



Divine Love



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1

DIVINE LOVE AND MAN

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

Name of the book: Divine Love and Man.

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Publisher: Queen Mary & Prince Tadros Coptic Orthodox Church

Edition: 2012.

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WHAT SHALL I SAY?

I dare to talk about Divine Love, to find myself talking about 'God' Himself, because "God is love" (1 John 8:4). Thus, I challenged myself to write about matters of which I do not deserve to speak. There are no human languages, not even angelic one, capable of explaining it, for no one knows Godly affairs except the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:11).

Let the Spirit of God help us to feel His presence in the depths of our hidden heart, and to open our eyes in recognition of the dimensions of unlimited Divine love.

These dimensions cannot be expressed in words or letters nor measured by any standard. Even the movements of the heart could drown in the depths of this love and become drunk, losing control and awareness. As Paul the Apostle said, "That you, being rooted and grounded in love (i.e., in God), may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height -to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:18-19).

❖ What would I do? I am human and I speak human language; my tongue is from the earth so I ask my Lord to forgive me for my inability to use the phrases that pertain to His Spirit. It is not out of carelessness, but because of my limited resources that result from my weakness and the nature of my human tongue.

Have compassion on me, O Lord! I don't say the appropriate words, not from madness, but because I am helpless. Despite my weakness, I am not fully convinced by what I say but I soar on the wings of my understanding.

❖ Look with me to the wisdom of Paul the Apostle and his search for phrases to explain the kindness of God! For he did not just say the word "grace" or the word "riches"; he said, "The **exceeding** riches of His grace in His kindness toward us" (Ephesians 2:6-7), and yet his phrases are incapable of expressing the proper meaning. It is similar to someone who tries to grasp an oily body that slips away. **Thus we are incapable of describing the compassionate Divine love, no matter how much we try to search for the right phrases; we stand speechless and bewildered before the greatness of God's kindness.**

Paul had his own experience for he discovered that the power of

words is insufficient to tell of the greatness of God's kindness; therefore he simply said, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15). For no talk or mind are able to describe God's care and His affection. That is why he used the word "exceeding." Paul also said, "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ Whoever wants to talk about God's love proves his incompetence because talking about this Divine love is completely impossible.
- ❖ Love is also wondrous; it is the language of the angels that can barely be translated.
Love is God's holy name. Who would be able to examine or set limits for it?
- ❖ Our Good Father, no one is able to describe Your love properly, not even those in whom You shine; they have not this awareness. It is not for us, O Lord, to talk about what is for You. **You, O Lord, speak inside of us about You** and about all of what is Yours, as it pleases You.
O Lord, shine inside of them with the light of Your knowledge so those who are in Your bosom will learn and realize that they are sheltered and protected.
- ❖ O God, show me the expanse of love so I may speak of it as much as I can despite my weakness.
- ❖ O Lord, pour into me Your grace with Your mercy so I may speak of it. Kindle the hearts of Your beloved ones so they arrive requesting the fullness of love.
- ❖ Someone once said to me - If the Heavenly Father's mercy (Divine love) shines on me and my mind is amazed with His Divine guardianship then my mind will be sinking in the sea of life and wading in the waves of light. Dive in and emerge to breathe the bouquet of life, enjoy the spiritual greatness and rejoice in what is unspeakable.
- ❖ How beautiful it is to speak of the grace of God; words that sweeten immaculate souls and cause them to rejoice.
How pleasant is the pure fragrance that emanates from the sweetness of God that can change the soul as well as the body.
Have you experienced the fire of the Divine that touches the heart, ignites the body and soul and kindles the heart so the heart will soar, escaping the inferno of the burning earth below? Am I capable of

describing the pleasure that exceeds any conception?

- ❖ No one is delightful like our God. There is no pleasure equal to the sweetness of knowing Him. Someone once spoke to me about it, saying, "If I fly high above, I won't be able to examine Divine love; if I drowned in its depths, I won't recognize it. I cannot determine its width or its length!"

St. John Saba

- ❖ **O my God, where can I find the words that could precisely tell of Your rightful glory and Your free grace?**

You created me when I did not exist. You have found me according to Your will and before my presence. You have been glorified for Your deserved greatness...

O my God, You Yourself are the true glory so who am I to tell others of the greatness of Your creation? **The heart is too small to contain Your wonders while the utterance is incapable of description and could not be understood by hearing.**

Everything will pass away, but Your wonders remain forever.

Thoughts have a beginning and an end; the echo of a sound will vanish once the ear hears it, for soon it will be gone but Your wonders remain forever.

Who would be able to praise You and glorify You as befits Your greatness? Therefore, I repeat saying that Your glory is eternal and steadfast.

O eternal glory; O my God, the source of each constant glory. Without You I am unable to glorify You, because outside of You there is only false glory.

Therefore, come quickly to me, so I may glorify You.

Actually, who am I to exalt Your name?! I am but ashes and dust, a dead and loathsome dog, a nasty slug. I am a dead and lifeless body that soon will be corrupted.

Yes, who am I to glorify You, O greatest Master, the eternal King, God, whose breath is much better, a thousand times so, than the earthly creatures?

Would it be appropriate for the darkness to glorify Light or the dead to praise Life?

My God, You are glorified according to Your almighty, Your infinite wisdom and Your unlimited kindness.

Be glorified in Your true mercy, Your unlimited compassion, Your eternal perfection and the greatness of Your divinity.

Be glorified in the greatness of Your unsurpassed ability and

**Your compassionate love, which led to the creation of us, O my God,
the life of my heart.**

St. Augustine

Thus, when the **Spiritual Elder (St. John Saba)** was asked about the reason for not writing about the hidden mysteries, he said that he is like a young child who would be given by his father all which is precious if he enters his father's house. But when the child's father meets his son's young friends, he would only provide simple matters intended for them.

Thus, my brother\sister, do not expect to read this book and to enjoy the deep love of God for you and me unless you enter into your own room and transfer the words of this book into prayer. Only then may you enter with me into the house of our Good Father and you will explore by yourself the secrets of the treasures of His love, which I cannot bring out with me because no one can acknowledge it nor enjoy it except for those who commune with Him.

Together with **St. John Chrysostom** I earnestly ask you, not to pause at my poor phrases but to pray for you and me, to go beyond the basic meaning of the words and to understand, with the strength of the Holy Spirit, the true spiritual concepts of each word written about the "Divine Love." The heart can feel and the soul can acknowledge these concepts and a transformed person can taste its sweetness.

This love is acknowledged in all of God's work with us, when He created us, when He planned our redemption and when He sanctified our souls for Him. We will start, according to God's will, by speaking of God's love in creating the human.

DIVINE LOVE AND THE CREATION OF MAN

1. Adam and the Love of Divine
2. Man is a delightful creature: is he a musician or a musical instrument?
3. Man is a complicated creature
4. Know yourself, so you may come into contact with Divine Love
5. Man is the beloved creature of God
6. The soul is the image of God
7. The king who is loved by God
8. Man is the Ambassador of Heaven
9. Man is called to see God and to receive His Divine Knowledge
10. Man is called to be the dwelling of God
11. Man and participation in God's goodness
12. Man and perpetual happiness
13. Man is a worker like his creator
14. Man is a creature that is perpetually growing in this world and in the coming age
15. Man and the gift of the human body with its senses and emotions

1

ADAM AND THE LOVE OF DIVINE

RELATIONSHIP OF MUTUAL LOVE

God is love and in His love He created the soul as breath exhaled from Him. The soul is capable of love, not from its own nature, but by its association with God - the Absolute Love. The soul is God's image and His likeness. It belongs to Him, it is attracted to Him, and it contains Him.

The relationship between God and man is not merely the bond between the servant and his Master or between the statue and its maker or even between motionless creatures and a powerful mighty God - it is ever so much deeper. It is a relationship of mutual love or an adoration between two lovers; one of them a copy or shadow while the other is the original.

There is a difference between man and the other creatures, for God did not make man to be like the rest of His earthly creations. God's other creatures just fully obey and worship in natural and absolute compliance without alteration, with no right to accept or to deny. But God's relationship with man is an affinity in which the copy is attracted to the original and it is a worship of mutual love. The Original is pleased with the copy and adopts it; at the same time, the copy accepts the happiness of the Original and is willingly joyful.

God created man, not because of a need for him or for his worship. For God does not even need the angels or the heavenly multitudes that have always longed to serve Him with pleasure! God created man in His image and in His likeness; man is the source of God's pleasure, for he reflects God's character before man corrupted himself. We owe God benevolence, not only for His creation of the universe for us and for tending it for our sake or because of our existence from nothing; we owe Him for His love even before our existence! Truly, Zephaniah the prophet said, "**The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing**" (Zephaniah 3:17).

GOD IS FULLY ENGAGED WITH MAN

God offers love and man acknowledges this love. God gives and man receives His offer. God cares and man recognizes God's welfare.

How foolish are those who visualize God as a distant, omnipotent deity, sitting in an ivory tower **far away from people and their affairs,**

unconcerned about their happiness or suffering. They picture God as Aristotle did, thinking that once God created the universe He no longer took interest in it. It was said that in Aristotle's mind God was like a leader who stood like a statue, prideful of His dignity, as if there were a host of wooden soldiers trying their utmost to compete with Him.

IT SEEMS AS IF YOU CARE FOR NO OTHER CREATURE BUT ME!

God has not created man to be still so He could stand watchover him, or to frighten or scare him. God did not ask man to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings to satisfy Him or otherwise He will be angry, as some think. God created man out of His love to His beloved ones.

So now, what did God's love mean to His beloved man? He offered Himself as bliss for the human soul so that man can satisfy needs of the flesh. He also honored man, granted him the commandment of love, and prepared salvation for him for when he falls!

❖ The majority of mankind says,

What does God think of me now? Does He know what I am doing in my home now?

Does God care for what I want to do, even while I am in bed?

"Understand, you senseless among the people; And you fools, when will you be wise?" (Psalm 94:8) Because you are the lord of the manor you need to know all that happens in your house and to be aware of all the work and the sayings of your servants. So don't you think that God could have the same job as this? He keeps His eye on you!

❖ You care for my life and my ways, day and night.

You watch over me, observing all my paths. You never stop caring for me. I can say: You disregard heaven and earth and all within them while focusing on my welfare so **it seems as if You care for no other creature but me!**

❖ With Your care You hover over all mankind from the day of birth to the day of passing.

❖ Your mercies, O my God, and Your kindness contain all Your creation for You do not reject the work of Your hand.

❖ Your eyes, O my God, are attracted toward mankind.

While You are looking after all Your creations You provide them all with Your amazing love.

❖ Your eternal sight is fully aimed at me even while it looks upon others, for

Your sight is strong enough to encompass all creation.

- ❖ Your sight is ever abundant in its might, for nothing could make it lessen its intensity.

Despite its magnitude it still contains full perfection, its power does not fail and its goodness does not weaken.

- ❖ Your sight is perfect, capable of seeing all at once.

Its eternal nature is not subject to any division, change or deficiency.

- ❖ You contain my presence by giving me total devotion. You keep me in Your bosom perpetually and You look at no one else but me.

You watch over me as if You forgot all creation!

- ❖ You give me Your gifts as if I am the only one You love.

With the goodness of Your perpetual presence in all places, You hasten to help me at all occasions, whenever You find me ready to accept Your assistance.

My God, wherever I go I find You in front of me, because You are everywhere. With the grace of Your presence I stay with You wherever I go so I don't stumble, for without You I would not exist.

- ❖ I acknowledge that all my deeds are visible to You and You view them all, whatever they are, and You know what I do better than me.

There is nothing that You are not aware of - my thoughts, my intentions, my joy, my deeds. There is nothing of these not represented before Your eternal attention.

- ❖ My God, You know my thoughts in the depths of my soul.

My God, You are aware of all aspects of my soul. You know the purpose of my deeds, You are familiar with all the thoughts in my mind and what pleases me...

Your eyes monitor all this and Your ears listen to it all.

St. Augustine

- ❖ The existence of the entire world depends on the power of the Word (the Divine) so it is inevitable to realize that the Word Himself is the cause behind all various matters in the world. For through Him a full plan of the existence was established.

