

# A History of Monastic Spirituality

by Luc Brésard, *English translation by D. Hilda Wood OSB*

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## **Introduction.**

1. Our Purpose. 2. Presentation.

### **1. Prehistory.**

I. The Monastic Phenomenon. II. History and Prehistory. III. The Source of Christian Monasticism. 1. The Old Testament. 2. The Jewish Monks. 3. The Evangelical Call. 4. The Martyrs. 5. Origen.

### **2. Antony (251-356).**

I. Introduction. II. Athanasius and the Desert. III. The 'Life of Antony.' IV. In Conclusion.

### **3. The Mediterranean basin.**

Lower Egypt. Upper Egypt. Palestine. Syria. Asia Minor. North Africa. Rome. Gaul. British Isles. Conclusion.

### **4. The Monastic Rules.**

Classification. Their Length. Their Content. Different Emphases. The Word "Monk."

### **5. Pachomius (292-346).**

I. The Pachomian Fire in Straw. II. The Life of Pachomius. III. Rules & Organisation of the Koinonia. IV. Pachomian Spirituality. V. Conclusion.

### **6. The Apophthegmata.**

I. The Literature of the Desert. II. The Apophthegmata. III. How are the Apophthegmata to be Read? IV. How are they to be Understood? V. Hesychasm. VI. Conclusion: Flowers of the Desert.

### **7. Evagrius (345-399).**

I. Scholarly Monasticism. II. The Life of Evagrius. III. The Works of Evagrius. IV. Evagrius' Teaching V. Conclusion. Explanation of some terms.

### **8. Cassian (365-435).**

I. His Life. II. His Works. The Institutes. The Conferences. III. Conclusion: Synthesis of his Teaching.

### **9. Basil (328-378).**

I. Saint Basil and his Ascetical Writings. 2. The Origin and History of the Basilian Rules. 3. Structure of the Basilian Rules. II. the Moral Rules. III. The Little Asceticon. IV. The Communities of Women. V. Basil Complemented by Gregory of Nyssa.

### **10. Pseudo-Macarius.**

I. The Author and his Writings. 2) Was Macarius a Messalian? 3) His Writings. II. Macarius' Doctrine. 3) Christ and the Holy Spirit. 4) Prayer.

### **11. Augustine (354-430).**

I. Saint Augustine's Monastic Life. II. Augustine's Rule. III. Other Monastic Writings. IV. Conclusion.

## **12. Western Monasticism.**

The Monks of Gaul. I. Central Gaul. II. Monasticism in Provence. The Monastic writings of Cesarius. III. Iberian Monasticism. IV. The Gallic Rules. Celtic Monasticism II. Saint Patrick & His Posterity. III. Saint Columban. Table of 2 Centuries in the History of Monasticism.

## **13. The Monks of Gaza (c. 500).**

I. The Desert of Gaza. II. the Spiritual Masters. III. Teaching. IV. Conclusion: Repose.

## **14. John Climacus (circa 580-680).**

I. His Life. II. His Writings. III. His Teaching. IV. Conclusion.

## **By Way of Conclusion.**

Glossary.

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# **Introduction.**

## **1. Our Purpose.**

This is a course on the history of monastic spirituality. Some terms used in this course:

### **1. History.**

History is the knowledge or the recounting of the past, the events of the past; it deals with facts relating to the evolution of a social group. It looks at a succession of men and women and the events through which they lived. It runs along a horizontal line.

These events are past, the people are dead. In spite of their archeological interest or the examples and lessons they give, they are nevertheless dead and gone.

### **2. Spirituality**

This concerns the spiritual life, the life of the Holy Spirit within us. The Spirit of the Living God comes to dwell within us and to lead us to God. Here we have a vertical line constantly coming down to arouse our response to return to him.

### **3. History of Spirituality**

Here we have a convergence of the two lines, horizontal and vertical. More exactly, the horizontal line of history is brought to life at every moment by the movement of the living God who comes to live among men and women ("to play with the sons of men" as the book of Proverbs has it). To this movement of God there corresponds a free movement of men and women who can respond to him in two ways:

a) In setting oneself free from everything which could be an obstacle to the work of God, renouncing the evil forces capable of limiting or annihilating this divine action. It is a combat, a struggle (= ascesis) leading to purification.

b) In letting oneself be caught up in this movement of return to God, giving oneself to his action through availability, surrender, prayer. This is contemplation.

Ascesis and contemplation are two movements linked together which we will come across constantly.

To study the history of spirituality is then to try to understand the movement of God towards men and women and their response to god in the course of history, particularly through the

texts which have been handed down to us, texts written by people who have spent their lives close to God or who have written about it. There is no history without texts. These texts will draw for us the moral and spiritual profile of each of these witnesses to God, their response to the action of God, their way of going to God. We are not dealing with something dead as in history pure and simple, but with something very much alive.

All the more alive as the same Spirit who has fashioned the different spiritual characters of the men and women whom we shall meet, is also within us to help us understand their teaching, the breath of life with which he has endowed them and their writings will transform us with a life-giving touch. It is the Spirit who will bring us into contact, and even into friendship with these men who are always present among us through their writings.

#### 4. Monastic

This third term simply indicates that we have made a choice in the history of spirituality. We will just think about monks, leaving on one side for the moment the Fathers of the Church who have little or nothing to tell us about the monastic life. For those among them who do say something in their writings, we will only give a brief presentation of their personality and look at what concerns monastic life alone in their works, leaving on one side what belongs to a course on Patrology.

The purpose of this study of the history of monastic spirituality, then, is to make personal contact with the spirit which was at work in our Fathers in the faith, the first monks. It should be an apprenticeship to *lectio divina*. For St Benedict, the *lectio* which can “lead us to the summit of perfection,” is the Bible and the “holy Doctors,” among whom he names particularly the monks: the works of CASSIAN and BASIL (Rule ch.73).

## 2. Presentation.

In this preamble explaining our purpose, first we state our OPTIONS: in this case spirituality takes precedence of history. There are already ‘histories of monasticism’; we present a ‘History of Monastic Spirituality.’

Then, we do not pretend to say everything that can be said on the subject. There is an excellent document: ‘The study of the Fathers of the Church in priestly formation’ which is useful for the study of monks as well. It underlines: “the need to make a choice, considering the huge amount of material.” Among the four different ways which it suggests for presenting this “great quantity of material,” we have chosen “the monograph, which concentrates on some of the more representative of the Fathers, a method particularly adapted to teach in a concrete way how to approach them and study their thought.”

This preamble also shows you the MANNER in which we will work:

One part will be the presentation of the subject or the author, as we must place our first monks in their historical context in order to understand them; this will be fairly brief, as many other books deal with the history of monasticism. Mention will also be made of the principal works of the authors studied; but we will concentrate particularly on their teaching.

To understand this, contact with texts is indispensable. It is through these above all that our Fathers speak to us and pass on the Spirit who dwelt in them. We will cite the texts on separate pages, giving their reference in the course.

Thirdly, before it was published, this course was given to the novices at Cîteaux, during which mention was occasionally made of the Rule of St Benedict in the form of short exer-

cises. Identifying the sources as we go along helps to understand them better, and so to value them.

Then, we thought it would be helpful to check the knowledge gained by revision at the end of each main subject.

As the course is now being used by other monasteries, we have added, for the use of the tutors, the answers to the revision and the exercises on the Rule of St Benedict; and also some explanations of the texts, which do not pretend to be the only explanations!

The PLAN followed tries to be both logical and chronological, but as monasticism appeared at the same time in several places, it is not possible to be completely chronological.

After this Introduction, we study the Prehistory of monasticism (1), then the earliest preparation, before there were any texts. After the prehistory, we present the first text, which begins the history, the 'Life of St Antony' by Athanasius (2).

Having established this landmark, the initial step, we take a look at what happened round the Mediterranean basin, the panorama of all the different kinds of monks who appeared in the fourth century (3). This 'Bird's-Eye View' is followed by a few words on the Monastic Rules (4).

Next we study the first of the 'Mother'-Rules, with the first form of cenobitism led by Pachomius (5). We stay in Egypt, to look at the anchorites who were the Fathers of the desert, and we study their Apophthegmata (6). This takes us to Evagrius, one of the Desert Fathers, who put their teaching into writing (7), and to Cassian who took it to the cenobites of Gaul (8).

Then we look at the "strong race of cenobites" with another Mother-Rule, that of Basil, to which we add some monastic texts of his brother Gregory of Nyssa (9). We turn next to the author who goes under the name of Ps. Macarius, and who depends to some extent on Basil and Gregory (10). Then we pass on to the last of the Mother-Rules, that of Augustine (11).

After a quick look at Western Monasticism (12), strengthened in Gaul by Cassian, we finish with the later inheritors of this magnificent flowering of Eastern monasticism which we have studied: the monks of Gaza (13) in the fifth and sixth centuries, and John Climacus in the seventh (14).

## 1. Prehistory.

### I. The Monastic Phenomenon

1. Outside Christianity
2. Definition and essential elements
3. Conclusion: for us as Christians

### II. History and Prehistory

### III. The source of Christian monasticism

1. The Old Testament
2. Jewish monks
3. The evangelical call
4. The martyrs
5. Origen

## I. The Monastic Phenomenon.

We are going to study the history of monastic spirituality. Let us consider what we mean by this.

### 1) Outside Christianity.

First, is monasticism a typically Christian phenomenon? To this we must reply: No.

There were monks long before Christianity. Fifteen hundred years before Jesus came, there were monks in India. Most non-Christian religions have known some form of monastic life.

In Europe, the mediterranean religions of antiquity had virgin priestesses: the Pythia of Delphi, the Roman vestal virgins, vowed to chastity at least for a time, but this was understood in a physical rather than a moral way. Among the Greek philosophers, there were also modes of life similar to that of monks. In the first half of the sixth century BC, Pythagoras founded a sort of community which one entered through different degrees of initiation. However there was, on the whole, no practice of sexual asceticism.

Much later, after the rise of Christianity, Islam, which has never officially recognised any form of monastic life, nevertheless had from its earliest days ascetics living in solitude who practised continence in the presence of God. Fraternities sprang up subsequently for training in a method of raising the soul to God.

Even in the New World, at that time unknown in Europe, in the pre-historic religions of America, Fr Lafitau, a 17th century missionary (quoted by Dom Jean Leclercq) has shown that there were communities of consecrated virgins. The famous temples in Peru under the Inca kings had communities of vestal virgins whose rules were more severe than those of the Roman vestals. The temples in Mexico had religious of the same kind: "They ate in common and slept in large halls, rising in the night and assisting in a choir like our religious at Matins. They were responsible for sweeping the temple and for its upkeep, and practised great mortifications; they were called 'daughters of penitence.'"

The Iroquois also had "vestals whom they called 'Ieouinnon' and who were professional virgins. There were also men who were virgins. It may be that in ancient times some lived in community, like the Essenes. But I think nevertheless that it is more likely that they retired into solitude, at some distance from their village, where they lived separately like hermits, having only a servant who brought them the necessities of life."

### 2) Definition and essential elements.

From these examples we can see that before Christian monasticism, there was in all the religions a universal phenomenon which resembled what we call monasticism. These special forms of life, not always similar, included essential elements of monastic life.

Let us try to see what are the essential elements of this kind of life which we have defined by the general term "monastic," several examples of which we have observed outside Christianity. We can infer that they will certainly occur in our Christian monastic life as well.

The first thing that stands out is that these various forms of para-Christian monastic life have a tendency to set themselves apart, to separate themselves from the world in isolation from the rest of men. This isolation often has an exterior sign, a wall, a reserved enclosure, access to certain buildings being reserved to the ascetics. Yet frequently they insist rather on the cloister of the heart.

This separation from the world is indicated by a distinctive habit and a special way of cutting the hair. It is ratified by different rites of aggregation or initiation.

We also find ascetic practices such as celibacy, at least temporarily, and poverty understood as detachment. These practices are meant to encourage interior vigilance.

They do not insist very much on obedience which is considered to be the consequence of a general openness or availability developed through meditation. On the other hand great stress is placed on absolute docility to a spiritual master.

Finally, the third essential element: mystical aspiration that is to say a profound sense of the Absolute and a desire for communion with this absolute reality. This is perhaps the deepest foundation of the monastic life, for it is the source of a keen awareness of the radical insufficiency of this changing world. It is the driving power of the two other elements: separation from the world and ascetic practices.

We can now formulate a broad definition of monasticism: it is a manner of life having a spiritual goal which transcends the objectives of earthly life, the attainment of which is considered the one thing necessary.

### 3) Conclusion: for us as Christians.

All through our course in Christian monasticism we shall find these three elements which constitute monastic life, but in a totally new perspective: the call to **follow Christ** (the 'sequela Christi'), is at the origin of Christian monastic life. In the daily living out of an unconditional response to the love of Christ, one discovers practices similar to those in other forms of monastic life; for the demands inherent in such a way of life are always the same, but the source is different, for the Christian monk and nun it lies in the Gospel imperative. For them these elements are transfigured and illuminated by the wonderful coming of a God of love to mankind in the person of Christ. Christian monks and nuns will be in love with the person of Christ.

Separation from the world will express their desire to belong to him.

Their asceticism will be a communion with his Kenosis (self-emptying) and his Passion.

Their mystical aspiration will find its full-flowering in the union with a divine-human person who will bring them into the heart of the Trinity.

*Note 1, below.*

### **A Difficult Word.**

We have just characterised the third element of monasticism as, in a broad sense, a 'mystical aspiration.' But this word 'mystical' is a snare, often misunderstood and used in the wrong way. What is its meaning for us as Christians?

In Christianity, it does not mean looking for extraordinary experiences. The word should be understood first in the way St Paul used it, with reference to the 'mystery of Christ,' which concerns salvation — known through faith — beyond reason. In this sense, mysticism is at the foundation of Christianity; baptism introduces us into the mystery of Christ, into the mystical life. Real union with God through belonging to Christ, the God-Man, is a supernatural reality which remains mysterious and hidden. We speak of the 'mystical aspiration' to express the desire of the Christian for communion with this hidden reality.

This communion comes about in this life in faith through the sacraments and through the desire to lead a holy life, the desire to do "what is pleasing to God," (a Pauline expression which we will find again in Basil), and through the pursuit of continual prayer which, as we will see, is characteristic of these first monks.

This is the first meaning of the 'mystical life,' the basic meaning: communion in the mystery of Christ and so in his Spirit who works in the soul through his gifts. The more intense this

communion with Christ, the more the gifts play their part. Gregory of Nyssa will explain it by the idea of synergy.

It sometimes happens that, under the influence of the gift of wisdom, the baptised person suddenly experiences the presence of Christ in the soul, a mysterious contact, a kind of spiritual touch of divinity, without intermediary: the presence of God invades the soul. So in this text from St Basil: "If ever a kind of light falling on your heart has suddenly given you an awareness of God, flooding your soul in a way that makes you love God and despise the world and all material things, this obscure and fleeting image can help you to understand the state of the just who rejoice in God with a peaceful and unending happiness. This joy is sometimes bestowed by the Providence of God, but rarely, so that this little taste may lead you to the remembrance of the good things which you do not possess" (*Homily on Psalm 32*). This text emphasises the unexpectedness, the suddenness of these graces, and also their rarity. The vocabulary of spiritual authors who have experienced them gives numerous expressions to underline these two qualifications.

There is a second meaning of the word which denotes a completely gratuitous gift of God, a grace which is not a proof of sanctity, for it is perhaps given to convert or to encourage. It is a grace which is not indispensable in order to reach great holiness, but which one can however desire as a precious help on our journey to God. St Basil also said: "Once the soul is possessed by the desire for its Creator and has experienced in its heart the joy of his beauty, it would not exchange this great joy and these delights for anything the world can offer with its great variety of fleshly passions; on the contrary, that which others find disagreeable increases their joy" (*Homily on Giving Thanks 2*).

St Therese of the Child Jesus, who has been described as: "the greatest mystic of modern times," is a beautiful example to help us understand the two meanings of this word. She sometimes knew these 'mystical' states in the second meaning of the term; she mentions one which lasted a week, (this is not very common!). But the last years of her life were spent in the darkest night of faith, yet what a 'mystical aspiration' was hers during this time! How she longed to be united to Jesus, so much so that she desired suffering and to find her joy in it because Jesus had suffered. At the end of her life this mystical aspiration was summed up in the desire to want nothing but what Jesus wanted for her: "You fill me with joy by all that you are doing," she said.

These are the heights to which we are invited. This is authentic Christian mysticism.

## II. History and Prehistory.

History begins with written documents. Before that there is prehistory.

When did the history of monasticism begin?

The first document about Christian monks whose author we know the author is the "**Life of Antony**," by St Athanasius. So the history of monasticism begins with Antony (c. 250-350).

The repercussions of this first writing were enormous. But it must not be thought that the "Life of Antony" was the beginning of monastic life. This book appeared in 357. But a papyrus shows there was a large group of monks round Antony in Lower Egypt already about 305. In Upper Egypt Pachomius founded his monastery about 320 and died in 346, that is, before the publication of the 'Life of Antony,' leaving about 6 or 8 thousand monks and nuns. Well before that, there were monks in Syria and even in Gaul, on an island near Lyons.

Monasticism did not begin by being passed from one to another but arose like spontaneous eruptions, or like a spring gushing forth in different places from a source underground.

This sudden emergence of monasticism in several distant geographical points: Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Gaul, suggests an underground spring, a secret preparation by the Holy Spirit. There was as it were a prehistory of monasticism: a prehistory within the hearts of men and women, a prehistory, that is, of monastic spirituality, a few features of which we shall try point to this preparation by the Spirit.

It seems that among the many causes which could, directly or indirectly, be at the source of the emergence of monasticism in the third century, the following can be identified in chronological order: a vague outline in the Old Testament, more defined ascetical movements among the Jews in the time of Jesus, the radical call of the gospel teaching which gave rise to consecrated virginity fairly early on, then martyrdom and finally Origen.

### **III. The Source of Christian Monasticism.**

#### **1. The Old Testament.**

Although Jerome spoke of “the monks of the Old Testament” (Ep. 125:7), there is no monasticism properly speaking at that time. This is no doubt because the people as a whole were considered to be consecrated. On the other hand the expectation of the Messiah called for child-bearing in the hope of bringing him into the world. This excluded consecrated virginity; we read that the daughter of Jephtha “bewailed her virginity” (Jg. 11:38).

However we do find some idea, some traces of consecrated life: the levites for whom God is the only inheritance; the nazirites (a name meaning “consecrated”), for life or temporarily, was sanctioned by certain restrictions. Samson was a nazirite, but his adventures with Delilah show that, unfortunately for him, marriage was not among these restrictions!

The Bible also mentions groups of ascetics round Elijah called, according to the translations: “Brother Prophets” or “Sons of the Prophets” (I Kg 20:35; 2 Kg 3f). Here too some of them were married (2 Kg 4:1).

The prophets Amos, Hosea and Jeremiah adumbrated the hermit life of monks by idealising life in the desert where God made a covenant with his people. Isaiah called on the people to: “prepare a highway in the desert for the Lord” (Is. 40:3). At the end of the Old Testament writings, one finds a hint of the fruitfulness of the barren woman and the virgin. (Ps.112).

John appeared at the threshold of the New Testament announcing Jesus, and also the advent of monks: he was not married, he lived in the desert, fasted, prayed, meditated on the Law and above all gave proof of his humility: “He must grow greater and I must grow less.” Then there was Mary who wished to keep her virginity and in whom later generations have always seen the model of consecrated virgins who, humble like her, allow the Word of God to enter and bear fruit within them.

Profane history also demonstrates the existence of forms of life very close to monasticism.

#### **2. The Jewish Monks.**

At the time of Jesus, historians mention the existence of Jewish ascetics who have retired from the world.

##### **a) The Essenes**

The historian Josephus and Philo of Alexandria both mention the existence of groups of religious Jews called Essenes. This religious movement was probably fairly widespread, com-

prising the group at Qumran among others. Philo derived the word Essene from the Greek: hosioi = holiness, but it probably came from the Aramean hassaya = pious. It was a conservative movement which sought to separate itself from the corruption of Israel in order to seek God in holiness; their Rule said: "They separate themselves from the dwellings of wicked men to go into the desert to make straight the way of God." Here are two texts which describe them (Texts 1-2).

#### b) The Therapeutae

In his book "On the Contemplative Life" Philo speaks of other ascetics who lived in Egypt to the east of Alexandria near lake Mareotis by the sea. The only writer to mention them, he sometimes went there, he says to make a retreat far from the noise of the world. He called them "Therapeutae" from a Greek word which means "to serve" and "to heal" and Philo meant it in the second sense: they were those who healed (their passions) (Text 3). He wrote of them as an educated and pious rabbi, caught up in allegorical exegesis and platonic philosophy (Text 4).

These two groups led a demanding ascetic and community life. Only isolated examples of celibate religious are found.

### 3. The Evangelical Call.

We can be sure that the demands of the Sermon on the Mount, the example of virginity in Jesus to the Corinthians on celibacy and the great love of the Lord who died for sinners very soon gave rise to the desire among men and women to give love for love and to consecrate their lives to God in virginity.

There are hints of it everywhere. First in the Acts of the Apostles: they tell us for example of Philip's daughters who were virgins and prophetesses. Later the letter of Clement of Rome, c.90, speaks of virgins and the chaste. Hermas, in 150, mentions virgins in Rome, and Ignatius an apparently numerous group of virgins in Smyrna. Polycarp and Justin also mention them.

The word "monk" appears for the first time at the end of the second century in the apocryphal gospel of Thomas which celebrates the blessedness of the monachus.

In the same period, between 150 and 200, we know that there were people in Syria and in Corinth who led a life of poverty and asceticism, and practised chastity. Here too they were still individuals, probably living in the family home or in the town, and we cannot yet speak of monasticism. But very soon there appeared, mixed with this good grain the dandel of self-complacency in the form of contempt of the world. Self-control, in Greek egkrateia = abstinence, continence, became a movement: "enkratism" which enforced abstinence and chastity; marriage was forbidden, the diet was fresh vegetables and wine.

In the first half of the third century we find the first example of organised monasticism: the "Sons of the Covenant" who lived in common, at the service of the Church and dedicated to worship, and leading a life of poverty. This is the first known example of cenobitism, nearly a century before the first signs of Egyptian monasticism.

But a little later there appeared among them the "Messalian" movement, which comes from the Syrian word meaning "to pray." Those who were influenced by this spiritual movement thought that no human activity should be undertaken apart from prayer. Among those who adopted this attitude, some remained within the Church, others left. In the 4th century Basil tried to lead them and the 'enkratists' back to orthodoxy.

Finally, about 300, came Antony, the first monk whose story we have in writing. His vocation came through hearing the Gospel. The history of Christian monasticism properly so-called begins.

#### 4. The Martyrs.

There is a third cause of the sudden rise of monasticism at the beginning of the third century: martyrdom. Very soon monasticism was seen as bound up with martyrdom, either as a preparation for it or a continuation of it.

1) It was a preparation for martyrdom for those who lived in times of persecution, like Antony. We are told that when the persecution of Diocletian broke out and Christians were taken to Alexandria, Antony left his monastery and accompanied them saying: "Let us go too, to watch those in the combat and to struggle with them if we are called to do so." We read too in the life of Pachomius: (Text 5).

2) A continuation of martyrdom: after the persecution stopped Christians were able to lead a life of consecrated celibacy openly, and a great many went to the desert to live as hermits and cenobites. They believed they were living out the same mystery as the martyrs, the total identification with Christ who died and rose again. This mystery of martyrdom, which is at the heart of the life of the Church could never disappear. It is this emphasis which is found in the Greek life of Pachomius (Text 5).

This raises a problem, for if monasticism equals martyrdom, do we, whether monks or novices, think we are martyrs?

Here are three texts which tell us what the Old Men thought. First an apophthegm (maxim or Saying) attributed to Athanasius, a contemporary of Antony who wrote his life (Text 6). Then two other texts, one about nuns and the other about monks (Texts 7-8).

We already have some explanations. To understand it more clearly, we will study a text of one of the most celebrated martyrs, Ignatius of Antioch. In his letter to the Romans he shows us what sort of a man he is and what a martyr is like. We shall find that this letter brings us to the heart of our monastic life, and in studying it we will find out whether there is anything in the Rule of St Benedict concerning the spirituality of martyrdom.

Ignatius was the bishop of Antioch in Syria. Captured during a persecution, he was taken to Rome overland and by sea, to be thrown to the wild beasts in the arena during a pagan festival. On arriving in Asia Minor, he stayed for a time in two towns: Smyrna and Troas. Delegations from the neighbouring churches there came to visit him. He wrote several letters, including one to the Romans in which he told them he was coming and asked them not to rescue him from the torture. This letter was written spontaneously, and reveals the heart of a martyr; it is not a literary or conventional piece of writing. Apart from an introduction and a conclusion, there is no plan; Ignatius writes as ideas come to him, as if he was speaking.

There are two themes which have great importance in the future development of monastic spirituality: the theme of spiritual combat and that of the imitation of Christ which we will come across again in other texts in the literature of the martyrs. For example, here is a text which illustrates the first theme, that of spiritual combat; the martyr, like the monk later, is aware of fighting against the demon (Text 9). The other theme, that of the imitation of Christ, is found, among others, in the story of the martyrs of Lyon. (Text 10). This inward presence of Christ who suffers with and in his martyr, is found also in the famous text of the Passion of Sts Perpetua and Felicitas (Text 11). Later we will see the same idea in the life of Antony, Christ was there when Antony was struggling against the demon. It is a good thing for us to remember this in temptation: Christ is there near us, although we think we are alone, and he helps us to overcome it.

## 5. Origen.

Lastly there is a man who, like Ignatius, was a great lover of Christ and like him wanted to give his life for Him. He was one of the great geniuses of Christianity, comparable to Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. He wrote many books which had a great influence on monasticism in its early stages. We will not study him here; we will only describe a few points in which he influenced this movement of the spirit — and of the Spirit — which gave birth to monasticism.

There is a continuity between the spirituality of the martyr and that of Origen. His life was spent in alternating periods of persecution and calm. His father died a martyr during the persecution of Severus, and his mother had to hide his clothes so that he would not go and declare himself a Christian. He wrote an Exhortation to Martyrdom during the persecution of Maximin the Thracian and he himself was arrested and tortured during that of Decius; he died three years later as a result. It is not surprising then that we find in his writing the theme of spiritual combat.

Moreover, at the beginning of his life Origen was in charge of a school for formation in the Christian life, a sort of “School of the Faith” before its time, where the students came to be instructed by him. They lived together, ate together, prayed together. At the end of his stay of five years as a scholar, according to the custom of the time, the student made a

spontaneous discourse. We still have one made by one of his pupils, Gregory, which means “wide-awake,” who later became a bishop and whose holiness was demonstrated by so many miracles that he was called the Thaumaturgus, that is the “wonder-worker.” He shows in his Discourse in gratitude to Origen what Origen meant to his pupils, a remarkable teacher, a precursor of the Novice Master. We will read a short passage of this letter to see what there is in it that touches our monastic life and in what respect Origen influenced this life which was ‘in the air’ (Text 12).

As a teacher and candidate for martyrdom, Origen placed the spiritual combat at the centre of his asceticism and his morality, a theme which became central in nascent monasticism as well. It is a central theme because there is no Christian life without struggle, for we stand at the crossroads, as the first psalm underlines. This theme of the two ways, often referred to in what follows, presupposes a choice, often a difficult one, which implies a struggle.

There is a whole doctrine of spiritual combat in the works of Origen, and this topic is taken up by the ascetics of the East and indeed in spirituality as a whole. Here is a quick outline of the leading ideas which one can find throughout the writings of Origen on the spiritual combat:

1. The spiritual combat is a fact: we all have to make a choice between good and evil, and this choice is not made without a struggle when our freedom is involved. The way of goodness is God’s way, the way of evil is the demon’s, the devil, whom Origen called by the name of those who opposed the Israelites in the Bible: Amalech or Pharaoh (Text 13). So there are two sorts of combatants (Text 14).

2. The spiritual combat takes place in the heart. Later we will find all these ideas in the works of Origen taken up by the Fathers of the Desert: the struggle against evil thoughts, guarding the heart, the need for vigilance, discernment of spirits and candour towards a spiritual Father.

3. Confiding in an elder is a powerful help for the soldier of Christ. But there are others to help us, God himself and his angels. Moreover we ourselves have weapons to defend us in the struggle: first of all, prayer: “One holy man who prays is much stronger than an army of sinners,” Origen assures us; and also the virtues, above all faith and humility, Origen often quotes the words of Paul: “the shield of faith with which you can quench all the fiery darts of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16); and humility; after a fall we must get up again (Text 15).

4. This combat is very useful: first because we are sometimes beaten and so discover our weakness, which helps us to be humble. Then it strengthens our virtue and brings a reward. Also it is useful for others, we can fight for them. Here is a remarkable text which shows what a grasp Origen had of the Mystical Body and of the hidden help we can give to others who have not had the graces we have had (Text 16).

The doctrine of Origen on virginity has also left a deep mark on primitive monasticism. Here is another schematic presentation:

- 1) The model is Jesus who is Chastity as he is all the virtues. Mary is also the model. Origen is the first theologian to teach the virginity of Mary after child-bearing. Mary was the first woman to have been a virgin as Jesus was the first man.
- 2) The roots of virginity are found in the nuptial union of Christ and the Church; of which Christian marriage is a symbol realised in the flesh; the union of the Word with the soul happens in a spiritual manner in the Christian who seeks God. But this union of the soul with the Word is much stronger for one who is a virgin; it is in fact superior to marriage because it not only symbolises the union of the Church with Christ, but also demonstrates it and brings it about. The virginity of the Church is realised by the complete chastity of some of her members.
- 3) Virginity in its essence is an exchange of gifts between God and human beings; between God and the man or woman who is a virgin there is a shared gift:

*The gift of God to men and women.* It is a grace which comes from God, and God guards virginity in the soul; it must be kept safe by prayer (Text 17). It is a grace which comes from the Trinity: the Father guards it, the Son brings it about, cutting away the passions with the sword that is himself and, in so far as it is a charism, it is a sharing in the Holy Spirit.

*The gift of men and women to God.* It is a sacrifice offered by the soul to God in the sanctuary of the body. It is the most perfect gift after martyrdom. The source is charity. It is through love one remains a virgin, a love which puts God above all else, and wants to give love for love. In giving him our whole body, we imitate God who has given us all.

4. Conditions: This gift is manifested by mortification, watchfulness over the body, guarding the senses. Prayer and mortification are necessary for virginity; they are the elements of sacrifice which the soul, the priest of the Holy Spirit, offers to God within the sanctuary of the body.

But virginity is only of value when joined to the other virtues, above all faith and humility. Chastity of the body has for its goal chastity of the soul and chastity of the heart, which is even more important. One must protect one's heart from impure imaginings, for sins of thought surrender the soul to Satan, the adulterous lover. On the other hand, in the case of the violated virgin, the defilement of the body is of no account if the heart remains virgin.

5. Effect: One original idea of Origen's is that virginity makes us like the little children to whom the Kingdom of Heaven belongs. It is like the virtue of spiritual childhood (Text 18). In this sense it prolongs the life in paradise where Adam and Eve, before they came together, were little children newly created by God with whom they walked and talked in the garden.

It is a prophecy of the eschatological state of the Resurrection, for it is the flesh and sin which constitute an obstacle here below to the union of the soul with the Word.

In our present state, it liberates us for the service of the Lord. Following Paul, Origen contrasts the servitude of marriage to the freedom of the virgin. If virginity is inspired by a spir-

itual love of God who is sought above all else, then it frees us to give ourselves completely to the service of God.

Finally virginity makes the soul fruitful; as with Mary, it brings Jesus to birth in the soul, a theme taken up by the Fathers of Cîteaux, Gueric in particular.

*NOTE 1: For Christian monks and nuns the mystery of baptism is the foundation on which rest the defining elements found in every form of monasticism. Emphasising the special character of the underlying source of the Christian monastic life gives rise to a more authentic dialogue with other forms of monasticism. It enables the Christian to find in them, in all truth, the hidden presence of the Spirit of God.*

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## **1. Prehistory Texts: The Jewish Monks**

### **1. The Essenes**

#### **1. *Flavius Josephus: The Jewish Wars, 11:8***

These men despise riches, they share their goods in an admirable way; none can be found among them who has more than another. For it is a law among them that those who come to join them must give all their possessions for the use of the community, so that among them all there is no degrading poverty or excessive riches. The possessions of each are mingled with those of everyone else and all, like brothers, have but one property. Those who look after their property are elected and each of them is allocated his work by all the members

#### **2. *Philo — The Wise Man 83-86.***

They are formed in piety, holiness, justice, domestic and civic duties, knowledge of what is good, what is bad and what indifferent, so that they may choose what is right, avoid what is not, taking for their three-fold rule the love of God, the love of virtue and the love of mankind.

They give many examples of the love of God: constant purity throughout their lives, the refusal to take oaths or to lie, the belief that the divinity is the cause of all that is good but nothing evil. Their love of virtue is shown by their contempt of riches, glory and pleasure; by self-discipline and endurance and also by frugality, simplicity, good-naturedness, modesty, respect for the law, an equable nature and all similar virtues. They show their love for mankind by their kindness, their equality among themselves and community life which is above praise, and so merits a brief mention here.

As well as living together in confraternities, their house is open to visitors from outside who follow the same ideals. There is one common purse and all expenses are met from it, they have the same clothes and the same food; in fact meals are in common. The custom of sharing the same dwelling, the same kind of life and the same food is not found anywhere else to the same extent. And this is perhaps natural: in fact, they do not keep for themselves what they re-

ceive as wages for their work. but put it into the common purse, so that anyone who needs it may use it.

## 2. The Therapeutae

### 3. *Philo — The Contemplative Life* 2.

The way of life chosen by these philosophers is evident from the name they bear: Therapeutae or Therapeutrides is an apt description, first because the art of healing which they profess is superior to that practised in our cities — in these only the body is cared for, but the Therapeutae also care for souls who have fallen prey to grievous and almost incurable diseases brought upon them by a life of pleasure and lusts, afflictions, fears, greed and folly, injustice and an endless multitude of other passions and woes. Secondly because they have been taught to lead a healthy life obeying the holy laws, and given to the worship of the Being.

### 4. *Philo — The Contemplative Life*, 11-13.

May the sect of the Therapeutae whose constant effort is to see clearly, aim at the contemplation of Being, and rise above the sun that is perceived by the senses and never abandon this rule which leads to perfect happiness. Those who adopt this therapeutic, deciding to do so not through force of habit or the advice and encouragement of others, but because they have been enraptured by divine love, and captivated by divine possession, in a state of inebriation like the Bacchae or the Corybantae, until they behold the object of their desire.

Then, as their desire for immortality and the blessed life makes them believe that their mortal life is already over, they leave their property to their sons and daughters, or their family, deliberately making them their heirs in advance; those who have no family leave everything to their companions and friends. It is right that those who have once taken hold of the treasure of spiritual vision should surrender blind treasure to those whose understanding is still blind.

## 3. The Martyrs

### 5. *Life of Pachomius*, 1

Because they saw the struggles and the patience of the martyrs, the Elders among the Greeks became monks, that they might begin renew their lives.

### 6. *Apophthegm attributed to Athanasius*

It is often said: Where are the persecutions so that we may become martyrs? Be a martyr of conscience, die to sin, mortify your body and you will be a martyr by intention.

### 7. *Methodius of Olympus, The Banquet* 7

Do not virgins bear witness, not by undergoing bodily suffering for a short while, but by enduring all their life long, without weakening, the true combat which is the struggle for chastity?

### 8. *Cassian, Conference* 18,7

The patience and strict fidelity with which monks persevere in the profession which they have undertaken once and for all, never fulfilling their own will, make them daily crucified to the world and living martyrs.

### 9. *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*

The day before our combat I saw the following vision. Pomponius the deacon came to the prison gate and knocked violently. I went out and opened the gate for him. He wore a white tunic without a belt and sandals. He said to me: “Perpetua, we are waiting for you, come!” He took me by the hand and we began to walk along a rough and winding path. At last we came to the am-

phitheatre, quite out of breath. He led me into the centre of the arena and said to me: "Do not be afraid. I am with you and struggling with you." Then he went away.

I looked at the huge crowd who watched in astonishment. I knew that I was condemned to die by the beasts and I was surprised that none were let loose on me. Then out against me came an Egyptian of ferocious appearance to fight me, together with his henchmen. At the same time some handsome young men came to help and support me. I was stripped, and I was a man. My supporters began to rub me down with oil, as is the custom before a contest. Then I saw the Egyptian on the other side rolling in the dust.

Then a man of great height came out, so tall that he rose above the amphitheatre. He wore a flowing purple tunic with two stripes over his chest. He wore sandals of gold and silver and carried a staff like the chief gladiator and a green branch with golden apples. He called for silence and said: "If the Egyptian defeats this woman, he will slay her with the sword; but if she is victorious, she will receive this branch." Then he went away.

We drew close and began to fight. The Egyptian tried to get hold of my feet; I kept striking him in the face with my heels. Suddenly I was lifted up into the air and I began hitting him without touching the ground. When the end was near, I put my hands together, linking my fingers; I seized the head of the Egyptian, who fell to the ground and I put my foot on his head. The crowd began to shout and my supporters sang psalms. I went up to the chief gladiator and took the branch. He kissed me and said to me: "Peace be with you, my daughter!" I began to walk in triumph to the Door of Life.

At this moment I awoke. I realized that it was not with wild animals that I would fight, but with the devil; but I knew that victory would be mine.

#### *10. The Martyrs of Lyons*

Blandina was hung on a post and exposed as bait for the wild animals that were let loose on her. She seemed to hang there in the form of a cross; she prayed continually in a strong voice, strengthening the brethren in their ordeal. In their torment the brethren there saw with their eyes Christ crucified for them in the person of their sister, to assure them that all who suffer for the glory of Christ will live forever in communion with the living God.

None of the animals touched Blandina, so she was taken down from the post and led back to the prison. She was kept for a new struggle. The victory won in further contests would bring final and inevitable defeat to the wicked serpent, and strengthen her brothers by her example. Tiny, weak and insignificant, she was clothed in the strength of Christ, the mighty and invincible athlete.

#### *11. The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity*

As the day of the spectacle drew near, Felicitas was distressed that her martyrdom might be postponed because of her state, for it is against the law for women with child to be executed. Three days before the contest they all prayed together to the Lord. Immediately the birth pangs came upon her. Because she was in labour after only eight months, she suffered much and groaned. One of the gaolers said to her: "If you groan like this now, what will you do when you are thrown to the beasts? You scorned them when you refused to sacrifice." She answered: "Now it is I who suffer what I am undergoing, but then there will be another within me who will suffer for me, because it is for him that I will be suffering."

#### *4. Origen*

#### *12. Gregory the Wonderworker: In Gratitude to Origen 11-15*

Like a farmer, he surrounded us with great care; he was not content with what appears on the surface and can be seen by all, but he delved, testing our most intimate depths, questioning, proposing, listening to our replies. Then, when he had noticed something in us which was neither unproductive or useless, but which promised some return, he dug it up, put it back, watered it and cleared away the rubbish; he brought to the task all his skill and attention, and he tormented us. Brambles, thistles, herbs and weeds and every kind of plant that our agitated souls produced in plenty, he cut off completely by his arguments and prohibitions. When he had fully prepared us and made us worthy to receive the words of truth, then, as to a well-prepared and friable soil ready to germinate the grains sown in it, he brought his seeds in profusion...

I do not say that he was an example of a wise man, although if I did, it would be the truth; but he desired very much to be one. He did violence to himself, one might say, with all his zeal and ardour, beyond human strength.

He did his best to form us, of course, in the same way, to give us mastery and understanding, not just of the impulses of the soul as an objective science, but of the impulses themselves. He obliged us, if one can so speak, to practise justice by means of our own spiritual efforts to which he urged us to be faithful he turned us from the multiplicity of the affairs of this life and the tumult of public life, urging us to examine ourselves and be busy with our own affairs. What could be a more fitting task for the soul and worthy of it, than to be occupied with itself, not looking at things outside, nor being concerned with the affairs of others, without being involved, in a word, in the worst faults; but rather, turned towards its own interior life, to dwell within itself and practise justice?

#### *13. Homily 19 on Numbers, 4*

Amalech, the enemy of Israel, attacked and forced the people to turn aside from the true path. It was he, in fact, who first attacked the Hebrews as they left Egypt for Rephidim, when Moses said to Joshua: "Choose out some men and go out to meet Amalech tomorrow, I will stay on the top of the hill and hold the staff of God in my hand." And Joshua did as Moses had told him, and he went out against Amalech; Moses and Hur went up to the top of the hill, and this is what happened: when Moses lifted his arms, Israel had the advantage; when he lowered his arms, Amalech had the advantage.

Understand by this who Amalech is whom God "attacks with his hand hidden," that is to say, without being seen.

#### *14. Homily 2 on Psalm 36, 2:8.*

Here are two soldiers in armour; one is the soldier of God, the other the soldier of the devil. The soldier of God is protected by the 'breastplate of justice' but the soldier of the devil is protected by the breastplate of injustice. The soldier of God shines under the 'helmet of salvation,' but the sinner, the soldier of the devil, is covered with the helmet of perdition. The feet of the soldier of Christ are ready to 'run and announce the Good News,' but the feet of the sinner run 'quickly to shed blood,' and his shoes, that is to say the plans he is preparing, are laced together with evil. The soldier of God has the "shield of faith," the soldier of the devil the shield of unbelief.

#### *15. Homily on Psalm 36, 4:2.*

It is like a battle; when two men confront one another, it may happen that one of them falls, but then he gets up and becomes the conqueror. Into the same way in our contest which we wage against the "Prince of this world," if perchance it happens that one of us is overcome and falls into some sin, it is possible that after this sin he may repent, rise up and hold the evil he committed in horror; and then afterwards not only is he on his guard, but he makes reparation to

God, “bathing his bed with tears every night,” making his own the confidence of the prophet: “Does anyone fall without being helped to rise? Or does he who has fallen not get up again?” There is a man who has fallen but cannot be overcome!

16. *Homily 25 on Numbers, 4.*

Among the people of God there are some who are soldiers of God, as the Apostle said; they do not interfere with the affairs of the world. They “go to war,” fighting against the hostile nations and “against the evil spirits,” on behalf of the rest of the people of God and the weak who are hindered either by age or sex or by their own choice. They fight by their prayers, fasts, piety, gentleness and chastity. All the virtues are their weapons of war, and when they return victorious to the camp, even the non-combatants who are not called or who are not able to fight profit from their labours.

17. *Commentary on Matthew 14:25.*

God will give the most excellent gift which is perfect purity in celibacy and chastity, to those who ask for it in their prayers with their whole soul in persevering faith.

18. *Commentary on Matthew, 13:16.*

When a man mortifies his carnal desires, putting to death the works of the body through the spirit, carrying the mortification of Jesus in his body until he returns to the state of a child unaware of carnal love, then he is converted and becomes like a child. The nearer he comes to this state, the greater he is in the kingdom of heaven, superior indeed to all the ascetics who have not attained such a degree of self-restraint.

19. *Commentary on Rom 4:6*

If you are mortified, you can bear excellent fruit; Isaac — Joy — is the first fruit of the spirit. Your seed, that is to say your deeds, will rise up to heaven and will become deeds of light compared to the shining splendour of the stars. Moreover if your understanding is pure enough, your body holy and your deeds undefiled enough, you can bring forth Christ himself.

## 1. Prehistory. Explanation of the Texts

### JEWISH MONKS

2.

*Choose what is right*, refers to the discernment of spirits. There are three principles: love of God, love of virtue and love of neighbour. Love of virtue, and to some extent ‘self-discipline’ derive from Stoic influence.

This and the preceeding text show the importance placed by the Essenes on common ownership and manual work.

3 & 4.

These *Philosophers*, which means ‘friends of Wisdom,’ seek the healing of their passions; which will allow them to ‘see clearly’ and to attain to the contemplation of ‘Being.’ What is meant here is the intelligible Being of Plato, lying beyond the senses. These are all valuable in Christian monasticism: monks, lovers of Wisdom, seek *apatheia*, a state where they can control their passions; this state of peace brings them to prayer and contemplation.

The *Corybantes* were priests of the goddess Cybele.

In these two texts the accent is placed on contemplation which Philo described in the vocabulary of the Greek mysteries (*end of 1st para’ text 4*). A condition of this life is the abandonment of possessions.

| <u>Essenes</u>          | <u>Therapeutae</u>                     |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Aggressive nationalists | Open to outside influences             |
| Messianism              | Not messianistic                       |
| Severe asceticism       | Moderate asceticism                    |
| Strict rule             | Not so strict                          |
| Manual labour           | Little manual labour, but more offices |
| Community life          | Semi-community life                    |
| Rabbinic misogyny       | Respect for women as equal to men.     |

The table above shows further differences known from other sources between the Essenes and Therapeutae. The first represent Judaism in Palestine, the second in the Diaspora.

### The Martyrs

5.

The example of the martyrs had an influence on future monasticism.

7.

An interesting text in several points:

a) The word ‘witness, in Greek, is *marturion*, which gives the word ‘martyr.’

b) Here is the theme of combat, which we will come across again.

c) The stake in this struggle is chastity. But chastity must be seen as a proof of love, and it is love that makes one a martyr.

d) Notice the contrast between the ‘short while’ of the combat of the martyr and the ‘life long’ of that of the virgin.

8.

Here martyrdom consists in patience, fidelity and renunciation of self-will, themes which we will come across in our Bird’s-eye-view of monastic spirituality.

9.

The very beautiful story of the martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicity is made up of two parts. The second is the account of the martyrdom itself written by a witness, perhaps Tertulian. The first is the journal which Perpetua wrote in her prison before she was put to death. In this account, this great woman recounted several of her dreams. This text is one of them, a premonitory dream which expresses the depths of the dreamer.

*A rough and winding path* — cf. Mt. 7:14

“*I am with you, and struggling with you*” — Behind the deacon Pomponius there is Christ who struggles with and in his martyrs.

*I became a man* — This refers to a well known context in the ancient world where the reunion of the sexes signifies a supernatural state of wellbeing like that of the gods.

*A man of great height* — In Judaeo-Christian literature God always appears as a very large man or angel.

The next words need to be deciphered: *purple*, symbol of royalty; *gold*, symbol of divinity; *silver*, often refers to the Word cf. Ps.12.7. ; *green branch*, symbol of life, bearing *golden apples* (divinity) symbolizing eternal life in God.

*Striking with the heel* — refers to Gen.3.15

*Peace be with you* — A Christian greeting.

*I knew victory would be mine* — An optimism which we will find again: the devil is not to be feared, Christ has conquered him. This theme is found in the following text.

## Origen

12.

*Like a farmer* — Gregory has retained the explanations of Origen who often spoke of the Father as a farmer and the field which is the soul. Basic education, for him, is the ability to be moulded: which we find in the following lines.

*The example of a wise man* — to become wise was the ideal of ancient man. For the Christian, the ‘Wise Man’ is Jesus, (cf. ICor.1:24; Col.2:3). A wise person then will be one who follows Christ, the fervent Christian or the monk.

To reach this goal, Gregory recalls two teachings of Origen: self-discipline and knowledge; not a theoretical knowledge, but a practical understanding of the impulses of the soul. Plato described these impulses as the concupiscible and the irascible, (or desire and anger). Self-knowledge leads to self-discipline; ideas which we will come across again.

Self-discipline and self-knowledge, Gregory continues, lead to justice. By justice he means one of the four great virtues of the Greeks (he mentions the others in the passage following our text). It is the virtue which gives to each his due. According to Plato, justice is present when the impulses of the soul (which Gregory has just mentioned) are governed by reason. But the teaching of Origen as related by Gregory goes further: there is justice when things are in their right order, when one respects the activity proper to the soul and gives pride of place to the interior life without dissipating one’s attention outside.

We can see the influence of such texts on the beginnings of monastic life.

13.

There are here two images of the cross, Moses with his hands held up and with the staff in his hand. Thus it is by the cross and by prayer that “God attacks with his hand hidden” the demon Amalech. Later Antony will say that the demons greatly fear the sign of the cross.

14.

*“The feet of the sinner run quickly to shed blood”* — in the context of persecution.

16.

An important text for future monasticism. In line 3 the soldier of God is seen as keeping at a distance from the world. Further on, his weapons are prayer, fasting and the virtues, which future monasticism will also develop. Finally one finds already in Origen a sense of the Mystical Body which justifies the usefulness of the monastic life; the monks fight for those who cannot.

19.

*“Isaac, Joy”* — Isaac, a biblical figure of Jesus, means ‘Joy’ in Hebrew.

## 2. Antony (251-356).

### I. Introduction.

The history of monasticism begins then with Antony, for he was the first monk about whom anything was written.

1. Writings by him: we have 7 letters from his own pen. The first is a treatise on conversion and asceticism. The other six are addresses to his disciples.

2. Writings about him: besides 38 apophthegmata which are not very original, there is the *Life of Antony* by Athanasius. This is a book every novice should have read, it shows us what a bishop of the fourth century thought about monastic life. Let us first see who this bishop, the author of the *Life of Antony*.

## **II. Athanasius and the Desert.**

Athanasius came from Egypt, the same country as Antony. When he wrote the ‘*Life of Antony*,’ he was bishop of Alexandria, the capital of Egypt. At that time it was a large city, and a port where all sorts of people and religions met. There was an important Jewish community there and also a very active Christian community. But there was also darnel among the wheat, for it was at Alexandria that Arianism, the first of the great heresies began; it was spread by Arius, a priest of Alexandria. He said that Jesus was a man, indeed a great man, and very holy, but he was not God.

Athanasius was one of the first to fight this heresy which caused much evil during the whole of the fourth century. Already condemned at the council of Nicea (325), it was then condemned definitively at the council of Constantinople (381); which affirmed that the Son is of the same nature as the Father. When Athanasius assisted at the council of Nicea he was only a deacon. A little later he was named bishop of Alexandria and he stayed there for 46 years until his death in 373. During all that time he fought Arianism relentlessly. He had to spend half his episcopate in exile; the emperors, who supported the Arian heresy for political reasons, first exiled him for 2 years in Treves, then for 5 in Rome. Then they condemned him to death and tried to kill him. Athanasius fled to his monk-friends in the desert to escape from the soldiers who were trying to capture him.

He was completely safe with the monks who loved and venerated him. Three times Athanasius was forced to escape to the desert where he lived for a long time. In this way he came to know the desert and the monks who lived there very well.

These monks were not all holy people; in the beginning, people fled to the desert for all sorts of reasons: to evade paying taxes; to escape from military service which at that time was obligatory and very arduous. Some, like Athanasius, went there for better motives; to avoid having to worship pagan deities and to escape persecution.

But a great many of those who went to the desert experienced solitude as a good opportunity for a life of prayer and intimacy with God. Later they went to the desert because they felt called there by God.

There are two ideas about the desert which are both found in the Bible: it is a sterile and inhospitable land to which the scape-goat laden with the sins of the people is driven; or it is the place where God is loved, the land of betrothal. Both these aspects are found in the life of Antony.

The somewhat pessimistic aspect: the ‘*Life of Antony*’ talks a lot about the demon, presenting him as the Master of the desert. At this time, when Christianity was spreading, the desert seemed to be the only place left for him. He waged war against the monks who came to live there. The monk’s struggle against the demon was placed within the framework of the story of the temptation of Jesus. The monk continued the work of redemption. This is one of the aspects of the desert.

The other is more optimistic. Although one went to the desert to fight against the devil, like Antony, an even stronger motive was to go there to meet God. If one left the city of men, it was to bring unity to one’s life; one left behind the things that were a distraction to keep one’s

“spirit fixed on a single goal,” as Cassian said later. The motivation is positive, one left the city of men for the city of God.

### **III. The ‘Life of Antony.’**

**Plan of the “Life of Antony” by St. Athanasius.**

- 0. PREAMBLE
- 1. INTRODUCTION & VOCATION OF ANTONY
  - 3 sayings of the Gospel = 3 conditions of being a monk
- 2. ANTONY’S 4 STAGES = the progress of a monk
  - a) outside the village
  - b) in a tomb
  - c) in a fort in the mountain (Father of monks)
- 3. THE ASCETIC DISCOURSE
  - a) practise ascetism
  - b) spiritual combat
  - c) conclusion
  - d) in the inner desert (Father of all)
- 4. ANTONY, THE MAN OF GOD
  - Miracles, prophecies, apophthegmata
- 5. THE APOLOGETIC DISCOURSE
  - (Sequel to Antony, man of God)
- 6. THE DEATH OF ANTONY
- 7. CONCLUSION

This then was the setting in which Athanasius wrote the “Life of Antony.” Athanasius did not imagine it, because he had spoken to people who had known Antony. But neither is it a simple biography, like that of a celebrated man. Athanasius did not write at random, he had a purpose.

He wanted to set right some deviations, correct deficiencies which he had noticed during his time with his friends, the monks. He wanted to give them a model in the person of Antony, to show them what a typical monk was like.

Another Father of the Church, Gregory of Nazianzan, said of the “Life of Antony” that it was a monastic rule in the form of a story (Or. 21.5).

The “Life of Antony” is very well planned.

We will choose some texts: The introduction and vocation of Antony, where Athanasius underlines three conditions for being a monk.

The four stages of the progress of a monk

A passage from the ascetic discourse on the discernment of spirits.

The death of Antony. (see the Texts)

### **IV. In Conclusion.**

The few texts that we have looked at give us a glance at the life of Antony, as St Athanasius saw it. We can fill it out by looking at his letters.

First of all we have the theme of the spiritual combat which we have seen in Origen. This theme has great importance for Antony. It means a struggle against the devil, but at the level of

the passions. Man was created good, he has become sick. The passions are a sickness of the heart. It is through them that the devil tries to lead us to perdition.

This is why vigilance and asceticism are necessary, they slowly transform even the body. Antony is optimistic, he knows that we have nothing to fear from the devil if we resist him to his face. He has no real power, for Christ has conquered him.

In order to overcome him, first we must unmask him, which is why discernment of spirits is so important. (Texts 13,14). Athanasius wants to tell us too that Jesus is there with us in our struggle (Text 6), he is present in his Spirit who gives us light and strength. In Letter 1 Antony calls the Spirit: “the friend of the heart” who “teaches us how to heal the wounds of the soul.” Elsewhere he teaches us to prefer nothing to the love of Christ (Text 8), a formula which St Benedict takes up in his Rule (4:21), for Christ has come to save us and impart his Spirit.

Prayer, which brings us close to Jesus and his Spirit, is also very important in this struggle against the demon. With prayer we must have perseverance, a theme often taken up in the ‘Life’ as in the ‘Letters’: “Hold fast, in spite of everything” (Letter 1:4). In two places he quotes psalm 131: “Do not let your eyes grow sleepy, nor your eyelids grow heavy” (3:1; 4:10). Perseverance is shown by the desire to progress a little more each day, it is always beginning again.

From the beginning, Athanasius teaches us that monastic life is an “imitation of Christ” and a “following of Christ,” two themes which come together in the ‘Life of Antony.’

Another interesting point: the monk does not seek God by himself, he is united to all his brothers. The further he goes into solitude, the more he is in a mysterious way in contact with his brothers.

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## **2. Antony, Texts**

### **1. Introduction**

1. Antony was an Egyptian. His parents were well-born and prosperous; they were Christians. From his earliest childhood he was brought up in the fear of the Lord. When he was a child he remained with his parents and he had no desire to leave them or his home. As he grew older he did not want higher learning. He had no desire to be with other boys. He did what the Scriptures say about Jacob: he wanted only to remain quietly with his family. He used to go with his parents to the church, God’s house. When he was a child he worked well. When he grew older he did not scorn his mother and father but did what they said. He paid attention to the readings at church and kept them carefully in his heart. His parents had money, but still the boy did not care about having much food and rich meals. That was of no interest to him. What they gave him was fine and he made no demands.

### **2. The Vocation of Antony and the First Stage**

2. When his father and mother were dead, Antony went on living with his sister who was quite young. He was eighteen years old. He was responsible for the house and his sister.

One day, about six months after the death of his parents, he went to the Lord's house as usual. While he was walking there he had something on his mind. He said to himself: "The Apostles gave up everything and followed the Lord; and in the book of the Acts it is said that the first Christians sold their possessions and they laid the money at the feet of the apostles for them to give to the poor. So they hoped to have a great reward in heaven. Antony's heart was full of these thoughts when he went into the church.

It was the time for the Gospel reading. Antony heard the Lord saying to the rich young man: "If you desire to be perfect, go, sell your property, and give to the poor and follow me. Then you will have wealth in heaven." The thought came to Antony: "These words are for me." From his parents Antony had some land, about two hundred acres. The land was rich and very fertile, and he gave it to the villagers. So he and his sister were free from that wealth. He sold all his furniture, keeping some things for his sister, and gave the money to the poor.

3. On another day, Antony went into the House of God. He heard the Lord saying in the Gospel reading: "Have no care for tomorrow." Then he could not stop there any longer; he went out and gave to the poor the money he still had. His sister he put into the care of some faithful virgins for them to see to her education.

After that he gave himself to asceticism, not living in his house. He paid attention to his behaviour and made himself undergo hard living. At that time there were not many monasteries in Egypt. The monks did not know the great desert at all. One who desired to watch his behaviour did so alone near the village where he lived. In the neighbouring village there lived an old man who had been an ascetic by himself since his youth. Antony went to see him and tried to do as well as he did.

At first Antony himself began by living near his village. When he heard of a zealous man he acted like a wise bee, he went after him. The example of that man's life was like food for the journey to him as he travelled the road of virtue. Then he went back home.

This was how he lived at first. He decided firmly not to go back to his possessions and to forget his family. The work of asceticism was all his desire, all that he sought. He worked with his hands because he had heard the word of St Paul: "If a man will not work, let him have no food." So, with the money he received for his work he bought bread and what was over after that he gave to the poor. He prayed all the time because he had learned that we should pray constantly in our hearts. He gave attention to the readings in church so that he did not let fall any of the words of Scripture. Indeed he kept it all in his memory, and his memory took the place of books.

4. That was Antony's life and all loved him. When he went to visit some ascetics he obeyed them whole-heartedly. He wanted to learn how to imitate their good acts and the asceticism of each one, so as to act like them. He watched them and noted: this one is kind, that one is always in prayer. He saw how one was awake at night for prayer, another gave his attention to reading the word of God. This one gave him pleasure because he was patient, that one because he fasted and the earth was his bed at night. He observed: this one is gentle, that one is generous. But it seemed to him that all of them had a great love and a holy fear for Christ and they all loved one another.

## 5. Second Stage in the Tomb

8. After having struggled against the demon, Antony desired to be strong against himself. He went off some distance to the tombs. He asked a friend to bring him some bread from time to

time. Then he went into one of the tombs, his friend shut the door and Antony did not come out again.

But the enemy refused to have that, he was afraid that the desert would soon be full of ascetics. So one night the demon came in with a great number of bad spirits. He whipped Antony so unmercifully that he fell speechless to the ground, so much did he suffer. The thought came to Antony: "These pains are so great; the blows of a man could not cause such great pains."

But the Lord never abandons those who place their trust in him. So he took care of Antony. The next day his friend came with bread. He opened the door, and saw Antony on the ground as if dead. He carried him to the church. There he put him down on the ground. Many of Antony's family and others came and took their places round him to mourn as for a dead person. But in the middle of the night. Antony came to himself. He opened his eyes and saw that all were sleeping and only his friend keeping watch. So he made a sign to him to come near and he made this request: "Take me back to the tomb while the others are still asleep."

6.

10. The Lord did not forget Antony, for he had been fighting with evil spirits. He came to bring him help. So Antony looked up and this is what he saw: the roof seemed to be opening, a ray of light came down to him. Suddenly the evil spirits had gone. At the same time his body was no longer painful. The walls were standing up straight again, and the building was once more intact. Antony saw that the Lord had come to help him. He could breathe more easily. His sufferings were gone.

Seeing the light, Antony said to the Lord: "Where were you? Why did you not come at the first to help me in my trouble?" And a voice came to his ears: "I was here, Antony, but I was watching to see how you would fight. You fight back well. You have not been overcome. so I will be your helper for ever and I will make you famous everywhere." Hearing this, Antony got up and offered a prayer. Those words gave him such comfort that he was stronger than he had been before the fight. At that time Antony was about thirty-five years old.

### 7. Third Stage in a Fort in the Desert

11. The next day Antony left the tomb with an even greater desire to be God's servant. So he went to see the old man he had known before. Antony requested him to come and be with him in the desert. But the old man did not agree, he was not young, and it was not common to go off into the desert at that time.

So Antony made his way to the mountain.

12. Antony was more and more certain that he desired a life pleasing to God. He went quickly on to the mountain. On the other side of a river he came to an abandoned fortress full of snakes, he went and made his home there. Then the serpents went off as though someone were chasing them. Antony blocked up the way in. He put bread in store there for six months (the Thebans could make bread which kept good for a whole year). there was water inside the fort. So he went in as to a safe and holy shrine and stayed there by himself without ever going out and without seeing those who came to visit him. For a long time he stayed there, living the ascetic life. He had more bread put over the top of the fortress wall, but only twice a year.

8.

14. Antony went on practising this ascetic life for about twenty years, living by himself and not going out. Nobody ever saw him, or at most they saw him infrequently. In the end, many had the desire to copy his asceticism. His friends broke down the door by force. Antony came out of the fort radiant as though from some shrine where he had been led into the divine mysteries and

full of the Holy Spirit. It was the first time that Antony had gone outside to meet those who came. When they saw him, his friends were amazed. He looked the same as he used to be: he was not fatter though he had no exercise; he was not thinner, though he had fasted and had battled with the evil spirits. Antony looked the same as before he went into the desert. But his heart had become pure.

He was not crushed by anything that made him sad and he was not overpowered by joy. He did not laugh and he was not sad. He saw the great number of people who had gathered, and he was not annoyed. There were many there and all gave him signs of honour, but that did not give him pleasure. His balance of mind was always the same for he acted according to reason and he was like Adam before he sinned. The Lord used Antony to cure the sick. Others were ruled by bad spirits and he freed them. God gave him words of grace, and so Antony helped many who were sad. He brought peace to those who had quarrelled and made them friends.

He said to all: "Put nothing before the love of Christ." Later on we shall be happy with God for ever. God loves us. He even gave up his Son for us all." When they heard Antony's words, many took the decision to begin asceticism. so it was that monasteries started in the mountains. To become ascetics, these men gave up their possessions; they built a town in the desert to become citizens of the Heavenly City.

#### 9. Fourth Stage in the Inner Mountain

49. Many people came and disturbed Antony's quiet life. He was not able to be alone as he wished. And the Lord used Antony to work wonders. So Antony was afraid. He said to himself: "I shall become full of pride or others will think I am better than I am." He thought this over carefully and decided: "I shall go to the Upper Thebaïd. Nobody will know me there." His brothers gave him some loaves of bread and Antony went to sit on the river bank to watch the boats as they passed. He wanted to go on one for the journey. Then a voice came from heaven saying: "Antony, where are you going? And why?" Antony was not troubled, he was used to hearing a voice that came to him like this. He answered: "All these people will not let me be quiet. They cause me weariness here and above all they want me to do things I am not able. So I want to go to the Upper Thebaïd." The voice spoke again: "Even if you go into the Thebaïd as you want, even if you go down to where the cattle are grazed, you will have twice as much to go through. If you truly desire a solitary life, go into the inner desert." Then Antony asked: "Who will tell me the way? I do not know it." At once he was shown some Desert Arabs who were going to take that road. So Antony went to them and said: "I wish to journey to the desert." The Arabs readily agreed for God had prepared them so that Antony's journey should have a good outcome. Antony went with them on foot for three days and three nights. He came to a very high mountain. A stream, very clear and pure, ran at the foot of the mountain. Further away, some trees grew on the plain.

10.

50. Antony liked the place, or rather, God made it pleasing to him; and certainly it was the place the voice had spoken of when he sat on the river bank. The Arabs gave Antony some loaves of bread before they went on, and he was left by himself on the mountain. He decided to stay there all alone. The Arabs admired Antony's courage and they gladly agreed to return by that road to bring him bread. He also had dates from the palm-trees for food. After a time, when the brothers found out where Antony was they sent food to him like good children looking after their father. But Antony saw that they were tired with taking bread to him. He asked the brothers who came to see him: "Bring me a small spade, an axe and some seeds." They sent him all these

things. Antony went over the mountain to find a fertile area. He found a place which was suitable, there was even a spring to water the seeds, so he was able to make bread for himself, and he did this each year. He was happy not to cause trouble to anyone anymore.

But then guests came to visit Antony. So he planted some vegetables to give his guests. At first the desert animals came to drink nearby and they damaged Antony's young plants. But he gently took hold of one of the animals and told them all: "Why do you harm me? I have done nothing to you. Go, and in the Lord's name do not come back here again." After that they kept away, as if they had heard what Antony said to them.

11.

51. So Antony was alone in the inner mountain engaged in prayer and asceticism. The brothers who served him asked permission to come and see him each month and bring him some olives, vegetables and oil, for he was now an old man. Those who visited him have told us how many struggles he endured there, not against flesh and blood, but against the demons, as St Paul wrote. They heard the noise of many voices and of fighting. At night they saw the mountain filled with beasts and they watched Antony struggling against these enemies and praying against them. He encouraged those who came. He fought on his knees, praying to the Lord.

Everyone marvelled that alone in such a desert, he was not afraid of the demons who attacked him nor was he frightened by the ferocity of so many beasts and reptiles which were there. As the psalm says, he really had "trust in the Lord as in Mount Sion." He was tranquil of spirit and untroubled; the demons fled and the wild beasts, as we have said, made peace with him.

12.

67. Antony's face was full of grace and was a pleasure to see. The Saviour had given him something more: when Antony was surrounded by his monks, if someone did not yet know him and wanted to see him, he did not go to any of the others, but went straight to him. It was as though Antony's eyes drew him. Antony was not noted for being particularly tall or strong, all tell of his conduct and his purity of heart. His soul was at peace and so his actions were calm. He had a joyful face because God was with him and his actions revealed his soul. Indeed the Bible says: "A glad heart makes a happy face. A sad heart crushes the spirit and darkens the face." It was thus that Jacob could see that Laban intended to deal deceitfully with him. He said to his wives: "The face of your father is not like yesterday and the day before." Samuel knew David because "he had lovely eyes and his teeth were white as milk."

This was the way others knew Antony. He was not troubled, his soul was in peace, his face was not sad because his mind was joyful.

### 13. Antony's Discourse: The Discernment Of Spirits

35. When the demons come to you at night and wish to tell what the future holds, or they say: "We are angels," pay no attention, they are lying. If they praise your asceticism and call you blessed, do not listen, have nothing to do with them. Rather make the sign of the cross on yourself and your cell, and pray; you will see them disappear, for they are cowards and are terrified by the sign of the cross, for the Lord overcame them by the cross.

If they still hold their ground, dancing and taking on different guises, do not be afraid or pay any attention to them as if they were good.

14.

36. One can easily tell the difference between good angels and bad, if God gives the grace. A vision of the good ones brings no disturbance. They do not cry out, one does not hear

their voice, but their presence is so gentle that the soul is suddenly filled with joy, delight and courage. The Lord who is our joy and the power of God the Father accompanies them. The thoughts of the soul remain calm and untroubled so that, shining brightly, it sees those who appear by its own light. The soul is overcome by a desire for future realities, it longs to be united with them and follow them to heaven. If, being human, some are frightened by the vision of good spirits, they remove their fear with love.

The coming and appearance of evil angels brings trouble with noise and shouting, as one might expect from unruly boys or brigands. This produces terror in the soul, confusion and trouble in the thoughts, depression, disgust for asceticism, listlessness, memory of relatives, fear of death and evil desires.

## 15. Last Visit To The Brethren And Death Of Antony

89. How did Antony end his life? I will give you an account of it as you desire for even in his death there is something to imitate.

Antony went to see the monks on the outer mountain as he commonly did. God had given him knowledge of his approaching death. In his talk to the brothers he said: "I have come for the last time to see how you are. We shall not meet again in this life if I am not mistaken. It is time for my departure, I am nearly 105 years old. At these words the monks were in tears. They gathered round Antony and embraced him. But Antony spoke to them joyfully. He was like a man sailing to his home town from exile, and he encouraged them: "Do not grow weary, keep on with your asceticism. Have the thought of death each day in your life. Keep your heart free from impure thoughts. Imitate the friends of God.

The brothers begged him to stay with them till he died, but he refused.

16.

91. Antony hurried away from the monks on the outer mountain, and took the road to the inner mountain where he had been living. Some months later he fell ill. Two brothers were living with him on the inner mountain. For fifteen years they had been practising asceticism with him and helping him in his old age. Antony called to them and said: "I am going the way of my fathers, as the Bible says. I see that the Lord is calling me. Be vigilant. You have been ascetics for some time, do not stop now. Be zealous, as though you were just beginning, be whole-hearted. You know about the evil spirits and their tricks. They are strong and evil, but they cannot do much, so have no fear of them. Look at Christ at all times and have faith in him. Let your life be as though each day is the day of your death. Watch yourselves and remember my words. Join yourselves to Christ first of all and then to his saints. At your death they will welcome you as friends in the house of God where we will live for ever. Think about these things, and if you love me, keep me in mind as a father.

Bury my body yourselves in the earth and do not let anyone know the place. At the resurrection of the dead, I will receive this same body from the Lord incorruptible. Divide my garments among yourselves. Give one sheepskin and the robe from my bed to bishop Athanasius. He gave it to me new. I have worn it out. Give the other sheepskin to bishop Serapion. You may keep the garment of hair. And now, my children, Antony is going on his way and will be with you no longer.

## 2. The Life of Antony, Explanation of the Text

*In the pages of the Text the numbers in bold type at the head of each major division refer to the explanations given here, where they are repeated. The numbers underneath refer to the numeration in the various published editions.*

## 1. The conditions for being a monk

1.

Here Athanasius introduces Antony to us. We see from the first words that Antony, an Egyptian Christian, has “well-born and prosperous” parents, which emphasizes that Antony’s monastic engagement was a free undertaking.

Then Athanasius depicts him as a perfect child. This is obviously not to be taken literally, he wants to present him to us as a perfect disciple of Christ. There are several indications. First the reference to Jacob (Gen. 25,27) who is one of the figures of Christ in the Old Testament. Then 3 texts from the Infancy Gospel in Luke (Lk. 2,42; 2,51). He is already the perfect ascetic, food and rich meals had no interest for him, he was detached from everything.

2.

In 2 & 3, Athanasius tells us how Antony became a monk. He gives us a lesson from earlier history, telling us what are the three conditions necessary to enter upon monastic life, with the help of three texts from Scripture.

In the second paragraph there is first a text (Acts 4,34) which will have great importance in the whole of primitive monasticism: the Apostles leave everything to follow Christ, and the faithful sell their possessions.

The first condition for being a monk then is to leave everything. It is given in the first text from Scripture which Antony hears (Mt. 19,21).

3.

Two other texts emphasize two further conditions for being a monk. We find here too the first of the four stages of his journey.

The first text is also taken from the Gospel (Mt. 6,34); it emphasizes total detachment. Antony had kept a small amount of money for his sister, taking thought for the future. Now, he gives it to the poor. The second text is taken from St Paul “If a man will not work, let him have no food” (2 Thess. 3,10).

Here then are three texts from Scripture which did not get there by chance, they show us what Athanasius thought a monk should be like. We have three conditions which one must accept if one takes on the monastic life:

1) Complete detachment to follow Christ

2) Absence of worry, coming from complete confidence in God

3) Manual work, both to live and to help the poor.

These three conditions can be connected to the three theological virtues of faith (1), hope (2) and charity (3).

## 2. The progress of a monk

3.

Still in text 3 we have the first stage in Antony’s journey. Each stage will be followed by a portrait of Antony as he has reached the degree of perfection underlined in this stage. Here too Athanasius has a purpose, he wants to show us the degrees through which the monk must pass, from that of a good novice to a perfect monk.

The first stage where Antony “gave himself to asceticism” shows us what Athanasius thought a good novice should be like.

Antony lived in or quite near his village. He had a Master, an old man of a neighbouring village, and he tried to imitate him. He watched those round him who acted well and, like a bee, he nourished himself on the good things he found among them.

For the rest, he prayed, he read the Bible which fed his prayer, and he worked for his daily bread and to give alms. These are the three occupations by which a novice is formed in the monastic life: prayer, reading and work.

4.

Here we have the first portrait of Antony, the portrait of a good novice. We are told that he obeyed everyone, and we can taste the honey which the bee has gathered from the ascetics, it is their virtues. We must know how to admire the virtues of others. The most important are being faithful to prayer and reading, then the social virtues: friendliness, patience, gentleness; and the ascetic virtues dear to the first monks: fasting and sleeping on the ground. All these are summed up in love of God and love of one’s neighbour.

5.

We come to the second stage. Antony goes to live in a tomb. This refers to an old custom of the East: the tombs are one or two kilometres from the village, each one is in a little house; on one side there is the tomb and on the other a small place where from time to time, on the anniversaries of the dead the relatives meet and eat together. The text tells us that there is a roof and a door. There one is well-protected and alone.

But now the demons come. They are found throughout the life of Antony. This needs some explanation; it must not be taken literally. The people of those time were not more simple than ourselves and the demon was not so stupid as to come in broad daylight then, as does not do so now. This way of speaking is like a parable, expressing deeper realities: there is within us a power stronger than ourselves, it is in us but not part of us, and this is what we have to fight against. This is the meaning of the spiritual combat, we have already noticed it in Origen. Antony imitates Christ in his struggle against the demon, and like him, he shown to us “as if dead.”

