

**Coptic Youth Conference**

**on**

# **PURITY**

**TOPICS, QUESTIONS, AND ANSWERS**

**1993**

**COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH**

**MELBOURNE - AUSTRALIA**

This book, in fact, is the outcome of two youth conferences, held in Victoria, Australia.

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Prepared by:  
**Nivene Hanna,**  
and others

English text revised by:  
**Dr. Nora El-Agami**

*In the Name of the Father,  
the Son, and the Holy Spirit  
One God.  
Amen*

*Thanks to my God who granted me this occasion to live for some days with our sons, the senior and junior youth in Sydney and Melbourne, discussing many youth topics in a spiritual and evangelical atmosphere.*

*Thanks to H. H. Pope Shenouda III who asked me to participate in these conferences with the youth.*

*In spite of my illness at that period, I was very happy to live in the world of the youth under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.*

*Here I revised the topics, for writing differs from speaking.*

*May our Lord Jesus Christ use these words for our spiritual edification and progress.*

*Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty*

*March 1993*

## WHAT IS PURITY?

### PURITY AND THE LIKENESS TO CHRIST

*“For this is the will of God,  
Your **sanctification**:  
that you should abstain from sexual immortality...  
Therefore he who rejects this **does not reject man, but God**,  
Who has also given us His Holy Spirit.”  
1 Thessalonians 4:3,8*

The Oxford dictionary defines “purity” as “the state of being clean, without evil or sin; unmixed with any other substance or thing / race.”

In 1 Thessalonians 4:3,8 there are two statements made by St. Paul which must be highlighted, for these statements help us in formulating a definition for purity. The first is that: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immortality,” and the second: “Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.”

One may ask:

Why it is God’s will, our sanctification?

Why when we reject purity it is considered as if we were rejecting God Himself and not just man?

Why God is so interested in our purity?

Why does God not allow us to act in freedom? What is the advantage of leading such saintly life?

A simple simile will help explain why God is concerned with His children’s purity. When a mother gives birth to a child, on the first day the doctor may comment on how much the child resembles his mother.

However, at this point, the father of the child probably grows jealous, wishing the child to look like him. It is here that a paternal contest begins, each wishing the child to resemble him or her. These same feelings of paternal love are the shadow of God’s paternal love. In a way that either parents long to see their children a picture of them, in other words focusing their morals and values. This comes out of intimacy between child and parents and paternal like ... Yes, we can say a result of pure true mutual love with no contradiction with free will. For love makes father’s will one with son’s will. Hence only one will God’s and man’s. **As a result the children of God should mirror His image, by not only being noble and gentle, but also holy temples where the Holy Spirit abides.**

Since the fall of Adam, the likeness of God portrayed in the image of His creation, man, was distorted. However, the New Adam, Jesus Christ our Saviour restored the image once spoiled by man, and creating a new form of practising the adoption to the heavenly Father.

In the epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians, there is a great emphasis on our new nature as the children of God, through which we become the temple of God, where the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts.

*“For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus** for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” 2:10.*

*“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,*

*having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone...*

*in whom you also are being built together for a **habitation of God in the Spirit**” 2:19-22.*

*“... till we all come to ... a perfect man, to **the measure of Christ**” 4:13.*

These concepts create the core of St. Paul’s theology. If Saul (St. Paul), was questioned about his religious status, during the time he persecuted the church, he would have answered: “I am a righteous man, I know the law, I memorize the prophecies of the Old Testament, I practise fasting, I am a true zealot, a brilliant pioneer and scholar.” When St. Paul met the risen Jesus Christ, he discovered that he was completely on the opposite path, and felt a yearning to be reunited with God and practise adoption to Him, to be in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

If a believer feels weak or overpowered in his battle against lusts, he needs to discover that he is a child of God. If he stands by himself in the battle of chastity he will be conquered, but it is through God’s Spirit that he obtains victory. Once a person discovers his adoption to God he repents and changes his path by the divine grace. Then he discovers that chastity is the natural law of his life. To ignore being a child of God, and a member of the body of Jesus Christ, then sexual immorality becomes the law of his nature. In other words, purity or chastity for a Christian is not his own, but belongs to the One who died on the Cross and sent His Holy Spirit to sanctify the church and each member of it.

Before St. Augustine’s conversion, his father compelled him to get involved in evil deeds, such as fornication and related actions. In the book of St. Augustine’s “*Confession*,” he admits to having been a leader of a ‘gang’ that would steal neighbours’ apples and feed them to the pigs. St. Augustine did not wish to eat the fruit, but merely to fulfil his desire of stealing with the members of his gang as their leader, directing them to such behaviour. St. Augustine lived in a de facto relationship for twelve years with his illegal son. It is said that each day, St. Augustine would pray to God wishing that God would allow him to repent and live a true life of chastity and purity, “but not today, for I wish to fulfil my needs first” - he was not sincere. One day, he heard of St. Anthony the Great. He wondered how a simple Coptic man with no qualifications could be such a great pioneer, attracting men to the kingdom of God, while he as a philosopher, could not live in chastity and purity. Consequently, St. Augustine knelt under a tree and repented.

After seeing him weep fervently, his friend Alepius repented also. The adulterous woman who used to come to him, was impressed by the way his life had completely changed. It is said that she knocked his door and when he asked whom she wanted, she replied in wonder, “Augustine!” He said, “Augustine died.” She replied,

“It is Augustine's voice!” He added, “Augustine died, Christ is speaking through him!” She repented and became a Mother Superior, while he became a great bishop, and attracted many to purity comforting them.

### **PURITY IN MOSES' LAW**

In the book of Leviticus, we learn the laws and rituals of sanctification through sacrificial blood, as of Jesus Christ, besides several laws of cleansing rituals of the body, and tabernacles. The aim of our sanctification or purity is declared in the same book, “Be holy as I am holy” 11:44,45, 20:26. It is not only a commandment, but also a promise. When lustful thoughts are attacking you, raise your hearts to your heavenly Father, the Holy God, asking Him to fulfil His divine promises.

### **STRUGGLING AND SUBJECTION TO BODILY LUSTS**

There should be a clear distinction between full struggle against lusts, and lean struggle against lusts. Once you have been a teenager, you must have been attacked by evil thoughts - it allows you to feel normal and attacks are external from Satan. Through these attacks of bodily lusts you will feel the need of the work of the Holy Trinity; you will enjoy the fellowship of the Son, unity with the Father, by the Holy Spirit. This is the means of being crowned. However, never obey these lusts, run to Christ and find shelter in Him. As long as you are in flesh, you will have to struggle to conquer in your spiritual war. If there exists a battle in your heart, do not feel conquered but realise that you are a living member of Jesus Christ and you are truly a soldier, battling the opposing forces attempting to enslave you to bodily lusts.

St. Paul says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” Phil. 4:13. If you say “I cannot,” you are hindering God’s powerful work in your life, neglecting the glorious works of His Holy Spirit in you, hence rejecting Him and accusing Him of weakness.

You are greatly honoured in the eyes of God. You are the person for whom He sent His law and prophets and prepared the redeeming way for his sake. The Lord wishes to glorify your body and soul in heaven, that it be glorified and honoured.

### **PURITY IS NOT A DESTRUCTION OF SENSES AND EMOTIONS**

Do not despair if you find yourself to be an emotional person. Emotions are a gift from God, if sanctified, these emotions help us to live in Christ. If you are not an emotional person, you cannot love God, nor His creation.