We are not against those who want to call Him "the Word," "the Wisdom," "the Power," "God" or any other name that is honored and glorified. Because the phrases or the names used all mean the same thing - **the power of eternal God**, Creator of all, who is aware of all that exists, who keeps all creatures safe and who knows the future before it even

occurs. It was proven through logical dialogue that the Word of God (or the Wisdom or the Power) is the Creator of mankind. **By no means was He obligated to create man, but He brought man into existence because of His superlative love.**

St. Gregory of Nyssa

Finally, the creation of man on the last day of creation signifies indeed the extent of God's care and attention to man, providing him with total happiness, for He had created everything for his sake.

2

MAN IS A DELIGHTFUL CREATURE: IS HE A MUSICIAN OR AMUSICAL INSTRUMENT?

God created man to be a joyful creature and to exercise on earth the heavenly life that recognizes nothing but perpetual joy. David the Psalmist sings and says: "Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful. Praise the Lord with the harp; make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy" (Psalm 33:1-3).

A UNIQUE MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

David the Psalmist mentioned two different musical instruments - the harp and the ten-stringed lyre, declaring that it would be appropriate for man as a unique musician to praise God by playing psalmodies. Man should make use of all of his talents - with body and soul, with tongue and heart, in public as well as in private. The righteous praise God with their bodies and present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (Romans 12:1). **St. Augustine** says, "No one should think of the musical instruments of theaters, for the matter here concerns inner deeds. As it is said: 'From within me, I praise You.'"

The harp refers to the holy body that glorifies God, gives thanks to Him and praises Him, not just with the tongue but with man's entire substance: the body's five senses and the soul's five senses or inner capabilities. The ten-stringed lyre symbolizes the body, the soul, the mind, the emotions, the senses, etc. All praise God in unison and harmony under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, through powers and capabilities both visible and invisible.

St. Didymus the Blind believes that the tone of the harp comes from its lower part; thus, it is likened to the body that came from earth. Conversely, the tone of the ten-stringed lyre comes from its upper part, so it refers to the soul circling in heaven, giving thanks.

❖ When we raise our holy hands to pray, without disputes or anger (1 Timothy 2:8), we play on a ten-stringed lyre for the Lord.

We play as David the Psalmist wrote, by making a melody to Him on a ten-stringed lyre and a harp. Our bodies and our souls are our harp where

they work in harmony together using all the strings to make a melody!¹

St. Jerome

St. Clement of Alexandria explained Psalm 150 – which the church praises during communion - in a symbolically beautiful tone. He illustrated the church resurrected from the dead through her Groom, the Risen Christ, as a live musical tool played by the soul to produce true and loving praise for God.

❖ In the divine service, the spirit chants...

"Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet," for with the sound of the trumpet He raises the dead.

"Praise Him with the psaltery," for the tongue is the psaltery of the Lord.

"Praise Him with the harp," meaning the mouth that is moved by the spirit as if it is a string of a musical instrument.

"Praise Him with drums and dance," pointing out that the church meditates in resurrection through banging on the skins (a reference to the dead, where the drums are made of the skin of dead animals).

"Praise Him with stringed instruments and harmonium," calling our body a harmonium, and the senses are the strings on which the spirit plays, giving human voices harmony.

"Praise Him with loud clashing cymbals," calling the tongue a cymbal, for it gives sound through lips of our mouths.

"Wherefore," He cried out to the human race, saying: **"Let everything that breathes praise the name of the Lord,"** because He cares for every creature that has breath. Truly, the human is an instrument of peace².

St. Clement of Alexandria

St. Jacob of Serugh teaches that God so loved man that He created him to be a joyous, musical creature, partaking of heavenly joy and praising God.

❖ Son of God, guide my hymns to praise You, so my senses will joyfully shout singing for You.

Since the beginning my tongue was prepared to praise You, and if it ceases to do so, it would deserve punishment.

My Lord, I will never rest or cease to sing Your hymns, lest I will be sentenced to turmoil on Judgment Day.

The mouth of man is made to praise the Divine and whoever

¹*Homilies on the Psalms, 21.*

²*Paedagogus 2:4.*

ceases to sing will be blamed and despised.

When God created the mouth He placed sounds and words in it so that it moves with praise.

Thus, whoever feels the presence of the Creator should praise the Lord who has created him.

The mouth of man has no authority to be used for nonsensical or inappropriate words.

When the Creator created the mouth, He made it perfectly so as to praise Him and not to utter foolish talk.

The Lord says to those who cease to praise Him: Cry loudly from deep within your throat and shout like a trumpet.

My Lord, I am Your creature. Help me to pause in wonder of Your deeds and allow me to praise as befits Your creation. Allow my heart to serve You with holy thoughts, for You are more fearful than any of Your creatures. Sanctify my tongue from all the worldly news, for by living with You my mouth will move with praise.

O My Lord, I opened my mouth so fill it with Your praise as You promised and let it not utter foolish talk. Let my hymns move toward Your gift that is full of wonder¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE LOVE OF RIGHTEOUS TO PRAISE

❖ Lord, I will not cease to praise You, even after my death.

Whoever lives for You, and lives with You, will never die and the silence of death does not have the strength to stop my praise. Then let my mouth speak Your glorification after my death.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE LORD PLAYS US AS IF WE ARE HIS SPECIAL HARP

St. Jacob of Serugh in acknowledgment of man's innate shortcomings considered himself a harp, whose strings remain silent and of no use unless the Lord Himself moves His fingers to play this instrument as if it is His own special harp. Then he will glorify the Lord in worthy song. The Lord does not need our praise but when we praise Him, we are blessed!

❖ The harp cannot play itself. Only a musician can play it; otherwise, it will stay silent and mute. The one who plays the harp skillfully moves his fingers, allowing it to make sounds...

The string is the soul and the soul sings to exalt You!

¹ Memre 1 (Cf. the text by Paul Bedjan and Dr. Behnam Sony).

O Lord, play on this string (soul) so it will sing magnificently with voices of glory.

You are not in need of exaltation by the earth's inhabitants; the human race needs You. O Lord, You are the prosperous.

❖ O Son of God, let my mouth be as a stringed instrument for You, so it opens with praise and I will be amazed, for You are the One who opened it for me to talk about You¹.

❖ O Son of God, the Word, the Indescribable, lavish me with words that praise You.

O, the One who is hidden and chose to be visible, reveal Yourself to me, so I will be able to raise my voice and declare loudly to those unaware of You.

My mind is fruitful and it carries You through my thoughts. By word of the mouth the voice carries You to the listeners.

❖ Lord of all, let my harp played by You praise You because with You the man who longs for You is capable of describing You.

Create for me, O Lord, hymns, words and songs so my mouth will be endowed to talk about You satisfactorily.

Let my tongue be Your pen, O Master. You are full of wisdom; put me with those where Your words are spoken and heard with love.

Let Your love move me so I talk of You with enlightenment. With my unworthy soul, let me be amazed by Your birth.

The Son of the Highest who chose to be mortal like mankind so that through You my weak words could reach Your Father.

O my Master, You are greater than thoughts and tongues, for minds and ideas are incapable of describing You.

Your memre² is invisible to both heavenly and earthly inhabitants. Your knowledge is not declared for heaven or earth.

Humans and angels cannot perceive You, for Your wonderment is beyond heavenly and earthly creatures.

St. Jacob of Serugh

CHILDREN AND INFANTS PRAISE WITH EXULTATION

❖ Children proceeded to glorify the Lord. The meek cried out, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." The children braided crowns of praises to express their joy for the eternal and everlasting God who became a Child among them.

² Memre is a Syrian word which means homily or poetry.

- ❖ **Zechariah the prophet** carried the spirit harp, and hastened before the Lord with prophetic hymns. He played his strings with joy, and raised his voice, saying: "Rejoice, O daughter of Zion. Cheer and shout with exalted glory, for He is coming to you just as prophecy told you."

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE DAUGHTER OF KING DAVID, THE SWEET PSALMIST OF ISRAEL

The Church of the New Testament inherited from the Jewish temple the worship of praise where worshipers were found. It was told that the number of the harps reached more than 4,000. The Church - the daughter of Zion - is likened by David, the king and the prophet, as "the sweet psalmist of Israel," for the Church had found in his psalms new and pleasant magnitudes regarding the work of the Son of David on the cross, His resurrection, and His ascension to heaven.

St. Paul the Apostle defined the kingdom of God as righteousness, peace, and joy in the Lord (Romans 14:17).

St. Basil the Great says: [Praising God is special work for the angels.] **St. Gregory of Nyssa** deems that through praises we are honored equally with the angels.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria says: [The enduring spirit forgets its pain, and through singing the holy words it looks with gladness only to Christ¹.]

St. Jerome, commenting on the psalmist's words, "let the rivers clap with hands," says: [The believers are becoming like rivers with water streaming into them from the original river, Jesus Christ. They clap with continuous spiritual work, as if clapping with their hands glorifies the Holy Trinity with their live conduct.]

- ❖ Be like a soldier and turn your darkness into musical night... singing with spirit, and understanding.

St. Jerome

- ❖ It befits the Christian's heart and mouth not to cease praising God, but to praise Him in both happiness and distress.
- ❖ It is said that even the angels, who possess a simple and spiritual nature, honor their Creator, and offer continuous thanks without ceasing. So how much more would man's spiritual bodies do after resurrection? All those of the glorified body would have tongues in their mouths, giving sounds to their spoken tongues; thus, they will shout with Divine

¹*Athanasius to Marcel on Psalms.*

praises, demonstrating the love and joy that fills their sensations¹.

- ❖ As God's greatness is endless, the same as His praise, so is it infinite. Thus, if you desire to praise God perpetually, then covet the angels and their praises.
- ❖ Giving hymns means offering double prayers.

St. Augustine

- ❖ The book of Psalms offers comfort and peace to the soul; it calms bewildering thoughts and lustful passions. It is the book of love.
 - It is a weapon against Satan.
 - It is a source of rest after the rigors of the day.
 - It is comfort for the elders.
 - It is motivation for our happiness and our holy sorrows.
 - It is a magnificent song, for it is the voice of the Church, and it is as fragrant as aromatic incense².
- ❖ Quiet hymns elevate thoughts to a state of gladness and peace.

St. Basil the Great

- ❖ Examine how St. Paul the Apostle cared for others' feelings, for he learned that reading leads to fatigue and tedium. Thus, he did not ask people to read the historical books, but instead drew their attention to the book of Psalms. Now people rejoice by singing the psalms and comfort others with "hymns and spiritual songs" (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).

But now your children are singing Satan's songs and dancing to his music. None of the cooks, the maids, or the musicians know any of the Psalms; they consider them ridiculous and shameful - this is the origin of evil.

Teach your children to sing these Psalms, which are full of love for wisdom and chastity. They will protect them from evil friendship.

And when your children learn the Psalms they will realize how holy the songs are, for heavenly powers chant the songs.

The wise man says, "The praise in the mouth of the sinner is not sweet" (Sirach 15:9)...

You can sing for God even if you are shopping in the market and no one would hear you. But Moses did so; God heard him, and said to him, "Why do you cry to Me?" (Exodus 14:15) Even though Moses did not speak, he cried out with his thoughts, so no one heard him except for God,

¹Letter, 94.

for he was calling God with a humble heart. It is not forbidden for man to pray with his heart, even while walking on his feet, for he is dwelling with his thoughts in the highest¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance" (Matthew 11:17; Luke 7:32).

Moses sang when he crossed the sea and the waters parted (Exodus 15). And Isaiah sang the song of his beloved vineyard (Isaiah 5:1), pointing out that the Jewish people who preceded them and gave fruits of many virtues would become very vicious and wicked.

The three saintly young men sang when their legs were tied, for fire became like dew for them. While everything was on fire the flames soothed them and did not harm nor burn them (Daniel 3:21-27).

Habakkuk declared a song predicting the passion of Christ as a source of comfort for believers (Habakkuk 3) to ease the sorrows of the people.

Thus, the prophets sang spiritual songs that taught salvation to all. The prophets wept with their sad lamentations as they tried to reach the hard hearts of the Jews.

St. Ambrose

- ❖ Behold, the mouths of all creation talked about Him - the Magi with their gifts, the infertile woman with her child, the star shining in the sky! Behold, this is the Son of the King ... Heavens are opened for Him, the seas calmed, the dove glorified Him... The angels proclaimed Him, children cried out to Him, saying "Hosanna!"