6.

This text teaches us that even if we think God is absent, he is nevertheless very close, and that it is at the moment when the devil is most active that God too is at work. His presence is hidden, but he is there when we struggle and it is he who assures us victory over the demon. Then Antony “got up,” so sharing in the resurrection of Christ after having taken part in his death: he was “stronger than he was before the fight.”

7.

Now we come to the third stage. After his combat he goes out with an even greater desire to serve God. He goes to see the Senior; the text is more precise than the translation, it reads: “He went to see the old man, his Senior,” so it was the one he had taken for his guide. But now, after the formation he received from this Senior and the combats against the demon, Antony has become a monk, and although his Senior does not want to follow him to the desert, he goes alone, impelled by the Spirit. We begin to see that Antony is someone who knows what he wants. He was “certain.”

He went to a fortress. Do not imagine it was anything very grand; it was simply a guard post in the desert against thieves and enemy armies, a solid building in a dry land which commanded a pass or a strategic place and which was only occupied by soldiers when necessary.

8.

This text gives a portrait of Antony at the third stage. He had “learnt the secrets of God, and was full of the Holy Spirit.” Athanasius gives us several lessons on the effects of the ascetic life.

First of all, the ascetic life does not destroy a person, but restores him; Antony is the same as before: “he looked the same as before he went into the desert.” Then the ascetic path enables the soul to recover its purity of heart and leads to equanimity, which the monastic tradition calls *apatheia*, a state wherein a person has controlled his passions and subjected them to reason. It is not that he no longer has any passion, which would be impossible, but that he is no longer dominated by them, he is the master.

Notice the word “natural.”. Asceticism enabled Antony to return to the “natural” state which Adam knew before he sinned, in which he had been created by God. These old monks were optimistic about the nature of man. What God has created is good, so naturally men and women are good too. They have been made evil by the fall; asceticism enables them to recover this “natural” state in which they came from the hands of God. Cassian thought in the same way, but not Augustine who had experienced in his flesh that man is drawn to evil.

9.

But the Spirit drew Antony still further. We see in this text what Antony did when he was discovered. Athanasius uses many expressions at the beginning of the paragraph to show this: “he was not able to be alone as he wished” — he decided: “I shall go” — then when he heard the voice, he: “was not troubled” and he replied: “I want to go to the Upper Thebaïd.” Antony was in control of his life. But then the voice told him to go into the inner desert, and Antony replied: “Who will tell me the way? I do not know it.” Here Antony changes from a state where he goes his own way to one where he is directed by God. Antony was living according to his own will, and now he is living according to the will of God. In this way Athanasius shows us that the monk must attain a state of perfect interior obedience where nothing is dearer to him than the will of God. He allows himself to be led by God.

Another interesting thing to notice is the march across the desert for three days and three nights; it recalls several passages in the Bible. Look up: Numbers 33,8; Tobit 3,10; Esther 4,16; Jonas 2,1; Matthew 12,40 where the three days and the three nights culminate in the resurrection. Athanasius wants to emphasize a new state the monk has reached, indicated by the first words of the next text (10) in which God makes it pleasing to him.

10.

Now Antony is “all alone.” To avoid giving trouble to others he cultivates a plot of land to make bread; and later to feed his guests. We learn that solitude does not prevent fraternal charity.

At the end of the passage, Antony talks with the beasts who understand and obey him. Athanasius wants to show that the union of men and women to God reconciles them with nature. This is the theme of paradise regained.

11.

This passage describes further combats when Antony was old; the monk must always struggle against the demon. His weapon is prayer. But he has progressed; now “he was tranquil of spirit and untroubled”; he had “trust in the Lord,” and even better, he “encouraged those who came.” He has achieved *apatheia*.

12.

This is the last portrait of Antony when he has achieved perfection; three words which recur several times are used to describe it; he is “at peace,” “calm,” “not troubled.” He is also

“joyful”: “his heart was joyful,” “he had a joyful face.” In his face, his eyes reflected the joy in his heart: “he had lovely eyes”; his eyes drew people to him.

There is an example here of the Father’s knowledge of the scriptures; they quote the Bible from memory, and sometimes their memory deceives them. The quotation: “he had lovely eyes and his teeth were white as milk,” is not said of David but of Judah, in Gen. 49,12.

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If we take these four stage which retrace Antony’s progress, we find another lesson which Athanasius gives us.

We find that at each stage Antony draws further and further away from other people; at the first he is near the village and we are told that “everyone loved him” (4); at the second he is one or two kilometres from the village and he has a friend who brings him bread (5); at the third he goes out into the desert where he is “by himself” in a fortress (7); and in the fourth he goes deeper into the desert, into what is called the “inner desert,” and there he is “all alone.”

But at the same time the text emphasizes that the greater the distance from people the nearer he comes to them. At the first stage he is “like a bee,” he goes from one ascetic to another, visiting them and observing the good things each one does (3&4). At the second, God promises that he will be “famous everywhere” (6). At the third he becomes a spiritual father, a father of monks (8) and here we have his ascetic discourse addressed to monks. Finally at the last stage he draws everybody to him, works miracles and become the father of all. Here we are given his apologetic discourse addressed to all people.

Athanasius gives us a lesson which will later be taken up by Augustine: “There are separations which are ruptures, but there there are others which unite.” Another monk, Evagrius, will later take up the same idea in the phrase: “A monk is he who, separated from all, is united to all.” Not “although separated,” but “because separated.” When one leaves the world, one is united to it in a deeper way than before.

### 3. The discernment of spirits

13.

This is a passage taken from the “Ascetic discourse,” a discourse which Antony never actually gave and which is more from Athanasius than Antony. However there is an idea in it which recurs in the letters of Antony: the demons ought not to be feared; they are cowardly and “come at night,” that is when we do not feel the grace of God; but the Lord has already conquered them by the cross. We triumph over them by the sign of the cross and by prayer.

14.

Athanasius gives us a way to recognise if a thought comes from the demon or from God. First paragraph: a thought which brings joy and courage comes from the Lord who is joy and power. Our thoughts are untroubled and bring a desire for heaven. Second paragraph: on the other hand a thought which produces trouble, terror, “a sad countenance, disgust for asceticism,” comes from the demon. We need to discern our thoughts. As was said earlier, the word “apparition” should not be taken in too materialistic a fashion, it means the thoughts which come to the soul.

### 4. The death of Antony

Two passages tell us of the last recommendations (15) which Antony made to his monks on his last visit, and (16) the story of his death.

15.

When Antony knew he was going to die, he bade his monks to: “keep the thought of death each day of your life,” which St Benedict also tells us in chapter 4 of his Rule, no. 46&47.

There is a beautiful definition of the “joyful” death of the monk: “like a man sailing to his home town from exile.”

16.

This time, when Antony returns to his solitude, we see how old he is, he is helped by two brothers. He gives them his last recommendations, and because he is with his close friends, he is more precise; first an instruction which we will come across again in the desert Fathers: “vigilance,” further on he says: “Live each day as though it is the day of your death.” Then another similar instruction dear to the desert Fathers: self-watchfulness. Vigilance and self-watchfulness give rise to constancy in the asceticism: “be zealous, as though you were just beginning.” Again we are told that the demons must not be feared; the remedy for resisting them is to keep close to Christ: “Look at Christ at all times and have faith in him.”

Then Antony said what should be done with his body; it should be hidden so that no one can go looking for relics. Then his possessions, his two fleeces (he means a garment of goatskin to keep out the cold), and his robe which he gave to his two friends, the bishops, and his garment of hair which he left to his disciples.

Then to finish, another beautiful definition of the death of a monk: “Antony is going on his way.”

### 3. The Mediterranean basin.

#### Lower Egypt.

We are in Lower Egypt. 60 km south of Alexandria, at the edge of the desert, we are flying over a deep valley, hills rising on each side dotted with caves. No sign of a monastery, but in each cave you can imagine a monk. This is NITRIA (A word that comes from nitrum, the old word for saltpetre, nitrate of potassium; salt and soda were extracted here.). But this place was relatively near Alexandria, and there were many visitors. It is said that when Amoun the founder of Nitria, told Antony of this annoyance, they both went south, after the meal at the ninth hour, and founded a second monastic centre at the place where they arrived as the sun was setting

So, half a day’s journey, about 18km, we find the next monastic centre called: THE CELLS because it consisted of small houses built next to each other. Each monk had a rough dwelling. Often one could build a cell in a day. They were made of mud and reeds, but they did have a bolted door. Sometimes, as in Nitria, they used a hole in the rock; the houses then had two rooms. Excavations here have shown that an anchorite’s cell was in a courtyard surrounded by a wall where he could walk about. In this courtyard a well provided water to drink and to water the garden. The space between the cells was large enough so that one could be neither seen nor heard. But the desert was vast. When Palladius went there, he found 600 monks. That means a town 6 km in diameter. The church was in the centre.

About 40 km further south, we find SCETE another monastic centre of the same kind for those who wanted even greater solitude; it was 30 km from the Nile and even further from any town.

Fairly soon, some more permanent buildings were put up in these places; the church where the monks gathered to celebrate Sunday, and a guest house. But the monks continued to live as hermits, apart.

So we have three successive monastic centres in Lower Egypt.

### Upper Egypt.

We will continue our flight, veering slightly to the right to find the valley of the Nile and we will fly over Upper Egypt and its capital Thebes. Antony said he wanted to live in the Upper Thebaïd; that is where we are. Surprisingly, here it is the opposite to Lower Egypt, there are very few hermits, but we are flying over entire villages surrounded by a wall. Here is one, let us get out of the helicopter.

We are at the foot of a wall about eight or ten metres high. We go to the right to find a door, but no luck, we have gone the wrong way and have to go nearly all the way round the wall to find the door, for there is only one door in the whole wall.

At this one door, there is a porter who is very good at his job; he asks a lot of questions: “Are you men, or women? Are you catholics, are you unbelievers? Are you priests, monks, lay-people? etc. This is because everyone will be made welcome, but not in the same way: the ladies here, the tourists there, the poor somewhere else, the catholics in one place, the monks in another.

We are monks, and so we can visit everywhere, but in the company of a monk. We begin by finding there are a great many inhabited houses with between 20 and 40 brothers in each house. We go into the first house, and ask the first monk we meet: “What do you do?” He replies: “I am a baker.” Then the second: he too says: “I am a baker,” and the third likewise. Is everyone a baker in this place? Then we go into another house and ask: “What do you do?” He answers: “I am a scribe.” In another house the answer is: “I am a shoe maker.” We begin to understand; in these houses the monks are grouped according to their crafts. There is organization!

Then we meet a monk and make a bit of conversation. But the bell goes: “Excuse me” he says “but I must go!” So then, there is a rule too. Then we see the brother we visited make a small bow as another brother passes by. We ask him why. He answers: “That is the head of the house.” There is a minor official. A moment later he makes a deep bow, we are meeting the head of the monastery. A little further on he falls on his knees and prostrates. It is Pachomius himself, the Father of the whole Order.

We are among the Pacomians, there is both an Order and order!

There are 9 monasteries like this one, and everything is done the same way in each. It is very different from what we saw in Lower Egypt. These monks are not hermits, they are cenobites.

Now we can see two kinds of life, on the one hand the anchoritic and on the other the cenobitic; for the one there is no written rule nor any organization, the other is organized down to the last detail.

### Palestine.

Now we will fly north to Palestine. Only ten years later Latin monasticism is to be found in this Greek-speaking country. Jerome came from Rome where he had had much trouble as we shall see later. He loved the Scriptures and he loved Jesus, so he settled in Bethlehem where Jesus was born. There, with a rich lady from Rome, he founded a double monastery, one of nuns for Paula and her companions, and one of monks for Jerome and his companions. Near-

by, in Jerusalem, a friend of Jerome, (at least he was a friend then, later the two became enemies), called Rufinus also founded a double monastery with Melania known as the Elder to distinguish her from another Melania called the Younger.

Still in Palestine, but in the deserts of Jordan and round the Dead Sea, we find the system of the Laura which lasted for some time in the East.

It is a combination of the two kinds of monasticism found in Lower and Upper Egypt. The novice entered a monastery, a cenobium where he made a apprenticeship for seven or eight years. Thus he began in a community, as in Upper Egypt. Then he went into solitude, in the Laura, where he lived as an anchorite, the same system as in Lower Egypt but institutionalised; although they lived in solitude, some kilometres from the monastery, they did not do what they felt like. They had a spiritual father, and every Saturday, whether they liked it or not, they went to see him and to live in community with six or seven others who had the same spiritual father. They gave him an account of the week, talked things over, had a meal, settled material matters, celebrated the office of vigils and then the Resurrection of the Lord, and on Sunday afternoon returned to complete solitude until the following Saturday. This was the pattern, until death.

For these people the anchoritic life was the culminating point which must be prepared for by the cenobitic life. St Benedict has an echo of this, no doubt indirect, in the beginning of his Rule. It has something in common with the systems of Upper and Lower Egypt and yet is different; the anchorites of Lower Egypt had no cenobitic apprenticeship, and the Pachomians did not live the solitary life.

## Syria.

Now we will go further north, to Syria. Here too there is a real attraction to the desert, but it is not thought of in the same way, nor lived in the same manner. For us today, the way of life of these monks is very difficult to understand; the more spectacular, the more excessive it was, the better! To us they seem to be truly fools for God!

There are the hypaitrae, from the Greek: *hypaiethros* which means: "in the open air." These men marked out a space in a field with stones or perhaps tied their feet to a chain so that they could not go outside a certain radius, and they lived there like a cow in a meadow, whether in the rain, the sun or the cold, open to the gaze of all the passers-by. It must have been very penitential!

There were also the dendritae, from the Greek: *dendron*, tree. They hollowed out the trunk of a tree and lived inside. Others were in hanging cages, so small that they could not stand upright. Others tied themselves to a rock. And in Syria the sun beats down mercilessly!

Then there were the stylites who lived their whole life long on a pillar.

Were all these people really mad? We cannot be sure! Certainly they should not be imitated, but in order to understand them, they must be considered in their own times. It was a time when people's temperaments, and therefore passions and temptations, were much more violent than ours. People led very dissolute lives. Above all the monks wanted to escape from sin in a world where sin was widespread, and they were hot-blooded, which explains their preoccupation with taming the flesh by any means.

Moreover, another aspect in which their asceticism was not entirely senseless was that to be a hypaitrie or dendrite was to be in contact with nature. For them a person completely given to God has restored the bonds with nature, which is itself the work of God.

A word about the most well-known of these eccentrics, the STYLITES who occupied an important place in the monasticism of Syria and some of whom were celebrities and saints.

The founder was Simon the Great. He began by living for three years in a hut, then he became a hypaitrite. He installed

himself on a slab with a 10 metre chain tied to his foot and a huge stone the other end. He refused to sit or lie down. But a crowd of people came to see him. To escape, instead of fleeing horizontally, like the monks of Scete who went out into the desert as far away from people as they could, he fled vertically and had the idea of putting his stone slab on a pillar. First he set himself up on a pillar of 3m, then 6, then 11, then 18 metres.

How were these dwellings of the stylites made?

First there was a base from 2- 2 1/2 metres in diameter. On this was fixed a shaft with an iron bar. About 1m. in diameter, it was composed of several cylinders held together by the bar (often there were three in honour of the Holy Trinity). The total height was not more than 20 metres, first because there had to be a ladder to get up, and also because, as the stylite spoke to the crowd he could not be too high for them to hear.

At the top of the shaft there was a platform 1.3 or 1.8 each side, with a parapet to prevent the stylite falling off in his sleep. A pipe ran down the shaft for refuse. The whole structure was surrounded by a small enclosure, the *mandra*, a courtyard enclosed by a stone wall. Inside there was a small cabin for the stylite's servant

What did he do up there?

He stood the whole day long, praying with many prostrations and genuflections. He ate only once a day. At night he normally slept sitting. During the day he exercised an apostolate by speaking to the crowd. The elevated position of the stylites expressed their desire to meet God and to be intermediaries between God and the people. That is in fact what they were. Their direct apostolate was considerable; they brought peace to individual consciences and reconciled people to each other. People came from everywhere to the foot of the pillar to tell them their problems.

This life was terribly austere; they were never able to lie down, but stood upright most of the time exposed to every kind of weather. The dreadful asceticism gave rise to many illnesses most of which the stylite refused to attend to, considering illness a grace of God. However this did not prevent most of the stylites dying at a great age.

So here we have men fleeing vertically to meet God, while the anchorites of Lower Egypt fled horizontally to meet the devil!

## Asia Minor.

In Pontus, we meet other eccentrics, not in their way of life but in their ideas. These are rather strange ascetics, unstable, generous people certainly, but they had no notion of authority. One can see that this exaggerated asceticism known as *enkratism* could be dangerous. Saint Basil went to meet them to try to put them right, gradually he created another kind of cenobitic monasticism, different from Pachomian cenobitism.

The Basilian communities were smaller than the Pachomian *koinonia*. They were called fraternities, as for Basil the word 'monk' meant anchorite, and Basil — who thought cenobites were the only proper kind of monk — did not use this word; he wanted a cenobitism where one lived among brothers, but under the authority of a superior. Moreover, while the Pachomian communities exemplified the heavenly kingdom, those of Basil wanted to show Jesus both retiring from the crowds and doing good to all the people. They were not surrounded by a large wall or out in the desert, but on the outskirts of the towns exercising charity. Thus Basil built a large hospital where his brothers served. Here, the fraternities were between the desert and the city.

A little further north and to the west, at Constantinople, with John Chrysostom it is different again. The monasteries were no longer on the outskirts but right in the city. John, as bishop of Constantinople, thought that monks ought to be useful. They were to have a charitable role: hospitals like the Basilians, and also pastoral tasks to help the bishop in his work. They tried to stop the Christians from becoming drowsy, their role was to bring them back to the Gospel.

### North Africa.

Going across the Mediterranean, we are now in present day Algeria and Tunisia. In the last years of the fourth century, after his conversion in Milan in Italy, Augustine went back to his native land with a great longing to love Jesus and he founded a small monastic community with his friends. Augustine was a great man, very intelligent; he had a immense desire for happiness and, for him, friendship was already a source of happiness on earth. Here we have, then, gathered round a richly gifted person such as Augustine, a small community of friends who helped each other in the common life. They prayed, they discussed philosophy, they studied holy Scripture and theology. It was a monasticism which was both intellectual and lay.

But three years later Augustine was ordained priest for the Church in Hippo, and helped the bishop with preaching. He left his monastery in the hands of Alypius, one of his friends, and asked to be able to continue his monastic life. He was given a house at the bottom of a garden, on a property belonging to the Church, and there he founded a community. Four years later, when he became the bishop's coadjutor, he had to leave this garden monastery. Many brothers from among the fervent monks of this monastery would be chosen as bishops in other dioceses in Africa. Augustine himself asked the priests of Hippo to come and live the common life with him in the bishop's house. It is this which gave rise to the idea, long current, that Augustine had founded monasteries of priests; and which influenced later centuries, giving rise to the confusion between monks and priests, the problem of the identification of priests with religious, the obligation of celibacy and the renunciation of all personal property. Later, in Rome, Gregory the Great had a monastery of priests living with him when he became Pope.

### Rome.

Crossing the Mediterranean again, we go to Italy. In Rome we find several kinds of monastic life. Rome is the imperial city, with an ancient tradition and a paganism linked with a high level of culture. The Christians, and particularly monks, were not viewed with favour, being often considered as rough and uncultured. There were, however some fervent communities of men and women ascetics in which charity was the whole inspiration of their rule of life; they were little known, but Augustine met them when he came back from Milan. They gave him a fine witness of the life of Christians.

There was also another feminine form of monastic life, a little surprising to our way of thinking, which can be explained by the context of Roman society. Women in high society, whether virgins or widows, led a life consecrated to prayer, asceticism and almsgiving in their own homes. Several of these great ladies gathered in the house of Marcella, forming a kind of monastery. They needed great conviction and faith to live in this way; rich widows were often sought in marriage because of their fortunes; young unmarried women did not have much standing in law; neither their families nor society approved their celibate state. What is more, these ladies studied the Scriptures, which educated people considered altogether barbaric. They had to endure the mockery of worldly people.

Then Jerome arrived in Rome in 381, an event which redoubled their fervour. Jerome worked hard on the Holy Scriptures and translated them from Hebrew into Latin. He had spent several years as a monk in the desert. He knew many of the noble families. He had great prestige in the eyes of these pious women, he both taught them exegesis and became their spiritual guide. One can see the rest of the story in Jerome's letters: these ladies increased their asceticism. Young Blesilla, daughter of another great Roman lady, Paula, who until then had been living in a very worldly fashion, was converted, led an austere life and died four months later. Everybody was upset and said it was because of too much asceticism and blamed that villain Jerome who made her lead such a harsh life that she died. There was a scandal in the city of Rome

At the same time a certain Helvidius wrote a short tract in which he tried to demonstrate that Mary was not a virgin, and then he said that if virginity had any value in the eyes of God, Mary would have observed it. Jerome responded with his usual vivacity in a book arguing vigorously against him. But he went too far and made an impassioned eulogy of continence, condemning the carnal union of man and woman. This was very badly received. For two reasons — the death of Blesilla and the dispute with Helvidius — Jerome and Paula had to leave Rome. It was then that they went to Bethlehem.

In the end, things settled down, but the row was rekindled by the writing of Jovinian, a monk who had married and who, to justify himself, explained that the normal outcome of continence was to marry. This writing was much read and many monks left. Jerome flew into a passion and joined the fray again; he wrote a tract "Against Jovinian" so outrageous, so scandalous, condemning all sexuality, that he had to retract.

So we can see that in Rome monasticism was not looked upon favourably. When a monk called Paulinus of Nola came to Rome in 394, we are told that Pope Siricius received him "*cum superba discretione*," that is: "with haughty reserve." People were mistrustful. But another pope, Anastasius, who was favourable towards monks, received him with honour and affection in 400. At the beginning of the fifth century monasticism put down new roots in Rome. This was a monasticism which would benefit others; the monks looked after pilgrims and occupied themselves with spiritual and pastoral care in the Roman basilicas.

## Gaul.

From Italy we go up to Gaul. Martin who was born in Hungary, went to Poitiers after he was a soldier, and spent some time alone on an island. He knew that bishop Hilary had gathered together some men who wanted to live a life of poverty and prayer, and thought that it would be good to be near him. Hilary gave him a plot of land at Ligugé and there Martin attracted a great many disciples. Many in Gaul admired the 'Life of Antony' which had become widely known. Martin became bishop of Tours, and founded a new monastery at Marmoutiers, where the solitaries came to live together. On the death of St Martin in 397, Sulpicius Severus described the funeral where a large number of monks wept for their beloved father. But a few years later barbarian invasions swept everything away. This form of monasticism in northern Gaul did not attach much importance to institutions and a rule, so it was vulnerable in the face of internal difficulties or exterior problems.

In southern Gaul, at Marseille, under the protection of bishop Proclus, monasticism took firm root in the Church; above all at Lerins where the great spiritual master Honoratus founded a fervent community, many of whose monks were asked to become bishops, and founded further monasteries in their turn. John Cassian, who had spent many years learning from the example and teaching of the Fathers of Egypt and Palestine, had just arrived in Marseille. The bishops and

abbots asked him to put the ‘Institutes’ of these great master into writing for the worthy desires of the Gallic monks would come to nothing without sound doctrine. Cassian so admired the great Egyptians that he often spoke in a condescending manner to the Westerners, he even behaved as if Augustine had never founded a monastery! But his writings were influential and successful as the ground was well prepared.

## British Isles.

In the British Isles we find another kind of monasticism. It was born among the Celtic Christians who had been pushed westwards in what is now England by the Anglo-Saxon invasions. Two of the great names are Patrick, and Columban. One of the characteristics of this monasticism is a form of asceticism which entailed leaving home and leading a wandering life of voluntary exile. They took literally the word of God to Abraham: “Leave your country.” There was a missionary character about it; Patrick went to evangelise Ireland and Columban founded monasteries in Gaul and even in Italy.

The desire for voluntary exile persuaded the Irish monks to venture far out to sea to build small monasteries in the most inaccessible places that they could reach with their fragile boats. It was on this back-drop that the fabulous adventures of the *Navigation of Saint Brendan* were painted. Some people claim that he reached America!

## Conclusion.

This quick bird’s-eye view shows the diversity of monasticism at the beginning and its powerful momentum. It went from the solitary life to cenobitism, from the desert to the city, from the laity to the priesthood, from ignorance to knowledge, from integration in the life of society to challenging that society, from life in as confined a setting as possible to one of immense spaciousness!

Diversity in form, but unity in the things which constitute the basis on monastic life; the desire for the Absolute of which we spoke in the first chapter, an Absolute which has been shown to us in the person of the Beloved Christ.

Some of these monastic forms have disappeared, others have remained. Today, for those of us who can see what has lasted, it is easy to say that was good, the other was not. But in those days, one could not tell; the test of time has shown what was of worth.

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## Monasticism stretches:

|                                                 |                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| From the anchorites = <i>Lower Egypt; Syria</i> | to the cenobites = <i>Pachomius, Basil, Augustine</i>                    |
| From the desert = <i>Upper &amp; Lower</i>      | to the city = <i>John Chrysostom in Egypt, Syria etc. Constantinople</i> |
| From the laity = <i>All except</i>              | to the priesthood = <i>Augustine at Hippo</i>                            |

|                                                    |                                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| From strict stability = <i>All except</i>          | to long journeys = <i>Irish monks</i>                     |
| From ignorance = <i>Egypt</i>                      | to knowledge = <i>Jerome, Augustine.</i>                  |
| <i>Integrated in social life = John Chrysostom</i> | <i>Opposed to social life = Syria, Lower Egypt Basil,</i> |

## 4. The Monastic Rules.

In the table: ‘Ancient Monasticism,’ there are against some names, they represent books. These are some of the monastic rules; for the Rule of St Benedict is not the only rule. There were many rules in ancient monasticism. Not all of them have survived, we know about twenty-five of them. It is a good idea to see how the Rule of St Benedict is related to all these rules.

### Classification.

Some rules are what we could call ‘Mother-Rules,’ because they were written before all the others and are independent of each other. The Rules written later are more or less inspired by them.

There are three “Mother-Rules.” Two come from Africa: the rule of Pachomius from Egypt and the rule of St Augustine from North Africa. The third, improperly called the rule of St Basil (we shall see why ‘improperly’) comes from Asia Minor. All those which depend on them, the ‘Daughter Rules’ come from Western Europe, particularly from Gaul.

Several generations of “Daughter-Rules” can be distinguished, according as they have descended with more or less intermediaries from the three Mother-Rules. These Mother-Rules do not use the word ‘monk,’ as they are destined for cenobites, and the word ‘monk’ implies solitude (see below: The word ‘Monk’). They preferred the word ‘brother’ because they were men living the common life; but the word ‘monastery’ already designated their dwelling, and Pachomius and Augustine, in other writings, used the word monk in speaking of cenobites. The word ‘monk,’ which was first used for anchorites, gradually came to be used in rules destined for cenobites; it is found in the daughter-rules as shown in Table 4 in Book 2.

Among the latter, some are more important. In the first generation we find the influence of Cassian’s Institutes; they are not a monastic rule, but they describe, for the cenobites of Gaul, the observances inspired both by Pachomius and by the hermits of the desert. In the second generation we find a very important rule from which St Benedict drew a lot of inspiration: it is written by an unknown person called ‘the Master.’

The Rule of St Benedict belongs to the third generation. It is strongly influenced by the Rule of the Master. It depends also very much on the Institutes of Cassian and on the rule of St Basil which St Benedict urges us to read.

After St Benedict, there are three more generations of rules which will be inspired by it. All of them are from Gaul or Italy.

### Their Length.

These monastic rules are of different lengths. The longest is the Rule of the Master, if we take only that part of the Rule of Basil which Benedict knew (as we shall see in the chapter on Basil), the only part on our table. But if we take the rule of Basil in its totality, it is the longest by far. The rule of Benedict is the third longest.

All the others are shorter than the rule of Benedict and, with one exception, the longest of them are less than half its length. Among the others some are very short. In Table 5 in Book 2 (pink paper) the shortest rule is used as a unit of measurement.

### **Their Content.**

The content of these rules is very variable. The three Mother-Rules afford a good example of their diversity.

What are called the Rules of Pachomius are in fact collections of regulations, probably edited and put together by his disciples, instructions and prohibitions concerning the life of the community. References to the Bible and the spiritual reasons for doing or not doing things are hardly mentioned here. They are found in other writings of Pachomius and his disciples. The rules are a sort of practical notebook.

The Rules of Basil are the opposite. The emphasis is on the Gospel on which they are founded, spirituality is everywhere abundant. The regulations laid down come from reflection on the Bible and flow from it. This is the richness and interest of the Rules of St Basil in which a real and profound theology is to be found. That is why St Benedict advises us to read them.

The third of these Mother-Rules, that of St Augustine is in between, combining concrete regulations and spiritual reflection.

Among the other rules, those of the Master and of Benedict resemble those of Basil and Augustine since they contain precise regulations but a theological and spiritual reflection show the reason for the regulations.

### **Different Emphases.**

All deal with monks living in common. However some of them are marked by the eremitical ideal of Lower Egypt; what counts most of all is the master-disciple relationship, the relationship between brothers takes second place. One could say that they develop a vertical cenobitism. This is the case with the writings of Cassian and the Rule of the Master.

Others give first place to fraternal relationships, insisting on the life of the community, on the communion of persons according to the ideal outlined in the Acts of the Apostles 2:44: "All the believers lived together and had everything in common," and 4:32: "The group of believers had a single heart and soul and nobody called any of their possessions their own, but all things were held in common." These rules could be said to portray a horizontal cenobitism. Such are the rules of Basil and Augustine.

In Table 4 we can see how Benedict is specially and simultaneously influenced by one rule of vertical cenobitism, that of the Master, and by another of horizontal cenobitism, that of Augustine. If we recall chapter 73 of his Rule, after he mentions the *Lives of the Fathers* he recommends that we read the Conferences and Institutes of Cassian (vertical cenobitism), and the Rule of Basil (horizontal cenobitism). This feature is an indication of the balance which characterises his Rule, a mark of his discretion.

### **The Word "Monk."**

The meanings of this word are rich and distinctive.

The word comes from the Greek: Monakos, already used by Plato to mean something unique or solitary. For Plotinus, The One who is at the summit of his ladder of beings is monakos: God is 'Monk.' The word has an equivalent in the Bible as we shall find.

Monasticism, which came to birth particularly in a Greek environment, very soon used the word *monakos*, 'monk,' to designate the ascetic who lived alone, apart from the world, even if these solitaries were sometimes grouped together in small communities. On the other hand, the first three cenobitic monastic rules, those of Pachomius, Basil and Augustine did not use the word: the cenobite lived with others, he was not alone, he was not solitary, he was not a monk. Basil, who was fiercely anti-eremitical, went so far as to say in his rule: "Man is not a monastic animal." In none of these rules do we find the word: 'monk,' they speak of 'brothers.' It is only later that the word 'monk' designates the cenobite. This came about slowly, so that the frequency of the word enables us to estimate the age of a monastic Rule. At the time of St Benedict it had already become a term which was used regularly: "Then are they truly monks when they live by the labour of their hands."

However, though the word is absent from the Rule of St Augustine, he wrote such a vast amount and lived at a time when the word 'monk' was becoming common and when the Donatists had their monks, he attempted to justify the word in his *Ennaratio* on Psalm 132: "How good and how pleasant it is, brothers dwelling 'in unum.'" He referred here to the passage in Acts: "the community of believers had but one heart and one soul." This "one" heart and soul are characteristic of community life. It is the community which is 'Monk,' and not the one who is living in community. How then, do we arrive at: "they are truly monks" of St Benedict?

The connection was admirably formulated in the twelfth century by a Cistercian, Geoffrey of Auxerre who said: "A community is only united if the monks who compose it first seek their own interior unity." The condition for a community to be one, is that the monks be 'one' interiorly. The monk then is not one who is alone exteriorly, but one who is interiorly one. We have then moved from exterior unity to interior unity. To account for this passage, we must take another line of enquiry and look at the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word *monakos*: *jahid*.

This Hebrew term caused a lot of trouble to the Greek translators. Let us take an example from Psalm 68:7: "Elohim makes the *jahadim* dwell in his house." It can be translated as "God gives the lonely a home to dwell in." Here we have the term *Monakos* which we have met. But this translation has not satisfied some translators, which is understandable, for if God has created human beings to live in society: "He created them man and woman," and has given them the command: "Increase and multiply," why is it that he has given the lonely a dwelling? So others have translated it by *monozonous*, "those who only have one belt." Here we have the idea of renunciation and poverty. Others have gone deeper: Aquila, who was a Jew influenced by Christianity, translated it by *monogenesis*, the only-begotten, assimilating the lonely to the Only Son of God (elsewhere he rendered the same word by *agapetos*, 'well-beloved').

Finally the Septuagint gives another translation which was to bear fruit in the Fathers: *monotropous*: "those who have only one direction." God makes those who have only one direction, one aim, dwell in his house. We can see the phrase of Geoffrey of Auxerre behind this translation. It is in fact the meaning retained by posterity.

Origen was the first to give this meaning when he commented on the verse from the book of Samuel: "There was one man." He said: "This 'one' man is he who has dominated the passions which distract him, who is not divided, no longer pulled this way and that, who has achieved equanimity, who has become the imitator of God, the Immutable. Man is 'one' when he is united to God in such a way that he has realised unity within himself. Origen was not a monk; he wrote for Christians. But what he says is very true when he deals with men and women consecrated to God. We shall find the same idea throughout the monastic tradition, in Pseudo-

Macarius and in Gregory the Great: “We are called ‘monks.’ The Greek word is translated into Latin by *unus* and means ‘one.’ Let yourselves be marked by this word.”

You will remember perhaps this well-known passage from Theodore Studite: “He is a monk who looks only to God, desires God alone, labours for God alone, and who, wanting to serve God alone becomes a source of peace for others.” The monk is a man with a single gaze, a single desire, a man with tremendous love which influences others!

This word ‘monk’ then conceals within it our whole future: our divinisation already begun here below. In heaven we shall be “truly monks”: one with the One, united to Jesus our Head who will bring us into the unity of the Trinity.

## 5. Pachomius (292-346).

Having studied Antony, the first of the great hermits, we will now go on to Pachomius, the first of the great cenobites.

### Plan:

- I. The Pachomian fire in straw
- II. The Life of Pachomius
- III. Rules & Organisation of the ‘Koinônia’
- IV. Pachomian spirituality
  - 1) *Double aspect*
  - 2) *Union with God*
  - 3) *Union with the brethren*
- V. Conclusion

### I. The Pachomian Fire in Straw.

This first form of the cenobitic life founded by Pachomius can perhaps be compared to fire in straw. In one sense this is true, in another it is not!

It is TRUE in the sense that a straw fire spreads quickly, generates much heat and light, but does not last long. In the same way Pachomian cenobitism grew very quickly. It seems that even from the beginning of cenobitism we must speak of an Order, that is, an organised whole having its own laws and structures, which is quite remarkable! It was a very large Order, Jerome speaks of fifty thousand monks, but he certainly exaggerates; ten thousand is nearer the mark. It is still very large!

It also generated heat and much light, for the Pachomian monks were the most famous at the time. They were the pick of the bunch, and if one had not seen them, because they lived a long way from Alexandria, one pretended one had done so, as did Cassian. Finally, like a straw fire, it did not last long; after extraordinary progress, Pachomian monasticism experienced a rapid decline. At the beginning of the fifth century, almost nothing was left!

It is not true, because unlike a straw fire which leaves only ashes, this first form of cenobitism had great influence in the Church; not so much because of its spirituality which was rather weak, but rather because of its legislative system. This has left its mark on later monasticism; the Oriental Rule, as we shall see, is taken in part from the Rules of Pachomius. Our Rule of St Benedict is strongly marked by it in at least twenty passages.

The Rules of Pachomius have even influenced Institutes which consider themselves quite the reverse of monasticism, like the Jesuits!

## II. The Life of Pachomius.

Who was Pachomius? It is difficult to tell what sort of a man he was. We cannot do so from his writings, for very little has come down to us: a few instructions and the Rules, but there are four very different ones and it is very probable that Pachomius wrote none of them. Nor by his biography, because there is not one life of Pachomius, but eight or nine, written by his disciples. Very soon dissensions arose among them; they did not all have the same idea of monastic life and each group wrote a life of Pachomius to justify his own point of view. Each of the Lives presents Pachomius from a different aspect.

Among these eight or nine Lives, three are longer, for they have come down to us complete (or almost so). They are designated by the language in which they are written: the *Bohairic* life, the *Saïdic* life, (these are both Coptic dialects); and the *Greek* life. The others are only fragmentary.

An Egyptian like Antony, Pachomius was not born a Christian like him, but a pagan. He was born in 292 of a family of well-to-do peasants at Sne on the borders of the Nile a little higher up than Thebes. He had at least one brother and one sister known to us through the Lives.

At that time Egypt was under Roman domination. In 312 the Emperor Maximin Daia needed soldiers to make war against Licinius. At that time, when one had no soldiers, one took them; people were conscripted by force. Some soldiers came to Pachomius' village and took him away with other young men. He was about twenty years old and so ready for military service whether he liked it or not. So he was taken to Alexandria. As prisoners, he and his companions took ship on the Nile and went down to Thebes, the first large town, where they stopped for the night. The soldiers took the conscripts to the prison in the town, and there, the Christians brought them food and assistance. (Text 1).

Pachomius, the pagan, was moved by the charity of these Christians. It remained with him all his life; for him, a Christian does good to everyone. This conviction which came home to him then influenced his conception of the monastic life in which the idea of the service of God and the brethren had great importance.

The war being over, Pachomius was set free at Antinoë. He went back up the Nile but he did not go home. He wanted to serve God and, like Antony, he settled near a village (Seneset) where he was baptised about 313. In accordance with the promise he had made to serve mankind, he helped the people round about in any way he could. Then, like Antony, he too became a disciple of an ascetic who lived nearby (Text 2). Again like Antony, he underwent many temptations. The founder of the cenobitic life had no thought of starting something new; he began in the same way as Antony. But God had other ideas.

About 323 Pachomius left Palamon to live in an abandoned village called Tabennesi, always with the intention of being a hermit. His brother John came to join him. Then one night Pachomius had a vision; God intervened (Text 3). During the following days a disagreement arose between the two brothers. John wanted to remain faithful to the eremitical way and continue to live in their little cell, while Pachomius, after his vision, wanted to build a monastery.

In fact, people came. Pachomius had the gift of gathering them round him "because of his goodness," say the Lives. Young people came to him, he instructed them and, faithful to his first inspiration, he served them (Text 4). One can see how his first experience of the charity of Christians had marked his life, he wanted to serve. As long as the novices were good, all went well;

the young were spurred on by his example and wanted to share the work: “Let us live and die with this man” they said, “and he will lead us straight to God.” But other less well-disposed people came and things went wrong. Pachomius suffered a set-back and learnt a lesson (Text 5). The lesson was this: a monastery is not a cooperative and a community must have an economic system capable of holding it together. At his first attempt, faithful to the light received at his conversion, Pachomius had become the servant of all, receiving in return something to pay for the food of his followers. He gave them the following rule: Each one must be self-sufficient and administer his own affairs but must contribute towards the material needs of the monastery, whether it was food for the monks or food for the guests. They brought their contribution to Pachomius and he made do with what he received. It was like a boarding-house, there was no sharing of possessions. After his set-back, Pachomius realised that to have a stable community, everything must be held in common. From then on he organised things differently and asked those who came to him to renounce their families and their possessions to follow the Saviour. He proposed as the way to God: that they lead the common life (in Greek *Koino-bios*), and establish a *Koinônia*, a community.

From this time, Pachomius’ *Koinônia* really started, and very quickly. The map shows the area in the Upper Nile where Pachomius lived: Sne, his birth-place; Thebes, the capital where he was imprisoned; Antinoe where he was set free. You can also see his foundations (small letters), a chain of monasteries in Upper Egypt on the borders of the Nile where the land could be cultivated. The first four, very near in time and space, are numbered: Tabennisi, the first and Phbew the second to which the central government of the Order was transferred. The crosses mark the communities of nuns.

Pachomius died in 346, during a plague. He was only 54.

The succession was very difficult and cliques sprang up. There was opposition between a group of elders and the new generation, all depended on who took power. Two great figures, disciples of Pachomius, Theodore, of the older generation, and Horsiesius of the new were for a time at the head of this immense Order. After the death of Theodore in 368 and of Horsiesius in 387 everything disintegrated. There was indeed an effort at reform by the white monks of Shenoudi (or Chenoute), but this was not a success. The brutal abba used the stick rather than the carrot and discouraged those of good will.

Fortunately, in 404 Jerome, then at Bethlehem, translated the 4 Rules into Latin, as well as the 11 letters of Pachomius, one of Theodore and the book of Horsiesius. Thanks to these translations the Pachomian experience left its mark on the West.

### III. Rules & Organisation of the Koinonia.

We have already seen in our ‘Bird’s-eye view’ that the Pachomian monastery was a veritable little village protected from relations with the outside by a huge wall with only one door and a porter checking arrivals: this put a distance between it and the outside world. Thus it was a little world on its own.

Yet this little world was remarkably organised. In each house of this small village there lived about forty brothers all exercising the same craft; there was the house of bakers, the house of cooks, the house of cobblers; the house of scribes, etc. In each house the brothers lived under the authority of a housemaster, a ‘superior’ helped by a ‘second.’

Three or four houses formed a ‘tribe.’ A monastery was composed of 10 tribes; thus 30 or 40 houses each with 40 brothers adds up to more than a thousand monks in a monastery (1200-1400).

At the head of each monastery there was an abbot and one or two stewards. There were 9 monasteries of men and 3 of women. Pachomius' sister Marie had founded a monastery for virgins near Tabennisi under his direction. Two others followed, one near Tsmine and the other near Phbew. Everything was well organised there too; the sisters had a copy of the Rule of the brothers. A chaplain, Peter, was there to give them spiritual help (Text 6).

These 12 monasteries formed an Order governed by an Abbot General, Pachomius, and a head steward who lived at Phbew. Each year, all the monks gathered at Phbew to celebrate Easter, and in August to hold a sort of chapter of faults and reconciliation.

This structure of the whole Order establishes that the life of the *Koinônia* was led under an Abbot, who was represented in each house by a superior — life under an Abbot, but also under a Rule. Pachomius had already put into writing some precepts taken from the Bible. As the Order developed, it became necessary to go into further detail, to elaborate rules. This resulted in 4 series of precepts which are called the “Rules of Pachomius,” although very probably they were not written by Pachomius himself. Are there any guidelines for formation in these writings? Possibly, but it is not clear and the opinions of those who have studied the question differ.

They are: The Precepts (the longest part),

The Precepts and Institutions

The Precepts and Decisions

The Precepts and the Laws

They are clearly collections of commandments. These first rules written for a community are “usages” with very little spirituality. However the fact that they are based upon the Scriptures and are remarkable for their sense of proportion and freedom from exaggeration, earned them an important place in the tradition. St Benedict took up several points in his Rule.

#### **IV. Pachomian Spirituality.**

These 4 rules are collections of rather dry prescriptions; they do have Scripture as their basis, but the theology is fairly rudimentary, with little spirituality. However, from them, the Lives and the other writings, one can nevertheless discover some features of a Pachomian spirituality.

##### **1) A double aspect**

To get a better understanding, let us go back to the beginning. Pachomius was born 30 years after Antony and died 10 years before him. The man who might be considered as the founder of the first cenobitism started among anchorites. Cenobitism was not yet standardised, while the eremitical monasticism of Antony had already had quite a history in Egypt. Pachomius, like all those who wanted to become monks, was formed by a hermit. Then his dispute with his brother John arose because the latter wanted to keep his eremitic solitude while Pachomius, faithful to the voice he had heard, wanted to build up something for others.

The birth of a cenobitic Order among anchorites gives us a glimpse of two contrary aspirations at the root of Pachomianism which had to be brought into harmony: on the one hand, the concern for individual perfection as found in the desert Fathers where each one sought his own way according to temperament and the call of grace; and on the other the aspect of common life required by cenobitism.

The solution found by Pachomius, faithful to his intuition, was that each one should find his own perfection in serving others. He was convinced that personal individual perfection cannot be realised on this earth; this ideal of perfection can only be found in a community of brothers, the holy *Koinônia*, where all help each other in the spiritual combat.

So we have here the first paradoxical aspect by which Pachomian spirituality harmonises two contraries; personal perfection is brought about in community, in the service of the brethren.

Another paradox stemming from the strong personality of Pachomius is this: in the Pachomian *Koinônia*, which applied specifically to cenobites, there is one element taken from the anchorites of Lower Egypt where the beginner was formed by an Abba or Elder. Pachomius was the sort of man who attracted others to him, one on whom the Spirit rested. It was the desire to learn from such a man which was the cause of so many monks gathering round him. Thus on the one hand, we find a *vertical cenobitism* as in the monasticism of Lower Egypt, for the Pachomian monk wanted Pachomius for his Father (Text 7). Even later, when the Order had grown so enormous, Pachomius was still the Father, though the head of the monastery chosen by him was his intermediary. In practice, this vertical aspect of monasticism was expressed by the hierarchical organisation we have already seen.

Yet on the other hand, Pachomian spirituality was one of community; and here we have an *horizontal cenobitism*. Pachomius' conversion had been brought about by the charity of the Christians of Thebes, and he was haunted by the image of the primitive community in Jerusalem where everything was held in common. His vocation, confirmed by heaven, was to "gather men together." He would be the Father of the community even more than Father of his monks. The community of mutual service, the holy *Koinônia*, would have a very important place in his spirituality. Charity would be expressed in deeds.

In fact charity, the foundation of the Christian life, was also the basis of the Pachomian legislation; at the beginning of the *Precepts and Sentences* we read: "Charity sums up the whole Law." As charity has for its object both God and the brethren, Pachomian spirituality developed along two axes: union with God and union with the brethren.

## 2) Union with God

First union with God. Pachomius was a man animated by the Spirit, a man of prayer; he was able to spend the whole night in prayer, even several nights, as many passages from the Lives witness (Text 8). Union with God was all-important to him. To encourage it, the Rules insist above all on the Scriptures and the common Office. Asceticism was not forgotten, for Pachomius, a practical and experienced man, knew well that this encounter with God cannot come about without renouncing all that is not God: the world, one's family, and above all one's own will, the source of sin. All these elements were to be taken into account; they contain the essence of monastic conversion.

### A) Scripture

Prayer and reading of the Bible go together in Pachomian spirituality. At this time people had very good memories. On his arrival in the monastery the novice must first learn to read in order to learn certain passages of the Bible by heart so as to be able to meditate on them (Text 9). "To meditate" was not, for these first monks, to reflect on a text, but rather to "chew it over," either by recitation from memory or by reading in a whisper. The monk must meditate on the Word of God all the time, going to the Office, in the refectory or his cell, going to work and while at work (Text 10).

Scripture is the Rule of life of the Pachomian monk. Three times a week the various superiors comment upon it, and after having listened to their explanations, he shares with his brethren what he has remembered before going into his cell to meditate on it. The Lives of Pachomius have vividly preserved for us the profound impression Pachomius made on his brethren when he commented on the Gospel (Text 11).

### *B) The Divine Office*

There were two assemblies in the church, called “synaxes” (*sun* = with, and *ago* = to go), one in the day and one at night, no doubt fairly long; there was also an assembly for prayer in the evening, but in each house rather than in the church.

The two great offices in the church were very simple, even rudimentary, little different from private prayer. The psalms or passages of Scripture were recited alternating with the Pater and silent prayers. They lasted a long time, but the monks were not idle, their hands were occupied in light work such as plaiting cords or making rush mats, as the Rules describe (Text 12).

But although they were simple, the offices had great importance for the Pachomians; it was a communion in prayer which had a very special value for them. They had great faith in the word of the Lord: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in the midst of them.”

The evening prayer in the houses was even simpler: six psalms and six prayers. This is how the Rule speaks of them (Text 13).

### *3) Union with the brothers: the Koinônia*

This communion in prayer before God demonstrates what lay at the root of the Pachomian community: a group of brothers just like the primitive Christian community.

In practice, this is seen in the community of goods and the various consequences which flowed from it.

### *A) Community of goods*

The symbol of this is the enclosure wall with only one well-guarded door. This wall defines two worlds; the exterior world and that of the life in common, the *Koinônia*. We have seen that after his painful experience in the beginning Pachomius demanded community of goods of every postulant; they could take it or leave it.

He meant not only material goods in common, but even one’s own person by putting oneself at the service of others both concretely and physically. This idea of service — even of bondage — is the basis of Pachomian cenobitism and of its organisation in houses with housemasters and subordinates. This bondage to one another also constituted the practical expression of a monk’s imitation of Christ who became the servant of all. For Pachomius, it was this service which made cenobitism superior to anchoritism. Basil took up the idea. So too for Horsiesius, Pachomius’ successor, community life is itself the “Work of God,” *Opus Dei*.

### *B) Consequences*

This community of goods brought with it mutual service, but, concretely, practical observances as well.

a) The same rule of life. This sought to give expression to a particular quest and to bring about the same observance for all, even superiors.

b) Poverty. The poverty demanded by this ideal was characterised by dispossession. Pachomian poverty was not primarily privation, but rather life in common; not an ascetical exercise but a community exercise. It was the cement which bonded the community.

c) Work. This came from the idea of service and was intended for the support of the poor. Pachomius believed that dispossession. Pachomian poverty was not primarily the community's possessions really belonged to God; the community itself possessed nothing. Thus sharing with the poor is not a virtue, it is the normal thing to do.

d) Obedience To break the bonds of self-love which are injurious to love of the community, Pachomius insisted on obedience so that within the community each member learned to suppress his own rights, his own desires. But obedience itself had a community character. It meant not so much being dependant for a time on an ascetic whom one took as a spiritual master on the road to God, like the anchorites, but to enter into a regime of obedience which had value in itself. So it was not a school for beginners, but a way of love, a permanent and definitive state, on this earth at least.

From this come three characteristics of obedience:

- 1) Each superior has his own sphere of authority which he must not exceed.
- 2) The command does not come from a charism, but is a temporary appointment, by the authority of a higher superior.
- 3) It is above all the Rule which one obeys; and the Rule is incumbent upon the Superiors as well as the subordinates.

As the Pachomian Order developed, the Rule became more central. In his writings, Pachomius gave great importance to Scripture; there one reads: "According to the Scriptures." But 40 years later, in the Life of Pachomius, this expression is replaced by: "According to the Rule."

e) Mutual forgiveness Here we have the final aspect of community of goods, mutual forgiveness. At the beginning the Pachomians had two annual assemblies which were concerned with financial matters, they studied the accounts. Fairly quickly these two assemblies, especially the one in the Summer, became huge chapters of faults.

## V. Conclusion.

With Pachomius, we have the birth of a true cenobitic Order right at the beginning of monasticism, which is surely remarkable. At the head of the Order was a rich personality. a man of prayer, a man on whom the Spirit rested and who was gifted with abundant mystical graces. We are told that just before his death he saw heaven (Text 14). Yet he was a humble man who had his feet on the ground; he kept these visions in perspective. We read in Pachomius' writings: (Text 15).

This man who was a mirror of God wanted the *Koinônia* to be a mirror of the thousand facets of God. Pachomius had an exalted idea of cenobitism: he bequeathed it to us in three kinds of parables which are just as valid for ourselves (Text 16).

Yet after the death of Pachomius the whole body of the holy *Koinônia* which he had built up collapsed! How can we account for such a rapid decline? There seem to be three reasons:

It was too centralized; all depended on a man of exceptional personality who inspired confidence. After his death and that of his disciple Theodore the whole Order lost its focus.

Moreover, the Order had grown too rapidly. It had all been too quick. At the beginning it was Pachomius himself who had formed the young, but later he could do so no longer and this was taken over by the heads of the monastery or of the houses. Inevitably these men did not have the same ability or sanctity as Pachomius.

The Pachomian Rules which would have assured the future of the Order did not have a sufficiently solid theological and spiritual basis. They are regulations, prescriptions, the fruit of the founder's experience. Also, without a spiritual basis, factions were formed on the death of Pachomius each led by men who had their own conception of Pachomianism.

In spite of all, traces of Pachomius' experience lived on in later monasticism through this double axis of Pachomian spirituality — vertical and horizontal; and we ourselves are, to a certain extent, his heirs.

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## **5. Pachomius Texts**

### *1.The Bohairic Life 7-8.*

After the persecution, the great Constantine became emperor of the Romans. He was the first of the Christian emperors of Constantinople. But another chief wanted to take the empire away from him, and he declared war on him. He ordered a search in all the villages to be made for big and sturdy boys to become soldiers and fight against the enemy of God. Pachomius was twenty years old. They took him away although he was not very sturdy, because they needed so many. When he was led away to the boat, he raised his eyes to heaven and sighed: "My Lord Jesus, may your will be done." The boat sailed down the Nile, and at Thebes, the capital, they were thrown into prison.

That evening the people of the city came to visit them, bringing something to eat and drink, for they saw that they were very wretched. Pachomius asked his companions: "Who are they? Why are they so good to us when they do not know us?" They told him: "They are Christians; they treat us with love because of the God of Heaven."

Pachomius did not sleep. He prayed all night: "My Lord Jesus, the Christ, God of all the saints, may your goodness come quickly upon me. If you deliver me I will serve mankind all the days of my life." The following day they were put on boats and came to the city of Antinoe. While they were there, the emperor defeated his enemies. He sent all the soldiers home. Pachomius went south to the Upper Thebaid. He entered the church in a village called Seneset. He became a catechumen and was baptized. On the night of his baptism he had a vision. The dew of heaven came down onto his head, then it became a honeycomb in his right hand; and while he was considering it the honey flowed onto the ground and spread over the whole earth. A voice said to him: "Pachomius, this will happen to you before long."

### *2.The Bohairic Life 10.*

Pachomius wanted to become a monk, and he heard of an old hermit called Palamon. He went to visit him and knocked at the door. The old man looked out of the window and said in a rough voice: "Who is there?" "Father, if I may, I would like to become a monk with you." "No, you cannot. It is very difficult to be a monk. Many have come and gone away again." "Try me,

Father, and you will see.” “First you must test yourself in your cell for some time. This is what I myself do. It is hard. I do not eat before sundown during the summer. In winter I eat every three days. I only take bread and salt, without oil or wine. I watch in vigil until midnight, often even the whole night, to pray and meditate on the Word of God.”

Pachomius replied humbly: “I have been testing myself in all these things before coming to you, and I am confident that with the help of God and your prayers, your heart will be at rest concerning me.”

Palamon opened the door to him and bade him come in. After having tested him for some time, he gave him the monk’s habit. They lived together a life of sacrifice and prayer. Together they made mats.

### *3.The First Sahidic Life*

One day Pachomius and his brother were reaping the harvest near the deserted village of Tabennesi where they lived. They prayed together according to their custom. Then Pachomius went a short distance away from his brother and sat down alone. He was downcast and broken-hearted; he wanted to know the will of God. It was dark, and a luminous man appeared and stood before him. He said: “Why are you downcast?” He replied: “I want to know what is God’s will for me.” The luminous man said to him: “Do you really want to know God’s will?” Pachomius answered: “Yes.” Then he said to him: “The will of God is that you should serve mankind and reconcile them to Him.” Almost vexed, Pachomius replied: “I seek God’s will and you tell me to serve mankind!” The man repeated three times: “The will of God is that you should serve mankind in order to call them to him.” After this Pachomius saw him no more.

Then he remembered the covenant which he had made with God on the day help had come to him when he was in the prison with his companions. He had promised him: “If you deliver me, I will serve mankind all the days of my life.”

### *4.The Bohairic Life, 23*

In God’s Providence, three men came to Pachomius; P sentaesi, Sourous and P soi. They said to him: “We want to become monks with you.” Pachomius said to them: “Can you leave your parents to follow the Saviour?” Then he put them to the test. He found that they had the right intentions. He gave them the monk’s habit and received them with joy. Little by little he helped them to advance in the monastic life. Above all he taught them to renounce the world, their families and themselves. He taught them to follow the Saviour and carry his cross. He formed them according to the Scriptures and they bore much fruit.

Pachomius wanted to remove all care from his novices. “Your work,” he said, “is to meditate on the psalms, the whole Scripture, but especially the Gospels.” He said to himself: “They are still novices; they are not able to serve the others.” He himself did all the work of the monastery, in the vegetable garden, the kitchen, the refectory, he was both porter and infirmarian.

The novices said to him: “We are saddened, Father. Why do you work all alone?” Pachomius answered them: “Does anyone forget his donkey who turns the water wheel to draw water? The Lord sees that I am tired; he will send me some companions.” His example encouraged them. They said to themselves: “No one is holy from his mother’s womb. When one is a sinner, one can find life. Was not our father a pagan? We can follow in his footsteps.”

Pachomius’ faith was pure and without heresy, it drew other novices: Peco s, Cornelios, Paul and John who were hermits in the neighbourhood.

### 5. *The first Sahidic Life 10-19*

Then fifty men from the surrounding villages came one by one to be monks. They built close to the monastery. Pachomius gave them a rule. Each should be self-supporting, but they would give a little money to Pachomius for their food. They ate all together and Pachomius served them. But their hearts were not true, they mocked Pachomius for his humility. When he asked them to do something, they often replied: "We do not want to!" Pachomius did not punish them, but bore with them patiently, saying: "They will see my humility and my labour and will return to God."

One day, during the harvest, Pachomius brought them some food on a donkey. When they had eaten, they started playing with the donkey and said to Pachomius: "Since you are the servant, pack the dishes on your back and take them back to the monastery." Grieved and groaning, he loaded up the dishes and took them back to the monastery.

But one day the Lord said to Pachomius: "My patience is at an end. Send them away so that the flock may be saved. Pachomius called them together and said to them: "When the hour comes for prayer, for work and for the meal, you will all come together. If you do not want to, you are free, go!" Looking at each other, they laughed saying: "What is the matter with Pachomius today, with his rough talk?" And at the hour of prayer, relying on their strong arms, none of them came. When Pachomius saw their obstinacy and pride, he grew bold thanks to the Holy Spirit who dwelt in him. He took hold of a door bolt and chased them from the monastery. They fled as if they were pursued by a regiment or by a fire.

But they went to complain to bishop Serapion. They accused Pachomius saying: "He drove us from the monastery." The bishop looked at them and saw their strong arms. He told them: "He could not drive you out by himself! It was God who drove you out. What evil have you done?"

After these brothers had left, the others made great progress. This is what happens when one takes the weeds out of the wheat. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, many other monks came to take the place of those evil monks.

### 6. *The Bohairic Life 27*

Pachomius' sister Mary, who had been a virgin since childhood, came to see him at Tabennesi. Pachomius sent the porter to say to her: "You know that I am alive. You cannot see me, but do not weep. If you wish to share my life, the brothers will build you a cell. The Lord will call other women to join you and they will be saved because of you." His sister wept at first, then she followed her brother's advice. They built a house for her a short distance from the monastery. Many other women came to live with her, and she was their mother until her death.

Pachomius gave them a Rule which was a copy of the Rule of the monks. He appointed an old man called Peter, "whose speech was seasoned with salt" (Col.4:6), to explain the holy Scriptures to them.

If a brother who had not yet attained perfection wanted to visit a relative among the nuns, Pachomius, with the permission of his housemaster, sent him to Peter. Peter asked the Mother to come out with her and another sister. They sat down together until the end of the visit. There was no exchange of gifts.

If there was some work to be done for the nuns, Pachomius chose some capable and prudent brothers. They went and did the work and returned for the meal.

When one of the nuns died, the Mother covered her with a shroud. Pachomius sent some venerable monks who stood in the doorway of the church with Peter, the nuns being on the other

side. The brothers chanted psalms while the body was prepared for burial. The Mother and the nuns followed the bier, then came Peter with the brothers. When the body was buried, they prayed and returned home.

After the death of Peter, Pachomius appointed Titoue to care for the nuns.

#### *7. The Sahidic Life, 3*

A man who begets another in the work of God is his father after God, in this world and the next. Our Father Pachomius deserves to be called Father, because our Father who is in heaven dwells in him, as the Apostle confesses saying: "It is not I who live, it is Christ who lives in me."

#### *8. The Bohairic Life 59.*

One day Pachomius got into a small boat with two brothers to visit his foundation at Thmousons. At the time for the meal, the brothers ate a little of everything: vegetables, cheese, figs, olives. Pachomius took only bread and salt. Then he began to weep. The brothers asked him: "Why are you weeping?" He answered: "Because you are not mortified. It is not a sin to eat, but we must be mortified in everything. Nothing must be allowed to dominate us."

In the evening, he said to the brothers: "Do you want us to keep vigil tonight?" They agreed. Soon one of the brothers was overcome by sleep and went to lie down. The other kept vigil until dawn. At dawn he woke the first and went to lie down. Pachomius kept vigil with the first brother until they reached Thmousons.

The superior, Cornelius, greeted Pachomius; then he asked the brothers in a low voice: "What has our Father been doing?" The brothers answered: "He has taught us a lesson!" Then they told him the story, and Cornelius exclaimed: "Well! outdone by an old man?"

But in the evening, Pachomius came to Cornelius and said: "Would you like to keep vigil with me tonight?" Cornelius accepted, they began to pray, and Cornelius found the night very long. He recited all his prayers by heart. In the morning, when the signal was given for the synaxis Cornelius said to Pachomius: "Why have you taught me this lesson?" Pachomius answered: "Well, Cornelius! Are you outdone by an old man?" And Cornelius replied: "Forgive me Father, I have sinned."

#### *9. The Rule of Pachomius 139-140*

Whoever comes to the monastery must first learn what he should observe. Then, after this first instruction, when he has consented to it all, he shall be given twenty psalms to learn, or two of the Apostle's epistles, or part of another book of Scripture.

If he is illiterate, he shall go at the first, third and sixth hours to find someone who can teach him and who has been appointed for this. He shall stand before him and learn very carefully, with great gratitude. Then the letters of the syllables shall be written for him and he shall be forced to read, even if he refuses.

Everyone in the monastery shall learn letters and memorize something of the Scriptures, at least the New Testament and the Psalter.

#### *10. Rule of Pachomius, 3,28.*

When one hears the trumpet calling to the synaxis, he shall leave his cell meditating some passage from Scripture until he reaches the door of the synaxis.

After the dismissal of the synaxis, each one shall meditate some passage from Scripture while he goes to his cell or to the refectory; and no one shall have his head covered while he is meditating.

#### 11. *The Bohairic Life 86*

One day, Pachomius was praying somewhere alone, and he fell into ecstasy. He saw all the brothers in the church and Our Lord seated on a high throne. He was speaking to them about the parables in the holy Gospel. He saw the Lord, he heard the words and at the same time he understood their explanation. After that day, when our Father Pachomius spoke to the brothers, he would take the place where he had seen the Lord seated and speaking to the brothers. When he repeated the words he had heard from the mouth of the Lord and their explanation, great lights came from his words, throwing out brilliant flashes. All the brothers were very frightened because of our Father Pachomius' words, which resembled flashing light coming from his mouth; they were like men drunk with wine.

#### 12. *Rule of Pachomius 4-8.*

4. When one comes to the church and goes to his place where he must sit and stand, he should not tread upon the rushes which have been dipped in water and prepared for plaiting ropes, lest someone's carelessness should cause even a small loss for the monastery.

5. At night, when the signal is heard, do not go and stand near the fire which is usually lit to warm the body and drive away the cold. Do not sit idle during the synaxis but with a quick hand prepare the twine to plait the warp for the mats. But you must avoid exhausting anyone who is weak in body; he must be allowed to rest from time to time.

6. When the one who stands in the first place claps his hand, reciting by heart a passage from the Scripture to give the signal for the end of prayer, no one shall be slow in rising, but all shall get up together.

7. Let no one look at another brother as he plaits a rope or prays; but let his eyes be fixed on his own work.

8. These are the precepts of life which the elders have handed down to us. If it happens that during the psalmody, the prayer or the readings that someone speaks or laughs, he shall immediately undo his belt and go and stand before the altar with his head bowed and his arms hanging down. He will be rebuked by the father of the monastery. He shall do the same penance in the refectory when the brothers assemble there.

#### 13. *Rules of Pachomius 10.*

To celebrate the six evening prayers during the great synaxis which brings all the brethren together, that is supreme joy; they are celebrated so easily that the brothers do not find them a burden or wearisome.

#### 14. *The Bohairic Life 114*

One day, Pachomius fell ill. The angels sent out to seek him took his soul. He died and was taken to another world. He saw Paradise, with the cities of the saints, and dwelling places one cannot describe, and all the good things which the Lord has kept for those whom He loves. He remembered the parable where it is said: "Enter into the joy of your Master." Paradise is so great that the lands of the earth seem very small. The air is very sweet. The fruit trees and vines give more beautiful fruit than those on earth. No one could bear the fragrance of the fruit, if God

did not give him strength. The light is very beautiful and never goes out, for the Lord is the light of Paradise.

As he approached the Door of Life, God ordered that his soul should be taken back to his body. Pachomius became very sad, because he did not want to come back to his body again, for the light was wonderful.

A man who guarded the Door turned towards him to look at him. He shone like a great picture. He said to him: "My son, go back to your body. You still have to suffer a little martyrdom in the world." Pachomius was happy, for he had a great desire to be a martyr for the Lord. The angels said to him: "It was the Apostle Paul.

Then they brought his soul to his body. His soul looked at his body and saw that it was dead. When the soul drew near, all the members opened and the soul took its place. Pachomius returned to life.

#### 15. *The Bohairic Life*

One of the brothers asked me: "Tell us what you have seen in vision." I answered him: "A sinner such as I am does not ask God to see visions, for it is against the will of God and is the way of error. Listen, and I will tell you of a great vision. If you see a pure and humble man, that is a great vision! What can be greater than such a vision: to see the invisible God in a visible man, the temple of God?"

#### 16. *The Bohairic Life 105.*

Pachomius said to the brothers: "I will show you that the glory and merits of those who live well in the Koinonia are greater than those of hermits.

It is like a merchant selling bread or vegetables or anything else in the market-place every day; he does not become very rich, but he does not lack anything necessary. It is the same with a hermit. He does not have responsibility for others, neither is he carried away by their example. The purity of his life, his fasts, his prayers and his mortifications receive their recompense and prevent him losing eternal life. But he does not gain a high rank in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Here is another parable about the lowly brothers of the Koinonia, who do not practise exaggerated mortifications, but walk simply in obedience, charity and purity according to the established rules. The hermits believe that these brothers do not live a perfect life, and that they are very lowly. In reality, they are like the favourite servants of the king; they freely enter and leave the palace of the king, whilst the great ones cannot enter without asking the servants. They are much superior to the hermits, because they continually serve one another, as it is written: "Serve one another in sweetness and patience before our Lord Jesus Christ."

I will show you also that the faults and falls of those who do not walk aright in the Koinonia are a greater scandal than those of the hermits. When a merchant sails in all weathers, if his boat does not have an accident, he will become very rich. But if he suffers shipwreck, he and all his wealth will disappear. So it is with the cenobite who makes progress and scandalises no one, he gains much merit. But if he scandalises a single brother, woe to him for his negligence. Not only has he lost his soul, but he will also have to give account to God for the soul whom he has scandalised.

## 6. The Apophthegmata.

**Plan:**

- I. The literature of the desert
  - II. The apophthegmata
    - 1) Their interest
    - 2) Formation of the collections
    - 3) Their use.
  - III. How are they to be read?
    - 1) A meeting
    - 2) Words and silences
  - IV. How are they to be understood?
    - 1) Who wrote them?
    - 2) The question: "How must I be saved?"
    - 3) Formation of the young:
      - a) Living continuously with an abba
      - b) Authority accepted on the word of the abba
      - c) Choice of an abba
      - d) Why this formation?
    - 4) The apophthegmata and the Bible
    - 5) Tears
  - V. The heart of the teaching of the Apophthegmata: Hesychasm
    - 1) Exterior hesychasm
    - 2) Interior hesychasm
      - a) *amerimna* = freedom from care
      - b) *nepsis* = vigilance
      - c) *melete* = practice of prayer
      - d) continuous prayer
  - VI Conclusion: Flowers of the desert
- The Letters of the Fathers of the Desert

**I. The Literature of the Desert.**

The literature of the desert is very varied, comprising four different types.

**1). The Lives**

We have already met the Life of Antony and the Lives of Pachomius; but there were others, for example the Life of

St Syncletic

**2). Travellers' accounts**

For the period with which we are concerned there are two main examples:

a) *The History of the Egyptian Monks* written by Rufinus, of interest because it is this especially which we find quoted in the Rule of St Benedict.

b) *The Lausiaca History* of Palladius, so called because in it Palladius tells Lausius what he has seen during a long stay with the Desert Fathers. These reports show us what these ascetics of the desert were like. We see colourful individuals:

Paul the Simple who, finding that his wife is deceiving him, says simply: “Have a good time, I am going to be a Then he sets off to find Antony who refuses to take him, but, by his persistence Paul makes him accept him and he becomes excellent disciple. There is also Moses the black brigand who after his conversion experiences obstinate and violent temptations. There is the competitive Macarius who always wants to achieve more austerities than the others and goes off to ‘coach’ the Pachomian monks, etc...

c) *The Spiritual Meadow* (Pratum Spirituale) of John Moschus came later.

3) The Treatises on Monastic Life

For example the *Gnostic Centuries* of Evagrius, the *Gnostic Chapters* of Diadochus of Photice, the *Conferences* of Cassian, the *Writings* of Dorotheus of Gaza.

4) Finally The Apophthegmata

These hold a place apart. In accordance with their title: *apo* = coming from, *phthegommai* = to speak, these are the Sayings of the Desert Fathers which have come down to us.

What did our forefathers know of this literature of the desert? Apparently it is what St Benedict calls *The Lives of the Fathers*. It was then in manuscript form and was printed in the middle of the fifteenth century. The text is now to be found in *Migne PL 73 & 74*.

THE LIVES OF THE FATHERS So called by St Benedict.

In manuscript until the middle of the 15th century .Rosweyde’s edition in the 17th century. Now in PL 73 & 74 (19th century).

#### PL 73

Book 1: Various lives by different authors: Paul by Jerome, Antony by Athanasius.

Lives of Hilarion, Pachomius, Abraham, Basil, Ephrem.

Book 2: History of the Monks by Rufinus

Book 3: Sayings of the Elders by Rufinus

= 220 apophthegmata, many of them repeated in Books 5 & 6.

Book 4: Extracts from Sulpicius Severus and Cassian

Book 5&6: Sayings of the Elders = a systematic collection by Pelagius & John (Roman clerics)

Book 7: Sayings of the Elders by Paschasius of Dumio

Book 8: Lausiac History by Palladius

#### PL 74

Book 9: The Theophilis of Theodoret of Cyrrhus (= Lives)

Book 10: The Spiritual Meadow by John Moschus.

Appendix: Apophthegmata by Martin of Dumio

## II. The Apophthegmata.

### 1) Their interest

We might ask: We are cenobites; why should we study the Desert Fathers who were hermits?

Firstly because, like them, we have withdrawn from the world and in a sense we live in the desert; solitude is part of our life. The experience of these great solitaries can be a guide for us.

Also because one of these Desert Fathers, Cassian, later adapted what he had learned from these desert monks for the cenobites of Gaul and handed down their experience to us.

That is why St Benedict recommends the study of both Cassian and the writings of the Fathers. He saw in them material for formation.

## 2) The beginning of the collections and their formation.

These Apophthegmata are something special; they are a book without an author, or if you like, with 250 authors. We are told about some 250 old men (a common designation for elders) and of their lives spread over two centuries. It is not possible to date the book, it came into being somewhere in the desert. It reports at one time conversations between several monks, at another brotherly intercourse between two abbats, or again, and this especially, private interviews between a disciple and his abba.

They arose, then, from personal words spoken to someone. Then it was realised that these private Sayings could be useful to others. On the occasion of a conversation, a meeting, it came about that one or another Saying addressed to a particular brother would be passed on to other brothers, who in their turn took care to profit by them. At first, then, these Sayings were passed on by word of mouth.

This oral tradition was then no doubt soon put into writing. There were different collections of Apophthegmata. Then the number grew to such an extent that at a certain point, probably in the middle of the 5th century, someone gathered all these different writings together into one.

There were also attempts at classification. There were two groupings, and so there are two collections of Apophthegmata:

### A) *Alphabetical collection*

The Sayings of the abbats are presented by grouping them according to the person speaking and they are arranged in the order of the greek alphabet. All the abbats whose names begin with the letter *alpha* are put together, then those which begin with the letter *beta* and so on until the letter omega.

In this collection, stress is laid on the person; we value the Masters for their own sake and we want to meet them, they speak and we listen. Some say little, others a great deal, no doubt those who were the most famous, whose teaching was most appreciated, and their personality shows through. So there is Arsenius, the foreigner from Constantinople where he had been a man of importance and intimate with emperors; he is cold and silent. There is the impetuous John the Dwarf (also called Little John or John Kolobos), Macarius, the athlete in asceticism, Sisoës, Moses the former brigand, and above all the gentle, humble Poemen (or Pastor). He holds the record for Sayings, we have 206 of his, a result no doubt of his goodness and sense of moderation.

There are also to be found the occasional 'Mother's, *Amma*, such as Amma Syncletica whose 'Life' is an echo of that of St Antony. During the persecutions, the women showed that they were as courageous as the men. They too went to the desert. No doubt these solitaries were uncommon, for life out in the desert was very harsh and perilous for a woman, but there were some. They tended to live near the Nile, not too far from the centres of habitation.