Purity does not mean a destruction of our senses and emotions, given by God, but their sanctification - all internal and external energies. Hence, now we understand this as the will of God: our sanctification.

There should not be one unclean member in your body, for it is all created by God, fully pure and undefiled. For we are God’s creation. He is the Good Shepherd, who creates us good.

## **PURITY AND THE SANCTIFICATION OF BODY**

Never use others body as an instrument of your pleasure, for God saved him just as He saved you. According to St. Augustine, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, hence we cannot think of the other as a thing to enjoy but a person whom you respect, for he \ she will be honoured with you some day.

## **LOVE AND LUST**

There is a difference between lust and love. Love means to give oneself to others for the glory and progress of others, whereas lust is to count others as instruments for the satisfaction of the "ego," and attaining bodily desires.

## PURITY OF THE INNER MAN

*“Don’t let your beauty be that outward adorning of arranging the hair,  
of wearing gold or of putting on fine apparel;  
but let it be **the hidden person of the heart**”  
1 Pet. 3:3-4.*

In the previous topic, I spoke about the meaning of purity in our view as children of God.

Here, St. Peter is speaking to women (wives), as they usually care more for their beauty than do men, although we may apply this to all people in general. When we speak about purity, we must not look at it as just to be clean of lustful actions or even thoughts, but rather purity touches our inner life (the hidden person of the heart). St. Peter spoke about the inner heart or the inner man. Purity means that we are not absorbed in the outer ornaments, but rather to look at our inner life.

The problem is that we consider the inner life not an actual or practical life. We want the outer things which we can sense, and are visible to us. However, man is not merely a body. Man has a body and soul and we can not separate between them except by death. Even after death, the body and soul will reunite whether one is recompensed or eternally punished. Therefore, we should be keen to possess a pure heart and watch our inner man. If we are totally concerned with the outer man, it is easy to be unclean, because we are occupied by what is temporary. However, if we focus on our inner life, it is easy to live in purity.

Through our concern with the inner man, we acknowledge that we are not just mortal creatures, but that our souls are immortal. Some Fathers of the Church say that there are three kinds of deaths:

1. death to sin,
2. death to God, and
3. bodily death.

The soul will not die. It will live eternally, either in eternal life or eternal punishment. The soul will perish if it is separated from the source of her life, God Himself. **If we honour and evaluate our souls, it is easy to give up bodily lusts, because we appreciate how precious our souls are.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said: "The kingdom of God is within you" Luke 17:21. The Jews were looking forward to an earthly kingdom, but Christ established His kingdom in our hearts. Therefore, if you want to be pure, look at your inner man and care about the salvation of your soul.

When the two saints Maximos and Domadius, the sons of Emperor Valentinus were occupied by their inner man, they left their high positions to live in a cave in the desert of Egypt. If one was to ask them of the life which they had left behind them in their father's palace they would say: "We are now the happiest people in the world." Therefore, when you look within your heart and truly struggle for the salvation of



your inner man, putting your life in the hands of God and respond to the work of the Holy Spirit within your heart, you will be the most joyful person in the world! If this is the case, you will never be conquered by any lusts or defile, and hence you will practise purity in all aspects of your life.

Here, I give an example, if a student who is about to obtain his Ph. D., on his way to discuss his works in front of professors, students and friends, he is insulted by a driver, do you think that this will affect him? He will accept the insult, or precisely he won't care, because he is more focused on the degree of excellence he is about to receive. Similarly, as a child of God, if someone insults you, you say: "my time is too precious to be occupied with this problem," since you are concerned with the kingdom of God within your heart.

St. Paul, who wants us to be absorbed in the inner kingdom, asks us not to enter into useless arguments which do not redeem the time, so that we do not speak idly (Eph. 4:29, 2 Tim. 2:23). A person occupied with trivial matters such as answering back will not see the preciousness of his/her inner life. St. Peter gives us the key to purity: "**the hidden person of the heart**" 1 Pet. 3:4.

Contemplating on the glory of our inner man helps us not only to attain purity in its narrow meaning, I mean abstaining from bodily lusts, but also in its wide meaning, that is purity of all sins. For example a believer who is concerned with the inner glory hates to be "double faced," saying: "I am not afraid of being exposed by others, nor afraid of society or even of my own conscience, but rather I am afraid of destroying the kingdom of God which has been established in my heart. How can I deceive others by my sweet words while I am the image of heaven itself?!" If your citizenship is in heaven then worldly problems become trifles, as you feel your heart is lifted up to heaven. Therefore, this is the key to our purity, that we lift up our hearts to heaven, for as St. Augustine says: "Let your hearts be lifted up, then all the members of your body will be lifted up," Likewise, St. Anthony the Great had forsaken all and paid attention to the kingdom of God within him, so that through his life, he was even able to bring the heretics back to the church because they saw him caring for his inner man.

**PURITY THAT SHINES  
INTO EVERY CORNER OR ASPECT OF YOUR LIFE**

*"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God,  
that you present your bodies a living sacrifice,  
holy, acceptable to God,  
which is your reasonable service.  
And do not be conformed to this world,  
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,  
that you may prove what is that good  
and acceptable and perfect will of God"  
Romans 12:1-2.*

I feel happy to use the word "shines" because when we speak about purity we may view it as the sun. Jesus Christ Himself, the Sun of Righteousness and Holiness, shines in our life, granting us to be in His likeness, I mean, we also shine on others by His rays of purity.

St. Paul says in verse 1: *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."* What is the relation between purity and self-sacrifice?

Purity in fact is not merely abstaining from sin, but also practising love, by offering oneself to others, denying his own ego.

St. Paul used to sacrifice himself every day, considering a day without a spiritual sacrifice as a lost day, "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ" Phil. 3:7. He knew that he would receive as much as he gave to others for Christ's sake. The same implies to purity. For instance, we may often wonder why we deprive ourselves of pleasures, and don't go to parties, or, why we don't watch some television's programs. However, as St. Paul experienced, when we do not enjoy ourselves with earthly pleasures, we receive a more precious heavenly reward. Therefore, purity is not to prevent yourself from worldly things only, but to receive the Lord of Righteousness in your heart, by tracing His life, or by sacrificing yourself daily, in fellowship with Him.

When Abraham went to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac, who was about 18 years old and stronger than his father who was more than 110 years old at that time; how was it possible for Isaac to accept to be sacrificed? He saw the sign - together with his father - of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, and accepted to be sacrificed with Jesus Christ so that he could rise with Him.

Purity changes you from a man into an angel. It is said that a monk once came to H. G. Bishop Shenouda (now H. H. Pope Shenouda III) complaining about the abbot of his monastery, saying that he dealt harshly with him. He asked if he should leave and go to another monastery. Pope Shenouda answered him and said: "Do not worry about how he deals with you. Start to live in fellowship with Christ, and then all the monks and the abbot will see that you are a man of God and will fear harming you,

lest God punishes them." Therefore, when we have God on our side, through purity, we have the solution to many problems.

A person who was working on a project in Alexandria once came to me and gave a sincere confession. He confessed that it was the first time he had ever confessed, even though he was about 30 years old and that after many talks with his 20 years old relative and after initially mocking him as a child, he wanted to return to God and repent for all the sexual relations he had in the past with girlfriends etc. After taking holy communion for the first time since his childhood, he returned to me proclaiming God's mercy on him. Some street people who abused drugs and were violent towards him had just knocked on his office door, wanting to say sorry and become his friends, thus his attackers became his protectors and his close friends. I felt that when he became reconciled with God, God granted him to be reconciled even with his enemies. I want to tell you that when your heart becomes pure, all the aspects of your life will totally be changed. We have to bear in mind how much the blessing of God affects our life.