All these voices together from above and below, all cried out witnessing Him!²

St. Ephraem the Syrian

- ❖ Let us offer the sacrifice of praise (i.e., the fruits of the lips) - these offerings are not according to the Law that God voided and canceled its deed; these offerings are according to the Holy Spirit, for we must worship God with spirit and truth. Thereafter, the offering of the Eucharist is not bodily but spiritually, therefore it is immaculate³.

St. Irenaeus

- ❖ Pray with peace and purity and sing with understanding and pleasure so you will become like a young eagle soaring high in the sky. Chanting with

¹*Homilies on Col., Hom. 9.*

³*Fragments on his Lost Works, 37.*

the Psalms helps to tame lust, and suppresses the pulse of bodily pain. Prayer leads the mind to become prudent and to do the right thing....

Singing with Psalms reflects on the diversity of God's wisdom...

If you have yet to acquire the gift of God or sing the Psalms then beg, plead and entreat so you may obtain what you seek¹.

Fr. Evagrius

- ❖ Who would have the ability – despite the experience one might have – to list what stimulates the heart so it would flare and burn with fire? Who would have the ability to urge the heart to conduct pious, great prayers?...

For example, sometimes singing a passage from Psalms can make us pray passionately and emotionally. And sometimes the harmony of a melody sung by a worshipper can provoke laggard minds to raise great supplications. Too, the manner in which the singer chants the song, with humility and modesty, may stir the emotions of others².

Fr. Isaac

In the words of St. Paul the Apostle, "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:19-20). **St. John Chrysostom** comments:

[What does it mean "**in your heart to the Lord**"? The praise should be fulfilled with great attention and understanding, for the lack of perception means that the "praise" is nothing more than mere words while the heart is wandering here and there.

St. Paul said, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6), for nothing could please the Lord as much as a thankful man... St. Paul said, "**Giving thanks always for all things.**" What does this mean? Should we be thankful for all that has come upon us? Yes, even in sickness and in poverty. If we were advised in the Old Testament by the wisdom of Ben Sirach, "Whatsoever is brought upon you take cheerfully, and be patient, when you are changed to a low estate" (Ben Sirach 2:4), then how much more important would it be in the New Testament?

Yes, offer thanks even if you don't know the word that you are offering! If you are thankful in comfort, prosperity, success, and richness, this is not a great or marvelous thing. The man also must be thankful when he is in sorrow, tribulation, and distress. There are no words better than "Thank

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You, O Lord...."

Let us thank God for the blessings that we see as well as the ones that we do not see; also, the ones that we accept unwillingly, for we receive many of these blessings unwillingly and unknowingly...

When we are in poverty, in sickness or in catastrophes we need to extend more thanks. I do not mean offering thanks by words and tongue, but through acts and deeds, in mind and with the heart. We need to thank Him with all our souls for He loves us much more than our parents. Just as evil is distant from good there is a huge difference between the love of God and the love of our parents. These are not my own words but the words of Jesus Himself, the One who loves us. Listen to Him saying: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:11)

Listen also to what was said (in Isaiah 49:15): "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you." If He does not love us, why did He create us? Was He obligated to create us? Do we provide Him with any assistance or service? Does He need from us to give Him anything back in return? Listen to what David the Prophet had to say: "You are my Lord, my goodness is nothing apart from You" (Psalm 16:2)...

Let us glorify God for everything!^{1]}

DANCES OF THE SPIRIT

❖ Would you imagine the prophet David dancing? (2 Samuel 6:14) Would you hear the sounds of musical instruments and the pattering of dancers' feet? (Psalm 81:2-3) It is the wedding! So pick up a harp, for when you enjoy the blessing of the spiritual touch then your inner strings of your soul will respond with the echo of good deeds.

Hold fast to the flute so there will be harmony between your words and your deeds. Take the tambourine so the Spirit will lead you to sing with all the enthusiasm your body may muster².

St. Ambrose

SINGING TRULY FROM YOUR HEART TESTIFIES FOR HOLY HEAVEN

Whoever practices singing truly from the heart will experience early life in Paradise, so he will live happily and joyfully and will find satisfaction in Christ and comfort in heaven. Sin will have no power over him and neither

¹In Eph. Hom 19.

²In Luc. 7:18-25.

will the world destroy his soul; he will enjoy multiple blessings and will go from victory to victory and from glory to glory.

True repentance is the practice of the son who longs to enter to a new depth in the bosom of the Heavenly Father; it is the openness of the heart to carry within the joyful kingdom of God - it is a renewal for the inner man. He will long to come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13) Therefore, the praising and the singing with true inner joy help the soul to taste sincere repentance full of cheerful hope without despair.

- ❖ As for trees, if they are not watered they will not grow. The same is true for the soul; **if it does not receive heavenly joy, it will not be able to grow or to ascend to the top.** But souls that accept the Spirit and heavenly joy are able to rise to the top... The secrets of the heavenly kingdom have been revealed to them while they are still in flesh; these souls have found intimacy before God in everything and their prayers were answered.
- ❖ The soul is always in contact with this joy, and it is pleased with it; with this joy, it rises up to heaven. In this the soul is like flesh because it has its own spiritual food.

St. Anthony the Great

- ❖ It is not appropriate for man to laugh at all times for he would be like a ridiculous animal...

The moron laughs with loud voice (Sirach 21:23), but the wise man merely smiles without drawing any attention...

On one hand it is not appropriate for a man to be distressed and grim, just serious. Myself, I prefer for a man with tough features to smile.

Smiling is one of the principles of education and discussions¹.

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ It is fitting for the Christian to be "Alleluia" from his head to his feet.
- ❖ Let us rejoice and be thankful, not because we are Christian, but because we have become members in Christ's body.

Do you realize that?

Do you comprehend the great mercy that was given to us by God? Just stand in reverence and joy for we have become the members in Christ's body!

St. Augustine

WHY DO WE STRIVE WITH FROWNS ON OUR FACES?!

¹Paedagogus 2:5.

"Worship preserves the heart and keeps men righteous; it awards delight and joy" (Sirach 1:18).

- ❖ Why do we struggle with frowns on our faces? Are we not the heirs of eternal life? Leave frowns and scowls to the pagans and the wails to the sinners but for the righteous and the saints it is appropriate for them to be joyful and smiling for they enjoy the heavenly hosts.

St. Apollo

- ❖ Turn away from grief and depression, for they spring from doubts and wrath¹.
- ❖ The Holy Spirit that dwells in you cannot bear sadness or tumult².
- ❖ If prayer is mixed with distress it will not be considered a pure prayer³.

Hermas

LET US PRAISE TO GAIN VICTORY OVER SATAN

- ❖ These are the secrets of the soul that truly occurred within man who sought diligently to reach the promised life and to be redeemed from the kingdom of death; he will obtain redemption from God and will enjoy the partaking of the Holy Spirit.

So while crossing bitter seas the soul obtains salvation against its adversaries, and by the help of the power of God, it will watch those adversaries to whom it was enslaved perish in front of its eyes. The soul will rejoice with inexpressible joy and boundless glory (1 Peter 1:8), and will be comforted with God and will find rest in the Lord. And then the spirit that was obtained will sing a new song to God with cymbals representing the body and with strings of the spiritual lyre representing the soul. With pure thoughts of the soul and with the key of Divine grace which plays on the lyre, the songs will be exalted to the living Christ who gives us life.

As for the breath of air that utters and speaks when it blows through wind instruments, it is the same for the Holy Spirit; He penetrates through the saints who carry the Spirit and He sings within them praises and psalms so they pray to God with a pure heart.

Glory is to Him who rescued the soul from the bondage of Pharaoh and made her a throne for Him. He made her a house, a temple and a pure bride just for Him and brought her to the Kingdom of everlasting life

¹*Hermas: The Shepherd, Command 10:1:1.*

²*Hermas: The Shepherd, Command 10:2:6.*

³*Hermas: The Shepherd, Command 10:3:3.*

while she was still living in this world.

St. Macarius the Great

The Sweet Psalmist of Israel and His Psalmist Fellows; they are Practical Models for the Life of Praise (2 Samuel 23:1)

The Sweet Psalmist of Israel, David, and his Psalmist fellows offered praises and thanksgivings as accepted sacrifices to the Lord. "I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving" (Psalm 116:17).

For them, who is singing? The Psalmist himself (Psalm 146:2), God's people (Psalm 22:3), the righteous (Psalm 22:23), and the entire world (Psalms 47:1, 67:4, 72:11, 86:9, 117:1).

For them soul, body and all their energies participate in singing: "Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope" (Psalms 16:9; 63:1).

THE MOTIVE FOR PRAISE

- ❖ **They are staying in the highest place**, experiencing joyful, heavenly life in connection with the praising heavenly hosts and sharing their heavenly food. These are the last words of David... "Thus says the man raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Samuel 23:1). "Men ate angels' food; He sent them food to the full" (Psalm 78:25).
- ❖ **Busy yourself with the word of God, the source of true joy.** "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2). "And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love" (Psalm 119:47). "My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness" (Psalm 119:172).
- ❖ **Busy yourself with the Word of God who was incarnate (Christ the Savior).** "He bowed the heavens also, and came down with darkness under His feet. He rode upon a cherub, and flew; and He was seen upon the wings of the wind" (2 Samuel 22:10-11).
- ❖ **Testify before all nations**, for praising with the spirit of true joy is the most significant way to testify for the delightful Gospel of Christ. "Therefore I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the Gentiles, and sing praises to Your name" (2 Samuel 22:50).
- ❖ **They are exulted with God of the rejected and the needy.** "A Father of the fatherless, a Defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation"

(Psalm 68:5)."The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed" (Psalm 103:6).

- ❖ **They praise the One who hears the prayer.**"O You who hear prayer, To You all flesh will come" (Psalm 65:2).
- ❖ **Keep hope in the Lord.**"But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; Let those also who love Your name be joyful in You" (Psalms 5:11; 65:5; 71:5; 84:12; 86:2; 112:7).
- ❖ **A call for exclamation.**"Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound!" (Psalms 89:15, 132:16)
- ❖ **Delivering a new song.** Not only by composing new songs does one enjoy the knowledge of God's mercies every morning: "Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy" (Psalms 33:3; 40:3)."Oh, sing to the Lord a new song!" (Psalm 96:1) The primitive man is demolished and the new man is built; that is why we sing a new song. "Oh, sing to the Lord a new song!Sing to the Lord, all the earth" (Psalm 96:1). The earth which is fully shifted with all its heart to the Lord will sing perpetually with thanksgiving praises and with a sweet, young voice¹.

St. Jerome

ECCLESIASTICAL SPIRITUAL PRAISING

1. Congregational praise (Psalms 22:22; 22:25; 35:18; 89:5, 42:4).

- ❖ Listen to the following comprehensive phrase: "All people acknowledge You so let us walk in the Way together, with all nations and with all people, O sons of peace, and sons of the one and universal Church - walk in the Way and look forward."
- ❖ Even those who fear thieves sing in the Way. How much safer you will be while singing in Christ! This road is free of thieves; if you give up this road then you will fall into their hands.

St. Augustine

2. Praise in the house of the Lord (Psalms 55:14; 118:26; 134:1; 138:2).

3. Praise of the priests with the people (Psalms 132:9; 132:16; 133:2).

4. Delightful praise on feast days (Psalms 43:4; 81:3).

5. Praise with pure hearts (Psalm 26:6).

¹ *Homily 72 On Ps. 96 (95).*

- ❖ "Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous!" (Psalm 33:1) Rejoice, O righteous, not in yourselves for this is not safe, but rejoice in the Lord. "For praise from the upright is beautiful" (Psalm 33:1).

Those who praise the Lord obey Him; otherwise they will stray and deviate. "Praise the Lord with the harp" (Psalm 33:2).

Praise the Lord presenting to Him "your bodies a living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1).

"Praise the Lord with the harp; Make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings" (Psalm 33:2). Be a servant to God's love. "Sing to Him a new song" (Psalm 33:3). Sing to Him the song of the grace of faith. "Play skillfully with a shout of joy" (Psalm 33:3). Sing to Him skillfully and with joy¹.

St. Augustine

6. Sing joyfully even in time of repentance (Psalm 67:4).

- ❖ This confession does not lead to punishment, for David continues by saying, "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!" (Psalm 67:4) If thieves weep before people after confession so then believers should be happy before the Lord after confession.