### B) *Systematic collection*

Here we have a different classification: these Apophthegmata are arranged in order of subject matter; they follow a 'system.' The aim of this classification is to bring out the teaching.

Here the emphasis is no longer personal but doctrinal. All the Sayings on humility are found together, then those referring to obedience, then those concerning discretion, and so on....

### 3) Use of the Apophthegmata

The alphabetical collection came first. It is the oldest. In the systematic collection where the Sayings are classified according to subject matter, there is already some reflection on them, a first interpretation through the choice of subject in which the Saying is classified. Therefore this systematic collection came second, it uses the Sayings for a purpose. It is less objective than the alphabetical collection; the compiler is beginning to become an author. In this collection, what counts is not so much the person as what is said. Given this bias, the literature could easily be transferred from the desert to surroundings where the common life is led, from the hermitage to the cenobitic life.

| <b>Formation, Use, Decline Of The Apophthegmata</b> |                             |                                     |                                      |                                           |                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------|
|                                                     | <b>Collection</b>           | <b>Place</b>                        | <b>Stress Laid On</b>                | <b>Intended Function Or Aim</b>           | <b>Style</b>           |
| 1                                                   | Alphabetical                | Desert                              | the Master (anchorites)              | Relationships<br>Meeting-dialogue         | Oral                   |
| 2                                                   | Systematic                  | Common life                         | what is said                         | to emphasise a teaching                   | Written                |
| 3                                                   | Alphabetical+<br>Systematic | Teachers of monastic spiritual life | Teaching to be drawn from the Saying | to develop & support a method of teaching | (Written)<br>Universal |
| 4                                                   | Alph+Syst                   | Treatises on perfection Retreats    | Examples                             | To illustrate a teaching                  | Universal              |

In fact, a third use we soon find is made by teachers of the cenobitic life who take some of these Apophthegmata as illustrations of their teaching addressed to cenobites. This was the case for Dorotheus of Gaza. Here the author plays a important role; a Saying is used with an explanation and an application of its meaning. The purpose of the Saying is then to establish a spiritual teaching on an approved tradition.

Finally, much later, the fourth use to which they were put and, we might say, debased, in which the Apophthegmata were again taken out of context. Treatises on the spiritual life addressed to quite different audiences than monks took the Apophthegmata as illustrations of their teaching.

## III. How are the Apophthegmata to be Read?

### 1) A meeting

These four stages in the use — or misuse — of the Apophthegmata show us the way in which we should use them. If we begin with the fourth stage, taking them as examples, the Say-

ings can be amusing or irritating, but they are always superficial, which is not particularly helpful. If used to bolster or authenticate a teaching (third stage) they are perhaps valuable for monastic life, but not otherwise.

It is better to go back to what the Sayings were originally and read them as a way of meeting some spiritual masters. It makes no difference that many centuries separate us, it is still possible to have a dialogue with them because this asks no more than the desire for a life fully lived.

Thus the Apophthegmata are a book of experience, and if we look at them in this way, they are incomparably rich. They are rather like the raw material of later monastic spirituality. They appear spontaneous, but they are not words merely for the sake of words; they are full of sap, fruit of a slow germination in the silence of the desert.

Their role is to educate; they will teach us to love God better, to strengthen our will. The book contains instructions on how we should live better lives.

## 2) Words and silence.

All these disconnected Sayings which we have in the Apophthegmata give us only a glimpse, one aspect, of the life of the desert monks. There are things which they tell us, but also things they leave unsaid. They use words but also imply silence. Christ is hardly mentioned, nor the Virgin Mary, which does not mean that the Desert Fathers had no love for them. They do not speak much of contemplation, of love of God, of the sacramental and liturgical life. Moreover these old monks have a certain reticence which makes them conceal their external and visible practices and still more their private spiritual life and their relations with God. But reading them we sometimes get a glimpse (Texts 1 & 2).

Elsewhere there is intentional silence; the men of the desert knew the value of silence which allows us to speak with God (Text 3).

So silence has to be taken into account. But along with silence can be seen the experiences of these men driven by the Spirit, and it is this which is interesting. This is what we look for in the Sayings. At the same time, the experience of one can be contradictory to that of another. We must pay attention to this, and not take all the Sayings as revealed truth. For example, Arsenius does not hesitate to be seriously wanting in charity for others in order to safeguard his solitude which is for him the necessary condition for a profound life of charity with God. By contrast, Poemen is an example of a wonderfully sensitive charity.

We shall take a few points to help us to a better understanding, as there are some aspects of the Sayings which may appear surprising.

## IV. How are they to be Understood?

### 1. Who Were The Authors?

First of all, who were these monks whom we are going to meet? Initially, country folk, Egyptians, mostly sturdy peasants used to a frugal existence, able to endure any trials. This explains their austerities in food and sleep which seem frightful to us.

On the other hand, what is admirable is that Egyptians are by nature jolly, full of life and optimistic; they are not given to solitude and isolation, but rather are settled and home-loving, in contrast for example to the Syrians, a nation of traders. So it was no small thing for them to leave the world, their land, their surroundings, their family. That is where their love of Christ shows itself.

Moreover, most of them were simple folk with no great learning; for example they took literally passages in Scripture which attribute to God human features and human passions. Their outlook was 'anthropomorphic,' giving to God a human (*anthropos*) form (*morphe*). When later educated monks like Evagrius, Ammonius, Cassian and others came to live among them, they appeared to them to be 'outsiders,' and this was a source of division and conflict. These new arrivals were used to Origen's allegorical and spiritual exegesis and opposed anthropomorphism, not only defending the immateriality of God but also championing 'pure prayer,' claiming that real prayer cannot employ any representation of the divine, however refined.

The Egyptians were not very educated, but neither were they mere rustics. They had prodigious memories. In addition they were gifted with remarkably fine minds, sagacious and understanding, and they had retained from their ancient civilisation a fund of nobility, pride and refinement.

All this has to be taken into account if we are to understand them.

## 2. The Question: How am I to be Saved?

This is a question which often occurs in the Apophthegmata, put in this form or something similar, it is a fundamental question: a young monk asks an abba: "Tell me, how am I to be saved?"

This needs to be properly understood; it is not a self-centred demand merely for salvation, just for oneself. In greek the word *soterion* means salvation, but also healing. Anyone going into the desert knows himself for a sinner, or if he does not, the desert will be sure to show him; he has left everything, he is alone in the desert, under attack from the devils and so suffering the hardships and anguish of the spiritual combat. So he soon realises he is a sinner. Like a sick man who knows himself to be in grave danger, he goes in search of a good doctor. he asks: "How can I be saved, how can I be healed?" So this means: "how am I to obtain complete healing, perfection?"

So, for the old monks, salvation is not separate from perfection. To save one's soul meant for them to reach even here below ablessed eternity and a paradise of peace through the soul's healing. The monk who left all, therefore, is asking an old man to show him the most direct route to reach his life's goal.

In the reply to be given to him, there will be few indications about the basic requirements: separation from the world, poverty, chastity, for they are understood as being already acquired. The person asking advice is already knows all the necessary precepts, all the counsels useful for salvation. What he wants is perseverance in the way. He asks the old man, who in his eyes is the mouthpiece of God, to guide him in his choice among all the possible means.

The reply is usually brief, a single precept, a simple formula, easy to remember (Text 4). But it is a reply to a specific person, and with regard to his circumstances. The word given by the abba in reply will, then, be valuable for this person, and not for another (Text 5).

## 3. The Formation of the Young Monks: Spiritual Father and Disciple.

We are no longer among the Pachomian monks for whom everything was ordered by a rule which was a collection of things to be done and not done. Obedience to this rule would then constitute the formation of the novice. But here among the hermits there is no rule. That being so, how are the young brothers to be formed to life in the desert?

Here it was experience that produced a teaching method for spiritual direction; the young brother comes to join the elder in his cell and share his life. Abba or old man does not necessarily mean 'old' but 'wise' (Text 6 & 7).

But there are two conditions for the formation of the young man to go well: 1) He must live with him all the time. 2) He must recognise that the word of the abba is right for him, that it has authority for him. What the rule was for the Pachomian monks, the abba will be for him.

#### *A) Living continuously with an abba*

The young brother builds himself a cell near that of the abba he has chosen and patterns his life like his. He submits blindly and totally to the will and the orders of the abba. (Text 8). But it is not only a matter of doing all the abba says, but also and above all acting like him, imitating him in everything. For these early monks it is by sharing the life of an experienced man that one learns the life. So a state of dependence is adopted, and renunciation of one's own will. In this way living for oneself is avoided. (Text 9).

But it would not be enough for this state of dependence to be limited to activities. Men and women also have intentions, desires both good and bad, they are filled with all kinds of thoughts. Therefore, as well as living in the abba's company, the disciple must open himself to him, tell him all the thoughts stirring within him. Otherwise he will not see clearly ("lose his reason" as the preceding text expresses it), and fall into the devil's traps (Text 10).

Thus the beginner learns not to live for himself, not to do his own will, and this will confirm him in his gift of himself to God. In order to act on us and in us, God calls for availability and openness to himself (Text 11). Moreover the disciple will learn discernment of spirits, that is to say how to distinguish deceptive appearances from the interior movements which come from the Holy Spirit or those which prepare for his coming, and to which he must correspond if he wants to live for God. He also learns to read the Bible and allow it to throw light on his path.

The desire to be saved, to achieve perfection, urges the beginner to put himself under the direction of an abba. Thus the disciple's first duty is to find a spiritual father. Abba Poemen said: "Take counsel in all that you do for it is written: 'To act without counsel is folly.'" St Bernard was to say the same: "One who wants only to be led by himself is led by a fool." The Sayings 9-11 show us how important it is; we do not know ourselves, and unless he does know himself the beginner comes up against many obstacles: self-confidence, vainglory etc....

By openness to his spiritual father, little by little the disciple becomes a spiritual man, becoming in his turn capable of guiding other inexperienced brothers; he too will be able to receive disciples and form them.

#### *B) Authority accepted on the word of the abba.*

It is not a question of any sort of word, but of the word of a man who seeks God. So we have linked together two men seeking God, two men eager to do God's will. On the one hand there is an old man experienced in discernment, on the other the disciple who wants nothing other than to find the way to salvation. In these conditions, the word spoken by the old man to the disciple imparts the grace of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because it is the fruit of the Spirit; the old man who speaks the word is a man of experience, moved by the Spirit, and the one asking for this word also does so in faith, prompted by the Spirit, in the sole desire of drawing spiritual profit from it, and not through curiosity or vanity.

So the young novice must have confidence in the abba's word, believe it to be able to form him, have faith in the Spirit animating his abba and have the desire to profit by it, or else the abba is driven to silence (Text 12).

The disciple must then be a man of desire. We can be disciples only in the measure of the intensity of our desire. But be careful, to desire is not necessarily feeling, but willing. Really to desire God is not a matter of feeling but of wanting to please God. Desire is measured by the price we are willing to pay to obtain what we desire. This then is the sense in which we can speak of a teaching method, of formation starting with the word of the abba.

On the one hand the master must be animated by the Spirit and seek the growth of the disciple. On the other hand the disciple must be a man of desire.

### *C) The choice of an abba.*

It is then the desire to reach perfection which leads a young monk to choose an abba, and to put himself under his direction. But how is he to choose? (Text 13). We do not choose an abba because he will let us do what we want, nor because we like him, but because we have heard that he is a good guide (Text 14). The same thing is said in another Saying: be a camel led by its master (Text 15).

Once an abba has been chosen, he must be obeyed in everything he says, unconditionally. We must be convinced that to obey the abba is to obey God. Among the Sayings there are certain stories which are obviously not true but which intend to convey this unconditional obedience. For example the Saying in which the abba orders a neophyte to throw his little boy into the river, or this one which again is obviously not true (Text 16). All these stories are intended to signify that we must be convinced that the abba is acting through the Holy Spirit of God. Therefore however much of a paradox it may seem, the old man will not command anything contrary to the word of God.

Such precise orders are rare in the Sayings. The abba will be the master more by what he is than by what he says (Text 17). In that personal relationship between Master and Disciple, the Master is a model, not a lawgiver. He is the Rule by what he says and still more by what he does.

These abbats therefore require obedience without argument or delay. So Abba Sylvanus had trained his disciple Mark well (Text 18). This Saying is no doubt true and St Benedict must have read it, traces of it can be found in his Rule.

### *D) Why this formation*

We might ask why this openness of heart and this obedience to a spiritual master were necessary.

Manifestation of thoughts has as its first aim to conquer the devil (Text 19). If these early monks went into the desert, it was to overcome the devil; and he cannot be overcome in the beginning except by following the advice of someone who has already struggled (Texts 20 & 21).

Openness and obedience also aim to combat self-will. The Desert Fathers knew well that sin, all sin, consists in preferring one's own will to God's will. Therefore they insist on the renunciation of one's own will which comes from obedience to a spiritual father. (Texts 22-24).

By obeying in this way the young monk will gradually acquire discernment of spirits and learn how to direct others. He will purify his heart, master his passions, become a man of peace. He will become an abba himself. One Saying emphasises the fruit of this obedience: God obeys the obedient person, for such a person has no thoughts contrary to the will of God (Text 25).

#### 4. The Apophthegmata and the Bible.

We may be surprised at finding so few quotations from the Bible in the Apophthegmata. By comparison with the length of the text, there are twice as many in Pachomius, four times as many in the Life of Antony. In the Sayings there are then very few, which gives the impression that these old monks neglected Scripture. Why was this so?

It was certainly not because they considered reading the Bible to be unimportant: “Even the mere reading of the Scripture makes the demons afraid” they said. We even find that in the Sayings they recommend reciting passages by heart, as we have seen with the Pachomians. Cassian, a Desert Father, compared our minds to a windmill; one cannot stop it turning, so it must be given the good grain of the Scripture to grind and not the dandel of our wandering thoughts (Conf. 1:18).

There is not doubt that the monks of the desert read the Bible frequently; they could recite long passages from it. So the study of Scripture was practised.

If then there are so few quotations from scripture in the Sayings, it is not because the Desert Fathers did not know and value it but because they thought that not every use of Scripture is necessarily good. They valued Scripture not as an end but as a means to arrive at an end, the perfection of charity, hence the recommendation to use Scripture with discernment; one should not be attached to the books of Scripture (Text 26). One does not read the Bible as a proof of one’s knowledge (Text 27). Besides, these monks are conscious of the greatness of the Word of God; they think that one should make oneself very small before it, Scripture is always greater than we are (Text 28).

Reading the Bible demands purity of heart and humility (Text 29).

#### 5. Tears.

We have been seeking to understand the Apophthegmata by picking out those things which may seem surprising when we read them; Why the frequent question: “How am I to be saved?” why the disciple’s dependence on the spiritual father? why so little reference to Scripture. There is something else just as surprising: the emphasis on tears.

What are we to think of this word of Abba Moses: “There are three virtues which a man acquires with difficulty: to be always mourning, to be continually mindful of one’s faults, and to have death before one’s eyes at every moment.” At first sight, this is not a very attractive ideal!

But it reminds us of something. In the Rule, chapter 4, St Benedict includes the following as a tool of the monk: “Every day with tears and sighs confess your past sins to God in prayer.” And in chapter 20 where he is writing about prayer, he warns us that it is “not in many words, but in purity of heart and tears of compunction that we will be heard.” Here are two texts requiring an explanation and the Apophthegmata show us how to understand them better.

This teaching about tears and compunction was dear to the abbas, and should not seem strange to us. They call it *penthos*, a greek word which means sorrow, affliction, mourning. It is then about sadness, but a sadness very different from the ordinary natural kind,

All sadness comes from a lack of something. Natural sadness comes from not having the good things we long for. It is the wrong kind of sadness which is accompanied by despair.

There is a natural sadness to which monks are prone called *acedia*. This word is made up of the greek word *kedos* = covenant, prefixed with the negative ‘a’: the covenant has been broken; the soul is careless, seeking other things besides God, it has broken its covenant with God, the connection with God is severed, God no longer gives joy, the soul is sad.

On the other hand there is a holy sadness, the *penthos* of the Desert Fathers. It too comes from unsatisfied desires, but this time they are good desires; the desire not to offend God, the desire to be delivered from evil, the desire for perfection, for heaven and for God. But we have not broken the covenant with God, it is not *acedia*, we are sure that God loves us and that one day he will give us all these good things. It is a sadness full of hope, not despairing sadness like the other. It is a sadness without anguish, by which we rest in God. St John Climacus even calls it: "The joyful sadness."

This is the sadness of which the Desert Fathers speak. They know that God is good (Text 30). When they speak of *penthos*, of tears or mourning, they are not despairing for they are certain of the goodness of God. It is love and not sadness which makes them shed tears (Text 31).

Then why these tears? In their love for God, they weep out of a desire not to offend him; they weep for their sins and those of others (Text 32). For they know that we are all alike prone to evil and would be capable of the sins that others commit if God did not shower so many graces upon us (Text 33). They weep also because they know they are far from God. When St Benedict asks us to desire eternal life with all spiritual longing, that is quite close to *penthos*! It is a grace freely given, tears are a gift from God which comes in his good time (Text 34).

What are the fruits of these tears? First it is a purification. The Fathers used to say that "tears coming from on high purify and sanctify the body." They drive out sin (Text 35). The gift of tears is also an aid to prayer, a weapon in the struggle against the devil (Text 36). They also generate prayer (Text 37).

A rather enigmatic little Saying introduces us to another fruit of tears (Text 38). So they give joy, as John Climacus used to say. This was also the thought of Amma Syncletica (Text 39). Tears make us happy in this world, and also in the next.

## V. Hesychasm.

Now that we have explained what might appear surprising in the Sayings and demonstrated their teaching method, it remains to speak of something very important for the spirituality of the Desert Fathers and which has had great influence on later times, especially in the Greek Church: hesychasm. This is as it were the heart of the spiritual teaching of the Apophthegmata.

Hesychasm is a way of life centred on the search for hesychia.

There are two forms of hesychasm: one exterior, the other interior. For the Desert Fathers, human perfection is found in the love which unfolds in a prayer which must seek to become continual. To arrive at this goal, they hold hesychia to be necessary, the tranquillity arising from complete withdrawal from the world. This tranquillity cannot be found without effort. On the contrary it supposes asceticism and derives from it. Hesychia is not an end in itself: the goal is charity, hesychia is a means to arrive at this end, a disposition favouring the growth of charity.

### 1) Exterior hesychasm

We might be surprised on reading the Sayings to see the importance they give to exterior hesychasm, sometimes to the detriment of charity. With some Fathers there is the impression that quiet is confused with total solitude, as though there is no hope of tranquillity and prayer in the company of other people; and as though solitude itself could produce this tranquillity. The words hesychia and anachoresis, or hesychia and withdrawal into the desert, are interchangeable. It is only gradually that we arrive at distinguishing exterior and interior hesychasm.

It is this confusion or mingling of the two which must be grasped in order to interpret some of the Sayings, those of Arsenius in particular. Arsenius is the model of hesychasts. We are told about the call of this high dignitary of the court of Constantinople (Text 41). “Flee, be silent, stay quiet” will be the motto for many hesychasts, their programme. Arsenius was the first to put it into practice. He lived in a cell deep in the desert of Scetis which he rarely left. He fiercely defended his solitude. Thus he gave such a rude reception to a wealthy lady who came from Rome expressly to see him that he made her ill, as we are told in Saying 28 in the alphabetical series. He also defended his solitude against bishops (Text 42). He even defended it against his brethren (Text 43). But another Saying of Arsenius shows us nevertheless that this external hesychia was aimed at an interior hesychasm (Text 44).

## 2) Interior hesychasm

This retreat from the world as practised by Arsenius can rightly seem excessive to us and close to the withdrawal of certain pagan philosophers like Diogenes, who said to some important person come to visit him when he had retired to his barrel: “Get out of my light!” However the previous text shows that his aim was peace of heart. Other texts show that it was a retreat from the world for and in Christ. Hence this Saying of Antony (Text 45). Here we can see better that exterior hesychasm, the cell, is directed towards interior hesychasm, which must flow into humility, fear of God, *penthos* and sincere charity towards all.

Running through all these Sayings can be seen three characteristics which lead the hesychast to his chosen end: continuous prayer. These are *amerimna*, which is freedom from care, *nepsis* or vigilance, *crupite melete* which is the practice of prayer. We will now see what is contained in these four expressions.

### A) Freedom from care = ‘*merimna*’

To find hesychasm it is therefore necessary to flee from the noise and bustle of the city of men, but still more the dissipation of the heart which, despite external solitude remains disturbed, troubled, plagued by its attachments and preoccupations, by its own thoughts. The hesychast’s main preoccupation is to be ‘without care’ (*a negative + merimna = care*). What does this mean?

It does not mean despising everything, letting oneself neglect the things of God, or one’s salvation. That is *acedia*, the source of melancholy.

It does not mean leading a lazy life, cutting out all work in favour of prayer. This is what the ‘praying monks’ did and we shall see Abba Lucius giving them a lesson.

It does not mean not caring for the needs of one’s brethren.

On the contrary it means the virtue of filial confidence that Jesus recommends in the Gospel: set aside the cares of this present life, worries about the temporal conditions of life, and place them in the hands of our Father in heaven (Text 46).

This requirement to be without care is also found in St Basil, and later St John Chrysostom was to explain that cares attract more cares and if the door is left open to them peace of soul is lost. He was even to say that not only should we not concern ourselves with reasonable cares but also drop all thoughts so as to establish the soul in inner silence. For that, he was to say, it is necessary to set one’s thoughts aside, not seeking to banish them at all costs, as this risks having a headache, but to take no notice of them, putting them ‘in a suit-case,’ so as to establish inner calm. This is the same as the “be silent” of the voice speaking to Arsenius in text 41.

### B) Vigilance = *Nepsis*.

In text 45 Antony recommends staying in one's cell to keep 'inner watchfulness.' This is *nepsis*, the attitude of the soul which is wide awake, present to itself and to God. It is attention to God, the guarding of the heart which we have already met in Origen with reference to the spiritual combat (Text 47). Another of Poemon's sayings links vigilance with flight from care.

### C) The exercise of prayer = *crupete Melete*

*Amerimna* and *nepsis* tend to be negative attitudes, with the aim of protecting the soul. Here is something more positive, *melete*, which will prepare the soul more directly for continuous prayer.

This word *melete*, translated into latin as '*meditari*,' means more than to 'meditate.' It also has the sense of 'exercise.' In *melete* meditation is made aloud with the aim of preparing the soul for prayer; it is an exercise for prayer: short phrases are repeated so that they penetrate the soul and bring about spontaneous prayer. People of those days had the habit of talking to themselves out loud or in a low voice. We have seen how the Pachomian monks repeated verses of the Bible to themselves when they were at work, at the Office, in the refectory etc. The hermits of Lower Egypt were alone and had no risk of disturbing others by speaking out loud (Text 49). We know some of these *meletai*. Abba Sisoës repeated a text of his own making (Text 50). We also know the prayer of Macarius who has committed a terrible crime before coming the Scetis: "I have sinned as a man, may You have pity on me, as God!" But in general the Fathers hid their *melete* out of humility: *crupete melete* means a 'hidden exercise of prayer.'

From the little that we know, these *melete* could be of two kinds: the 'auxiliatrice' prayer, asking for help or protection, and the 'catanytic' prayer, meaning 'which pricks,' of the kind to arouse *penthos*, tears, mourning, holy sadness. Macarius gives us an example of these two kinds of *melete* (Text 51).

Much later these prayers would be called 'ejaculatory prayers' from a latin word meaning 'to throw a javelin,' according to a remark of St Augustine in one of his letters: "They say that in Egypt the brothers use frequent prayers, but very short and thrown out rapidly like darts" (*Letter to Proba: PL 130, 10,20*). In the East they are called 'monologue prayers,' meaning a prayer consisting of one word or a single thought.

This practice gave rise to the 'Jesus Prayer.'

### D) Unceasing prayer

*Amerimna*, *nepsis*, *melete* should lead to continuous prayer. The phrase of St Paul: "Pray always without ceasing" has always been a challenge to monks. They have tried to respond. It became a preoccupation first of all because they knew by experience that prayer is not easy (Text 52). They realised it is a struggle. Furthermore they were realists and knew that men and women are no angels, but have bodies, and this body must be fed. They must work to live. so we see them giving a lesson to those who, like the *Euchites*, the 'praying monks,' took the Apostle's command by the letter and imagined they could literally pray without ceasing, which, to their way of thinking, excused them from working with their hands (Texts 53 & 54).

Besides, experience has shown the usefulness of manual work.

Firstly it assured complete independence, which allowed them on occasion to speak the truth to sinners, whoever they might be, and not to flatter the wealthy.

It also allowed them to share with those in need.

And above all it was for them, along with prayer, the great remedy for acedia which fosters laziness.

Thus Little John, on being asked one day: “What is it like to be a monk?” replied: “Trouble and hard work!” By that he meant the labour of asceticism, but also manual work. There is also this Saying: “An abba was asked one day: ‘What must I do to be saved?’. Now the old man was working at weaving reed mats. Without interrupting his work or even raising his head, he replied: ‘You can see!’

The problem then was to harmonise the essential manual work with the continuous prayer at which the ascetics aimed.

Certain young rogues had found a dodge for praying without ceasing (Text 55). But that rather naive solution did not satisfy everyone. Other Sayings put us on the right track (Texts 56 & 57). Which is to say that along with words there is the prayer of the heart, a directing of the heart towards God, which may be wordless. By multiplying *meletai*, exercises of prayer, the monks arrived at a simple prayer, a prayer of the heart. The heart watches. In the same sense, St Basil distinguishes ‘prayers’ and ‘praying.’ Prayers merit the grace of prayer. This grace of continual prayer is found when charity is dwelling in the heart. It is in this sense that some short Sayings, not without meaning for being short (Text 58).

## VI. Conclusion: Flowers of the Desert.

The Apophthegmata, all very different and on various subjects, do not offer a unified theology of the monastic life. But all the same, they do present the truth of the monastic life and even of the Christian life itself. We have had occasion to point out that they are not all true; but what they say to us is true.

The truth of the Sayings comes first of all from the picture they give of human nature. They do not try to make it appear better than it is. We see that among these monks there were sinners, there were failures, shipwrecks.

Men and women are sinners. The Desert Fathers knew this and laid great stress on humility (Text 59). We have seen this in connection with the obedience of the disciple to an abba who is training him, and in connection with Bible reading. Also, mourning and tears form part of this idea of humility.

It is also because men and women are sinners that they recognised the struggle that must be fought against the forces of evil to be rid of sin; and that is why they insist so much on openness of heart: the spiritual combat is never carried on alone; to know oneself it is necessary to be seen by the eye of another; furthermore, openness of heart is an important way of renouncing self and strengthening the desire to be with God.

A sense of humour which prevents one from taking oneself too seriously is also close to humility. And these old monks who knew how to weep over their sins knew also how to use little stratagems and laugh at themselves (Texts 60 & 61). They also knew how to combine humour with fraternal charity (Text 62).

We can see from this last text their charity towards others. The next text also shows this (Text 63). And again this delightful reply from Poemen (Text 64). And again one which shows the charity between two brothers living together for years in the same cell (Text 65).

What the Sayings tell us is therefore true because they put before us the Gospel truth: Men and women are sinners yet they are loved by God and called to the fulness of charity, to a transforming union with God, transfiguration, divinisation.

This transfiguration was sometimes already visible among them. In one Saying we are shown Pambo with his face shining like that of Moses coming down from Mount Sinai (Text 66). Several others show us the abba as if on fire (Texts 67-69). These are the images which show us the divinisation, the transfiguration of one who has become spiritual.

In conclusion, one very short Saying is a marvellous summary of the Desert Fathers' spirituality.

"An abba said: our task is to set wood on fire."

And it is true, we are only a bit of dry wood. But by the labour of asceticism, the fire of the Spirit begins to burn in us. So the smoke brings tears to our eyes (*penthos*, see text 39), then the fire of love kindles the soul and the wood itself becomes fire. This is the divinisation to which we are called.

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### **The Letters of the Fathers of the Desert**

The following Letters are extant, though not all are translated into English.

14 letters of Abba Ammonas, disciple of Antony, then a monk of Scetis before becoming a bishop.

The 'Letter to his Sons' of Macarius the Egyptian, the only one attributed to Macarius the Great which seems authentic.

A Letter of Arsenius.

The 'Letter to Monks' of Serapion, disciple and friend of Antony who left him his sheep-skin. He later became bishop of Thmuis, when he was in correspondance with Athanasius.

These Letters, which also come from the silence of the desert, are a complement to the teaching of the Apophthegmata; they demonstrate a more general aspect of the spiritual life of their authors.

Ammonas insists on solitude and the suppression of self-will to attain purification of heart, but in the Letters we see more clearly than in the Sayings that this purification is a precondition for the coming of the Holy Spirit. This insistence on the Holy Spirit unfolding his graces in the soul is characteristic of these Letters of Ammonas who gives us here the fruits of his experience. "The Spirit gives himself to the souls of the just who are completely purified. to flow over them like a sweet perfume" (XIII,2). He is "a precious pearl" within them, a "hidden treasure." "He reveals his great mysteries to the souls within whom he dwells; for them night is like the day" (id.3). "The sweetness of spiritual grace is sweeter than honeycomb, and few monks and virgins have known this great sweetness" (II,I). "This divine strength" enables us to spend "our life in freedom, joy, delight. This strength given to man on earth leads him to the repose of heaven" (id.2).

The mysticism of the Desert Fathers which can be glimpsed in some of the Apophthegmata, is seen more clearly here.

The Letter of Macarius describes the spiritual path of the monk which begins with *penthos* and culminates, after temptations, in the full possession of the soul by the Holy Spirit. The knowledge of self leads to the search for the Creator, and first of all to awareness of his sinfulness. *Penthos* is thus the foundation of progress, then come trials and temptations: the whole array of 'thoughts.' "When the soul feels weak in the face of all the enemy's wiles, then the good God who cares for his creature, again sends him holy strength" (11) which "confirms his heart, giving him joy and comfort and enabling him to be stronger than his enemies" (9). "After having been put to the test in all these ways, the Spirit reveals to him the things of heaven" (13). "The Paraclete makes a covenant with the purity of his heart, the strength of his soul, the holiness of his body and the humility of his spirit. He places him above all creation; his mouth does not speak of human affairs, his eyes see what is right. He puts a guard over his mouth and walks on a straight path. All this the Paraclete does for him with measure and discernment, without any disturbance, in tranquillity" (14).

The Letter of Arsenius takes us deeper into what we have already seen in the Sayings: the practice of hesychia which leads to continual prayer.

The 'Letter to Monks' of Serapion is in praise of the monastic life. At first it misleads us by its intellectual approach marked by rhetoric, its opposition to the secluded life of the monk, and traces in it of civil or married life. Behind this kind of writing, one must decipher the essential traits of the monk: a steady resolution, a detachment from the world and from self, asceticism, prayer which is the chief occupation of the monk, and the expectation of promised blessings.

## 6. The Apophthegmata Texts

### 1. Abba Poemen

Abba Joseph tells how Abba Isaac said: "One day I was sitting beside Abba Poemen and I saw him in ecstasy. As I had great freedom to speak to him, I prostrated and begged him, saying: 'Tell me where you were.' And he, embarrassed, told me: 'My thoughts were with holy Mary, Mother of God, who was weeping over the cross of the Saviour. And I too would like to weep like that always.

### 2. Abba Arsenius

Abba Arsenius said: "If we seek God he will show himself to us, and if we hold to him he will dwell with us.

### 3. Abba Pambo

Theophilus, archbishop of Alexandria, came to Scetis one day. The brothers gathered together and asked Abba Pambo to say a few words of edification to the bishop. But he replied: "If he is not edified by my silence, he will not be edified by my words."

### 4. An unknown Abba

A brother asked an Abba: "Tell me. what must I do to be saved?"

The abba replied: "It is a great thing if you can bear insults, greater than all the virtues."

### 5. Abba Ares

Abba Abraham went to see Abba Ares. They sat down together. A brother came to the abba; he said to him: "Tell me what I must do to be saved." Abba Ares replied: "Go, and for a whole year eat only bread and salt in the evening. Then come back and I will speak with you."

The monk went off and did so. After a year he returned to Abba Ares. By chance Abba Abraham was there again. The old man said again to the brother: "Go, and fast again for a year, every other day." When the brother had gone Abba Abraham said to Abba Ares: "You give all the other brothers a light task. But you impose a heavy charge on this one. Why?"

The old man replied: "What I say depends on what the brother comes to seek. This brother has courage. He comes to hear a word from God, and he obeys joyfully. That is why I tell him what God says."

6. *Abba Poemen*

Abba Joseph said: "One day we were sitting with Abba Poemen. He was speaking about Abba Agathon. We said to him: "Agathon is very young, why do you call him abba?" Abba Poemen said: "Because his speech makes an abba of him."

7. *An unknown Abba*

One Romanus said: "There was an old man who had a good disciple. One day, not believing he was good, he drove him out with his cloak. The brother remained sitting outside. The old man opening the door and seeing him sitting there, prostrated and said to him: "O Father, the humility of your patience has overcome the small esteem I had for you. Come in; from now on, you are the old man and the father, and I am the younger and the disciple."

8. *Abba Antony*

Abba Antony said: "As far as possible a monk should disclose to the abbas the number of steps he takes and the number of drops of water he drinks in his cell, to know whether he is truly in the way of truth."

9. *An unknown Abba*

A brother had found a retired and tranquil spot in the desert. He begged his abba in these words: "Command me to live there and I hope that with God's grace and your prayers I shall mortify myself a great deal." But his abba would not allow it: "I well know that you would mortify yourself a lot, but because you would have no abba you would put your trust in your own works, sure of pleasing God, and, persuaded that you were acting like a monk, you would waste your time and lose your reason."

10. *Abba Poemen*

Abba Poemen said: "The one who gives most pleasure to the enemy is the one who will not open his thoughts to his abba."

11. *Abba Antony*

Abba Antony said: "I know many who have borne many trials. Yet they have fallen and become proud because they put their trust in their own acts and ignored the precept of him who said: "Ask your father and he will teach you."

12. *Abba Felix*

Some brothers brought certain laymen with them. They came looking for Abba Felix and begged him: "Give us a word." But the abba remained silent. They begged him repeatedly.

Then Abba Felix said to them: "You want to hear a word?" They said: "Yes, abba." The old man said to them: "There are no more words now. Before, the brothers put questions to the abbas and they did what the abbas said. At that time the Lord showed them what to say. But now they put questions and do not do what they hear. So God has taken away the gift of speaking a word from the abbas and they no longer have anything to say because nobody makes the effort any more."

On hearing these words the brothers groaned and said: "Pray for us, abba!"

13. *An unknown Abba*

A brother said to a great old man: "Abba, I should like to find an abba I like and die in his company." The old man said to him: "Well, well! That is a fine thing, sir! " But the disciple, thinking he had spoken well, paid no attention to the old man's reply. Then, when the old man saw that his disciple did not understand that he was mocking him, said to him: "So, if you find an old man whom you like, you want to live with him?" "Oh yes" replied the disciple, "That is what I want." The old man said to him: "Maybe that is not so that you can follow the old man's wishes but so that he will follow yours and you can stay in peace." Then the brother understood what he had said, he got up and prostrated and said: "Forgive me. I thought it was a good idea, when it was not."

#### 14. *Abba Poemen*

Abba Poemen said: "One day someone asked Abba Paesius: "What am I to do with my soul, for it is dull and has no fear of God." And Abba Paesius said to him: "Go with a man who fears God and by living with him you too will learn to fear God."

#### 15. *An unknown Abba*

An old man said: "Be like a camel; carry the load of your sins, be led by a bridle and follow after the one who knows the way to God."

#### 16. *Abba John the Little*

This used to be said about John the Little: he had gone to be with an abba from Thebes at Scetis, who was living in the desert.

One day, his abba took a dry stick and planted it and said to John: "Give it a jar of water every day until it bears fruit." Now the water was so far away that John would set off in the evening and not return until morning. Three years later that stick began to come to life and bear fruit. Then the abba picked a fruit. He took it to the church where the brothers were gathered and said to the brothers: "Take and eat the fruit of obedience."

#### 17. *Abba Poemen*

A brother questioned Abba Poemen saying: "There are some brothers living with me; do you want me to be in command?" The old man replied: "No! You work first, and if they want to live, they will watch of their own accord." The brother said: "But it is they, Father, who want me to be in command" The old man said to him: "No. Be their model, not their lawgiver."

#### 18. *Abba Sylvanus*

At Scetis, Sylvanus had a disciple called Mark who was a marvel of obedience. He was a calligrapher. And the abba loved him for his obedience. Now there were eleven other disciples, and they were vexed because Abba Sylvanus loved Mark better than them.

When the abbats heard of this, they were saddened by it. So one day they came to Abba Sylvanus to reproach him. Then Abba Sylvanus took the abbats with him, and he went knocking on the door of every cell saying: "Brother, come here, I want you." But none of the brothers came to him at once.

Abba Sylvanus came to Mark's cell. He knocked and said: "Mark!" On hearing the abba's voice he ran out at once. And the abba sent him on an errand. Then he said to the abbats: "Fathers, where are the other brothers?" He went into Mark's cell and took up his book. He pointed out that Mark had begun to form the letter O, but on hearing the voice of his abba he had not finished writing it. Then the abbats said: "Truly, abba, we too love the one you love, because God loves him."

#### 19. *Abba Abraham*

Abba Bana one day asked Abba Abraham: “Does a man who is like Adam in paradise still need to seek counsel?” And he said to him: “Yes, Bana, for if Adam had asked the angels’ advice: ‘Should I eat of the tree’? They would have said ‘No.’”

20. *Abba Zeno*

It was said that there was in the village a man who fasted so much that he was called ‘The Faster.’ Abba Zeno, who had heard about him, sent for him. The other came gladly. They prayed together and sat down. The old man began working in silence. Not being able to talk to him, the Faster was overcome with boredom. And he said to the old man: “Pray for me, Abba, I want to leave.” The old man said: “Why?” The other replied: “Because my heart is on fire and I don’t know what is the matter. Indeed when I was in the village I fasted until evening, and nothing like this happened to me.” The old man said: “You were feeding your ears in the village. But go, from now on eat only at the ninth hour, and do it in secret.” When he began to do this, he waited for the ninth hour with difficulty. And all those who knew him said: “The Faster has been possessed by the devil.” Then he came and told this to the old man who said to him: “This way is according to God.”

21 *An unknown Abba*

“If bad thoughts make war on you, do not hide them but tell them straight to your abba. The more we hide our thoughts the stronger they become and the more numerous. It is like a snake, once out of its hole it flees straight away. So a bad thought goes away as soon as it is revealed.

But if it is hidden it is like a maggot in wood, it destroys the heart. the one who discloses his thoughts is healed at once; the one who hides them becomes sick with pride.”

22. *Abba Poemen*

Abba Poemen said: “The will of man is a great wall between him and God (Jer. 1:18). It is a stumbling stone. If you turn your back on your own selfish will, you too will say: ‘With God I leap over the wall’ (Ps 17:30). But if a man’s search for righteousness is yoked with self-will, that man is sick.”

23. *Abba Pambo*

One day, four brothers from Scetis, clothed in animal skins, went in search of the great Pambo. Each spoke of his neighbour’s good actions, though not in his presence. The first one fasted a lot. The second was poor. The third had great charity. Of the fourth they said: “He has obeyed an abba for twenty-two years.”

Abba Pambo replied: “This brother shows the greatest virtue. Indeed each brother has obtained the virtue he wanted to possess. But this brother has denied his own will and does the will of another. People like him are martyrs if they persevere to the end.

24. *Abba Joseph of Thebes*

Abba Joseph of Thebes said: “There are three actions which have value in the Lord’s eyes:

1. A man is sick, he suffers temptations. If he accepts them gladly, that is pleasing to the Lord.

2. When we do everything in the presence God, with a pure heart, seeking nothing for self, that is pleasing to the Lord.

3. When one continually obeys his spiritual father, when one denies one’s selfish desires, that is pleasing to the Lord and for that there is a great reward.

For myself, I prefer sickness.”

25. *Abba Mios*

Abba Mios of Belos said: "Obedience answers obedience. When someone obeys God, God obeys him also."

26. *Abba Serapion*

A brother asked Abba Serapion: "Give me a word." The abba said to him: "What have I to say to you? You have taken the livelihood of widows and orphans and kept it in a cupboard." In fact, Serapion saw the cupboard was full of books.

27. *Abba Sisoës*

Abba Ammon of Rhaitou said to Abba Sisoës: "When I read the Bible, my mind longs to prepare a fine discourse. Then I should be able to give an answer to anyone who questioned me." The abba said to him: "That is not necessary. Seek rather to keep your mind pure. Then you will be able to be without care yourself and have the gift of words for teaching others."

28. *Abba Antony*

One day some old men came to see Abba Antony. Abba Joseph was with them. Abba Antony wanted to put them to the test. So he gave them a word from the Bible.

First Abba Antony questioned the younger ones. He asked them: "What does this word mean?" Each one explained as well as he could. But Abba Antony said to each of them: "No, you have not understood." Abba Joseph was the last who had to give a reply. The abba said to him: "Well, Abba Joseph, how do you explain this word from the Bible?" He replied: "I do not know." Then Abba Antony said: "Truly Abba Joseph has found the right way. Rightly has he said: 'I do not know.'"

29. *An unknown Abba*

It was said of an old man that he wanted to ask God for the interpretation of a word from the Bible. To obtain his request he passed seventy weeks eating only once a week. But God did not reveal it to him. He said to himself: "I have given myself so much trouble and received nothing for it; so I will go and ask my brother."

Just as he was shutting the door behind him to go to the brother an angel of the Lord was sent to him. He said to him: "Your seventy weeks of fasting did not bring you close to God; but when you humbled yourself and went to seek your brother, I was sent to tell you the meaning of that word." And he gave a perfect answer to what he was seeking in the Bible. Then he left him.

30. *Abba Poemen*

A brother said to Abba Poemen: "I have committed a great sin and I want to do penance for it for three years" The old man said: "That is a lot!" And the brother said to him: "A year at least!" The old man said again: "That is a lot!" Those present said to him: "Forty days?" Again he said: "That is a lot!" And he added: "I tell you that if a man repents wholeheartedly and does not commit that sin again, three days are enough for God to receive him back."

31. *Abba Hypericus*

Abba Hypericus said: "The monk who keeps vigil turns night into day because he is praying through the night. By oppressing his heart he makes tears spring forth and calls down mercy from heaven."

32. *Abba Pambo*

Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, begged Abba Pambo to leave the desert and go to Alexandria.

So Abba Pambo went down that way. He met an actress and began weeping. His companions asked him: "Why are you weeping?"

Abba Pambo replied: "I weep for two reasons: one because this woman is lost; the other because my desire of pleasing God is less burning than her desire. She indeed tries hard to please depraved men.

33. *An unknown Abba.*

An abba said: "In the same way that we carry our evil tendencies about with us everywhere we go. So we should keep tears and compunction with us wherever we are."

34. *An unknown Abba*

A brother questioned an abba: "How is it that my soul wants to weep like the monks of old and the tears do not come when my soul grieves?" The abba said to him: "It was not until after forty years that the sons of Israel entered the Promised Land. If you enter there you will have no more combats to face. For God wants the soul to be afflicted so as to desire entry into that land."

35. *Abba Longinus*

Abba Longinus experienced great compunction in his prayer and psalmody, and his disciple said to him one day: "Abba, is it a canon of the spiritual life for the monk to weep while saying his Office?" And the old man said to him: "Yes, my son, It is the law required by God. God did not in fact make man for tears but for joy and happiness, just like the angels. But since he fell into sin, man needs tears. Where there is no sin there is no need to weep."

36. *Abba Evagrius*

Abba Evagrius said: "When an alien thought arises in your heart do not try praying in this way or in that but sharpen the sword of tears."

37. *Abba Paul the Great*

Abba Paul the Great has said: "I am up to the neck in mud. I weep before God saying: 'Have pity on me.'"

38. *Abba Poemen*

Abba Poemen has said: "Mourning has a twofold action: it stirs up and it preserves."

39. *Amma Syncletica*

Amma Syncletica said: "At the beginning, those on their way to God struggle and weary themselves greatly. Later they know inexpressible joy. Indeed people lighting a fire are surrounded in smoke at first and they weep. By this means they obtain what they are seeking. In fact it says in the Bible: 'Our God is a consuming fire' (Heb. 12:29). In the same way, we should also light God's fire in us with tears and sorrow."

40. *Abba Arsenius*

It was said of Abba Arsenius that all his life when he was sitting at work he had a cloth over him because of the tears which flowed from his eyes. Abba Poemen, learning that he was dead, said weeping: "Happy are you, Abba Arsenius, to have wept over yourself in this world! For one who does not weep over himself here below, will weep eternally. So whether willingly here below or there in torment it is impossible not to weep.

41. *Abba Arsenius*

At this time Abba Arsenius was still living in the royal palace. He made this prayer to God: "Lord, lead me on the way to salvation." A voice replied: "Arsenius, flee far from men and you will be saved."

Arsenius went away from men. He lived alone. He began repeating this same prayer: "Lord lead me on the way to salvation." He heard a voice. It said to him: "Arsenius, flee, be silent, stay quiet. These are the roots of a sinless life."

42. *Abba Arsenius*

One day Archbishop Theophilus and an important person came to see Abba Arsenius. Theophilus put questions to the abba. He wanted to hear him speak. After a moment's silence the abba replied: "Will you do what I am about to say to you?" — "We promise," they replied. So the abba said to them: "When someone says to you: 'Arsenius is in that place,' do not go."

43. *Abba Arsenius*

Abba Mark said to Abba Arsenius: "Why are you leaving us?"

The abba replied: "Ah, I love you. God knows! But I cannot live with men. Millions and millions of angels have only one desire; men have many. That is why I cannot leave God in order to come and be with men."

44. *Abba Arsenius*

One day Abba Arsenius came to a place where there were some reeds waving in the wind. He said to the brethren: "What can I hear moving?" They said: "It is the reeds." So the abba said to them: "If a brother is recollected and he hears the song of a little bird, that is the end of it; his heart does not feel the same peace. And you! You hear the sound of those reeds, your hearts cannot be at peace."

45. *Abba Antony*

Again, Abba Antony said: "When fish stay too long out of water they die. It is the same for monks. When they spend their time with people of the world, or otherwise stay a long time out of their cells, they lose the deep peace of the heart.

Come, let us do the same as the fishes. They go back quickly into the sea. Let us then go quickly back to our cells so as not to forget our inner vigilance."

46. *Abba Kronios*

A brother asked Abba Kronios: "How can a man attain to humility?" The abba replied: "Through the fear of God." The brother said to him: "And what must one do to arrive at the fear of God?" The other said to him: "To my mind, you reach that point when you leave aside all care, give yourself to manual labour, and remember death and God's judgment, as far as you are able."

47. *Abba Poemen*

Abba Poemen often said: "What we need to do is to keep our minds alert."

48. *Abba Poemen*

One day when Abba Isaac was sitting with Abba Poemen, they heard a cock crow. He said to him: "You have one of those here, abba?" The old man said to him: "Isaac, why are you forcing me to speak? You and people like you hear it. But one who is watchful does not give it a thought."

49. *Abba Achilles*

Abba Amnoes used to say: "We went, Abba Bitimios and I, to visit Abba Achilles and we heard him repeating this word: 'Jacob, do not fear to go down into Egypt' (Gen.46:3). And he continued a long time repeating this word. After we knocked he opened the door and asked: 'Where have you come from?' Fearing to reply: 'From the Cells,' we said: 'From the mountain of Nitria.' Then he said to us: 'What shall I do for you as you have come such a long way?' He took us in and we saw that he had plaited a lot of reeds during the night. When we asked him to give us a word, he said to us: 'Between yesterday evening and now I have plaited twenty yards, but to tell you the truth, I do not need it; it is only so that God will not be angry and blame me saying: 'You could have been working and you have not done so.' That is why I work as much as I can.' And we went away edified.

50. *Abba Sisoës*

One day, Abba Sisoës was speaking quite openly. He said: "Courage! After thirty years I no longer pray to God about my faults, but I make this prayer: 'Lord Jesus, save me from my tongue!' And yet even until now I fall every day because of my tongue and I sin."

51. *Abba Macarius*

Someone asked Abba Macarius: "How should we pray?" The abba replied: "You have no need to make long speeches. Simply stretch out your hands and say: 'Lord, as you will, as you know how, have pity on me!.' And if a conflict arises within you, say: 'Lord, help!.' The Lord knows what we need and takes pity on us."

52. *Abba Agathon*

The brothers asked Abba Agathon: "Which of all the good actions is the one hardest to do?" He replied: "With respect, I think it is prayer. Yes, each time you want to pray your enemies want to stop you doing so. Indeed, they know there is only one way of stopping you going to God: to turn you away from prayer. When you begin some good thing, whatever it is, if you go on courageously you will find peace. But with prayer, you have to fight on with your enemies until death."

53. *Abba Sylvanus*

A brother went to visit Abba Sylvanus on Mount Sinai and on seeing the brothers working said to the old man: "'Do not work for the food that perishes; Mary indeed chose the better part.'"

The old man said to his disciple: "Zachary, give the brother a book and put him in an empty cell." When it came to the ninth hour, the brother had his eyes fixed on the door to see if anyone came to fetch him for a meal. But as no one called for him, he got up, went to find the old man and said to him: "Have the brothers not eaten today, abba?" The old man said: "Oh yes, but you are a spiritual man and do not need fleshly nourishment. The rest of us who are carnal expect to eat, and to do that we work. You have chosen the better part, you read all day and do not want to eat bodily food." When the brother heard these words he made a deep bow saying: "Forgive me, abba." The old man said to him: "Of course, Mary herself needed Martha and in fact it is thanks to Martha that Mary was given praise."

54. *Abba John the Little*

This is something told about Little John: One day he said to his older brother: "I want to be without care like the angels. They do not work, but worship God unceasingly." Then he took up his cloak and set off into the desert.

After a week he returned to his brother. He knocked at the door. Then he heard his brother asking before opening the door: "Who is it?" He replied: "I am your brother John." His elder brother said to him: "John has become an angel. He is no longer among men now." Then John begged him saying: "It is I!" But his brother would not open to him. And he left him sorrowing until morning.

Then he opened the door and said to him: "You are a man and you must start working again to feed yourself." John bowed before his brother and said: "Forgive me."

55. *Abba Lucius*

Several monks called 'praying monks' came to Enaton to see Abba Lucius. The abba asked them: "Where is your handiwork?" They said: "We do not work with our hands but we pray without ceasing as the Apostle commanded." Abba Lucius asked them: "Do you not eat?" They replied: "Oh yes!" So he said to them: "When you are eating, who takes your place praying?" But they had nothing to say in reply.

Then Abba Lucius said to the monks: "Pardon me, but you do not do as you say. Let me show you how I pray without ceasing while working with my hands. I sit with God. I moisten my reeds and I twist them into ropes. At the same time I say: 'God, have pity on me in your great kindness; in your abundant mercy blot out my offence.'" (Ps.50:1).

Abba Lucius asked the monks: "Is that not a prayer?" They replied: "Oh yes."

Then he said to them: "When I have spent the whole day working and praying I have earned about sixteen pieces of silver. I put two at my door and I buy food with the rest. Whoever it is who receives those two pieces of silver prays for me while I eat or when I sleep. So with God's help I obey the commandment to pray without ceasing."

56. *An unknown Abba*

Some brothers have the following to tell: We were with one of the abbass one day and as is customary we sat down. After conversing we wanted to leave and asked them to pray with us. And one of the abbass said: "What, have you not been praying?" And we replied: "Abba, there was the prayer when we arrived, but since then we have been talking." The abba said: "Pardon me, brothers, but there has been a brother sitting talking with you and he has made three hundred prayers." And having said that, they prayed and we left.

57. *An unknown Abba*

The abbass used to say of a brother that he never left off his manual work and the whole time his prayer went up to God, and that he was also very humble and persevering in his state of life.

58. *An unknown Abba*

An abba said: "If a monk only prays when he stands for prayer, he does not pray at all"

59. *Abba Arsenius*

One day, Abba Arsenius was assailed by tormenting demons in his cell. His servants, when they came to visit him and stood outside the cell, heard him cry out to God and say: "O God do not abandon me! I have done nothing good before you, but in your goodness let me start now."

60. *Abba Theodore of Enaton*

When some brothers were speaking about Abba Theodore and Abba Lucius of Enaton, they said: "They spent fifty years getting the better of their thoughts by tricks."

Indeed Abba Theodore and Abba Lucius used to say: "After the cold season we will leave here." When the hot season arrived they would say: "After the hot season we will go."

These two Fathers passed all their time in this way. We should remember them.

61. *An unknown Abba*

A brother had a thought which was giving him constant trouble: "You must go and visit such and such an abba" it said to him. But he put it off from one day to the next saying: "I will go tomorrow." And for three years he battled against that thought. Finally he said to this thought: "Supposing you went to see the abba; you would say to him: 'Are you keeping well, father? I have been wanting to see your holiness for a long time.'" Then he took a bowl and washed, playing the part of the abba: "You have done right to come, brother. I am sorry you have gone to so much trouble on my account. May the Lord reward you." Then he got a meal ready, ate and drank well, and at once his struggle was over.

62. *An unknown Abba*

A thief came to steal from a brother, who said to him: "Be quick before the brothers come!"

63. *Abba Agathon*

Abba Agathon said: "If I could find a leper to who I could give my body and take his, I should be happy, for that would be perfect charity."

64. *Abba Poemen*

Some of the old men came to Abba Poemen and said to him: "What do you think: when we see a brother asleep at the Office, ought we to shake him to make him stay awake during prayer?"

He said to them: "When I see a brother sleeping I put his head on my knee and let him rest."

65. *An unknown Abba*

Two abbats lived together for many years and never came to blows. The first said to the other: "Let us have a quarrel and be like everybody else." The other replied: "I do not know how to quarrel." The first said: "Look, I will put a brick between us and I will say it is mine, and you will say: 'No, it is mine,' and that will start a quarrel." So they put a brick between them and the first said: "That is my brick." And the other said: "No, it is mine." And the first continued: "If it is yours, take it and go." And they went off without managing to have a disagreement.

66. *Abba Pambo*

There was somebody they called Abba Pambo and they said of him that for three years he had begged God saying: "Do not give me glory in this world." And God glorified him to the point that no one could look at him in the face because of the glory in it.

67. *Abba Arsenius*

A brother came to the cell of Abba Arsenius in Scetis. He looked through the window. He saw the old man as though he were all on fire. (This brother was worthy to see such a thing).

He knocked on the door. Arsenius came to open it. He saw the brother was quite overcome. Arsenius said to him: "Have you been knocking long? Did you see anything?" The brother replied: "No." So Abba Arsenius spoke to him for a moment and then told him to leave.

68. *Abba Joseph*

Abba Lot came to visit Abba Joseph and said: "Abba, when I am able, I recite a short office, I fast a little, I pray, I meditate, I stay recollected. As far as I can I try to keep my thought pure. What else should I do?"

Then Abba Joseph got up. He stretched out his hands to heaven and his fingers became like burning lamps.

He said to Abba Lot: "If you will, become all fire."

69. *Abba Sisoës*

It was said of Abba Sisoës that when he was near death, the Fathers being round him, his face shone like the sun. And he said to them: "Abba Antony is coming." And after a little while he said: "The choir of prophets is coming." And again his face shone even more bright and he said: "The choir of Apostles is coming." And his face shone more brightly still and he seemed to be conversing with someone. And the old men asked him: "Who are you talking to, Father?" He said: "Here are some angels come for me and I am begging them to let me do a little penance." The old men said to him: "You have no need of penance, Father!" But the old man said: "Truly I feel I have hardly begun." And all around recognised that he was perfect. And once again his face became suddenly like the sun and all were seized with fear. He said to them: "See, the Lord is coming!" And immediately he gave up his spirit. Then there was a lightening flash and a sweet scent filled the whole house.

## 6. The Apophthegmata Explanation of the Texts

4.

We see in fact that the answer to this question: “What must I do to be saved?” is a counsel of perfection. Bearing injuries and love of enemies is the height of charity.

12.

These monks who came to visit Abba Felix had lay persons with them. It may be for this reason that Abba Felix did not wish to reply to their question; they did not live the hidden life of the monks.

15.

The camel, a beast of the desert, is used to carrying heavy loads. It is held by a bridle to prevent it doing what it fancies. The monk has to carry the heavy burden of his sins and submit to a guide. This Saying illustrates the previous one.

16.

This Saying, a famous one, cannot be true for it would have John go without sleep every night for three years!

Cassian later gives a more likely version: the disciple can have his sleep, and there is no miracle, the dry stick remains dry (Inst.4:23-26). In either case, this Saying remains true for the lesson it gives: unconditional obedience.

19.

Seeking counsel therefore is necessary, even for the perfect, those who have found Paradise, that is to say a state of perfect harmony with creation.

21.

For the Fathers, pride is the hardest vice to uproot, the deepest sickness. Humility is the cure. It is obtained through manifestation of conscience.

22.

Again the idea that self-will is a sickness. It is capable of resisting God. This will be found

again in Basil who says the disobedient monk should be sent to the infirmary!

23.

These are the brothers of Scetis, who have chosen the strictest separation from the world. They are dressed in animal skins, so are great ascetics. And yet the lesson given us by this Saying is that submission to an abba is even superior to all that and to the virtues of the other three.

Notice too the end of the passage showing that monasticism well lived was for the abbats analogous to martyrdom. Self-will is what we cling to most.

24.

“I prefer sickness.” For Abba Joseph there is something even greater than unconditional obedience: accepting trials with thanksgiving. These trials are not of our own choosing and they are hard; so with them too “one denies one’s selfish desires” and moreover receives them gratefully as coming from God.

25.

We are sometimes amazed at the miracles worked by these saints. In a few words Abba Mios gives the explanation: to those who refuse him nothing God gives all they want. We can admire both this wonderful tenderness of the Creator towards his creatures and the way Abba Mios explains it so simply.

26.

Books were rare among the Desert Fathers; they arranged them on a window-sill or a shelf carved out of the wall. This is what is the word ‘cupboard’ means, and so Abba Serapion

could see the brother had good library. These books were rare because they were copied by hand, and most of them were copies of the Bible. Being rare, they were expensive. The brother was reproved by Abba Serapion because he had bought many of them; but anything left over from what the brothers earned by their work should have been given to the poor, especially to widows and orphans.

28.

This 'right way' which Abba Joseph has found is the great humility which has made him realise that the Bible surpasses human intelligence and so admit that he does not know; which we find hard to do! His was a truly deep humility!

29.

This proves that the abbas venerated the Bible and sought to uncover its deepest meaning. They even fasted in order to understand better.

32.

An actress, today we would say a star, had at that time a very bad reputation. This lasted a long time; until the 18th century they were not given Christian burial, they were held to be public sinners in mortal sin. The term 'actress' is also used as an euphemism for a prostitute. That is why Abba Pambo thinks this actress is damned.

There is therefore a double motive for his tears: the presumed ruin of this woman, and his own lack of love for God.

34.

Tears are a gift. They are a sign of union with God and of love for him. It is in this sense that entering into tears can be called entering the Promised Land.

35.

Canon' in greek means: decree, rule, concerning a discipline. The answer to the disciple intrigued — or vexed — by the tears of Longinus is that tears are passing. The 'canon' set by God is joy.

38.

A short Saying, but hard to understand. It refers to Genesis 1:5: "Yahweh took man and put him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it. The underlying idea is again the return to Paradise. Mourning stirs the heart, purifies it and keeps it from bad thoughts, as in Saying 36.

39.

The joy does not come from the pain, but from the fire of God which tears and pain help to kindle. Pain establishes the soul in humility and draws down the Holy Spirit, the divine fire.

43.

A humble and firm reply. Arsenius knows, as is suggested in the 'Life of Antony' that he will find those he loves in the heart of God.

49.

"Fearing to reply: 'from the Cells' we said: 'from the mountain of Nitria.'" No doubt because the monks of the Cells, many of whom were Origenists, had a bad reputation among those in Scetis. It was not a bad lie, the Cells were an annex of Nitria. Besides we have to remember the geography and the respective positions of the three monastic centres. Abba Achilles was at Scetis, 40km from the Cells, and 60 from Nitria. That is why Abba Achilles said: "You have come a long way."

50.

“Save me from my tongue”: is the “Be silent” of Arsenius. See the Letter of St James 3:2-12.

55.

In the second paragraph is an example of *melete* showing how these monks prayed at their work: it was a prayer of the heart, quite simple, which left the mind free for work. Note the phrase: “I sit with God.”

56.

Here we see this prayer of the heart, a profound prayer which is not conveyed by *melete* in this text, it leaves the mind free for conversation.

62.

The Desert Fathers lived by the Gospel, and as soon as the opportunity presented itself of putting into practice some precept which they had not yet had the chance to follow they seized it joyfully. It is in recalling Mt. 5:40: “If anyone wants your tunic, give him your cloak also,” that the brother said: “Be quick, before the brothers come.” Obviously not to be taken literally, but a lesson in detachment.

64.

“At the Office.” As with the Pachomian monks, the Office must have been quite long, but simple: psalms, prayers and silent pray

## 7. Evagrius (345-399).

### Plan:

- I. Scholarly monasticism
- II. Life of Evagrius
- III .His works.
- IV. His doctrine:
  - 1) Asceticism: *The Praktikos*
  - 2) Mysticism: *On Prayer*
- V. Conclusion

### I. Scholarly Monasticism.

The alphabetical series of the apophthegmata introduced us to the Desert Fathers, but without any background in either time or space. The table: “The desert stars,” shows the greatest of them, with the length of their life (single line) and the length of their monastic life (double line). Below are the two authors of cenobitic rules which we have not yet studied, to show how they relate to each other. The table shows that the golden age of the Desert Fathers lasted fortwo centuries; and this has important consequences.

At the beginning recruitment was mainly local and most of the Desert Fathers were Egyptian peasants, uncultured men — but this did not stop them from loving God. Then the reputation of the ascetics spread about and people came to the desert from further away, cultivated men like Arsenius who had been an important person at the court of Constantinople. Among these were some who reflected on their life and tried to put their experience of the desert into writing so that they could tell others about the spirituality of the Desert Fathers: his gave rise to what might be called: ‘scholarly monasticism.’

Another consequence: with decline in fervour because of the great number of monks, gradually the unlettered monks grew jealous of those who were learned, and they found the un-

lettered monks a little too simple. These all-too human emotions degenerated into quarrels which became very serious and resulted in the exclusion of a groups of monks, of which Cassian was one.

Now we will go on to study the authors who have put their experience of anahoretic monasticism in the desert into writing: Evagrius, who is rather difficult as he leans towards intellectualism, and Cassian who is easier because he reacted against the intellectualism of Evagrius and simplified what Evagrius had made complicated so that the monks of Gaul could understand.

## **II. The Life of Evagrius.**

We know a lot about the life of Evagrius because one of his friends, Palladius, wrote about him in a book called: "The Lausiatic History"; because it was written for someone called Lausius.

Evagrius was born in 345 in the province of Pont in the north of the present Turkey. This was the year that Pachomius died, seven years before Antony. Evagrius knew Basil, who ordained him reader. On the death of Basil, he took Gregory of Nazianzen as his master. He followed him to Constantinople where he became known for his ability in refuting heretics.

But he fell in love with the wife of a high official. He fought against this passion, and when he had succeeded in overcoming it, the lady fell in love with him. A dream made Evagrius realise all the troubles that would be his lot from this affair: prison or worse; so he fled to Jerusalem and took refuge in the monastery of Rufinus and Melania.

This monastery was in a town. Evagrius left and went visiting young women. Then God, who was watching over him, sent him an illness which lasted six months and exhausted him. The doctors could not understand it, but Melania, who was a saint, realised that perhaps God had a hand in it. Evagrius confided in her, and she made him promise to be a playboy no longer and go to Egypt to become a monk far away from the world. He promised, and a few days later he was healed.

So Evagrius left for Egypt and lived for two years in Nitria. Then he went deeper into the desert and lived in the Cells. He lived a very ascetic life, earning a little bread, salt and oil by working as a transcriber. He wrote for those who did not know how to write, copying manuscripts, and also writing books himself.

Among these monks, most of whom did not know how to read, he seemed to be an intellectual; but he himself understood the limits of knowledge (Text 1). He tried to make himself very small before those who were not intellectuals and suffered their ill-feeling in silence.(Text 2).

Evagrius was a cultured person and a shrewd psychologist; he became the leader of a group of monks whom Palladius called the 'confraternity,' or the 'company' of Evagrius. These monks read and admired Origen's allegorical exegesis of Scripture. But being over-zealous disciples and not very prudent, they sometimes distorted the thought of the Master, affirming as certitudes ideas that Origen had only put forward as possible. The more simple monks, who had not read Origen and were for the most part anthropomorphists, were shocked by what they heard. All this deteriorated into violent disagreements and gave rise to the 'Origenist controversy.' It began in the year 400 and ended when this group of monks of the Cells, who were disciples of Origen, were expelled from Egypt. Cassian was one of them, but Evagrius had died a few months beforehand.

### III. The Works of Evagrius.

Besides letters, Commentaries on Scripture and a treatise called *Antirrheticos* where scriptural texts for expelling demons are cited; Evagrius wrote some very important treatises:

There are three books which were grouped together by Evagrius himself:

1. The *Praktikos*, which he also called: '*The Monk*.' It is a century, that is a book made up of a hundred short chapters. Evagrius created this form of literature which became well-known in the East. This book explains his ascetical doctrine.

2. The *Gnostikos*, following the first, is a half-century. It is a series of counsels addressed to the 'gnostic,' that is, the spiritual Master.

3. The *Kephalaia Gnostica*, which means: "Chapters of Knowledge." This work is made up of 6 centuries, but of 90 chapters, not a hundred.

It is the great doctrinal work of Evagrius where are found out of context nearly all the theses which he took from Origen and which were anathematized in 553.

There is also the:

4. Chapters on Prayer, the most important treatise and the richest; it had the greatest influence on posterity. As Evagrius had a bad reputation because of the ideas found in the *Kephalaia Gnostica*, it has been preserved under the name of St Nilus. It is in the form of a letter of 153 very short chapters (the 153 fishes in Jn. 21:11). Here we find Evagrius the mystic, and through this work he became the founder of monastic mysticism.

### IV. Evagrius' Teaching.

Evagrius is then a witness to the spirituality of the Desert Fathers. He echoes their teaching, and on one hand, by the synthesis he makes of the teaching of the desert, by the depth of his knowledge and his mystical experience, he is attractive. But on the other hand, he is not easy to understand because of his vocabulary, the care he takes not to unfold a truth too abruptly to those who cannot understand it, and sometimes because his subject matter is so profound.

We shall study the asceticism of Evagrius in the *Praktikos* and his mysticism in the *Chapters on Prayer*.

#### 1) Asceticism: The *Praktikos*

The covering letter which serves as a Prologue is important. It begins by showing the significance of the monk's clothing, its symbolism; then Evagrius summarizes the teaching of the Desert Fathers in one phrase (Text 3). In this text he divides the Christian life into three parts. It is very briefly repeated in chapter 1 (Text 4); and given again in Chapter 84 (Text 5).

The purpose of this book is *praktike*; a plan is given on the next page.

Evagrius defines *praktike* as: "The spiritual method for purifying the affective part of the soul" (78). He means asceticism, the battle against the passions.

We have seen from studying St Antony and the *Apophthegmata* that the monk goes to the desert to fight the demons. Origen has already told us that the spiritual combat takes place in the heart. Evagrius takes up this idea and speaks of 'interior warfare' (Text 6). When he speaks of 'thoughts,' he means temptations. He numbers eight of them, always in the same order, so there are eight evil thoughts which we must fight against. (Text 7). The end of the paragraph is important; it does not depend on us whether we have evil thoughts, temptations; but what does depend on us is whether we let them enter our souls and stay there. "The temptation of the monk," he says elsewhere, "is a thought which rises from the passionate part of the soul and obscures the

intellect. The sin of the monk is to consent to a forbidden pleasure which has been suggested by the thoughts.”

### **Plan of the Praktikos**

Its place in Christian life  
The eight evil thoughts  
Against the eight thoughts  
On the passions Instructions  
What happens in sleep  
Signs of apatheia  
Practical considerations  
Sayings of the monks

These eight thoughts of Evagrius are taken up by Cassian and through him they pass into the tradition. Later acedia, the monk’s particular sin, and its fruit of sadness, are replaced by laziness (which also comes from acedia), vainglory is joined to pride and we have the list of the seven capital sins which every Christian must avoid.

Thus Evagrius fixed the number of major temptations a teaching given by the Desert Fathers. First there are those which concern what is exterior to us: the body. These are gluttony and lust; the first two on the list in text 7. Gluttony is the avoidance of the asceticism of fasting, the desire to have a meal earlier and to eat good things, as we know only too well today.

Then there are the temptations concerning good things which are outside ourselves: those we possess. The temptation of attachment to some possession is avarice. That of wanting something we have not got is sadness. There is a sadness which afflicts a monk called acedia, which we have already met. Evagrius gives a vivid description of it, showing that it is a mixture of all the temptations (Text 8). Another consequence of sadness is anger, a vice which the Desert Fathers often condemn. For them, as for Evagrius, it is an open door to passion, the great obstacle to prayer.

Finally there are the temptations concerning good things which we have of ourselves: being or existence. These are attachments to being someone of importance; temptations to vanity and pride which the Fathers thought were the hardest ones to get rid of.

This struggle against ‘thoughts,’ temptations, must lead, according to Evagrius, to a state in which a person dominates his passions; it is called apatheia. The passions are natural to us in the present state of our bodies, they cannot be suppressed. However one can control them by practising apatheia or impassibility. Evagrius distinguishes two kinds of impassibility (Texts 9 & 10). Impassibility consists in not being disturbed by things outside ourselves, but even more in not being troubled by their remembrance.

At the end of *praktike*, charity blossoms. In text 3 we have a scheme which starts with faith and comes to fulfilment in charity; and Text 11 traces the journey of the monk in the opposite direction.

**TEXT 3:** FAITH => fear of God => abstinence => perseverance => hope => impassibility => CHARITY

**TEXT 11:** CHARITY <= impassibility <= practice <= observing commandments <= fear of God <= FAITH

## 2) Mysticism: *On Prayer*

In texts 3 to 5 Evagrius explains his understanding of the spiritual life. We will try to formulate it in the form of diagrams. In text 3 he speaks of the ascetic and the contemplative life. We have studied asceticism in the *Praktike* Treatise, also called: “The Monk.”

When writing about contemplation, he called it the “gnostic life,” which means a life in which one knows God. In text 4, he divides it into two parts: contemplation of nature (*phusike*) and contemplation of God which is theology (*theologike*). In text 5 he tells us that the beginning of the gnostic life is contemplation of nature and its goal is theology. So we can draw this diagram:

Gnostic life => natural knowledge = *physike* => Theology

Evagrius wrote two other books in his trilogy which deals with this gnostic life: the *Gnostikos* and the *Kephalaia Gnostika*, both very difficult works, and the second contains doctrinal theses which have been condemned as heretical. We will not use them, but we shall study his very beautiful Chapters on Prayer which has come down to us under the name of the monk Nilus, where we will find his teaching on contemplation.

In order to understand it better, we will put the preceding scheme into greater detail:

*Physike* => Contemplation of nature (lower) => bodies and their ‘logoi’ = ‘purposes,’ discovering in this way the great variety of wisdom the Creator has given them.

Contemplation of nature (higher) => spiritual natures; sharing in angelic knowledge

=> *Theologike*: A vision of the intellect from within Vision of the ‘place of God’ (i.e. his presence)= ‘light without form,’ enlightened understanding, light of the holy Trinity.

This diagram might seem very unattractive because of the complicated words that are used. We will decipher it, explaining that for Evagrius, contemplation was a combination of three stages. The first stage is the contemplation of created things perceived by our senses: ‘bodies and their purposes.’ The second stage is the contemplation of things not perceived by our senses: ‘spiritual natures,’ that is angels or saints. The third stage is the contemplation of God, a unique and simple being. This contemplation comes without thought, by a simple regard or glance of the spirit.

This is the teaching found in Evagrius’ book on Prayer. It has no strict plan. The author decided in advance to have 153 chapters, corresponding to the catch of 153 fish after the Resurrection.

However one can discern the line of his thought: from 1-62, there is a steady progression: he starts with praxis to arrive at the summit. But at 63, he goes down again to speak of other things, then at 113 he ascends to new heights. Then from 121- 149 one has the impression that Evagrius has no more to say, but he wants to get to 153 fish! Finally he finishes with a passage of great beauty and a splendid conclusion.

A) Let us look at some texts from the first part (1-63) of this Treatise on Prayer where one can detect a definite progress.

a) The necessity of praxis.

From 1-27, Evagrius underlines the necessity of quietening the passions to approach God (Text 12). Humility is the foundation of prayer, so we have the theme of penthos (compunction), (Text 13); then recollection (Text 14). After having insisted, like the Desert Fathers, on the necessity of the absence of anger in order to be able to pray, Evagrius gives some definitions of prayer. (Texts 14-15).

Then (28-46), he traces the conditions of prayer: perseverance, disinterestedness, desire for renunciation (Text 17), purification of the memory (Text 18).

He warns us that the demons (47-50) will make war on one who prays.

b) To arrive at the heights.

Text 18 has shown that prayer is founded on love, and so tends to become continual, because when one loves someone, one loves all the time. Next come 3 chapters which are very important for the understanding of Evagrius' concept of prayer (Text 19).

1) Attain apatheia => only simple thoughts

2) Leave aside simple thoughts => objects and their 'logoi' remain

3) Leave aside objects => understanding of intelligible things remains

4) Leave aside intelligible things => reach the place of God

Then follow some very beautiful chapters (Texts 20-23).