As I said, purity changes a man into an angel. The person who lives in purity lives in Jesus Christ, and has the power of the Holy Spirit working in his/ her heart. On the contrary, the person who insists on his sins, though he may be popular, almost suffers from feeling loneliness, because his sins separate him from God. If I am truly pure in Christ, and I am the temple of the Holy Spirit, then even if all people forsake me I will never feel lonely.

### **PURITY MAKES YOU A KING!**

Joseph, the son of Jacob, had a pure heart. Wherever he went, God blessed him and made him prosper. He was a decent, obedient, pure-hearted person, yet he was sold as a slave, tempted by his master's wife and sent to jail. Even in jail the keeper respected him and gave him the authority to do as he pleased, then he sat on the throne of Pharaoh of Egypt. Purity granted Joseph to be lifted from the house to jail to the throne, where his whole family lodged in time of famine. Joseph who was responsible to feed people in the critical period of famine symbolized Jesus Christ who is the feeder of all the church through His body and blood. This was the fruit of purity. Although he was sold, he did not feel like a slave within himself but rather felt inner freedom in Jesus Christ.

We know about Ptolomy, one of the kings of Egypt, who was a slave to the beauty of Cleopatra, and lost his throne. Although he was mature in the eyes of his people because of his age and position, he could not satisfy his lusts, hence lost his throne, and became a bad example to the whole world. This is how lusts may change a king into a slave!

### **PURITY CHANGES YOUR LIFE INTO HEAVEN**

Purity is Christ Himself who shines on your life, on every aspect of your life, at home, school, work, in your worship, in your relationship with others, on your thoughts, all the aspects of your life can be transferred into heaven when you have purity.

It is said that one day an artist wanted to depict the image of Jesus Christ. He noticed a pleasant face, a beautiful and smiling person, whose face declared his inner calmness and peace. So he started drawing his portrait. After several years, he wanted to depict Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. He found a totally grieved and depressed looking person, so he tried to draw his picture. The person asked the artist: "Do you remember me?" The artist did not remember him, so he continued, "I am the same person you drew several years ago." The artist said "How? Your face has changed completely!" The person replied, "Sin!"

Sin has a great effect on your body, on your thoughts, on your behaviour... It ruins all aspects of your life. On the other hand, purity also has its own effects on all the aspects of your life.

When we speak of purity, we are speaking about God Himself. Try to gain this experience - not through books, not through homilies or sermons, but through the true practice of purity. We can conclude by saying that if you want to live as if you are in heaven and never have inner problems, live in purity.

Therefore, when St. Paul says: "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God,*" Rom. 12:1-2, he is making a correlation between the bodily sacrifice and the renewal of the mind.

## **PURITY'S EFFECT ON OUR INNER LIFE**

When you have purity you enjoy the harmony of all your abilities. An impure person is in conflict - his spirit and his flesh are contrary to one another (Gal. 5:17). His mind wants to be lifted up to God, while his body is inclined to his lusts. Do not think that the body and mind are in peace when one leads a sinful life, because the natural law within us which even the non-believers have, is working in the minds and hearts of human beings.

Once, when I was in the church of St. Mark in Los Angeles, we were all sitting in the church hall, about midnight a young woman knocked on the glass and entered. She was Palestinian, and she asked if we spoke Arabic, for she wanted to hear Arabic. I asked of her and of her marital status, and she replied that she wasn't married, but that she had her boyfriend. I asked her how long had she been with her boyfriend. She answered: "For a few months. I lived with many boyfriends, one for some years, one for some months, etc." Then I asked her "Are you happy?" So she said to all of us: "Do you want me to speak frankly? I use drugs. I spend all nights at parties with boyfriends. My appearance shows I am a happy person, but in my heart I feel the most miserable person in the whole world. I can't imagine how I am living. I look like a

person who feels that he is in a miserable state and tries to find a solution not by deserting this life, but by leading a corrupt one."

When I spoke to her about God, she refused to accept God as a Father because she didn't taste fatherhood, and didn't know what it meant: "I don't see my father taking care of me, or loving me," she said. I asked her "Where is your father?" She didn't know in which state of the U.S.A. he was staying, and likewise her mother. I asked her, if any of her parents were sick, wouldn't she ask about their health? She said "No, why should I ask about the health of my father or mother? There are many hospitals and doctors!" She didn't care what happened to her parents. This is the fruit of sin. She was deprived of parental relationship thus lacked the tender feelings of family love. In the appearance she was a person with many boyfriends/lovers, went to many parties, and appeared happy in her popularity, etc., but in fact she had suffered a feeling of loneliness, that nobody cared for her. Hence she was not ready to care for any person, not even her parents.

Sin isolates us from God, from our humanity, and from all those around us. Purity in Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, grants us the experience of unity with God, the reconciliation with our souls, and the harmony of our lives, as well as the reconciliation with others.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### 1. HOW CAN WE CONTROL OUR EMOTIONS SO THAT THEY DO NOT OVERRIDE OUR THOUGHTS?

We should distinguish between “controlling” our emotions and “sanctifying” them. “Controlling” implies restriction; it is important to control our emotions, but not to the same extent as a rider would bridle his horse and thus gains control. It is not merely important to control your emotions but to “sanctify” them to be directed in the right way.

For example, when you are riding a chariot and this chariot is heading in the wrong direction or in a dangerous way; a good driver would not stop it but guide it to travel in the right way with wisdom. There are two steps of doing this:

- a. Leaving what is evil, and
- b. performing what is good.

This is what Prophet David states in his psalms: "*Depart from evil and do good.*" 34:14. To leave what is evil is not sufficient. Meanwhile you should start and perform what is good. The two actions work together.

This doesn't mean to have dead feelings but controlled ones. At the same time we ask the Holy Spirit to change the emotions for the edification of the church and for our own spiritual progress.

It is essential to have emotions. A priest without emotions can't practise tender fatherly love. Anyone who lives with Jesus Christ is not emotionless, but has well directed emotions under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. A priest prays in the liturgy for the sick, travellers, widows, strangers, prisoners, the deceased, even for rivers and trees. During the liturgy of the Eucharist the priest expresses his emotions not only towards God but also towards heavenly creatures and all the world in Jesus Christ.

St. John Chrysostom was not frigid, on the contrary he had warm feelings towards his people. When he used to leave them just for a single day he declared that he missed them as if it had been a year. He told his people that he loved them more than his eyes, because what was the advantage of having eyes without his beloved people.

St. Anthony the Great had many children in monasticism to whom he expressed great love; not only for his children, but also for the entire world. St Anthony was praying for all men. St Paul the Pilgrim who stayed seventy years or more in the desert without seeing any person, was still praying for the whole world. God told St. Anthony that because of His beloved Paul's prayers he had blessed Egypt and the waters of the Nile. Even monks and hermits who lead a rough life in the desert, have deep feelings towards all humans. Thus they pray for the salvation of the entire world.

### 2. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF PERFECT HOLINESS OR PURITY?

Perfection is relative, that is, what's perfect for you is imperfect for St. Anthony the Great. Every believer resembles a vessel, once it is full he considers he is satisfied. However, the more one spiritually grows the more he feels imperfect and that its a long way to reach perfection.