"The nations rejoice and sing for joy." Why? It is because of the confession itself. Why? Because God is good to those who confess. He requests confession for the purpose of salvation of the humble. He condemns those who do not confess and punishes the arrogant. Therefore, be rueful before confession. When you confess, be glad. In this way you become healthy.

St. Augustine

¹ *On Ps. 33 (32).*

3

MAN IS A COMPLICATED CREATURE

Our proposition is not so straightforward. The creation of man is not secondary to any of the world's wonders; it is the greatest of all the wonders that we know, for there is no creation on the face of the earth that has the image of God except for the creation of man¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

All heavenly and earthly creatures, even Satan and his soldiers, stand before man, this amazing creature, and consider him a difficult riddle for the mind to perceive. The mystery of this puzzle is the exceeding love of God for us.

MAN IS A MICROCOSM

Man contemplates his creation by God, not knowing to what category he belongs. For God created man from ashes and because of defiance man returns to ashes from where he came. But what of the spirit that is breath from God's mouth? Would man be united with one of the heavenly hosts because of his mind, his free will, and his spirit? What about his body with its earthly needs and temporal demands?

Some of the fathers deem that man is an amazing creature who could be called a minicosmos since he contains a mix of heavenly and earthly creations. Man is above the animals since God made man **representative of all heavenly and earthly creation.**

God magnificently created the man; he is a small world with marvelous capabilities!

A UNIQUE CREATURE

In his book '*De OpificioHominis*,' **St. Gregory of Nyssa** writes that man carries the similarity of God through his mind. However, man's mind is different from God's, because it depends on sensations and outward surroundings. But the body of man is different from the body of animals, because the body of man is the tool of the mind. **Man's rational soul**

¹*De OpificioHominis, Introduction.*

depends on the physical senses. The knowledge of man is based on the interaction of the body with both the senses and the mind.

MAN IS BEWILDERED WHEN HE CONSIDERS HIMSELF!

Man is a strange and puzzled creature and not only for others, whether they are men or from the heavens or even from the devils; he is also perplexed about himself.

Man stands amazed, not aware of the truth of himself as long as he does not perceive the true Divine love toward him. And he remains unaware of the truth of God and His exceeding love as long as he does not know his real relationship with God. It is a cycle where man does not know whether to start learning about himself in the light of his relationship with God or to know God based on his perception of God's surpassing love for him.

Man does know to whom he laments. In some moments his thoughts are elevated to the heavens, longing to unite with the Creator and the angels, and he considers everything in the world to be worthless. In other moments his thoughts descend and he drowns in his bodily lust, distressing even his siblings and his sons. Man descends to a level to which even the wild animals don't reach.

Man is bewildered by the difficulty of realizing his true greatness, how much affection God has for him and how others perceive him. Man might act as if he is god, but despite displaying much pride and arrogance he still feels a kind of humiliation and weakness within himself, such as a fear of illness or of the unknown future or of death!

May God grant us His boundless grace to learn about ourselves and to know about Him and rejoice in Him!

MAN AMONG CREATURES¹

St. Jacob of Serugh differentiates between three categories of creatures:

1. Creatures who are mortal in nature, like the animals. They are not free; their acts do not affect their nature, be it good or evil. Death is the end of these creatures.

2. Creatures who are immortal in nature, like the angels and devils; they are free like mankind.

3. Creatures who are both dead and immortal, like Adam. Adam was given the choice according to his will to live forever or to die. He is dead and immortal. **St. Jacob of Serugh** says about Adam:

- ❖ If man considers his creation he discovers that he is a hybrid. He is dead and immortal. God in His wisdom created both natures and He made one man out of death and life.
- ❖ God made an image, half dead and half alive, to conform to both natures with awareness.
- ❖ The body of man is the reason for death because it is from ashes and at the same time it is the reason for life because his soul is spiritual. Hence his soul is immortal.

St. Jacob of Serugh

St. Jacob of Serugh believes that the body cannot live alone, just as the soul cannot live alone. Athenagoras, the Dean of the School of Alexandria, preceded him in this opinion in the second century.

Athenagoras rejects the Aristotelian belief that states the soul is associated with the body and cannot be separated. Following the teachings of **St. Justin**, Athenagoras differs by asserting that man not only has a soul and a body, he is a creature of **both elements combined and united in one**, and the soul leads the body. In this belief Athenagoras is close to Plato's ideas.

However, Athenagoras varies from Plato by asserting that man cannot be complete without the support of both the body and the soul together, for both combine to form one creature and all acts are assigned to this one creature¹.

But Plato states that man is a spirit who inhabits a body. This Christian concept is based on the Hebrew belief that man does not have a body, but he is a body without any clear differentiation between what is bodily and what is spiritual. Man is a complete creature. **Man in his complete existence, according to Christian Hebrew belief, is not a soul without a body but one creature spiritually and bodily.**

Athenagoras reacted forcefully against the Grecian teachings. He insists that man must have an eternal body. If man cannot be complete without his body **then the body is not a prison or a tomb for the soul** (as it was contained in the 'Origen' and Plato's belief). **The unity of the soul and the body is a good feature.** It is also contrary to Plato's idea concerning the reincarnation of souls.

- ❖ The body is not bestowed an eternal life without the soul and the soul is not bestowed sensation without the body. The soul is lifeless without the body and the body which lies in the dust remains without life.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹*De resurrectione 12.*

Some people ask: Was man created to die or to be immortal? The Syrian Fathers pondered this question and were divided into three groups with three viewpoints.

The first viewpoint, espoused by **Theodore, the Bishop of Mesopotamia and Narsai** (d. ca. 502), and **the Fathers of the Nestorian School**, believes that God created man to be prone to corruption. The commandment was for man to be free and to recognize that he is vulnerable to death.

The second viewpoint is championed by, among others, **St. Severus of Antioch and Philoxenus of Mabbug** (d. 523) who believe in a singular nature of man. They believe that God created Adam with the nature of immortality; when Adam was sentenced to death after sin mankind inherited death from our father Adam. Some scholars believe that **St. Jacob of Serugh** shared that opinion. He sees that man, filled with all beauty, carries immortality. When Jesus Christ was incarnate He took Adam's original status before he fell into sin. It is said in the Book of Wisdom: "God did not make death, and He is not delighted with the perdition of the living" (Wisdom 1:3). And St. Paul says, "Just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men" (Romans 5:12).

The third viewpoint is given by **St. Ephraem the Syrian** (d. 373), **Diodore of Tarsus** and **Theophilus of Antioch**. They state that man by nature is not dead or immortal. If man was immortal since his creation he would have been God Himself. And if death is a natural consequence of man's creation then we would think that God is the reason for his death. Therefore, man with complete freedom chooses either immortality or death. Some scholars believe that **St. Jacob of Serugh** held this belief. If the nature of Adam is beautiful and complete then it is because it is both immortal and vulnerable to death together, made of a soul like the angels and of a body like the animals. The nature of Adam enjoys freedom to do what he desires. This is the magnificence of the Creator for He created a creature that would not die if he chose so¹.

THE FIRST MAN WAS NOT CREATED TO DIE

❖ Adam was not created to die but to strive for immortality. To prove his credibility he added, "Who gave us the spirit of jealousy?" Now He works through baptism and granted us a guarantee which is not insignificant: the Holy Spirit².

St. John Chrysostom

²2Cor. hom 10. PG 61: 507.

- ❖ He created Adam and gave him life beyond death, but he willingly accepted the advice of the wicked one¹.
- ❖ Sin is profane; it opened the door of death for Adam to enter, for if he had not sinned he would not have died. There is no desecration or sin in Christ; therefore, no defects were permitted for the offering sacrifice².

St. Jacob of Serugh

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4

KNOW YOURSELF SO YOU MAY CONTACT DIVINE LOVE

Many of the Early Fathers like **St. Clement of Alexandria, St. Basil the Great, St. Isaac of Nineveh and St. Gregory of Nyssa** taught us to know ourselves as if we are facing a riddle. Small wonder, for it is hard for man to know himself!

Solomon the Wise says, "If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock, and feed your little goats beside the shepherds' tents" (Song of Songs 1:8).

❖ It befits everyone to know himself the way he is and to distinguish himself from what does not belong to him so he does not find himself inattentive and keeping things that are unfamiliar to him. This happens to the careless that do not pay attention, because their priorities are power, beauty, greatness, social status, wealth, arrogance, vanity, a graceful figure or any materialistic thing. These are described as careless guards because they are attracted toward what is wrong and do not guard what is good for them.

How could anyone care about something that he does not know?

The best way to preserve the good that we have is by getting to know ourselves.

Each one must know who he is and must understand his capabilities accurately and differentiate between real and unreal so he does not chase illusions.

Whoever highlights the value of this world and considers it important cannot differentiate between what belongs to him and what is strange to him. Whatever is temporary we do not own. How could we keep what is momentary and temporary?

There is only One in this world without a materialistic nature. He is God the Eternal. The entire materialistic world vanishes through rapid and sequential changes. Whoever separates himself from the eternal God will be lost in the abyss.

Whoever separates himself from God will be surely carried to Satan's followers. He who owns and cares for temporary things and at the same time is looking for God will reach nowhere; he will be separated from God and will not be able to reach any goal.

The Groom's friends give the following advice: **"If you do not know,**

O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock, and feed your little goats beside the shepherds' tents." What is the meaning of this?

The ignorant person does not know the value of himself¹.

- ❖ God instilled in your nature glories similar to His nature, as if He inscribed it on wax.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

- ❖ The man who is prepared to examine himself is greater than the one who thinks he is qualified to see the angels...and he who considers himself ready to recognize his sins is greater than he who brings the dead to life through his prayers².

St. Isaac of Nineveh

- ❖ The mind that examines itself and does not cease on calling God is able to save itself. The one who perishes through lusts can save himself by being a strong and zealous captive to the love of God, and by clinging to Him³.

St. Macarius the Great

- ❖ Someone said to brother Sisoy: "I am keen to always keep the remembrance of God with me." The elder said to him, "It is not that great to keep God in your thoughts; what is greater is to believe that you are the least among creation."⁴

Monks' Orchard

- ❖ If he (the prodigal son) has returned to himself, it is because he had abandoned himself. He fell and ignored himself, so he must return to himself first, to regain his prior status before falling off.
- ❖ When he falls he distances himself from his Father.
If he falls he goes to outside interests.
Now he returns to himself and so returns to his Father where he will be completely safe⁵.
- ❖ Who am I, O my God? What is my nature? It is a life that is extensive, powerful, and different and has multiple shapes.
- ❖ I fail to perceive to know myself.
- ❖ I desire to know God and myself. Do you desire something else? No!

² *Ascetical Homilies*, 64.

³ *Sermon 9:11*.

⁴ Cf. *Benedicta Ward: The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, London 1975, p. 180.

⁵ *Sermons on N. T.* 46 : 2.

St. Augustine

❖ He returned to himself after he pulled himself away, for **returning to God is returning to one's self**. Whoever distances himself from Christ will be resisting his self¹.

❖ O beautiful soul, may you know that you are the image of God and you are in God's glory.

O man, be mindful of your greatness and be watchful.

St. Ambrose

❖ The hardest perception is for man to know himself.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Move inside of yourself for within it you will see outside of it. Empty yourself from inside, so the sons of the house who are driven out will enter in peace and then the Builder of the house will gladly occupy His house².

St. John Climacus

❖ Do not deceive yourself should be your first concern.

St. Melito, Bishop of Sardis

❖ Do you want to know God? First learn how to know yourself.

❖ If you want to recognize your own self then do not pay attention to your status now, but to your original creation.

St. Evagrius

❖ If we are aware of our eminence and that we are planted in heaven then we will not act in any manner that disgraces our nature.

Nemesius of Emesa

KNOW YOURSELF, FOR YOU ARE MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE!

Some theologians believe that the essence of the theological thought of **St. Clement of Alexandria** is summed up in the following phrase: "Know yourself, so you get to know the Son of God. Know the Son of God, and then you will become an icon for Him." But who is able to know himself unless the Spirit of God reveals to him the insight to know himself?

Man needs to meditate for just a few moments daily, asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten his depths so he may appreciate God's love to him, and realize how much God is longing to dwell in him. Asking God to disclose His

¹In *Luc 15: 11- 32*.