B) Second Part (64-120)

These chapters go over again necessity of *praxis*, as we have seen above, and finish with a series of Beatitudes. (Texts 24-29).

C) Third Part (126-153)

After the heights, we go down again, and Evagrius tries to reach 153. Here are two beautiful texts (Texts 30-31).

The *Chapters on Prayer* end with a little gem in which Evagrius outlines the path of prayer (Text 32).

## V. Conclusion.

1) The emphasis of Evagrian monasticism.

A text from the Treatise: *To Monks who live in the Cenobium* sums up the spirituality of Evagrius well. (Text 33).

Through mortification in all aspects of life in the desert, the monk must strive not only to overcome his passions, but to dominate them to the extent that he even attains apatheia. Then he is set free from all that distracts and divides him. He attains a pure heart which brings him, first to the contemplation of God in his creatures, then to the spiritual contemplation of the invisible God Himself.

What is new in Evagrius' teaching, is not the idea of apatheia, but that of spiritual contemplation. Through his rather special vocabulary, he wants to say that God is beyond all image, beyond all human representation. This was before anyone used the term *apophatic* for this kind of theology.

This approach is not false, but it is affirmed in a somewhat nuanced or subtle way. The drama of this period is that side by side with the followers of Evagrius there were other monks who were not very learned and were not able to pray to a spiritual God; they were the *anthropomorphists*. On both sides there was a misunderstanding of the Incarnation. The one became bogged down in forms or representations which they tried to substitute for the reality they signified. The others thought of themselves a little like superior human beings, impassible or contem-

plative, whose inner attention was taken up into the divinity and who had no need of human mediation.

This misunderstanding brought about the first grave crisis in monastic spirituality, and, in a sense, this crisis was the prototype of all future crises; we find it again in the ninth century with the iconoclastic controversy.

## 2) The influence of Evagrius

Among the Greeks, his condemnation was an obstacle to the transmission of his writings. He has a notable place among the 'Neptic Fathers.' His influence is clear in Maximus the Confessor and St John Climacus. Among the Desert Fathers of Gaza, Barsanuph advised against reading him, but then allowed one of his novices to do so, provided that he chose only what was of profit to his soul. For Dorotheus the teaching of Evagrius was traditional, he knew it.

Among the Syrians he was held in great veneration; for them he is a great mystical teacher.

Among the Latins, Jerome was hostile towards him, reproaching him for his doctrine of *apatheia* which he poorly understood. John Cassian never mentioned his name, but borrowed a lot from him. Rufinus translated his writings. In the West he was not known as a monk but as a daring theologian.

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## 7. Evagrius Texts

### 1. *Arsenius* 5

Abba Evagrius said to the blessed Arsenius: "How is it that we, with all our culture and our wisdom have nothing, while these uncultured Egyptians have acquired so many virtues?" Abba Arsenius told him: "We are not detached from our worldly culture, and these uncultured Egyptians have acquired virtue by their own labour."

### 2. *Evagrius* 7

One day in the Cells there was a meeting about something. Abba Evagrius spoke up. The priest said to him: Abba, we know that if you lived in your own country, you would no doubt be a bishop and a governor of many people. But here you are a stranger. Filled with compunction, he was not disturbed, but nodded his head and replied: Yes, that is true, Father. I have spoken once, but I will not speak again.

### 3. *Letter to Anatolius*

8 ...These are the realities which the habit symbolises. The Fathers repeat constantly the following words: faith, my sons, is strengthened by the fear of God, and continence strengthens this fear; through perseverance and hope continence becomes unshakeable, and from them is born freedom from passions (*apatheia*) which has charity (*agape*) for a daughter; charity is the door to natural knowledge, then theology succeeds it and finally comes beatitude.

We will say no more for the moment on the holy habit and the teaching of the ancients.

9. Now we shall explain the ascetic life and the contemplative life, not indeed all that we have seen and heard, but only that which we have learnt from them to pass on to others. We have summarised the ascetic teaching in a hundred chapters, and that on contemplation in fifty chapters and another six hundred. We have concealed certain things and alluded to others in an obscure manner so as “not to give what is holy to dogs or throw pearls to the pigs.” But all will be clear for those who are following their footsteps.

*4. Praktikos 1*

Christianity is the teaching of Christ our Saviour. It is composed of praktike, phusike and theologike — asceticism, contemplation of the natural world and contemplation of God.

*5. Praktikos 84*

The goal of the ascetic life is charity; that of knowledge is theology. The beginning of the one is faith, and of the other is contemplation of nature.

*6. Praktikos 48*

The demons fight against people in the world chiefly through outward affairs; but with monks it is more often through their thoughts as there not many such outward affairs in solitude. It is easier to sin in thought than by deeds. Also the interior warfare is more difficult than that of outward affairs. For the understanding is something which it is difficult to keep from sliding into forbidden phantasies

*7. Praktikos 6*

There are eight thoughts which give birth to all the others. The first is gluttony, then comes lust, the third is avarice, the fourth sadness, the fifth anger, the sixth acedia, the seventh vainglory and the eighth pride. Whether these thoughts trouble the soul or not does not depend on us; but what does depend on us is whether they stay in the soul or not, whether they rouse our passions or not.

*8. Praktikos 12*

The demon of acedia which is also called the ‘midday demon’ is the worst of all. It attacks the monk at about the fourth hour and lays siege to the soul until the eighth hour.

First he makes it seem as though the sun hardly moves or has stopped, and the day goes on for fifty hours. Then he makes the monk fix his eyes continually on the window, to leave his cell, to watch the sun to see if it near the ninth hour, and to look about him to see if a brother is not coming. Then again he inspires in him disgust for the place where he is, for the life that he leads, for manual work. After that he puts into his head the idea that charity has disappeared from among the brethren, and there is no one to console him.

If it happens during this time that someone offends the monk, the demon uses this too to increase his distress. He prompts him to desire to live elsewhere, in a place where he can find what he needs more easily, follow a less arduous calling and one which brings greater success. He then suggests that it is not the place which pleases the Lord; according to the Bible God can be adored everywhere.

On top of all this, he recalls to the monk’s memory his family and the life he led in the world. He puts into his head the idea that life lasts a long time and asceticism is very laborious. In short he does all he can to persuade the monk abandon his cell and run away from the struggle.

No other demon follows this one. If the soul triumphs a state of peace and inexpressible joy comes over him.

*9. Praktikos 57*

There are two peaceful states of the soul; one comes from natural causes, the other from the withdrawal of the demons. The first is accompanied by humility and compunction, tears, a deep longing for the divine and unbounded zest for work. In the second, vainglory and pride use the disappearance of the other demons to lead the monk to his downfall. The monk who observes the limits of the first state will quickly recognize the inroads of the demons.

10. *Praktikos 67*

The soul which possesses impassibility is not one which is not tested by any passion for things, but one which is undisturbed even by the memory of them.

11. *Praktikos 81*

Charity is the daughter of impassibility; impassibility is the flower of asceticism; asceticism consists in keeping the commandments; the guardian of the commandments is the fear of God which in turn comes from true faith; and faith is an interior good which exists naturally even among those who do not yet believe in God.

12. *Prayer 4.*

If Moses, when he tried to approach the burning bush, was prevented until he had removed his sandals, should you not free yourself from every passionate thought if you wish to see Him who is above every thought and feeling.

13. *Prayer 5*

Pray first to receive the gift of tears to soften the hardness of your soul with compunction, and by confessing your sin to him, obtain the pardon of the Lord.

14. *Prayer 11.*

Strive to make your understanding deaf and dumb at the time of prayer, and you will be able to pray.

15. *Prayer 15.*

Prayer is the fruit of joy and thanksgiving.

16. *Prayer 36*

If you long to pray, renounce all to receive All.

17. *Prayer 46*

The demon is terribly envious of the man who prays, and he tries every means to make him fail. He does not cease to rouse thoughts of objects in the memory and to reawaken all the passions by means of the flesh; in order to prevent such a beautiful way and his journey towards God.

18. *Prayer 54*

The one who loves God speaks with him as with his Father, turning away from every passionate thought.

19. *Prayer 55-57*

55. It is not because one has attained apatheia that one truly prays; for one can have simple thoughts and yet be so distracted meditating on them that one is far from God.

56. Even if the mind does not tarry in simple thoughts, it has not, because of this, already attained the place of prayer; for it may be contemplating objects and considering their nature which, though they may be simple concepts, nevertheless, being considerations of objects, they imprint an image on the mind and draw it away from God.

57. Even if the understanding rises above the contemplation of the created world, it still cannot see the place of God perfectly; for it may be caught up in the knowledge of intelligible things and share their multiplicity.

20. *Prayer 59*

The one who prays in spirit and in truth no longer draws the praise he gives the Creator from creatures, but he praises God because of God.

21. *Prayer 60*

If you are a theologian you will truly pray, and if you truly pray, you are a theologian.

22. *Prayer 61*

When your understanding, in ardent love for God, withdraws little by little, so to say, from the flesh and rejects all the thoughts which come from the senses or memory or temperament and is filled at the same time with reverence and joy, then you can consider yourself near the borders of prayer.

23. *Prayer 62*

The Holy Spirit having compassion on our weakness, comes to visit us even when we are not yet purified. If he finds our mind praying with the desire for true prayer, he comes down upon it and dispels the whole host of reasonings and thoughts which beset it and carries it into spiritual prayer.

24. *Prayer 118.*

Blessed is the mind which, praying without distraction, goes on growing in love for God.

25. *Prayer 121.*

Blessed is the monk who thinks of himself as the rubbish of all men.

26. *Prayer 122*

Blessed is the monk who considers the salvation and the progress of all as important as his own, and rejoices in it.

27. *Prayer 123*

Blessed is the monk who sees all people as God, after God.

28. *Prayer 124*

Blessed is the one who is separated from all and united with all.

29. *Prayer 125*

A monk is one who considers himself one with all, because he always sees himself in each one.

30. *Prayer 151*

The preeminence of prayer does not consist simply in quantity, but in quality. This is proved by the two men who entered the temple, and also by the words: "When you pray, do not go on repeating yourself...."

31. *Prayer 153*

When in your prayer you go beyond all other joy, then only will you have found prayer.

32. *Prayer — Conclusion*

This then is the way of prayer; it begins with tears and repentance. It continues with the practice of all the virtues, by renouncing everything, and above all oneself, by gentleness and fraternal charity, through progressive purifications of soul and mind, in complete abandonment to the will of God who is always engaged in leading us towards the goal in spite of diabolical persecutions, so that we may win through by patience, while avoiding illusion by the practice of humility, to the peace and the marvellous repose of the contemplation of God.

It is setting forth on a journey with God.

Arriving at the goal of the "completely desirable," the contemplative finds in God, through knowledge (gnosis), in an pre-eminent and spiritual manner, that which he has left behind for the sake of knowledge; he is separated from all and united to all; impassible and yet with

supreme sensitivity; deified and yet he thinks of himself as the rubbish of all the world. Above all he is happy, divinely happy.

### 33. To Monks

The flesh of Christ is the virtues, and he who eats it will become free from passions. The blood of Christ is the contemplation of beings, and he who drinks it will be illumined by him. The breast of Christ is understanding of the vision of God, and he who rests there will be a theologian.

## 7. Evagrius: Explanation of the Texts

### 2.

Here is meant a meeting (*sunedrion*) of those monks who are concerned with the conduct of the community and who take counsel together. The text illustrates the authority which is invested in the priest (probably Macarius in this instance), among these monks who remain laymen all their lives. However they do not seek the priesthood; they resist it strongly out of humility. We know of some who mutilated themselves in order to escape being made priests. There is the story of Abba Isaiah who, seeing that some wanted to ordain him, fled and hid in a field of lucerne. When evening came, his pursuers stopped on the edge of the field, letting their donkey loose to graze the lucerne and so Isaiah was discovered!

### 3 & 4

The second part of text 3 gives us Evagrius' trilogy and the two teachings of which it is composed: the ascetic or active life from *praxis* or action, and the 'gnostic' life which means knowledge (of God).

He then goes on to say that the ascetic teaching is found in the first book of the trilogy: the *Praktikos*, composed of one hundred chapters; and the 'gnostic' teaching in the two other books: the *Gnostikos*, a half-century of 50 chapters, and the *Kephalaia Gnostika*, six centuries or six hundred chapters.

Going on to text 4, we find *praktike*, active or ascetic; and two other words we have not yet met: *phusike* — physical, and *theologike* — theological. Both these are components of the 'gnostic' life.

Going back to the first paragraph of text 3 we find a term we know: 'theology' set beside another we do not yet know: 'natural knowledge,' nature in Greek is called *phusis*. It is thus the same thing as 'physical.' The scheme which he has just given is his description of the active life; it proceeds from faith to charity. We find this same scheme, but in the opposite order, in text 11. In these two schemes, charity is presented as the goal of the 'active' or ascetic life; it is closely linked to *apatheia*.

The great divisions of the spiritual life according to Evagrius are thus set out. They can be seen in the two schemes on page 68.

### 5.

We find them again in this short chapter, with their beginning and their goal, we have: faith? asceticism? charity.

contemplation of nature (or physical things) 6 knowledge (or gnosis) 6 theology.

These three stages of the spiritual life are not an invention of Evagrius, they were known before him. Among the Greeks, the pair *praktikos-gnostikos* comes from Plato. The first term means practical knowledge, the second intellectual knowledge. Aristotle has the pair *praktikos-*

*theoricos* and not *gnosticos*, with a wider meaning; the first has action for its goal, the second refers to truth.

With Philo we come to a moral and religious sense. He presents the life of *theoretikos*, referring to the vision of God, which in old age succeeds the life of *praktikos* = asceticism. Later the Christian authors used the term *praktikos* for the active life: (Martha), and *theoretikos* for the contemplative life (Mary).

6.

The distinction ‘seculars’-‘monks’ can be applied to cenobites and anchorites. To tempt cenobites the demons make use of exterior objects, the brethren, thoughts. The end of the paragraph puts one on guard against the imagination; the mind is naturally led to wander when it is attracted by exterior objects.

7.

The word ‘thoughts’ is used here in a perjorative sense; these are the evil thoughts against which a monk must struggle in order to reach *apatheia*, and then charity. Evagrius goes on to speak of the principle temptations, those which give rise to all the others.

In the course we mention the order of ‘thoughts.’ Evagrius alludes to the story of the temptations of Jesus in Luke, 4. The first: “*That these stones become bread*” concerns eating, gluttony (which is not what we mean by the term, but rather avoiding the asceticism of fasting by advancing the hour of the meal); the second: “*I will give you the kingdoms*” refers to avarice; the third: “*If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down*” to vainglory. Evagrius explains elsewhere that the demons which correspond to them are the frontline soldiers behind which all the rest march.

Gluttony for him comes at the beginning, vainglory and pride at the end of the passions. He is referring to an order which is for the most part conventional; the passions are enumerated in the order of spiritual progress; the first endanger beginners, the last the monk who is on the way.

The last sentence is pointed out in the course.

8.

We have already noticed acedia when studying the apophthegmata: *a-kedos* = to break off the bond with God. This what the demon of acedia wants to make us do.

He says that it is ‘arduous,’ burdensome, because it overwhelms the soul and the body, the text shows that both are affected. It comes at the hottest time of the day; called the ‘midday demon’ recalling Ps. 90.6 (Others say it is because it attacks the monk in the middle of his life). Here he means the middle of the day, from the fourth hour (10am) to the eighth (2pm), that is two hours before and after midday when the heat is greatest. In the East the heat is unbearable and burdensome to the point that all the strength of the soul and body flag.

Then follows details of his action; the meal was served at the ninth hour, or 3pm. So we see the monk watching the sun to see what time it is. In this, acedia is close to gluttony. Then he “looks about him to see if a brother is coming,” because solitude grows wearisome.

“Disgust for manual work” is according to Cassian one of the principle marks of acedia. Here acedia is close to laziness. Then further on there is the desire for “a less arduous calling.”

“God can be worshipped in every place,” see *John 4:21-24*.

“No one to console him” is reminiscent of *Lamentations 1,2* (& *9,16,17,21*)

“He does all he can to persuade the monk to run away from the struggle.” This is the theme of the spiritual combat, dear to all the Fathers.

“No other demon follows this one.” According to other texts from Evagrius, it is because this temptation contains all the others; here we have noted gluttony, sadness, anger. Victory over acedia brings peace and joy.

9.

The first peaceful state comes from the ‘natural’ seeds of virtue; ‘natural’ because put in us by God at the creation so that we may develop them. The Greek Fathers are optimistic; the intellect (mind or understanding) is naturally able to be open to God, because it is in the image of God. Passion, sin, is like a foreign body coming from outside, which manifests itself by trouble and darkness. The first state is good, it belongs to the monk who has attained *apatheia*. Notice the signs of this *apatheia* given here: *penthos*, the desire for God, the gift of self.

This first state is thus the only true one. The second is only a pretence of the demons (‘the retreat of the demons’) to arouse pride.

Elsewhere (83) Evagrius makes it clear that when the monk has attained *apatheia*, he has learnt discernment and can easily recognize the manuvres of the enemy; which is in agreement with the end of this chapter.

10.

According to Evagrius, *apatheia* is the calm of a rational soul, coming from humility and chastity. One who is *apathes* is one who is not disturbed, and not someone who does not feel. Evagrius admits that some temptations are with us until death. “It is not possible that you love all the brothers equally, but you must live with them in *apatheia*, free from the remembrance of injuries and of hatred.”

Jerome caricatures the *apatheia* of Evagrius, reproaching him with the wish to make a man into a stone or a God.

11.

Here we find the inverse of the schema in text 3.(8). Charity is at the beginning.

“Faith is an interior good” which exists even among unbelievers, because they believe nevertheless in the existence of a God. Often they rebel against the idea of God which others give them. Those who have no idea of a God are very rare.

12.

This text refers to the episode of the burning bush in Exodus. Sandals were made from the skin of a dead animal and so are a symbol of impurity; accordingly one must be free of all passion in order to pray.

13.

Humility, *penthos* (tears), are the foundation of prayer. Tears make the heart gentle and obtain pardon.

14.

Here he speaks rather of recollection: silencing intruding thoughts (‘deaf’). By adding ‘dumb,’ Evagrius refers to prayer without words and without thoughts, which he calls ‘pure prayer.’

15.

A monk who prays is always celebrating a festival!

17.

The passions prevent us praying.

18.

This beautiful little chapter says the same thing. The Greek term translated by ‘speak’ is the verb *Omileô*, which means: ‘to be in relationship with someone, to meet them.’ *Omilia* which

comes from it, has many meanings: ‘meeting, assembly’ — ‘family relationship’ — ‘familiar conversation’- ‘the lesson of a master.’ All these meanings are a beautiful definition of prayer.: a conversation with our Father. If we are really small, and he is really our Father, he is everything to us, and we are attached to nothing but Him! That is why Evagrius makes the condition: “turning away from every passionate thought.

19.

These three chapters which go together refer to the schemas on page 4 of the course. *Apatheia*, the summit of the ascetic life, is only the door to prayer. Afterwards one must pass through the “contemplation of objects” which is nature at the first stage: contemplation of lower nature; then the “knowledge of intelligible things” which is the contemplation of higher nature; to attain finally *Theologike*, which is to “see the place of God perfectly.”

“Their multiplicity”: the God of Evagrius is the God of Plato: He is One.

This “place of prayer,” “place of God” is therefore the contemplation of God who dwells in the soul. It is the luminous vision of the glory of God in the one who is purified of all passion. It is the highest form of the knowledge of God in this life, and it will come to perfection when we see him face to face, when God will be “all in all.”

20.

Behind this text we find Evagrius’ idea of prayer. He says elsewhere that there are two sorts of prayer. The one where one makes use of the beauty of creatures to praise the Creator (contemplation of lower nature). The other where one’s heart is silent (Theology) because the Holy Spirit comes to pray in us, praising God within us. This prayer is much the better.

22.

Does this chapter shows a certain misunderstanding on the part of Evagrius about the body and its role in prayer? It would be better to say that contemplation assimilates us to that which we contemplate, for the nous (mind) becomes that which it knows; flesh when it allows itself to be absorbed by the passions; and God when it contemplates him. It is in any case the description of a very high state of prayer.

23.

This action of the Holy Spirit in us happens even before we have arrived at perfect prayer; for the Holy Spirit is full of goodness towards us and knows that we are weak, so he comes to help us to pray. It is he who gives recollection to the soul.

24.

God is infinite but man is finite. One can always grow in love. Love grows unceasingly, because its boundaries are always beyond the horizon.

Antony and other Fathers of the desert said at the moment of death: “I have not yet begun!”

25.

Blessed because after having vanquished the other vices, they will not be overcome by vainglory.

26.

“Blessed,” because he possesses humility and fraternal charity.

27.

What does this mean? Our joy will come from humility which will convince us that everyone else is better than ourselves; then we will be protected from vainglory.

It is close to chapter 71 of the Rule: “Obedience is so great a blessing that all the brethren should obey one another.”

28.

This is a celebrated phrase of Evagrius which is often met in one's reading. "Separated from all" means asceticism, renunciation. "United with all," because united to God who becomes our charity and unites us to everyone.

This takes up what we have seen in the *Life of Antony*: the further Antony went into the desert, the nearer he drew to men; he became the 'Father of monks' after having withdrawn into the fort; he became 'Father of men' at the end of his life after having withdrawn into the inner desert.

This was the experience of the old monks, as it should be ours; withdrawal from the world must bring us closer to this world which suffers so much, for God is love. The nearer one comes to God who is Love, the nearer one comes to other people. Later Dorotheus of Gaza will express it through the image of the wheel. The figure at the centre is God; the nearer the spokes come to the centre, the nearer they come to each other.

31.

Prayer, coming close to the God of love, though sometimes difficult, can also fill us with joy. "Beyond all other joy," because God is infinite and can fulfil all our desires.

32.

This beautiful conclusion summarises the thought of Evagrius on the spiritual life very well. At the beginning of union with God, a person must be aware of his destitution; this is pen-thos. Then comes asceticism, renunciation, purification; then Evagrius mentions the ambience in which the quest for God is made: abandonment — the hindrances of the devil — and the goal: the marvellous repose of contemplation.

There comes a very short definition: "a journey with God."

The conclusion, by a series of 3 oxymoron (from the Greek words *oksus* and *moron* which mean: 'sharp-blunt,' or two words of opposite meaning), show that one finds in God in a higher degree that which one has left for God's sake.

33.

In this text we find under the three images of the flesh of Christ, his blood and his breast, the divisions of the spiritual life: *praktike*, *phusike* and *theologike*.

Why is the flesh of Christ compared to the virtues? Perhaps it is a reminiscence of Origen for whom Christ is Virtue itself. His blood is the symbol of his love. The breast of Christ refers to John the 'Theologian.'

## Explanation of some terms.

APATHEIA: 'without passion,' impassibility, interior simplicity, harmonious integration of the emotional life ordered charity, purity of heart (Cassian). spiritual freedom, detachment, but not indifference.

VOUS — 'intelligence' in French, intellect or mind in Philokalia spirit in Bamberg.

The highest faculty in man, through which, when it is purified, he knows God. Not the same as reason which is deductive understanding. It understands divine truth by means of inner experience or intuition. It dwells in the depths of the soul, is the innermost aspect of the heart — the 'eye of the heart' and means of contemplation (Macarian Homilies)

HEART — is the spiritual centre of man's being as he is made in the image of God. The deepest and truest self in which the mystery of the union between the divine and the human is consummated.

LOGIKOS — The intelligence, that is: how the intellect works. Closely connected with logos: the divine intellect. Signifies one who possesses spiritual knowledge.

PRAKTIKE — practice of the virtues, asceticism to purify the soul of its passions or emotions  
praxis= action

GNOSIS — the knowledge of the intellect as distinct from that of reason, Knowledge inspired by God and so linked with contemplation.

THEORIA — Contemplation. the perception of the intellect through which one attains spiritual knowledge.

THEOLOGY — denotes far more than learning: active and conscious participation in the realities of the divine world; ie. a realization of spiritual knowledge experiential knowledge of God through the highest form of prayer. Mysticism

NEPSIS — watchfulness, vigilance, guarding of the heart, connected with apatheia and hesychia

HESYCHIA — inner tranquillity, silence of listening and openness to God

REASON — Mind, the conceptual and logical faculty which draws conclusions from data given by senses or by spiritual knowledge.

LOGISMOI — passionate thoughts

THEORIA PHUSIKE — contemplation of natural world

PENTHOS — compunction

LOGOI — inner essences or principles of things

ANTHROPOMORPHISM — man is made in the image and likeness of God, therefore the form of God must in some way be in the image and likeness of man only larger.

## **8. Cassian (365-435).**

Cassian, a disciple of Evagrius, set out to explain the teaching of the Fathers of the Desert for cenobitic monks. St Benedict had read Cassian and in chapter 73 of his Rule he recommends that we read him too. This was because he discerned in Cassian the rich spiritual teachings of the desert Fathers which Evagrius had synthesised. Cassian takes up the teaching of Evagrius, but not in a very systematic way. He does not separate each stage of the spiritual life and on purpose leaves out any harshness.

## Plan

- I. His Life
- II. His Works:
  - The Institutes
  - The discourses of Pinufius
  - The conferences
  - Conference 1*
- III. Conclusion

## I. His Life.

### 1) Birth and Childhood — 365?

Cassian was born about the year 365, about 13 years after the death of Antony. Evagrius was 20 years older than him. He was born in what is today Roumania, but which at that time straddled two empires: East-West, at a moment when a gulf was forming between East and West. There we have the first interesting point about Cassian. He belonged as much to the Greek world as to the Latin, Greek and Latin being equally well spoken in his country. He wrote in Latin, but not a very pure Latin, that of the frontier of the empire. From his works we learn that he came from a Christian family which was fairly well off and thus arranged for him to follow the usual studies undertaken at that time.

### 2) Monastic Experience — 383?

Having finished his studies Cassian felt called to the monastic life. Led by his friend Germanus, he set out for Palestine. The two friends were received into a cell of the monastery of Bethlehem where they stayed for two years. Cassian was still very young, about 17 or 18 years old.

### 3) Pilgrimage to Egypt — 385?

After spending two years in this monastery at Bethlehem, and hearing people talk about the monks of Egypt, Cassian asked his abbot's permission to go there for a while and have a look. His superior valued him and fearing he would not return, began by refusing. Cassian insisted, so his abbot gave permission on condition that he made a vow to come back in two years. Cassian promised him and departed with his friend Germanus.

The hermit life in Egypt appealed to the two friends so much that two years passed very quickly. They told each other that they certainly ought to go back because of their vow, but it was a nuisance. So they went to see an old man, a spiritual father, who explained to them that it had been a good thing to make a vow but it was even better to remain in Egypt (Conference 17). Cassian was easily convinced, and the two of them remained for another ten years in Egypt.

What did Cassian do during this stay in Egypt? He began by going round everywhere to see what was happening. Then he settled in the desert of the Cells near the Origenist monks where he became a disciple of Evagrius. Evagrius was a learned man, as we have seen, he was a great reader of Origen and had gathered round himself other monks who were called 'Origenists.'

This is another noteworthy aspect of Cassian's personality. He knew the life of the desert monks from the inside, and he was a friend of one of them who had thought deeply about their teaching and systematized it.

So Cassian joined this group of Origenist monks and shared their fate when they were expelled. He tells the story himself (Conference 10): Theophilus, patriarch of Alexandria, who

respected and supported Evagrius and his friends, challenged the anthropomorphist monks in one of the letters which he wrote each year for the Feast of Easter. There were many of them, and a crowd of them armed with sticks came down to Alexandria and organised a huge demonstration against the patriarch. They reproached him, justifiably perhaps, about his way of life. In order to calm them down and satisfy them, Theophilus rather conveniently found out that Origen was a heretic and turned against the Origenist monks. In 400, he had them forcibly expelled by soldiers. Evagrius had just died, but Cassian, Germanus and their friends left Egypt in 399.

#### 4) At Constantinople — 400

Having been expelled from Egypt, these monks sought a refuge and a protector. They found it in the person of John Chrysostom who welcomed them with open arms. Germanus was ordained a priest and Cassian a deacon. All went well until the day when John, who was uncompromising rather than tactful, fell foul of the emperor who sent him into exile. Cassian and Germanus were then sent to Rome to tell the pope what had happened.

#### 5) Rome — Antioch — Rome — 405

Cassian stayed a short while in Rome, then went to Antioch. The bishop there incorporated him into his clergy and ordained him priest against his will. That is why, in a passage in the *Institutes*, he quotes a saying of the Elders: “A monk must flee absolutely women and bishops.”

Then the bishop sent him to Rome again as an ambassador. He returned there and made friends with the pope, Innocent I, who held him in high regard and confided in him. He also got to know a young deacon who later became Pope: St Leo the Great. It is more than likely that Germanus died in Rome because we hear nothing more of him after this.

In all this there is another interesting feature about Cassian; he lived in each of the four great patriarchates which made up the catholic and orthodox Church of that time: Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople and Rome. He remains a privileged witness to the undivided Church.

#### 6) At Constantinople — 415?

We are not quite sure of the date, nor do we know the reason, but one day a small boat arrived at Marseille and someone got out. John Cassian.

Of this we are quite sure, however: it was truly providential! For he arrived when there were many attempts at monastic life in Gaul, but they had all more or less failed — at Ligugé with St Martin, at Lérins and at Arles. Cassian however brought with him an unusual experience. He already knew about the hermit life, he had lived alone in a cell in the desert and had been in contact with the greatest Fathers of the desert of his time. He had also been called to the diplomatic and ecclesiastical service which made him aware of all the great movements which were spreading throughout Christianity in both East and West. In this way he had already acquired a whole human and spiritual culture which he could profitably pass on to the monks of Gaul.

According to an apocryphal letter of the fifth century, Proculus, the bishop of Marseilles, confided the monks who had gathered round him to the care of Cassian. Did he really found two monasteries as is supposed? There is no evidence. He was still alive in 430 when he wrote a treatise against Nestorius at the request of Pope Leo. He died about 435; and by 470 his holiness had been recognised by everyone.

## II. His Works.

It was to give the benefit of his experience to the monks of Gaul that Cassian wrote his two works, one in about 421, the other in 426. It would be more correct to say ‘his work,’ be-

cause this very important work, divided into two, is one whole. Cassian is one of those people who, the moment who, the moment they take up their pen, know exactly what they want to say. Basil and Bernard are like that; their teaching is formed from the start.

| Works of Cassian     |                                                                                 |                                   |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|                      | 1) Preface to Castor, bishop of Apt 1-4 to the end of the discourse of Pinufius | Formation of the exterior person  |
| CENOBITIC INSTITUTES | 2) 5-12: the eight capital vices                                                |                                   |
| CONFERENCES          | 3) Preface to Leontius, bishop of Fréjus 1-10 = 10                              | Formation of the interior         |
|                      | 4) Preface to Honoratus & Eucher abbot & monk of Lérins 11-17 = 7               | person                            |
|                      | 5) Preface to Jovinien, Leontius, Minervius, Theodore (abbot) 18-24 = 7         | Perfection of the interior person |
|                      | Total = 24 (Elders of the Apocalypse)                                           |                                   |

The two works of Cassian, the Cenobitic Institutes, that is to say the ‘way of life of cenobites,’ and the Collations or Conferences, which means the ‘Conversations’ or ‘Interviews,’ are marvelously construed, as is shown by the plan above. It is one single work divided into five parts.

## The Institutes.

### Plan of the ‘Institutes’: 1-4

1. Symbolism of monk’s clothing
2. The Night Office
3. The Day Office
4. How monks live:
  - a) Introduction
  - b) Formation in monastic life
  - c) Life in the monastery
  - d) Some exemplary monks
  - e) The spirit of monastic life: the discourse of Pinufius

These are composed of two parts. The second deals with the ‘eight thoughts’ of Evagrius. The first is more complex. Here is the plan.

Cassian begins, as did Evagrius in the ‘Practical Treatise,’ by tracing the symbolism of the clothing of the monk(1). This is what we notice most when we arrive at a monastery. Another striking thing is to be woken up at

night for office. Cassian deals with the night office in (2). He describes the Pachomian office: 12 psalms and two readings; between each psalm a prostration, but not a long one for fear of falling asleep. With some humour he says: "They say that someone remaining prostrate too long is more seriously attacked, not only by thoughts but by sleep." He speaks next of the day offices (3). Here Cassian gives as a norm the offices of the monks in Palestine and Mesopotamia: the three hours of Terce, Sext and None and goes on to explain their symbolism. He mentions that in the West a morning office has just been added.

We come next to a section (4) divided into 4 parts; an introduction (a); then formation in monastic life (b); life in a monastery (c); some exemplary monks, the last being Pinufius (d).

#### **Plan of the Institutes 4.**

##### *a. INTRODUCTION 1-2*

##### *b. FORMATION IN MONASTIC LIFE*

###### 1) Before admission

###### a) ten days of probation 3

###### b) renunciation of wealth 4-5

###### c) monastic clothing 6

###### d) a year in the guest house

###### before being assigned to an abba 7

###### 2) Preliminary teachings of the Abba

###### a) to overcome self-will 8

###### b) disclosure of conscience 9

###### c) obedience 10

##### *c. LIFE IN THE MONASTERY*

###### a) practice of obedience 12

###### b) complete detachment 13-15

###### c) 'penitential' 16

###### d) food 17-18

###### e) organisation & spirit of services

###### in the East 19-21

###### in Egypt 22

##### *d. SOME EXEMPLARY MONKS*

###### a) John of Lycopolis 23-26

###### b) Paternulus 27-28

###### c) A brother from a noble family 29

###### d) Pinufius 30-31

##### *e. SPIRIT OF MONASTIC LIFE*

###### Discourse of Pinufius 32-35

Cassian uses this abbot as an example to introduce a discourse on the spirit of monastic life which we are going to study.

First let us highlight a few points in this rich passage.

(8) In the "teaching of the Abba" on overcoming self-will, the phrase: "deliberately to bid him to do something which he said to be contrary to his temperament" may surprise us. But we must look more closely. The abba knows that the monk cannot control his lust unless he has al-

ready learned to mortify his will by obedience. It is a question of the lower affective faculty submitting to the higher. It is a means of growing in love, not arbitrary bullying. We obey a human being so as to become accustomed to obeying God. It must also be seen in the context of the times; the monks of Gaul were not very disciplined!

9) We should also notice the insistence on disclosure of conscience, an essential practice in early monasticism. A wily devil can only confront a young brother or make him fall by forcing him to conceal his thoughts through pride or human respect.

(12) On the subject of obedience, there is a reference to the saying of Silvain to his disciple Mark (no:18): “. He who practises as a scribe dare not finish the letter he has begun.” Mark was a scribe.

(17) Reading during meals comes not from Pachomius but from Basil.

### **Discourse of Inufius, Plan**

#### I. Introduction

#### II. Setting out for perfection

##### 1) Renunciation of the world

##### 2) Demands of fidelity.

#### III . Ascent towards charity

##### 1) From fear to humility

##### 2) Practical method.

#### IV.Conclusion

In ‘d,’ about the first exemplary monk, John of Lycopolis we find (24) the Saying about the wood (no:16), but in a more plausible form. In ‘Patermutus’ (Pater-mutus = “dumb Father” as he watches the sufferings imposed on his child), we find the Saying where an abba, as a test, bids one of his disciples who has children to throw his youngest son into the Nile.

Writing about the last of the ‘exemplary monks’ enables Cassian to pass on valuable teaching through the discourse of Abba Pinufius at the clothing of a novice. It is in the fifth section where Cassian describes the spirit of monastic life. We can see then how well the first part of the Institutes is constructed: starting with the outside, which is easily seen, we go on to what is within.

First we will study the fifth part, the discourse of Pinufius, for which there is a plan.

The text was not written haphazardly. It reflects teaching known to St Benedict for he quotes some passages from this section almost word for word. (Text)

The second part of the Institutes takes up the teaching of Evagrius on thoughts.

in chapter 5, notice Cassian’s discretion regarding fasting: his rule varies according to the person — food must be taken as health requires and not according to our desires. The end of the chapter (24-41) records “many axioms of the elders.” Notice especially a beautiful definition of prayer (35) “they hold a conversation with God and hold on to him clasped in their hearts.”

With regard to anger, it is interesting to observe that it darkens our inner vision and impedes the light of the Holy Spirit (VIII:1). Sadness snatches us away from contemplation (IX:1).

Concerning the last two thoughts, the most searching, Cassian, writing for cenobites, makes a connection between vainglory and singularity in the common life (XI:16). Pride is the first of the capital sins, it attacks the very person of God and so deserves to have him as an enemy (XII:7).

At the end of this section we find once more the teaching given in the discourse of Pinufius:

Fear of God? nakedness? renunciation? humility? virtues? charity (XII:31).

### The Conferences.

The Conferences echo the formation given by an abba from among the Desert Fathers to a young candidate. They deal with very varied aspects of the monastic life. The scheme on page 84 shows that this formation is progressive.

We will study the first Conference on: "The objective and the ultimate goal of the monk."

But you should read them all. We will indicate the most important.

The second is on discernment of thoughts: discretion is a priceless gift of divine grace; it is a charism of the Holy Spirit which enables us to see in the night.

The third is on three calls, three riches, three renunciations. Three calls from God: directly, through a human intermediary, through necessity. Three riches: bad, good, or indifferent. Three renunciations:

1) exterior = things (Proverbs); 2) interior = attachment to things (Ecclesiastes); 3) withdrawal from the visible world through a desire for invisible things (Song of Songs).

The fourth is on concupiscence: three causes of dryness are explained.

The fifth comes back to the 'eight thoughts' seen from experience. The capital sins are interconnected; there is a special way to fight them.

The sixth speaks of the problem of evil and temptation.

The ninth and tenth deal with prayer. These conferences are particularly interesting. We give a plan on TABLE 7. (Book 2).

The fourteenth Conference is also very important. It gives Cassian's teaching on *lectio divina*. After an introduction, Cassian tells us that every kind of knowledge has its own laws. It is the same for religious life which he defines as the knowledge directed towards the contemplation of heavenly mysteries. This knowledge is twofold. Here Cassian reproduces Evagrius' distinction in the spiritual life between *praktike-theoretike* = asceticism-contemplation. Asceticism is the foundation of contemplation; and the foundation of asceticism is the struggle against vices.

So here again we find:

struggle against the vices => practice of virtue => contemplation.

It is in dealing with *theoretike* that we come to *lectio divina*. Cassian takes from Origen the division of the meanings of Scripture: the historical or literal interpretation; and the spiritual interpretation consisting of three branches: *tropology, allegory, anagogue*. Then he speaks about the conditions for *lectio divina*: purity of heart, humility, perseverance. Here again the teaching of Origen is apparent. After a passage on distractions, he describes the fruits of *lectio divina*: the perfection of spiritual knowledge.

Now we will go back to Conference 1. (Text: *The aim and the goal of the monk*).

### III. Conclusion: Synthesis of his Teaching.

Having gone through these texts and tables, we need to conclude with a synthesis of Cassian's teaching. We will find that many points have been studied.

As a disciple of Evagrius, Cassian outlines the teaching of his master in his own words, but with slight differences and without his excesses. The spiritual life is oriented towards the life

of heaven, a life of union with God who is charity. Its goal is charity which Cassian likens to purity of heart.

We reach it by renunciation. This is his teaching on the three renunciations outlined above. The first step is to leave the world, divesting oneself outwardly to live in solitude. But this must be followed by a second renunciation, divesting oneself inwardly by abandoning former habits, passions and vices. This is the theme of spiritual warfare: we must fight against vices in order to acquire virtues. Cassian recommends first discretion in the Latin meaning of the word: 'to choose'; between two extremes we must choose the happy medium where the moral good is to be found. In order to be formed in this virtue we must submit to the judgement of an abba and this presupposes humility. We see here the formation given to a young aspirant by an abba among the Desert Fathers.

Patience leading to self-control will be one of the fruits of spiritual warfare. In this way the soul attains peace, stillness, purity of heart — three aspects of the same reality: charity, the first step in contemplation. For Cassian charity is both a means and an end. We cannot reach perfect charity except by practising charity which is the source of all virtues. Hard-won contemplation leads to a contemplation which is simple, tranquil and overflowing.

This will lead the monk to the third and last renunciation "in which all perfection is contained." It dispels all remembrance of the present world and carries our gaze to our everlasting dwelling place. In this state a monk is grounded in purity of heart, Cassian's name for what Evagrius calls *apatheia*. Baptism has born fruit in such a soul. Without being aware of himself and knowing that he is praying, so without self-reflection, he is constantly turned towards the Father. Charity has become constant in this state and it is sometimes expressed by the "prayer of fire."

Formed in the eremitical school, Cassian seems convinced that the solitary life is better than life in a monastery. Yet he is full aware of the dangers of solitude through his own experience. He makes it clear that the desert is not without dangers, solitary life involves possibility of failure, whereas cenobitic life offers sure and solid benefits. Among the inconveniences of the solitary life he mentions the need to provide for oneself, the danger of vain glory, the pursuit of the unusual and peculiar. The conclusion he draws, and which St Benedict follows, is that the eremitical life is only suitable for souls cleansed and purified from their vices.

Cassian then is a man of sound judgement, experienced, prudent and unassuming. Formed in the school of St Antony for whom human nature is good, he was opposed to the pessimism of Augustine. He tried to reconcile these two views, recognising both the fundamental goodness of human nature and the necessity of grace; but he did not have sufficient theological expertise to deal with such a difficult subject, and he was accused of 'semi-Pelagianism'; but his basic thought was true to the faith. This does not prevent him from being considered an outstanding master of ascetical and mystical ways. His work prepared the way for Western monasticism and had a major influence in the development of Catholic spirituality in the whole church.

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## 8. Cassian Texts.

The Discourse of Pinufius

*Institutions 4*

Introduction

1.

32

You know how many days you have been staying outside the monastery before being admitted today. First you must learn why it is difficult to get inside. This will help you to understand the life on which you wish to enter, if you will serve Christ in this way as you ought.

33

For as God has promised immense glory in the future to those who serve him faithfully and cling to him according to the rule of this institute, so too severe punishment is in store for those who follow him carelessly and half-heartedly and care little for the fruits of holiness worthy of their profession and what men believed of them. For according to Scripture it is better “not to make vows than having made them to fail to fulfil them,” and “Cursed is the man who does the work of the Lord carelessly.”

This is why we have turned you away for so long: it is not that we do not desire to embrace yours and everyone’s salvation with all our hearts and that we do not wish to go to meet, even afar off, all those who long to turn to Christ; but we fear that admitting you too easily, we become guilty of inconstancy before God and bring an even greater punishment upon you if, being admitted too easily, and not understanding the seriousness of your profession, you then abandon it, or live in a careless manner.

Setting out for perfection

2

That is why you must first learn the motive for your renunciation of the world: and having seen it, you will be instructed more clearly in what you must do.

34

Renunciation is nothing less than the sign of the cross of Christ and his death. That is why you must today recognise yourself as dead to the world, to its doings and its desires, and according to the word of the Apostle, you are crucified to the world and the world to you. Consider then the meaning of the cross, the mystery in whose light you must live, for now, “it is no longer you who live, but he who was crucified for you lives in you.”

We must conform our lives to that state and manner in which he was hung of a gibbet for us so that, as David says, piercing our flesh with the fear of the Lord, our wills and desires will no longer be at the service of our own cravings, but fastened to this cross which puts them to death. In this way we shall fulfil the command of the Lord: “He who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”

3

But perhaps you will ask how a man can carry his cross all the time, and how a living man can be crucified. Listen, quite briefly.

35

Our cross is the fear of the Lord. Then, as a crucified man cannot move his limbs as he pleases, so we too must set our wills and desires on the law of the Lord where it restrains us, no longer on what is pleasant and delightful to us now. He who is fastened to the gibbet of the cross

no longer considers present advantages, nor thinks of his affections, nor is he tormented by the cares and anxieties of tomorrow, nor excited by the lure of gain, nor inflamed by any pride, rivalry, or dispute, he is not troubled by present grievances or remembrance of those of the past; although he still lives in the body, he considers himself dead to all earthly things, for his heart is already turned towards the place to which he knows he will one day come. In the same way, we too, through the fear of the Lord, must be crucified to all these things, dead not only to the vices of the flesh but even to all these earthly things, keeping the eyes of our soul fixed on the place we hope each moment to reach. In this way we can put to death all our cravings and carnal affections.

4.

36

Be careful never to take back what you rejected when you renounced the world and, in spite of the Lord's command, turn away from the field of the gospel where you are working to put on the tunic you had stripped off. Do not fall again into the desires and earthly cares of this world, and in defiance of Christ's bidding come down from the roof of perfection to take back something you had thrust aside at the time of your renunciation.

Be careful not to call to mind your parents and your former affections; if you go back to the cares and anxieties of this world, in the Lord's words: "putting your hand to the plough and then looking back," you will not be worthy of the kingdom of heaven.

Be careful lest the pride which you have trampled underfoot in the ardour of your faith and great humility as you set out, gradually comes to life as you begin to appreciate the psalms and our manner of life — do not think of reviving it; in the words of the Apostle, if you rebuild what you had once destroyed, you become a liar. Rather try to live to the end in that state of nakedness which you have professed before God and his angels.

This humility and patience in which you persevered with many tears, imploring for ten days in front of the door to be allowed into the monastery, should not only stay with you but increase and grow in virtue. It would be a great misfortune if, when you should be going forward from the initial stages and tending towards perfection, you go back to a state worse than the first. It is not the one who has begun, but the one who has persevered to the end who will be saved.

5.

37

The subtle serpent is always watching our heel, which means he is watching for our departure from this world, and he is trying to trip us up until the end of our life. so it is no good having begun well and taken the first steps in a life of renunciation with great fervour, if you do finish it in the same way, and if you do not keep the humility and poverty of Christ which you have professed in his presence to the end of your life.

To succeed, always watch his head, that is your first thoughts, disclosing them to your elder. In this way you will crush his overtures which can bring about your fall, if you are not ashamed to disclose them all to your elder.

6.

38

That is why according to the Scripture, once you have promised to serve the Lord, hold fast to the fear of the Lord, and prepare your soul for temptations and difficulties rather than rest, tranquillity and delight. "We must enter the kingdom of God through many tribulations." "It is a narrow gate and rough road which leads to life, and few find it." Consider then that you belong now to the small number of elect, and do not let yourself grow cold by the example and tepidity

of most people. On the contrary, live in the same way as these 'few' so that you may merit to be found worthy of the kingdom of God with them. "Many are called but few are chosen," and it is a little flock to which the Father is pleased to give an inheritance. Do not think that it is a light matter if, after having promised perfection, you follow what is imperfect.

Ascent towards charity

7.

We come to this state of perfection by these steps in the following order:

39

The beginning of our salvation and its safeguard is, as I have said, the fear of God. In this way, those who have set out on the way of perfection attain the beginning of their conversion, purification from their vices and protection in virtue.

When this fear has penetrated the spirit, it brings a contempt of everything, forgetfulness of one's family and a horror of this world; through the contempt and loss of all one's possessions we gain humility.

Humility is recognised by these signs:

1. If we put to death our self-will
2. If we conceal nothing from our elder, not only our actions, but our thoughts.
3. If we do not rely on our own discernment, but seek the elder's judgment in everything and listen eagerly and willingly to his advice.
4. If we are obedient in all circumstances, and remain gentle, calm and patient.
5. If we not only do no wrong to others, but also endure wrongs inflicted upon us without being upset.
6. If we do not dare to do anything except what the common rule and the example of the elders recommends.
7. If we are content with the cheapest goods; and if, in all that we are told to do, we consider ourselves bad and unworthy workmen.
8. If we confess ourselves last of all, not merely with our lips but really believing it in the depths of our hearts.
9. If we are restrained and quiet in speech.
10. If we are not ready and quick to laugh.

By such signs, and others like them true humility can be recognised. When you possess it in truth, it will at once raise you to higher to the love which knows no fear. Then you will begin to accomplish without any trouble what formerly you observed through fear of punishment; no longer now because of punishment, but for love of goodness itself and delight in virtue.

Practical method

8.

40

So that you may achieve this more easily, look for models of the perfect life in the community to imitate; only very few monks, or better, one or two, not too many. For, apart from the fact that few men have been tried and purified, you will gain more from being instructed and formed by the example of a single person in the perfection you seek in the cenobitic life.

9.

41

To attain this objective and live always under this spiritual rule, you must observe three things in community, as the psalm says: "I was like a deaf man, I did not listen, I was like a

dumb man who cannot open his mouth. I became like a man who cannot hear and does not answer back.”

You too must be like a man who is deaf, dumb and blind. Beside the one you have chosen as your model of perfection, you must be blind, not seeing anything which is unedifying for fear that you may be influenced by the motives or example of those who act in this way and so be trapped in evil ways which at first you condemned.

If you hear anyone being disobedient, rebellious or disparaging another or if he tells you to do anything which you have not been taught, do not be led astray or follow such an example to your ruin; but pass by these disorders like a deaf man who hears absolutely nothing.

If someone insults and speaks ill of yourself or another, remain unmoved and rather than answer in retaliation, listen like a dumb man, always singing this verse of the psalmist in your heart: “I said I will watch my ways that I do not sin with my tongue. I put a guard on my tongue when the sinner stood before me, I was dumb and humbled and I kept silence.”

10.

Above all observe this fourth thing which adorns the three others which I have told you. Make yourself “a fool in this world” so that you may be wise, as the Apostle says. Do not criticise or argue about anything you have been commanded. Show your obedience in all simplicity and faith, considering only what the law of God or the judgment of the elder tells you to be holy, useful or wise is indeed so.

Then strengthened in such a manner of life, you will always be able to live under this rule and no temptation or deceit of the enemy will make you leave the monastery.

11.

42

You should not hope to be patient because of the virtue of others, which means that you will only be patient when no one upsets you; whether this is so does not depend upon you. Rather keep patience through your own humility and perseverance which does depend on your own freedom.

12.

43

Finally, so that all I have said at great length may be engraved in your heart and be stamped on your memory, I will make a short summary so that you can memorise all that I have told you.

Hear in a few words how you can mount up to the heights of perfection without any hardship or difficulty.

“The beginning of our salvation and of wisdom,” according to the Scriptures, “is the fear of the Lord.” From fear of the Lord comes salutary compunction. From compunction of heart comes renunciation, that is nakedness and contempt for riches. From nakedness comes humility. From humility comes mortification of our will. By mortification of our will all the vices are uprooted and wither away. After driving out the vices, the virtues grow and bud. Through the budding of virtues we acquire purity of heart and through purity of heart we possess the perfection of charity of the Apostles.

## **The Objective and the Goal of the Monk**

*Conference 1 — Abba Moses*

1. Objective, Goal, Means.

1.

Every art and discipline, said Abba Moses, has its scopos, that is its objective; and its telos, that is its own goal or end. One who longs to practice some art keeps his eye on the goal and willingly and calmly undergoes every labour, danger and loss.

The farmer, for instance, faces both the burning rays of the sun and the frost and ice as he tirelessly cultivates the earth and turns the new furrows with the help of his plough. He pursues his scopos to clear away the brambles and weeds and by hard work to create a fine tilth like sand. He reckons in no other way can he achieve his goal, an abundant harvest and a rich yield so that he can live free from worry or increase his possessions. Again he readily empties the grain from his well-stocked barns and by hard work entrusts the seed to the loosened soil. The thought of the coming harvest makes him unconcerned about his present loss.

Then again merchants have no fear of the hazards of the sea, no dangers terrifies them, the wings of hope carry them on to their goal of profit.

In the same way those who burn with military ambitions look towards the goal of honour and powers which makes them unconcerned with danger and and many deaths in the wanderings. Suffering and wars in the present do not stop them; they long for the goal to which they aspire.

Our profession too has its own scopos and its goal for which we suffer all the hardships on the way, not only without tiring but even with joy. Fasting and hunger do not exhaust us, the weariness of keeping vigil gives us joy; continual reading and meditation of the Scriptures does not pall, even constant toil, destitution (nuditas), and deprivation of everything, even the horrors of this vast solitude do not frighten us away.

I am sure that it was with this goal in mind that you gave up the affections of your family, your native soil, the pleasures of the world; that you travelled through so many countries to seek the company of simple bumpkins like us, lost in the vast stretches of this desert.

So tell me, what is the objective and the goal which makes you put up with all this so willingly?

3.

When he insisted on an answer, we replied that we endured it for the Kingdom of heaven.

3.

4.

That is right as far as the goal is concerned; but what must be our scopos, the objective which we must constantly pursue to attain the goal? You must know this before all else.

When we admitted, in all simplicity, that we did not know, he continued: the first thing is that every art and trade has its scopos, that is its aim or steadfast purpose in the mind; if we do not keep that constantly in sight with eagerness and perseverance, we cannot reach the goal of our desire.

The goal of the farmer, as I have said, is to live tranquilly in abundance, thanks to good harvests. His scopos, that is his objective is to clear his field of brambles and weeds; otherwise he knows he will not obtain the wealth and repose which is his goal, if he does not possess in advance, as it were a foretaste in his toil and expectation, of that which one day he wants enjoy in reality.

The merchant too is not deflected from his desire to acquire goods which will make him rich; it would be useless for him to look for profit if he has not gone about it the right way.

Those who desire worldly honours first take up the jobs or career they need to obtain the dignities they want, and so find the best path to the goal they hope for.

In the same way the goal of our life is the Kingdom of God; but we must consider carefully what is the scopos. If we do not find out, we will wear ourselves out uselessly; travellers on the wrong road get nowhere.

Seeing our surprise, the old man continued: As we have said the goal of our profession is the Kingdom of God. Our objective, that is the scopos, is purity of heart without which it is impossible to attain the goal. Keeping this objective in sight we will follow our course, as though along a straight line. If our thoughts wander a little, we can come back to it and correct our steps by a reliable standard. All our efforts will converge on this one point and it will serve as a warning if we deviate even slightly from the right path.

4.

5.

It is like archers who want to demonstrate their skill before some king of this world. They aim their arrows at small shields on which the prizes are painted. They know well that only if they hit the target will they attain the goal of the coveted prize. They will have it if they manage to hit the scopos.

If by chance the target is hidden from view, even if they look in the right direction they will not notice any deviation as they lack a point of reference to tell them how near was their shot. They will shoot ineffectual arrows into space without any idea why they go astray, unless their faltering eye can show them how to shoot straight.

5.

It is the same for us: the goal of our profession is, according to the Apostle, eternal life; "Holiness is your reward and eternal life your goal." Our scopos or objective is purity of heart which Paul rightly calls holiness and without which we cannot reach the goal. It is as if he had said: "Purity of heart is your scopos and eternal life your goal." Elsewhere the Apostle uses the very word scopos in a most significant way when he says: "Forgetting what is behind and reaching out for what lies ahead, I press on towards the target, to the reward to which the Lord calls me from on high." The Greek is even clearer: "Kata scopon diôkô", which means I press on towards the objective.

Therefore we must follow with all our might whatever can lead us to the objective of purity of heart, and avoid as dangerous and hurtful anything which hinders us.

6.

7.

Purity of heart will be the one aim of our actions and desires. For that we must seek solitude, undergo fasts, vigils, work, nakedness of body, reading and the other virtues. In this way we can keep our heart free from all harmful passions and climb step by step to the perfection of charity. If for good reason we have not been able to complete what was asked of us, we must not give way to sadness, anger or indignation, since it was to suppress these vices that we did less than we should. We gain less by fasting than we lose through anger; and our profit from reading in no way equals the harm that comes from contempt for a brother.

Things of secondary importance: fasts, vigils, silence, meditation on Scripture are subordinate to our main scopos (objective) of purity of heart which is charity, and we must not disturb this principal of charity for the sake of these secondary things. If this remains whole and unharmed within us it will never be lost even if we have to omit some lesser observance. It will not help us to fulfil all of them if we lack the principal thing, charity, for the sake of which all else is undertaken.

7.

A worker does his best to get hold of the tools for his craft, not just to have them without using them, nor because their usefulness lies in possessing them, but in order with their help to attain the skill and accomplish the craft for which they are the means. So fasting and vigils, meditation on Scripture, destitution and deprivation of all possessions are not perfection, but the tools of perfection. They are not themselves the goal of the craft but the means to it. He who concentrates the eyes of his heart on these exercises misunderstands them as if they were the highest good and does not make efforts to reach the goal for which they are undertaken; he has the tools of his craft but does not know their purpose!

So anything which troubles the purity and tranquillity of our heart must be avoided as hurtful, even if it seems useful and necessary. With this rule we can escape the mistakes and digressions and make straight for the goal we desire.

## 2. Asceticism and Contemplation

8.

8.

To cling always to God and the things of God must be our chief effort and the steadfast purpose of our heart. Any diversion, however impressive, must be regarded as secondary, unimportant and perhaps dangerous.

Cassian gives as an example the biblical passage about Martha and Mary.

9.

You see that the Lord gives theoria as the principal good, that is divine contemplation. It follows that the other virtues, although necessary, useful and good, are put in second place since they are done for the sake of this one necessary thing. When the Lord says: "You are anxious and troubled about many things, but few things are necessary, or only one" he puts the highest good not in activity however praiseworthy and abundantly fruitful, but in contemplation of himself which is indeed simple and one; he shows that few things are necessary for perfect blessedness, by which he means this theoria. First one first reflects on some of the saints; from contemplating them, the one who is making progress goes on with God's help to the one, the sight of God alone. Passing beyond the activities and services of the saints he will feed on the beauty and knowledge of God alone. "Mary therefore chose the good part which shall not be taken away from her."

10.

We must look at this carefully. When the Lord says: "Mary has chosen the good part," although he does not mention Martha, and does not seem to criticize her in any way, yet in praising the one, he implies that the other is inferior. When he says: "which shall not be taken away from her," he shows that Martha's part can be taken away (for a bodily service cannot last for ever), but Mary's role never ends.

9.

Cassian and Germanus were very moved at the thought that all their asceticism, their good deeds and fraternal charity would not last. Moses however said they would not be taken away, but that they are all done for the sake of charity, and that charity alone remains whereas everything else that which belongs to this life will pass away.

In thinking about contemplation, we move on to the things that hinder it:

## 3. Distractions.

11.

16.

Germanus — How is it that in spite of ourselves and without our being aware of it, useless thoughts steal upon us in such a subtle and hidden way that it is very hard not only to chase them away but even to realise they are there and take hold of them? Is it possible for the mind ever to be free of them and never suffer such invasions?

12.

17

Moses — It is indeed impossible for the mind to remain undisturbed by many thoughts, but it is possible for one who tries to accept or reject them. Their origin does not depend entirely on us, but we can choose to approve and welcome them.

Although I said it is impossible for the mind not to give way to these thoughts, but they must not be attributed completely to chance or to spirits which force themselves upon us; otherwise we would have no free will and could not correct ourselves. No, we are able to improve the quality of our thoughts and to let either holy and spiritual or earthly and carnal thoughts stay in our minds.

That is why frequent reading and continual meditation on Scripture are part of prayer so that our memory may be spiritually inclined; singing the psalms brings constant compunction so that the mind is matured, no it longer hankers after earthly things but contemplates heavenly things. If we drop these, the mind, hardened by vices, is soon carried away by the flesh and falls.

13.

18.

This activity of the heart can be compared to millstones which are turned by the falling water. These millstones cannot stop so long as they are driven by the pressure of water. However the miller can decide whether to grind wheat or barley or darnel. They can only grind what is fed by the miller.

In the same way, in this life the mind turns under the flow of unwelcome temptations, it cannot free itself from the torrent of thoughts. But its zeal and diligence take care which can be admitted and cultivated. If, as I said, we constantly meditate on Holy Scripture and remember spiritual things, long for perfection and hope for future blessedness, then surely the thoughts that arise will stay with us. If, on the contrary, through laziness or carelessness, we spend time in useless gossip, if we are caught up in worldly cares and anxieties, then darnel will invade our hearts, and as our Lord and Saviour said, where our treasure, that is our attention, lies, there must our heart be too.

4. Discernment of thoughts

14.

19.

We should know that our thoughts have three sources: God, the devil, and ourselves...

20.

We must keep a close watch on this threefold source of our thoughts, and exercise a wise discernment as they surface in our hearts, considering first their origin, their causes and

author so that we may then decide what action to take. In this way we will become what the Lord calls 'skilled money-changers' who are able to tell pure gold from that which has not been fully tested. Their trained eye can detect a copper coin trying to imitate precious money by a bright golden covering. Not only can they recognise coins bearing the head of usurpers, but they can even spot those which bear the head of the rightful king but are fakes. They test them on scales to see that they are the correct weight.

The gospel shows us by their example that we must observe the same precautions in spiritual matters. Whatever thought creeps in must be most carefully tested...

5. Conclusion: Master-Disciple relationship

15.

23.

The old man saw how astonished and enthusiastic we were. Admiring our longing, he stopped talking for a moment, and then continued: “My sons, it was your zeal which led me to speak for so long, a kind of fire took hold of my thoughts. But to make sure that you thirst for the teaching of perfection, I will say a few words on the excellence and beauty of discretion which is first among all the virtues, and tell of its greatness and value, not only by examples from daily life, but also by the old sayings and opinions of the Fathers.

I remember that often when people asked me with sighs and tears for a talk about it, and I was eager to teach them. But I could not; ideas, even words failed me. I had to send them away without any consolation. By this we can see that the grace of the Lord inspires a speaker according to the merits and desires of those who are listening.

**Cassian: Plan of the Conferences on Prayer**

Conference IX

1. Introduction
2. Perfection of heart = Continual prayer — *praktike*
3. Dispositions for prayer
  - a Silence
  - b Comparison with a feather
  - c What weighs down the soul
  - d The work of the devil
4. The different kinds of prayer
  - a Prayer surpasses all manner of classification
  - b The classification of Paul
  - c In practice there is no rule.
  - d The example of the Lord
  - e Beholding God alone
5. The prayer of the Father
6. The prayer of fire
7. The gift of tears
8. What enables our prayer to be heard
9. The gospel precepts
  - a enter into our room
  - b pray with the door closed
  - c in secret
10. Prayer should be frequent and short.

Conference X

1. Digression on Theophilus, Serapion and the anthropomorphists
2. The purity of prayer — 2 degrees:

- a In the plain = *praktike*
- b On the mountain = *theoretike*
- 3. Prayer makes us one.
  - a it divinises us
  - b the aim of the solitary is continual prayer
- 4. How shall we control our thoughts?
- 5. Melete: "O God, come to my assistance, Lord, make haste to help me!"
- 6. It will bring us to spiritual poverty
  - a spiritual hedgehog
  - b spiritual deer
  - c the prayer of fire
- 7. How to avoid distractions: Vigils, meditation, intercessions
- 8. Conclusion

## 8. Cassian Explanation of the Texts

The Discourse of Pinufius

*Institutions 4: 32-35*

Introduction

1.

The introduction shows how difficult it is to enter the life of the monastery (see the plan of the Institutes: ten days of probation). We do not take the decision to enter lightly.

Cassian emphasises the last end, as does Benedict later; heaven or eternal suffering. This influences whether we follow good ways or evil ways. This Jewish theme of the two ways with which the psalter begins recurs all through Jewish-Christian literature.

We commit ourselves to the service of Christ. Benedict calls it fighting under the true King, Christ the Lord.

Setting out for perfection

2 & 3.

To understand 'the gravity of profession,' we must turn to the gravity of the cross of Christ.

The renunciation implied by leaving the world is symbolised by the cross, sign of dying to oneself. The cross is a symbol; it must not be taken literally, as did some monks, according to Cassian (Conf. VIII: 3,5,). It is a visible sign of invisible realities, a 'sacramental.' It is the sign of our death to the world. The nails signify 'fear of the Lord'; a loving fear, a fear mingled with love as expressed by these sayings: "the attention of the heart turned towards its destination," "the eyes of the soul fixed upon that place where at every moment we are hoping to go." Here we have the theme of vigilance so dear to the Desert Fathers. This loving fear means that "our will and desires" are no longer fixed upon our own cravings, but on the crucified. The example of the crucified Christ is given as a model of detachment from the world. Underlying all this is the theme of martyrdom with which we dealt in the first chapter.

Though St Benedict speaks little of the cross, it is not difficult to find this approach in the Rule which includes faith, hope and charity.

4.

Now he deals with the requirements for remaining faithful to this renunciation. In this passage the phrase “be careful” occurs three times, underlining the triple renunciation to which one must consent on entering the monastery:

The first is detachment from material possessions; the wealth which is compared to the tunic one takes off (ref. Mt 24:18). Here again, with the word *nuditas*, there is the underlying theme of spiritual combat (wrestlers fought naked), and of martyrdom.

The second detachment is from possessions of the heart (“remember”=*re-corderis*=take to heart). There are the words: “cares and anxieties” which remind us of *amerimna*. Here again is a reference to the Gospel (Lk. 9:62).

The third detachment is from one’s own self. Notice that the “the appreciation of the psalms and our manner of life” which is a good thing, can lead to pride which is a bad thing. This reminds us that the Desert Fathers presented pride as the hardest vice to root out, precisely because it can arise from our very progress.

The vow of poverty corresponds to the first detachment, chastity to the second and obedience to the third.

At the end of this paragraph on detachment from oneself there is a phrase summing up all that has been said about the 3 detachments clearly defined as a stripping, a “nakedness,” a theme we have met before. “Which you have professed before God and his angels” is taken up by St Benedict (*Ch 58:17-18*). Monastic profession is therefore a stripping for combat.

Then follows a paragraph insisting on humility, as would Benedict, and which also underlines the need for constant advance, otherwise one “falls back into a worse state.” This idea will be taken up by Bernard who says: “One who does not go forward slides back.”

5.

The same idea is followed here. Note that one makes profession “of the humility and poverty of Christ.” The same idea: profession = stripping.

At the beginning of each paragraph the serpent is mentioned, in reference to Gen.3:15: “he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.” The head of the serpent signifies thoughts, which must be disclosed to the abba. Here we have the teaching of the Desert Fathers: revealing what is in one’s heart assures victory over thoughts, which St Benedict also teaches.

6.

The conclusion of the first part is this: we prepare our souls for temptations and trials, and strive for perfection.

We find these ideas in many places in the Rule: “Narrow is the way which leads to life” (5:11). “Let us prepare our bodies and souls for the struggle” (*Prologue*); “Let him be told all the hardships and difficulties on the road which leads to God” (*Ch.58*), and *Ch.7*, the fourth degree.

Ascent towards charity

7.

The study paper 4 deals with this chapter, and the explanations will be found on p. 39 and TABLE 13, p.38.

Here we need only add a few words on the last paragraph. It is found almost word for word in the Rule. It is interesting to study the parallel texts in Latin of Cassian and Benedict. There is a significant change: “love of goodness” becomes “love of Christ,” a mark of the Christ-centred spirituality of Benedict.

8-9.

Now Cassian gives us a practical method for our journey towards perfection: to be blind, deaf and dumb, and he adds: an obedience full of “simplicity and faith.”

Cassian is very realistic, experience has taught him that a community is not perfect: “few men have been purified.” That is why he recommends a young person to be guided by the example of one or two (in practice the novice master and abbot). This too is very close to the spirituality of the desert. There will be a different emphasis when we come to study Basil and Augustine.

10-11.

The fourth point is obedience “in all simplicity and faith,” which assumes no murmuring. The last paragraph of 10 assures us that our perseverance depends on this.

11: shows the importance of our freedom in the quest for virtue.

## The Objective and the Ultimate Goal of the Monk

### *Conference 1 — Abba Moses*

#### 1. Goal, Objective, Means.

1-5.

In the first part, Cassian makes a clear distinction between the goal and the objective, giving three examples: the farmer, the merchant and the soldier, in which at first sight, objective and goal seem to be confused. Then he clarifies that the goal, the “Kingdom of God” is to be distinguished from the objective (scopos) which consists in a “steadfast purpose in the soul” that is purity of heart.

6-7.

Then he distinguishes the means, the “secondary things” which help us to attain this objective. These secondary things are subordinate to our objective — purity of heart, which is charity. Thus asceticism must not be sought for its own sake, but as a means to attain charity.

#### Asceticism and contemplation

8-10.

By the example of Martha and Mary Cassian enlarges upon this point, proving that asceticism is subordinate to contemplation, the “better part.”

In no. 9, as a good disciple of Evagrius, Cassian distinguishes two kinds of contemplation: one where the intellect is active and uses ideas in order to pray: “one reflects on some of the saints”; and the other consists in “the sight of God alone,” a contemplation without ideas, a simple and loving gaze upon God.

In no.10, he maintains, obviously, that asceticism is necessary; through it we can attain to contemplation, just as it is thanks to the activity of Martha that Mary can contemplate. Asceticism is only exercised in this life, while contemplation “never ends.”

#### Distractions

11-14.

At the request of Germanus, abba Moses begins by giving a general principle: the origin of distractions do not come from ourselves, but what does depend on us is whether we accept or reject them.

However we must not be too hasty in saying that they do not depend on us. For we are free and must make an effort not to allow them to become settled in our memory too quickly. Here we find the role of *lectio divina* which is to feed the mind so that distractions cannot enter too easily. The purpose of asceticism and prayer is also to direct our soul towards God.

Then Cassian gives the example of millstones which are constantly turning, kept in motion by the force of the water; but one can feed them with either good grain or bad.

Discernment of thoughts

14.

Thus it is important to know how to discern one's thoughts. Here too we have an echo of the teaching of the Desert Fathers; the abba must form the younger man in discernment of thoughts. They can have three causes and we must know how to distinguish between them.

To become "skilled money-changers" according to the "precept of the Lord," is an allusion to what are called 'logia agrapha' (unwritten words), that is sayings of the Lord which are not in the Gospels, but are found in other sources. For example, the Acts of the Apostles gives us one: "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving" (20:35). That of "skilled money-changers" has been preserved for us by Clement of Alexandria; it passed to Origen and then to Cassian. It is very probably true.

## 8 — Cassian Answers to Revision

1) Why is Cassian's life so interesting?

Both because of the place in which he was born (at the frontier between the Greek and Latin worlds) and by the circumstances of his life: he lived the cenobitic life and as a hermit, he was a disciple of Evagrius, he had contact with four great patriarchs of the Church of that time, and he was a diplomat; in this way he acquired unusual human experience in many fields.

2) What are Cassian's principal writings? What do these titles mean?

\* The Cenobitic Institutes, which describe the manner of life of cenobites.

\* The Collations, which means 'collections,' or Conferences, meaning 'to bring together,' hence 'Interviews.'

3) Cassian set out the development of the spiritual life in a schematic way. What comes first? Where does this lead us? At what stage do we find humility?

Cassian places the 'fear of God' first; and he always works towards charity as the final goal. Humility comes half-way; it is the fruit of the fear of God and renunciation. For St Benedict humility is the principal virtue which embraces the whole of the ascetic endeavour.

4) What difference does Cassian make between the objective and the goal?

The goal is our final destiny, the life of blessedness.

The objective, 'scopos,' is the direction in which we must look and what we must aim for in order to arrive at 'purity of heart' which leads to the perfection of charity.

5) What attitude does he recommend towards distractions?

Distractions initially do not depend on us, what does on us is whether we welcome them or not. What also depends on us is whether we give them free rein by letting our minds wander. To lessen distractions, we should fill our memory with reading, meditation on Scripture, and singing the psalms.

6) In text 9, p37 the two stages of contemplation of Evagrius are found again, are they not?

Yes, here are the two stages of Evagrius: the active (‘phusike’): “ one listens to holy people”; and ‘theoria’: “one rises up to the One,” looking at God alone.\_

### Cassian-Benedict — Parallel Scheme

| Cassian 1                                                                                                    | Benedict                                               | Cassian 2                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Fear of the Lord<br>through which:<br>purification of vices<br>practice of virtues<br>penetrate the spirit | HUMILITY                                               | 1. Fear of the Lord      |
| 2 NUDITAS<br>= <i>entrance into noviciate</i> De-<br>tachment from possessions<br>Detachment from affections | 1 FEAR OF GOD<br>= Presence of God<br>= vices overcome | 2. compunction of heart  |
| 3 HUMILITY = <i>Cenobitic<br/>life</i><br>Detachment from self                                               | 2 Detachment from self-will                            | 3. Renunciation          |
| 1 Mortif. self-will                                                                                          | 3 Obey without murmuring                               | 4 HUMILITY               |
| 2 Hide nothing from abba                                                                                     | 4 Accept injuries patiently                            | 5 Willing mortification  |
| 3 Follow abba’s judgment                                                                                     | 5 Hide nothing from abbot                              | 6 Reject vices           |
| 4 Obey without rancour<br>with patience                                                                      | 6 Content with least<br>as a poor workman              | 7 Growth of virtue       |
| 5 Accept injuries                                                                                            | 7 Consider oneself last of<br>all                      | 8 <i>PURITY OF HEART</i> |
| 6 Obey the common rule                                                                                       | 8 Obey the common rule                                 |                          |
| 7 Content with least as a poor<br>workman                                                                    | 9 Keep silence                                         |                          |
| 8 Declare oneself last of all                                                                                | 10 Not much laughter                                   |                          |
| 9 Silence — few words                                                                                        | 11 Few words                                           |                          |
| 10 Not laughing easily                                                                                       | 12 Humble attitude                                     |                          |
| 4. CHARITY                                                                                                   | CHARITY                                                | CHARITY                  |

## 9. Basil (328-378).

### Plan:

- I. ST BASIL AND HIS ASCETICAL WRITINGS
  - 1. Basil and his world
  - 2. Origin and history of the Rules
    - A) First stage
    - B) Second stage
    - C) Third stage
  - 3. Structure of the Basilian Rules
- II. THE MORAL RULES
  - 1. The preface
  - 2. The conclusion
- III. THE LITTLE ASCETICON - the basic principles
  - 1. Charity
  - 2. Attentiveness to God
  - 3. Cenobitic life
  - 4. Obedience
- IV. THE BASILIAN COMMUNITIES OF WOMEN
- V. BASIL COMPLEMENTED BY GREGORY OF NYSSA
  - 1. On Virginité
  - 2. The Hypotyposis

Cassian was a Desert Father who 'wrote for a purpose': to show inexperienced cenobites how to live the monastic life. St Basil too 'wrote for a purpose.' But, apart from that, the situation is very different. Far from being a desert dweller, an anchorite, Basil is frankly anti-eremitical. Though he made a tour of Egypt, he noticed what should not have been done rather than what should be done!