St. Paul wanted to be in the likeness of Jesus Christ "*the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*" Eph. 4:13, therefore, he continued to grow each day. Thus he felt that the way was infinite, but without feeling despair. He realized that every time he attained a kind of perfection or purification that made him deserve to be crowned, he would rejoice. At the same time he wanted more and more, to be in the image of Jesus Christ, because he is a member of the body of Jesus Christ. However man cannot attain absolute perfection, which is a character belonging to God alone.

### **3. HOW DO WE KNOW IF WE ARE PURE?**

You can feel it. I give here some examples:

1. When a person sees something or someone beautiful; if he envies this person, or desires to satisfy his own emotions with this beauty, he is impure. If he glorifies the Creator looking to what is beautiful in sanctity, then he is pure.

2. Another example, if a person's mind is absorbed in seeking what is earthly, such as looking for the latest fashion clothes, hair style etc..., although these things are not sins in themselves, but the heart which is absorbed in them is not clean. It is suitable for the true Christian's mind not to be constantly occupied with it.

3. A believer who spends almost all his time working, may contemplate on Jesus Christ while he is working, feeling that he is in the presence of God; even while gardening, his heart is inflamed for the salvation of all human beings. This is purity which one practises even when he is working in the garden.

Purity is not only practised within the limits of the body against its lusts, but involves all our being. It is a sanctification of all aspects of our life.

### **4. IS IT POSSIBLE TO CONTEMPLATE ON GOD WHILST WORKING, WHEN YOUR JOB REQUIRES A GREAT DEAL OF CONCENTRATION SUCH AS ACCOUNTING OR MAKING CALCULATIONS?**

There was a brain surgeon who was genius. Once a lady went to him so he could diagnose her symptoms. She had a brain tumour and needed to have an operation to remove it. She asked him about the likely success rate of the operation. He posed, then asked her if she believed in God and prayed to Him; she answered "Yes." He continued saying that before he performs any operation he is used to ask God to grant him success, and it is then up to God to make the decision and to determine the outset of the operation. He stated that it wasn't her work nor was it his job, but God's. This professional and surgeon felt that even while he was occupied with such a serious and possibly fatal operation of the brain, it was God, not himself, who was working; and he had performed a great number of operations successfully. Therefore if you begin your work with a prayer asking God to work with you and from time to time whilst you are working pray (even for a few seconds), saying: "God

save me, God help me, Christ be with me,” you will feel that you are in the presence of God and absorbed in Him whilst you are working.

**5. OFTEN OUR YOUTH ARE INVOLVED IN THE IMPURITIES OF OUR SOCIETIES; IT HAS BECOME A PART OF OUR LIVES. I THINK A BIG PROBLEM IS THAT WE DO NOT LOVE PURITY, IT IS MORE ENJOYABLE OR EASIER BEING IMPURE. HOW CAN WE HAVE THIS DESIRE TO REALLY LOVE PURITY?**

You need to taste the sweetness of purity. Ask God to grant you this experience. Once a youth came up to me asking: “Do you believe that any youth is able to live without having a relationship with the other sex. Can one truly live this kind of life or will it make him depressed?” Initially he thought that when a person lives in purity he would be depressed and that without purity he would enjoy life by going to parties and having relations and being happy. After speaking with him of purity, he repented and came back talking about how joyful the life of purity is. After tasting purity and experiencing it, he came to the conclusion that purity is life and uncleanness is death. It is important to practise and examine the sweetness of purity.

**6. GENERALLY, HOW DO I KNOW IF MY EMOTIONS ARE GOOD OR BAD?**

If your emotions are absorbed in your ego, loving yourself and making yourself the centre of this world, society and family, and wanting to take not to give, this indicates wrong emotions. If you feel that you want to give your own self for others progress and salvation, as Jesus Christ had given Himself for the salvation of all mankind, then these are good emotions to have.

**7. HOW CAN I ENSURE THAT I AM NOT A STUMBLING BLOCK OF IMPURE ACTIONS OR THOUGHTS TO OTHERS?**

When we feel we are stumbling blocks to others, we have to do our best not to be thus; however, sometimes even some saintly persons unintentionally stumble others. If this is so it’s not your fault so long as you are doing your best and have no bad intentions. There is no need to be upset or concerned about it but pray for them.

**8. IF YOU FEEL THAT YOUR AMBITION IN LIFE IS TO DEVOTE ALL YOUR TIME, LOVE, AND EFFORT TO THE LORD, THEN WHY DO YOU GET MARRIED?**

Not everyone can live unmarried. Many people are married and devote their lives to Jesus Christ. We can’t say that everyone shouldn’t marry and we can’t say that getting married necessarily implies that they don’t devote all their lives. There are many priests who were married and truly lived a saintly life. Father Michael Ibrahim is an example of such a person who was married and had children and performed miracles. Marriage is a holy saintly life if we are guided by the Holy Spirit.

Once a person came up to me saying how he felt guilty because he got married. He considers it legal adultery. But this is a wrong idea. There is a difference between marriage and a lustful relationship. With lust everyone wants to satisfy his own bodily desires, and his ego being the centre. In marriage the sexual relationship is



a result, not the aim. Marriage shouldn't be the reason for satisfying one's bodily desires. Marriage is a unity between two people, sexual intercourse is a result and a sign of love. It may or may not occur between a couple such as in the times of fasting, but this does not mean that they have lost their love. Love is above all things which is expressed by several means, one of which is sexual intercourse. There are some people who after giving birth to children, have lived in virginity by their own will. They didn't feel as if they were separated but continued to love each other. The bodily intercourse does not represent an essential thing. At the same time it's not an evil relationship. It is not forbidden nor does it prevent us from the sanctification of life.

#### **9. YOU SAY THAT GOD CREATED EVERYTHING GOOD, THEN WHY DID HE ALLOW SIN TO ENTER?**

God created everything good including freedom. He sanctified the freedom of human beings. If He had prevented sin from entering the world, He is thus destroying our freedom. He does not push or encourage me to sin but on the contrary He gives me the power to live in sanctity and holiness. I myself misuse freedom. Therefore it is not God's fault but my own fault. If He prevents me from sinning I will be like a robot or machine, that has a master who directs it right or left. However, God grants us the ability to be good and to live in sanctification according to our own will, if we choose to.

#### **10. WHAT ARE THE STEPS TO REPENTANCE?**

I must discover my own weaknesses and sins. To do this requires time to examine my own soul. The problem is that we are too involved in outside activities; we don't give our souls the opportunity to meditate under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are in need, at least once a week, to sit by ourselves and start to make an account of our life: our emotions, senses, activities, thoughts, time, worship, behaviour with others, faithfulness in study etc. When you know yourself you know God. One knows that he is a sinner and in need of the Saviour Jesus Christ. When we feel that we are above all sinners, that we are desperately in need of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; when we truly feel that we are in need of Him we shall be able to respond to the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Two important points concerning repentance are:

\* To sit with yourself honestly and to examine your conscience through the work of the Holy Spirit within you.

\* To discover God as your Saviour, trust in Him and ask Him to give you repentance and healing and grant you the work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

#### **11. HOW CAN I START TO LIVE IN PURITY?**

1. Cut off all the sources of evil: bad friends, magazines, and any environmental influences that will divert you from living in purity. I must cut them off, if I am serious in wanting God to work in my life. Cutting off these sources doesn't mean that I am pure, but it is a sign that I want to be God's child and be after His image.