.5:39 ²

exceeding love to man will lead him to melt in God's love, and request to be united with Him, enjoying being in communion with Divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

- ❖ First, return from being outside yourself and then offer yourself again to the One who created you. He is the source of our happiness and full goodness¹.

St. Augustine

KNOW YOURSELF, FOR YOU WILL BE ABLE TO SEE YOUR GOD!

- ❖ "Meditate yourself" until you reach the sighting of God².

St. Basil the Great

KNOW YOURSELF, CARE FOR YOURSELF AND NOT FOR WHAT YOU HAVE

"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mark 8:36)

- ❖ The holy Scriptures call you to pay more attention to yourself.
Do not care for the body or for what pertains to the body(i.e., health, beauty, pleasure, and longevity). Also, do not pay much attention to richness, glory, power, and what is relevant to earthly life. But care for your soul above everything for it is your precious treasure.
Adorn your soul with virtues, purify her from sin, and beautify her with adornment of honor, which is the most beautiful of decorations. Think seriously of this idea: the body will dissipate and vanish, but the soul is immortal³.
- ❖ Meditate yourself (Deuteronomy 15:9). What I mean to say is examine not what you have in hand or what is around you, but pay attention to nothing but your own soul.
We differ from what we own and what is around us, for we resemble our Creator. You are of a soul and a spirit. What we own is the body and its senses, and what we surround ourselves with is money, work and all of life's requirements. So what is the meaning of the verse?

¹ Cf. Robert Llewelyn, *The Joy of the Saints, Spiritual Readings throughout the Year*, Springfield, Illinois, 1989, p. 54.

.256 1989 :

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It means that you should disregard the body, and not care much for it, and do not struggle to find what pleases it, like health or beauty or longevity. And do not use excuses for lustful pleasures. Do not be tempted by innovation, glory, power, or greatness. And do not highly regard that which is made to serve mortal life and consider it important. Do not neglect your soul; you should care for your soul more than anything else.

But "**observe yourself**," nothing else. Adorn it and care for it and diligently remove all evil, iniquity, and stain that tarnish you through sin. Try to beautify your soul so that you sparkle with splendor.

Examine yourself, find out who you are and get to know your essence.

Your body is destined to die, but your soul is the daughter of immortality.

Know that we have two lives: a bodily life that is quick to end, and a spiritual life that is not terminated and not subjected to destruction¹.

St. Basil the Great

KNOW YOURSELF, FOR YOU WILL BE HEALED OF YOUR ILLNESS!

- ❖ "Examine yourself" to determine if you are sick or well, for many of those who are sick with incurable diseases do not completely know that they are sick, because of neglect, lack of care and inattention.

What great benefit this command is to those who are well. Whatever their health, this command will heal he who is ill and will keep strong he who is completely healthy.

Are you travelling? Pray "Guide my steps," and observe yourself so you do not lose the purpose of the road by veering left or right, but walk in the royal path of the righteous.

O **engineer**, set up the basis of the faith, which is Jesus Christ, and make it firm and strong.

O **builder**, look at what you are constructing, and make sure it is not made out of wood, or chaff or hay but from "gold or silver or precious stone."

O **shepherd**, be watchful so you don't fail to follow the pastoral tasks. And what are these tasks? It is the guidance of the stray, healing the wounded and curing the sick.

O **guard**, dig around the barren fig tree and give it all you can to make it productive.

Osoldier, "participate in Gospel hardships," stand against evil spirits and bodily desires, take up the whole armor of God and do not get entangled with the affairs of this life so that you may please Him who enlisted you as a soldier.

Owrestler, **pay attention to yourself** so you do not exceed the tradition of this sport. For no one is crowned unless he competes according to the rules. Be like Paul the Apostle, who strove and struggled as he toured countries. But take care and do not turn a blind eye to yourself; be like the wrestlers who are experienced.

Defend key members with your arms who are targets for the enemy's arrows.

Keep your eyes wide open on your opponent and stare forward.

Keep going until you win the race. Fight in the war with the invisible enemies. So the only objective for these words is to warn you not to be lazy in your life or to fall asleep but keep your feet set and pay attention to yourself by being watchful and prudent¹.

St. Basil the Great

KNOW YOURSELF, FOR YOU WILL REALIZE THAT YOU ARE COMPARABLE TO THE ANGELS

❖ First, you are human and you are the only one among the animals that was created in God's image.

Isn't this enough for you, if you look at it precisely? Fortunately, you were created by God's hands, which excelled in all creations. Second, since you were created in the image of your Creator, the One who made you, won't you be able to compare yourself to the angels by conducting yourself properly in life?

God has given you a rational soul to become aware of Him, and to search with your thoughts for the nature of existence and gain the best fruits of wisdom.

The entire animals in the world, whether wild or domestic, swimming or flying, are bonded to you and you are their master.

Haven't you invented the arts and built cities?

Haven't you given to all what is necessary? And perhaps you have also achieved luxury and extravagance.

Because of your brilliance and your discernment, haven't you found your ways across the seas?

Doesn't the land or the sea give you what you need in your life?

Isn't it because of you there is the sky, the air, and the upper planets with their beauty and their marvelous order?

So why are you sad and depressed? Is it because you do not own a horse? But you have the sun that shines its light on you while passing quickly during the day.

Or are you gloomy because you don't have gold utensils and silver lights? But you have the moon that illuminates you with its abundant light.

Or are you distressed because you don't ride in vehicles armored with gold? But you have two legs; they are the vehicle that accompany you everywhere.

Or could it be because you don't sleep on an ivory bed? But you have the earth which is more precious than ivory. In its bosom you can rest without sorrows or worries.

Or could it be because you do not sit under a parasol gilded with gold? But you have the glittering sky with its bright stars.

That was from the perspective of humanity; what exceeds all is the descent of God from heaven to be among humans. Just for you, He gave the gift of the Holy Spirit and the destruction and the disappearance of death. Hope of the resurrection and the Divine commandments lead you to perfection.

You have the commandments which will lead you to God and to the kingdom of God that is prepared for you. The wreaths of justice are prepared for those who did not stray from virtue but struggle to maintain their faith¹.

St. Basil the Great

5

MAN IS THE BELOVED CREATURE OF GOD

St. Clement of Alexandria declared that man is the most honorable creature¹, and the most beloved one to God, for he was in God's thought before creation.

Because of the endless love of God, He created the universe for man and then He created man in His image so he may partake of the taste with God.

St. Gregory of Nyssa, the disciple of **Origen**, outlined the creation of man as being the most beloved creation to God, for God was not obligated to create man, but did so through His exceeding love.

❖ Truly, man is dear to God for he is made from His hand. When God created the universe He gave it just order (He merely ordered and it was created) but when it comes to man He created him by Himself, by His hands; He breathed in him and gave him life. When God formed man He made him in His image and aspired for him more than any other creature².

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ No creature can claim to attribute his existence to himself. You did not get your entity from someone else... All creation has no existence before its creation. The reason of our being is the Creator's will³.
- ❖ The fact of our existence is not because our deeds are worthy, but because of the grace of our Creator⁴.
- ❖ Regarding rational creation, whatever righteousness it has is not a natural righteousness, but a good gift from its Creator... For the Creator gave it a mind and gave it freedom of movement with free will, so its goodness will be considered on its own by keeping the will free⁵.
- ❖ No one, whether Jewish or a Gentile, is free from this law which is naturally in all humans. For God has given man all the feelings and sensations with which he can fight to live and grow in the life of virtue.

¹*Paidagogos 1:3; 1:8:63.*

²*Paidagogos 1:3; 1:8:63.*

³*In 1 Sam., Homily 2.*

⁴*Comm. in Ep. ad Rom. 4:5 [See Drewery].*

⁵*De Principiis 2:9:2 [See Drewery].*

In addition to this, God implanted the power of mind in man. With this power man can determine what to do and what to avoid. God granted this to all equally¹.

Origen

- ❖ God did not create man just because he is His creation as He did with the other irrational earthly creatures; He created him in His image, giving him a portion of the power of His Word. While he carries a sort of reflection of the Word (Logos), and being created as rational, he then can enjoy the everlasting, the true life, the life of the saints in Paradise. But because God knows in advance the direction which the will of man might deviate, He secured the grace that is given to him by providing him with the Law. He brought him to His Paradise and gave him the Law. So if man keeps the grace and remains good he will practice the life of paradise without sorrow, pain, or worry and will enjoy the promise of being with no corruption in heaven².

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

- ❖ The Bible signaled to three creatures:
 - The first creation: setting out from non-existence to existence.
 - Second: the change from bad to better.
 - Third: resurrection from death.In all of the above, notice that the Holy Spirit works with the Father and the Son... Now man is created for the second time through baptism. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

St. Basil the Great

¹ *Comm. in Ep. ad Rom. 3:6.*

² *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei 3:3,4.*

6

THE SOUL IS THE IMAGE OF GOD

The greatness of man and the greatness of the extraordinary love of God for man have always been the main concerns for the Early Fathers of the Church, for the servants and for the people.

God made the soul of man in His image and according to His likeness (Genesis 1:26) with the purpose of directing the heart of man toward the Original, the Creator. So from within the image and the likeness man shall desire to see God Himself. On the other hand, man is suffering from emptiness as long as he is carrying this image that shall never halt. It is always on the move, in unbroken progress, to profit from the cascade of the origin, and consequently, the image will be brighter and shine in splendor.

The story of God with man is a love story, for God created man as a live icon for Him. "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Genesis 1:26). He gave man His image in order for him to practice his royal power over earthly creation. Many times **St. Jacob of Serugh** has used the phrase, "**Adam is the noble image of God**," to express human nature before the fall.

The Bible affirms: "This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them" (Genesis 5:1-2). Perhaps this verse refers to a certain kind of adoption. St. Luke the Evangelist made it clear when he explained the genealogy of Christ, saying: "The Son of Adam, the Son of God" (Luke 3:38).

- ❖ God has formed His image in us because of His compassion and with the same mercies He will bring us back to life in the last day¹.
- ❖ Sin was not part of Adam's nature, but found access to him from outside: it was a strange feeling that caused him worry and then he fell².

St. Jacob of Serugh

JONAH IS THE IMAGE OF THE SON

The main concern for **St. Jacob of Serugh** when he talked of the

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extraordinary love of God toward man was his creation in the image and the likeness of God. And **St. Jacob** sees the achievement of salvation as a path to restore this image which was lost because of sin. St. Jacob considers Jonah the prophet in the belly of the fish as a symbol of Christ's salvation at work and believes that silent Jonah in the belly of the fish had restored this image on the level of the shadow and the symbol. This image was apparent because he represented Christ, who offered salvation, by being buried in the tomb and resurrected from death. Also, the success of Jonah's mission was a symbol of the evangelism of Christ among Gentiles.

He restored the image so that he was qualified to see the holy temple of Heavenly God!

That was a unique image which was manifested in Jonah conducting a priesthood task (the sacrifice of praise) in a temple that no one has entered yet, just as Christ intercedes for us in the holies of heaven.

- ❖ Jonah's calling was not to engrave a picture for his King and His Lord but to become an icon for the Son of his Lord. Jonah had not uttered a word regarding our Savior, but became a herald for His coming by announcing Him through his silence¹.
- ❖ His speaking was amazing - a priest who prolongs the prayer - and its temple is amid the speeding waves. The altar is inside the fish and sound is present instead of the offerings. It is the Most Holy Place which no one can enter except one (the high priest).

There was a temple that no one can build except the one who is born inside the water. The priest came from the land, entered it, and sanctified it.

There was Aaron in the Tabernacle, Elijah on the top of the mountain, Solomon in the temple, and inside the fish, there was Jonah. It is the altar where no priest had entered since the Magnificent Priest entered with His unique service.

It is amazing to say that when Jonah thundered inside the fish, his prayer ascended and nothing could hamper it.

His prayer cut through the fathoms and the sea did not stop it; it flew to the highest and did not drown in the great depths.

The prayer pushed in, entering in the midst of the angels and was not banned. It met with lines of the fiery ones, and was not rebuked.

The prayer held out its hands and cried out in pain before the greatness of God. The prayer bowed its head and requested mercy from Divine compassion. It was disturbed and with thundering voice it

entreated with sweet harp; its mouth called for mercies. O Lord, that servant who is imprisoned in the depths of the sea has sent me, and I came to offer the request.