Moreover, we find ourselves in another world, not Egypt but Cappadocia. We do not have a monk speaking from his experience, but a bishop addressing Christians; indeed, a bishop who does not pretend to write a monastic rule; which nevertheless, posterity would recognise as the second of the Mother-Rules. And it is the longest one!

So we must take the trouble to see who St Basil is, what is the origin of the 'so-called' Rule of St Basil, and what he has to say to us, what is his teaching. Don't forget that St Benedict recommends that we read him!

### I. Saint Basil and his Ascetical Writings.

#### 1. Basil and his World

Basil lived in the middle of the fourth century, when monasticism flourished almost everywhere. He was born in Caesarea, in Cappadocia in the middle of present-day Turkey, at a rather gloomy time.

Gloomy from the religious point of view; it was a period of persecution, but inflicted by Christians, not pagans. The emperor was in fact Christian, but a heretic, an Arian. This was a heresy which held that Christ was indeed an extraordinary man, a superman, but he was not God.

The emperor wanted forcibly to convert Catholics who remained faithful to the true faith to heresy. He exiled the bishops who resisted him and killed the faithful Christians.

From the economic point of view too, it was a very difficult time; a few huge landowners possessed all the land and were rich, all the rest were small people over-burdened by taxes who had to work hard and were exploited. Slavery had not yet disappeared. Added to this were famine and epidemics; the poverty was great.

Basil's family was rich, and good Christians. Both his father and his mother had known persecution by the pagans; one of Basil's grandfathers had even died a martyr. Basil's father, also called Basil, was a rhetorician; today we would say a professor of letters. His mother was called Emmelie. They had many children, several of whom died young. Macrina was the eldest daughter who had a great influence on Basil, and then four other daughters.

Their father wanted some boys too, he prayed hard and five boys were born. We know four of them: Basil, then Naucratus who died young in a hunting accident; Gregory who would be bishop of Nyssa; and Peter, future bishop of Sebaste.

Their father wanted his sons to do higher studies. He sent Basil first to Caesarea and then to Athens, the intellectual capital at the time, where he made friends with another Gregory whom he later did a bad turn by making him bishop of Nazianzus. But for the moment, with his studies finished, the young man returned to Caesarea and began to teach rhetoric. His eldest sister found that he was not living earnestly enough as a Christian and she strongly reproached him. Basil was touched by grace (he would call this his 'conversion'), took what she said seriously and retired to a family property at Annesi where, with his family and some friends, he lived of retired life apart from the world. They were captivated by the very austere manner of life of a contemporary preacher, Eustathius of Sebaste.

We have Basil's first monastic writing from this period, his LETTER 2, addressed to his friend Gregory of Nazianzus. It is the letter of a young man; Basil writes with the fervour of a young novice overflowing with consolations, no doubt profound ones. Besides his friend, who did not need to be convinced, his enthusiasm was openly addressed to their cultured friends who were scandalized to see him and his companions adopt a way of life fit for slaves. Basil clothed his ascetic ideal in philosophical themes and concepts taken from rhetoric on purpose, very rarely quoting Scripture. He wanted to show that this ascetic ideal which seemed barbaric to his scandalized friends had its precedents in the wise men of Greece and corresponded to what they called *paideia*.

In this letter we find a beautiful definition of prayer which takes up the themes we studied in the *Apophthegmata*; after saying that reading awakens the desire for God in the soul, Basil continues: "The best prayer is one which imprints upon the soul a keen sense of God. This what it means to become a house of God: to have God dwelling within through our remembrance of him. We become a temple of God when earthly cares do not sever this continual remembrance of God and unforeseen emotions do not trouble the spirit. Fleeing all things, the one who loves God will draw near to him, chasing away the desires which lead to evil and holding to those things which lead to virtue."

On the other hand, other passages show that he is influenced by the very ostentatious asceticism of Eustathius: "The feeling of lowliness and humility is borne out by a sorrowful eye fixed on the ground, unkempt appearance, untidy hair and dirty clothes." It will come back...! and we shall meet it again when we come back to Eustathius.

Unfortunately, Basil could not enjoy this solitude for long. Eusebius, his bishop, had noticed him; he ordained him priest and after three years he made him his coadjutor bishop. Five

years later, Eusebius died and Basil succeeded him as bishop of Caesarea. It was a heavy burden, and he found himself up against many difficulties due to the religious and political climate. He was badly affected, for he had a pessimistic temperament, partly due to a liver complaint. In spite of all, Basil would be a great bishop, fighting against Arianism with all his strength, opposing the demands of the powerful of this world. He died in 378, without having seen the final crowning of his efforts, the Council of Constantinople, which put a definite stop to the spread of Arianism, did not take place until 381.

## 2. The Origin and History of the Basilian Rules.

### A) First stage.

Let us go back to when Basil was in his retreat at Annesi, in the fervour of his noviciate and when he was a fervent disciple of the impetuous ascetic Eustathius. This man was criticised at the time, and with reason. He extolled a rigorous asceticism which he flaunted in front of everyone. Basil followed him at first, as we have just seen, but, endowed with solid common sense, it was not long before he realised the weaknesses of such an exaggerated asceticism. Moreover, he was aware of the problems all around him; the social inequality, and above all the disputes and dissension within the Church itself.

To get a better perspective, he stood back from the situation and went on a tour of Egypt. This investigation did not satisfy him; he saw that all was not ideal, even among the monks. He then had the idea of turning to the New Testament to find out: What is a Christian? Returning to Annesi, he wrote down the texts from the New Testament which answered his question, and this became his first work: the Moral Rules, the only one which, for him, merited the title 'Rules,' and which was addressed to all Christians, for the New Testament is truly the Rule of the Christian.

### B) Second stage

Now, Basil is ordained priest, and then coadjutor-bishop. As a pastor, he found himself in the grip of many difficulties, Eustathius of Sebaste among them; his exaggerated asceticism became even more pronounced. He presented celibacy and total poverty as the ideal conditions for the Christian life, to the extent that he influenced married men, debtors and slaves to escape from the social ties that bound them. The disciples of Eustathius were conspicuous for their disreputable clothing, a glaring symbol of their renunciation of the world. This craze for an exaggerated asceticism was known as encratism, from the Greek word *egkrateia* meaning 'temperance,' 'abstinence.'

Among these ascetics were the people we have met in the Apophthegmata who claimed that, following the advice of the Apostle, one should pray all the time and so do no work. They gave themselves the name 'spirituals,' but they were called '*Messalians*' from a Syriac word meaning 'those who pray,' or '*Euchites*' from a Greek word with the same meaning. They practised *amerimna*, but in the bad sense of an idle life, whereas true *amerimna* must be completed by *nepsis*, watchfulness.

To sum up, Eustathius was the spiritual father of groups of more or less educated ascetics with a tendency towards Messalianism, inclined to do just what they liked. Basil realised this, and came to the conclusion that he should put the matter right and bring back this enthusiastic but anarchic ascetic movement. He would be the driver of the wayward cart. With rare tact he re-

established them in the way of the Gospel which he had analysed in his book, the *Moral Rules*: What is a Christian?

As auxiliary to his bishop, he went round the villages. During the day he catechised all the population. In the evening he spoke to a chosen audience of the fervent: the fraternities of ascetics. He gained their confidence and they questioned him. Basil answered them in the spirit of his former studies, the *Moral Rules*, in which he had taken from the New Testament guidelines for the true Christian. Thus day by day, with the help of Scripture, doubts and difficulties over organisation were resolved and a reform gradually took place among these groups which had until then been under the influence of Eustathius. These improvised dialogues, about 200 in number, constitute what is called the *Little Asceticon*.

### C) Third stage

Later, these communities developed, they became large fraternities with their own internal organisation and stability which set them apart in a definitive way from the generality of the Christian people. Later, when Basil became bishop, the long hard winters of Cappadocia when one had to stay at home gave him some spare time. He went back to his first draft, adapted it in view of the development of communities, and completed it, adding several passages. This second draft is what is called the *Great Asceticon*.

Basil's works on monastic legislation were written throughout his life, under the pressure of circumstances. There are three of them: the *Moral Rules* in which he analysed the behaviour of a Christian; the *Little Asceticon* for small communities of fervent Christians; the *Great Asceticon* for the use of those communities which had grown and had become, in fact, monastic communities.

Strangely enough, we find that these three stages in the formation of the 'Rules' of St Basil correspond to the three stages of development in Christian asceticism:

|             |                              |                 |
|-------------|------------------------------|-----------------|
| Gospel      | Groups of fervent Christians | Cenobitism      |
| Moral Rules | Little Asceticon             | Great Asceticon |

Basil's monastic writings have two characteristics, the consequence of their origin.

1) The point of departure is reflection on the Bible, classified in the *Moral Rules*. His whole thought is centred on the Bible, particularly the New Testament, considered as the Rule of the Christian.

2) Basil wanted to reform an ascetic movement which had its own characteristics and deviations. Thus he would insist on certain points to remedy its weaknesses:

a) The followers of Eustathius formed a spiritual movement with a tendency to set itself apart from the Church, believing itself superior to other people. So Basil, even in the last draft where he dealt with communities which could be called monastic, never used the word 'monk,' but he always spoke of 'brothers,' or 'Christians.' For him, the monk was not a being apart, but a Christian who wanted to live his faith to the full. Moreover, the word monk means 'alone,' which is another reason why he did not use the it; he said somewhere that man is not 'a monastic animal,' meaning that man is not made to live alone.

On the other hand, although charity holds a central place for him, one finds very little of the mystical spirit in his monastic works. There is more of it in his sermons to the people!

b) In dealing with a movement which lacked order, Basil took care to structure these informal communities by giving them a leader. Although we never find the word 'superior,' there

is in the Basilian monastic writings, and particularly in the Great Asceticon, a complete theology of the superior.

c) It was an excessively ascetic movement, especially concerning poverty, which was trumpeted in a very ostentatious way. Because of this, Basil spoke little about poverty and proposed a moderate asceticism.

d) Finally, there were Messalian tendencies: “Do not bother to work, it is enough to pray.” In reaction, although Basil was a man of prayer, as we find in all his writings which give us a complete doctrine of prayer, he rarely mentions it in his Rule. He is one of the few Fathers of the Church who gives us a fairly elaborate doctrine of manual work.

### 3. Structure of the Basilian Rules.

We have then three principal works which can be called the “Rules of St Basil”: the “Moral Rules, the Little Asceticon and the Great Asceticon.

1) The Moral Rules, written, like letter 2, during Basil’s retreat at Annesi, are an enquiry into the New Testament on the question: “What is the Christian life in the life of the Gospel?” They are a collection of scriptural texts, Rules given in the Gospel for every Christian who wants to live a full life of faith.

Next we have two writings which incorrectly bear the name of Rules: the Little Asceticon like the Great Asceticon are answers Basil gave by word of mouth to questions put to him during his years of preaching and episcopate. Basil subsequently edited these two texts under the heading Asceticon in the form of questions and answers.

2) The Little Asceticon. This consists of 203 answers to questions put by the small communities of fervent Christians when Basil was still only a priest or auxiliary of his bishop. Its interest lies in the fact that of the three texts, it was the only one which St Benedict knew, it’s influence is felt in our Rule; Rufinus had translated it into latin. It can be found in the collection of various rules brought together by Benedict of Aniane in the Latin Patrology: PL 103.

3) The Great Asceticon came 8-10 years later. Basil was by then bishop and he wanted to give better organisation to these enlarged communities of fervent Christians. He took the Little Asceticon and completed in with contemporary needs in mind. This Great Asceticon is composed of the Great Rules or Long Rules, 55 in number and drawn up in two stages; and the Little Rules or Short Rules to the number of 313.

The table shows that the two *Asceticon* have a common structure in the sense that they both begin with ascetical teaching. These are the basic principles (the beginning of the *Little Asceticon* and the *Long Rules* of the *Great Asceticon*). Then come the answers to various questions of the brothers (the end of the *Little Asceticon* and the *Short Rules* of the *Great Asceticon*).

This is how the *Great Asceticon* is divided in relation to the *Little*:

| Comparing the Two Structures |                  |                 |
|------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
|                              | LITTLE ASCETICON | GREAT ASCETICON |
|                              |                  | Long Rules      |
| The ascetical teaching       |                  |                 |
| The basic principles         | 1-11             | 1-23            |
|                              | //////           | 24-55           |
|                              |                  | Short Rules     |

|                                   |        |                                        |
|-----------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------------|
| Various questions of the brothers | 12-203 | 192 Q's (from L.A.)                    |
|                                   |        | (one needs a concordance to find them) |
|                                   | ////// | 121 Q's (new)                          |

The Long Rules are in two parts: chapters 1-23 take up the basic principles of Christian life found in the *Little Asceticon*. The second part is not in the *Little Asceticon*. These are later additions made necessary for the organisation of these communities as they grew in numbers and became 'monastic.' They regulate the practical aspects of life: domestic arrangements, activities, discipline. Much space is given to the superior, above all in rules 45-55 which are a still later addition. As time went on, the need for a superior made itself felt the more, and his role became more well defined.

In the Short Rules the questions and answers are a bit haphazard, without any overall plan, although one can group some of them by subject.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now we shall see from the texts how Basil's thought developed. First the Preface to the Moral Rules will show us the foundation and progression. The whole moves towards the conclusion (Rule 80 — the end) where he outlines the portrait of a Christian.

Then we come to the essential basic principles of the two *Asceticon*.

## II. the Moral Rules.

| <b><u>Preface to the Moral Rules</u></b>                |                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Trinitarian Introduction<br>Basil introduces himself | Reference to Macrina                                                                         |
| 2. He notes:                                            | Discord and disunion                                                                         |
| 3. He has pondered & questioned                         | The cause: God is ignored, abandoned.                                                        |
| 4. The validity of his reflection                       | An example from the world — the bees                                                         |
| 5 Further reflection                                    | Obedience makes for unity.                                                                   |
|                                                         | When there is disunity, there is disobedience                                                |
| 6.(Scriptural texts) -                                  | When there is disobedience, it is because of ignorance                                       |
| 7. What are the norms for change                        | 1) The Apostle shows us the Church, the place of union and peace when it is ruled by Christ. |
| 8.                                                      | 2) The life of the Trinity itself proves that obedience makes for unity.                     |

|                                                        |                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 9. First conclusion (general)                          | The Church must find unity & peace again. So, no one must seek his own will, but everyone must seek the will of Christ in the Holy Spirit. |
| 10. Search in Scripture Second conclusion (specific) . | All those who form the Church must answer their deeds                                                                                      |
| 11. Third conclusion (practical)                       | I will search in the Scriptures for what pleases God and what displeases him, so that we can do what pleases him, and avoid what does not. |

The Preface, as you can see by the plan outlines the progression of Basil's thought very well: at the beginning there is a statement of the troubles in the Church, the disorder among the enthusiastic disciples of Eustathius of Sebaste. In spite of his admiration for the Master, Basil realises that this enthusiasm could be dangerous without proper direction, so he searches for the true Master speaking in the Gospel. He ponders on the Christian ascetical life in the light of the New Testament (Text 1).

The body of the work is thus a collection of quotations from the N.T. grouped under chapter headings, the only evidence of the hand of Basil. 1542 verses of the N.T. are recorded and classified. The work ends with a synthesis in which Basil brings together the main results of his reflection which go to the heart of the Christian life.

This synthesis is found in chapter 80. It is composed of three parts: the first where he describes, using images from Scripture, what a Christian should be: disciple of Christ, sheep of Christ, vine of Christ, member of Christ, spouse of Christ, temple of God, offered victim, child of God, light in the world, salt of the earth, word of life. In the second he describes "what Scripture wants those to whom the preaching of the Gospel is entrusted to be like": servants of Christ, heralds of the kingdom, models of piety, the eye in the body, shepherds of the sheep, doctors, foster-fathers, collaborators of God, workers in the vineyard of the Lord, builders of the temple of God. In the third part he defines what belongs to the Christian person. This forms the concluding section of his enquiry. (Text 2).

### III. The Little Asceticon.

The Preface to the *Moral Rules* shows us the point of departure of Basil's thought: we do not live as Christians, so we must look at the Scriptures to see what a Christian is like. This is what he does in the *Moral Rules* and text 2 paints a portrait of the Christian.

Now Basil is speaking to those who want to live the Christian life more deeply. He will give them the principles. This is the beginning of the *Little Asceticon*. Later he will take up these same principal themes when the communities have developed further, looking at them from a decidedly monastic perspective.

These common basic principles of the two Asceticons are particularly important. They which show us what Basil considered a monk to be. Here they are in detail with the relevant chapters of the *Little Asceticon*.

| The Basic Principles |                 |   |
|----------------------|-----------------|---|
| CHARITY              | General remarks | 1 |
|                      | Towards God     | 2 |

|                        |                       |      |
|------------------------|-----------------------|------|
|                        | Towards others        | 2    |
| FEAR OF GOD            |                       | 2    |
| MINDFULNESS OF GOD     |                       | 2    |
| RETREAT FROM THE WORLD |                       | 2    |
| LIFE                   |                       | 3    |
| RENUNCIATION           | Of oneself            | 4    |
|                        | What is renounced     | 5    |
|                        | Those who renounce    | 6    |
|                        | Admission of subjects | 7    |
| TEMPERANCE             | In general            | 8    |
|                        | In laughter           | 8    |
|                        | In food               | 9-10 |
|                        | In clothing           | 11   |

We shall follow this text, translated into latin by Rufinus, as it was the only one known to St Benedict. The foundation of Basil's thought is first of all charity — oth one and twofold. It urges us on to reverence God and be mindful of him. It also entails some withdrawal from the world, and in order to obtain mutual support we go to live with other brothers who have the same purpose in mind: to love God more than all else. This is the first part of the basic principles (1-3).

The second part: in order that this love should be effective, we must renounce ourselves, as the Gospel and the example of Christ tell us, and practice temperance (4-11).

These basic principles then all flow from charity, the first principle, and hang together in a logical order. As we cannot study them all, we shall look at the most important in the first part: charity, mindfulness of God and the common life.

We shall also say a word about obedience. In his first reflection, the Preface to the Moral Rules, Basil realised, as we have seen, that the evils of the Church in his time came from a lack of obedience. The need for obedience is present in all his writings. We can take this insistence on obedience too as one of the basic principles of his thought.

## 1. Charity

Rule 2 which concerns charity is at the heart of Basil's thought: "Wonderful pages which reveal the heart of a saint touched by the arrow of divine love" writes T. Spidlick.

We can distinguish two parts:

The first revolves continually round the fact that God has given us his love; it is a seed which must cultivate. Thus one can say that all beings tend towards God (Text 3:1,1).

The second part deals with the motives which will arouse us to love God. (Texts 3:1,2-9).

Then Basil applies what he has said of the love of God to the love of our neighbour.

## 2. Mindfulness of God.

The love of God is thus sown in our hearts. But how can we make it grow? After the theory, we go on to the practice. Here we have a text of the greatest importance. Based on the Paul-

ine theme: “to please God,” this text deals with continual prayer, with an example taken from manual work. We find here the themes of apatheia, guarding of the heart, remembrance of God. It is very valuable (Text 3:2).

### 3. Common Life

Here we have a very good description of the benefits of the common life. Perhaps it lacks some moderation, Basil is fiercely anti-eremitical! But it is remarkable that all the reasons he gives in favour of the cenobitic life find support in Sacred Scripture, and in particular in the New Testament. One can sum up his thought by saying that the common life is preferable to the solitary life because it is more evangelical (Text 3:3).

### 4. Obedience

In the *Little Asceticon*, straight after these basic principles which will be repeated in the *Great Asceticon*, come three chapters which deal with obedience, and one on the superior. As in all the work of Basil, obedience is prominent. (*Texts 3:4,1-5, taken from the Great Asceticon. In what follows, LR = Long Rules, SR = Short Rules. ‘Question’ refers to the Little Asceticon*).

For him, obedience is love in action, the proof of our love. As far as man is concerned love is the foundation of obedience. He says clearly in SR 153: “What are the signs that we possess the love of God?” Reply: “The Lord tells us: ‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments.’” Moreover we have seen in the Moral Rules that Basil grounds obedience objectively in the very life of the divine Persons and in the kingship of Christ. The idea is found too in SR 1. (Text 3:4,1). He then explains that one should obey Scripture first, and when nothing is found there, then one should conform to the directive of St Paul: “All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful” (1 Cor.10:23), and in this way seek not what is pleasing to ourselves but what is useful for others.

Obedience has above all the teaching of Jesus Christ in Scripture as its object. These two facts will be taken up in Question 12; and in the next he makes it clear that we also obey one another — and the superior (Question 15); but if some one commands something contrary to the commandments of God, we do not obey him.

The dispositions which animate obedience are humility, and above all the desire to please God and give him glory. A desire which Basil describes as “ardent, insatiable and constant” (SR 157). For the Christian, obedience must be his food, as it was for Jesus who said: “My food is to do the will of my Father.”

This text, and others, show us that the three theological virtues are the foundation of obedience: faith, hope and charity. That is why Basil gives it such importance.

Now, what is the measure of obedience? To the question: “What is the measure of the love of God?” Basil answers: “Always to stretch out our spirit towards the will of God, seeking out and desiring all that gives him glory.” Obedience and love of God are thus intimately linked. There is no measure of the love of God, nor of obedience (Text 3:4,3).

Elsewhere we find the same idea in a text close to the thought of St Benedict (Text 3:4,4)

This last text shows us what Basil thought of the disobedient person: murmuring and disobedience engrave in his heart the vices opposed to obedience. The obedient man is like a person in good health radiating joy; on the other hand the disobedient man is sick, according to Basil (Text 3:4,5).

Murmuring is thus a lack of faith which separates a person from the community of believers. If the disobedient person does not amend, Basil does not hesitate to cut him off from the community.

#### IV. The Communities of Women.

It seems that the origin of double monasteries in the Basilian tradition began with Macrina, Basil's elder sister. In fact, under her influence, the family home became two monasteries. In his 'Life of Macrina,' Gregory of Nyssa gives us some information on the women's monastery of Annisa where Macrina was superior; prayer was spread through the day and the night; work took second place and was concerned with hospitality and charity. The spirit of this monasticism was conformed to Gregory's ideal of 'Christian philosophy': freedom from the passions so as to purify the soul and enable it to become acceptable to Christ the Spouse. The theme of progress, (epektasis), so dear to Gregory, inspired this life which was a constant growth in virtue. These double monasteries later increased.

Basil's letters and his *Great Asceticon* prove the existence of these women's communities. The canonical letter 199 gives a definition of the virgin: "A virgin is one who, of her own free will, has offered herself to the Lord, has renounced marriage and prefers a life of holiness." Then Basil sets down the rules of admission: it must be voluntary and not before 16 or 17 years old. Letter 173 describes the way of life of these communities of virgins. (Text 6).

In this text we find on the one hand the insistence on poverty of life in both clothing and food, characterised by the allowance of necessities and the absence of superfluity; and on the other hand the prudence demanded by Basil "in conversation with men."

This last point is insisted upon again in the *Great Asceticon* in the finishing touches added by Basil when he became bishop and the communities had grown. There are two Little Rules which only concern the women's communities. This proves their existence and although they availed themselves of the advice given by Basil to the men ascetics, they also had questions of their own to ask him. One of these (SR 153), concerning the "sister in charge of the wool" who has to give each sister her work, gives us a sure indication of the charitable purpose of their work. Question 281 asks what must be done when a sister does not want to share in the common office of psalmody (Text 7). In SR 154 the question is about the small number of brothers who have to lend a hand to a large number of sisters, which supposes some growth in the communities of women.

A few other Rules which mention the women's monasteries deal with the relationship between them and the monasteries of men, insisting on prudence. It does not seem that these virgins were in fact cloistered; they should not therefore provoke gossip, and set malicious tongues wagging. Basil is a realist, he knows human weakness. He remembers too the care Paul took not to scandalise the weak. He takes precautions which would today seem excessive, to "avoid every shadow or suspicion of evil." SR 220 repeats LR 33, and prescribes that the sisters and brothers should not speak together except in the presence of others. SR 108 specifies "in the presence of the superior"; and SR 110 says that the superior must be present even when a sister makes her confession to an abba.

Unfortunately sin is always round the corner in this life. Sometimes there were failures; letter 199 gives precise details on what must be done when a virgin goes astray. Basil addresses letter 46 to one of them: "You have broken the yoke of divine intimacy, you have fled from the pure chamber of the true King."

But though he is a realist, Basil is also a spiritual man who lives in the presence of God, who alone can judge his freedom (PR 109). He hopes to see his disciple grow in that spiritual perfection which rises above the flesh and demonstrates the good news of the Gospel expressed by St Paul: “In Christ, there is neither male nor female, slave or free man.” SR 154 refers to this (Text 8).

Another optimistic note that we find throughout the Rules of Basil is that he takes up a position in favour of the liberation of women, fairly unusual in his time, and the fruit of his meditation on the Gospel. Here is Short Rule 111, quite entertaining: the reply is very short, a single word which says a lot! “When a senior monk gives an order to a sister without the knowledge of her superior, has she the right to be indignant?” — Reply: “Absolutely!”

## V. Basil Complemented by Gregory of Nyssa.

Gregory, Basil’s brother, deserves a place at the end of a study of the monastic writings of the great bishop of Caesarea.

Gregory was six years younger than Basil, the youngest of the brothers. His elder brother was a man of action, a powerful personality; even when he was alive he was given the title ‘Great.’ While Basil was alive, Gregory stayed in the shadow of the great bishop, his brother. It was only after Basil’s death that he revealed the strength of his genius as a theologian and a spiritual man. Then he wrote his most famous books which would quickly be read and appreciated in monastic circles: the “Life of Moses,” his Commentaries on Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs. This is not the place to go into Gregory’s spirituality who, very likely married, was not a monk, although he occasionally spent time at the mini-monastery in the family home of Annesi.

But there are two works which Gregory wrote specially for monks. They round off those of Basil by adding themes dear to this great contemplative and mystic who was bishop of Nyssa.

These two works, properly called monastic, are the: *On Virginity*, and *The Hypotyposis*.

### 1. On Virginity

This was written when he was relatively young; Gregory was 40, a skilful orator, and Basil profited from his skill by asking him to write something in praise of virginity. It smacks a little of ‘publicity,’ but publicity is not always very objective! Here, the author has some passages where the inconvenience of marriage serves as a foil to extol virginity! Obviously this is not acceptable. On the other hand Gregory is not yet confronted with pastoral problems; it was only later that Basil made him bishop of Nyssa against his will. Moreover, the rhetoric displayed in this book sometimes makes for boring reading.

Apart from these negative aspects, the treatise is full of rich things. Contrary to other works of the Fathers on this subject, it is written for young men, without excluding the other sex.

Gregory finds in God the archetype of virginity; God is holy and immaculate, not only in his divine nature, but also in the relationships which distinguish the divine persons. The Father begot the Son without passion, that is to say without the alteration which birth brings about. The Holy Spirit is pure (Text 9). The mystery of eternal generation within the Trinity thus gives meaning to Christian virginity here below: The consecrated virginity of virgins, on earth, is a reflection and participation of that eternal generation (Text 10).

In order to understand the doctrine of Gregory on virginity, we must understand his anthropology, which is not what we are used to! (See Table 8 — Book 2).

For western theology human nature includes animal life which we have in common with the beasts, with instinct and the two basic tendencies which Plato had already defined: the con-

cupiscible and the irascible appetites, (which are not bad in themselves, they are there to protect the animal life), and the intellectual life which includes the intellect and the will, and is capable of free choice. Added to this is the life of grace which is rightly called the ‘super-natural’ life.

Gregory has a different scheme: human nature comprises the intellectual life and the spiritual life; the animal life is added because of the fall. The present human condition no longer corresponds with human nature as it was willed by God. Our true nature is to be an ‘image of God’: possessing intellect and reason, pure, a stranger to all evil, immortal. This animal life which has been ‘added-on’ is what Gregory calls “the tunics of skin,” symbol of our mortal condition which is not destined to exist eternally. The “tunics of skin” are not the body itself, but the condition of fallen man (Text 11). It also means human beings subject to the passions which we have in common with the beasts and which our wills can no longer master as they did before the fall.

Death, like sexuality, is thus for Gregory a sequel to sin; so too is the disordered state of the instincts: now human beings live under the dominance of the passions. They are caught up in the web sin and evil which bring death.

In their creation, human beings are then in the image of God, the archetype of virginity: they are virgin, they have parrhesia, that is the spontaneous trust of the child towards its father, but they are also endowed with freedom. The first couple lived in continence, finding pleasure only in the one Lord. It was only later, because of sin, that Adam, in turning from the Lord, knew sexual pleasure (Text 12).

To set ourselves free, as this text expresses it, we must return the opposite way along the road taken by Adam. Marriage is the last step, so it must be renounced first of all. Virginity of body, reintroduced into the world by Christ, is then the first stage on the road to perfection. But it must be accompanied by virginity of soul, the second stage and the most important. This is what will help us to take off the “tunics of skin” with which our first parents were clothed after the fall.

So we must follow the road taken by Adam, but in the opposite direction: first renouncing marriage in order to embrace virginity, then taking off the “tunics of skin,” which means to take in hand the wayward passions, the “thoughts of the flesh” (Text 13).

Why does virginity favour the shedding of the passions? A characteristic of the thought of Gregory is that we are persons of strong desires; if desire is detached from created things, the soul directs its desire to the things of God (Text 14). Virgins who love with all their strength the one most desirable thing, the beauty which is God, can more easily master the passions. So asceticism enables one to recover apatheia, it restores the image of God and favours contemplation. (Text 15).

Elsewhere Gregory says that this happens in two ways here below: through the beauty of creation and through the image of God present in the purified soul. In this first book Gregory only outlines this latter idea. On the other hand he emphasises that the virgin does not pursue an abstraction but a person; God who is Spouse. “Let the chaste virgin, clinging to the Logos, hold herself aloof from every passion which affects the soul and keep herself pure for the Spouse who is rightfully united to her” (16:2). Gregory delights in seeing in virginity a marriage with God, a spiritual marriage which is the antitype of corporal marriage. God is preferred above all, and we find here the most passionate vocabulary of human love, with the terms “lover” (*erastheis*), “object of desire” (*pothomenou* — *to epithumètikon*), “covetous love” (*erôs*) (Text 16).

Gregory derives the fruitfulness of virginity from the fact that God is the ‘partner’; marriage with God is promised a more universal and noble fruitfulness than human marriage; virgins share in the fruitfulness of Mary (Text 17).

## 2. The Hypotyposis

Gregory's other monastic writing is very different. Rhetoric gives way to simple language, short and profound. Basil is dead. The communities which he reformed have grown. Gregory is now a mature man, celebrated as a writer and mystic, and he is still in contact with these communities. He wrote a little book which he modestly entitled "a model": *Hypotyposis*, and which is in fact a valuable summary of the essentials of monastic life, its goal and the means to reach this goal. It is also known under its latin title: "*De Instituto Christiano*." In the first two parts it is very similar to a work by a contemporary author known to us by the name of 'Pseudo-Macarius' (studied in the next chapter); the relationship between the two writings has been much discussed. It seems that Gregory took and reworked the 'Great Letter' of Macarius in order to spread his ideas in a more cultured environment. We will present Gregory's version.

The first lines give the plan of the work: "An outline of the goal of piety, on the common life and on the course to run." The two first parts are clearly delineated, the third serves rather as a conclusion.

In this book written no doubt for the Basilian communities, we find set out the points on which Basil had insisted: renunciation of property and above all of one's own will, and consequently the necessity of obedience; the benefit of the common life and of spiritual direction; the idea, borrowed from Stoicism, that all the virtues hold together; the quest for the glory of God and following on from that the humility which bids us seek our glory from God and not from human beings; the remembrance of God: "The remembrance and desire for God are the only means of guarding the soul, the only way to maintain an attitude of vigilance."

There are other themes even more typical of Gregory. We have seen in the preceeding treatise that we are beings of desire. We find it again here (Text 18). It is this characteristic of human nature, the desire for an infinite God which is the origin of the theme of *epektasis* already initiated by Origen, but which Gregory has fully drawn out, and which is found in this treatise (Text 19). The vision of the greatness of God engenders both humility and generosity.

One characteristic of this book is the intertwining of two other original themes which one meets nowhere else with such frequency; they are like two threads which run through the book: synergy and the indwelling of the Spirit who works within the soul.

*Synergy* comes from two Greek words: *sun* 'with' and *ergon* 'work'; it expresses the interaction of the spirit and the human will in the work of our sanctification. The role of the Spirit is pre-eminent; he comes to meet the soul who draws him to herself by prayer and even through the fruits she bears (Texts 20 & 21).

In this way the soul which purifies herself draws the spirit to her, and in turn the power of the spirit purifies the soul, enabling her to be yet more inhabited by the divine guest: "The soul offers herself to the adorable and holy Spirit as a pure dwelling. She receives the steadfast peace of Christ by which she clings to the Lord and unites herself permanently to him." This is the divine goal; the grace of the Spirit makes the soul blossom in divine beauty, toiling over us who labour under his transformation (Text 22).

After a beautiful passage which depicts the role of prayer (Text 23), the book finishes with a text demonstrating the degree of spiritual maturity reached by Gregory, to which he invites us too (Text 24).

## Bibliography

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## 9. Basil Texts

### 1. The Starting Point

*Preface to the Moral Rules: The Judgment of God*

1. Through the kindness and favour of the goodness of God, in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, I was preserved from the errors alien to our faith; brought up, as I was, since birth by Christian parents. While still a child I learnt the sacred Scriptures from them and was led to a knowledge of the truth.

2. When I became a man, I travelled often and being naturally involved in much business, I noticed in all the arts and sciences a splendid harmony among those who studied them; yet on the contrary, in the one Church of God, for which Christ died and upon which he poured the abundance of his Holy Spirit, I saw frequent and excessive discord among many, both between themselves and about the divine Scriptures.

What is worse, it was the leaders themselves who had such dissentiant thoughts and opinions, taking different attitudes to the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ, pitilessly dividing the Church of God and carelessly disturbing his flock. It was at this time when the Anomeans were rife, that the saying was fulfilled as never before: “People with pernicious teaching will rise up among you who will try to draw disciples after them.”

3. Observing all this and much else of the same kind, I wondered about the cause and origin of so great an evil. At first I found myself in great darkness and, as if I were on the scales of a balance, I alternated from one side to the other; one consideration based on my long experience of persons pulled me down to one side while another pulled me down on the other because of the truth I recognised in the Scriptures.

I spent a long time looking for the cause of these things. Then I remembered the book of Judges which tells how each one each one did what seemed good to him and gave the reason in these words: “In those days there was no king in Israel.”

This recollection immediately led me to reflect on present events — perhaps a frightful and paradoxical thing to say, but very true if you think about it — the one great, true and only God and King of all has not yet been rejected, yet there has never been such discord and strife among Church members. Each one is forsaking the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, claiming his own authority for his theories and definitions and preferring to overrule the Lord rather than be ruled by him.

4. Turning over these thoughts and full of fear in the face of so much impiety, I pushed my enquiry further; It seemed to me that it was also true if one considered the goings on in the world. Order and harmony prevail in a crowd as long as the obedience of all to one person is maintained, while discord, disagreement and a scramble for power come from the absence of a leader.

I once saw a a swarm of bees gather in orderly fashion behind their queen, following the law of their nature. I have seen and heard many examples of this sort, and those who have studied them know more, and can confirm the truth of what I am saying.

5. Indeed, if those who look to one authority and serve a single leader maintain good order and agreement, it is obvious that all dissension or division is the sign of the lack of a leader. By the same token, if we too find among ourselves such disagreements both about the commandments of God and among ourselves, it is an indication that we have forsaken the true King. *(Then follow some texts from Scripture to prove it).*

6. From these texts, and others like them, it seemed obvious to me that in general, through ignorance of God, the evil of the passions brings about a depraved outlook; and in particular the discord which puts people against each other comes from the fact that we make ourselves unworthy to be ruled by the Lord.

Actually, I thought it a good idea to undertake a study of such behaviour, but I was incapable of judging such thoughtlessness, madness, folly; I do not know what word to use to describe such excessive wickedness. For if even among animals which have no reason we find harmony because they submit to their leader, what can be said of us, who disagree among ourselves and contravene the commands of the Lord?.....

7. This is what the Apostle says: "When one member suffers, all the others suffer with him, and when one member rejoices, all the others rejoice with him." .and again: "There should be no division in the body, But all the members should have the same care for one another," for they are obviously inspired by one indwelling Spirit. Why this rule of conduct? For myself, I think that it is to safeguard more effectively cohesion and cooperation in the Church of God to which it was said: "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it." The one and only true head, that is Christ, clearly rules and binds each one to the other to establish unity.

But among them there is no unity, peace is not kept, the spirit of gentleness is not preserved; on the contrary there is quarrelling, discord and rivalry. Really it would be a bold person who would call people who live in such a way members of Christ, or pretend that they are governed by Him!....

8. Moreover, the Only Son of God himself, our God, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were made, proclaims: "I have not come down from Heaven to do my own will, but the will of my Father who sent me." And: "I do nothing of myself." And "He has told me what I should say and teach." In the same way the Holy Spirit who gives great and marvellous gifts, bringing about all things in every person, speaks nothing of Himself, but says all that he has heard from the Lord.

9. How, I ask, is it not much more necessary that the Church, striving to keep unity in the bond of peace, should fulfil what is written in the Acts: "The multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul"? For it is clear that no one should prefer his own will, but all together should seek in the one Spirit of the Lord the will of the one Jesus Christ who said: "I did not come down from heaven to do my will".....

10. Having then reread the Holy Scriptures, I discovered both in the Old and the New Testament, that it was not the number or the greatness of sins, but the single transgression of a commandment, whatever it may be, which is clearly an insult to God, and that the same sentence is passed by God on all disobedience. (*Then follow further biblical texts in support*).

11. Through the grace and goodness of God "who wishes all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth," and "who teaches all of us knowledge," I have found this and many other things of the kind in the divinely inspired Scriptures; I have understood the terrible cause of such conflict of people among themselves and against the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ. Since then I have been taught the dreadful judgment pronounced on such iniquity, and knowing that every disobedience against any decree of God is equally punished; told also of the dreadful judgment passed against those who, without having sinned personally, nevertheless incur his anger for not having shown zeal with regard to sinners, even if they had often not known about it; I thought it necessary to draw out from the inspired Scriptures, as far as I am able, an account of the things that displease God and those which please him. In this way, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching of the Holy Spirit; renouncing self-

will and worldliness; and walking rather according to the Gospel of our blessed God, our Lord Jesus Christ, and so living in this world in a way pleasing to him, avoiding what is forbidden with the greatest care and striving to do what approved; we shall be judged worthy, in the time of immortality, to escape the anger which will fall on the children of disobedience and be among those found worthy of eternal life and the Kingdom of Heaven which our Lord has promised to all those who “keep his covenant and remember his commandments to do them.”

## 2. The Point Of Arrival

*Moral Rules 80 (end).*

1. What is the mark of a Christian? Faith which works through charity. What is the mark of faith? Firm belief in the truth of the inspired words of God, a faith unshaken by any argument based either on a law of nature or on an appearance of piety. What is the mark of a believer? To be so convinced that the words used have meaning, that we dare not either take away from or add to them. For all that does not come from faith is sin, as the Apostle says (Rom.14:23); but faith comes from preaching, and preaching is only on the word of Christ (Rom.10:17), thus everything that is outside inspired Scripture, as it does not come from faith, is sin.

What is the mark of one who loves God? To observe his commandments with the intention of giving him glory. What is the mark of love of our neighbour? Not to seek one's own interest, but the interest of the one whom we love in both soul and body.

2. What is the mark of the Christian? To be born anew in water and the Spirit through baptism. What is the mark of one who is born of water? As Christ died once to sin for all, so he too is dead and unmoved by any sin, as it is written: *“All of us who have been baptised in Jesus Christ have been baptised into his death. We have therefore been buried with him in his death through baptism. Knowing that our old self has been crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed and we might no longer be enslaved to sin”* (Rom.6:3-6).

What is the mark of one who is born of the Spirit. To become, in the measure that is given him, that very thing of which he was reborn, as it is written: *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”* (Jn.3:6).

What is the mark of one who is born a second time? To strip off the old self with its deeds and desires, and to be re clothed in the new self, which is renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (Col.3:9), as he said: *“You who have been baptised in Christ, have all been clothed in Christ”* (Gal.3:27).

3. What is the mark of a Christian? To purify oneself in the blood of Christ from all uncleanness of body and spirit, and to complete the work of one's sanctification in the fear of God and the love of Christ (2Cor.7:1), to have *“neither spot nor wrinkle, nor any such thing,”* but to be holy and irreproachable (Eph.5:27), and so to eat the body of Christ and drink his blood, *“For he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks his own condemnation”* (1Cor.11:29).

What is the mark of those who eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord? To keep the constant memory of him who died for us and rose again. What is the mark of those who keep this memory? *“To live no longer for themselves, but for Him who dies for them and rose again”* (2Cor.5:15).

4. What is the mark of a Christian? That his righteousness should surpass that of the scribes and pharisees in every way (Mt.5:20), as Christ taught in the Gospel.

What is the mark of a Christian? To love one another as Christ loved us (Eph.5:2).

What is the mark of a Christian? It is to have the Lord always present before one's eyes. (Ps.15:8).

What is the mark of a Christian? It is to watch every day and at all times, and to be ready in the perfection which is pleasing to God, for the Lord will come at an hour when we are not thinking about it (Lk.12:40).

### 3. The Basic Principles

#### 1. *Charity. The Little Asceticon, Question 2*

Question: As you say that the love of God is the first of the commandments, tell us about it first. We have understood that we must love, but we would like to know how to do it.

Reply: A good question! It is indeed the best beginning and what I want to speak to you about most. I will answer you, with the help of God.

1. You must understand, first of all, that if this commandment seems isolated, it does however include and encompass all the commandments, as the Lord assures us: "For from these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets." But our purpose is not to speak in detail of the order of the commandments. We shall just look at the one which concerns us at this moment.

First let me say that we have, sown within us, the strength from God who enables us to fulfil all the commandments. Because of this, we have no difficulty in fulfilling them, it is not something new and extraordinary; and on the other hand, there is no reason why we should be proud, as though we imagine we can offer something more to God than we have received from him in our created nature.

Since there is within us this strength sown by God, to live uprightly and devoutly is to practise virtue. On the other hand, to ill-use the gifts of nature is to tend towards evil. This is the definition of evil: to use the impulses of the soul sown in us by God in the wrong way. On the other hand, the definition of virtue is this: to use the movements of the soul introduced in us by God in the right way, that is, according to the commandment of God and our conscience.

2. This being so, this is what can be inferred concerning charity. We have received the commandment to love God. The soul carries within it, put there by God from its very beginning, the power to love. We do not need an outside witness to believe this, each one of us finds the proof of what we are saying within himself and about himself. Every person desires what is good, and we are drawn by a feeling which is natural to us, to all which we regard as good. Moreover, without anyone having taught us, we are bound by love to our parents and those who are closely related to us. To those too from whom we have received love and favours, we feel united through their tenderness and the kindnesses they have done for us.

3. Who is as good as God? Or rather, who is good, but God alone? What radiance, what splendour, what beauty which naturally draws us to love Him, can one find anywhere, which could be as great as that which we believe to be, which indeed is, in God? Where find such grace? What flame of love is capable of enfolding the most secret and intimate parts of the soul, as the love of God can inflame the hidden recesses of the spirit — above all if it is purified from all stain and if the soul is pure and cries out with sincerity: "I am wounded by love!"?

Yes, I know it, the love of God is ineffable, easier to experience than to put into words. It is a sort of indescribable light; even if a word could capture it and render it similar to lightning or a spark, the ear would not sustain it, it would not receive the message. If you take the rays of the morning star, the splendour of the moon and even the light of the sun, in comparison with his glory, all this is but blackness and much more sombre than if one compared a black night plunged in the obscurity of deep darkness to the purest light of the midday sun.

This beauty is not seen with the eyes of the body; only the soul and the spirit can encompass it. If, by chance, this beauty has touched the soul and spirit of the saints, it has pierced them with the burning pang of love. This is why one of them, as if consumed by the fires of this love and holding this present life in abhorrence, wrote: "When shall I come and appear before the face of God?" And elsewhere, set on fire by the ardour of these flames, he says: "My soul is thirsting for the living God!" and consumed by his insatiable desire, he begs to "see the delight of the Lord and to be in the shelter of his holy temple."

So then, we naturally desire what is good, and we love it. Yet nothing, we have said, is as good as God; and that is why we pay back to him as a debt this charity we have received from him....

4. As for our parents, we have a natural love for those who gave us birth; indeed this is not only found among human beings, but also among animals. Take care then that we are not found to be more stupid than the beasts and more savage than ferocious beasts, should no feeling of love bind us to Him who brought us into being..

Even if we cannot know his greatness nor what he is, from the mere fact that we come from Him, we must venerate and love him with the love that we have for our parents and cling continually to the thought of him, like babies clinging to their mother's neck.

5. But we should do so even more and with much greater eagerness, knowing as we do that we are indebted to him for his immense gifts. And this too, I believe, we have in common with the other animals, for they too remember the good that has been done to them. If you do not believe me, listen to the prophet who says: "The ox knows its herdsman, and the ass the manger of its master." But God would not be pleased if what follows could be said of us: has not known me, and my people have not understood me."

So too, we love those who do good to us without being taught, and try, as far as possible, to pay them back in return. How can we give thanks for the gifts of God, which are so great they cannot be numbered, and such that a single one puts us under an obligation to our benefactor for the whole of our life?

6. I shall not speak of all the gifts which, although great and magnificent, are however eclipsed by the greatest and best as the stars are by the greater radiance of the sun. It is not the moment to prolong our discourse to enumerate in detail the divine gifts we have received. We shall pass over in silence the daily rising of the sun and the whole world illuminated by the brightness of a single light. We shall not mention the phases of the moon, the changes and sequence of the winds, the rain that falls from the clouds, the springs and rivers which rise from the earth...

Of all this, and many other things too, I shall not speak. But there is one thing which cannot be left out, and I cannot be silent about it. Although it is not possible to pass over this favour in silence, it is even less possible to speak about it fittingly, as one should. This favour, is that God has allowed human beings to know him, and that he has created him a rational animal on the earth, and given him the opportunity, through the pleasure and beauty he experiences, of an indescribable Paradise.

7. But God never scorned Man, deceived as he was by the shrewdness of the serpent, fallen into sin, and then from sin cast down to death; he gave him the Law as a help, confided him to the angels and sent him the prophets. He curbed the hold that evil had over him by severe threats; he aroused good desires by marvellous promises, and he emphasised in advance by many images what awaits us at the end of both paths.

8. When, after all this, we became hardened in evil by our lack of faith, the goodness of this tender Lord did not turn away from us and abandon us. Even though we were ungrateful for his gifts and thrust aside his mercy, his goodness did not change; but called us back from death and restored us to life again through our Lord Jesus Christ. "Who, being in the form of God, did not think equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant." "He has borne our weakness and carried our infirmities, he was chastised on our behalf, that we might be healed by his wounds." "He has set us free from the curse, who became a curse for us." And he was condemned to a most shameful death, to call us back to life.

Yet it was not enough for him to give us life; to us who were dead he gave a share in his divinity and bestowed on us the gift of eternity. And above all that we could desire or comprehend, he has prepared for those who believe in Him and love him: "What the eye has not seen, what the ear has not heard, nor the human heart conceived."

9. What shall we render to the Lord for all his bounty? Truly, He is so good and so gentle that he does not ask us to give anything in return, he is content to be loved for all that he has showered upon us. Who then would be so ungrateful as not to love Him who has heaped such inestimable gifts upon us?

Let this be enough about the love of God. As I said before, one cannot mention everything, nor was it my intention, I only wanted to say briefly the most important thing: the love of God is sown in the soul and we must make it grow.

## *2. Mindfulness of God. Little Asceticon, Question 2 (cont.)*

1. Above all, it must be said that no one knows how to carry out what is commanded concerning love of God and neighbour, nor any other commandment, if one's mind is distracted among many varied and diverse occupations. People who flit here, there and everywhere cannot devote themselves to any craft or train themselves in any activity.

2. We must then take every care to guard our hearts, so that evil desires and unworthy thoughts do not chase from our souls the desire for God and take its place; on the contrary, through continually recalling the heart, through the remembrance of God, let us engrave his form and figure as a seal on our soul in such a way that no disturbance can efface it.

3. In this way the desire of divine Love will be stirred in us, since frequent remembrance of him enlightens our soul and spirit; we will be urged and aroused to set to work on the commandments of God. In return, the love of God will be preserved in us, or even increased by these acts of charity.

This, I believe, is what the Lord wanted to show us when he said: "If you love me, keep my commandments." But sometimes: "If you do what I tell you, you will dwell in my love, as I too have kept my Father's commandments and dwell in his love." The Lord teaches us by this that the gaze which guides our action must be depend on his will. It is like a mirror in which we always look at Him; we govern our actions by the eye of our heart fixed on Him.

4. It is, indeed, like any craft which train the mind to see certain things, and the hands of the craftsman accomplish what the mind has perceived. In this work of ours we must likewise hold to one manner of seeing things, and one goal towards which we strive: to please God. Let us then direct the work which is commanded us with this in mind.

5. Otherwise, it will be impossible for us to give shape to our work, if we do not always remember the will of him who has given it to us to do; observing his will and eagerly accomplishing our work as it should be done, we shall always be united to God since we always have Him in mind.

As the blacksmith making an axe or a sickle always thinks of the one who ordered it, keeping in mind the measurements, the quality and the shape which he has ordered. He works at it continually because he remembers the directions of the one who gave him the job. He guides his hands so that the shape he gives it will correspond to the will of him who gave him the order. But if he forgets the nature and the quality of what he was told to do, he will, of course, fashion something quite different from what he was commanded to make.

6. In the same way the Christian must in all his actions put every effort and all his enthusiasm into directing his work according to the will of God who has commanded him to do it. Done in this way, his actions will be an adornment and he will carry out the will of Him who commanded him. Then he will fulfil what is written: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever else you do, do it all to the glory of God."

But if anyone turns away from the rule and breaks the observance of the law, we see by that very fact that he does not remember God.

### *3. Life in Community. Little Asceticon, Question 3.*

I think that in many ways, it is exceedingly useful to lead a life in common with those who have the same desire and purpose.

1. First of all because none of us is self-sufficient when it comes to bodily needs and food, And it is true to say that we need each others labour for things that are necessary to keep us alive. So, the foot has its own strength but lacks that of the other limbs, and without their help it cannot do its work or even exist without them; so a solitary life does not seem bearable to me, since it cannot get hold of the things it does not have and what it does have is of no use.

2. Besides, charity does not allow anyone to seek his own interest, as the Apostle says: "Charity does not seek its own interest."

3. Furthermore, each person cannot easily discern his own faults and vices, if he has no one to admonish him; he might easily become like the one of whom it is written: "Woe to the one who is alone, for, if he falls, he has no one to lift him up."

4. Moreover, the commandments can be more easily fulfilled by several people. One person alone can carry out one, but be prevented from putting another into practice. Tell me, how can he who is alone visit the sick, how can he receive guests?

5. If all of us together are the body of Christ, members of one another, we must be fitted together by the Holy Spirit to form one single body, and bound to one another. If one person chooses the solitary life, he will do it, surely, not for some motive pleasing to God or because he wants to serve others, but to satisfy his own will and pleasure. Then, divided and separated, how can we accomplish and bring about perfect harmony among the members? Far less can we rejoice with those who rejoice or weep with those who weep; separated and far away from others, one cannot even know the needs of one's neighbours.

6. Then again, no single person is able to receive all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, for the sharing out of faith and the spiritual gifts is made according to the measure of each one, in such a way that what is given to each in a fragmentary way, gathers together and unites to form one whole in the same way that all the members do so, for the building up of one body. for "to one has been given a word of wisdom, to others a word of knowledge, to others faith, to others prophecy, to others the grace of healing," and so on. Each person receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit, not for his own sake but for the sake of others. So it comes about that the grace which each one receives from the Holy Spirit is for the service of all.

It follows then that the person who lives apart and isolated, though he receives some grace, he renders it useless since he does nothing with it, but buries it within himself. Those of you who read the Gospel know what great danger this may lead to. But if this person shares his grace with others, he will enjoy the grace he has himself received, it will increase within him as he shares it with others, and he enjoys the grace of others as well.

This common life led by the saints has many other advantages, so numerous that it is not possible to mention them all now. Yet already, as we said, there is the fact that in the company of many, it is easier to preserve the gifts of the Holy Spirit than if we lived in solitude.

7. Moreover, to ward off the ambushes of the enemy which attack us from without, it is much safer and more practical to live in the company of several brothers; if someone grows heavy with the sleep that leads to death, it is easier for him to be woken up. The sinner's misdeed becomes apparent to him more easily if it is noticed or pointed out by several people, as the Apostle says: "For such a person, punishment inflicted by many is (2Cor.2:6).

8. Again, in prayer, there is no little advantage gained from several people praying with one mind: through the grace within us, thanksgiving is given to God by many people.

On the other hand, danger lies in wait in the solitary life. The first danger to which it is exposed, a truly grave one, is self-satisfaction; having no one to put his actions to the test, the solitary thinks he has reached the highest perfection.

Then, lacking experience, the solitary does not know his many faults, nor the virtue he lacks. He is no longer able to discern the quality of his actions as he has no opportunity to reveal them. How can he prove his humility, when there is no one before whom he can humble himself? How can he practise compassion if he is cut off from all companionship and from society? How train himself in patience if no one contradicts his wishes?

Someone may pretend that the teaching of the Scriptures and the precepts of the Apostles is sufficient for him to amend his ways and direct his life, but to me he is like those who talk endlessly about the art of forging iron and yet have fashioned nothing, or like those who spend all their time learning the art of architecture and have never built a house.

9. The Lord also did not think that the teaching of his word alone was enough, but he wanted to give us an example of humility when, girded with a towel, he washed the feet of his disciples. Whose feet do you wash? Whom do you care for? To whom do you make yourself inferior and last of all, since you live alone?

10. Moreover, it is said: "How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live together!" This happiness which the Holy spirit compares to the perfume of the high priest which runs down upon his head to his beard — how can it be found in the dwelling of a solitary?

This community of brothers who live in harmony is like a sports track where, to correct one's ways and reform one's life, one advances by the practice of virtue. In community meditation on the divine commandments shines resplendently. Community resembles and exemplifies the saying of holy Scripture in the Acts of the Apostles: "All the believers lived together and had everything in common"

#### *4. Obedience. Short Rules 1*

##### *1. Great Asceticon*

Talking about the Holy Spirit, our Lord Jesus Christ declared: "He will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak," and about himself: "The Son can do nothing of himself." Elsewhere he added: "I do not speak on my own authority, but my Father who sent

me has himself told me what I must say, and I know that his commandment is life eternal. The words that I say to you, I say as my Father has told me.”

Who, then, would be foolish enough to dare to express such a thought of himself? For man must be led with kindness by the Holy Spirit to walk in the way of truth.

#### *2. Short Rules 84*

What are the right dispositions for obedience? — Just as a hungry infant would suckle its mother’s breast at her slightest sign, or with the same promptitude that a man receives something essential for his life; and even with greater eagerness, for the future life is more precious than the present life. The Lord said: “My commandments are eternal life.”

#### *3. Short Rules 82*

The one who loves God faithfully and purely does not think what he is told to do is enough, but always tends to do more; he desires and longs for more than he is asked to do, even if this seems beyond his strength.

#### *4. Long Rules 28, end.*

When someone has once and for all accepted enrolment in the body of the brethren, if he is considered capable of service, then even if it seems to him that an order is beyond his strength, let him rely on the judgment of the one who commanded him more than he felt able, and show himself docile and obedient even unto death, remembering the Lord “who was obedient unto death, death on a cross.”

For rebellion and contradiction lay bare many faults; a weak faith, unstable hope and a proud character. No one, in fact, rejects an order without having first despised him who gave it. But the one who has confidence in the divine promises and hopes firmly in them will certainly not hesitate to do what he is asked, however difficult, for he knows that: “the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with future glory.”

Besides, the one who believes that “whoever humbles himself will be exalted,” will show greater eagerness than his superior expects, for he does not forget that “our slight momentary afflictions prepare for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”

#### *5. Short Rules 71*

The Apostle said: “Do everything without murmuring or discussion,” so the one who murmurs should be isolated from the unity of the brothers and his work rejected. It is obvious that such a man is sick because of lack of faith; he is not animated by real confidence in the future hope.

### **IV. Communities of Women**

#### *6. Letter 173*

Tongue and eye must be trained to be used in the spirit of the Gospel; they must work with their hands with the intention of pleasing God; their feet must be on the go and they must make use of every limb in their body as the Creator laid down in the beginning. It is important to be modest in clothing, prudent in conversation with men, frugal in food, and while possessing what is necessary to avoid superfluity.

These are only small things when one enumerates them, but it is a great struggle to put them into practice.

#### *7. Short Rules 281*

Is it necessary to force a sister who does not want to sing psalms?

If she does not go willingly to sing the psalms, if she does not show the attitude of the one who said: “How sweet is your word to my taste, better than honey in my mouth!” and if she

does not think her laziness is a great misfortune for her, she must be corrected or sent back, lest a small amount of leaven corrupts the whole pastry.

8. *Short Rules* 154

When a small number of brothers have to lend a hand to a large number of sisters and have to go a long way to fulfil their tasks, is there any danger for them?

If their only concern is to obey the command of the Lord and do whatever God wants of them, every brother who fulfils his own task is pleasing to God. Unity comes about through union of souls, the ideal of the community and the realisation of the word of St Paul: "Though absent in body I am with you in spirit."

## V. Basil Complemented by Gregory

9. *On Virginity* 2:1

The grace of virginity is found also in the incorruptible Father, now it is a truly astonishing thing (and quite outside our experience), that virginity can be found in a Father who possesses a Son and has begotten him without passion. God, the Only Son, leader of the incorruptible, is also virgin, for his begetting was resplendent with the purity and passionlessness of his coming to be; again the same paradox, virginity leads to the thought of a Son. We contemplate it too in the essential and incorruptible purity of the Holy Spirit, for in speaking of purity and incorruptibility we are describing virginity under another name.

10. *id.* 2:2

The source of incorruptibility, our Lord Jesus Christ himself, did not enter the world through marriage so that he might give proof of this great mystery by the manner of his Incarnation; only purity is able to receive God when he comes. One cannot live virginity in depth unless one becomes a stranger to the passions of the flesh. What was accomplished in immaculate Mary's body when the fulness of Divinity shone forth in Christ by virtue of her virginity, is also accomplished in every soul who remains virgin.

11. *Dialogue on the Soul and the Resurrection*

By these skins I understand the form of animal nature, with which we have been covered by our sensual life. The things that have been added to our true nature are intercourse, conception, child-bearing, nursing, food, desire for another, adolescence, maturity, old age, sickness, death.

12. *On Virginity* 12:4

What was the first man like, in his first life? He was naked, without any clothes made of skins; he looked upon the face of God with confidence and freedom and did not yet measure the good by taste and sight but found his delight in the one Lord, and for this used the help given him, as the divine Scripture implies: he had not known the woman before they were banished from paradise and she had been condemned to the pain of child-bearing for her sin in letting herself be led astray. This then is the chain of circumstances by which we left paradise, expelled with our forbears; and you can see also how it is possible now, by retracing our steps, to run once again towards that original blessedness.

13. *id.* 13:1.

Marriage then constitutes the last step in our estrangement from the life of paradise. Those who set out towards Christ must first renounce marriage, this is the first stage; then they must free themselves from the worldly drudgery in which man has become ensnared after sin; then they must divest themselves of the garments of flesh, casting off the "tunics of skin," that is the "thoughts of the flesh." "Renouncing all the shameful things which are done in secret," they

should no longer shelter under the shade of the fig tree of a bitter life, but come again before the eyes of their Creator. They should repel the temptations of taste and sight and no longer follow the counsel of the venomous serpent but the precept of God alone. But he demands that we cling solely to what is good and thrust aside every inclination to savour what is evil, for our entanglement in evil began with our refusal to ignore evil.

14. *Id.* 6:2.

In the same way that water enclosed in a sealed pipe is often pushed upwards by rising pressure there being nowhere else for it to go despite its natural tendency to fall downwards, so the human intellect, when closely channelled on all sides by the practice of continence, will be lifted up, as it were, towards the desire for the highest good by its natural disposition to move forward, in the absence of other outlets. A being in continual movement, endowed by his Creator with such a nature, can never remain stationary; if he is hindered from going after vanities, he has no other possibility open to him than to go straight to reality, since absurdities have been excluded on all sides.

15. *Id.* 5.

How can our intellect still gaze freely upon the intelligible light to which it bears a relationship, if it allows itself to be nailed down to the pleasures of the flesh, if it spends its desire on human passions?. In order to be able, then, to lift our eyes to a divine and blessed pleasure as freely and as spontaneously as possible, our soul will not turn towards any earthly things and will not take part in pleasures which ordinary life permits. It will rather turn its ability to love away from bodily good to the intellectual and immaterial contemplation of Beauty.

16. *Id.* 20:4

If anyone would believe Solomon and dwell with true Wisdom of which he says: "Take her into your heart and she will guard you; honour her, so that she may encompass you with her protection," and would take her as his life-companion, such a person will, in a manner worthy of this desire, clothe himself in a spotless garment and prepare to feast with those who find their joy in this marriage. He will do this so that he may not be shut out because he is not clothed in the wedding garment allowing him to share the feast.

It is clear that this discourse concerns both men and women eager for such a marriage. Indeed, when, according to the expression of the Apostle: "there is no longer man and woman," and when "Christ is all in all" then surely the lover of Wisdom will possess the divine object of his desire which is true Wisdom, and the soul, clinging to the incorruptible Spouse, will possess the love of true Wisdom, which is God.

17. *Id.* 13:2,3

We know that the flesh, as a result of sin, is subject to death, but the Spirit of God is incorruptible, life-giving, immortal. Just as generation according to the flesh confers on the one begotten a potency which brings dissolution, so too, surely, the Spirit confers on those who are begotten through his virtue a potency which brings life.

Bodily union produces mortal bodies, but in the case of communion with the Spirit, life and incorruptibility take the place of children in those united with him. The psalmist sang of this in his divine hymns: "he gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children." For this virgin-mother truly rejoices to bear immortal children in her womb through the Spirit, she who was called barren by the prophet because of her chastity.

18. *Hypotyposis* 13.

We have a natural and inborn impulse, a desire which bears us towards beauty and excellence. There is in our nature a love, blissful and transcending all passion, of this clear and blessed 'Image' which we ourselves reflect.

19. *Id.* 37-38

We must not, under any pretext, slacken the intensity of our effort, nor leave the arena that stretches out before us, nor be anxious about what is in the past, but forgetting all this, "stretch out to what is before us" as did the Apostle. The one who esteems this Charity and who gazes up towards the promise does not extol himself on achieving success, neither when he fasts, nor when he keeps vigil, nor when he is zealous in all kinds of virtue. Filled with the desire of God, and gazing intently towards the One who calls him, he considers all that he has done to attain Him but a small thing and unworthy of recompense. As long as this life lasts, he keeps on advancing, heaping labour upon labour and virtue upon virtue, until he appears before God, precious in his works, but never considering himself made worthy of God.

20. *Id.* 18-19.

The Spirit is rich and not jealous of his gifts; he pours himself like a torrent upon those who receive grace; the holy Apostles, full of this grace, have displayed to the Churches of Christ the fruits of his plenitude. The Spirit dwells in those who receive this gift in complete uprightness; according to the measure of each person's faith, he is their guest, he works with them and fashions goodness in each, in proportion to their zeal of soul in the works of faith.

21. *Id.* 21.

The Apostle invites us to run and concentrate all our efforts upon this combat, for the gift of grace is in proportion to the effort of the one who receives it.

It is the grace of the Spirit which gives eternal life and ineffable joy in the heavens; and it is love which, through faith accompanied by works, bears fruit, attracts gifts and rejoices in grace. The grace of the Spirit and good works labour together towards the same end, filling the soul in which they are united with this blessed life. On the other hand, separated, they bring no profit to the soul. For the grace of God is of such a nature that it cannot visit souls which refuse salvation; while human virtue is of itself incapable of raising to the life of heaven souls who do not share in grace.

22. *Id.* 57.

We must put all our zest, our love and our hope into the work of prayer, fasting and other exercises, yet remain convinced that the flowers and fruit of this labour are the work of the Spirit.

23. *Id.* 52.

Above all persevere in prayer which leads the choir of virtues, and it is through prayer that we ask God for all the other virtues. Those who persevere in prayer commune with God; they are united to him by a mystical consecration, a spiritual force, a state of soul which cannot be expressed.

From now on, taking the Spirit as guide and support they are on fire with the charity of the Lord and bubble with desire, never having enough of prayer. More and more are they inflamed with love of good and rekindle their fervour of soul, according to this word of Scripture: "Those who eat me will still hunger, those who drink of me will still thirst."

24. *Id.* 59.

When a person receives the grace of the Spirit, he is united to the Lord through it, becoming one spirit with him. Not only does he unhesitatingly exercise the virtues which have become his, without having to fight the enemy now that he can withstand the assaults of his evil design, but also — and this surpasses all the rest — he receives within himself the sufferings of the Pas-

sion of the Lord and is filled with a happiness greater than all the lovers of life on this earth who rejoice in the honours, glory, and power conferred by human beings.

The Christian who has received grace, and who, by the gift of the Spirit and the good conduct of his life, progresses towards the 'fulness of knowledge,' the glory, the satisfaction, the joy which surpasses all pleasure is to be hated for the sake of Christ, to be persecuted, to put up with every insult and humiliation, for his faith in God.

The hope of such a person in the resurrection and in the good things to come is total, and so all the torments, the anguish, the sufferings, whatever they may be, even the cross itself, will constitute his well-being, his repose and a pledge of heavenly benefits.

Since it is in heaven that with the strength of the Spirit as your help you are building an edifice of power and glory, behave as citizens of heaven. Bear with gladness all your labours and your struggles, using them for the foundations of this building so that you may be judged worthy to become the dwelling-place of the Spirit and co-heirs with Christ.

## 9. Basil Explanation of the Text

### The Starting Point

#### *Preface to the Moral Rules*

1. Trinitarian introduction: "God" is the Father.

"Favour": the word *philanthropia*, ie. through friendship for humanity.

"Knowledge of the truth." The word will recur later: the root of evil is ignorance of God and of his commandments.

2. "Harmony" = *Symphonia*, symphony. The words "harmony/discord" (*diaphonia*) run like a leit-motiv throughout this passage.

"For which Christ died." 'For' = *yper* = 'For the sake of.' The death of Christ dominates history.

"Flock": Basil was a pastor.

"the Anomeans": the most extreme and rigorous branch of the Arian heretics..

3. "Scales of a balance" = a contemporary rhetorical image. Basil was the son of a 'rhetor' (rhetorician, orator) and a rhetor himself.

"True and only God and King." A reference to the royalty of Christ; cf. St Benedict: prologue and ch. 61.

4. "Bees": this too is a rhetorical image; "their queen" = in Greek *basileus*: king.

5-6. Here again we have the pair: *sumphonia/ diaphonia*. The "animals which have no reason" = in Greek *alogoi* (without the Logos), compared to "madness" (unreason) a few lines higher.

7. Again *sumphonia/diaphonia*, and the reference to Christ the King.

8. "Through whom all things were made." Christ is creator: a favourite idea of the Greek Fathers.

"proclaims" = *bointos* = cries

St Basil's profound insight that the obedience of the Christian has its source in the Trinity.

9. The reference to Acts found in most of the monastic legislators; one senses a nostalgia for the primitive Christian community.

"his own will": self-will, an expression probably invented by Basil, and much used by posterity.

The end of this verse shows well that the obedience of the Christian, based in theory on the Trinity, must also refer to the Trinity in practice.

10. This shows Basil's rigorism, for him the commandments are one whole. They hold together; to disobey one is to disobey them all — an idea from Stoic thought.

11. Here is his conclusion: the fruit of his reflection on Scripture.

We find once more the term: "self-will," and the Pauline expression: "pleasing to God," dear to Basil. We will meet them again later.

Another reference to the Trinity.

## 2. The Point Of Arrival

*Moral Rules 80 (end)*

1. "Firm belief" = *plerophoria*.

Basil's argument with regard to *Romans*: if considered objectively, is beside the point; Paul is speaking of his conviction that no food is impure, and not of theological faith. But subjectively, it is right in the anti-heretical context which Basil is dealing with. The conclusion seems a bit extreme, but is made clear by SR 1:

Among the actions or words which we find in Holy Scripture, some are mentioned as the object of an order from the Lord, others are passed over in silence. As far as those in Holy Scripture are concerned, no one is allowed to do something if it is forbidden, or not to do it if it is commanded, for the Lord has willed it once for all and he has said: "You will observe the commandment that I have given you; you will not add or take away anything." Concerning those which are not laid down precisely, the apostle Paul gives us a rule when he says: "Everything is permitted to me, but not all is profitable, everything is permitted to me, but not all is edifying." So no one must look for what pleases himself, but what is useful for others. This doctrine is found again here: "Not to seek one's own interest" = forgetfulness of self, gift of self. "But the interest of the one whom we love": for Paul's "that of another" Basil substitutes "one whom we love," and he insists: "in both soul and body."

2. The topic of baptism: plunged in the death and resurrection of Christ. At the end, a reference to man in the image of God.

3. Purification through asceticism prepares us for the eucharist. To the quotation from Paul (2Cor.7:1) Basil adds: "and the love of Christ" The eucharist must lead to prayer, and this must be translated into deeds.

4. "Righteousness that surpasses that of the pharisees." The law of Jesus is a law of love. There is all the difference here between law and charity; one can finish with the law, fulfil all its prescriptions and think oneself free of it. But God would not be God if one could wipe out one's debt to Him. This is why the demands of charity are infinite, and why the righteousness of the Christian must surpass that of the pharisee. There is no limit to the love of God. Love demands a continual advance, always walking forward. Here we have the reference to *epektasis* — "always more," which we often meet in the Fathers. In Basil, it has the character of concrete engagement which is special to him.

## 3. The Basic Principles

*Charity. The Little Asceticism, Question 2.*

1. Let us say straight away that Basil was strongly influenced by Stoicism. He took themes and ideas from this philosophical movement. These are fragments taken from the Stoic system which serve to express ideas which he takes from Scripture. For Stoicism, the world is a

living thing, like God, with whom it is confused. To live, for human beings, is to be in harmony with universal life. In so doing man will be in the truth; while on the contrary to be in disharmony with universal life is to be in error.

This idea of “strength sown within us” also comes from Stoicism. Before Basil, we meet it in the philosophy of the Christian apologist Justin.

This strength urges us to good. If one works with this strength one is virtuous, if one goes against it one is depraved. We find here, as in Antony, the idea that nature is good.

The Greek text, which is later, took up this idea, clarifying what “the school of God’s commandments” is which will nurture this seed. But for Basil, this school is listening to the Gospel, it is not the monastery as we find in Benedict (cf. Prol.45).

2. Basil applies this principle to love. This fragment gives us the plan of what follows: “good,” “parents,” “favours.” We shall love God then, because he is good, because he is our Father, because he showers us with favours.

Basil’s reasoning is presented in a syllogism: we have received strength from God which predisposes us towards love. But God is supremely lovable, for he is beautiful and good. Therefore we must love him and it is inexcusable if we do not love him. This might appear to confuse the natural will with free will, for though that which we do well through a free decision is, by nature, ours, the inverse is not true: we do not always do freely the good which we love ‘by nature.’ But Basil takes his stand on the hypothesis of perseverance in the fear of God. The commandments are effective on condition that one observes them: the love one has for God lead us to love him the more, on condition that one is aware of this natural love and cultivates it in oneself. The seed of charity does not germinate and grow unless one cultivates it in “the school of the precepts of God.” The text should be understood in this perspective.

3. Now follows one of the most beautiful pages in the work of Basil and indeed in Christian literature. We find again here Origen’s theme of the “wound of love.”

God is good and beautiful: the first motive for loving him. And from the beginning, to inspire us to love him, Basil lets us catch a glimpse of the joys found through the flowering of love, as will Benedict, more unobtrusively at the end of the Prologue and in chapter 7.

4. God is our Father and our Mother!

5-8. Basil deals here with the gifts of God; first as Creator, then as Redeemer, who by his Incarnation and his Passion has won for us the gift of heaven where we will be divinised.

9. The conclusion is well balanced. Basil leaves no room for laxity: “God does it all, why bother ourselves?” nor for Pelagianism: “man is free, it is he who effects his salvation.” On the contrary, man receives (passive aspect); but he must bear fruit through asceticism (active aspect). Two complementary aspects.

*Mindfulness of God. Little Asceticon, Question 2.*

1. This is the next part of the *Little Asceticon*. After the theory, comes the practice. First a general principle: every skill requires concentration.