2. Give yourself time to evaluate your life and discover where you have gone wrong. Analyze your relationship with your family; ie, perhaps you are treating your mum or dad in pride, this is one of the serious sources of lusts. If I disobey my parents my body will disobey my soul. This is a common problem, not only among the youth but also among elders. Therefore it is important to reevaluate your life and your relations with your family, your friends, church, God and your body.

3. Pray and ask others to pray for you: your confession father, your parents, and spiritual friends. We need to pray for each other. Start reading the Bible, repent, confess and ask God for forgiveness.

## **12. IS THE CHURCH A PLACE FOR SINNERS OR SAINTS?**

The church is a hospital, as saint Athanasius called it. It is a hospital, where our Saviour Jesus Christ is working for all human beings to be healed and become saints. St. Paul said: "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, to whom I am chief*" 1 Tim. 1:15, because he felt he was in need of the heavenly Physician. We never despair of anyone. When the priests and bishops were in jail at the time of Sadat, we witnessed a violent criminal who enjoyed living there. He felt it was his home and an environment whereby he could practice evil works. One day this man came up to us and had sown his lips together with a needle. When we asked him why he had done so, he answered that it was a way by which he could cause trouble to the wardens, making it look as though they were responsible for harming him. Not only had he sown his lips together but placed two knives in the door and with his back facing the knives he cut himself and went to the priests with blood oozing out from the deep wounds he had perpetrated against himself. This violent person - even with himself - once he found love, acted like a simple child with us. Everyone is in need to feel God's love working through His believers. Nobody could push or prevent such a person from doing any harm, however, love can change him. This prisoner was then serving us willingly, and enjoyed being in our company.

Salvation is presented to everyone. God is waiting for everybody to return to Him and be saved. Therefore the gates of the Church, but of Paradise, are opened, waiting for all sinners without any exception, whatever sins one could have committed. The most important thing is to start to repent. The Church encourages her members to repent every day, to keep their clothes clean. Washing is continuous. Each time you pray you recite Psalm 50 (51) in the introduction of the "Canonical Hours," asking God to cleanse your soul.

## **13. HOW CAN WE OVERCOME THE EVIL THOUGHTS WHEN THEY ATTACK US?**

We have to distinguish between thoughts coming from outside and those springing forth from within us. In your age as youth, remember that you have to be attacked by evil thoughts. However, when I am attacked by such thoughts, I have to look at this battle as a chance to be crowned. If there is no battle, how can there be victory and how can we be crowned?! Therefore with evil thoughts, you have to struggle, and do not feel desperate. Don't allow sin to press on you, whatever these thoughts are, and no matter how much they attack you.

#### **14. WHY IS ADULTERY CONSIDERED A SIN?**

You are a child of God, and God wants you to carry His image and to imitate Him. He is the Holy One. So when you are deprived of holiness, or sanctity of life, you deform your personality, then by adultery you lose your likeness to God. This is sin. Sin doesn't just mean that I harm others, for avoiding to harm anybody is not the only aim I should care for to consider myself leading the right way. Just think about it in this way, when I commit adultery, I do wrong to the most important being I care for... that is myself! I harm my purity, the divine image and likeness which God granted me. Adultery, then, spoils this likeness to God.

#### **15. HOW COME THAT KING DAVID OR KING SOLOMON, WHO WERE HIGHLY CONSIDERED AS MEN OF GOD HAD TAKEN MANY WIVES TO SATISFY THEIR DESIRES?**

If we observe the way of life St. David the prophet led, we find out that in spite of his taking many wives yet he didn't accept these wives to satisfy his lusts, and the same way was with Abraham. He accepted them in order to multiply and fill the earth. Though David had hard times yet he was always brave and peaceful. He had such tender feelings ever towards his enemies. If he was a man of pleasure then when he was persecuted or suffering, he would have left Israel, his people and even God. But this was not the case, for even though his life was a chain of sufferings, he never ceased praising God, and singing psalms. We can obviously observe this when he was persecuted by his son, Absalom, or by his counsellor, Ahithophel, or by his people. He wrote many psalms on these occasions and he was rejoiced. Truly, he used to start his psalms with grief, but he concludes with giving thanks to God. Thus his life was free from any earthly desires. We don't mean to neglect his fall with Uriah's wife, but we shouldn't judge him as a man of pleasures because of this fall that he repented for with unceasing tears. If David was living just for pleasure with his wives, why didn't he struggle to take the throne? He had the chance to get it. He loved to have God working in his life.

As for Solomon, he truly had a bad experience. The Holy Bible tells us that when he took his wives, especially the foreign ones, he took them for pleasure, and he had to pay the price, as the book of Ecclesiasts tells us. He bore the fruit of sin, but he repented. He wrote his experience and he gave a very good example of repentance.

But if we look at someone like Joseph, we can know how much purity affected his life, and had its fingerprints on all the history of salvation.

#### **16. I DON'T LIKE GOING TO PARTIES, BUT SOMETIMES I HAVE TO, AND I NEVER FEEL ANY HAPPINESS, SO WHAT CAN I DO?**

If you do not feel happiness, why do you go?

Why do you put yourself in temptation?

At the moment, because you are in a good spiritual condition, you don't enjoy the party, but perhaps later on, even your feeling will change. You must be strict and fair with yourself. When you say: "What is wrong with dancing?" I ask you a question:

"Do you think that you are glorifying God while you are dancing?" We must speak frankly. We are the members of the body of Jesus Christ, the sons of the King of kings, we must act in a way that suits our rank. I am an ambassador sent to this world to represent my Lord Jesus Christ. Imagine if the ambassador of any state to Australia acted improperly in a way that affects the reputation of the country he represents. How would the government of his country react? It would ask him to quit. Similarly, you are the ambassador of God. You are heaven itself; whatever you do is in the name of Christ.

**17. I OFTEN HAVE WRONG PRESUMPTIONS AND WRONG SUSPICIONS, AND I KNOW THAT THIS IS BECAUSE MY OWN HEART IS IMPURE. WHAT DO I DO TO ACQUIRE PURITY?**

As I said, we should confess our sins under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who grants us repentance, then the fruit will appear in due time. We must trust God, the Forgiver of sins, without despair nor negligence.

Once, in my visit to upper-Egypt, I met a man whom I was his confession father, when he was once a student. I never saw a person so fiercely attacked by evil thoughts the way he was. He used to weep every night, saying: "God, please release me from these impure thoughts." He repented repeatedly but could never attain purity. So when I met him in upper-Egypt, I asked him about his present life. He said: "I will tell you something. These four years (at university) was for my advantage, and for the edification of the church. When I came here to serve God in some villages, I started to work with the youth but they were too shy to talk about their sexual problems, so I used to tell them that I myself had the same experience, I wept often for my thoughts were impure. They loved me because they felt I was like them. I am not a heavenly creature, but have the same body, and the same emotions, and I was attacked by the same thoughts. In this way many of the youth repented."

Therefore, don't be afraid from the impure thoughts, but rather struggle against them so that one day you will be pure and you will attract others also to the pure life.

Once I was called to see a woman about forty years old, who wanted to deny Christ. She "loved" a man who was the thirtieth of her lovers. She stayed in a hotel of bad reputation, but I felt I had to go, so I took with me a deacon who was married and went to ask for her at the hotel. She said: "What do you want?" I said: "I came to speak with you about our Lord Jesus Christ." She said: "No, I am not Christian. I don't want to speak with you. I don't love the church." I continued speaking to her, but she was totally silent, showing no response at all. Then the deacon spoke to her, saying: "What do you think of "Abouna" (the father)? Do you think that he is an angel coming down from heaven? He has the same body as yours. I myself in my youth, had a bad experience..."