St. Jacob of Serugh

BETWEEN THE IMAGE AND THE LIKENESS

St. Clement of Alexandria and Origen believe in the necessity of making a distinction between the soul being the image and the likeness of God. They think that "**the image of God**" is what we receive upon birth; however, "the likeness of God" is earned by striving all our life with the support of Divine grace.

- ❖ Man was given honorable image when he was first created but to complete the likeness he must work to achieve perfection¹.

Origen

But **St. Gregory of Nyssa** holds that the image and the likeness are two sides of one coin. He thinks the image is an idle concept but the likeness is a dynamic concept which moves continuously². We can say that this idea does not contradict the previous concept but it completes it.

- ❖ Likeness is reaching or achieving progress for the image. It is a struggle to enjoy the image; it forms the soul according to the image requirements that God placed in us as a preliminary plan³.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

THE SOUL IS THE IMAGE OF GOD

Man's deepest level of his existence is known through his relationship with God and with each movement that pushes him to become closer to the likeness of His form. This is attributed to the Divine work, which was declared in the beginning and to the freedom that was given to man when he was created. Within this freedom, there is the freedom of will – i.e., the ability to choose – which occupies an important place.

- ❖ Which one among the earthly beings was created in the image of God except man?

And to whom was power given over nature and all its creatures, to be only for him?

It is a great honor which dignifies man and exalts him to the heaven,

¹ *De Principiis* 3:6:1.

² Cf. Boniface Ramsay: *Beginning to Read the Fathers*, N.Y. 1985, p.67.

³ Cf. Boniface Ramsay: *Beginning to Read the Fathers*, N.Y. 1985, p.67., W.J. Burghardt: *The Image of God in man According to Cyril of Alexandria: Studies in Christian Ant.* 14, Washington 1957, P. 4.

higher than the sun in pride and honor... Even though he is less in stature to the angels because of his material body he nonetheless is granted the ability to understand and to know his Lord and his Creator¹.

St. Basil the Great

- ❖ Notice that there is something in man’s creation that is unique and distinguished. Creating man in God’s image and likeness did not take place when the heaven, the earth, the sun or the moon were created.
- ❖ Our inner nature is one that is invisible, immaterial, imperishable, and immortal. These true characteristics identify and describe the image of God².

Origen

- ❖ God formed all the creatures, but He did not portray His image on any creature except for Adam. The earth is vast, the heaven is high, the sun is bright, the moon is beautiful, and the march of soldiers is glorious. When God made all this beauty it was not said that God had made anything in His image except Adam who is the image of His Only Begotten Son and because of Him he was called the image of God³.
- ❖ God allowed the Archangels to portray His image and His likeness on the human soul. He adorned the soul with beauty that exceeds all other creatures⁴.
- ❖ The first blessing that cannot be described is when God blessed our kind by creating it in His image⁵.
- ❖ Because of His image, men acknowledged their closer relationship to God; they entreat to Him without shame by His special image⁶.
- ❖ The soul is an honorable and beautiful creature; no other creature exceeds it. It is the image of the King, the noble image of the Divine and its beauty surpasses the beauty of all creatures. Look at how charming was the light of the first day; however, God did not portray His splendid image of Divine on it. Look at the firmament that outstretched over all the creatures, yet it was also not worthy to carry the image of the King. Too, the sun and the moon with their rays were not worthy to carry the noble

¹*Hom. In Ps 48, 8, PG 29:450 b.*

²*In Gen. hom 1: 13.*

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image¹.

- ❖ Look at the soul so it may conceive the scene – it is the same as the mirror when it conceives and carries the image of the one who looks at it. Gaze at it, because if you distance yourself you will lose your companion. As long as the viewer looks at the mirror, it will carry its image. But if he moves away from it then it will become empty, for he does not remain there.

It is delighted with the sight of those who look at it. It is totally empty from images and likeness as long as the viewer is away from it and not looking at it. It will be blighted with poverty and desolation unless the image returns. If it is enlightened, it cannot be beautiful without an onlooker to gaze upon it. Nothing is in it, unless the one who owns it looks at it. When we look at it, it immediately conceives of him and he will enter and dwell in its bosom. Then it will be delighted with him, full of beauty, images and likeness; that is because its owner has looked upon it and then it will be adorned with the grand image.

O Son of God, look at the soul so it will be filled with Your beauty.

O Lord, do not stay away because if You do, it will perish².

St. Jacob of Serugh

FROM THE SAYINGS OF THE FATHERS: THE HUMAN SOUL IS THE IMAGE OF GOD

Following are selections regarding the human soul and the image of God. There are some who deem that the image of God is reflected in the following:

First: **the beauty of the powers of the soul.**

Second: **the mind which resembles the great and the eternal.**

Third: **the love which is the image of God inside us.**

Fourth: **the immortality which is also the image of God inside us.**

Fifth: **the freedom which is the image of God in the soul.**

First: the beauty of the powers of the soul

St. Jacob of Serugh says that God had given the soul the beauty to be higher than the creatures. He gave her the freedom, the mind, the wisdom, the thought, and the senses that are fully capable of distinction. Her beauty exceeded that of all creatures - the silent and the speaking creatures, the visible and invisible creatures. The angels do not resemble her. The soul is the bride of the King and it carries the likeness of her Lord. It is full of a Divine beauty, which is the image of the Light and the chariot, the

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companion of the heavenly ones. The devils are jealous of her.

❖ **It (the soul of man) is the image of the King and the image of the great Divine, after which the beauty of all creatures will come.**

How beautiful was the light that appeared on the first day even though the image of the great Divine was not portrayed in it.

The firmament that reached in all directions was not enough to become an image for the King in His great highest.

The captive seas and the entire universe with its dimensions were smaller than the image of the King in His borders.

The sun and the moon with their rays and brightness were not beautiful enough to portray the great Icon in them.

The Paradise and its spiritual fruits were not in the image of the great Creator when they were created.

He did not portray His image on the chariot of the heavenly nor on its wings or speaking wheels.

His likeness is not portrayed on either the Cherubim or the Seraphim nor in the masses or in the rows of the flames.

He did not want to be portrayed on the flame of Gabriel or the spirit of Michael that is full of wonder.

He remained in the highest of all high places and He made the soul of man in His likeness and portrayed His image in him¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

❖ Truly, the Divine Beauty does not need to be decorated with any shape or with the charm of any color; we meditate the highness of the Divine Beauty with unspeakable pleasure...

Thus, first it is for us to conceive that our Creator drew an image for the likeness of His beauty by adding virtues. These virtues were assorted with light colors to show His royalty. We can say that with these virtues He shows His true image in us, not with red or white or a combination of these colors whatsoever... Instead, He used chastity, freedom, deliverance from lusts and salvation from all evils which helps man to be formed in the likeness of God. With these colors the Creator distinguishes our nature in His image².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

SECOND: THE MIND WHICH RESEMBLES THE GREAT AND THE ETERNAL ONE

²*De Opificio Hominis, 5:1.*

In a remarkable phrase, Origen speaks to us about the role of the mind in the life of the believer. [Just as our eyes in their nature, ask for light and sight, and the body, with its desires, demands food and drink, likewise the mind has its natural desire to know the truth of God and to seek the explanation of this desire which is from God¹.]

Apollinaris believes that as a result of the first sin, the mind and the will of the human had become completely corrupted in their nature. Therefore, Jesus Christ, who is the Model and the Way of salvation, is excluded from any inherited blemish; i.e., He did not have the mind and the will of man for they were replaced by the Divine. In his first letter to Chledonius ("Against Apollinaris") **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** confirmed that he does not agree with the Apollinarian heretics, talking in detail regarding this subject:

- ❖ People should not be deceived by the idea of accepting a man without will, as those fake people say "human Lord" when they should use a better expression like "Our Lord and our God." We do not separate Human from the Divine in Christ, but we confirm and we teach one God and one Son who was not human in the beginning.

He was alone since the beginning without the context of a physical body but in the end He too became human for our salvation. He was affected by pain and the physical sensations, but not affected by it in His divinity. He was limited by His body, but infinite with the Spirit - earthly and heavenly, visible and spiritually known, definitive and infinite - so as to renew all of mankind who fell because of sin since He was perfectly Human and Divine².

- ❖ Whoever has hope in man without mind, he is also without mind and not worthy of salvation.

Unless God abides in him, he won't be saved; what is united with God is to be saved. If half of Adam was the part that fell then his half would have been the part to be saved. **But if the whole person fell, then God will unite the wholly born person and save all of him.** Therefore, all our agitators should not undermine our full salvation or create a Savior who consists of only bones, nerves and the image of a man.

And if this man was without a soul, as the Arians say, the purpose of suffering upon the Divine where the one who inhabits the body (God) would be the one who suffers. **And if He had a soul but cannot mentally comprehend, is it possible for him to be human? The man is not an**

¹ *De Principiis* 2: 2: 4.

animal without a mind! Then according to their opinion, the physical body must have been human, but the soul could be the soul of a horse, cow, or any other animal that is not rational, and this could have been the one to be saved.

But if man can mentally comprehend and he has a mind, then these people should cease with their foolish polemics¹.

But they said, "The Divine compensates the mind..."**The Divine with only a body, or only a soul, or both, is not human if it is missing the mind, which is the best part of man.** Therefore, you need to keep all the components of man and united with the Divine within him so man will completely benefit (from salvation).

They say, "But Christ cannot absorb two full things together." Well, this could be true from a physical standpoint. A small bowl does not have enough space to take a gallon and the vacuum that accommodates one body cannot take two bodies or more, but **if you are looking at intellectual things or metaphysical concepts you must notice that I myself have space for my soul, my thoughts, my mind, as well as my spirit.** The universe that existed before me consisted of the visible and invisible; it was able to accommodate the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The nature of intellectual things is that they mix together and mesh with objects in neither undivided nor materialistic ways. The hearing of the man allows for many sounds. Many people's eyes can see the same scene and several noses can also smell the same scent; all this happens without any impact on the senses and without confounding them. Perceptions do not diminish because of the number of people who can feel them².

Where is the full human or angelic mind, which if it reaches a certain level of perfection with regard to the Divine mind, would have the impetus to force the other one away? The human mind or the angelic mind is similar to the ray relative to the sun or a drop of water relative to the river; both the ray and the drop are not big enough to push others away to make room for something bigger or more perfect.

Let us contemplate how the house could have space for two complete things: sunshine and its glare, and the earth containing water in the forms of humidity and a river. Much thought is needed for this matter. Do not the objectors realize what is considered relatively perfect could be considered much less significant if it is compared to something different? (Examples are the hill compared to a mountain and the mustard seed in relation to a

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bean seed or a bigger seed). Consider an angel compared to God, or man to an angel.

Therefore, the mind is a perfect thing that controls the soul and body, but it is not absolutely complete. It is the servant to God and is under His control, not a partner in judgment or otherwise equal to His level. Moses himself was a "god" to Pharaoh (Exodus 7:1) despite the fact that he was "the Lord's servant" (Joshua 1:15). Stars shine at night but the light of the stars disappear during the day due to the presence of sunlight to the extent that we do not notice stars. If there was a small lamp beside a pile of burning wood the lamp is not extinguished but its light won't shine as brightly. Also, the lamplight will not appear as separate from the light of the burning wood; the stronger will prevail, as if all light came from the burning wood¹.

If the Master had taken the lowest element (the flesh) to be sanctified through incarnation, wouldn't He take the higher element (the mind) to be sanctified by becoming a Man? If the mud had fermented and new dough had been formed, would not the image be fermented and be mingled again with God and sanctified with Divinity?

We also add: if you believe that the body was totally despised and sentenced to death because it begat sin, this would cause Christ to take the body and exclude the mind. So those whose sins come from their minds will have an excuse, for the testimony of God has showed clearly that they are not susceptible to the treatment and to the cure from sin. I will tell you about your argument: you are offending my intelligence because you are "body worshipers" (you are saying that I worship a man!). You link God to the body – Who is impossible to connect with anything else – and this is the reason that He broke down "the middle wall of separation" (Ephesians 2:14). How do I respond to you, for I am not educated or a philosopher? The mind is mixed with the mind, for it is closer to Divinity and it is more knowledgeable by its intervention between Divinity and the primitive, harsh body².

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

❖ **The man is a small, marvelous being through which he sees the world and its deeds.**

His head is the tower, his heel is the anchor under the ground, and all creation is like components linked to a machine within him.