2. Then the application to ourselves, to our craft which Basil describes later as: “the craft of pleasing God.” First the negative aspect, defensive: guarding the heart, dear to monks of the desert. Then the positive aspect: if we guard our hearts from bad thoughts, it is to engrave on them the remembrance of God.

3. An important text dealing with Basil’s conception of asceticism, and also of continual prayer and prayer during work. One can schematize this text in the form of a circle. Basic to his thought is the text of St Paul: two poles. Basil adds a third, remembrance: love leads to remem-

brance; this leads to the desire to be pleasing to the loved one by following the commandments. Moreover action, to be correct, must conform to the will of God, it must remain anchored in obedience. This takes for granted that one remembers the order received and him who gave it. We shall see later that one ascends to love through the remembrance of God.

4. The *scopos* of Cassian which was purity of heart becomes here the intention to “please God.” The monk is one whose craft or work is to be pleasing God.

5. Earlier, we had a descending movement in the circle of love. Here we climb up again: the remembrance of what is pleasing to God guides our actions, and to do well we must keep the remembrance of God in our thoughts, which will intensify our love. This, for Basil, is the way of continual prayer. Asceticism leads to contemplation.

To help us to understand it better, Basil gives us the example of the blacksmith. Here again we find the circle of love. It is a circle which is never closed in this life; we should rather speak of a spiral.

6. Now the conclusion: the love of God must be translated into deeds; it leads to the glory of God, and to our glory as well: “his actions bring him enrichment.” The glory of God and our glory go together. In one of his homilies to the people, Basil comments on the word of the psalmist: “I exalt you”: “This means that God is exalted by those who are aware of his greatness, who know rightly who he is, and who live for the glory of God. For the one who knowingly pursues his own blessedness — the one who sanctifies himself -, exalts God. As for one who does the opposite, it is not even possible to say at what point he degrades God, in the measure at least that a person can do so.”

The love of God and true love of self thus go together; we shall be glorified in the measure in which we have given glory to God.

### *Life in Community*

1-2. There is no very clear plan in this extract. Basil begins with one sensible remark on the practical level: we need other people. Then he rests his thought on the first of the basic principles: charity to our neighbour, which is one with charity to God.

3-5. Common life is useful for correction (3); for practising all the commandments: Cenobites complement each other (4). We are members of Christ and must help one another (5).

6. An original idea: God is so great that one single person cannot receive all his gifts, all his graces. On the other hand, the gifts given to one person also belong to others.

7. The idea of fraternal correction comes up again.

8. A return to the idea developed in 6, under another aspect: God is so great that one single person is not sufficient alone to thank him — idea of thanksgiving dear to Basil. There is a similar passage in the homily on Psalm 33: “One mind alone, the meditation of a sole person is not sufficient in the short time he has available, to understand the magnificent works of the Lord. For this the efforts of all those who have learnt to live in peace must be united.”

Then Basil begins a long criticism of the life of the anchorite.

9-10. A fine conclusion in three parts: the cenobitic life has the example of the Lord (9); the support of Scripture and the example of the primitive community (10). The last paragraph is a beautiful commendation of the common life.

### *Obedience*

4. A text to be compared with the chapter in the Rule of St Benedict on obedience in impossible things.

Observe that the three theological virtues underlie this whole text. Obedience, for Basil, is something very fundamental.

#### IV. Communities of Women

6. “Tongue and eye must be trained to be used in the spirit of the Gospel.” We have here again the idea that the Gospel is the Rule of the Christian. The prescriptions which follow are but practical applications of this Rule. Practising the Gospel is the way “to be pleasing to God.” Again we have the theme dear to Basil; we saw earlier that for him this defines the monk. The same idea comes again in text 8.

#### **Basil complemented by Gregory**

##### *On Virginit*

9. Consecrated virginity is thus considered by Gregory to be a participation in that virginity which he discerns in God within the relationship of the three Persons.

“An astonishing thing (and quite outside our experience),” is a translation of the greek word: *paradoxos*, in English ‘paradox.’ Here the paradox is virginal fatherhood and fruitful virginity. In the writings of Gregory of Nyssa we often find this paradoxical character of the experience of divine things expressed by two contrasting words: luminous darkness, learned ignorance, vigilant sleep, sober inebriation. This is what is called an oxymoron (from *oxis* = pointed and *moron* = blunt).

“He has begotten him without passion.” For the Greeks, generation implied suffering, a qualitative change by way of alteration: that is to say, a birth. Whence we have the paradox, as God is impassible, he cannot suffer change.

“Leader of the incorruptible” = choir master or choreographer, leader of the dance.

10.

“Enter the world...” here means the Incarnation.

To welcome God, we must be like Mary, a stranger to the passions of the flesh. Virginity of the spirit is meant here, which is more important than bodily virginity.

12.

“In his first life” means in the life before sin and the fall. In the previous text we found that the “clothes made of skins” stood for what we have in common with the animals whose skins became the clothes of fallen man..

“Confidence and freedom” is *parrhesia*, that confident familiarity of the child towards his Father which, according to Gregory, was man’s before the fall.

13.

The “worldly drudgery” is doubtless the pre-occupied search for well-being through work in a life where all is vanity.

“The shade of the fig tree” is an allusion to the quickly falling leaves of a life spent in the search for earthly glory (glory, honours, pleasure); “bitter life”: before they are ripe, figs are bitter. Life on earth is bitter in contrast to life in heaven which will be ‘ripe and succulent.’

After detachment from evil and passing things, comes attachment to the true good.

14.

This comparison has already been made by Gregory of Nazianzan and will be taken up by John Climacus (26th degree).

“In continual movement”: man is a being of desire, in search of infinite good, by his very creation. This idea gives rise to the theme of *epectasis*. St Augustine has the same idea: “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” Man either chases after vanity, or he seeks the true good where he will find rest.

16.

“Men and women.” Clement of Alexandria had already emphasised the equality of the sexes in their search for God: “The same virtue concerns all of us, men and women alike” (*Pedagogue* 1,IV:10) So too Origen in his Commentary on the Canticle (III:9) takes up the word of St Paul: “In Christ there is neither male nor female” (2Cor.8:9). Gregory of Nazianzan too in his funeral prayer for Gorgonia cries: “Indeed feminine nature has surpassed masculine nature in the struggle for salvation, proving that there is a difference of body between the two but not of soul.”

Note the vocabulary of passionate love: (*eros*, used in the last line, of true Wisdom), and its derivative *erastheis*, the object of desire (*epithumia*), clinging (*proskoletheisa*), possess.

17.

Mary is not named in this text; she is behind the quotation of Psalm 112, and the context of the strict parallelism between bodily fruitfulness and spiritual fruitfulness.

Continence is fruitful through participation in the Spirit, as the virginity of Mary was made fruitful by the Spirit.

### *The Hypotyposis*

18.

The same idea is found in Rule 2 of Basil in which the love of God is presented as inborn in man; Gregory gives it a dynamic nuance. By nature man, a being of desire, is drawn towards the Beauty which is God. This is so because he is created “in the image of God.”

19.

Following on the preceeding text is the theme of *epectasis* dear to Gregory: the soul never ceases in its approach to and discovery of God who is infinite. This theme is developed particularly in the *Life of Moses* and in the *Homilies on the Canticle*. Here it is the pledge of both generosity and humility.

20.

It is “according to the measure of each person’s faith” that the Spirit comes to each and the he works and “fashions goodness in each in proportion to their zeal.” The text is an eloquent expression of synergy. Later Pelagianism would place human effort before grace. Gregory teaches that human effort is tied to the power of the Spirit who works within the person.

21.

The Spirit is thus present both at the beginning and the end of the work of the person’s efforts: faith itself is a gift of the Spirit. But the response of the human person, whose chief characteristic is freedom according to Gregory, conditions the extent of the gifts of God.

23.

Here again on the subject of prayer, we can emphasise the dynamism of Gregory and its underlying theme of *epectasis*: God is infinite, the soul can never have its fill of contemplation. The rest of the text shows that here are to be found: “the first-fruits, the sign of eternal felicity which the souls of the saints enjoy in eternity.” Although in Western theology we are at “death ‘fixed’ in the degree of charity we have reached; according to Gregory, even the life hereafter will be a continual progress in charity.

24.

The Passion being the summit of life in Christ, for the monk, the lover of Christ in Gregory's eyes, communion in the passion of Christ is the gauge of future joys. It is of course in the Spirit and in his strength that this joy can be tasted.

#### Table 8

The tutor can judge the advantages and limits of these two presentations.

The first (Western) gives a better account of the origin of man as a rational animal, by nature mortal; but it presents man as two-fold, unaware of the spiritual part of his nature.

On the other hand the second part, according to the approach of Irenaeus and Origen, is a three-fold anthropology: body, soul and spirit. But it shows the final destiny of man as possessed by him since his creation. It connects death with sin, although death is in the nature of man.

## **10. Pseudo-Macarius.**

### **Plan:**

#### **I. THE AUTHOR & HIS WRITINGS**

- 1) The author
- 2) Was he a Messalian?
- 3) His writings

#### **II. HIS TEACHING**

- 1) A cenobitic framework
- 2) Anthropology
  - a) Man
  - b) The spiritual combat
  - c) Humility
- 3) Christ and the Holy
  - a) Christ
  - b) The Holy Spirit
- 4) Prayer
- 5) The summit

### **I. The Author and his Writings.**

#### **1) THE AUTHOR**

The anonymous author who was thought at first to be Macarius the Great, founder of Scete, was in fact a spiritual writer who lived in the region between Mesopotamia and eastern Asia-Minor in the second half of the fourth or in the beginning of the fifth century. The name of Symeon of Mesopotamia, a promotor of Messalianism, has been suggested because there are in these writings questionable opinions and ideas very close to Messalianism. The attribution to Symeon, however, rests on shaky premises. However it may be, Pseudo-Macarius is surely a profoundly spiritual person with a good knowledge of human nature. He was very well educated, had learnt much from his own milieu and from his reading and contacts with others. His writings reveal him as an imaginative person, with an artist's eye, who thinks pictorially rather than con-

ceptually as he treats of the Bible, nature or society, but possessed of a very clear idea of the theology of the Trinity. He is clearly also a good teacher who can make sublime doctrine come alive. His rather large body of writings has had a great influence on posterity.

According to these writings, he was the head of communities of ascetics. There are indications which would lead us to believe that he practised a sort of ascetic exile. He seems to have some knowledge of Basil's writings as there are certain similarities in their works both in vocabulary and ideas; moreover, a text of Gregory of Nyssa seems to speak of Mesopotamian ascetics, "Like Abraham they have left country, family, and the whole world, and keep their eyes fixed on heaven. their lips are vowed to silence. and they have a remarkable power over spirits." We have seen too that Gregory's *Hypotyposis* or *De Instituto* is a parallel version of Macarius' Great Letter. Probably Gregory's paraphrase was intended to put the writings of Macarius through the mill once more in order to distance it from Messalianism.

## 2) Was Macarius a Messalian?

We have already met the Messalians in connection with the Apophthegmata (the Euchites), and in the chapter on Basil. But it is a fact that there are in the writings of Macarius similarities with Messalian propositions which had already been condemned by the Synod of Side (between 380 and 400) and subsequently by the Council of Ephesus. In Pseudo-Macarius' exchanges with the brothers, which he conducted, discussions bearing on Messalian ideas have come to light. But Macarius is far removed from the crude deviations of the sect as reported by Theodoret and obtained by trickery from the old man Adelphios: "Holy baptism is of no use to those to whom it is administered; persevering prayer alone is able to put to flight the demon dwelling in us. When the demons have been expelled by prayer, the Holy Spirit then comes and manifests his presence visibly and to the senses, freeing the body from the movement of the passions and completely liberating the soul, which is no longer inclined towards evil. It is no longer necessary thereafter to fast in order to tame the body nor to submit to guidance in the way of righteousness. The person who has obtained this gift is not only freed from the uncontrolled movements of the body but also sees the future clearly and with his eyes looks on the divine Trinity." (Ecclesiastical History IV, 10)

Macarius is far from such extravagance; in fact he often corrects extremist Messalians. Certainly there are in his works some Messalian tendencies, but they are mild and, even if textual coincidences may be found, these must be read in the general context of his whole work, which is balanced. Macarius' position is everywhere nuanced, moderate, and he acted as a moderating influence within the Messalian movement as a whole.

## 3) His Writings.

Macarius' writings consist of some one hundred discourses or homilies dispersed in four large Greek collections and one Arab collection, but the greater part of his letters appear in more than one collection at once. Collection II, the Fifty Homilies, is the best known. The "Great Letter," which we have already mentioned is the first item in Collection I and in Collection IV. Having already dealt with Gregory's *Hypotyposis*, a repeat of the "Great Letter," we shall give in the Texts only extracts from the Homilies.

## II. Macarius' Doctrine.

Immediately on opening the works of Macarius, one is struck by three rather characteristic features:

- His insistence on evil as a present entity which one must fight against; whence the theme of spiritual combat present throughout. In affirming the liberty of the soul, Macarius is opposed to Manicheism, but he has been influenced by the movement all the same and, like the Messalians, he is obsessed by evil.
- Secondly, his insistence on prayer directed towards Christ and towards the Spirit.
- Thirdly, characteristic of his writings is the place held by the Spirit. This links him with the Syrians, above all when he speaks of the Spirit as 'Mother.' We shall take these points up again, illustrating them by the texts.

## 1) A Cenobitic Framework

The doctrine of Pseudo-Macarius is set within a loosely cenobitic framework. Like Basil, he prefers the word 'Christian' or 'brother' to that of 'monk.' Charity is the reason why living in harmony is expected of the 'brothers.' They separate themselves from the world and renounce marriage: for Macarius these are two synonymous expressions which have a spiritual finality. The organisation of the community seems quite flexible; it depended on the needs of each of the brothers, who differed in age, temperament, experience and spiritual gifts. Each had to co-operate according to his abilities for the good of all (Text 1). We can surmise from this fine text, which remains valid for all time, that for certain brothers in Macarius' community prayer doubtless had a preponderant role but they took advantage of it to look down on the rest.

The text goes on: "What is more important than all else is constancy in prayer." But Macarius does not forget that interior renunciation is the condition of prayer; he goes on: "We ought to engage in the fight and make war on our thoughts." Elsewhere he shows that we ought to renounce our souls by handing ourselves over completely to God, which in practice is done through obedience: to be "like a redeemed slave." (Great Letter)

Homily 56 also is devoted to the monastic life. Macarius begins by giving the two meanings of the word 'monk': to be alone exteriorly, and to be alone interiorly. "Let his mind itself become monkish, remaining alone before God, and no longer letting in evil thoughts." He then affirms that the purification of heart that that supposes, springs from man's free choice and for that one needs to learn the meaning of: "Take up your cross and follow me." There follow the subjects dear to the Desert Fathers: patience, *anemimna*, *nepsis*, which enable us to attain that prayer which will bring us charity. He ends with a description of the ups and downs in the life of grace (Text 2).

Homily III, 10:4 underlines the serious nature of the consecrated life. It is not just a question of wearing a habit, but of acquiring a new heart, without which we cannot become divinised (Text 3).

## 2) Anthropology

### a) Man

Of course, we find traditional ideas from Origen in Macarius' anthropology: man is made up of three parts: body, soul and spirit (Text 4). He is created in the image and likeness of God, and Macarius takes up again the principle of homonymy developed by the Alexandrine: there are two men in every man, the exterior man and the interior man, each having its own meaning. For Macarius, the first is the 'old man,' the second the 'new man.' Like Origen also, to designate the principal faculty of the soul, he uses either the word 'intellect,' or the word 'heart' in the biblical sense, especially Collection II. In speaking of the body, Macarius is opposed to Manichean tendencies affirming that the body is not evil in itself: it is "the lovely tunic of the soul" which

should take care not to tear it with the thorns of worry or scorch it with the fires of lust (II,4:3-4) destined to be transfigured.

Created in the image and likeness of God, man has kinship then with him, as the Cappadocians had noted (Text 5). It is this which constitutes man's dignity (Text 6). "Be conscious of your dignity" is an exclamation like that which will burst from the heart of St. Leo later, but is already found elsewhere: "Recognise that you are a noble creature, O man, recognise your dignity and your worth: you are a brother of Christ, a friend of the King, bride of the heavenly bridegroom." (II 27:1). Yet there is nothing in common between the nature of God and the nature of man (III 26:8, see below).

But man has fallen, Adam first and we afterwards (Text 7). The rest of the text shows that Christ has come to restore man's lost image: "He renews and remakes a heavenly image and brings forth a new soul. Thus Adam recovers his sway over death and his lordship of creation." As with the Greek Fathers, the Incarnation is the instrument of our salvation, for in assuming our nature, in taking our body, the Saviour has blended them with the Holy Spirit so that our nature might receive "the heavenly soul" (II 36:6). Salvation then is obtained through the contact of the divinity with the humanity. By his body which came into contact with death, Christ-God destroyed death: "It is by means of a dead body that our enemy was put to death" (II 52:2). But we have to co-operate with this salvation. First, by believing in order to be healed (Text 8), then by weeping in order to receive the Spirit (Text 9). (See also III 26:3,5, below).

### **Homily II, 5: The True Christian**

1-3 People in the world are complex beings, troubled by ceaseless and unquiet thoughts, by dread, by fear, by unease and by their own cravings.

4-5 On the contrary, after many a struggle and after a long time, Christians do achieve stability, freedom from agitation. They are at peace.

6 The dew of the Spirit has found its way in, their heart has been smitten by love for Christ, the King of heaven. Straining towards him, they free themselves from all love of the world, break every earthly tie.

7 But they are few who break every tie with the world in this way.

8-9 To do it, they have to renounce their own will, renounce themselves.

10 For our love is what weighs us down.

11 If we love what is earthly and fleshly, our love keeps us chained, preventing us from taking flight towards God.

12 On the contrary, the person who directs all his love towards God and renounces himself, comes through all difficulties and trials.

13 For our love is what weighs us down. It is a burden, or it is light according to what we love: the things of heaven or the things of earth.

14-17 Different examples show that renunciation, self-stripping contribute to our salvation.

18 Conclusion: love God alone, strip oneself of all earthly love.

19 This is why asceticism is necessary, whereas we would prefer the rewards without having to make the effort.

20 Within trials, within sufferings borne with patience and in faith, are hidden our glory and the restoration of our heavenly inheritance.

21 By means of the spiritual combat, the practice of the virtues and of faith, we build ourselves a heavenly house to replace that of our body. It is the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us which brings this about.

22 Let us struggle on then so as not to be found naked when we shall have put off our body but, through our sharing in the Holy Spirit, be reclathed with the treasures we are garnering now. The trees which are covered once more with leaves and flowers in the spring are an image of Christians at the resurrection.

23 This is why April is the most important month for the true Christian. It is the time of resurrection when our bodies will be glorified by the power of the Holy Spirit who already dwells in them.

24 Moses prefigured the glory with which the Holy Spirit will clothe the bodies of the saints.

25 In the resurrection we shall have the wings of the Holy Spirit to bear us whithersoever the Spirit wills.

26 Whence the benefit of asceticism which brings about our sharing in the glory and holiness of the Spirit.

#### *b) The spiritual combat*

The spiritual combat finds a place in this fallenness of man redeemed by Christ, for Christ himself had to fight to redeem sin (Text 10). Macarius still depends on Origen for this idea of the spiritual combat, present everywhere in his work. But if in Origen man could, by reason of his freedom, consent either to the pull of the flesh or to that of the Spirit, in Macarius who reifies evil, man is poised between grace and evil; his free-will will make him incline towards the one or the other. Man then must do violence to himself (Text 11). Discernment is necessary to carry on this fight (Text 12). If a person fights to the best of his ability, if he does violence to himself, God will make his efforts fruitful (Text 13). Homily 5, an outline of which we give on the previous page, stresses the role of asceticism and of the spiritual combat in the life of the 'christian.'

#### *c) The virtues, humility*

The spiritual combat is a factor of growth, and opens up the possibility of overcoming vice and acquiring virtue. All the virtues hold together — a stoic conception prevalent in Basil, and also found in Macarius (Text 14). Virtue is the opposite of vice. As in the Desert Fathers, the most difficult vice to overcome is pride, so very special attention is given to the virtue of humility. Macarius often comes back to it. Humility makes good sense (Text 15). It is characteristic of the Christian (Text 16). Humility often finds expression in tears, which are the nourishment of the soul and the sign of its desire (Text 17). A fine text (Text 18), sums up rather well the process to be undergone: faith, obedience through asceticism, the spiritual combat, should culminate in humility.

### **3) Christ and the Holy Spirit.**

These two are generally closely linked in the thought of Macarius.

#### *a) Christ*

We spoke above of the Incarnation. If Christ has come to save us, it is in order to bring us the Spirit, who will mould us into his likeness. Macarius' language is not strictly theological even if at the beginning of the Great Letter, he makes a profession of faith that is close to that of

Constantinople (381) and on occasion expresses a Christology that is accurate and carefully phrased (I,10:4). What he aims to do is awaken the love of the Saviour and the desire to imitate him. Indeed, Christ became incarnate and ‘mingled’ with his creatures so that we might imitate him (Text 19). This Incarnation is reproduced now in those who seek Christ (Text 20). It is clear from this text that in order to speak of Christ, who adapts himself to the needs of each, Macarius takes up the ‘epinoīai’ (thought) of Origen. Thus is Christ born spiritually in the soul (Text 21). Through his Passion he will seek out death, dispute with it and snatch the souls it holds in its grasp (III, 11). This Passion too is offered for our imitation (Text 22).

### *b) The Holy Spirit*

We are struck, on reading the Homilies, by the place accorded to the Holy Spirit and his relationship with Christ. This feature links Macarius with the Syrians. The images used to describe the action of the Spirit are manifold. One occurring most frequently is that of wings. “The souls of the saints possess these wings even now to enable their minds to fly up towards heavenly thoughts” (II,5:25). At the resurrection they will “cover and clothe the naked bodies anew and take them up to heaven” (id.). Another image with a platonic flavour: “Holy souls are impelled and guided by the Spirit of Christ, who holds the reins” (II,1:9). The Spirit is also heavenly nourishment, salt and heavenly yeast (II,24), heavenly treasure, heavenly light. He is a garment, for the soul is poor and naked when it is bereft of communion with the Spirit (II,18:3 & elsewhere). This good Spirit and friend of men is at once dew (II,5:6) and a fire which sweeps away the thorns (II,15:53).

It is he that teaches us true prayer: he collects our scattered thoughts, lifts them up to heaven, becoming as it were the wings of the soul (III,18:2). He teaches us humility and comes to pray in us (Text 23). It is in the Spirit that divine life unfolds; he assimilates us to Christ, etches in us the image of Christ (II,30:4-5). Thus communion with the Holy Spirit is sometimes union with the Spirit, sometimes a nuptial union with Christ in the Spirit. It is he that wounds the soul with love for Christ.

We give here by way of example an outline of Homily 18, “The Treasure of the Spirit.”

### **Homily II, 18: The Treasure of the Spirit**

1 Christ and the Spirit are a treasure within, enabling us to practise all the virtues and thus increase our spiritual riches.

2 Let us beg God to give us the treasure that is his Spirit, without whom we are needy and naked.

3 The possession of the Lord, this true treasure, enables us to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, to accomplish all justice, to observe all the commandments.

4 Example of a rich person who has all the resources to give a banquet, and of a poor person who has to borrow everything, pay it back afterwards and, when he has done so, finds himself as poor as ever.

5 Also, those who are richly endowed with the Holy Spirit, draw upon their own wealth to do good to others. But the person less well endowed borrows from the spiritually wealthy person and, after he has communicated these goods, remains poor and naked. He is neither happy nor filled with the joy of the Spirit.

6 We ought, then, to pray God to let us find his own riches in our heart: the true treasure which is Christ together with the vigour of the Spirit. After having found it, we shall try to be of help to others by explaining the heavenly mysteries.

7-9 Those who bear Christ within, giving them light and repose, are guided by the Holy Spirit, by grace working within them. The action of the Holy Spirit in the soul is described under the following images: a banquet, repose of the bride within the arms of the bridegroom, angelic lightness, divine intoxication, the gift of tears, intense joy, ardour in the combat, repose, possession of wisdom.

10 The person who is united with the Spirit becomes all light, all eye, all spirit, all joy, all gentleness, all happiness, all charity, all compassion, all goodness and all sweetness.

One characteristic of Macarius with regard to the Spirit, is to present him as a Mother, which demonstrates still more his dependence on Syrian spirituality. In several places in Collection II, he depicts the Christian as a child (15:26) and even as a quite small child (31:4; 45:7) calling for his mother (Text 24).

But in Collection III, this mother is the Holy Spirit. The subject is treated at length in Homily 27. After a passage very like Text 24, in which he presents the soul as a very small child who can do nothing much but cry for his mother, Macarius continues (Text 25).

#### 4) Prayer.

According to this last text, prayer is a cry to God, therefore the expression of desire. But we know enough of Macarius now, his insistence on asceticism, the spiritual combat, to be sure that in his scheme of things prayer will not be isolated from good works. In his Great Letter, Macarius presents it as being the crown of the virtues: “The crown of all good zeal and the summit of all virtuous practices is perseverance in prayer, thanks to which we can each day obtain the other virtues by imploring them of God.” This cry to God which is prayer, Text 25 explains — and the same thing is found in quite a few other places in the Homilies — attracts the Spirit, who gives his grace in order to help us practise the virtues. Macarius also opposes the extremist Messalians who consider that prayer is sufficient and so dispenses with the works of virtue (Text 26). He also reproves those among them who think that prayer should be externalised by loud utterances. He shows them, on the contrary, that such externalisation should be excluded as it can only disturb other people, and that the essence of prayer resides in one’s inner attention (Text 27). In the next text, Macarius distinguishes between two kinds of recollection, one that might be called active, the result of personal effort, and the other, the reward of such effort, brought about passively by God’s action. We have already seen this in Text 13; the same idea is taken up again here (Text 28).

Everything can be a help to prayer: the acknowledgement of our ills and our poverty (Text 29) just as much as the contemplation of natural reality (Text 30). To the purified soul all things are pure and all things lead to God (Text 31). Then, continual prayer — the continual remembrance of God — is reached (Text 32).

Once purified, the soul becomes fit to receive within itself the prayer of the Spirit. It is a higher degree of prayer, therefore, that Macarius distinguishes from ‘natural’ prayer and which he calls ‘true prayer.’ In it the Spirit teaches the soul the mysteries of God directly (Text 23).

#### 5) The Summit

Macarius speaks with an air of personal assurance when he describes these high degrees of mystical union (Text 33). He explains in Homily 17 that the friends of the king, used to the customs of the royal palace, are not discomforted when they become kings. “Just so Christians who are being prepared to reign in the age to come, will not be discomforted since they have come to know the secrets of grace beforehand” (4). He goes on (Text 34).

But perfection is not completion: these sublime graces whet the appetite of the soul even more, for God is infinite while man is a finite being who can never exhaust the Godhead. The theme of *epektasis* dear to Gregory of Nyssa, is also found in Macarius (Text 35). There is no worse danger than saying, “It is enough, we now need nothing more.” For “the Lord is infinite and unattainable and Christians do not venture to say that they have attained him, but remain humble, seeking him day and night” (II,26:17). Or again (Text 36).

This is because we are still on earth and this perfection attained here by the saints is but a foretaste of what will be granted then when, after the resurrection, “the risen body will be covered with a new and divine garment and nourished with heavenly food” (II,12:14).

We give on the next page the third outline of a Homily, taken this time from Collection III, in which we find quite a few of the topics singled out in this course.

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### **Homily III, 26: The Destiny of the Christian**

1 Christian hope does not look to this earth. Its object is greater than the earth, greater than heaven. It gives itself to the pursuit of the Good and the Beautiful.

2 The Good, the Beautiful, is the Lord, the inheritance and the life of the Christian. Before him, man is free. God asks of him faith and love.

3 God alone can free us from sin. He frees from sin those who believe in him and love him. To believe in the Lord, to love him, depends on you.

Example of a sick person who, though unable to move, is on the look out for the doctor. So also, even though the soul can do little, it can always call on God.

4 Another example of a sick person, but seen from a different angle: just as a sick person,

laid low by fever, cannot work on the land, so “the one who has been judged worthy of

the heavenly fire of the Spirit of life and who is possessed by the power of the divine fire, is hindered from giving himself to the works of sin, drawn as he is by love and affection for the divine Spouse.”

Greatness of the soul: at once in the body and outside the body, it is destined to be the dwelling of God, and is made in his image.

5 Return to the idea developed in 3, but taking a prisoner as example. The soul is in a prison. As a prisoner can only cry out for someone to open up for him, the soul can only cry to the Lord and wait for the advent of his grace.

6 When the soul clings to the Lord, the Lord “takes pity on it, loves it and clings to it.”

“The soul becomes one spirit with the Lord, one only alloy, one only thought.”

The soul has entered into possession of the Lord in heaven, the Lord has taken possession of the soul on earth.

7 The greatness of the soul, created by God to be a bride who can be united with him and become one spirit with him.

8 Nevertheless, what a difference between the Creator and the creature! And yet, in his love and infinite mercy, God has willed that we be united with him, partners with him, that we be his bride, noble and pure, and destined endlessly to rejoice in his presence.

## **10. Pseudo-Macarius Texts**

### **1. II, 3:1-2**

The brothers should live together in great love whatever they are doing, whether praying, reading the Scriptures, or working at some task, in order to obtain that mutual charity which is the foundation of all. God will then be pleased with their pursuits and those who pray, those who read and those who work can build each other up reciprocally in sincerity and simplicity....

The brothers should be loving and cheerful towards each other as they go about their tasks. Let the one who is working say of the brother who is praying: “The treasure which my brother gathers belongs to me too, as it is held in common.” For his part, let the brother who is praying say of the brother who is reading, “The profit which my brother draws from his reading enriches me as well.” And the brother who is working should say in his turn, “The service which I render is a help to everybody.” For just as the members of the body though many form but one body and help each other, while each is engaged in its own task — just as the eye sees for the whole body, the hand acts for the other members, just as the foot walks sustaining them all, so ought the brothers to behave towards each other.

Let him who is praying not judge the person who is working, saying, “Why is he not praying?” He who is working should not judge the person praying, saying, “He is lingering over his prayer while I am working.” Let him who is serving not judge the others, but let each one, whatever he is doing, do it for the glory of God. The person reading will experience joy and love for the person praying if he says, “He is praying for me.” And he who is praying will think of the one working, “What he does, he does for the common good.”

### **2. II, 56:7**

Sometimes through the effect of grace his soul rejoices interiorly, for the Saviour can be both thoroughly demanding and kind. But often, too, consolation goes and grace allows Satan to buffet him. Satan rouses his evil passions, makes him sleepy, subject to acedia and atony (out of sorts) and lots of other things that cannot be described. All this happens, so that in his pain and sorrow he may call on the Lord with steadfast faith and tire himself out in prayer. Then once more, if it sees him persevere and truly seeking God’s mercy, grace frees him from all vexations of the enemy. Then it makes his heart merry, as was indeed intended, and purifies it of all the guile of the enemy. Indeed, it desires that man should not obtain grace except at the price of struggle and effort; it does not want a man to experience only sweetness so that his mind may not become lazy but rather vigilant and committed to the war against Satan.

### **3. III, 10:4**

You will find those who have renounced the world, but whose soul is sick. There are many who wear a habit exteriorly but their understanding is weakened, and they wander aimless-

ly for ever. They need to acquire a new heart, a heavenly understanding in the interior man, a divine soul within the soul, a body in the body, so that they may become a twofold being. You give your trust: trust will be given you in return; you love: you will be loved in return; you acknowledge God: he will acknowledge you in return; for over and above his nature, man receives a reality which is foreign to him, a good that is heavenly, and he becomes a twofold being.

4. II, 32:6

Man was created in the image and likeness of God; he has two eyes, two eyebrows, two hands, two feet. If it should happen that he only has but one eye, one hand, one foot, he is incomplete. If a bird has only one wing, it cannot fly. It is the same with human nature: if it is not united with the heavenly nature and in fellowship with it, it is not what it ought to be; it remains naked and defective, reduced to its own measure, and full of uncleanness. Is not the soul called precisely the temple and dwelling-place of God, and the spouse of the King? Indeed it is said, "I will dwell with them and walk with them." This is why God was pleased to come down from the holy heavens and assume your rational nature, assume your flesh which was taken from the earth and mingle them with his own divine Spirit, so that you, yes, you, earthy as you are, should receive a heavenly soul.

And when your soul enters into communion with the Spirit and the heavenly soul penetrates your own, you are in God a perfect man, his co-heir and son.

5. II, 45:5

God created the heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon, the waters, fruit-bearing trees and living things of all kinds. But in none of them does God find rest. The whole of creation is subject to him, but he has not established his throne in it nor entered into union with it. His delight has been only in man. He has entered into communion with him and in him he finds his rest. Do you see now the kinship of God with man and man with God? This is why the wise and prudent, who have surveyed the whole range of creatures, fail to find their rest save in the Lord and why the Saviour took his delight in none of these creatures save only man.

6. II, 15:43-44

Christians know that the soul is more precious than all created things, for man alone has been created in the image and likeness of God. Look at the heavens, how great they are! And the earth, and all the great and precious things it contains! Nevertheless man is more precious than they, for God's goodness has been reserved for him alone. And yet, the monsters of the sea, the mountains, the wild beasts appear outwardly to be greater than man. Be aware, then, of your dignity. See how precious you are whom God has placed above the angels in coming himself to help and redeem you.

God and his angels came to save you. The King, the Son of the King, held council with his Father, and the Word of God was sent, clothed with human flesh, his divinity hidden, so that like might be saved by like, and he gave his life on the cross. Such is God's love for men. He who is immortal chose to be crucified for you. See, how "God has so loved the world as to give his only Son for it." "How with him, will he not give us everything?" The soul, then, is great indeed. What value it has in the eyes of God! For God and his angels seek its fellowship with them and in their kingdom!

7. II, 11:5

Adam had been created pure by God in order that he should serve him, while the other creatures had been given to him for his service. He was indeed appointed king and lord of all creatures. When the evil word approached and conversed with him, he did not at first entertain it except outwardly with his ears, but then it penetrated into his heart and took possession of his

whole self. When he was thus reduced to captivity, the whole of creation which served him and was subject to him, became captive with him. Through him death came to reign over every soul; through his disobedience the image of God in him was completely effaced.

8. II, 20:8

If the Lord came on earth and was so concerned for bodies destined to corruption, how much more concerned must he have been for the immortal soul created in his likeness? It is because of our lack of faith, because we draw back, because we do not love him with all our heart and do not truly believe in him, that we have not obtained spiritual healing and salvation. Let us believe in him, then, let us really draw near to him so that he may speedily bring about true healing in us.

9. II, 20:1

If a person be despoiled of the divine and heavenly garment, that is to say, the power of the Spirit, let him weep and implore the Lord so as to receive from heaven the spiritual garment with which to cover his denuded soul with the divine energy. For he who does not wear the garment of the Spirit is covered with the great shame of his disreputable passions.

10. I, 55:3

Let us be like the anvil which does not yield under the hammer, no trace of softness, carelessness or boredom under the blows of affliction; if we are struck, let us overcome our adversary by patience. For our Saviour went through the world under the rain of blows, insults, persecution, mockery and spit; finally, impious men subjected him to the vile punishment of death on a cross. He bore it all for our salvation, leaving us a living example so that those who really believe in him and would become co-heirs with him might advance on the same way of temptation, affliction and death. Through great suffering, through dying finally on the cross, he emerged the victor. Crucified, he has crucified and, dying, he has condemned and put to death sin committed in the flesh. He has destroyed the hostile powers.

If we endure with alacrity and courage every infliction and assault by the Evil One, 'even unto death,' then we too shall overcome the adversary through our faith, patience and hope in the Lord; once proved worthy, we shall be set free. We shall be filled with the holiness of the Spirit and become heirs of eternal life, which comes from him.

11.53:15-16

The person who would truly be a Christian must submit to toil and a struggle, not of the flesh but of the mind, against his thoughts. With all his strength of will he must accustom himself to rest in thoughts that are good and pure, to direct his mind to what is right, at every moment awaiting in faith the visit of the Spirit. By means of such a struggle, he will arrive at purification so that he can turn to his own edification whatever he sees in the world, bringing pure thoughts to bear on everything....

He that would always escape the thoughts suggested by the Evil One should be sure to provide himself with a shelter and refuge in the Lord, ceaselessly keeping in his heart the thought of him and trusting in him. Thus he will combat the evils which overwhelm us, whether they be from the external world or from the evil powers within, and altogether get rid of bad habits or sinful dispositions. Through such combat, while holding on to their hope in God, have the Fathers won his favour.

12. II, 4:1

Those who would lead a strictly Christian life should above all concentrate all their attention and energy on exercising the soul's faculty of understanding and discernment. It is in acquiring a sure grasp of good and evil, in distinguishing always between pure nature and those pas-

sions contrary to nature, that we shall find it possible to lead a straightforward and upright life. Using the faculty of discernment as a kind of eye, we shall be able to live without getting bound or mixed up with evil suggestions; we shall then be judged worthy of receiving divine gifts and become worthy of the Lord.

13. II, 19:3

When any one draws near to the Lord, he must at first do violence to himself in order to accomplish what is right even if his heart is not in it, and always hope for God's mercy with invincible faith. Let him do violence to himself in order to love without love, to be gentle without gentleness, to be compassionate and merciful; let him do violence to himself in order to bear contempt, to remain patient when scorned, not to be angry when he is held of no account or disgraced, according to the saying: "Beloved, do not seek revenge." Let him do violence to himself in order to pray without the ability to pray spiritually.

When God sees how he is struggling and doing violence to himself, although his heart is not in it, he will give him true spiritual prayer, true charity, true gentleness, sincere compassion, true goodness — in a word, he will fill him with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

14. II, 40:1

About which activity to prefer or put first, know this, beloved: all the virtues stand together and form a spiritual chain, as it were. The one is linked to the other, prayer to charity, charity to joy, joy to gentleness, gentleness to humility, humility to the will to serve, the will to serve to hope, hope to faith, faith to obedience, obedience to simplicity. The same thing is true for the opposing camp in which the vices stand together no less: hate is linked to anger, anger to pride, pride to vain glory, vain glory to weak faith, weak faith to hardness of heart, hardness of heart to negligence, negligence to soft living, soft living to boredom, boredom to want of patience, want of patience to the love of pleasure.

15. I, 54:5,3

If God wished to enquire into and draw up a balance sheet, nothing would be found there to man's credit. The wealth and all the goods of the world, thanks to which each one can do some good, all these belong to God. Who has made the earth and all that is in it? Who created the body and who made the soul? If God wills it, the earth causes the plants to grow; if he does not so will, nothing grows. If he wills it, you enjoy good health; if he does not so will, you are not well. Why, then, should man take credit to himself for this state of things, or be proud of it or pretend to be something? Everything is in God's hand; man possesses everything because he has received it; he possesses it as a gift. Being itself he possesses as a gift, and to a large extent he finds his peace thus: the soul acknowledging God with a true and enlightened understanding and a sure knowledge, fully informed by faith, and having learnt how things really stand, attributes to God everything good which it does, all the labours it endures for him and all that it understands and knows; it refers everything to him, does not think that it has achieved anything whatsoever but ascribes to God, itself, and all that it has.

16. II, 15:17

If you see someone standing tall and puffed up with pride because of graces received, note well that, even if he works miracles and raises the dead, if he has not got a humble and lowly opinion of himself, is not poor in spirit and despised, he is a prey to evil without even realising it. In spite of his miracles, he is not to be trusted.

For it is a mark of the Christian who is pleasing to God to try and remain hidden from the eyes of men and, even if he has all the treasures of the King, to conceal them and say often:

“They do not belong to me; someone else has confided them to me and will reclaim them when he feels like it.”

But if someone says, “I am well-off, I have all I need; my fortune is made, I need nothing more,” he is not a Christian but deluded and a tool of the devil.

Once one has savoured God, desire for him becomes insatiable. The more one tastes, the more one eats, the more one is hungry. Those who have experienced this burn with a passionate and wholly spontaneous love towards God. The more they strive to progress and advance, the more they think themselves poor, indigent and wanting everything. They say: “I am not worthy even to have the sun shining on me.” Humility like this is the mark of the Christian.

17. II, 25:8

The tears which spring from a really great affliction and from an anguished heart, which is both in possession of the truth and burns with interior ardour, are nourishment for the soul provided by the Bread which came down from heaven. This bread was shared with Mary, as she sat in tears at the feet of the Saviour, as he himself testified: “Mary has chosen the better part which shall not be taken away from her.” What precious pearls these blessed tears! What docility and eagerness to hear! What courage and wisdom! What keenness of spirit, inspiring a passionate love of the immaculate Spouse! What burning desire of the soul for the God the Word! What intimate communion of bride and heavenly bridegroom!

18. II, 19:1

He who would draw near to the Lord, would be deemed worthy of eternal life, and become the dwelling-place of Christ, would be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to bear the fruits of this same Spirit and obey purely and without reproach the precepts of Christ, should in the first place firmly believe in the Lord, then commit himself without reserve to his commandments, completely renouncing the world so that his mind may be no longer occupied with anything visible. He ought always to persevere in prayer, continually on the watch, in confident expectation of the Lord, for his coming and his help and always keeping this as his one goal in life.

He ought further to do violence to himself because of the sin in him, in order to accomplish all that is right and observe the commandments of the Lord. Let him then be humble before all others, see himself as the meanest and worst of all, not seek honour, praise or glory from men as the Gospel says, but have continually before his eyes nothing but the Lord and his commandments and desire to please none but him in complete meekness of heart, as the Saviour says, “Learn of me because I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

19. II, 4:9-10

The infinite, inaccessible, uncreated God, in his gentle, infinite and inconceivable goodness, took a body to himself. He became small, as it were, with respect to his inaccessible glory, so that he might be united with his invisible creatures, I mean the angels, and the souls of the saints, to enable them to share in the life of the godhead. By nature the angel, the demon, the human soul, though subtle certainly, are all bodies, but in their substance, properties and form, they are subtle bodies in keeping with the subtlety of their nature, while our bodies in keeping with their substance are dense bodies. The soul, which is subtle, lays hold of the eye by which it sees, the ear by which it hears, the tongue by which it speaks, the hands — in a word, the whole body. Grasping the body thus, the soul is mingled with it and through it performs all its vital activities.

In the same way, the infinite and incomprehensible God, in his gentle goodness made himself small and, coming down from his inaccessible glory, took the members of our body which he likewise laid hold of. In love and meekness, he changed himself, took a body, mingles

with holy souls who are pleasing and faithful to him, grasps them and in the words of St Paul becomes one spirit with them.

20. idem, 11

In his indescribable kindness, his meek and incomprehensible goodness, He who is as he wills and what he wills, can transform himself, become small and, taking a body, assimilate himself to holy, worthy and faithful souls to enable them to see the Unseen and to touch the Untouchable by means of the subtle nature of the soul. In this way these souls become conscious of his sweetness and, through the experience of his kindness, revel in the rays of an unspeakable delight.

When he wills, he becomes a fire which burns up all evil passions coming from outside, as it is said: "Our God is a consuming fire." When he wills, he becomes inexpressible and unimaginable rest so that the soul may rejoice in the divine repose. When he wills, he becomes joy and peace to warm and coddle the soul.

21. III,28:2,1.

Let the wise virgin realise that she must bear Christ within herself as Mary did; as Mary bore him in her womb, you ought to bear him in your heart. You will then be able to sing and understand the psalms, saying, "So are we in your presence: we have conceived, we writhe as if we were giving birth; we have not given the spirit of salvation to the earth." (LXX).

22. III, 6:4

You that live in poverty, draw down the wealth of heaven thanks to this very poverty. In penury or in poverty do not lose your ardour. Keep as your model and as your goal the Lord, who trod the same path.

When you are tired and your body is in pain, remember the Lord's body, how he was struck by Pilate and how he suffered moving from place to place. When you have no roof over your head, remember that the Lord of creation when he was here on earth, said, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." When you walk, remember that the feet of the Lord were covered with dust all the time that he was on earth, except once when he was seated on an ass in order to fulfil the prophecy. When your eyes fill with tears, remember that the Lord wept for your fall, imploring the Father with cries and tears that you might escape death. When you are mocked, think of the blows and the spitting that were his lot and hold fast in your humiliation. Likewise reflect, when you lie on the ground, that it is no harder than the crown of thorns that was placed on his head.

23. II, 19:9

The Spirit himself will teach us that true prayer which is at present beyond our power even when we force ourselves to it. He will teach us true humility, which we are incapable of now even by doing violence to ourselves. The same goes for compassion of heart, gentleness and all the commandments of the Lord. He will teach us to observe them in truth without difficulty or duress, for the Spirit is able to fill us with his gifts. If we obey in this way the precepts of God, through the action of his Spirit who alone knows the will of the Lord, if this Spirit renders us perfect in him and if he is perfected in us, purifying us from all spot and stain of sin, he will present our soul to Christ like a beautiful bride, pure and blameless. Then shall we rest in God, in his kingdom, and God will rest in us through endless ages.

24. II, 46:3

If a small child is unable to do anything for itself, unable even to go towards its mother on its own feet, it will at least roll itself over continually, weeping and crying as it searches for her. The mother will have compassion on him, delighting to see her infant trying to get to her

with such a determined effort and so much anguish. Since the child cannot go to her, it is she herself, because of the great longing he has for her and because she too is constrained by love for him, who will pick him up in her arms, utter endearments to him and tenderly nourish him.

God, who is our friend, acts in the same way towards the soul who comes to him, burning with desire. More than that, impelled by his deep love and the gracious goodness proper to his nature, he unites himself closely with its understanding, becoming one spirit with it, as the Apostle says. Indeed, if the soul clings to the Lord, and if the Lord, moved by love and mercy, comes to unite himself closely with such a one willing to dwell uninterruptedly in his grace, they will then become one spirit, being and understanding fused in one.

25. III, 27:4

Those who have not advanced beyond the silliness of the world remain a prey to passion; held in the grip of evil, they are incapable of doing what they must to obtain life. If they experience distress and seek God's help, bestir themselves for the sake of eternal life, with tears and pleas call on their heavenly mother, the Holy Spirit; if they seek no solace in the world and abide only in union with the Spirit and in their longing for the nourishment she gives, that excellent heavenly mother will draw near to these souls that seek her. She will lift them up in her life-giving arms, warm them with the spiritual and heavenly food of delicious, desirable, holy, pure milk, so that they will recognise the heavenly Father, and grow each day into spiritual maturity until they arrive at the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God.

26. II, 53:3

In God's sight, it is not necessary to spend the entire day on one's knees in prayer. Undoubtedly it is an excellent occupation; it is really a good thing to pray and altogether to persevere in prayer. It heads every other occupation in importance, but if not accompanied by the virtues to be found in the other members, prayer is a dead thing. Prayer is pleasing to God if accompanied by good works: not hating one's brother nor speaking against anyone, being humble not superior, not thinking that we are somebodies, but rather fulfilling all the works of justice. If we seek the Lord thus in all sincerity and holiness, he will come to our assistance without delay. If we do not seek him in this way, what we do will be regarded as unsubstantial as a dream and our prayer being superficial will avail nothing before God.

27. II, 6:3

The true basis of prayer is to keep guard over our thoughts; we should carry it out in such great calm and peace as to give no scandal to others. People will be edified by the one who has received the grace of prayer from God and prays quietly to the end, "for God is not a God of agitation, but of peace." Those given to loud cries during prayer behave like coxswains shouting at the rowers to keep time; they cannot pray everywhere, not in churches nor in the villages, perhaps only in the desert can they do it as they like. Those on the other hand who pray quietly, no matter where they may be, edify everybody.

28. II, 31:2

Let the soul collect and discipline, as one would unruly children, the thoughts which sin has scattered far and wide; let it bring them into the house of the body while it fasts and loves, waiting for the Lord to come and give it the grace of true recollection.

29. III, 16:8

Let us then approach him, the gate that leads to life, and knock that he may open unto us; let us ask to receive him, the Bread of life. Let us say to him, "Lord, give me the Bread of life so that I may live, because I am horribly racked by the pains of an evil hunger and am on the way to

perdition. Give me the lightsome garment of salvation to cover my soul's shame, for I am naked, deprived of the power of your Spirit, and ashamed of the indecency wrought by my passions."

And if he says to you, "You had a garment, what have you done with it?" answer him, "I fell among thieves who robbed and left me half-dead, then they stripped me and took my garments. Give me the oil of gladness and the wine of spiritual joy so that I may apply them to my wounds and live again. Heal me, restore me to health, for my enemies, those fearful robbers, have left me lying, half-dead." Happy the soul, needy and wounded as it were, who prays tirelessly and ceaselessly, with perseverance and with faith, for it will receive what it has asked for; it will obtain healing and an eternal remedy and will be avenged of its enemies, the sinful passions. God has promised it, and he is faithful.

30. II, 33:4

When the Lord sees that the soul musters its powers as well as it can, that it seeks and watches for its Lord night and day and calls upon him as he has commanded without ceasing, then shall he do what is right by it, according to his promises. He will purify it of its sins and take it to himself, a bride without spot or blemish.

If you believe all this is true, as indeed it is, keep a watch on yourself, see whether you have found your guiding light and the true food and drink that is our Lord himself. If you have not found them, seek them night and day. When you see the sun, think of seeking the true Sun because of your blindness; When you see the light, turn your eyes towards your own soul to see if you have found the good and true Light. For visible things are a shadow of the true realities of the soul.

31. II, 53:15

By engaging in a struggle with his thoughts, a Christian can arrive at such a degree of purification that he can turn whatever he sees in the world to his own edification. He can think purely about everything. Worldly riches and pleasures will make him think of true and heavenly riches, of glory and unfading delights, of which those are but a shadow. Indeed, this world is an image of the heavenly and eternal world.

Let us then turn to our advantage whatever we see within, so that we do not give up meditating on the good, for it is possible successfully to accomplish what is good through struggle, sweat and spiritual travail. Indeed, God renders all things truly pure.

32. II, 43:3

The Christian must always keep in mind the thought of God. Indeed, it is written, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart." It is not only when trotting off to the chapel that he loves the Lord. The thought of God still remains with him and he still loves him tenderly just as well while walking, talking or eating. It is said, "Where your heart is, there your treasure is also." In fact, that to which our heart is attached, to which our desire draws us, that is our God. If your heart ceaselessly desires God, he is the Lord of your heart.

If after having professed renunciation and embraced poverty, exile and fasting, a monk remains attached to himself, to the things of this world, to his house, to love of his parents, he may have left the world by the front door, but he has returned and falls back into it by a concealed door.

33. II, 8:1

A person's heart may be filled with the power of God the moment he has fallen to his knees. His soul rejoices in the Lord as a bride in her husband, or as Isaiah says, "As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so will the Lord rejoice over you." It can happen that, having spent the whole day seeing to his duties, he gives himself for an hour to prayer. The interior man is en-

raptured and gently transported to the infinite depths of that other world, so much so that his mind is totally exiled from this one, raised up and ravished to the heights. At moments like these, he completely forgets his earthly concerns; he is filled and held by thoughts which bear him towards divine, heavenly, infinite and inconceivable realities, towards marvels human lips may not utter. Such is the experience, that he would fain ask that his soul might depart from this life during this moment of prayer.

34. II, 17:4

Those who even now are enraptured and transported to the world to come contemplate its beauty and its wonders. We are still on the earth, but “our homeland is in heaven”; as far as the mind, the interior man, is concerned, we live and dwell in that other world. Just as the physical eye, if it is healthy, always sees the sun clearly, so the perfectly purified spirit sees the radiant glory of Christ continually; it is with the Lord day and night just as the body of the Lord, united to the divinity, is always with the Holy Spirit.

However, people do not reach this stage in a moment; they do so through many trials, tribulations and struggles. There are some of them in whom grace and evil dwell and abide at the same time: two kinds of citizenship, one of light and the other of darkness, both exercise their influence on the heart.

35. II, 10:1

Those lovers of truth and of God who, fired by a great hope, long to put on Christ, do not really need the guidance of others. They cannot bear, even for a single moment, to be without their heavenly desire and impassioned love of our Lord. Being completely and unreservedly nailed to the cross of Christ, they sense they are progressing spiritually day by day towards the nuptial chamber. Smitten by the desire of heaven, athirst for righteousness and all the virtues, they are consumed by an ardent and insatiable desire for the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Even if, because of the grace of their faith, they be judged worthy of understanding the divine mysteries, of sharing in the joy of heaven, they still place no trust in themselves and do not imagine that they are somebodies. On the contrary, the more spiritual gifts they receive, the more insatiable their desire for heaven, the more ardent their thirst for God. The more they discern spiritual progress in themselves, the more hunger and thirst they have to receive grace and grow in it. The more richly endowed they are spiritually, the more they think themselves poor, for their spiritual desire for their heavenly Spouse has become insatiable.

36. II, 10:4

The true lover of God and of Christ, were he to accomplish ten thousand acts of righteousness, would consider himself to have done nothing at all, so insatiable is his desire for God. Even if he had worn out his body with fasting and vigils, he would act as if had not yet begun his toilsome pursuit of virtue. In spite of the various gifts of the Spirit, the revelations and the heavenly mysteries of which he has been deemed worthy, he is conscious, in his limitless and insatiable love of the Lord, of not having done anything yet. Throughout the day, he experiences hunger and thirst in his great faith and love, and he perseveres in prayer, insatiable when it comes to the mysteries of grace and the acquisition of virtue.

His soul is smitten by the impassioned love poured into him by the heavenly Spirit, who continually awakens in him by the action of his grace, a burning desire for his heavenly Spouse. This desire urges him to aspire to the mysterious and indescribable communion with him in its fullness, through the sanctifying action of the Spirit. The countenance of the soul is unveiled and, face to face with his heavenly Spouse, it fixes his eyes on him in a spiritual, inexpressible light. The soul becomes one thing with Christ in unshakeable faith. Conformed to his death, she looks

forward avidly and ceaselessly to death for his sake and in the invincible hope that the Spirit will free her completely from darksome passion and from sin.

Then, purified by the Spirit, holy in body and soul, he is judged worthy of becoming a pure vessel, able to contain heavenly perfume and to receive the true King, Christ himself. He is now rendered worthy of eternal life, having become even in this life a pure dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit.

## 10. Pseudo-Macarius Explanation of the Texts

1.

We have here, then, the word “Brother” to designate the monk. Macarius often uses the word “Christian,” since the monk takes the Christian life seriously and tries to live it to perfection, e.g. Homily II, 5, the outline of which will be found on the third page of the course, is addressed to the Christian who has left the world. Which does not mean it should not be an ideal for the Christian in the world!

Note the sense of fraternal charity and of the unity of all in the one body, the Body of Christ, which this text exemplifies.

2.

‘Atony’ is a term very close to *acedia*, and indeed is a result of *acedia*: *acedia* = breaking off of the relationship with God and so the forfeiture of grace and of divine succour. The result is a loss of spiritual tone (*a-tony*).

Grace returns when one comes back to God through prayer and supplication. An important theme in Macarius: cf. further on, the comparison with a small child who can do nothing but cry to his mother.

At the end, the mention of vigilance, *nepsis*.

3.

“So that man may become a twofold being” refers to the notion of the exterior man and the interior man, the earthly man and the heavenly man. It is summed up in Homily II,15:22: “If a person loves God, God’s love becomes part of him. Once a man has believed in him, God endows him with heavenly faith as well, and man becomes a twofold being.” And again, “The Lord thought it well for the Christian to have two souls, one created, and the other heavenly coming from the divine Spirit.” (52:5). The idea recurs in the following text (4).

5.

The kinship of the soul with God, due to the fact that alone among creatures, man has been “created in the image and likeness of God,” implies that he must seek him, his final end.

7.

Temptation comes when one listens willingly to the word of Satan. However, one remains free. It is when man welcomes it into his heart and allows it to penetrate him through and through that he commits sin and so is reduced to slavery and become subject to death.

11.

Mention of the “thought of God,” trusting in him, which helps in the struggle against thoughts.

13.

For Macarius, the spiritual life has two phases. First there is the active, even wilful, phase in which the brother must fight the spiritual fight, thus proving to God that he is really seeking him. But when we have abandoned our will to God, and given proof of our desire for him by our

perseverance, God himself intervenes and gives us what our efforts have been unable to bring about: true prayer, true love, true meekness.

This idea also lies behind Texts 18 and 23.

19.

Macarius takes up an Origenist idea, according to which, God alone is incorporeal. All other creatures, being created, have either a material body, like man, or a “subtle,” “ethereal” body. Macarius compares the way in which the soul, a “subtle” body, is united to our earthly body and that in which God, who is incorporeal, is united to holy souls by means of the Incarnation.

23.

The rest in question is rest in God, the reward of humility, promised by Jesus: “Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” The soul recognises that it is dependent on a God who is love. This rest will find its fulfilment in the vision of heaven. As God is rest, he will rest in us just as we shall rest in him.

But Macarius also recognises an evil rest in which the soul fails to recognise its real benefactor and rests in the goods of this world (II,45:3). Those who know the rest given through grace reject rest in the pleasures of the world.

24.

Here we have a passage in Macarius, and not the only one, in which we find the teaching of the ‘little way’ of St. Therese of Lisieux. It is our weakness which most moves the heart of God. If in the spiritual life, our efforts seem unfruitful, we can always cry to God, plead our helplessness and beg his help.

We can see here the importance of grace for Macarius, who has sometimes been accused of semi-pelagianism! Grace is the expression of the motherhood of God, as the following text shows even more clearly.

26.

Macarius’ thought is very balanced: he upholds the importance of prayer, but this is no more than a day-dream without good works.

34.

This is the theologia of Evagrius, but more concretely expressed by someone who has lived it.

## 11. Augustine (354-430).

### Plan:

- I. AUGUSTINE’S MONASTIC LIFE
- II. ST AUGUSTINE’S RULE
- III. OTHER MONASTIC WRITINGS
- IV. CONCLUSION

### I. Saint Augustine’s Monastic Life.

Augustine is, with Origen, the most important Father of the Church, as much by the quantity and value of his writings as by the influence they exercised. Here we shall deal not so much with his life as with those writings which concern Augustinian monasticism.

Augustine was born in 354. Antony was already at the end of his life; he died two years later. Pachomius had been dead for 8 years, Basil for 26 and Jerome for 7. The life of Antony, written in 357, the Pachomian texts, the letters of Jerome on asceticism and the monastic life only became known in the West around 375. In his youth, Augustine did not know any of these writings. He was a young man who needed to be surrounded with friends, who longed for happiness, friendship, wisdom and beauty.

Augustine tells the story of his life in the *Confessions*. Focusing on what is important for his monastic life; he 1. ST says that during his studies, the reading of Hortensius by Cicero led him to the search for wisdom. His childhood faith did not stop him, for he set reason over against faith; holy Scripture seemed to him to be too simple in style, and its contents too obscure. Then he met some men who promised to lead him to wisdom without the need for faith: the Manicheans.

He followed their teaching for many years, first as a professor at Carthage, then in Rome. There, he began to see more clearly what Manicheism really was: his disappointment made him veer towards scepticism. Then he was appointed professor at Milan where he got to know Ambrose and came in contact with Platonism. Through Ponticianus he learned of the existence of the monks of Trèves and the Life of Antony. This meeting was decisive for Augustine's quest; he was converted by what took place in the garden, this led to his baptism and guided him towards the monastic life. For Augustine there was a close link between becoming a Christian and becoming a monk.

| Augustine's Monastic Journey |     |                          |
|------------------------------|-----|--------------------------|
| Date                         | Age | Event                    |
| 384                          | 30  | Conversion at Milan      |
| 387                          | 33  | Baptism                  |
| 388                          | 34  | Went to Africa           |
|                              |     | Monastic Life at Tagaste |
| 391                          | 37  | Priest at Hippo          |
| 396                          | 42  | Bishop                   |
|                              |     | Rule                     |
|                              |     | Monastery of clerics     |
| 430                          | 76  | Death                    |

Augustine was converted in 384 and baptised in 387. At this time he heard about a group of ascetics living near Milan. Immediately after his baptism he retired to Cassiciacum, a property lent to him by a friend. There with his mother, his brother, his son and some friends he formed a small group dedicated to a quiet life; they undertook light work in the fields, they read and commented on the works of Virgil and engaged in philosophical discussions on three themes which,

in Augustine's eyes, were the most important: certitude, happiness and evil. Augustine did not consider seeking truth except within a circle of friends.

The following year he returned to Africa.

On the way he passed through Rome, where he came into contact with groups of ascetics living in and near the city. He described his discovery in: *The Customs of the Catholic Church*, making a connection between the monastic life and the holiness of the Church. It was through these communities and through Jerome that Augustine came to know Eastern monasticism. In spite of these various influences, he did not try to imitate what he had seen or heard about. The monasticism of Augustine had no other real source than Augustine himself. It is the fruit of his genius, of the way in which he was gripped by reading the Bible and of his vocation as a bishop. The Rule which he soon began to write is one of the three 'Mother-Rules.'

On his return to Tagaste, Augustine made the family home available to a community of friends and pious laymen. The common life which he led with them and his son Adeodatus was similar to the way of the East: a definitive common life based on renunciation of property as its basic tenet. He envisaged study and literary activities as a part of the life, thus early integrating asceticism with learning and letters. On the other hand, the community was near the local church which was much disturbed by the people of Tagaste. Augustine then went to Hippo to look for a place to found a monastery.

It was not a good idea, for he was nominated a priest by the Christians, and assistant to the bishop! Conscious of the good he had lost, Augustine obeyed, crying: "If men refuse to serve the Church, who will be able to help her bring forth children?" To compensate him a little, and enable him to lead his monastic life, the bishop gave him a garden near the church in which to set up his monastery. Some of those who were with him at Tagaste came to join him there.

As bishop, Augustine wanted to continue his monastic life; he organised his clergy into a community. Near the 'garden monastery' of laymen led by Alypius, there was a monastery of clerics.

Augustine died in 430, having founded monasteries all over North Africa.

## II. Augustine's Rule.

### Plan of the Rule

- I. Basis and essential conditions of monastic life: common ownership.
- II. Prayer
- III. Food
- IV. Guarding of the senses and chastity Fraternal correction.
- V. Compendium: use of possessions: clothes, books, baths, sickness.
- VI. Fraternal relationships, forgiveness.
- VII. Obedience and the superior.
- VIII. Conclusion.

It has long been asked what was St Augustine's rule.

There are in fact three texts: the *Ordo monasterii*, the *Praeceptum*, Letter 211. The *Praeceptum* is now considered to be the rule of St Augustine. He wrote it for the garden monastery at the time when, having become bishop, he left it to found the monastery of clerics. Letter 211 was

the Praeceptum adapted for nuns. The Ordo monasterii was written by Alypius for the monastery at Tagaste; only the first and last lines are from the hand of Augustine.

At first sight, the rule of Augustine is essentially practical, as in fact it is. We find there the usages of contemporary Roman life combined with the leisure of the philosophical life as lived at Cassiciacum. Added to this there was a rigorous asceticism, but flexible and adapted to the strength of each individual. However, if one digs a little deeper, we find there a spirituality described in few words, which must be completed by the other monastic works of Augustine.

The theology of the monastic life in this Rule is found at mainly the beginning and the end. The first two verses of the first chapter and the penultimate verse of the last chapter form a sort of bracket and establish the basis of the monastic life: the brothers must be: “turned towards God” (I:2), and they must “observe all these precepts with love, as lovers of spiritual beauty” (VIII:1)

There is an insistence on contemplation: for Augustine, the observance of the Rule is oriented towards contemplation: the love of the beauty of God, as he shows in this text (Text 1). The monastic life has no meaning if it does not turn the soul towards God. Augustine underlines this at the beginning of his Confessions: “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” The monastic life should offer the necessary conditions for the full flowering of this desire for rest in God which every human person has within him.”

You will find the most beautiful passages of the Rule given in the pages of Texts (Book 2, no.2). numbered according to the recognised editions; they are commented on in order here.

I. Here again, the second verse and the last (8) of this first part of the Rule form a sort of bracket underlining one characteristic of the Rule: the ‘gathering’ of the brothers forms a single temple of God: therefore they must be ‘of one mind’ in the ‘house’ where they dwell, which is a symbol of the spiritual temple which they themselves form.

Their life in a house. This house is the monastery, the place of the ‘gathering’ of the brothers, an image of the great Church where Christians are one in the Body of Christ. This physical unity must become a spiritual unity: “one soul and one heart turned towards God.” This house is also each one of us, as is shown at the end of the paragraph: “this God whose temples you have become.” This implies that each one of us must become one with the rest; one sole person in the house, transformed into Christ, as Augustine has written elsewhere (Text 2). Common life goes very deep.

Such is the beginning and the end of the presentation of monastic life. The rest is an account of the essential condition for community: common ownership. Note the reference to Acts to support this necessity by the example of the first Christians. We find it again elsewhere: (Text 3). Common ownership is prompted by the love of Christ.

In order to bring this unity about, Augustine gives us two forms of renunciation straight away: renunciation of possession: poverty (3-5); renunciation of self: humility (6-7).

There were considerable differences between the rich and the poor in the social life of Antiquity. Augustine insisted on poverty. We have passed over the passage where he dwells at great length on the way to reduce these differences which can harm the unity of the community.

Here is a summary:

“The rich should give up their riches.

The poor should not seek to become rich.

They must not be proud because they have been given all that they need

The rich ought to be glad to live with the poor, and find it a source of pride.

Material riches and poverty are nothing without spiritual poverty which both must strive for. This spiritual poverty is humility.”

The conclusion, (8), which can be bracketed with (2) shows that common ownership and humility are the cement which bind the living stones together to make both the community and each individual member a temple for the Lord.

All these ideas which we have seen in this introduction are summarised in a passage of the commentary on psalm 131. (Text 4).

II. Augustine goes on immediately to speak of prayer. This indicates the importance he gives it. Prayer too will form the community. It is not a treatise on prayer, but a warning against certain abuses. However the passage is dense: perseverance in prayer; the place of prayer: the oratory (Augustine is perhaps the creator, in the West, of the conventual oratory of which St Benedict speaks in ch. 52 & 19) — Like St Benedict too, he wants the words and heart to be in harmont. We find the same remark elsewhere. (Text 5).

III. On food. The Manichees hated the body. Augustine, a converted Manichee, did not want to despise the body which is created by God and is servant to the soul.

Augustine knew by experience that, as a result of sin, the passions have become a snare to man. They set themselves up against his reason and overpower it. The concern of the Christian then, is never to be led astray by the passions, but to master them by mortifying the flesh.

Mortification has a positive goal. Fasting and mortification are the expression of the human aspiration towards God. “When one sets aside the joys of the flesh,” he said somewhere, “one receives spiritual joy.”

This renunciation ought to serve the main goal, the *union of hearts*. Human love would not allow the brothers to have a single soul turned towards God nor to rejoice together in possessing eternal blessings.

In practice Augustine prescribes fasting according to health (3). Thus he suggests that the degree of fasting be assessed for each person individually, while maintaining the principle, even for the weak. We find in this subject the effects of social inequality noted in I,5-7. In the following paragraph (4) we find the same with regard to the sick.

IV. Going out (4-7). Asceticism must also be practised in what we look at, in particular restraining the roving eye on seeing a woman. Augustine insists on the need for chastity, it is because this too contributes to the *union of hearts*. Chastity flows from the love due to God; love is chaste.

(8-11) After having drawn attention to the danger of faults, the end of the chapter is devoted to fraternal correction, an important element in the common life. Here Augustine is following oriental monasticism. Charity must be shown by a sincere concern for the spiritual good of one’s brethren. The monk has the duty to exercise fraternal correction; to be silent is to be an accomplice. For St Benedict, this duty of correction is reserved to the Abbot.

V. Service. This chapter deals with many matters to do with common ownership, but in more detail; it is an indispensable condition of the monastic ideal according to Augustine. In practice: Not to give gifts — to refuse those given to a particular monk.

All is in common, clothes, books, washing and storage.

Avoid clashes between classes.

One important text (2) shows that concern for the common good is the measure of our spiritual progress.

This Rule mentions work without going into detail. In Augustine’s other works, we can find the following: Work has value in itself.

Work is a collaboration with creation, from which it derives its dignity. (This was contrary to the idea of the ancient world in which work was for slaves).

It is a way of doing penance, by which man is restored, rescued from pride and taught humility. It is a means of sanctification.

Moreover it enables us to glorify God in all our activities.

All those in the monastery must work, even the rich. One must be careful though to give each person work which is adapted to his strength.

In 9. Augustine warns against murmuring.

VI. Fraternal relationships and forgiveness. The ideal would be never to have disputes. But as this is not always the case, they should at least be brought to an end as soon as possible. The confession of faults, mutual support and forgiveness are daily occurrences in the exercise of brotherly love: "He who does not ask forgiveness or who does not give it from the bottom of his heart has no place in a monastery."

Notice an original observation (3) which expresses the mentality of the age rather than the spirit of the Gospel.

VII. Obedience. Augustine does not mention it until the end of his Rule, and then only in a single verse, while the three other verses of this chapter concern the superior. This ties in with Augustine's conception of monastic life. The basis of monastic life is not obedience, as Pachomius or Basil maintain, but love as a form of life in communion with brothers. Thus obedience becomes one of the realities of the common life, a mutual support. What he does say is to the point: "Obey the prior as a father." It is short, but compact. The community must have a head, a father, and one must obey him as one does in a family. Obedience is something important, but secondary; the common life is the essential mark of Augustine's monasticism.

The portrait of the superior (3) is brief, but beautiful. In no. 4 the brothers obey with a good spirit so as not to overburden the superior whose responsibility is heavy. It is compassion that inspires obedience, compassion for the prior, but also for oneself.

VIII. The Rule finishes with a beautiful passage which returns to the aspect of his theology of monastic life describing monks as 'lovers of beauty.'

The Rule of Augustine does not contain everything. It was written in a particular context, as a guide. For Augustine, as for Basil, the rule of the Christian is the Gospel. For the one as for the other, the most essential thing is charity. The whole Rule aims at freeing us from our own self-interest so that we may be entirely given to God and to our brothers.

We had to wait to find in the doctor of love what we saw in Evagrius, Cassian and Basil; it is charity which gives meaning to the life of a monk.

### III. Other Monastic Writings.

First the *Ordo Monasterii*: 'Regulations for a Monastery' which we have already mentioned. It is very short text. At the beginning and the end there is the same inclusion on love: "Above all, love God, and your neighbour" (1), and: "If you observe these prescriptions faithfully and with love, you will make progress and your salvation will give us much joy" (11)

No. 2 establishes the order of the seven offices of community prayer. Murmuring, a very human reaction when one's own will is crossed, is forbidden in 5, as we saw in V.9 of the Rule.

A text which dates from his visit to Rome, when on his way back from Africa, and his discovery of ascetics near the city, emphasises that for Augustine, love is at the centre of monastic life. (Text 6).

Some other texts can also be cited to complete the teaching of Augustine on the monastic life.

First there is the rather difficult text on the Trinity: Letter 238. To clarify the mystery of a God who is both three and one, Augustine first takes several examples to show that there are things which are both 'not one' and 'one.' He begins with the simplest: The soul and the body; then, the more abstract: the outer man and the inner man; The Spirit of the Lord and the spirit of man; finally "one faith, one hope, one love" which has made of Christians: "one soul and one heart."

Augustine concludes: With even more reason "the Father and the Son have the same divine nature, this means, if one can say so, that the Father and the Son are one God." Men will become one, but the Father and the Son are "always and ineffably one." All this, he adds, flows from the peace of God which "surpasses all understanding."

It is this peace of God which will make us one, we who are the descendants of the first disciples (Text 7). The harmony and charity of believers should reflect the peace of God, the peace of the Trinity. This it is which keeps the hearts of all one in God.

### **Plan of the Ennaratio on Psalm 132**

1. Introduction: does the first verse apply to all Christians, or only some?
2. This verse has given birth to monasteries  
the Jews have not heard, yet monasticism came into existence among them
3. Digression on the ascetics among the heretics.
- 4 & 5. There are false monks and true ones,  
just as there are false clergy and true ones.  
The three states of men each comprising good people and wicked ones.  
The three states common to *Luke* and *Ezekiel*
6. Return to heretic monks.  
Etymology of the word 'monk'
7. Explanation of Aaron's beard = strong men
8. Digression on Stephen, the strong man.
9. The robe and the collar of the robe.
10. The dew.
11. Hermon.
12. The Mountains of Sion
13. There God has commanded the blessing.

A very eloquent and celebrated text on monastic life is the Ennaratio (commentary) on psalm 132. We give first a plan which will make reading easier. The marks the passages in the text which we reproduce. We do not give the complete text; the cuts have been made to omit the digressions which break the thread (Text 8).

There is no need to give an explanation, except for one of the digressions where Augustine introduces three classes of men. This is in support of his affirmation that there are good men and wicked everywhere. To give an example, he quotes Luke 17:31 and 34-35 where it is written: "On that night, two will be in the field, one will be taken, the other left; there will be two in one bed, one will be taken, the other left; two women will be grinding together, one will be taken, the other left." Those who are in the field are the pastors of the Church, as St Paul wrote: "I have planted, Apollo watered..." etc; those who are in one bed are the monks who enjoy the re-

pose of contemplation, those who are at the mill grinding the grain are the people of the world occupied with their many labours.