She started to speak, because she felt that we were not coming to judge her, or acting as leaders, but that we were coming to participate and be in a communal life with her in Christ as the Saviour of all men. We felt her weakness as if it were our own weakness.

When we spoke with each other she said: "What do you want, father?" I said: "Just leave everything in the hotel and come with me." She left everything, and came

to the church. Now she is married and has many children and truly lives as a faithful Christian.

Therefore, don't feel in trouble when you are attacked by evil thoughts, because even this experience will help you deal with youth problems when you become older, saying, "I had the same experience, and I know how God granted me purity, and how I struggled and was serious in my life". This does not mean to drive yourselves towards impurity, or submit to impurity! But by far, you have to struggle as much as you can, and the work of God in your heart will support you.

**18. ABOUNA (FR.), YOU USED THE EXPRESSION "TO BE CROWNED" SEVERAL TIMES, WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "TO BE CROWNED" WHEN WE EXPERIENCE STRUGGLE?**

"To be crowned" means that you acknowledge you are a king or a queen in Christ (Rev. 1:6; 5:10), the King of kings (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14) and the King of the saints (Rev. 15:3). For you have authority over your thoughts, your emotions and your senses. As St. Isaac the Hermit said, "The Christian person is a king. He says to this thought 'Go out!' and to the other thought 'Come in!'" Thus is the spiritual king or queen. You feel proud that you are able to rule, not by yourself but by God who is working within you, and this gives us a kind of satisfaction.

**19. CAN YOU PLEASE EXPLAIN WHAT ST. PAUL MEANS IN ROMANS 12:2 BY CONFORMING TO THIS WORLD, AND BEING TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND?**

The verse reads this: "*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*".

The world has its own form and Christ has His. You are either in the likeness of the world or the likeness of Christ. We were born in the likeness of the world through sin. But now through baptism we are transformed and our nature is renewed. Moreover, everyday, through repentance, your minds are renewed by the Holy Spirit whom we have received in baptism and Chrismation (Myron). Through sin, we lost our glorious nature or our original nature, but now by baptism we have the power to live in the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must practice it by daily repentance, in order to be transformed into the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**20. HOW CAN WE FACE THE PROBLEM OF LAZINESS ?**

I will tell you of a very simple way. We can use it not only on the spiritual level, but even in our daily lives. You must do what is important at the start, giving it the priority. For instance, when you are very tired and you want to sleep, say to yourself "I will pray only: Our Father..." This takes one minute at the most, so you decide to say the "Thanksgiving Prayer" following "Our Father." After Thanksgiving, you

encourage yourself, say I am not that tired I can add Psalm 50. In this way you will do the right thing at the right time without delay.

Don't postpone the spiritual work for tomorrow. Say, I will do it now and rest tomorrow. Otherwise tomorrow will drag you on to the next day, etc. You will have rest when you start because the rest of the soul is more important than the comfort of the body. When I sleep with peace in mind, even my body is in comfort, whereas if I sleep with anxiety, then even my body will feel discomfort.

#### **21. HOW CAN A PERSON GROW TO LOVE THE LIFE OF PRAYER AND LOVE GOD MORE?**

To love prayer, try practising the "Prayer of Jesus Christ," keep saying: "My Lord, save me; my Lord forgive my sins; my Lord, have mercy on me, I am a sinner," as frequently as you could all the day long. Therefore when time of prayer comes you feel very comforted. But if you are occupied all day in business only, without reciting these words, then when you stand to pray you will find difficulty to contemplate on God. We need to enter in an unceasing dialogue with God all day long. Hence when it's time to stand before God in prayer you will feel comforted. Besides it will be a chance to judge our conscious and repent.

#### **22. IS IT EASY OR HARD, IN THIS WORLD, TO FOCUS ON MY INNER MAN?**

It is hard if we do it trusting in our own abilities alone, but if we depend on the divine grace, sincerely struggling hard, it will be very easy.

Second element that we have to consider in our spiritual struggle is to remember that we must live a communal life in Jesus Christ, caring for one another and praying for one another as well. In the book of Acts, we notice that the Apostles always had the communal life, worshipping and working together, and struggling in the spiritual battle together. Even when St. Peter was in jail, all the church was praying in the upper-room of St. Mark's house (Acts 12:5,12).

When you speak to a friend over the phone, do you talk about the latest fashion or latest car, or do you speak to him / her about the salvation of his / her soul? We are in need of communal attitude, as well as the personal life. We can not separate the communal from the personal life in Jesus Christ.

#### **23. SOMETIMES IT IS HARD TO SPEAK TO MY FRIENDS ABOUT SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS, HOW CAN I INDUCE THESE SPIRITUAL DISCUSSIONS WITHOUT FEELING EMBARRASSED?**

Why is it hard? Jehovah's Witnesses talk to people all the time, spreading their teachings although they are wrong. When you speak the truth, feeling how precious is your friend's soul, and that his success helps your progress also, then you are not ashamed, saying to yourself: "I am not afraid of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16). Is my relationship with Christ shameful? Isn't it important to speak to your friends about the salvation of the soul, which when they adhere to, will lead them to eternal life? Which is

shameful; a person whose conduct sometimes looks like an animal's and sinful, or a person who wants to raise others' soul to the angelic way of life?

Sometimes, if the world can not accept the true way in Christ, we have at least sown the seed in each person's inner soul and let God work, as St. Paul says: "*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.*" 1 Cor. 3:6. Maybe what I said to him will not bring forth fruits now, maybe in many years it will. That is why it is very important to look not only to our personal life but also our communal or group life, because as a community of Christ we are proud to be attributed to Him and should not feel ashamed.

**24. SOMETIMES IT IS EASIER TO TELL PEOPLE WHO DON'T KNOW CHRIST ABOUT HIM THAN IT IS TO TELL OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS ABOUT HIM. BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN BROUGHT UP IN THE TRADITIONAL CHURCH, THERE ARE SOME WHO COME TO CHURCH OUT OF DUTY AND THINK THEY ARE ON THE RIGHT TRACK AND HENCE ARE IN NEED OF NO REPENTANCE, ETC. HOW DO WE TALK TO SUCH PEOPLE?**

The youth or even the children may have a strong effect on their parents, either through words or simple attitude. It is essential to approach our parents with wisdom, humility and obedience, but don't forget love and gentleness.

For instance once a professor told me that his father had said to him that when he was about eight years old he heard in Sunday School that when we pray, God sends his angels to protect us. He went home that day and noticed his dad going to sleep without praying so he said to him: "Father, how can you sleep without praying? Don't you want the angel of God to protect you?" His father told his son that from that day on he never slept without praying.

We have to work without despair wisely, obediently and kindly, because every seed will surely bear fruits. However, do not consider yourself as a teacher to your parents, but rather deal with them through love.

**25. IS IT ENOUGH TO BE PURE INSIDE HAVING GOOD INTENTIONS, SAYING THE HOLY SPIRIT IS FILLING MY HEART AND GUIDING ME, AND TO IGNORE FASTING, READING THE BIBLE OR GOING TO THE CHURCH, ETC.?**

In our Orthodoxy, we never separate the inner life from the outer life, or the work of the soul from the work of the body. When we are fasting, this helps our prayer become more spiritual. Therefore, the body participates with the soul in its spiritual struggle, as it does when we pray on standing up. Those who truly and sincerely read the Bible have purity not only in their hearts but also in their bodies. Therefore we do not want to separate the inner life from practising worship in our outer life.