Man has a mind which is like the Great, Everlasting God; the

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mind is within him entirely, and also outside him and is not limited by his body.

The body does not limit the mind and it dwells there. Also, God is never limited.

Now we say that the mind dwells in the brain.

But who is he that tours in places outside the brain?

Thus, also God Who sits in glory in heaven goes outside the worlds with His power.

He is the Almighty; the high heaven does not limit God who dwells there.

Thus, the mind is not limited by the body in which it dwells.

O mind, how dare you! You go to the end of the earth and look at what is beyond the world!

Who is he that supports you, to ascend now to the house of the heavenliest and to look with amazement at the heavenly hosts?

Up and higher than the highest and under the depths, who is assisting you unless it is the likeness of God which is meant for you?

The great mind does not limit itself to stay on earth.

He left me now and stands among the angels in fearful places which with perfection do not change.

Crowds have pushed him and reached with him to the chariot...

Here is the mind; it is crushed with amazement like Ezekiel who also viewed for himself the fearful vision, as viewed by the Cherubim, linked to the fire of the Divine flames.

St. Jacob of Serugh

- ❖ The Divine sees, hears and searches everything; you too have the power to recognize and understand through vision, hearing and understanding which discovers and verifies¹.
- ❖ Within yourself you read the word and understand; it conforms to the Divine mind itself and to the word².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

- ❖ The mind directs those who are truly righteous and philosophic to honor and love only what is true. They also reject the thoughts of the ancients if it is not important... As for us, we consider that no evil could befall us unless we are condemned as wrongdoers and to be proven evil, for you can kill us but you cannot harm us...

The facts they teach belong to us; we are Christians. Because of the

¹*De OpificioHominis, 5:2.*

²*De OpificioHominis, 5:2.*

"Logos" that we worship, begotten from the Father who was incarnate for our sake and healed our sins through suffering and passion, He Himself inspired us with these facts.

They acknowledge the truth, for the Logos Himself had been sown in them. But there is a big difference between being sown and sharing the harvest. Therefore, all the proper principles that were discovered and articulated by the philosophers and lawmakers were found and contemplated partially in the Logos. They erred because they did not know the Logos entirely, which is Christ. But for us, we knew Him and learned the whole truth from Him¹.

St. Justin the Martyr

THIRD: LOVE IS THE IMAGE OF GOD IN US

❖ God is love and the source of love. John declared that "love is of God" and "God is love" (1 John 4:7-8). The Creator of our nature does this in order for us to adopt love as our sign too. He says, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Thus, if this love is absent then the entire seal of likeness will change².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

FOURTH: ETERNITY IS THE IMAGE OF GOD IN US

❖ Since one of the good things belonging to the nature of the Divine is "eternity," it is essential that our nature not lack this characteristic, but perceive this element in order for man, through his cognitive powers, to comprehend the incomprehensible and to belong to everlasting Divine.

Truly, the story of creation has explained this clearly and with discernment by using one phrase, as it was said that man was created "in the image and according to likeness of God..."

There is a paradise with unique fruit that does not satisfy the appetite of those who taste it but provides them with knowledge and eternal life. This applies completely to what we previously noted about man. Our human nature was good since the beginning and was surrounded by goodness³.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

FIFTH: FREEDOM IS THE IMAGE OF GOD IN THE SOUL

Origen teaches that freedom does not stop at the boundaries of

¹Apology, 2-10.

²De Opificio Hominis, 5:2.

³Oratione Cat. 5

enjoying free will, but is affirmed through spiritual teaching. The believer enjoys practical freedom through spiritual teaching where he meets with God and becomes free from the enslavement of denying His existence. It confirms one of the principles of Greek philosophy: "A thing cannot be known without its likeness" and simply we say that Origen deems that man in his **likeness with Jesus Christ ends up by being united with Him.**

❖ Man (Adam) was an image and an example of the power that controls all blessings. He had sovereignty over himself, for he was in the likeness of God... He has never been a slave for any external necessity.

He was thinking of the truth, and with his full free will he chose what pleased him. And with his choice at that fateful moment he caused the calamity that dominated mankind¹.

❖ This (Benevolent) God did not deprive man from possessing the most honorable and precious of benefits; i.e., the gift of freedom and the ability to make decisions for himself.

If necessity rules man's life then the "image" (which he has from the image of God) would have been false, for it would be distant from the original and there would be no likeness between them.

How can human nature that is enslaved to any kind of necessity be called the image of Royal Nature?

God is not responsible for current evils, for He created your nature to be free and not to be enslaved. But responsibility falls on the deviated will with which man chooses the bad instead of what is best².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

GOD REQUESTS HIS IMAGE IN US

Since God has given the human soul all this exceeding beauty, He will then ask us to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ so that it belongs entirely to Him. For we do not need to expend any effort to submit our life to Him; we offer to Christ what is His. If all our senses become holy and open to receive what Christ offers, our senses will provide our entire life to Christ. But if our senses receive the pleasures of the world and its lusts we will have nothing to give to Christ; we give worldly matters to the world. Concerning this **St. Hilary** says: [If we have nothing for Caesar, then we are not obligated to retrieve anything for him, but if we depend on him and benefit from his governance then we are obligated for the retrieval of what is his.]

¹ *De Virginitate* 12.

² *Oratione* Cat. 5.

- ❖ I understand what the Lord said when He saw Caesar's currency: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). It is as if He says: As Caesar asks from you the seal of his picture, thus God asks. So the currency is restored to Caesar and the soul is restored to God, enlightened and sealed with His bright features¹.
- ❖ You have printed Your features on us! You have brought us in Your image and likeness! You have made us Your currency but it does not befit Your image to remain in darkness. Send Your ray of wisdom to illuminate our darkness so that Your image will shine in us².
- ❖ Do not seek how to repay Him... Just give Him back His image, for He does not ask for anything else. He is asking for His currency... Do not give Him recompense, for God does not ask for anything from you. When you give Him what you have, you are offering sin³.

St. Augustine

- ❖ Let us give back to God the things that are for Him; i.e., we render to Him our body, soul and will. Caesar's currency is made of gold and it has the seal of his picture; the currency of God has His image. Let us give money to Caesar and keep the principles that are without blemish for God⁴.

St. Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers

- ❖ Turn from the image of the dusty one and throw away his earthly image, so you can be blessed with the image of the Heavenly Man; then you will give God that which is God's⁵.
- ❖ The man has two icons; one was given to him by God when he was created, as it said in Genesis: "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him" (Genesis 1:27). And the other icon is the image of the man of dust (1 Corinthians 15:49), which he accepted because of his rebellion and his sin after he was driven out of paradise when the ruler of the world tempted him (John 12:31).

The currency carries the picture of the ruler in this world; thus, it will be the same for those who work for the head of the governors, they will carry his picture.

Jesus wants us to abandon this picture and reject it in order to restore the original image that He created in us so we become His likeness. So we

¹ On Ps. 67.

² On Ps. 67.

³ On Ps. 103.

⁴ In Matt. Canon 23.

⁵ In Luc. hom 39:5.

will render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's (Luke 20:23-26).

But our inner man - the invisible, the imperceptible, the incorruptible, and the eternal - is the one who was created in the image of God. Through these characteristics the image of God is much better comprehended. But if anyone believes that man was created in the image of God and according to His likeness in terms of having a human figure, then apparently they believe that God Himself has a human figure and is from flesh and bones. This thought is absolutely evil.

Should any man created in the image of God look at the devil's image, then he adopts the devil's likeness by sin. How much more will there be for he who looks at the image of God, whom He created in His image, and take the appearance that was given to him naturally by the Word and by His Divine power. **If man notices that he more resembles the image of the devil than the image of God, he should not lose hope of potentially restoring the image of God again**, for the Savior came not to call the righteous but to urge sinners to repent (Luke 5:32).

Origen

BEHOLD, THE SOUL, WHO LED YOU ASTRAY?

❖ Behold, the soul, the beloved of her Lord, who led you astray? Who mocked you? Who persuaded you with lusts?

Who changed you from spiritual to lowliness and into scrawny slaves who are corrupted?

You are the daughter of the Free, you are the daughter of the King, and you are the daughter of Light; why are you wearing the color of night and your complexion dark?¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

SATAN IS TRYING TO REMOVE THE IMAGE OF GOD

❖ Truly, the evil observer of these days holds time in his jaws and strives with all his power to eliminate the image of God. He chose to fight against God from the beginning and it will continue until the end².

St. Gregory Thaumaturgus

❖ The Book of Genesis says: this serpent that mocked me between the trees made me naked and humiliated me and now she is biting me. It tricked me, stole the garments I wore, and tempted me with the love of the world. Every day it throws me fruit from the tree of knowledge to eat and

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² *Gregory Thaumaturgus: Paraphrase of Ecclesiastes 3:11.*

to die with its lusts.

They made me the keeper of the vineyard between trees and I did not protect myself from the fruit that killed me.

They placed me as keeper of the tree of life, and I picked the fruit from the tree of knowledge.

The serpent mocked me with its awful deceit and dragged me down from the great peaks so here I am, falling in the wicked world¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

SIN CORRUPTS THE BEAUTY OF THE SOUL AND DEFORMS ITS IMAGE!

It is hard for man to realize the truth of the beauty of his soul that God created in His image and according to His likeness, to install man as the ambassador for Him on earth and a deputy in heaven. Too, it is also difficult for man to describe the corruption that the soul has reached because of its separation from God, Who is the source of its beauty, its richness, its true peace, and its everlasting happiness. This is what sin did to the soul.

❖ The soul is beautiful and most precious among all creatures; **nothing could defile her except sin**. She shines brightly, but **should she commit an iniquity**, she darkens while still full of beauty and if she loses direction, she becomes hateful... She is a pearl that has not been saved without the Blood of the Son of God, when she was exiled by persecutors.

She is despised, neglected, left, and thrown into the ashcan by us; we did not lift her from the trash.

She is harmed by sin, yet easily able to repent, but we are too lazy to make the effort to find the beauty that was lost.

How much would gold be despised and worldly possessions rejected and opulence discarded if the lost and beautiful soul is found?

We have despised the soul, ignored her, and did not give her attention when only it was necessary to possess it. We are rushing to collect wealth and we consider the queen of light as if she is nothing.

We did not respect the soul nor serve her; we were not proud of her and we did not try to save her from fearful evils².

❖ Here is sin surrounding the soul from all directions, and we did not renounce sin with repentance which solves all dilemmas.

Look at the sun shine and how strong its rays are. **One cloud is able to obscure it from all viewers**.

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Look and observe the attire of the soul and how many costumes she has, **yet the lack of one of them may change the soul to be hateful.**

Notice too that repentance is free and with it the soul, which is above all creatures, is saved.

The Son of God has purchased her with a price when He saved her; we don't care to heal the wound for free¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

WATCH THE PRECIOUS SOUL!

It befits man, beginning in childhood if possible, to practice knowing his value; in this God takes great pride and this practice astonishes the heavenly. Then man will appreciate the pity of God who gave His Only Begotten Son's precious blood to restore man's beauty.

It befits the believer not to let a day pass without sitting under the leadership of the Holy Spirit of God; God will shine His Divine light upon him, and the believer will learn how to know himself. Hence he becomes aware of God his Creator, who cares for his salvation.

❖ O man, whose love is linked to his possessions, do not despise the wonderful affinities you have. You have a soul that is greater than any material wealth so if you want to love, you need to appreciate your soul because it is best.

Do not covet trifles as fools do and discard that great possession, neglecting it as if it is nothing.

Regard gold and silver in terms of its value.

Should you find money, appreciate its value, and consider possessions for what they are. Watch the price of the soul, consider her significance, and hold her dear.

Whoever knows the price of the soul should preach so her owners can appreciate her value².

St. Jacob of Serugh

WHO COULD DESCRIBE THE PRICE OF THE SOUL EXCEPT THE CREATOR?

There is no man regardless of his wisdom, his knowledge, and his piety who can see his soul or assess her at the heavenly level even though he is certain of her existence. It is difficult and may be impossible for man to place bodily and material limits and standards on his rational soul.