Augustine finds these three classes of men in a text of Ezekiel where Noah, Daniel and Job are mentioned: "If a land sins against me, and there are three men there: Noah, Daniel and Job, their lives would be saved by their righteousness" (Ez.14:13-14). Noah, who built the ark, is the symbol of the leaders of the Church, the pastors. Daniel — Augustine reads Daniel — called in the Bible the 'man of desire,' is the symbol of contemplatives; and Job, a married man, is the symbol of the faithful laity. The description of the monk which he gives with reference to Daniel is found in no.5 of the extracts from the *Ennaratio* on psalm.

This passage is given because it has been taken up by Gregory the Great and Bernard, among others.

#### IV. Conclusion.

The rule of Augustine, like the other texts which refer to his idea of the monastic life, gives a very different emphasis from the other forms of monasticism we have seen.

There is no incompatibility with this study.

Above all, Augustine wanted to found a community of love oriented towards contemplation.

The ideal behind it was the first community at Jerusalem. For Augustine, this communion in love is the fundamental condition for union with God. Other more practical consequences flow from it: poverty, obedience, chastity. They are at the service of charity; and all this frees us from ourselves and enables us to be entirely at the service of God and our brethren.

It is a community in the image of the Church, Augustine the bishop sees in the monastery the same image as he does in the Church: a community of love centred round Jesus Christ.

With Augustine we come to the end of the 'golden age' of the eastern and African monks. Before going on to western monasticism in the next chapter, you will find in Book 2 a chronological table of this period: 'Two centuries in the history of monks' (Table9).

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#### 11. Augustine Texts

##### 1. ON THE RULE

##### 1. *Sermon on the Creed*

"The believers had but one soul and one heart." There were many souls, faith had made them one. They were a multitude of souls; they loved one another and the whole multitude became one. They loved God with the fire of charity, and this multitude attained the oneness of beauty.

##### 2. *Letter 243:4.*

Your soul does not belong to you alone, but to all the brothers whose souls also belong to you; or rather, their souls and yours are not many souls, but a single soul, the one soul of Christ.

##### 3. *Catechism for beginners 23:42.*

Jews by the thousands did penance, were converted and believed in Christ. They no longer wanted temporal blessings and an earthly kingdom; they no longer awaited the promised Christ as king according to the flesh, but they embraced and loved in his immortality him who, for them and at their hand, had suffered so much in his mortality, who had pardoned their sins, who had shed his blood and shown them by his resurrection that it is immortality which must be hoped for and desired. That is why, putting to death the earthly desires of the old man and burning with eagerness for the newness of the spiritual life, they sold all they possessed as the Lord ordained in the Gospel, and laid the money at the feet of the apostles so that these could distribute to each one what he needed. They lived united in the charity of Christ; they did not say about anything: "this is mine," but possessed everything in common; they had but one soul and one heart fixed on God.

#### 4. *On Psalm 131:5.*

How many thousands believed, my brothers, when they laid their money at the feet of the apostles. But what does Scripture say? Surely that they became the temple of God. Not only did each one become a temple of God, but all of them together were the temple of God. They became a place for the Lord. And so that you may know that there was but one place for the Lord among all of them, Scripture says: "They had but one soul and one heart in God." But there are many who do not prepare a place for the Lord; they seek possessions of their own and love what they own, rejoicing in the power they have and craving that which they are denied.

The one who wishes to prepare a place for the Lord should find his joy in the common good not in his own possessions. That is what these people did, by giving up their own possessions, they shared them with everyone.

#### 5. *Commentary on Psalm 18.*

The blackbirds, parrots, ravens, magpies and other birds are sometimes trained by men to make sounds which they do not understand. The divine will has given human nature the privilege of understanding its song.

## 2. Principle Texts of the Rule

### I.

1. This is what we ask you who live in a monastery to observe.

2. Above all, you are gathered in a community to live harmoniously in the house and to have one soul and one heart turned towards God.

3. So do not say: "This thing is mine." Everything should be common to all. Your superior ought to give each one food and clothing. He will not give the same to everyone because you do not all enjoy the same health. He must give each one what he needs; for we read in the Acts of the Apostles that: "they had everything in common" and "distribution was made to each according to his need."

4. Some brothers owned possessions in the world; when they enter the monastery, they must freely agree to put them to common use.

8. Live together all of you in harmony and concord and give honour to God in one another, whose temples you have become.

### II.

1. Be steadfast in prayer at the hours and times fixed for it.

2. No one should do anything in the oratory except what it is meant for, which is why it is called an oratory. So that if someone wishes to pray even outside the fixed times, he will not be prevented by another who thinks he has something else to do there.

3. When you pray to God with psalms and hymns, the words you speak should be alive in your hearts.

### III.

1. Subdue your flesh by fasting, depriving yourself of food and drink as far as your health permits...

2. When you come to table, and until you leave it, listen to the customary reading without noise or dissension. Food is not just to be eaten, your ears too should hunger for the Word of God.

3. If there are brothers whose health is poor due to their former way of life, the others should not be upset if they are given different food, nor should it be thought unjust when they who are stronger receive something else. These should not consider others more fortunate for eating what they themselves do not; rather they should be grateful for the strength to do what others cannot.

4. If those who have come to the monastery after having led a more fastidious life receive food, clothes, blankets or other bedding, the stronger and more fortunate brothers to whom such things are not given should realise what kind of life-style their brothers have given up to enter upon this life, even if they cannot practise the frugality of the stronger. No one should crave for the extras given to a few more out of tolerance than as a mark of honour; for it would be a dreadful perversion if the monastery became a place where the rich work hard while the poor become fastidious.

### IV.

1. Your habit should not be attract attention. Do not try to please by your clothes, but rather by your manner of life.

4. If you notice a woman, do not stop to look at her. You are not forbidden to see women when you go out, but to desire them or want them to desire you is sinful. It is not only touch or affection but also looks that excite or express the desire for women. Do not pretend to have a chaste soul if your eyes are unchaste, for the shameless eye is the messenger of the shameless heart. Even if the tongue is silent, impure hearts reveal their feelings by glances, and by their lust they find delight in their mutual passion. Then, even if their bodies are not given to unchaste actions, chastity itself flies from such falsity.

10. What I have said with regard to custody of the eyes applies also to all other faults; one must carefully and faithfully discern, forestall, and make them known, convincing the culprit of his fault, and punish the offence. This must be done with love for the person and hatred for the sin.

11. If anyone goes so far in evil-doing as to receive letters or small presents secretly; if he confesses it, pardon him and pray for him. But if he is caught and proved guilty, he should be severely punished according to the judgment of the priest or the superior.

### V.

2. No one should work for himself alone, but all your work should be for the common good, with greater industry and more joyful enthusiasm than if each one were working for himself. For it is written: "Charity is not self-seeking"; which means that the good of all comes before that of the individual, not the other way round. The more you put the common good before your own the more you will know you are making progress. So, among all the things that must be done in this passing life, it is the love which abides which holds first place.

3. Consequently, if anyone brings something even to his own sons or another close relation in the monastery, an article of clothing or anything else considered necessary, the gift is not

to be accepted on the quiet. It is to be given to the superior to be put into the common store and given to whoever needs it.

9. Those who have charge of the food, or the clothes, or the books must serve their brothers without murmuring.

#### VI.

3. When the need for correction forces you to speak hard words, and if you see that you have been too severe, you are not obliged to ask pardon of those who are under you. An exaggerated humility might undermine your authority over those who must obey you. You should rather seek pardon from the Lord of all who knows that you love with all your heart those whom perhaps you correct somewhat harshly. Your love for one another ought to be spiritual, not carnal.

#### VII.

1. Your superior should not think himself fortunate in exercising authority but in serving with love. He should have the place of honour among you, but in fear before God let him lie at your feet as a servant. Let him be an example of good deeds for everyone. Let him correct the wayward, comfort the fainthearted, support the weak and show patience to all. Let him observe the Rule willingly and see that it is respected. Although both are necessary, he should seek to be loved by you rather than feared, remembering always that he must give an account to God for you.

4. In being obedient, you show compassion not only for yourselves but also for him; because the higher the position he has among you, the more he is endangered.

#### VIII.

1. May the Lord grant that you observe all this with love, as lovers of spiritual beauty, spreading the good odour of Christ by your holy lives; not as slaves serving under a law but as people living in freedom under grace.

2. This little book should be read to you once a week so that it may become a mirror in which you see yourselves, and that forgetfulness may never make you negligent. When you find yourselves observing what is written, give thanks to the Lord, the source of all good. But if one of you sees that he has been negligent on some point, let him be sorry for the past, pay attention in the future, praying God to pardon his fault and that he be not lead into temptation.

### 3. Complementary Texts

#### 6. *The customs of the Church*

Love is experienced in everything. Love is the guide at table, in conversation, in one's manners and behaviour. We are united in a single love and it is in this love that everything breathes. Whatever is opposed to love is fought against and rejected. We do not allow anything which may wound it to last more than a day. For we know that love has been so strongly recommended by Christ and the Apostles that everything is useless without it and perfect when it is present.

#### 7. *Letter 238,16*

Let us consider what makes peace among brothers who, though many souls and many hearts, have been transformed by it into "one soul and one heart" in God; let us believe all the more, with a sincere love, that in this "peace of God which surpasses all understanding," the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit themselves are not three gods but one God. Let us believe this: as their oneness is far superior to that enjoyed by brothers of "one soul and one heart"; so too the "peace which surpasses all understanding" is more excellent than the peace which makes the heart and soul of all the brothers one in God.

## 8. On Psalm 132

1. "How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together." The melody of these words is so sweet that even those who do not know the psalter love to sing this verse. It is as sweet as the charity which causes brothers to dwell together. First let us reflect carefully whether it is of all Christians that it is said: "How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together," or whether there are some perfect people who dwell together in this way; whether this blessing applies not to everyone, but only to some, from whom however it may descend upon the rest.

2. These words of the psalm, this sweet song, this melody pleasant both to sing and to meditate on, gave rise to the monasteries. Brothers who longed to dwell together awoke at this song; this verse became their trumpet. It sounded throughout the earth and those who had been separated were reunited...

3. It is from these words of the psalm that monks took their name...

5. Daniel chose a quiet life, preferring to serve God in celibacy, that is, without seeking a wife. He was a holy man who spent his life desiring the things of heaven. Tried in many things, he was found to be pure gold. How peaceful he was, who was safe among the lions! The name of Daniel, called also 'man of desires,' chaste and holy desires, surely designates the servants of God of whom it is said: "How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together!"

6. The Greek word monos means 'one'; not just 'one' in any sense, for even in a crowd a man is 'one,' but 'one' among many; it can be said that he is 'one,' but not that he is monos, that is alone, for monos is 'one' who is 'alone.' Those then who live together so as to become one man so that what is written is really true: "One soul and one heart," are many bodies but not many souls, many bodies but not many hearts; they are truly called monos, that is 'one alone.'

7. "How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!" Now let the psalm tell us what they are like: "They are like ointment on the head, ointment running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down to the fringe of his garment." Who was Aaron? The priest. Who is a priest, but the one priest who entered the holy of holies. Who is this priest but he who is both victim and priest; if not he who, finding nothing pure in the world to offer, offered himself.

The ointment is on his head, because Christ is one with the Church, But the ointment runs down from the head. Our head is Christ; crucified, buried, risen, he has ascended to heaven. And the Holy Spirit came down from the head. Whither? On the beard. The beard signifies dauntless young men, courageous and vigorous. That is why we say of such men: "He has a beard." The ointment ran down first upon the Apostles, upon those who bore the first assaults of the world. The Holy Spirit came down upon them. They were the ones who first began to live together, who suffered persecution. But because the ointment ran down upon the beard, they suffered but were not overcome. The head from whence the ointment ran down had suffered before them. After such an example, who could conquer the beard?

9. These strong men suffered and endured many persecutions. But if the ointment had not run down from the beard, we should not have monasteries today. But it ran down to the border of his garment, as the psalm says, and the Church followed this movement, and from the garment of the Lord she brought forth monasteries. The priestly garment is the symbol of the Church. It is the garment of which the Apostle speaks: "Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her, so as to present her glorious, without spot or wrinkle." What is the border of the garment? The border is the extremity of the garment, the edge. What must we understand by the edge of the garment? Is it not that at the end of time the Church should have brothers who live together? Or can

we understand by the border of the garment the symbol of perfection, because it is there that the garment is completed and that those who know how to live together in unity are perfect? Those who fulfil the law are perfect. But how is the law of Christ fulfilled by those who live together as brothers? Listen to the Apostle: "Bear one another's burdens and you will fulfil the law of Christ." This is the border of the garment.

But which border does he mean? I do not think that the prophet can have meant the borders on the sides. The ointment could only run down from the beard onto the border which is nearest the head, at the collar. Such are those who live together. In the same way that a man puts on his garment by way of the collar to dress, so Christ who is our head, through brotherly concord puts on his garment so that the Church may cling to him.

10. What else does the prophet say? "Like the dew of Hermon which runs down on the mountains of Sion" (dew = grace). By this the prophet wants to say that it is by God's grace that brothers dwell together; They cannot do it of their own strength or merits, but by his gift, his grace, like the dew which falls from heaven...

11. ...Hermon means 'a light set on high.' For the dew comes from Christ and there is no other 'light set on high' but Christ. How has he been set on high? First on the cross, then in heaven. Christ was lifted up on the cross at the time of his abasement; but his abasement set him on high...

Thus the light set on high is Christ, whence comes the dew of Hermon. You then who desire to live together, yearn for that dew, desire to be watered together. Otherwise you will not be able to keep what you have professed...

12. As for the mountains of Sion, they are the great ones in the Church. Those who are signified by the mountains are also signified by the beard and by the border of the garment. By the beard is meant the perfect. Only those who dwell together are the ones in whom the love of Christ is perfected. When those in whom the love of Christ is not perfected come together they are full of hatred, disagreeable and turbulent. They are like a skittish horse in a team which not only will not pull together, but breaks the traces with its hoofs. But on the contrary, if a person is soaked with the dew of Hermon, he is tranquil, gentle, humble, and he prays rather than murmurs. Scripture admirably describes the murmurer: "The heart of a fool is like the wheel of a cart." The cart carries hay and it creaks, for a wheel cannot turn without creaking. It is the same with many brothers, they only dwell together in the body. But who are those who dwell together? Those of whom it is said: "They had but one heart and one soul."

## **11. Augustine Explanation of the Texts**

*The texts from the Rule have already been explained in the Course; here we give a few comments on the other texts.*

4.

Here again, as in texts 1 and 3, mention is made of the primitive Christian community. If it is a sort of nostalgic leit-motiv for other authors of cenobitic rules, it is even more so for Augustine whose ideal is a community of love.

In this text we see that the community makes room for God, creates a place for the Lord. It becomes the temple of God.

11.

Communion on earth comes from the peace of God. It is the image of the future communion and peace of heaven.

8. On Psalm 132

6. The name monk which is derived from monos, alone, originally meant one who lives alone, the anchorite who lives in solitude, far from other people. Then the meaning deepened and came to mean someone who is 'one.' To be a monk is then to be someone who has one single objective, who has an undivided heart, who is integrated within himself. The term is close to the judaeo-christian virtue of 'simplicity.' It is the condition of continual prayer.

Like the two other authors of 'Mother-Rules,' Augustine does not speak of members of the community as 'monks,' but as 'brothers.' For him, it is the community which is 'monk,' if the hearts of all the members are 'one,' if a union of hearts is achieved.

7 & 9. Two passages where we have to follow the sequence of ideas. The head is Christ. The ointment is the Holy Spirit which runs down first on the beard = the Apostles who have suffered persecution after the example of Christ, who is the head filled with the Holy Spirit (7).

"If the ointment had not run down from the beard, we should not have monasteries." The idea expressed in texts 1,3,4,11, is again a reference to the apostolic community, the model of the monastic community. The ointment then ran down from the beard to the garment which is the Church.

But the psalm specifies: "on the border of the garment." What is this border? Augustine explains the different meanings it can have; the way of life which will come at the end of time, the perfect way of life. This border of the garment nearest the beard can only be the top border, the collar, symbol of brotherly concord.

12. Here again we find the idea that monastic life is an apostolic life in the sense that it reflects the life of the apostles. To dwell together in peace assumes that there is love. It assumes a certain perfection which Augustine describes: "the monk is tranquil, gentle, humble and he prays rather than murmurs." Then follows a humorous description of the murmurer: wheels were then made of wood bound with an iron circle, and the roads were paved with stone or in an even worse state!

## 12. Western Monasticism.

### **The Monks of Gaul**

#### I. Central Gaul

1. Saint Martin
2. Sulpicius Severus
3. Paulinus of Nola
4. The Fathers of the Jura

#### II. Monasticism in Provence

1. Marseilles
2. Lérins

#### III. Southern Gaul

##### Iberian monasticism

#### IV. The Gallic Rules

1. Origin
2. Spirituality
3. Evolution

### **Celtic Monasticism**

- I. General View
- II. Saint Patrick and his posterity
- III. Saint Columban

## **The Monks of Gaul.**

We know little about the origins of Christianity in Gaul, except for the Church of Lyons which has left a famous account of the death of its martyrs in the persecution of 177.

Up to the middle of the fourth century Christians were a minority in the population of Gaul. At the end of the century, Christianity made notable progress, first of all in the towns and then in the countryside. It was in this context of progress that there began in Gaul a strong religious life in which the ideal of asceticism started to develop.

Thus it was that from the beginning of the fifth century there appeared 'virgins dedicated to God'; very likely they lived out their consecration within their families. Moreover fervent Christians who wanted to follow Christ more closely left the good things of the world to live a life of asceticism in food and clothing; they devoted themselves to reading the Scriptures and to liturgical prayer. They were called "saints" or 'turned towards God' or 'the chaste ones.' This was one of the forerunners of monastic life. This latter seems to have begun very early in Gaul because we know about the existence of a group of hermits in the Ile-Barbe, near Lyons, from the year 250, that is, a year before the birth of Antony. Later on, the influence of Egyptian monasticism would make itself felt among the ascetics of Gaul; they would make a wise blend of their way of life and that of the Egyptians.

The first monastic generation in Gaul is marked by the outstanding personality of Saint Martin who was born into a pagan family. The grace of God was at work among the pagans.

### **I. Central Gaul.**

#### **1. Saint Martin**

We know about St Martin from the 'Life of Martin' by Sulpicius Severus, probably a romanticised 'life.' The date of Martin's birth is disputed; it was either in 315 or 336. Antony was then 54 or 85 years old. He was born in Sabria, in Pannonia, (present-day Hungary), where his father, a military tribune and a pagan was on garrison duty before being sent to Pavia in Italy. It was there that Martin was brought up and probably met Christianity. His father wanted him to become a soldier like himself and enter the army; Martin did so reluctantly, his biographer assures us, for he was already a follower of Christ. He was at Amiens when, in mid-winter, he shared his cloak with a poor man who was very cold. Legend tells us that this poor man was Jesus. Martin, who was then a catechumen, was baptised at Easter 354. Two years later, in 356, he left the army, and went to his parents, converting his mother but not his father. It is possible that he met Hilary of Poitiers about 356. Between 357 and 360 he may have had some experience of the ascetic life in Italy. It is certain that after Hilary's return from exile (360) he founded a monastery at Ligugé, near Poitiers. There he lived the life of a monk for 10 years and attracted disciples.

But in 371 he was elected bishop of Tours. He wanted to remain a monk and built himself a wooden cell outside the cathedral. Disciples gathered round him, and then he founded the monastery of Marmoutiers, which means 'the great monastery.' It was in fact a group of hermitages rather than a large monastery. Life at Marmoutiers was poor, with community of goods, a fairly flexible cenobitic life compared to the Pachomians — the sons of Gallo-roman families were not

like the young Egyptian peasants; much time was given to contemplation, to the extent that there was no official work apart from copying books. Marmoutiers was thus the forerunner of the medieval monasteries with their workshops for copying manuscripts.

We have no personal document from Martin on his interior life. It is not easy to form an idea of his spirituality from the apologetic biography of Sulpicius Severus. It seems that Martin's chief characteristic was that he remained a soldier. In his community he insisted on obedience. For him the monk was the successor of the martyrs and he must demonstrate this by his patience and humility in following Christ. As a soldier, he must engage in combat against the devil. An interior combat, certainly, for like Antony Martin was visited by the devil; but also an exterior combat in the destruction of pagan sanctuaries, for he believed that paganism was the work of the devil, and in healing those who were possessed. Finally, Martin was a pastor formed by Hilary. His spirituality, both active and exacting, was pastorally oriented; his asceticism was subordinated to preaching the Word.

Like Pachomius, Martin was an outstanding personality, a charismatic abba. But, again like Pachomius, he did not give a sufficient theological and spiritual foundation to his monasticism. Even in his lifetime there were arguments within his monastery and at his death, in 397, it seems that everything collapsed. Of the many monks whom Sulpicius Severus shows us mourning his death, how many were still there a few years later?

## 2. Sulpicius Severus

Among the fervent Christians mentioned above, two made their mark on their times. Two friends from the Gallo-roman aristocracy took up the ascetic life: Paulinus of Nola and Sulpicius Severus.

The latter, who would be St Martin's biographer, was born about 360 at Bordeaux. He studied there, and became friends with Paulinus. He married a young girl from a rich family, but his wife died very young. This was a great blow for him; he sold his possessions, keeping only two small properties at Primuliac in order to live a monastic life there. This was monastic life in the tradition of Martin, with probably many traits characteristic of life in a Gallo-roman villa, where the rich owner was surrounded by his family and dependents. Sulpicius spent his time in writing *The Life of Saint Martin* and *The Sacred History*. Monastic life was quite relaxed; solitude was fairly lax, since many people came to see the writer who had kept up many friendships outside. We know that he was still living in 404, because Paulinus wrote to him, but we know nothing about the last years of Sulpicius Severus.

## 3. Paulinus of Nola

The dates of Paulinus' birth and death are exactly the same as those of Augustine, 354-430. He also was born at Bordeaux of a very rich family, where Christian life was a matter of routine. After his studies, Paulinus began his career as consul and then governor of Campania, in present-day Italy. There, at Nola, he was struck by the miracles which occurred at the tomb of St Felix and his heart was opened to the light of Christ, as he would write later. He married a devout Spanish woman who bore him a son who died very young. Shortly after his baptism, Paulinus and his wife retired to a desert place in Spain. Paulinus planned to return to Nola, and the bishop of Barcelona ordained him priest, perhaps to keep him in Spain. But he persevered in his plans and went back to Nola where he and his wife lived for 35 years, near the tomb of St Felix. Two small communities, one of men and one of women, grew up around them. Paulinus became a bishop. He was a lovable character and kept up a correspondence with Jerome, Rufinus and

Augustine. He was neither a theologian nor an exegete, but his writings manifest his spiritual experience. He led a monastic life similar to that of the bishop of Hippo, linked to clerical life; the head of the monastery was also the bishop of the city.

#### 4. The Fathers of the Jura

In the Jura mountains, Condat, (now Saint-Claude) was founded by Romanus in 435. The 'Life of the Fathers of the Jura' shows us the birth and development of a community as well as the evolution of its institutions during the life of three abbots: Romanus, Lupicinus and Oyend.

Romanus owned a large property in the Jura. He was educated first at Lyons. started living alone beneath a huge fir tree, where two streams met (meeting = Condat). When disciples joined him, he moved to a flatter and more cultivable place. He was ordained priest in 444. Romanus was calm and modest, compassionate and welcoming. His spiritual teaching was to remain pure, without any knowledge of evil.

His brother Lupicinus succeeded him, a totally different character; he was austere, strong, a strict disciplinarian, severe towards the proud and stubborn, but a good teacher and a good man. As a result novices abounded and he had to found another monastery, Loconne. He died there about 480.

The sister of Romanus and Lupicinus founded a monastery of nuns at La Balme.

After Lupicinus, Oyend perfected the existing rule, about the year 500. He introduced reading in the refectory and a communal dormitory. His reform is presented as an adaptation of Eastern rules, particularly Pachomian rules, to the character of the Gauls, "according to the climate of the country and to the demands of work."

An interesting point — monasticism is seen as a gift to the Church under the inspiration of the Divine Word (12).

An urban monasticism also developed in many towns in Gaul: Rouen, Toulouse, Auxerre, Vienne and Dijon.

## II. Monasticism in Provence.

#### 1. Marseilles

As a commercial port, open to influences from abroad, Marseilles was home to monks from very early times. About the year 400 Paulinus of Nola was writing of a 'brotherhood' there. Ten years later Jerome was writing to one of its inhabitants who wanted to enter religious life. He told him to speak to the bishop, Proculus. Marseilles was therefore ready to receive John Cassian and his teaching.

We have studied Cassian and have seen his influence over Benedict. Though Cassian did not bring monasticism into Gaul, he gave it his monastic teaching through his writings, which he dedicated to the bishops of Gaul. These conferences were widely read and brought to monastic life in Gaul a body of doctrine which it lacked.

Cassian probably founded two monasteries at Marseilles, one for men (St Victor), and the other for women (Saint-Sauveur). The monastery of Lerins was already in existence.

#### 2. Lerins

This monastery of Lerins, the heart of a very important monastic centre at that time, had been founded about 410. With Ligugé, it is certainly the oldest of present-day monasteries where there have always been monks.

Several notable people have made it famous.

*HONORATUS* First of all its founder, Honoratus. He was born in Belgian-Gaul about 365. He withdrew to Cannes where he led the life of a solitary ascetic. After several pilgrimages to Greece, he ended by withdrawing to a cave in Esterel, and then, about 410, to the island of Lerins, which was full of snakes. He welcomed many disciples there, one of whom was a close relative, Hilary, who would later write his life. Elected bishop of Arles in 428, he only stayed there for two years, dying in 430. He founded another monastery on an island in the Rhone.

*HILARY OF ARLES* After entering Lerins, Hilary accompanied Honoratus to Arles, where he was elected as bishop to succeed him. Arles was then a metropolitan see whose jurisdiction included more than twenty-five bishoprics in Provence. Hilary gave the funeral oration for Honoratus, describing monastic life. In this 'Life' can be found all the traditional themes. Monastic life is defined as a service of God.

Hilary was noted for his great generosity. He died in 449, aged 48.

*EUCHERIUS OF LYONS* Eucherius came from a distinguished and cultivated family. He married and had two sons. He and his wife became Christians, handed their sons over to the monks of Lerins and built themselves hermitages on an island near Lerins. Eucherius became bishop of Lyons shortly after 432 and died about 450. His two sons also became bishops!

A little later:

*CESARIUS OF ARLES* was born in 470 near Châlon-sur-Saône. When very young, he set out for Egypt, attracted by the fame of the land of monks. When he got to Marseilles, he boarded the ship. and then disembarked at Lerins! He was about 20 years old and stayed there a dozen years.

When he became ill, he was sent for treatment to Arles. There he was ordained deacon and then priest and was sent as abbot to the monastery of Trinquetaille. He then became bishop of Arles where he founded the monastery of Saint John for nuns. He then drew up a rule for this monastery, the first edition drew on the 'eastern' rules, the second on Augustine. Towards the end of his life he drew up a Rule for monks which is a summary of his great Rule for virgins.

We give here a table of the monastic writings of Cesarius, and in Book 2 some texts from the Rule for Virgins.

Other figures should be mentioned: *LOUP* who first entered monastic life at Lerins and then became bishop of Troyes; *SALVIAN*, who after a period at Lerins went to St Victor at Marseilles, where he was ordained priest; *VINCENT* of Lerins who, though he did not become a bishop, is a real theologian; he wrote several works, in particular his *Commonitorium* (handbook), in which he emphasizes the importance of consulting both Scripture and the Fathers. It is still today the guarantor of the authority of the Fathers of the Church.

We can see the importance of monasticism in Provence. In later ages, Lerins would play the same 'mythical' role in the West as did Egypt in the fourth and fifth centuries.

## **The Monastic writings of Cesarius.**

The Rule for Virgins is the centre-piece of the monastic writings of Cesarius, coming after Sermons for Monks and before the Rule for Monks. These three works are not the only writings of Cesarius, but they are the three principal ones and they complement each other. Here monastic spirituality is more prominent than in any other western Rule.

The six Sermons for Monks assume that monks are perfect; but Cesarius puts them on their guard against the danger of thinking that they have 'arrived.' Even in a tranquil harbour, a boat can suffer shipwreck, either by water gradually seeping in (the little sins), or by the sudden

wind of pride. We remember that in the earlier tradition, pride is the most tenacious of the 'thoughts,' the sin of those who are perfect.

Cesarius insists then on humility and obedience, the two wings of the soul. Charity cannot be separated from them: *humility, obedience, charity* are the three virtues of the monk. The cenobite must be an example to all his brothers.

The Rule for Virgins does not lay much stress on these three cenobitic virtues, but insists on an attitude of separation from the world. The first words declare that the virgin who enters the monastery will never leave it (1), and Cesarius returns later to the theme of strict enclosure. This separation from the world is expressed particularly by the two virtues of poverty and chastity. After having dealt with several particular observances: the measure of food and the quality of their clothing, reading and prayer, the Rule outlines a monastic timetable.

The tone of this letter is personal, urgent, affectionate and enthusiastic. We give some passages in Book 2.

The Rule for Monks is quite different, it is neutral in tone and is simply a summary of the major work for nuns. On the other hand, new scriptural quotations are scattered throughout, and it concludes with a beautiful epilogue on perseverance of which we find an echo in the Rule of St Benedict

### III. Iberian Monasticism.

In the Iberian peninsula (Spain, as a political entity, barely dates from the VII century), monasticism also developed as an institution. Already in about the year 400, the nun Egeria who came from southern Gaul or perhaps from Galicia, told in picturesque detail of her journey to Jerusalem. It is not surprising that this Iberian monasticism was also directly inspired in the first place by Eastern monasticism, as was the monasticism of Provence.

The most well-known person of the period we are studying is another Martin, bishop of Braga. Born, like Martin of Tours, in Pannonia into a family of important civil servants, he received a first-class education. For a long time he lived in the East, in Palestine, and it was there he felt called by God and became a priest. Later he arrived in Galicia by sea; there he made a translation of the Apophthegmata and established a monastery at Dumio, near Braga, about 556. In 570 he was metropolitan of Braga, and like Martin of Tours, to whom he had a great devotion, he set up an episcopal monastery there. He died in Braga sometime after 579. His life as a bishop was dedicated to leading the Arian Suevi to the Catholic faith. Further east, St Emilian established a monastery at Asan, in Aragon.

In the south of the peninsula, another influence was at work, that of the Rule of St Augustine, brought from Africa by the monks fleeing from the Vandal invasions. An abbot and 70 monks arrived in the region of Valencia bringing their library with them.

In the following century monasticism in various forms continued to spread. The outstanding names are: Leander and Isidore of Seville, Fructuosus of Braga, and Valerius of Bierzo.

### IV. The Gallic Rules.

#### 1. Their Origin

A characteristic of Gallic monasticism is the proliferation of Rules; the codex of Benedict of Aniane contains 25, but these are only the ones that survived; there were certainly more than that.

This phenomenon comes from the fact that many monasteries owed their foundation to charismatic figures, similar to the Desert Fathers and Pachomius. These men gathered disciples round them, and as they grew in number, rules became necessary. Each monastery worked out its own rule, drawing inspiration from previous documents. As well as this, several bishops thought it a good idea to write rules themselves for monks living under their jurisdiction.

After St Benedict and St Columban, only the rules of these two founders of Orders tended to dominate. Sometimes a legislator made one document out of the two. After the time of Benedict of Aniane, the Benedictine Rule alone remained.

In Book 2 we give some excerpts from the Gallic rules, chosen from the most interesting. Others will be found in the Study Paper: "The Gallic Rules and Benedict." In Book 2 you will find as well Table 10 which indicates their origin, their characteristics and their style. Have a look also at Tables 4 & 5 illustrating chapter 4: "Monastic Rules."

## 2. Their Spirituality

Except for the Rule for Virgins of Cesarius, which is important as the first Rule for nuns which has come down to us, the teaching in these rules is not deep; there is hardly any theology or spirituality behind the regulations. They are documents born of experience, based on the old Rules, especially the two Mother-Rules of Pachomius and Augustine.

*PACHOMIUS*: Obedience and respect for the abbot come first. This is the foundation of asceticism for everyone. The monastery is looked upon as the Body of Christ.

*AUGUSTINE*: Here we find: "Live together in the house." Obedience is the key to unanimity.

In all of them murmuring is denounced and patience and putting up with injuries is recommended.

Separation from the world, a traditional characteristic of monasticism, is only mentioned as essential in Cesarius. Elsewhere it is taken for granted.

Sometimes one has a glimpse that the goal of monastic life is to encourage the progress of each individual, and even perhaps the visit of the Spouse and entry into the Kingdom.

These rules are not sad. Joy is often mentioned, and the assurance that the monk will find joy in putting them into practice. This is a witness of the spiritual experience of their authors.

## 3. Evolution

What is interesting in this Gallic monasticism is that it is at the root of monastic life in the Middle Ages as it was lived by the Cluniacs and Cistercians. But there were obviously several developments in the course of the centuries:

The original communities were largely made up of lay people, later they became communities with a predominance of clergy.

In the early stages, monastic life was characterised by prayer and work. The liturgical element was often very simple and of no great importance. Gradually there developed a daily cycle of Hours in which Solemn Mass took first place.

To begin with, the monastic life was a call by God to an individual. Later, although the call might still be present, monastic life was seen all too often as a profession like many other, with a role in society.

The obligation of strict enclosure, a characteristic trait of contemplative life for women, makes its first appearance with Cesarius and will be intensified in the West right up to the time of Vatican II.

## Celtic Monasticism

About the same time, parallel to monasticism in Provence, there developed in what is now the British Isles and Ireland a Celtic monasticism, one of whose characteristics was to seed itself abroad thus gaining considerable influence.

### I. General View

A little before 450, Roman Britain was invaded by the Anglo-Saxons who established themselves in the East of the country, pushing back the Roman-Celtic population towards the West, with the consequence that Christianity developed in Cornwall and Wales. A Church with very special characteristics appeared; so that one can speak of a Celtic Church. This was in effect relatively isolated with its own usages: a special tonsure for priests, a different date for Easter, but above all monasticism developed remarkably with a profusion of hermitages, and monasteries sometimes housing more than a thousand monks.

This Celtic monasticism had some special characteristics.

First, although elsewhere the episcopal church was the central point of religious organisation, here, almost exclusively, it was the monastery which filled this role.

Asceticism was very rigorous; it seems exaggerated to us. We find feats like those of the Egyptian desert and Syria, yet in different surroundings and climate; prolonged fasts and various mortifications taken to the limits in defiance of nature; for example, immersion in an icy pool took the place of exposure to the sun of the hypaitae and stylites. Here too there were impetuous souls who went to extremes.

Some of these special characteristics of Celtic monasticism had an influence on Latin Christianity:

The implantation of Christianity in Ireland gave rise to a Latin culture of Christian inspiration, so much so that later this culture spread over the European continent which had been almost completely reduced to barbarism; it would be one of the principal centres nurturing the Carolingian renaissance.

Sacramental penance in a private and repeated form developed widely in the Irish monasteries, while elsewhere it did not go beyond an embryonic form. A strange literature grew out of it: the penitentiaries which laid down the penances for each fault, according to its gravity and the degree of culpability. The penances of these rituals, which seem very rigorous to us, corresponded to a strongly felt pastoral need. In this way Latin Catholicism inherited from Ireland one of the most characteristic aspects of its piety: frequent confession accompanied by spiritual direction.

One of the ascetical practices dear to the Celtic monks was voluntary exile, the peregrinatio pro Christo or pro amore Dei. That these peoples may have had a taste for adventure or some psychological instability which drew them to this form of asceticism does not lessen its significance; they left their beloved homeland where they lived in security to go and live in unknown and perhaps hostile surroundings. In any case this religious movement knew an astonishing popularity and was particularly fruitful; Columban's monks populated Gaul and even Italy, while the Irish evangelised the islands right up to the north of Scotland.

### II. Saint Patrick & His Posterity.

It is not certain that St Patrick was a monk. The sources which connect him with St Germain of

Auxerre and even make him a monk with Martin at Tours, or claim that he was formed at Lerins, are very late. The writings of Patrick tell us nothing, indeed they give us the impression that he received his formation in Britain and not in Gaul. It is very probable that before becoming a bishop, he practised a form of ascetic life, either alone or with a group. In any case the apostle of the Irish had an imposing monastic posterity. He makes several allusions to the monks and nuns whom he established in Ireland.

Patrick himself wrote his life in simple language, showing us a truly humble man, grateful for the graces he received from God and full of mistrust of himself, yet able to make important decisions; a mark of true humility.

He was probably born in what used to be called Cumberland (now Cumbria) near Scotland, to which the Anglo-Saxons had driven the Celtic population. He tells us of his childhood in Britain: born of a Christian family, he was carried off to Ireland in a raid by pirates (Text 1). He spent nearly six years in slavery, (Text 2) then escaped and returned home. He felt called by God to go and evangelise Ireland (Text 3). He was consecrated bishop, and his apostolate must have covered the years between 432-461, the date of his death.

We quote two passages from his 'Confession' which give us an insight into his humility and his awareness of the greatness, love and fatherly Providence of God. (Texts 4 & 5).

Another monk even before the time of Patrick was St NINIAN, 362-432, of Roman-British stock, who visited Rome and spent some time with St Martin. He founded the monastery called 'Candida-Casa' in south-west Scotland at Whithorn. One of the monks of this monastery, ENDA, founded the first monastery in the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland, about 520. Other saints who made other monasteries famous were St FINNIAN of Clonard (470-549), St BRIGID of Kildare (d. 523), St CIARAN of Clonmacnois and St COEMGEN of Glendalough. Later St COLUMBA (Columcille 521-597), having founded several monasteries in Ireland, left his homeland to go and found a monastery on the tiny island of Iona on the west coast of Scotland which became a centre of evangelisation (about 563). Still later, about 650, St AIDAN founded the no less famous monastery of Lindisfarne on the islet off Northumberland from where the Gospel spread among the Anglo-Saxons, who had conquered Britain

### **III. Saint Columban.**

The life of St Columban has come to us from one JONAS, who was born in Italy and entered the foundation of Columban at Bobbio. He wrote the life about 25 years after the death of the saint, but as a confidant of abbot Attale, the saint's successor, he knew what he recounted.

Columban came from West Leinster in Ireland. He began by living with a holy man called Sinell, then he entered the monastery of Bangor, led at the time by abbot Comgall. After having stayed there for some years, he felt the call to leave his homeland on the peregrinatio pro Christo which we have already mentioned. According to Jonas, he was 20 when he left his country and set out for Gaul. He came to Burgundy where Gontran was king, and founded three monasteries quite near each other: Annegray, Luxeuil and Fontaine. The second of these experienced a rapid development and became famous. It was here that Columban wrote his Rules and his Penitentiary, of truly Irish severity. Crowds came to him, and he exercised a great influence.

But after 20 years, his moral intransigence led him to reproach the king and incur his anger and that of the king's grandmother, the terrible Brunhaut. They chased him out of Burgundy and wanted him to go back to his own country, but at the moment of boarding the ship at Nantes he escaped and went to the country of the Moselle and the Rhine, stirred up enthusiasm and encouraged vocations which gave rise to many monasteries. He spread the Gospel among the many

pagans in German lands, particularly in the present Alsace and Switzerland, so far barely touched by missionaries. Then Columban continued his peregrinatio pro Christo; he crossed the Alps and went into Italy where he founded the monastery of Bobbio in the Apennines. He died there in 615.

Columban has left a Penitentiary, a collection of penalties for faults committed; most of them concern the clerics and the laity, but the beginning and the end concern monks. We also have his Conventual Rule which too only contains penalties. On the other hand his Rule for Monks is his richest writing which deals mostly with the great monastic virtues.

The Rule for Monks is as it were the heart of Columbanian monasticism. It was inspired by other monastic authors whom we have studied, notably Cassian and also Benedict. The first chapter deals with obedience, which is primordial (Text 1). Christ is the model of obedience. Before this chapter on obedience we read several words which show that the principal aim of the Rule is to learn to love God and one's neighbour. This journey towards love is made, as in Cassian, by the stripping and purification of the vices, so as to arrive at continual prayer (Text 2). In the penances inherent in monastic life, Columban affirms the need for discretion (Texts 3 & 4). Virginité of body is of no value if one is not virgin in one's heart (Text 5). Though he asks great mortifications of his monks, Columban is sure that love will make them bearable (Text 6). They will lead the monk to humility which finds the yoke of the Lord sweet (Text 7). There is then an evangelical flavour to this Rule for Monks.

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## **12. Western Monasticism Texts**

### **1. The Monks of Gaul**

The Rule of the Four Fathers

1: 8-12 We would like the brothers to dwell together in unity and joy. With God's help, let us now lay down how these may be maintained by a right order of things.

We want one person to be the head of all, and that no one deviate in any way from his advice or commands, but obey him joyfully as if it was the command of the Lord.

2:16-35 We shall explain how those who leave the world and are converted should be tested. First the world's riches must be taken from them.

If a poor man is converted, he too has riches which must be taken away. The Holy Spirit describes them when he says through Solomon: "My soul hates a poor man who is proud," and elsewhere: "A proud man is a wounded man." The superior must observe this rule very carefully: if a poor man is converted, he must first open up his burden of pride, and so, having been tested, let him be received. Above all, he must be taught humility, and how great a thing and how ac-

ceptable a sacrifice to God not to do his own will but to be ready for anything. Whatever happens, he must remember: “be patient in tribulation.” When someone like this wishes to free himself from the darkness of the world, let him begin by going to the monastery and lying before the gate for a week. Let none of the brothers associate with him, and let him be told the hard and laborious things. If he perseveres in knocking, let entrance not be denied to him who asks, but the superior should instruct him how to observe the life of the brothers and the rule.

If he is wealthy, possessing many of the world’s riches, and wishes to be converted, he must begin by fulfilling the will of God and following this important precept which was given to the rich young man: “Sell all you possess and give to the poor, and take up your cross and follow me.” Then the superior must instruct him to keep nothing for himself but the cross which he must take hold of to follow the Lord. Now this is the full weight of the cross which must be carried: first, not to do his own will but that of another in all obedience. If he wants to give something to the monastery, he should understand the conditions under which he and his offering are accepted. If on the other hand he wants to have some of his slaves with him, he must understand that they are no longer his slaves but his brothers, so that he may be perfect in every way.

#### The Rule of Macarius

1. The soldiers of Christ must order their steps in the following way: by keeping the most perfect charity among themselves, “to love God with all their soul, with all their mind, with all their heart and all their strength.”

2. Let them practise the most perfect obedience to each other, and be peace-loving, gentle, moderate, not proud, not insulting, not murmurers, not mockers, not talkative, not presumptuous; not pleasing themselves but Christ whose soldiers they are; not falling into blasphemy or contradicting anyone; never tardy in service, ready for prayer, perfect in humility, girded with obedience, diligent in vigil, joyful in fasting.

3. Let no one consider himself more just than another, but let each one despise himself as inferior to all, for “he who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

4. Receive the instruction of an elder as a precept for salvation. Do not murmur about some task. Do not complain about an instruction.

5. Do not boast or flatter yourself that you have done a good piece of work. Do not rejoice in gaining something or be downcast in any loss.

7. Respect the superior of the monastery as God himself, love him as a father. In the same way you should love all the brothers, with whom you expect to find yourself in the glory of Christ.

8. Do not hate arduous work, do not look for the idle moment. Wearied by vigils, drenched in sweat by honest labour and almost asleep as you walk, go to your bed exhausted believing that you rest with Christ.

9. Love the observance of the monastery above all. The one who wishes to pray more often will more surely find the abundant mercy of Christ.

10. After saying matins, let the brothers meditate until the second hour, unless something has to be one in common in which case the meditation is omitted.

11. After the second hour let each one work at his task until the ninth hour, and let him do whatever he has been asked without murmuring, as the holy Apostle teaches.

12. If anyone murmurs or argues or shows ill will in any way with regard to the work given him, after he has been severely reprimanded according to the elder’s judgment and the

gravity of the fault, let him be excluded for as long as the nature of the fault demands, so that he humbles himself and does penance, and may not fall again.

14. At the hour of prayer, when the signal has been given, he who does not immediately abandon all that he is doing and make haste, should be kept outside so that he may be ashamed, for nothing must be put before prayer.

17. The one who is often corrected and does not amend should be told to take the last place. If he still does not amend, let him be treated like a stranger, as the Lord said: "Let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

18. At table particularly should no one speak, except the superior or whoever is asked.

19. Let no one pride himself on his skill or his voice, but in humility and obedience let him rejoice in the Lord.

20. Practise hospitality in all circumstances and do not avert your eyes leaving the poor man helpless; maybe the Lord will come to you as a guest or a poor man and seeing you hesitate, will condemn you. Welcome everyone cheerfully and in faith.

21. When injured, keep silent. Never let yourself do an injury, put up with an injury done to you.

23. If someone wants to leave the world for the monastery, let the rule be read to him when he enters and all the customs of the monastery explained. If he accepts everything in the right spirit let him be received by the brothers in a fitting manner in the community.

24. If he wants to bring something into the community, let it be put on the altar in the presence of all the brothers as the rule prescribes. If his offering is accepted, from that moment not only his property which he brought but even his own self will not be at his disposal. If he gave something to the poor beforehand or brought something for the brothers when he came to the community, even so, it is no longer permissible for him to have anything for his own use.

26. If a brother commits a fault for any reason, let him be suspended from the prayer and undergo a strict fast. If he asks pardon prostrate before all the brothers, let him be forgiven.

27. But if he perseveres in his wicked pride and says: "I cannot put up with this, I will take my cloak and go where I like." then let the brother who first heard him say this go and tell the prior and the prior tell the abbot. Let the abbot take his seat in the presence of all the brethren and order him to be brought. After he has been corrected by a beating, let a prayer be said and then let him be received in communion. Those who cannot be corrected by sound teaching must be healed by a beating.

28. If it happens that a brother wants to leave the monastery because of some quarrel, let him wear nothing but the most tattered clothes and leave the community as a faithless person. For the gentle and peaceful lay hold of the heavenly kingdom; they shall be numbered among the sons of the Most High and shall receive precious and splendid crowns. But the sons of darkness shall go into outer darkness. "Upon whom shall I rest, says the Lord, if not the humble and tranquil man who reverences my words?"

### The Regula Orientalis

1. In order that the elders do not labour in vain in governing the brothers, nor the discipline of the juniors weaken, dependent as this is on the abbot's own monastic observance, the abbot must for his part be irreproachable, severe, patient, one who fasts, pious and humble, so that he may fill the role of teacher and father and give an example of the beauty of good works. Let all the brothers be under his jurisdiction and do nothing without his advice and authority.

He cares for all the needs of the monastery, and is free to make decisions in everything connected with the monastery, showing no preferences or favouring anyone; but advising, encouraging, chastising or condemning each one, judging him in truth according to the merits of his daily way of life. Let him receive those who come to the monastery, and expel those who behave badly if it seems necessary.

Next it speaks of the different officials: 2. two elders; 3. the prior (praepositus); 25. the cellarer;

26. the porter. Then come chapter 27 on the reception of brethren, and 28 on the weekly servers.

30. All the brothers will observe the following: obeying their elders and deferring to one another, they will have patience, moderation, humility, charity and peace, without dissimulation, lying, evil words, gossip or the habit of swearing. Let no one lay claim to anything or take it for his own use, but let them hold everything in common.

32. When a fault is discovered, let him who is found guilty be corrected by the abbot in private. If this is not enough for his amendment, let him be reproved by a few elders. If he does not amend, let him be chastised in front of everyone. If even then he does not amend, let him be excommunicated and let him not eat anything. If even this does not help him, let him be placed last, in the order of psalmody, whatever his rank. If he persists in his perversity, let him not be allowed to sing the psalms. If this humiliation has no effect, let him be kept away from the community of brothers, forbidden both the table and the office, nor let any junior brother talk to him. He will be kept apart for as long as the nature of the fault demands, according to the judgment of the abbot and elders, or until he humbles himself, doing penance for his fault from his heart, and asks pardon for his error in the presence of all. If he has offended a brother, let him ask pardon of the brother he has offended.

35. When someone is so hardened and estranged from the fear of God that he does not amend after so many chastisements and so many pardons, let him be cast out of the monastery and treated as a stranger, lest others be endangered by his vice.

## Rules of Cesarius

### For Virgins

2. In the first place, this is what is most suitable for your holy souls: If someone wishes to leave her parents, to renounce the world and enter the sacred fold so that she may, with the help of God, escape the jaws of spiritual wolves, she must never leave the monastery until her death, not even to go to the basilica where the door can be found.

4. When someone is converted through the inspiration of God, she should not receive the religious habit straight away, her will has first to be tested by many trials. Let her be entrusted to a senior for a whole year, keeping the clothes in which she came.

7. No one, not even the abbess, may keep a servant for her personal service. If anyone needs help, let it be given by one of the juniors.

If possible, a small child should only be admitted to the monastery with difficulty or not at all; she should not be received until she is at least six or seven years old and can learn to read and practice obedience.

20. One of the sisters will read until terce, while the others work together. For the rest of the time, let their hearts continue to meditate on the word of God and pray.

May you be one soul and one heart in the Lord.

21. Those who possess something in the world should humbly offer it to the mother when they enter the monastery, so that the community may have the use of it. Those who had nothing should not seek to receive from the monastery what they could not have outside it. But those who had possessions in the world should not show disdain towards their sisters who came to the holy community from poverty. Let all live together in unanimity and concord and give honour to God in each other, for you have become his temple.

22. When you pray to God with psalms and hymns, may the words on your lips be also in your hearts. Whatever work you are doing, when there is no reading, ponder continually on the divine Scriptures.

23. Let none of you, led on by the devil, cast longing glances at any man; neither claim to have a modest soul if your eyes are immodest, for the immodest eye is the messenger of the immodest heart. Let us concede that the culprit may not be seen by anyone else; yet what will she do in the sight of heaven from whose gaze she can never hide?

## **2. Celtic Monasticism**

Saint Patrick

### **1. Confession 1**

I am Patrick, a sinner, a real bumpkin and the least of all the faithful, regarded by many people as utterly contemptible. My father was the deacon Calpornius, son of the priest Potitus who lived in the hamlet of Bannavem Taburniae. He had a dwelling in the country nearby, and it was there I was captured. I was then sixteen years old. I did not know the true God. I was taken into captivity in Ireland...

Then the Lord opened the understanding of my unbelieving heart so that I might at last remember my sins, and turn with all my heart to the Lord my God who looked upon my lowliness, and took pity on my youth and my ignorance. He watched over me before I knew him and before I knew how to distinguish between good and evil, he strengthened and consoled me as a father consoles his son.

### **2. Confession 16-17**

Every day I took the sheep to graze and I prayed often during the day. The love of God and his fear took hold of me more and more, my faith grew. My spirit was led to make about a hundred prayers in a single day and nearly as many in the night; I lived in the forests and on the mountain, I rose before daybreak to pray, whether in snow, hail or rain. I never came to any harm and I was not lazy for at that time the spirit was full of fervour.

And there one night when I was asleep I heard a voice which said to me: "You do well to fast, soon you will return to your homeland."

### **3. Confession 23**

After a few years I was again in Britain with my parents who welcomed me like a son. They begged me not to leave them and go elsewhere after all the hardships I had endured. It was there that "I saw a vision in the night" of a man called Victorinus who seemed to come from Ireland with innumerable letters; he gave me one and I read the beginning of the letter which said: "The call of the Irish." And while I read the letter, I believed I heard at that moment the call of those who lived by the forest of Voclut near the Western sea. This is what they cried out with one voice: "Holy boy, we pray you come and walk with us once more." I was deeply moved in my heart and was not able to continue reading; and so I awoke. Thanks be to God, after many years the Lord heard their cry.

#### 4. Confession 35-36; 38

It would take too long to recount every one of my labours, or even part of them. I will briefly tell how the good God often freed me from slavery and the twelve dangers which threatened my life, not counting the many plots which I cannot put into words, for I do not want to bore my readers. But God, who “knows everything before it happens” is my witness of the many times a divine voice gave me warning, poor wretch that I am.

How did this wisdom come to me? It was not mine as “I did not even know the number of my days” and was ignorant of God. And later, from where did so great and so salutary a gift come, that I should know God and love him, even leaving my homeland and my parents?

Yes, I owe so much to God who gave me so great a grace that through me many people were born again in God and then received confirmation. Clergy were ordained for them everywhere for these people coming to the faith whom God took from the ends of the earth, as he once promised by his prophets.

#### 5. Confession 55, 57

I find that even in the present time the Lord has exalted me beyond measure; I was not worthy nor a suitable person for such a thing, for I am sure that poverty and misfortune are better for me than riches and pleasure. Each day I expect to be killed, ambushed, captured or anything else, but because of the promises of heaven, “I fear none of these things.” As the prophet says: “I cast all my care upon the Lord and he will care for me,” I have cast myself into the hands of God Almighty who rules in every place.

How can I give him anything for all he has done for me? What can I say or what can I promise my Lord, as I can do nothing without his gift? May he search my heart and my innermost being, for I desire him so much, and I was ready should he give me his chalice to drink, as he has given to others who love him.

### Saint Columban

#### 1. Rule for Monks 1 Obedience

At the first word from a senior, all those who hear it should rise to obey, for obedience is offered to God, as our Lord Jesus Christ said: “Who hears you hears me.”

Whoever contradicts falls into the sin of revolt, and thus he is not only guilty of disobedience, but even more, having launched others on the path of confrontation, he will be responsible for their ruin.

If anyone murmurs, even though he obeys in spite of it, he too should be accused of disobedience. His work should be refused, until he shows his good will.

On the other hand, how far may one go in obedience? There is no doubt that we should go even as far as death, for Christ obeyed the Father on our behalf even unto death.

#### 2. Rule for monks, 4, Poverty

To strip oneself and despise riches is the first perfect work of the monk. The second is the purification of vices. The third and foremost perfection is continual love of God and continual love of divine things which follows on the forgetfulness of earthly things,

#### 3. Rule for monks 3 Food

Let the monk's food be plain, taken in the evening, avoiding overeating and drunkenness. Thus may he keep body and soul together without further harm.

Indeed, whoever desires eternal recompense must be very careful in using what is helpful and advantageous. That is why one must use whatever serves our life in moderation, so work should be moderate, for true discernment consists in safeguarding the possibility of spiritual pro-

gress, while checking the flesh with abstinence. Indeed, if abstinence goes too far, it is a vice and not a virtue, for virtue holds and strengthens many good things.

#### 4. Rule for monks 8 Discretion

The straying of many shows that discretion is needful for monks, and the ruin of some proves it. They began without discretion, and without sufficient understanding to guide them, they have been incapable of leading a praiseworthy life to the end. To go beyond the measure is to meet certain danger, since our adversaries place stumbling blocks of evil and obstacles of every kind of error along the right path of discretion. So one must pray to God continually to give the light of true discretion to enlighten this road bordered as it is on each side with the thick darkness of the world, in such a way that his true adorers may be able to pass through this darkness without straying and so come to him.

Discretion takes its name from ‘to discern’ for it discerns within us between good and evil, and also between means and goal.

#### 5. Rule for monks 6 Chastity

What use is it to be virginal in body if one is not so in soul? God is spirit and he dwells in the spirit and heart which he finds untarnished, in which there is no adulterous thought, no stain of the impure spirit, no taint of sin.

#### 6. Rule for monks 9 Mortification

The most important part of the rule for monks is mortification. Scripture enjoins it: “Do nothing without counsel.” If then one must do nothing without counsel, one should seek it on all occasions.

But although this discipline seems hard to hard hearts, knowing that a man always depends on the word of another, it will nevertheless be found sweet and secure by those who fear God, if they observe in completely and not partially, for nothing is sweeter than security of conscience and nothing is more secure than a soul without reproach. This is something which no one can obtain by himself, for it truly comes from the judgement of others.

#### 7. Rule for monks 9 Mortification

If monks have not learnt the humility of Christ, they will not taste the sweetness of his yoke, nor the lightness of his burden. Humility of heart is in fact the rest of the tired soul from its vices and difficulties, and its only solace in the midst of so many evils. The more they are drawn far from anything exterior, passing and vain by this consideration, the more they find rest and solace within. So too that which was bitter to him becomes pleasant, what before seemed hard and arduous he now finds natural and easy. Mortification itself, which is intolerable to the proud and hard of heart, become a consolation for him who delights in humility and gentleness.

## 12. Western Monasticism Explanation of the Texts

### 1. The Monks of Gaul

#### THE RULE OF THE FOUR FATHERS

##### 1.

The beginning is typically Augustinian — picking up the word ‘joy.’ But unlike the Rule of Augustine where the superior does not appear until the end, here the superior is put first. Avoidance of murmuring and joyful obedience are laid down.

##### 2.

Here again this paragraph is Augustinian. We find the social differences between the rich and the poor again. All must renounce their riches. The riches of the poor man are his ego. Note that the writer is hard on the poor, precisely to ensure that he wants to renounce his ego and serve God. It is for him and not for the rich man that the renunciation of his possessions is the guarantee of his following of God, so he is asked to remain lying before the gate for a week. It is to him that “hard and laborious things” must be given.

The rich man who, we see, has great possessions and slaves, must strip himself of them all; if he wants to keep one of his slaves, he must treat him as an equal, and above all renounce his own will.

## THE RULE OF MACARIUS

1.

Charity is the most important thing. Here, and in the following paragraph, the monk is the soldier of Christ.

2.

This is a beautiful portrait of the ideal monk. The first quality to be looked for is obedience. Already we find the condemnation of murmuring, neatly expressed in 4.

4.

“Receive the instruction of an elder as a precept for salvation.” This recalls the Apophthegmata: “Tell me how I am to be saved.” We can recall the meaning given to this word ‘salvation’: healing and even holiness.

7.

Here fraternal charity is the subject. First the superior whom one must respect and love; then the brothers. There is an original note here: the brothers are already seen as companions in heaven. This eschatological outlook is very beautiful.

8.

Manual labour was hard in Gallic monasteries. Notice the beautiful ending: “exhausted, believe that you rest with Christ.”

10-11.

Recommends adaptability. Here too we see that they work very hard: 8 hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon.

14.

Here too there is an echo of the Apophthegmata: Sylvanus.

23-24.

Concerns entrance into the monastery. It is the community which accepts the new brother. He must leave not only his possessions but his own self.

27.

In these last two verses, those who want to leave the monastery are considered. This intention is attributed to pride. From the psychological point of view, this interpretation is arguable. The poor brother is perhaps simply fed-up. The series of reportings and the beating which precede prayer seem wrong to us today. However the abrupt ending of the text makes us think that they first spoke to the miscreant.

Notice that the desire to leave is already considered as excommunication.

28.

Here too to leave the monastery is to withdraw from communion. The supposed motive is a lack of gentleness. In the school of the monastery, we learn from him who said: "Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart."

There is then a beautiful eschatological ending.

This text probably went through several stages of revision, for in 4 it speaks of the "elder"; amend in 7 of the "superior"; and at the end we find both the superior and the abbot.

## THE REGULA ORIENTALIS

1.

A beautiful portrait of the abbot (here this title is given him from the beginning), he is doctor and father. Lesser officers besides the abbot are also mentioned.

32.

There is a scale of penances from a private reprimand to showing him the door (in 35).

## CESARIUS' RULE FOR VIRGINS

1.

Even the abbess is under the strict rule of enclosure which lasts until death, when they are buried outside the cloister.

"The basilica" is the cathedral church. The nun's monastery was situated beside the cathedral where there was a door into the monastery. The nuns must never go through this door.

20.

Cesarius recommends the recitation of the words of Scripture by heart (as does Pachomius) which should lead to continual prayer. The end of the paragraph recalls St Augustine.

23.

As the nuns are strictly enclosed, this passage must refer to clergy who came into the cloister for the offices, the procurator who looked after the house, or occasionally workmen.

## 2. CELTIC MONASTICISM

### SAINT PATRICK

1.

"Patrick" — Patricius was a common name in the Roman Empire. Augustine's father was called Patrick

At this late date it was a social convention for the bishop to call himself a sinner. This does not necessarily mean that Patrick was indeed a humble man.

5.

If Patrick had a fruitful apostolate in Ireland, as the end of text 4 says, his life shows us that suffered much persecution. Many people hated him and he wrote his 'Confession' to defend himself.

### SAINT COLUMBAN

1.

Here we find borrowings from Basil, even the methods of question and answer. The measure of obedience is until death.

6.

Dependence on Cassian and on the Apophthegmata in the security found by those who rely on a spiritual father.

7.

Here again the influence of Cassian is very marked

## **12. Western Monasticism Revision Answers**

1) Which monasteries were founded by St Martin? What was the chief characteristic of his spirituality, taking into account the kind of man he was?

Martin founded Ligugé, near Poitiers, first; then when he became bishop of Tours he founded Marmoutiers. He was once a soldier: he insisted on obedience.

2) What are the names of the Fathers of the Jura whom history has recorded for us?

They are Romanus, Lupicinus and Oyend.

3) Who were the people who influenced the beginnings of monasticism at Lerins?

Honoratus founded Lerins. Hilary and Cesarius, who were both bishops of Arles, entered there. Eucher, future bishop of Lyons, and his wife lived on an neighbouring island.

4) Which Mother-Rules do the Gallic Rules derive from? How does this monasticism develop in the centuries to come (call — clergy/laity — divine office — enclosure for nuns)?

The Gallic Rules derive mostly from the Mother-Rules of Augustine and Pachomius. The various developments in the following centuries centre on the following points: Call: the aspect of 'vocation' too often becomes blurred and monasticism seems to be a profession like any other.

Clergy/laity: laity were predominant in the beginning, but later became a minority.

Divine Office: simple at the beginning, later becomes more complicated and lengthened.

Enclosure for nuns: it became very strict under Cesarius, and this became the common rule until Vatican II.

5) Who was the man who began monastic life in Iberia? Which Mother-Rules inspired him?

Iberian monasticism began with Martin of Braga. He translated some apophthegmata and was inspired by Eastern monasticism, particularly the Rule of Pachomius.

6) What are the special characteristics of Celtic monasticism? Have some come down to us?

The special characteristics of Celtic monasticism are: very rigorous asceticism — the monastery played an important role in religious organisation in the country.

A latin culture inspired by christianity had a great influence on the Carolingean renaissance, and thus on the Middle Ages — Sacramental penance under a private and repeated form spread — Voluntary exile of the Celtic monks led to the evangelisation of Ireland, Gaul and northern Italy

7) Which country did St Patrick evangelise? Give the names of two famous monasteries founded by his spiritual sons.

St Patrick evangelised Ireland. The most famous monasteries founded by his spiritual sons are Iona and Lindisfarne

8) Where did St Columban come from? In which country did he go on a peregrinatio pro Christo? Give the names of the monasteries which he founded.

St Columba was a native of Ireland. He entered the monastery of Bangor. His voluntary exile took him to Gaul, Burgundy, then into the country of the Moselle and the Rhine; and finally to northern Italy.

He founded the monasteries of Luxeil (and nearby Annegray and Fontaine) in Gaul, St Gall in present-day Switzerland, then Bobbio in northern Italy (Apennines).

9) Following the texts of the Rule for monks of St Columban which are given in the Course, write down the chief characteristics of his spirituality.

Columban put obedience in the first place. The journey to God is made by stripping oneself and the purification of the vices to achieve continual prayer. He asserted the necessity of discretion and insisted on humility.

### Table of 2 Centuries in the History of Monasticism.

| Two Centuries in the History of Monks<br>251-451 |     |                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Death of Decius                                  | 251 | Birth of Antony                                         |
|                                                  | 271 | Antony lives near the village                           |
| Emperor Diocletian                               | 285 | Antony in the fort, in the desert at Pispir             |
|                                                  | 292 | Birth of Pachomius at Sne                               |
|                                                  | 293 | Birth of Macarius of Alexandria                         |
|                                                  | 300 | Birth of Macarius the Egyptian                          |
|                                                  | 304 | Birth of Pambo & John of Lycopolis                      |
|                                                  | 308 | Hilary at Gaza                                          |
|                                                  | 312 | Amoun becomes a monk                                    |
|                                                  | 313 | Antony in the inner mountain<br>Baptism of Pachomius    |
|                                                  | 314 | Pachomius taught by Palamon                             |
|                                                  | 320 | Pachomius founds Tabennisi                              |
|                                                  | 321 | Theodore joins him                                      |
| Constantine the only emperor                     | 324 |                                                         |
| Council of Nicea                                 | 325 |                                                         |
|                                                  | 326 | Amoun in Nitria                                         |
| Athanasius patriarch of Alexandria               | 328 | Birth of Basil                                          |
|                                                  | 330 | Macarius the Egyptian at Scete Monasteries in Palestine |

|                                   |     |                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Constans and Constantius emperors | 337 |                                                                                             |
|                                   | 338 | Foundation of the Celles by Amoun & Antony                                                  |
|                                   | 340 | First monastery of nuns founded by Pachomius                                                |
|                                   | 346 | Death of Pachomius                                                                          |
|                                   | 347 | Birth of Evagrus                                                                            |
| Death of Constantius              | 350 | Seclusion of John of Lycopolis                                                              |
| Constans sole emperor             | 353 |                                                                                             |
|                                   | 354 | Birth of Augustine                                                                          |
|                                   | 356 | Death fo Antony                                                                             |
|                                   | 357 | Athanasius writes the 'Life of Antony'<br>Basil visits the monasteries of Egypt & Palestine |
|                                   | 360 | Basil writes the 'Moral Rules'                                                              |
| Julian the Apostate emperor       | 361 |                                                                                             |
| Valens emperor in the East        | 364 |                                                                                             |
|                                   | 365 | Birth of Cassian .                                                                          |
|                                   | 367 | Death of Hilary of Poitiers                                                                 |
|                                   | 368 | Death of Theodore                                                                           |
| Death of Athanasius               | 373 |                                                                                             |
|                                   | 375 | Death of Pambo                                                                              |
|                                   | 376 | Melanie on the Mount of Olives                                                              |
|                                   | 378 | Death of Basil                                                                              |
| Theodosius sole emperor           | 379 |                                                                                             |
|                                   | 380 | Rufinus joins Melanie on the Mount of Olives                                                |
| Council of Constantinople I       | 381 | Jerome in Rome                                                                              |

|                             |     |                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Council of Constantinople I | 381 | Death of Jerome                                                                             |
|                             | 383 | Evagrius at Nitira                                                                          |
|                             |     | Shenoudi and the 'White monastery'                                                          |
|                             | 385 | Evagrius in the Cells<br>Cassian in Egypt<br>Poemen in Scete<br>Jerome & Paula in Bethlehem |
| John bishop of Jerusalem    | 386 | Conversion of St Augustine                                                                  |
|                             | 387 | Baptism of Augustine                                                                        |
|                             |     | Death of Horsiesius                                                                         |
| Death of Gregory Nazianzen  | 390 | Death of Macarius the Egyptian<br>Palladius in Nitria                                       |
|                             | 391 | Palladius in the Cells<br>Augustine founds the garden monastery                             |
|                             | 393 | Death of Macarius of Alexandria                                                             |
|                             | 394 | Arsenius in Scete<br>Beginning of the Origenist controversy                                 |
|                             | 395 | Death of John of Lycopolis                                                                  |
| Death of Ambrose            | 396 |                                                                                             |
|                             | 397 | Death of Martin                                                                             |
| John Chrysostom a bishop    | 398 |                                                                                             |
|                             | 399 | Death of Evagrius<br>Cassian & the Origenists expelled from Egypt<br>Palladius in Palestine |
| Exile of John Chrysostom    | 404 | Cassian in Rome<br>Jerome translates the Rules of Pachomius                                 |
|                             | 405 | Cassian in Rome<br>Rufinus translates the 'History of monks'                                |

|                          |     |                                                   |
|--------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------------------|
| Death of John Chrysostom | 407 | First destruction of Scete                        |
| Sack of Rome             | 410 | Death of Rufinus<br>Death of Melanie in Jerusalem |
|                          | 412 | Palladius leaves Egypt                            |
|                          | 415 | Cassian in Marseilles                             |
|                          | 417 | Melanie the Younger in Jerusalem                  |
|                          | 419 | Palladius writes the 'Lausiac History'            |
|                          | 420 | Death of Jerome                                   |
|                          | 421 | Cassian writes the Institutions                   |
|                          | 423 | Simeon Stylites                                   |
|                          | 426 | Cassian writes the Conferences                    |
| The Vandals reach Hippo  | 430 | Death of Augustine                                |
| Council of Ephesus       | 431 |                                                   |
|                          | 434 | Second destruction of Scete                       |
|                          | 435 | Death of Cassian                                  |
|                          | 439 | Death of Melanie the Younger<br>Birth of Sabas    |
|                          | 449 | Death of Arsenius                                 |
| Council of Chalcedon     | 451 |                                                   |
|                          |     |                                                   |

| Table Showing the Characteristics of the Gallic Rules |                                                                               |                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 406 LERINS<br>at its inception                        | Rule of the 4 Fathers<br>Charter of foundation(influenced<br>by St Augustine) | Cenobitic option<br>Insistence on obedience to a<br>superior (is qui praest)<br>manual labour               |
| 426 LERINS<br>under Maximus' rule                     | Second Rule of the Fathers Ag-<br>giornamento (bringing up to date)           | Stress on charity between<br>brothers Divine Office edges<br>out lectio superior (prepositus)<br>penal code |
| 500 LERINS                                            | Rule of Macarius                                                              | More stress on spiritual                                                                                    |

|                                       |                                                                          |                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| under abbot Porcairius                | (influenced by Jerome)                                                   | life=abbot. His role becomes blurred in favour of fraternal relationships.                                           |
| 515 CONDAT<br>Oyend?<br>AGAUME?       | Oriental Rule<br>Compilation of Pachomius, R.F.2,<br>and original texts. | From the beginning,<br>superior = abbot Defines role of<br>each official and their relation-<br>ship with the abbot. |
| 534 ARLES<br>Cesarius                 | Rule for Virgins<br>(Cassian — Augustine)<br>Rule for Monks              | First Rule for women<br>Strict enclosure<br>Timetable laid down<br>Impersonal summary of the<br>Rule for Virgins     |
| 535 Council of Auvergne<br>(CLERMONT) | Third Rule of the Fathers                                                | Series of canons for the monks                                                                                       |

| Chronology of Western Monasticism       |     |                                           |
|-----------------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------------------|
| Saint Paul, hermit (?)                  | 250 | Group of hermits on Ile-Barbe, near Lyons |
| Antony a hermit near the village        | 270 |                                           |
|                                         | 312 | Group of ascetics at Clermont-Ferrand     |
| Pachomius founds Tabennisi              | 323 |                                           |
| Macarius founds Scete                   | 325 |                                           |
| Amoun founds Nitria                     | 326 |                                           |
| Birth of Augustine                      | 354 | Birth of Paulinus of Nola                 |
| Life of Antony by Athanasius            | 357 | Martin an ascetic in Italy                |
| Basil at Annesis, Little Asceti-<br>con | 358 |                                           |
|                                         | 360 | Martin founds Ligugé                      |
|                                         |     | Birth of Sulpicius Severus                |
|                                         | 368 | Martin founds Marmoutiers                 |
|                                         | 370 | Translation of the Life of Antony         |
|                                         | 371 | Martin, as bishop, founds Marmoutiers     |
| Rufinus and Melanie in Jerusa-<br>lem   | 378 |                                           |
| Death of Basil                          | 379 |                                           |

|                                              |     |                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                              | 385 | Birth of Patrick                                                                            |
| Jerome and Paula in Bethlehem                | 386 |                                                                                             |
| Augustine & the garden monastery at Tagaste  | 388 |                                                                                             |
| Augustine & the monastery of clergy at Hippo | 391 |                                                                                             |
| Rule of Augustine: the Praeceptum            |     |                                                                                             |
| Rufinus: Little Asceticon into latin         | 397 | Death of Martin, Sulpicius Severus' life                                                    |
|                                              | 405 | Honoratus founds Lerins. Rule of 4 Fathers                                                  |
| Death of Rufinus                             | 410 | Ninian founds Cadida Casa (?)                                                               |
|                                              | 415 | Cassian founds monasteries at Marseilles                                                    |
| Death of Jerome                              | 419 | Cassian publishes the Institutes                                                            |
| St Simon Stylites on his pillar              | 423 |                                                                                             |
|                                              | 426 | Cassian publishes the Conferences                                                           |
|                                              | 427 | Second Rule of the Fathers                                                                  |
| Death of Honoratus                           | 430 | Death of Augustine                                                                          |
|                                              | 435 | Romanus founds Condat                                                                       |
|                                              | 449 | Death of Hilary of Arles & Eucher of Lyons                                                  |
|                                              | 461 | Death of Patrick                                                                            |
|                                              | 470 | Birth of Cesarius of Arles                                                                  |
|                                              | 480 | Death of Lupicinus                                                                          |
|                                              | 490 | Birth of St Benedict (?)                                                                    |
|                                              | 495 | Rule of Macarius                                                                            |
|                                              | 500 | Cesarius reforms the monastery of Arles<br>Oyend completes legislation for Jura monasteries |
|                                              | 513 | Oriental Rule                                                                               |
|                                              | 515 | Third Rule of the Fathers                                                                   |
|                                              | 520 | Enda founds in the Aran Islands                                                             |

|  |     |                                          |
|--|-----|------------------------------------------|
|  | 529 | Benedict goes to Monte Cassino           |
|  | 534 | Rules of Cesarius                        |
|  | 540 | Rule of St Benedict<br>Birth of Columban |
|  |     |                                          |

## 13. The Monks of Gaza (c. 500).

### Plan:

- I. THE DESERT OF GAZA
- II. THE SPIRITUAL MASTERS
- III. TEACHING
  - 1) The letters of the solitaires
  - 2) The instructions of Dorotheus
- IV. CONCLUSION: REPOSE

### I. The Desert of Gaza.

Egypt had been the high-place of the anchoritic and cenobitic life for nearly two centuries. beginning with Antony in 271, then Pachomius in 320 to the death of Arsenius in 450.