**26. IS IT POSSIBLE TO HAVE MORE ENGLISH LITURGIES?**

H. H. Pope Shenouda III does his best to assign two priests in every church, to celebrate two liturgies (masses) at the same time on Sundays, one held in Arabic, and

the other in English. This is your church, and it is your right to pray by the language you understand, so that you may participate in the liturgies and not only listen to prayers you can't comprehend. You have a part to do, that is to witness to Christianity, and to your Orthodox Church.

**27. IF YOU FEEL THAT YOU ARE CLOSE TO GOD, BUT HAVE SOMETHING UPSETTING YOU FROM GOD, WHAT CAN YOU DO, IF YOU GET NO ANSWER TO YOUR PRAYERS, AND YOUR PROBLEM REMAINS UNSOLVED?**

A person's life can never be free from problems, every day we may have to face new problems. If at times we can't bear the burden we can express our upset to God, ask Him "why are you hiding Your Face, O Lord!" Speak frankly with your God for you have no one else to seek but Him.

Tell Him: "Truly You are the Creator and I am Your creation, but I want to discover Your mysteries. Grant me faith that You are always planning for my good even if I am in a hard situation.

**28. HOW CAN WE KEEP OUR FRIENDSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIPS PURE, ESPECIALLY WITH FRIENDS FROM THE OPPOSITE SEX?**

They are not the opposite sex, but rather the other sex, for they are on the same path with us. Our Lord Jesus Christ said "I am the way," for the two sexes. When I am among friends I should keep my relationship pure.

To have pure talks, spend pure spare times together even when going out in picnics, having fun, we should do our best to keep pure all the time.

We have to ask ourselves a few questions and observe some points:

a) When I make friendship with someone, is Jesus Christ a partner in this relation? In other words, is He blessing it. Am I growing in grace and faith or am I losing because of bad company. As our early Fathers said that if you are in good company you will step forward in your spiritual life and if in bad company you are liable to fall or at least step backward.

b) If you feel like hiding your acts, beware... for you are doing wrong. Be honest with yourself, frank with your parents, confession father and in first place with God.

c) Don't keep with one and the same friend at all times. You must ask yourself about the aim of this friendship, whether it is to glorify God or not. Besides being with different friends is a chance to acquire good things from different people as the butterfly that picks good odour from every flower.

d) You must, especially the boys, regard your friend as if she / he is your sister or brother. Would you accept your sister having impure relationship with another boy? Here is a real story that I think answers my question.

Last summer, a person came to me upset about the priests in Alexandria, for they wouldn't allow him to carry on his friendship with some girlfriends. He said to me, "If you are my confession father, will you allow me to have these friendships?" I smiled and said: "I want you to speak to me openly and frankly." He started speaking about



the first girlfriend, saying she was spiritual and liked the church, loved God, etc... I asked him, "And what is the end of this relationship?" He said, "I hope that I can marry her." So I told him to speak with her father and mother, so that both families know, and she must speak frankly with her confession father. Then he started to speak about the second girl. He praised her, and at the end he had forgotten what he had already said about the first one, and I asked, "What is the end of this relationship?" He said, "I hope that I will marry her." I did not comment until the end, and he spoke the same way about a third girl. He simply wanted to satisfy his own emotions under the name of love, deceiving himself.

Therefore we must speak openly to our parents, confession father, and at first with God.

Thus, you will have the answer of whether this is a healthy friendship or not. Don't expect anyone else to answer the question for you, because you know what is good for your spiritual progress and what leads you to failure and is rather a disadvantage for you.

### **29 IN 2 COR. 7:1, ST. PAUL TALKS ABOUT FILTHINESS OF THE FLESH AND SPIRIT. WHAT DOES HE MEAN?**

The filthiness of the flesh is bodily lusts, greed etc. The spirit's filthiness is pride, vainglory etc. There are spiritual faults of the soul, and bodily sins of the flesh .

### **30. WHAT IS WRONG WITH THOUGHTS - I DON'T 'T HARM ANYONE BY THEM?**

Our minds are God's creation and we should keep them holy by permitting only pure thoughts get in and out.

Beware of evil thoughts that Satan works hard to introduce into your mind to possess you, for they ruin you. When evil thoughts attach you don't allow them in, but say: Christ is my Lord who reigns on my mind that my thoughts may be pure and holy, with no trace of impurity in there.

We have a heavenly mind in which we see God reigning in it. Our minds are a dwelling place for God, who sanctifies everything: our bodies, minds, emotions, and senses, but this doesn't mean that we shall be isolated from society. For Jesus Christ Himself is pure and was living in the society. We see Him via our senses and emotions.

God's aim is to sanctify our emotions, to love God and men. This enables us to express our emotions, sharing sorrow with the grieved and those who are suffering, and joy with the elated. God is readily willing to guide our emotions in the right way, if we seriously ask Him.

### **31. IT IS DIFFICULT TALKING TO MY PARENTS BECAUSE WE ALWAYS FIGHTS.**

It is important that you enter into dialogue with your parents in love, speaking in a gentle and calm manner. St. Dorotheos stated that our relationship with our parents or any person looks like a circle, and its centre is God. If I walk towards God, surely, I

will be close to my mum and dad, my friends and even my enemies. If I live in Him I will be able to attract them to God, even those who are in enmity with me.

First we should reconcile with God, and once we draw closer to Him, then we can get closer to each other. That is, one should have peace with God and with himself through repentance, and this leads to reconciliation with others even with enemies. The further away from God I am, the further away from others (including my parents) I will be.

### **32. "IS IT WRONG TO SAY "SHUT UP" TO ANYONE?"**

It is important that we try to behave in a decent and pleasant way, even towards those who insult us or tease us. Through peace, love and kindness you can attract others to the right Christian attitude, not by using rude words as saying, "shut up."

### **33. I FIND IT DIFFICULT TALKING TO MY PARENTS WITHOUT GETTING INTO AN ARGUMENT?**

It is important for you to choose a suitable time, method and words to communicate with your parents. If you are wise and gentle you will be able to communicate and discuss issues with them. You can gain them to your side by your pure Christian life and faith, and they will be able to talk to you in a gentle manner. It is important that you correct your own life first before criticising the life of others.

Try to be understanding and logic, and don't consider yourself right all the way, there must be something wrong about you! On the other hand your parents must have something good, don't refuse all they say just for the idea that they are old fashion, give it a second thought maybe you can take part of it, it might do you good.

### **34. IF YOU SAY A WORD WHICH HARMS A PERSON UNINTENTIONALLY, IS IT A SIN?**

Don't look to any action or deed as being a sin or not. You are God's child and you should consider every soul as something precious in your eyes.

If I feel someone has misunderstood my comment, I contact him and apologize. Your sole aim being to edify others and bring them closer to God.

## SUMMARY

### **SPEAKER 1:**

\* Firstly we are hoping to obey the rule of God, that is our foremost aim, to be good Christians. God gave us freedom to chose our way, but He promised to help us and His Holy Spirit works within us, so we should do our part also.

\* We are the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16). Therefore it is important that we remain pure. Purity is God's gift to you, at the same time keeping your mind pure is your gift to God.

\* We should not be conquered by sin, idleness, or laziness, and try hard to "bring every thought into capacity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Having the spirit of discernment will help us to refuse impure thoughts and adopt only pure ones.

\* Eph. 6:7 "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God." Also "your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by your name, O Lord God of hosts" Jer. 15:16. Memorizing such verses of the Holy Bible helps us to keep in touch with the word of God, and grow in knowledge and grace.

\* When we occupy ourselves with pure, heavenly thoughts, and think of our Lord Jesus Christ frequently, then no evil thought can have place in us. We must be keen to participate in church meetings, sacraments, practise repentance, confession, and communion, in order to enjoy the spirit of unity. Thus you grow and take part in edifying the church itself.

\* We must avoid bad company, "Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits." 1 Cor. 15:33.

\* Finally, I pray that we do remain pure and keep our minds pure, because it's worth it in the end.

### **SPEAKER 2:**

We discussed a few points:

- a) what is purity,
- b) achieving purity, and
- c) sin and temptation.

a) The first thing we realised was that purity is not just some good deeds, but rather the condition of the heart and the inner motives. Our definition of purity was that it is Christ's likeness, when a person's heart becomes like Christ's.

b) To achieve this we decided that for one to aim to be like Christ is just the beginning, but that alone wouldn't be enough, for it is impossible for a person to be like Christ, or have His heart, unless he gives way to the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart to change him. To attain this change, one must give it a chance to stay long with God, examine one's conscious according to Christ's teachings and make benefit of God's grace and mercy that help one to change deep down.

c) See 2 Tim. 2:22 "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." God works in us, but it is also our role to keep away from bad company (fleeing youthful lusts), and then to have fellowship with Christ who gives us a pure heart to pursue righteousness. Compare this to emptying a dirty cup in order to fill it with clear water.

\* When we are tempted,  
first we are attacked by evil thoughts,  
then when we are conquered, the desire to do evil grows inside us.  
This desire is transformed into action.

In other words sin is realized in four stages: from mind to emotions, to the will, where man commits sin by action.

\* Lastly, purity is a lifetime experience.

### **SPEAKER 3:**

We set out to see whether our perceptions of purity today have changed or not. Today, purity is looked upon as a physical feature, and we consider our failure to achieve purity a kind of weakness. Moreover we feel purity is a trait of one's personality.

However, purity is more than that. It is a way of life, to achieve perfection in Christ. Impurity is not only a sort of weakness, but what's more is that it hinders us on the royal path, for purity is the only way that leads us to God. To be Christ-like we should be free from any stain of impurity, blameless, pure and whole. We decided that to do this; there may be some steps to take to help us, based on the second epistle of Paul to Timothy:

\* We have to start with our inner man which will eventually affect the external man.

\* We all have weaknesses, some obvious which we should consider first. Give it a chance to examine our consciences and repent, through the work of the Holy Spirit within us, we can overcome our weakness no matter how defeated we are.

\* Do not ever give up trying to attain purity, we shall do it... for God has assured us, He will never leave us alone, for the struggle is His.

\* Remember that if we fall we can still rise again.

\* We should seek humility for it's the only way to acquire any virtue.

\* Keep our senses clean, be watchful.

\* Be honest with ourselves and with God.

### **SPEAKER 4:**

I would like to add to what we have already mentioned about "purity" a main point to the subject. That is we must realize that purity is not something foreign to us nor abnormal, for we were created in the image of God. Review Eph. 4:24: "*and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness,*" meaning this new man was actually created in us and already within us. Therefore purity is not something new that we want to possess, but rather it is our feature from the beginning. Besides repeating the Name of Jesus in our minds and

hearts helps to keep a pure mind and heart. St. Augustine suggested that when we say "Lord help me, Lord guide me, etc." Satan can find no place in us.

**ABOUNA TADROS SUMMARY:**

I feel very happy to be with you, as a father loves being with his children, and it is very hard for me to express my feelings, especially when we are gathered together in the Name of Jesus Christ. Besides as many of you noted, we are speaking about the likeness to our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, which is very important to consider. We want not only to follow His footsteps, but to be in His likeness or image.

**NOTE**

I preferred to publish the topic "**The Purity of Tongue**" seperately.

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## **THE FATHERS OF THE EASTERN CHURCH**

### **ROBERT PAYNE**

Gregory of Nyssa, the first to map the pathway of the soul in its progress toward the Heavenly Mountain.

In their own time the Fathers of the Eastern Church were regarded as only a little lower than the apostles.

Greek was the language of the Gospels, of the early Church, of the early liturgies, of the first Christian missionaries to Rome, and the names of all the early bishops of Rome before the time of Victor, who died A.D. 198, were authentically Greek.

Their Christianity is not the same as ours. They were a people of warm imaginations, more incandescent than the Fathers of the western Church, fiercer in denunciation, quicker in anger, more sudden to praise. For them Christianity was “the imitation of the divine nature”; it was not so much a way of life as a fierce effort toward perfection. They took quite seriously the text: “Be ye therefore perfect, as also your Heavenly Father is perfect,”.

According to Gregory of Nyssa the profession of Christianity was nothing less than to restore man to his lost paradise, and so they went on to explore the utmost possibilities of man’s likeness to God.

We shall not understand the Eastern Christians unless we see them, as they saw themselves, in the light of the Apocalypse or the blaze of the Transfiguration.

Eastern Christianity, which remains faithful to an earlier Christian tradition, may again invigorate the West.

There is a sense in which it is true that we cannot understand Christianity unless we come to terms with the Eastern Fathers.

Again and again in the writings of the Eastern Fathers there appears this singular devotion to the dignity of man, an attitude which survives in the offertory in

the Mass: “O God, who didst marvelously create the dignity of human nature. In the West this devotion to the dignity of man is only occasional; in the East it is perpetual.  
Gregory of Nyssa.

By its likeness to God human nature is made as it were a living image partaking with the Godhead both in rank in name, clothed in virtue, reposing in the blessedness of immortality, garlanded with the crown of righteousness, and so a perfect likeness to the beauty of the Godhead in all that belongs to the dignity of majesty.

[De hominis Opificio, IV,136]

“Man’s soul is a mirror in which he can see God,”

O you who are possessed with the desire to contemplate the true good, when you hear that the divine majesty is exalted above the heavens and that His glory is unfathomable, His beauty ineffable, His nature incomprehensible, do not despair of being able to see the object of your desires. ... You have only to return to the purity of the image established in you in the beginning: you will find in yourself what you seek, for once the spirit is cleaned and free from all wickedness, you will find the blessed vision in the serenity of your heart. There you will find purity, holiness, simplicity, all those gentle radiances of the divine nature by which God is seen.

[De beatitudinibus, 6]

The Eastern Fathers shared with the earliest Christians the knowledge of Christ’s imminent return: He had gone from them for so short a time it was easy to think of Him returning soon.

Maria Rilke said that “the world has passed out of the hands of God into the hands of men.” The Eastern Fathers would have denied it firmly; and they were not ignorant of war and the misery men create for themselves. For them the evidence of God’s presence lay in flowers, in trees, in animals, in the faces of children, in people going about their daily affairs; and it was present in the thunder and the sword blade. And for them too, the person of Christ was incomparably greater than the person we are accustomed to represent to ourselves in our prayers. Origen and Gregory of Nyssa and many others among the Eastern Fathers believed that He came to save all spiritual creatures, not men only. He did not shed His blood on earth as Jerusalem for sin alone; He offered Himself as a gift on the high altar in Heaven, to save the angels and all the universe, of which this little corner of earth is the smallest part. His mission was the restoration of God’s peace through all time, through all eternity, through all the spaces of the universe, in every heart and every sentient thing; and they claimed of Christ more than He ever claimed of Himself, and in so doing they made His sacrifice more comprehensible.