From the north of Egypt to the south of Palestine, the desert of Gaza was very soon inhabited by monks: Hilarion came to settle there about 307 after he had been trained by Antony; and several monasteries formed round him. We have seen that the system of lauras flourished in the south of Palestine; there a monk was trained in a monastery, but he did not inevitably stay there for the rest of his life. He could lead a more solitary life, returning to the monastery each Saturday; or even stay in solitude. Some lived in complete seclusion. It is this mixture of cenobitism and anchoritism which we find among the monks of Gaza at the period we shall now study, the first half of the sixth century, which is contemporary with St Benedict. These monks lived more than a century after the desert Fathers whom we studied in the Apophthegmata.

At the end of the fifth century, a monastery was founded in this region by Seridos who became the first superior. It was famous for the holy monks who lived there. Many are unknown to us, but some have left texts which enable us to know the authors well and also give us the names of some of them. These texts are the the letters of direction of two solitaires: Barsanuphius and John and the spiritual writings of a cenobite, Dorotheus: instructions to monks, letters, and the life of his disciple, Dositheus.

These texts reveal a spirituality imbued with the Gospel. Its writers are human, rich in experience and remarkable for their balance; the emphasis is always on what is essential.

### II. the Spiritual Masters.

#### Seridos

Though he founded a monastery, he was a humble and retiring man about whom we know very little. He was trained by Barsanuphius who did not hesitate to treat him severely. A hard and rough formation which had him practice complete submission to his master and a heroic obedience, led him to great perfection. Barsanuphius called him his 'true and well-loved son.'

However, although he himself put Seridos through a severe training, he advised him to use discretion when as abbot he was too demanding of his monks. Barsanuphius quoted this text from the book of Proverbs: "Churn the milk and you will get butter, but if you squeeze the udder too hard blood will come forth." (30:33 in a different translation). Seridos was a condescending father to his monks.

### **Barsanuphius**

His outstanding wisdom, teaching and holiness earned him the name: 'The Grand Old Man.' He was born in Egypt about 460. First he embraced the anchoritic life, then he came to live as a solitary near the monastery of abba Seridos. He bade Seridos write letters at his dictation addressed to people outside, and guarded his solitude so fiercely that some monks doubted his existence, thinking that Seridos had imagined this mysterious and invisible person in order to bolster his own authority.

Beneath his rather austere replies, one senses great humility, a sensitivity mistrustful of itself, and great charity. We see too sometimes in his writings the heights of contemplation and familiarity with God to which he had attained.

On the death of Seridos, followed a little later by that of John, his solitude became total; he stopped all correspondence and we hear no more of him. When alive, he was thought not to exist; dead, he was thought to be still alive at the end of the sixth century.

### **John**

A disciple of Barsanuphius like Seridos, he too was a solitary and had close connections with the 'Grand Old Man.' In the letters, Barsanuphius calls him: 'The other Old Man.' He is also called 'The Prophet.' He was Barsanuphius' double, his 'other self' (Text 1). They are a remarkable example of spiritual friendship; God enabled them to know each other's thoughts.

John lived for 18 years in a separate cell to Barsanuphius. He also got others to write letters to those who asked his advice. First it was Seridos, then Dorotheus. John seemed to enjoy unalterable peace. His humility was evident by his constant self-effacement in the presence of 'the Grand Old Man.' We have the story of his death which gives us a final example of his charity (Text 2).

### **Dorotheus**

Because of his writings, which are easy to read and contain precious teaching, Dorotheus is the most important of these monks of Gaza. He is the nearest to us in spirit. He was born at the beginning of the fifth century at Antioch. His family was Christian; he received a good education and solid human formation as is clear from his works. Entering the monastery of Seridos, he put himself straight away under the direction of Barsanuphius and John. We can, thanks to the letters, follow the formation of a young monk who was to become one of the greatest names in spirituality; a unique occurrence in monastic history. Trials and temptations were not spared the novice from the moment he entered the monastery, as we see in this correspondence. His great strength in these struggles lay in his willingness to open his heart to his abbas (Text 3). The fruit

of this humble transparency was a peace such that Dorotheus was no longer disturbed by trials (Text 4).

Soon, Dorotheus was given important responsibilities in the monastery. First he was made guest-master, then also infirmarian and spiritual director, notably of Dositheus. These many occupations were a trial for someone who aspired to a humble and hidden life of silence: how could he keep the thought of God when he was pestered on all sides? He was tempted to become a hermit. Here again it was by opening his heart that he overcame it. Dorotheus told his two Old Men of being torn between action and contemplation. Abba John answered him (Text 5). A purely contemplative life is good, but only for those who are perfect. The mixed life is best for Dorotheus, uniting contemplation and the practice of fraternal charity. In the counsels of Barsanuphius we find the same teaching on continual prayer as Basil: the mindfulness of God is not far from keeping the commandment (Text 6).

Seridos died about 560 and John followed three weeks later. Barsanuphius was a complete recluse. At this time, Dorotheus left the monastery. Why? Was it because he had been criticised for his moderation by the other monks, champions of an excessive asceticism? Did he want to become an anchorite? We do not know. Even if it was for the latter reason, Dorotheus could not remain long in solitude. His reputation spread. Disciples came to live with him and he was constrained to found a cenobitic monastery.

We know nothing about this monastery, the life that Dorotheus led, or his death. But we have a precious treasure in the instructions which he gave to his monks and which tell us of his experience.

### **Dositheus**

Barsanuphius, John, Seridos, Dorotheus, each in his own way exemplifies the ideal of the spiritual father. The simple and pure life of Dositheus, as Dorotheus tells it, shows us the ideal of the disciple, the model novice.

Dositheus was a general's son and no doubt destined for the army; but he was converted during a journey to Palestine after a vision of the Virgin in Gethsemani. He entered the monastery of abba Seridos who confided him to Dorotheus. The novice was not very strong. Wisely, Dorotheus made his asceticism consist in forgoing his own will at every opportunity and in detachment from things given for his use (Text 7), in the practice of humility (Text 8), obedience, gentleness, patience and fraternal charity (Text 9) always. In the formation Dorotheus gave his novice, this constant fidelity in little things, anticipating the teaching of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus, was united to mindfulness of God (Text 10). This wise and sound formation, Dositheus soon achieved sanctity. He left this world after having received from Barsanuphius the assurance that all his sins were forgiven and his bidding: "Go forth in peace! Take your place with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and be our ambassador before God," which made his death an act of obedience.

The life of Dositheus ends with these words: "Dositheus became a friend of God in a short time! Yes, God judged him worthy of such great honour because he knew how to obey and to say 'no' to his own will."

## **III. Teaching.**

### **1) The Letters of the Solitaries**

From the letters of John and Barsanuphius we can see in writing how a young man must have been trained by an abba among the anchorites. This exchange of letters between master and disciple shows us how this relationship functioned: the master led by the Spirit, the disciple a man of desire. We read of the struggles undergone by the disciple, his temptations, and the victory gained through humble openness. We see too how the masters knew how to accommodate themselves to the disciple and help him grow, the balanced formation and true sense of values they communicated.

Close to the teachings of the Apophthegmata, these letters do not say all that can be said, although they record perhaps more personal confidences. Like the Apophthegmata, they are written for the needs of someone already advanced in the spiritual life, and so adapt to the way of life and state of soul of the recipient. Their teaching cannot be systematised or used without discernment. For instance, John said to Dorotheus: "You must obey the abba in everything, even if it seems sinful" (288). That is also the teaching of the Apophthegmata. It is not that of Basil.

The teaching of Barsanuphius is very close to that of John "his double." For both, the essence of perfection consists in charity. It is the roof of the spiritual house which we build (208). But this charity must be shown in deeds: to love is to observe the commandments, to renounce one's own will and to do the will of God (Text 11). Renunciation of one's own will is at the centre of this spirituality; everything else flows from it: humility means that one regards oneself as nothing, which makes obedience easy. Obedience and humility are the lynch pins (Text 12).

When one has renounced one's own will, one is completely open to the will of God (Text 13). It is *amerimna* which keeps the soul united to God in all circumstances (Text 14). This is why the letters insist on submission, on spiritual direction to preserve the interior liberty given by *amerimna* (Text 15).

The Fathers of Gaza help us to understand the nature of *amerimna* which is recommended by the Apophthegmata and represented as a stage towards *hesychia* and continual prayer. It is abandonment to divine Providence in the depths of humility, which Fr de Caussade and dom Léhodey taught in our day. It is the trust of the child, which is at the heart of the teaching of St Thérèse.

The monks of Gaza saw the surrender ('abandonment') which is *amerimna* as the preparation for *hesychia*; the highest degree of *amerimna* is *hesychia*, the repose of contemplation (Text 16). In this text we see that Barsanuphius experienced the heights of contemplation. For him, *hesychia* is hardly possible except in the solitary life, but he recognises that contemplation is possible amid the worries of life in a monastery (Text 17).

The teaching on prayer in the letters of the two solitaries is much the same; they speak of it a lot. Like Cassian, they place charity at the summit of perfection because they realise that it coincides with the highest forms of contemplation and prayer. They show us the way to get there.

As the foundation there is first of all humility and purification of the passions (Text 18). This text shows that we must never completely abandon the Pater, nor, as they say elsewhere, the Kyrie eleison and psalmody. The Pater is for sinners as well as the perfect. Both of them recommend to their correspondants continual prayer under the form of 'remembrance of God,' an habitual union with God retained amid exterior occupations, reading and conversations. Dorotheus, when overburdened with work, asked Barsanuphius if it was possible to retain remembrance of God. Here is his reply (Text 19). To a layman Barsanuphius explained how to advance in prayer (Text 20). He recommended the prayer of Jesus: "Let us never cease to call upon the Name of God to find help, for this is prayer" (425). It is the chief remedy which destroys the passions and keeps us humble (424).

## 2) The Instructions of Dorotheus

In the works of their disciple Dorotheus, we find the same teaching, but it is more systematic. Dorotheus presents it to his monks in a more general and methodical form; but he is still concrete and practical.

His Instructions are probably jottings taken by a disciple during the conversations Dorotheus had with his monks; their style is simple and without frills. This is very rare in ancient monastic writings: there is no literary fiction here as in Cassian. We have the simplicity once again of the Apophthegmata. But beneath this simplicity there are treasures of perception and a deep psychological understanding; Dorotheus knows the human heart, its resources but also its frailty in face of the devil's snares. He knows the Scriptures and the Fathers too and how to use them to get his message across gently and with a smile, sprinkled with anecdotes and memories.

Instruction 1 is noteworthy. It gives us a summary of his spiritual teaching. In order to explain the need for Christian and monastic asceticism, Dorotheus, who was inspired by the greatest of the Greek Fathers: Irenaeus, Origen, Athanasius and the Cappadocians, put it at the heart of the mystery of salvation. He goes back to the beginnings of humanity, to the fall and its consequences (Text 21). Then he shows the liberating work of Christ (Text 22). This liberation goes deeper than the Law. That told us what we must not do. The commandments of Christ tackled the cause of evil (Text 23). Thus he bids us avoid the cause of evil which is the passions, rather than evil itself.

Dorotheus realised that Christ goes further (Text 24). He concludes: "Let him who would find true repose for his soul learn humility! "There he will find all joy, glory and repose, but in pride he will find quite the opposite."

This is the way of every Christian; all must obey the commandments. Dorotheus goes on to develop the way for monks (Text 25). First there is the theme of renunciation, seen as renunciation of the world as in Cassian (13-14). Like Evagrius and Cassian, Dorotheus first gives the meaning of the monk's habit. Then he goes on to renunciation properly so-called. From his masters Barsanuphius and John, Dorotheus learnt the great lesson of renunciation of one's own will (Text 26). This detachment is the *amerimna* which Barsanuphius and John speak of.

The whole teaching of Dorotheus is summarized in this first instruction.

Elsewhere we find complementary points: the need for a guide to discern our passions and to be sure we are not doing our own will (Text 27), and of course charity towards our neighbour. Dorotheus uses a comparison to show the link between the love of God and love of our neighbour (Text 28). We find here the same teaching as Athanasius gave in the 'Life of Antony.'

Dorotheus also underlines the necessity of vigilance, the *nepsis* of the Apophthegmata, taking up the concept we found in Cassian and Basil (Text 29).

The Instructions of Dorotheus are not so rich on prayer as the Letters of the two solitaires. He shows it is necessary: we must pray to ask God to help us. He gives it as a remedy against resentment. Barsanuphius had taught him to be thankful in all circumstances. We find the same lesson in many of the passages of the Instructions.

## IV. Conclusion: Repose.

The term *hesychia*, for the two solitaires, was the repose of contemplation. Dorotheus too was attracted by *hesychia* at the beginning of his religious life, but his two spiritual masters made him realise that the eremitical life was not for him. After having been torn between his desire for solitude and the difficulties of the active life, Dorotheus learnt to find repose at the heart of a life

of obedience and service of his neighbour. His ideal was cenobitic. He only spoke of hesychia twice in his works, and that in passing.

It was to repose that Dorotheus continually invited his monks, showing them how to attain it. He meant a repose, not of body, but of soul. It is not the repose of a soul without temptations, which thinks itself free of them (Text 30). Rather it is a repose tied to *anemimna*, to surrender, which we have already mentioned; a repose which is the outcome of the spiritual struggle (Text 31).

The cenobitic teaching of Dorotheus not only concerns cenobites. He also instructed lay people of Gaza who came to visit him. He was read by thousands, for his teaching was above all Christian and moreover its 'social' character made it valued among Christians anxious to lead a life of perfection in the world.

This is why the works of Dorotheus were frequently translated and widely read by both monks and lay people. He was also read by the monks of Sinai, of Mount Athos and in Russia. In the West, partial translations were found in Monte Cassino. Later his works were translated by many Benedictines; he was recommended by Mabillon. Outside the cloister, Dominicans and Jesuits also used him. His teaching is always contemporary, as he explains the teaching of the Gospel in a picturesque way, with examples taken from daily life.

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### **13. The Monks of Gaza Texts**

#### **1. Barsanuphius — Letter 188**

What can I say about my blessed child, who is humble and obedient, who is one with me and has completely renounced all his own wishes, even to death. The Lord said: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." He also said of the disciple that he could be "like his master." "Whoever has ears to hear, let him listen."

#### **2. Anonymous**

Abba John lived in the first cell which had built for the Grand Old Man outside the monastery. He lived there as a recluse for eighteen years, until his death which he foretold as follows: I will die less than eight days after Abba Seridos. When we begged him not to leave us orphans, he said: "If Abba Seridos had stayed, I would have stayed another five years, but because God has taken him, I will not stay any longer." Then Abba Elien, the new superior of the monastery, begged Abba Barsanuphius with prayers and tears, that John might stay with us especially as he himself no longer wrote letters. Abba John knew this in spirit. When we came the next day with supplies, he said to Abba Elien: "Why did you beg Abba Barsanuphius about me? Do not go to all that trouble, for I shall not stay." Then, as we were all weeping at his feet, Abba Elien decided to ask: "Give me at least two weeks so that I may consult you about the monastery and its government." The Old Man, moved with pity and urged by the spirit who dwelt within him said: "Oh well! you may have me for three weeks." Abba Elien questioned him continually about each detail of the government of the monastery. When two weeks had gone by, he asked us not to speak about his death before it happened. Having called to him all the brothers and all those who

were in the monastery, he embraced each one and sent them all away. Then he gave up his soul to God in peace.

3. Dorotheus, Instruction V:66

When I was in the monastery of Abba Seridos, I used to confide everything to the old man, Abba John, and I never did anything without his advice. Sometimes my thoughts said to me: "This is what the Old Man will tell you; so why bother him?" But I answered: "Damn you and your discernment, your understanding, your prudence and your knowledge! What you know comes from the devil." Then I went to ask Abba John, and sometimes it happened that his reply was exactly what I had already thought. Then my thoughts said: "Now what? It is what I told you. You have disturbed the Old Man unnecessarily." And I replied: "Now I know that it comes from the Holy Spirit. What comes from you is bad, it comes from the devil, from your passions." So I never allowed myself to follow my thoughts without taking counsel.

4. Dorotheus, Instruction 1:25.

You have no experience of this unquestioning obedience, nor do you know the repose one finds in it. One day I asked the Old Man, Abba John, the disciple of Barsanuphius: "Master, the Scripture says that we shall enter the Kingdom of heaven through many tribulations. Yet at the moment I have none. What must I do so as not to lose my soul?" For then I had no troubles, no cares. If a thought came to me, I took a tablet and wrote to the Old Man. I had not even finished writing when I found relief and benefit, such was my freedom from care and my repose. Nevertheless, as I did not know the power of virtue and as I had heard that we must enter the Kingdom of heaven through much tribulation, I was worried that I had no troubles. But when I told the Old Man of my fears, he said to me: "Do not be upset, you have no need to be. All those who give their obedience to the Fathers possess this freedom from care and this repose.."

5. John, Letter 315

Do not be presumptuous in solitude, nor contemptuous in the difficulties of business; take the middle way where you will not fall, but will keep humble in solitude and watchful in the difficulties of business. There are no fixed times for recollection of spirit, neither hours nor even days. But events must be accepted with thanksgiving. You must be compassionate with all those who are troubled in the monastery and in this way fulfil the precept of the Apostle. If anyone is afflicted, you must share his affliction, console and strengthen him, for this is compassion. It is good to show compassion to those who are sick and to help in their healing.

6. Barsanuphius, Letter 328

Brother, all day long you are mindful of God and you do not realise it! In fact, to receive a commandment and to try and keep it is both submission and remembrance of God. Brother John was right in telling you: "Send out leaves first and in God's good time you will bear fruit as well" You do not know what is best. Go along with the advice of those who know. That is humility, and in that way you will find the grace of God.

7. Dorotheus, Life of Dositheus 8

Another time a brother went to the market and brought back a very good knife. It was a beautiful knife. Dositheus took it and handed it to Abba Dorotheus and said: "Brother X has brought this knife and I have taken it. If you agree, we will keep it in the infirmary because it is very good for cutting the bread into small pieces." But Abba Dorotheus did not want to have beautiful things for the infirmary. He wanted only sturdy things and nothing else. So he said to Dorotheus: "Bring the knife, I want to see if it is a good one. Dorotheus gave him the knife saying: "Yes Father, it is very good for slicing the bread small." Dorotheus also saw that it was very good for that; but he did not want Dositheus to be attached to anything too much, so he did not

let him keep the knife. He said to him: "Dositheus, does this knife really please you? Do you want to be the slave of this knife or the slave of God? It is true, Dositheus, this knife does please you and see, you are attached to it! What do you want? This knife is your master, not God! Are you not ashamed?"

Dositheus listened. He bent his head and said nothing. Dorotheus reproached him for a long time. In the end he said to him: "Come now, put this knife here and do not touch it!" Dositheus was very careful not to touch the knife, he did not even take it to hand to someone. All the other brothers used it, he was the only one not to go near it. And Dositheus never said: "All the others have the right to use it except me. Why?" But he did everything he was told with joy.

#### 8. Dorotheus, Life of Dositheus, 7

Dositheus was very good at making the beds of those who were ill. He had a guileless heart and said openly any thought that came to him. For example, often Dositheus made a bed with great care. Abba Dorotheus passed by, Dositheus saw him and said: "Father, Father, I have been saying to myself, I am good at making beds, I am!" Dorotheus answered: "Oh, my son! you are a good servant now! You have become a good worker, but have you become a good monk?"

#### 9. Dorotheus, Life of Dositheus 6

Dositheus took good care of those who were ill in the infirmary; however he was not always patient with them. Once he spoke to them crossly. Then he wept, he left everything and went to the store-room. The other brothers working in the infirmary wanted to cheer him up and went to see him. But Dositheus was still sad. So the brothers said to Abba Dorotheus: "Please come and see Dositheus. He is weeping and we do not know why." Dorotheus went to the store-room; he saw the brother sitting on the ground weeping and said to him: "What is the matter Dositheus? What is wrong with you? Why are you weeping?" Dositheus answered: "Forgive me, Father. I was angry and spoke unkindly to my brother." "What, Dositheus, you were angry! Are you not ashamed to let yourself become angry and speak unkindly to your brother! He is Christ and it is Christ you are wounding. Do you still not know this?" Dositheus bent his head and said nothing. Dorotheus saw that he had wept enough, so he said to him: "God forgives you! Get up! From now on, make a fresh start! Be very careful and God will help us!" When Dositheus heard these words he got up straight away and ran off happily to serve the sick. Yes, God had forgiven him, he was sure of it!

#### 10. Dorotheus, Life of Dositheus 10

Dositheus' thoughts were always on God. Abba Dorotheus had taught him to say always, according to the custom: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me!" and from time to time: "Son of God, help!" Dositheus prayed without ceasing in this way. When he fell ill, Dorotheus said to him: "Dositheus, think of the prayer. Pay attention to it and do not lose it." Dositheus answered: "Yes Father, pray for me." Some time later, Dositheus was more seriously ill. Dorotheus asked him again: "What about the prayer, Dositheus? Are you holding on to it all the time?" He answered: "Yes Father, with the help of your prayers."

Time went by and Dositheus became even worse. He had no strength and they carried him in a sheet. Dorotheus said to him: "How is the prayer going, Dositheus?" He answered: "Forgive me, Father, I no longer have the strength to pray." Then Dorotheus said to him: "Well, leave the prayer. Only be mindful of God, and remember that He is before you."

#### 11. John. Letter 574

Dearly beloved brother, faith in God, for one who is surrendered to God, consists in no longer having the freedom to go his own way, but to abandon himself until his last breath. He accepts everything that happens to him from God with thanksgiving: "Giving thanks in every-

thing.” For if someone refuses what comes from God, he is disobeying God and seeking to follow his own will.

12. Barsanuphius Letter 582

The one who dies in humility and obedience in the monastery will be saved by Christ; for the Lord Jesus has given him his word. But if someone follows his own will and pretends to obey and be humble, he will be judged by God

One who behaves according to his own will for the well-being of his body and not for the profit of his soul must constantly be admonished for the sake of him “who wishes everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of his truth.”

13. Barsanuphius Letter 38

The one I have entrusted you to knows what you need before you ask him. Since you know this, be without anxiety. It is by letting go of all anxiety that you will approach the city; and by being apart from men that you will dwell there. It is dying to all men that will enable you to inherit the city and its treasures.

14. Barsanuphius Letter 2

I hope that you too will enter into the repose of God. For it is “through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God.” Have no doubt in your soul and do not relax in your heart, but remember the word of the Apostle: “Though the outer man is falling away, the inner man, on the other hand, is renewed day by day.” If then, you do not endure tribulation, you will not mount the cross. But if you bear up under tribulation, you will enter through the great door of his repose, and you will live in quietness from then on, in complete freedom from all care. The soul which is strong and joined to the Lord whatever may happen, will be vigilant in faith, joyful in hope, exultant in charity, protected in the Holy Trinity. For him the word will be fulfilled: “Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad.” Such is the life of the man of God who is free from care.

15. Barsanuphius Letter 247

Brother, let him who wants to be saved and longs to be a child of God acquire great humility, obedience, submission and modesty. You ask: “Tell me what I must do.” This is what I answer, and I guarantee that you will not be burned by the passions of the enemy. For they will be burnt away by humility as by a fire, and the heart enlightened by Christ will rejoice in his own peace.

16. Barsanuphius Letter 207

May the Lord make you worthy to drink at “the fountain of wisdom”! All those who have drunk there have forgotten themselves, they have left behind the old man. From the fountain of wisdom they are led to another fountain, that of “unfailing charity,” and having reached that degree, they have attained the place where there is no agitation or distraction. They have become wholly spirit, wholly eye, utterly alive, wholly light, wholly perfect, wholly gods. They have laboured hard, they have been lifted up, glorified, made famous and perfect. They were first dead and now they are alive. They rejoice and give joy. They rejoice in the undivided Trinity and give joy to the heavenly powers.

Seek to join them, run like them, covet their faith, gain their humility, their endurance in every circumstance, so that you may receive their inheritance. Lay hold of their indestructible charity so that you may find yourself with them in the marvellous possession of those things which “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, which God has prepared for those who love him.”

17. Barsanuphius Letter 9

Do not lose courage in the afflictions and hardships which you endure for us and for our monastery, for this too is to give one's life for one's brothers, and I am sure that the reward of such labour will be very great. I will tell you the word of the Apostle to Timothy: "You, my child, must find strength in the grace of the Holy Spirit." Indeed, I can see how you will find repose, and I rejoice with you in the Lord. For insofar as you live outside yourself, you will find tribulation and hardship. But once you have come to the harbour of quietness, you will find repose and peace. Our Master, in truth, is no liar when he says: "I will give them a hundredfold in this world, and in the world to come life eternal." So work with enthusiasm, brother, to obtain charity and repose to the full.

18. Barsanuphius Letter 150

The Lord teaches us how to acquire perfect humility when he says: "Learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls." If then you wish to acquire perfect humility, learn what he suffered, and be prepared to suffer the same. Turn away from your own will in everything, for he said: "I came down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of my Father who is in heaven." This is perfect humility: to bear the injuries and insults which our Master, Jesus has suffered.

Perfect prayer is to speak to God without distraction, gathering one's thoughts and feelings together; and the way thither is to die to every man, to the world and to everything in the world. There is nothing we need to say to God in prayer but: "Deliver me from evil," and: "May your will be done in me." Do this in such a way that your spirit is present to God and speaks to him. We know that we are praying when we are delivered from distractions and when our spirit rejoices in being full of light in the Lord.

19. Barsanuphius Letter 150

Concerning continual remembrance of God, each one should practice it as well as he can. As for yourself, be content to humble yourself, for I know better than you what is best for you and I beg God to give it to you. All things are possible for him.

20. Barsanuphius Letter 150

Continual prayer is for the perfect who are able to control their spirit and keep it in the fear of God, so that it does not drift away or become absorbed in a compelling distractions or fantasy. One who cannot keep his spirit continually in the presence of the God should unite meditation with vocal prayer. Look at those who swim in the sea. Those who know how to swim jump in with confidence. They know that the sea will not engulf a good swimmer. But one who is only just learning to swim makes for the bank as soon as he feels he is going to sink down under the water, frightened of being unable to breathe. Then, taking courage, he may strike out again into the water. He tries this many time to learn to swim well, until he has acquired the ease of experienced swimmers.

21. Dorotheus, Instructions 1.

In the beginning when God created man, "he put him in Paradise," as holy Scripture says, adorned with every virtue. He commanded him not to eat of the tree in the middle of Paradise. So man lived in the delights of Paradise, in prayer and contemplation. He was filled with glory and honour. His faculties were healthy, in the natural state in which he had been created.

For God "made man in his own image," that is, immortal, free and adorned with every virtue. But when he had disobeyed the command and eaten from the tree that God had commanded him not to eat from, he was expelled from Paradise. Fallen from his natural state, he found himself in a state contrary to nature, that is to say, in a state of sin, love of glory, attach-

ment to the pleasures of this life, and the other passions dominating him. Then, evil gradually increased and “death reigned.”

22. Dorotheus, Instructions, 1:4.

Then in his goodness and love for men, God sent his only-begotten Son, for God alone knew how to heal and overcome such misery. So our Lord came, being made man for our sakes, “to heal like by like, soul by soul, flesh by flesh” as St Gregory says, “for he became completely man, without sin.” He took our very being and he became a new Adam, “in the image of him whom he had created.” He restored the state of nature to what it had been in the beginning. As man, he raised up fallen man. He delivered him from slavery and the tendency to sin.

23. Dorotheus, Instructions 1:5-6.

God knew our weakness and saw that even after baptism we would sin again — Is it not written: “the heart of man is evil from his youth”? — In his goodness he has given us holy commandments to purify us. If we really want to we can be made pure again not only from our sins but even from our passions by keeping the commandments.

The passions are different from sins. The passions are anger, vainglory, love of pleasure, hatred, evil desires and similar things. But sins are the acts which follow from these passions, when we actually do the things which our passions would have us do. Indeed, it is possible to experience the passions without in fact giving way to them.

Therefore God has given us commandments to purify us even from our passions, the evil dispositions of our inner person. He has enabled us to discern good and evil, and to recognise the cause of sin which he has shown us. “The law says: Do not commit adultery; but I tell you: Do not have evil desires. The law says: Do not kill; but I tell you: Do not get angry.” If you have an evil desire, even though you do not actually commit adultery, the craving goes on agitating you interiorly until you have committed the act itself. If you are irritated and annoyed with your brother, there comes a moment when you will speak ill of him, then you will plot against him, and so, little by little, you will come finally to murder him.

24. Dorotheus, Instructions 1:7

Finally Christ shows us how we come to despise and disobey the precepts of God. He gives us the remedy so that we may obey and be saved,

What is the remedy and what is the cause of our contempt? Listen to what our Saviour himself says: “Learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” See how in a single word he shows us the root and cause of all evil; and also the remedy, the source of all good. He shows us that it is pride that makes us fall, and that it is impossible to win mercy except by its opposite, humility.

So, pride gives rise to contempt and harmful disobedience, while humility yields obedience and salvation of souls. I am speaking about true humility, not about abasement in words and attitudes, but a really humble disposition deep within the heart and spirit. That is what the Lord meant when he said: “I am gentle and humble of heart.”

25. Dorotheus, Instructions 1:11-12.

The Fathers knew that it was not easy to attain virtue in the world. They thought of an existence apart, a special way of life, I mean the monastic life; and they began to flee the world to live in deserts and spend their lives in fasting, sleeping on the ground, in vigils and other hardships, in complete renunciation of homeland, relatives, riches and possessions. In a word, they crucified themselves to the world.

They not only kept the commandments, but they offered a gift to God in this way: the commandments of Christ have been given to all Christians, and every Christian is bound to ob-

serve them. This is, as it were, the tribute paid to a king. Will anyone who refuses to pay the tribute to the king escape punishment? But there are some great and illustrious people who, not content with paying the tribute to the king, also offer him gifts and so merit great honour, favour and respect.

So too the Fathers not only kept the commandments but offered gifts to God. These gifts are virginity and poverty. They are not commanded, they are given.

26. Dorotheus, Instructions 1:20.

If we want to be set free and enjoy perfect freedom, let us learn to renounce our wills. Then progressing little by little with God's help we shall achieve detachment. There is nothing so profitable for a man as to renounce his own will. Truly, in this way we progress, so to say, beyond all virtue. Like a traveller who finds a short cut and by taking it reduces his journey considerably, so too one who journeys by this way of renunciation of the will. For in renouncing one's will we attain detachment, and through detachment we come, with God's help to perfect apatheia.

It is possible, in a short time, to renounce ten desires. This is how: A brother takes a walk, he sees something, the thought comes to him "Look at that," then he says: "No, I will not look at it." He renounces his desire and does not look. Then he finds some brothers talking. A thought suggests itself: "You go and have a word too." He renounces his desire and does not speak. Then another thought comes to him: "Go and ask the cook what he is preparing." He does not go and renounces the desire. He happens to see something, the idea comes to ask who brought it. He renounces his desire and does not ask.

So, by these repeated renunciations he acquires a habit. After such little things he can renounce even big things easily. In this way he finally comes to have no desires of his own. Whatever happens, he is satisfied, as if it was what he himself wanted. Then, not wanting to do his own will, he finds that he is always doing what he wants; for everything that happens without his desiring it is pleasing to him. So he has no attachments and from this detachment, as I said, he attains apatheia.

27. Dorotheus, Instructions 5:

In the book of Proverbs it says: "Those who have no guide fall like leaves. There is safety in much counsel." See, brethren, the force of these words. See what Scripture is teaching us. It puts us on our guard against following our own understanding, our own wisdom, so that we should not think we can guide ourselves. We need help, we need a guide to God. No one is more wretched or vulnerable than those who have no one to guide them on the way to God.

Of those, on the contrary, who reveal their thoughts and do everything with counsel, Scripture says: "There is safety in much counsel." By "much counsel," it does not mean that we should consult everybody, but that we should consult someone in whom we can have the fullest confidence. If a man does not confide everything about himself, particularly if he has just abandoned a life of evil habits, the devil will discover that he is self-willed and self-opiniated and use it to bring about his downfall.

See how the evil one loved the brother whom he described to Abba Macarius: "I have a brother who swings like a weathercock when he sees me." He loves such monks, he is delighted with those who do not let themselves be guided by one who can, under God, help them and lend them a hand.

You see why the enemy "hates the safe way"; because he always wants our destruction. You see why he loves those who have confidence in themselves, because they work with the devil, laying snares for themselves. For my part, I know of no monk falling except through being

too sure of himself. Some say the man fell for this or that reason, but I repeat, I do not know of any fall happening except for this reason. Have you seen someone fall? Be sure that he was his own guide. Nothing is worse, nothing more fatal, than to be one's own guide.

28. Dorotheus, Instructions 6

The more one is united to his neighbour, the more one is united to God. To help you understand the meaning of this word, I will give you an example taken from the Fathers: Imagine a circle traced on the ground, and its centre. We call the centre the middle of the circle. Concentrate on what I am telling you. Imagine that this circle is the world. The centre is God, and the rays are the different paths or ways of life of men. When the saints, desiring to approach God, walk towards the centre of the circle, they come nearer to each other as well as to God, the more they approach the centre of the circle. The nearer they come to God, the nearer they come to each other. And the nearer they come to each other, the closer they are to God.

You can understand that it is the same in the opposite sense, when we turn away from God towards external things; it is obvious that the further we go from God, the further we are from each other, and the further we are from each other the further we are from God as well.

Such is the nature of charity. The nearer we are to the edge of the circle, the less we love God and the further we are from our neighbour. But if we love God, the closer we come to him through the love we have for him, the more we are united in charity to our neighbour; and the more we are united to our neighbour, the more we are united to God.

29. Dorotheus, Instructions 10.

If someone wants to acquire virtue, he should not let himself become distracted or dissipated. One who wants to learn carpentry does not practise another trade. It is the same for those who wish to acquire the spiritual craft. They must not be occupied with other things but apply themselves night and day to what they must do to become masters. Those who do not, not only do not make progress, but, having no goal, they tire and wander off. Without vigilance and struggle one easily falls away from virtue.

30. Dorotheus, Instructions 7

It happened that a brother, thinking himself to be in peace and tranquillity, was nevertheless troubled by a brother who came and said something offensive to him. He felt he was justified in saying to himself: "If that brother had not come and upset me, I should not have sinned." But it is a delusion, and false reasoning! Did the one who spoke to him implant passion in him? He simply revealed the passion that was already there so that he could repent, if he would. The brother was like pure wheat bread, looking good on the outside, but which, once broken, reveals that it is rotten inside. He thought he was at peace, but there was a passion within him which he ignored. A single word from his brother brought to light the rottenness within him.

If he wishes to receive mercy, let him repent, let him purify himself and make progress and he will see that he should rather thank his brother for having done him so much good.

31. Dorotheus, Instructions 13

The soul which has ceased to commit sin and has crossed the spiritual sea, must first struggle in the fight and in many afflictions. It is in this way that, through many tribulations, it will enter holy repose. "For we must pass through many tribulations to enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

As the winds bring rain, so tribulations call forth the mercy of God on the soul, as the winds bring rain. Yet too much rain rots the tender flower buds and destroys the fruit, while the wind slowly dries them out and makes them hardy — so it is with the soul; relaxation, carelessness and too much rest weakens and dissipates it. Temptations, on the other hand, pull it together

and unite it to God. The prophet said: "Lord, in tribulation we are mindful of you." We must not let ourselves be troubled or discouraged in temptation, but have patience, give thanks, and ceaselessly beg God, with humility, to have pity on our weakness and protect us in every temptation, for his glory.

### **13. The Monks of Gaza Explanation of the Texts**

4.

We find in these texts many things which we have met before. The "freedom from care" mentioned here is *amerimna*.

5.

John recommends a "middle way," that is to say a way in which action, fraternal charity and contemplation are practised together. The "watchfulness" or vigilance mentioned is the *nep-sis* found in the *Apophthegmata*. "There are no fixed times for recollection of spirit" means continual prayer, the goal of *hesychia* for the Fathers.

6.

Here we are very close to the teaching of Basil: action = "leaves" leads the soul to remembrance of God, contemplation = "fruits."

There is probably the trace of an *Apophthegm* here too: "Someone asked Abba Agathon: Which is better, bodily suffering or interior watchfulness? The old man answered: "Man is like a tree: corporal affliction is the foliage, and interior watchfulness the fruit. It is obvious that our concern is for the fruit, that is to say, guarding of the heart. But we need the protection and the adornment of the leaves which are bodily affliction."

9.

Dositheus received the gift of tears which accompanied his humility.

10.

"According to the custom" means the custom of *melete*. We have here a good example to illustrate what we have already found in the *Apophthegmata* concerning *melete*: it can take two forms: 'catanytic' (which pricks), the first formula; or 'auxiliatrice' (seeking help) which is the second.

Refer back to the distinction which Basil made between prayers: the formulas of *melete* and prayer, the mindfulness of God which Dositheus was bidden to keep when he no longer had the strength to practice *melete*.

11.

"He accepts everything that happens to him from God with thanksgiving," as did St Thérèse of the Child Jesus in a later age; she wrote at the beginning of her Gospel that she always carried with her: "You fill me with joy in all that you do."

13.

"The one I have entrusted you to." The spiritual Father is the intermediary between God and the disciple.

"without anxiety" = *amerimna*

"the city" is *hesychia*; contemplation "its treasures." Thus letting go of all anxiety, which is *amerimna*, introduces one to contemplation.

14.

"Repose," or rest, a theme which comes from Hebrews 3 & 4. Repose, like the "city," is contemplation, the fruit of affliction, as the repose of the resurrection is the fruit of the cross. It is perfect *amerimna*.

15.

“Tell me what I must do.” Surrender to the spiritual master, who represents God, brings “tranquillity” and “repose.”

16.

“Have forgotten themselves.” This makes us think of the Dark night of St John of the Cross: “I kept silence, in forgetfulness. My head resting on the Beloved. Everything ceased. I rested there. Surrendering my cares. Among the lilies, forgotten.” “Surrendering my cares,” “without agitation or distraction,” as it says further on in this text 16. It is so true: God manifests himself in the same way, under the same conditions, to the great contemplatives of every age and country!

“Wholly gods.” This is the theme of divinization dear to the Greek Fathers.

At the end of the passage we find the same distinction made by Cassian: the immediate aim is charity, the goal is eternal life.

21.

In this passage we find again the optimistic idea that man was created good that we have seen in Antony and Basil. The “natural state” is good. Sin is a state “contrary to nature.”

28.

A celebrated text which illustrates the idea already mentioned by Athanasius in the ‘Life of

Antony’: the nearer one comes to God, the nearer one is to other people, our brothers and sisters. Evagrius too said: “Separated from all, united to all.”

31.

The “spiritual sea” refers to the Red Sea, and the story of the Exodus; “holy repose” is the Promised Land, the Kingdom of Heaven.

## 14. John Climacus (circa 580-680).

### Plan:

- I. HIS LIFE
- II. HIS WRITINGS
- III. HIS TEACHING
- IV. CONCLUSION

### I. His Life.

With the monks of Gaza: Barsanuphius, John and Dorotheus, we were in southern Palestine, in the first half of the fifth century. They were contemporary with St Benedict. Now, with John Climacus we have moved further south to the Sinai peninsula, and nearly a century later, for John Climacus lived sometime between 580 and 680. We know little about his life; the only source is a short text by Daniel of Raïthou who claimed to be a contemporary of John, but did not know which country he came from!

We know that he received a good intellectual formation. At sixteen his thought was already mature, he was only a novice! He put himself under the tutelage of an elder of the monastery of Mount Sinai. He received the monastic tonsure and became a monk when he was twenty.

His spiritual father died, and John went to lead the solitary life in Tholas, at the foot of the Holy Mountain. He retired to a cave near a group of anchorites who lived there. He experienced acedia, but also the gift of tears and continual prayer. He stayed there for forty years.

However, he did travel a little, and he visited the monks of Egypt.

A monastery of penitents where he stayed for a month made a great impression on him, and he often mentions them in his writings.

As happens with every true man of God, he became a radiant personality and attracted disciples. He was a celebrated spiritual father whom many came to consult. His writings show that he saw much and heard even more. A monk called Moses became his disciple. John's influence aroused envy and people reproached him for his pastoral work. He kept silent for a whole year, and by his humble patience won over the hearts of his accusers.

Then he was chosen as superior of the monastery of Sinai. It was certainly at this time that he wrote his book: "The Ladder of Divine Ascent." In the following centuries he was called: 'John of Sinai,' or 'John Climacus,' which means: 'John of the Ladder' (*klimakis* = ladder).

A monk at 20 and hermit for 40 years, then superior for some years, John must have reached a great age. When he was old, he handed over his responsibilities to his brother George who survived him by only ten months. John retired into solitude again and died between 650 and 680.

## II. His Writings.

John has left us one book, The Ladder of Divine Ascent. It is an important work, more by its content than its length, for it is only one book in thirty chapters, followed by a Letter to a Shepherd which is a small treatise for the use of superiors or spiritual fathers.

The book is important because it is the product of a period of transition and synthesis.

Transition, because it was an age when Arab invasions would soon shift the centre of Eastern monasticism to Athos.

Synthesis, for John gathers together the teaching of his predecessors: the Fathers of the Egyptian desert, the Fathers of Gaza and Cassian whom he cites by name; and, as Cassian had done, from this synthesis he draws instruction for cenobites.

John is a monk who has experienced both the summit of monastic life — the deification of man by the uncreated Light, and the way that leads there. It is this way which he retraces for his monks on a practical level.

We find here the teaching he has received from tradition: the practical experience of the Apophthegmata, an echo of the doctrine of Evagrius on the capital sins, and on the relationship between praxis, (asceticism and the practise of the commandments), and theoria, contemplation. His spiritual realism, his insistence on obedience and discernment, come from meditating on the writings of the monks of Gaza.

He has also read the Greek Fathers of the patristic Golden Age and retained the sense of the grandeur and the fragility of humanity, and above all of the redemption and trinitarian theology.

It is this plenitude of doctrine united to a remarkable gift of discernment which gives John Climacus an important place in the Eastern Church among the doctors of spirituality and asceticism. We should approach him as disciples to a master, ready to see what God wishes to say to us in his writings, while realising that, like the Apophthegmata and the Fathers of Gaza, we do not have in them a complete doctrine of the spiritual life.

The presentation under the form of a 'Ladder' is familiar. We have found degrees in the discourse of Pinufius, and in the Institutes of Cassian. Origen had already presented the ladder of Jacob as a symbol of spiritual progress. St Benedict took up the image, and here Climacus re-traces the steps.

What are these steps?

### III. His Teaching.

#### The Ladder of Divine Ascent Plan

1. Break with the world
  - 1) Renunciation = Faith 1
  - 2) Interior detachment = Hope 2
  - 3) Exterior detachment = Charity 3

2. 'Active Life': Asceticism

- A. Fundamental virtues:

- 1) Obedience 4
    - 2) Repentance 5
    - 3) Remembrance of death 6
    - 4) Penthos 7

- B. Struggle against the passions:

- 1) From anger to acedia 8-13
    - 2) Gluttony, lust & avarice 14-17
    - 3) From insensitivity to pride 18-23

- C. Summit of the 'Active Life':

- 1) Simplicity 24
    - 2) Humility 25
    - 3) Discernment 26

3. 'Theoria': Union with God

- 1) Hesychia 27
  - 2) Prayer 28
  - 3) Apatheia 29
  - 4) Charity 30

We can find three parts in the degrees set out by John Climacus. The first deals with the first conversion which is entrance into the monastery. The two others deal with the two divisions of the spiritual life given by Evagrius: 'Active life' and 'Theoria.'

#### 1. Break with the world

The first step of the first part is renunciation of the world. John gives three motives which recall the three classic degrees: slave, mercenary, son (*Text 1*). Renunciation is a journey in faith which will be hard in the beginning, but will open out in love and joy (*Text 2-3*). Then John gives

us the two components: interior detachment or exile leading to hope, (*Text 4*), and exterior detachment or exile which he calls voluntary exile, that is, entrance into the monastery (*Text 5*). Then one is motivated by real charity

## 2. Active Life

Then comes an account of the ‘Active Life’:

A. First come the virtues. They obviously refer back to the Desert Fathers: obedience, repentance, remembrance of death and *penthos*, the account of these virtues is illustrated by many anecdotes and stories.

Voluntary exile is entrance into the monastery, so John now addresses himself to monks and cenobites. He puts obedience first, and says a lot about it. Obedience is an act of faith (*Text 6*). It is important because normally it leads to humility and apatheia. To prove it, John calls to mind the monastery of Penitents where he had once stayed for a month, (*Text 7*). He concludes: (*Text 8*). He explains why obedience leads to humility (*Text 9*). This is the outlook of the Desert Fathers who demanded from their disciples unconditional obedience to the abba whom they had chosen. According to John, confidence in the superior is the basis of obedience (*Texts 10-11*).

After a chapter on repentance and on remembrance of death, John calls the next chapter: “The affliction which brings joy.” This is *penthos*: sadness at not having loved enough (*Text 12*) which leads to humility (*Text 13*), but also to tears of love (*Text 14*). These tears are a gift from on high which manifest the presence and action of God. (*Text 15*). Only then can *penthos* really be called the: “affliction which brings joy” (*Texts 16-17*).

B. The account of the “Active Life” continues with the vices and their opposite virtues. John speaks of eight capital vices (13:11) but it is not easy to tell which they are among all the vices of which he speaks. They are not the same as those mentioned by Evagrius and Cassian. He seems to attach particular importance to six. He gives them in pairs according to the Stoic divisions of the soul: anger and acedia are concerned with the ‘irascible’ part; gluttony, or more exactly ‘over-eating,’ and lust with the ‘concupiscible’ part; the ‘rational’ part are insensitivity or ‘carelessness which has become a habit,’ vainglory and pride which John classes together, although he has a step for each on his ladder.

First anger. According to Evagrius it was the greatest obstacle to prayer, and John agrees (*Text 18*). Similar to anger is resentment, harbouring injuries in another form (*Text 19*). Anger gives birth to slander which gives rise to gossip. Against these, John praises silence (*Text 20*). Anger and the vices which flow from it lead to acedia. Like Evagrius, John Climacus calls it the “weightiest of all the vices”; and he too paints an amusing picture of it at work (*Text 21*). The common life is a great help in overcoming these two leading vices.

Then come the vices which have the body as their target: gluttony and lust to which John adds avarice. The stomach (*Text 22*). He who has conquered says John “makes big strides on the road to chastity.” The fifteenth step of the Ladder praises this virtue (*Text 23*). It aims at the transfiguration of the body and transforms human love into divine love.

The Desert Fathers, Evagrius and Cassian, denounced vainglory and pride as the most difficult vices to eradicate. They are also found at the end of John’s catalogue of vices; vainglory is the mother of pride (*Text 24*). The pride which magnifies itself is really a sign of great poverty (*Text 25*). These two vices are the perversion of every virtue and the ‘shipwreck in the harbour.’

C. John shows us the fruit to be had at the end of the struggle against the passions: the ‘Active Life’ is crowned by three virtues: discernment, simplicity and humility.

Discernment: the purified soul knows itself, and it has reached the stage when it knows the will of God. It has entered a new world where it participates in the simplicity of God (*Text 26*). The end of this text shows humility united to simplicity. It is a priceless gift of Him who said: "Learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart." It is the imitation of Christ, the Gateway into the Kingdom, a tranquil haven. This is what the monk must espouse (*Text 27*); for it is the daughter of God (*Text 28*).

### 3. Theoria

At the summit of the Ladder, the integrated soul is ready for union with God, for Theoria. John describes it with the help of four almost interchangeable terms: hesychia, prayer, apatheia, charity. The ladder of St Benedict shows us interior humility outwardly demonstrated in our bearing. Here too, one cannot distinguish between behaviour and being.

Hesychia is a way of life, but also an interior disposition (*Text 29*). It is unceasing worship given to God, continual prayer (*Text 30*). Hesychia is incompatible with anger, bitterness, vanity; it achieves the angelic life, it is an interior heaven, resurrection anticipated. (*Text 31*).

Prayer. There is a full doctrine of prayer in the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*.

John's predecessors thought anger was the enemy of prayer. For John too the preparation for prayer is the absence of bitterness (*Text 32*). Prayer is a matter of faith (*Text 33*). It is not always easy (*Text 34*); it is linked with the reality of our everyday lives (*Text 35*). Prayer demands perseverance (*Text 36*). God is the master of prayer and it is his gift (*Text 37*); and through it he shows us the state of our soul (*Text 38*). It is characteristic of John that he insists on simplicity in prayer (*Text 39*). He recommends the prayer of a single word, the brief and repeated invocation of the Name of Jesus as we breathe (27:62). This unwearying repetition of a brief invocation frees the soul from a multitude of thoughts. It gradually leads us to the constant remembrance of God (*Text 40*). So one attains continual prayer which can then intensify the moments set aside for more formal prayer (*Text 41*).

Then the divine fire sweeps through the soul: "Some people come from prayer as though they were leaving a burning furnace" (54). We are reminded again here of the Apophthegmata: the old man who became fire! Our angel will come to pray in us then (*Text 42*). This is a precious text which teaches us to benefit from the moments when prayer rises spontaneously in our hearts.

Apatheia. The soul is now without passion, stretching out towards God (*Text 43*).

Charity: apatheia and charity are one (*Text 44*). The hesychast is drawn towards the depths of divine love (*Text 45*). He becomes the dwelling place of the Lord who transfigures him (*Text 46*).

A small work called "The Shepherd" is appended to the Ladder; it consists of advice to superiors and spiritual fathers.

The superior or spiritual father is a shepherd (9-11), but John also compares him to the sheepdog (12), to a pilot but above all to a doctor (14). He should not take credit for the good he does, but attribute it to the faith of those whom he guides. Here we have an echo of the Apophthegmata (Felix t.12) and Cassian (end of Conf. 1) (*Text 47*). As in the Apophthegmata too, his teaching must be adapted to each person (36). Above all, he must identify himself with the Lord, Christ (*Text 48*) whose teaching must be rooted in his heart. Once it has taken root, he "carries within him the spiritual book of knowledge, written by the finger of God, the illumination that is

that he bestows, and the Pastor has no need of any other book”(5). In the same sense, John concludes his book in these words (*Text 49*).

#### **IV. Conclusion.**

One could reproach John Climacus for his emphasis on an “angry God” or “policeman-God.” Did he not impute to “the wicked Origen the baneful disease which insists on the love of God for man”! (5:52). Of course he is referring to the theory which denies that hell lasts for ever, which is, perhaps mistakenly attributed to Origen. But all the same it is significant! This does not appear in the choice of texts presented here. But if we read the text of the Ladder in its entirety, we might, in the first reading, be offended by some expressions of John’s which seem too hard; sometimes his severity seems almost inhuman.

John is first of all a pastor. Like Basil, he is concerned that his sheep do not stray, that they walk on the right way, and he uses the point of his crook to poke them. But also he is convinced that the monk is one who takes the Gospel seriously, and he asks ‘more’ from him who would be perfect. John emphasizes a “holy evangelical violence” which must be like an unquenchable fire in him (*Text 50*). The monk must not be content with being a good Christian, he must follow Christ, embrace his cross so as to attain his resurrection and the deification of his whole being. This is not a matter of choice, but the logic of an evangelical radicalism, the sense of the claims of a God of love crucified by love, and the certainty of the help of grace.

However this endeavour will be adapted to each person. Discernment has a place in the teaching of John, as a disciple of the Desert Fathers. If each person must do all he can to follow the Gospel in all its radicality, it is still “what he can.” The discernment which John recommends to the pastor takes into account both the claims of God and the capabilities of the person.

Moreover, humility has first place. The most advanced monks are not those who consider themselves great ascetics or great contemplatives, but those who are convinced that they are unworthy monks and who say continually: “I am beginning again.” For John the foundation of the spiritual life is *penthos*, penitence. Its end is charity.

It is within this subtle perspective that we must understand the seemingly extreme element in John’s teaching. It’s objective is the relationship of man with God, his transfiguration and personal, total communion with his Creator.

#### **Bibliography**

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#### **14. John Climacus Texts**

##### **1. 1:26**

The one who renounces the world through fear is like burning incense. First he spreads a fragrant aroma, but it ends in smoke. The one who renounces the world through the hope of reward is like a wheel constantly turning on itself. But the one who leaves the world through divine love is set on fire within from the beginning; and like a forest fire, spreads into a great conflagration.

##### **2. 1:20**

Those who, while clothed in a body, venture to ascend to heaven, must necessarily do violence to themselves and suffer continually, particularly at the beginning of their renunciation,

until their instinct for pleasure and their insensitive hearts have been changed through compunction into a sound disposition of love of God and of purity.

3. 1:31

At the beginning of our renunciation, for sure, we will find much labour and bitter affliction in practising the virtues. But when we have made some progress, we shall have no more affliction, or very little. And when our earthly mind has been consumed and mastered by zeal, we shall practice them with joy, lightness of heart and love, and with a divine flame.

4. 2:1

One who truly loves the Lord, and truly seeks to possess the Kingdom to come, who feels true sorrow for his faults, who truly keeps eternal punishment in mind, who is truly afraid of his death; such a man has no other love, nor anxiety, no concern for money, for his possessions, for his relatives for the glory of the world, for his friends, for his brothers or anything whatsoever on the earth. Having rejected every attachment and every care about such things, even about his own flesh, he follows Christ, dispossessed and without care, looking eagerly towards heaven and waiting for help from there according to the words of the holy king: "I have not grown tired of following you, and I do not look for the day or the ease of men, O Lord."

5. 3:1

Voluntary exile is to leave behind irrevocably everything in our homeland which stops us attaining our goal: to love God. Voluntary exile implies self-control, a wisdom which remains unknown, veiled prudence, a hidden life, a yearning for what is contemptible, a passion for what mortifies, a desire for the immutable God, an abundance of love, renunciation of vain glory and an abyss of silence.

6. 4:9

The Fathers teach that psalmody is a weapon, prayer a rampart and pure tears a bath. But blessed obedience they compared to the act of faith; for without it, no man subject to the passions can see God.

7. 4:23

I saw there men who had passed nearly fifty years in obedience. When I begged them to tell me what consolation they had found in such hard labour, some replied that they had reached the lowest depths of humility; others said that they had obtained perfect indifference and freedom from all distress amid injuries and insults.

8. 4:78

Humility comes from obedience, and from humility comes impassibility. It is written: "The Lord remembered us in our humility, and he has delivered us from our enemies." So we can declare that obedience leads to impassibility, which brings humility to perfection. Humility is the beginning of impassibility, as Moses is the beginning of the law.

9. 4:60

One day I questioned one of the most experienced fathers, and asked him how humility is achieved through obedience. He answered: "A wise and obedient monk, even if he raises the dead or receives the gift of tears, or has been freed from all struggle, thinks that all this is due to the prayer of his spiritual father. He is far from any presumption. How could he take pride in something which he admits is due to the help of his spiritual father, and not to his own efforts?"

10. 4:7

It is absolutely necessary that those who wish to have unshakeable confidence in their superiors keep a constant and indelible remembrance of their good deeds in their hearts. So when the demons sow distrust, they can silence them by these memories.

The more a heart grows confident, the more zealous the body is to serve. One who stumbles over distrust has already fallen.

11. 4:133

If your superior reproves you constantly, and your love and confidence in him grows proportionally, is because the Holy Spirit has come to dwell invisibly in your soul, and the Power of the Most High has overshadowed you. But do not pride yourself or rejoice when you courageously put up with insults and humiliations. Rather bemoan what you have done to merit such treatment which has disturbed his soul and provoked him against you.

12. 7:45

Is there anyone who has spent all his monastic life so piously that he has not lost a day, nor an hour, nor a single moment, but has spent them all for the Lord, realising that one never has the same day twice in one's life?

13. 5:42

One who weeps over himself does not count his tears, nor the fault of his neighbour, nor the reproaches that come his way.

14.7:9

Groans and sadness cry to the Lord. Tears caused by fear intercede in our favour. But the tears of holy love show us that our prayer has been accepted.

15. 7:28

In nature as in compunction, we must distinguish what rises spontaneously and what comes from elsewhere. When our soul, without any deliberate effort on our part, feels itself melt in tears and is filled with tenderness, let us run! For the Lord has come uninvited, and he gives us the sponge of sadness which is precious to him, and the refreshing water of tears pleasing to God to wipe away the debt of our sins. Guard these tears as the apple of your eye as long as they last. Great is the power of this compunction, far superior to that which comes from our own efforts and our meditation.

16. 7:54

When I ponder the nature of compunction, I am astonished. How can what we think of as affliction and sadness contain such joy and gladness hidden in its breast, like honey in a comb? Compunction is a special gift from the Lord, and God secretly consoles the broken heart.

17. 7:44

One who has put on the wedding garment of blessed affliction and overflowing grace knows spiritual laughter in the soul.

18. 8:18

The Holy Spirit is called the peace of the soul — and so it is. Anger is called disturbance of the heart — and so it is. Nothing so hinders the coming of the Holy Spirit within us as anger.

19. 9:12

You will know that you are completely free from the infection of resentment, not just by praying for the one who offended you, nor by exchanging presents with him, nor by inviting him to a meal, but on learning that he has fallen into some bodily or spiritual misfortune, by suffering and weeping over him as over yourself.

20. 11:5

The friend of silence comes close to God; and conversing with him in secret, he receives his light.

21. 13:8

At the third hour the demon of acedia causes shivering, headache and even an upset stomach. At the approach of the ninth hour, the monk finds a little strength, and when dinner is ready, he jumps out of bed. But when the hour of prayer comes, the body feels overwhelmed again. When he is at prayer, the demon sends him to sleep and interrupts each verse with untimely yawns.

22. 14:2

A full stomach dries up the source of tears, but when the stomach is dry tears flow in abundance.

23. 15:2

Chastity makes incorporeal nature its own. Chastity is the beloved abode of Christ, and the earthly heaven of the heart. Chastity is a supernatural renunciation of nature. It is the condition in which a mortal and corruptible body competes in a marvellous way with the incorporeal. A chaste person is one who drives out love with love, and puts out the fire of the flesh with spiritual fire.

24. 22:35

A man who had received the gift of vision told me what he had seen. "One day" he said, "while I was sitting in the assembly, the demon of vanity and the demon of pride came and sat near me, one on either side.

One poked me with the finger of vainglory and urged me to tell some vision which I had had, or some labour which I had accomplished in the desert; I had hardly got rid of him saying: "Let all those who wish me evil be put to flight and confounded" (Ps. 39:15), when the other demon at my left whispered in my ear: "Very good, well done! You have become great by having vanquished my impudent mother!"

Turning towards him, I added the following verse: "Let them be put to flight and confounded who say: Well done, well done!" And I asked him: "How is it that vainglory is the mother of pride?" He answered: "Praise lifts up and swells the soul. When it is lifted up, pride takes hold of it, takes it up to heaven and then throws it down to the abyss."

25. 23:23

Pride is extreme poverty of soul which imagines itself to be rich and believes its darkness to be light. This impure passion, not only hinders all progress, but throws us down from the heights of virtue.

26. 24:18

Let all of us who long to draw the Lord towards us approach him as disciples to their master, in all simplicity, without hypocrisy, malice, guile or deviousness. He himself is simple and without complexity, and he wants the souls who approach him to be simple and innocent. You will never find simplicity separated from humility.

27. 25:9

One who has taken humility for spouse is gentle, kind, full of compassion, sympathetic, peaceful, shining with joy, docile, inoffensive, vigilant, active; to sum up, free from passion, for "the Lord remembered us in our humility and has delivered us from our enemies," from our passions and our uncleanness.

28. 25:68

Someone experienced for a day the beauty of humility in his heart, and seized with admiration, asked her to tell him the name of the one who had given her birth. With a shining and peaceful smile, humility answered: "Why do you want to know the name of the one who brought

me into being? He has no name, and I cannot tell you until you have God for your possession!" To him be glory for ever.

29. 27:4

The beginning of hesychia is to avoid all noise, because noise troubles the depths of the soul. When perfect it fears no disturbance and remains untroubled.

30. 27:18

The hesychast declares openly: "My heart is ready O God!" He says: "I sleep, but my heart wakes."

31. 27:16

I have seen hesychasts slake their thirst without slaking their burning desire for God, generating fire by fire, love by love, desire by desire.

32. 28:4

When you go to present yourself before the Lord, the tunic of your soul should be woven entirely with the thread of the absence of bitterness. Otherwise you will gain no profit from your prayer.

33. 27:69

Faith is the wing of prayer. Without faith my prayer will return to my breast.

34. 4:104

When lazy people feel that the orders they have received are arduous, they begin to think that prayer is preferable. But when they find them easy, they flee from prayer as from a fire.

35. 4:112

He is a true servant who among men is in the body, but in spirit knocks at the gate of heaven through prayer.

36. 28:32

When you have persevered a long time in prayer, do not say that you have got nowhere; for you have already obtained some result. For what greater good can there be than to attach yourself to the Lord and persevere unremittingly in this union with him?

37. 28:67

Have great courage, and you will have God himself as the master of your prayer. It is impossible to learn to see by means of words, because sight comes from nature. In the same way, it is impossible to learn the beauty of prayer through the teaching of another. Prayer is only learnt by praying, and God is the master, who himself teaches man knowledge, who gives prayer to the one who prays and who blesses the years of the just.

38. 28:37

Prayer will show you the state of your soul. Theologians call prayer the mirror of the monk.

39. 28:9

When you pray, do not look for complicated words, for the simple and monotonous wailing of children has often touched the heart of their Father in heaven.

40. 28:19

The beginning of prayer consists in repelling our thoughts by a single word the moment they turn up. The middle state consists in concentrating on what we are saying or thinking. Its perfection is ecstasy in the Lord.

41. 28:34

Prepare yourself for the times you consecrate to prayer by continual prayer, and you will make rapid progress. I have seen men whose obedience was outstanding and who made them-

selves guard the thought of God in their heart. At the moment of prayer they were able immediately to recollect their spirit and shed floods of tears, because they were prepared in advance by obedience.

42. 28:11

If a word of your prayer fills you with sweetness or compunction, dwell on it, for our guardian angel is there, praying with us.

43. 29:2

He has become truly impassible who has made his flesh incorruptible, lifted his mind above creatures and made it master of his senses; and who, keeping his soul in the presence of the Lord, continually reaches out to him with an eagerness beyond his own strength.

44. 30:9

Love, impassibility and filial adoption are only distinguished by name. As light, fire and flame go together, it is the same, I think, with these three realities.

45. 30:12

A mother does not clasp her new-born infant to her breast more closely than a child of love clings to the Lord at all times.

46. 30:16

If the face of a loved one brings an outward change to our whole being and makes us joyful, gay and carefree, what will the face of the Lord not bring about in a pure soul when he comes and dwells there invisibly?

47. The Shepherd, 53

You should ask yourself, as all superiors should, whether divine grace does not often work through us because of the faith of those who come to us, and not because of our own purity.

48. The Shepherd, 28

Whatever the shepherd does, he must remember it is love that brought the Shepherd to the cross.

49. The Shepherd, 100

As I write this, I hear this word: "You who teach others, can you not teach yourself!"

So, I will say no more than this before concluding my discourse. A soul united to God in purity has no need of the word of another to instruct him. This blessed soul carries the eternal Word within her and he is her instructor, her guide and her light.

50. The Shepherd 28:19

Who is a faithful and wise monk? He who has kept his fervour without letting it go out, and who has not ceased day by day to add fire upon fire, fervour upon fervour, desire upon desire and zeal upon zeal until the end of his life.\_

## 14. John Climacus Explanation of the Texts

1.

This is similar to the Saying of Amma Syncletica. (Text 39).

4.

A very rich passage where we find many themes we have seen before.

From the beginning, John, like Basil, places love of God as the highest endeavour. 'Truly' is repeated five times, underlining the consequences of this love of the 'true' God in descending order. If one truly loves God, one wants to be with him in the Kingdom. It is the 'aim' of

Cassian. Then, feeling sorrow for having offended him is *penthos*. Then follows the remembrance of punishment and the fear of death.

The consequences of this love are: first *amerimna*. The word ‘care’ or ‘anxiety’ is found three times. We have seen that among the monks of Gaza absence of care is similar to abandonment or surrender. The same idea is found here.

Then comes the following of the “dispossessed” Christ, the theme of detachment found in Cassian. The “following of Christ,” found again in the last sentence is a central theme of monasticism.

“Looking eagerly towards heaven” reminds of continual prayer, the “mindfulness of God” mentioned by Basil.

Finally there is the theme of hope, of spiritual poverty and abandonment is underlined by: “waiting for help from heaven.”

5.

“Our goal,” the *scopos* of Cassian: “to love God.”

6.

“Psalmody is a weapon.” The Desert Fathers had recourse to texts of Scripture in their struggle with the devil. See text 24 for a further example.

10.

A remedy against murmuring.

11.

Dorotheus said: “To accuse oneself is the way to peace”

15.

As in the preceding text, there are two kinds of *penthos*: that which comes from our own efforts, and that which comes from God.

“The Lord has come uninvited.” This second kind of *penthos* is then an infused grace: the Holy Spirit touches man’s soul without intermediary.

“Guard these tears.” John will repeat further on the counsel to know how to guard the prayers which God inspires in the soul. (Text 42)

19.

Love of one’s enemies must always be considered as the summit of charity, its highest degree.

22.

Here John makes a connection between abstinence and *penthos*.

23.

A monk’s chastity can only be explained by great love.

29.

“Avoid all noise because noise troubles the depths of the soul”; external *hesychia* favours *nepsis* and *amerimna* must lead to interior *hesychia* which, according to John, is the same thing as *apatheia* and charity.

31.

Here is the theme of *epectasis*: as God is infinite, our desire for him is satisfied because his presence experienced in contemplation fills us; it is also unsatisfied, because God is greater than our limited selves and will always be beyond us.

38.

Hence the danger of abandoning prayer: one no longer knows oneself. This is also why tepidity brings avoidance of prayer, one is afraid to recognise one’s tepidity.

40.

There are three degrees of prayer here: prayer of a single word, prayer without words, ecstasy in the Lord.

43.

Continual prayer brings about a love full of hope.

#### **14. John Climacus. Revision Answers**

1) What does the word 'Climacus' mean, and when did John live in relation to St Benedict?

Climacus means 'ladder,' the name of his principal work. He lived a century after St Benedict.

2) Why is the work of John important?

John's work is important because it was written in a time of transition. After the Arab invasion, the monastic centres of Egypt and Palestine were destroyed, and Eastern monasticism found refuge on Mount Athos. John is therefore the intermediary between the monasticism of the Desert Fathers whose experience he culls and the monasticism of Mount Athos to which he transmitted this inheritance.

3) Explain in what way we find the teaching of the Fathers from earlier monasticism in John Climacus.

In John Climacus we find the traditional teaching of the Fathers. This is the practical experience of the Apophthegmata: the formation given by the abba, the importance of obedience, the opening of the heart, penitence; and the doctrine of Evagrius on the capital vices, and on the relation of praxis and theoria. He has also read Cassian with his teaching on the three renunciations, and the monks of Gaza.

4) Can you give some notes on the teaching of John on prayer.

A more personal question. Here too John collects the teaching of his predecessors: preparation by humility and the absence of anger. The difficulty of prayer and necessity of perseverance.

Prayer is a gift of God and a judgement: it shows us what we really are. John insists on brevity which should be as short as possible. This is what leads us to a remembrance of God. Continual prayer will enable us to experience the prayer of fire.

### **By Way of Conclusion.**

#### **Outline of Methodology**

##### **PRINCIPLES**

##### **READING**

Prayer Know how to skip what is common-place, of little interest.

Know how to pause over what helps you to pray.

Get to the heart of it — chew it over — think about it during the day, so that it feeds you.

Above all, read it with the heart.

Study Here the heart should not be inattentive, but the understanding has more work to do.

Make up your mind to read the whole book, even if it does not seem to feed your prayer directly.

The noviciate is where we learn to read and to pray.

## PRACTICE

There are many ways in which we can make our lectio divina fruitful, and do it thoroughly; ways which I have used myself or heard about. In presenting such a wide subject, I must first explain that I have not practised them all. Secondly, I have been doing it for forty years; and over such a long period of time one grows and changes. So do not think you have to take everything; find what is most profitable for yourself. What is important is that what you read does not go in one eye and out of the other. It should strengthen and nourish your life of prayer.

I. THE FLOWER: Simply write down a beautiful phrase or passage. One can keep it in one's pocket to re-read during the day and so continue one's prayer

II. THE FLORILEGIUM: This is a bouquet of flowers.

Florilegium comes from *Flowers* — *I tie* = *I tie the flowers together*.

There are various kinds of florilegia:

A Simple florilegia: On separate pages in a notebook write down beautiful passages as you read them, they can then be classified later on. Write well so that you will enjoy re-reading them.

Do not forget to note the author and the reference so that you can find the passage again later.

B Florilegium for one author: An even more interesting way of doing it. Make a collection of the best extracts from a favourite author.

First read the text to see what are the recurrent themes he uses which will help to give an outline of the plan of the book.

When you have discovered the ideas which he returns to frequently, then arrange them in a logical order, with headings and sub-headings.

Within this plan, copy out the extracts that appeal to you and which nourish your prayer. In this way you have a small book.

III. THE HOLD-ALL: Use the simple florilegium, but use the florilegium a bit also for each chapter. This is better than the simple florilegium as one can put in everything: not only extracts but also words and themes.

Here too it can be done very simply, in alphabetical order.

Even better, one can arrange one's findings by word or expression on separate pages (large to put in a file, or cards for a card-index), placing headings at the top right hand corner. The classification will then be according to these headings in alphabetical order.

For example, there might be: Acedia, Adam, Adam & Christ. Love (with sub-divisions as it is a large subject: Love = know oneself loved — Love = gift of self — Love = desire to love etc...) Mother. and so on.

Here again, do not forget to add the author and reference.

## IV. READING — STUDY

A. For reference: Reading for reference, pen in hand. Make a note of interesting ideas and copies passages which will help your prayer.

Do not forget to leave a margin on the left to write in the page reference in case you want to come back to it.

B. Careful study: This is what we must aim for. It could be the study of a whole book, or a chapter or passage. Identify the author of the extract. Then make a preliminary reading to get an overall view. Try to find out how it is put together and the plan. (To find out how it is put together, notice where there is a change of ideas. What are these ideas? What are the transitions?).

Having found the plan, then summarize the principal ideas in a schematic way within it, or add passages which will help you to pray.

This is a good method for the Sermons of St Augustine and other Fathers; particularly when they are used on feast days.

## V. OTHER HELPS

A. Colours: One can underline the same or similar words with coloured crayons, this helps to identify key-words or changes of idea in a short text. Of course the text must be copied out, to avoid defacing the library book!

B. Tables: There are many interesting ways of doing this

1) According to ideas: Summarize a text with a plan.

2) For the psalms: The 'Last judgement' method: one puts whatever refers to God in the centre; what refers to good on the right and evil on the left. One may need more columns for places or people; it is for you to decide!

Obviously several methods can be combined and others invented. The point is to work at it and be nourished by one's reading.

## Glossary.

Acedia — boredom, restlessness, despondency, listlessness

Anachoresis — withdrawal into solitude

Amerimna — freedom from anxiety

Anthropomorphism — notion that since man is made in the image and likeness of God, the 'form' of God must be in some way the form of man.

Apatheia — participation in the passionlessness of God and so a foretaste of the 'angelic' life, the life of the resurrection, of inner and outer integration; impassibility; interior simplicity; purity of heart (Cassian); spiritual freedom; detachment, but not indifference.

Apotaxis — renunciation

Diakrisis — discernment or discretion.

Epektasis — notion of the search for God and participation in the Divine life as unending 'stretching forward' (Phil 3:13) in self-transcendence into the Transcendent, who is ever beyond; eternal life is thus conceived as dynamic, ever-deepening union with God, not a static 'vision.'

Epinoia — thought, conception.

Gnosis — the knowledge of the enlightened mind, of one who has learnt to perceive the by means of diakrisis which is a participation in divine knowledge and so linked with contemplation.

Heart — is the spiritual centre of man's being as he is made in the image of God.

The deepest and truest self in which the mystery of the union between the divine and the human is consummated.

Hesychia — inner tranquillity, stillness, the silence of listening and entering into God's own silence.

Homonymy — homonoia, unanimity, concord, agreement.

Logikos — the intelligence, that is: how the intellect works. Closely connected with the logos: the divine intellect. Signifies one who possesses spiritual knowledge.

Logismoi — passionate thoughts

Logoi — inner essences or principles of things

Melete — the exercise of prayer; meditation; brief and constant prayers.

Nepsis — watchfulness, vigilance, guarding of the heart

Nous — intellect or mind; the highest faculty in man, through which, when it is purified, he knows God. Not the same as reason which is deductive understanding. It understands divine truth by means of inner experience or intuition. It dwells in the depths of the soul, is the innermost aspect of the heart — the 'eye of the heart' and means of contemplation.

Penthos — compunction, sadness at not having loved enough.

Praktike — practice of the virtues, asceticism to purify the soul of its passions or emotions

praxis = action

Reason — mind; the conceptual and logical faculty which draws conclusions from data given by the senses or by spiritual knowledge.

Scopos — aim or objective

Telos — final goal or end

Theology — denotes far more than learning: active and conscious participation in the realities of the divine world; ie. a realization of spiritual knowledge; experiential knowledge of God through the highest form of prayer. Mysticism.

Theoria — Contemplation; the perception of the intellect through which one attains spiritual knowledge

Theoria phusike — contemplation of the natural world