When we meet with the Lord of glory, Jesus Christ, on the clouds, the

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believers will come together like a heavenly bride, holy and dressed in the righteousness of the Heavenly Groom. This is the scene that the heavenly celebrate in wonder. We will be amazed at how we did not realize the truth of ourselves when we were in the world. God Himself cares for our souls. He cascades His splendor on our souls and allows them to dwell in high Jerusalem in the likeness of the heavenly hosts, which is a most beautiful sight to behold.

❖ The Creator put the entire world in one palm and the soul in the other. The palm of the soul overcomes the world.

He knows that pearls are best and no one knows their value except Him.

He set a price for our souls, for they are worth more than anything in the world.

Nothing surpasses the soul in the world; the world is nothing while the soul is everything.

The world will fall but the soul will not disappear with it! The world is like weeds while the soul is the image of the Divine.

The entire world will disappear like shadows at sundown but the soul will remain; it is the image of the great Creator.

If man gains the whole world and loses himself, what does he own if he does not own soul?

When the Son of God created the soul, He gave her His image. He wore the image of the soul from the womb when He saved her.

He asked us: "What is her price? How good is she?" No one knows what the soul is worth except Him.

When He was teaching to groups, He said that the soul is worth more than possessions!¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

ANGELS REJOICE WITH THE SINNER WHO RESTORES THE IMAGE OF GOD

The Heavenly hosts live in heaven, home of love; they have never been separated from the presence of Divine, even when they are sent for service on earth. With this extraordinary presence they are filled with joyous love toward mankind that is beloved by God Himself. They rejoice and shout with joy when sinful man restores his inner beauty by the Blood of the Savior and through the work of the Holy Spirit. They long for our company, and delight in the rejoicing praises and happiness of the Divine vision with us.

❖ The angels rejoice with the sinner who repents, for the lost image of God has been found¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE ICON OF GOD CONSTANTLY GROWS OR WANES

When God created man in His image and according to His likeness; He did not create a statistically immobile and idle creature but one with constant dynamic movement, reflecting the splendor of God on him. Man should flourish in magnificence always and the icon of God remains and increases in glory without end.

When St. Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Luke 1:46), it does not mean that she is adding any new glory to God; instead, she is gathering the glory of God so her soul will be exalted and will go from glory to glory. In her glorification of God she enjoys greatness. This is what we ask from God in the Lord's Prayer when we say "Hallowed be thy name." The name of holy God does not need sanctification, but those who pray enjoy the holiness of God's name; thus, the holiness of God will reflect on the life of the worshipers.

Origen remarked on these words of St. Mary: "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Luke 1:46), stating that God is consistent but His image in us is growing or decreasing. Since the image of God grows and shines according to my deeds, my thoughts, and my words that glorify God, when we sin His image in us becomes smaller until it fades away.

Since the image of God can grow perpetually in the believer, likewise it is possible that the image can weaken. Man corrupts the image of God in him by being separate from God and not responding to the Holy Spirit. The image of God can be distorted in man, but the soul is capable of restoring it.

❖ The soul of man is the image of the Great Divine, O Son of God; with You, the soul becomes pure and acquires her beauty.

You made the soul the most beautiful creature, but the soul had fallen by sinning. O, the Heir of the Good Father, please help her to rise to her feet.

The soul was engaged to You in the water of baptism; keep her united with You and safe from the stranger that could corrupt her.

The evil world corrupted the soul by its harmful lusts. Maintain her beauty, O Perfect One.

The image of the King who is engaged to You sits carrying Your name; please keep her with Your name lest Satan mocks her.

The world is full of obstacles, pits, and snares. O Lord, carry my soul that lags behind You, so I may be with You.

The soul fell - since it is difficult for it to arise again, help her, OMighty One, to stand. Support the hand of the weak soul that is engaged to You.

The soul stumbled and fell, O Lord, extend to her the hand of repentance and carry the sheep on Your shoulder, for the wolves had tormented it.

My Lord, the soul is endearing to You; she is proud of You and when she falls she relies on You to help her to stand to her feet.

The soul is Your sheep, and it won't be taken away from You, because You are mighty. She is united with You, and with You she will be delivered from thieves.

Your Cross saved the soul from worshipping false idols, and it saved us from slipping into evil desires.

The soul is falling into iniquity; she is clinging to the hope of Your power and she awaits You, so please come to assist her, O Son of God¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

PAY ATTENTION TO YOURSELVES AND NOT TO WHAT YOU HAVE

The heart of the believer does not hesitate to cry out to God, praying for Him to restore to him the beauty of his soul. With the grace of the Divine, the work of the Holy Spirit will sanctify and perpetually renew him until his soul becomes a true icon of the Savior. At the same time the believer honors God by doing his best, praying from his heart, humbling himself before God, saturating himself with the word of God, and giving continuous eternal praise and thanksgiving. Hence, he announces his true desire to restore the beauty of his soul and to nurture his steadfast growth. Nothing in the world distracts him from the intensity of his faith, which is the center of God's concern.

- ❖ Pay attention to yourselves, not to what you have or what surrounds you but in particular to yourselves, for there is a difference regarding these matters. The soul is the self, she is us, and she is the image of God in us. Our body and our senses are related to the soul but what surround us are wealth and various gratifications in life².
- ❖ Pay attention to yourself (i.e., to your soul), for she is worthy of honor. Try to protect her from the imprints of evils. Be aware that your nature is dual:

²Hom.3, in illud, PG 31:203 a.

the nature of mortal body and the nature of the immortal soul. Thus, your life is dual, a temporal life pertaining to a physical body that passes quickly into oblivion and endless life pertaining to the soul. Therefore, take care not to treat these transient, worldly good things as perpetual. And do not despise eternal goodness as temporal¹.

St. Basil the Great

MAN'S GREATNESS AND HIS INNER BEAUTY

Earlier, I referred to the text cited by **St. Gregory of Nyssa** who believes that man is the dearest creature to God. He learned this concept from **Origen**, who described Jesus Christ in His relationship with man as the Greatest of the greats, Lord of lords, and King of kings.

[Jesus is the greatest among those whom were called great, for He is the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), the High Priest for the priests (Hebrews 4:14) and Lord of lords and King of kings (1 Timothy 6:15); thus, He is the Greatest of the greats, for it is said, He is "the Greatest among His brothers" (Leviticus 21:10)].

TRAITS OF THIS GREATNESS

Many of the Fathers describe to us the features of man's greatness, especially **St. Gregory of Nyssa** in his article "**Creation of the Man.**"

1. Some of the Fathers believe that man is a unique creature because within him is a combination of two elements, the soul and the body - **a glimpse of both heavenly and earthly creation.**

2. **St. Gregory of Nyssa** believes that man is the only one among the earthly creatures who is **adorned with mind and sanity.**

❖ We have been blessed to be attuned with God. God implanted in us the likeness of His great traits in His image. Therefore, He, through His generosity, gave wonderful gifts to mankind. Regarding the mind and sanity, it is not accurate to say that God gave them to humans but rather He granted them to humans to beautify the image to fit His nature.

Since the faith of the mind is a rational thing and not bodily, and God's grace is unique and difficult to conceive with no way to describe it, therefore, there must be a mechanism which, like the feather of the player that touches a musical instrument, describes with musical notes the inner movement of the musician.

If a virtuoso musician lacks vocal skills yet wants to show his prowess, he introduces a melody using others' voices and spreads his art

¹Hom.3, in illud, PG 31:202 b.

by playing the flute and harp. Thus the human mind, which explores all kinds of concepts, fails to show its ways of comprehension using only the soul. Those who listen with human perception are like musical composers scoring instruments, manifesting hidden thoughts through the sources of sounds of these tools. Music of the human instrument is a combination of the flute and the harp that harmonizes to play a musical piece¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

3. **St. Gregory of Nyssa** places emphasis on the holiness of bodily senses for they are there not only to meet the needs of man, but to go beyond the concepts of the mind. The senses have two roles: a visible role to serve the needs of the body and an invisible role for the mind to accomplish its superior concepts.

4. God provided man with magnificent capabilities in terms of his soul, his mind, and his abilities. But He allowed him to be **deprived of natural and bodily defenses** that He provided to the other creatures. **St. Gregory of Nyssa** compares man to other creatures, especially animals. Why?

God did not allow man to enjoy the capability of rapid and powerful movement like the horse, the strength of a lion's tusks, the power of a tiger's muscles and the horns of a bull or the ooze of a serpent's venom. Despite the ability of man to think and to control domestic animals and the other earthly creatures, he nonetheless stands weak in stature before many other creatures. Why? To exercise his authority over animals he utilizes them to serve him and his brothers. If he had all the capabilities of the animals, birds, reptiles, and plants, life would not be remarkable and his gifted authority would not have its preeminence. All that was given to the earthly creatures is for the benefit of the king (i.e., man), holder of its authority.

❖ Man came into life naked of natural cover; he is a poor and harmless creature, deprived of all useful and valuable things. According to his appearance man deserves sympathy, not admiration. He is not armed with protruding horns, sharp claws, hooves, or teeth and he does not naturally carry the bite of a serpent's venom. These are weapons that many animals use to defend themselves against those who would harm them.

The body of man is not protected by a layer of fur. However, it was expected that those who were assigned to have power over other creatures would be provided with natural defenses of their own. In this way, man would not need assistance from others to remain safe. At present, lions,

¹*De Opificio Hominis*, 9:1-3.

bears, tigers and other similar creatures all have natural power that is sufficient to protect them. In general, the bull with its horns, the hare with its speed, the deer with its leaps and its sharp sight, the birds with their wings, and the bee with its stinger -each have a protective power instilled in them naturally. But man is the only one among all who is slower than swift beasts and smaller in size than giant animals; he is less capable of defending himself than those creatures that are protected with natural weapons. So how is it said that man was given power over all of those creatures?

If man were to be given all this power - to be faster than horses, to have strong feet that are not torn but protected by hooves and claws of special design, to have horns and tusks - he would become like the beasts. He would look like some horrific creature should these features be found on his body. Additionally, he would have ignored his power over other creatures, for there would be no need to reach his goals. But now, as we are in need for these services in our life, it is divided between the various animals that are under our control. Therefore, our authority over them has become necessary¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

5. St. Gregory of Nyssa believes that man is the only one among all creatures who has an upright body, with his head always looking upward, and this body does not bend toward the ground like other animals.

❖ The physical body of man is straight and extends toward heaven, looking above, and this is the sign of kingship that shows the honor of his royalty. Indeed, the man is the only one, without exception, who enjoys this trait while the rest of the creatures bend down their bodies. It is obvious to notice the difference in dignity between those who bend down their bodies and those with authority over them².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

6. St. Gregory of Nyssa believes that man is unlike animals for he has two feet to stand firmly and instead of two other feet, man has two active hands. Man, being in power, can lead his hands to do what his mind requires them to do³.

7. God created the man to **enjoy immortality**.

❖ God did not create the first man to die but to make him immortal. **St. Paul**

¹*De OpificioHominis*, 7:21.

²*De OpificioHominis*, 8:1.

³ Cf. *De OpificioHominis*, 8:1-2.

the Apostle confirmed that by saying, "Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee" (2 Corinthians 5:5). God is present. He commits to fulfill His promise¹.

St. John Chrysostom

8. St. Gregory of Nyssa compares the creation of the entire universe and the creation of man. Creation of the universe was not in need of anything except order to create it and it occurred without purpose. But when it came time to create man, God pronounced him by Himself, described him, and addressed his role before creating him.

- ❖ When God created the world and all its parts, with its significance as a fundamental element of forming the universe, creation was accomplished by order of the Divine power. But when man was created God described him prior to creation. He showed the appropriate way to create him, with which likeness, why man was created, his role after creation and how to control these elements. These elements were examined in advance for man to have his status assigned before his creation. Man had dominion over all things created before his appearance. "God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth'" (Genesis 1:26).²

St. Gregory of Nyssa

9. Conduct a talk with God and enter into a covenant with Him:

When man looks at the earth, he considers it almost as a small point that is hard to see beside the other planets. And if man is found in the middle of a desert, on the top of a mountain or in the midst of one of the oceans, he will feel that he almost has no meaning. Nevertheless, God cares for man and even the hair of his head is counted before Him. What is amazing is that the story of man's creation and the history of his salvation, whether on a public level or personal level, had been in the mind of the Creator of the entire universe. God wants us to perpetually enter into a dialogue and conversation with Him. I wonder who the man is that draws God's attention. And what is the reason behind this remarkable love and great care?

- ❖ God placed His image and His likeness on man, He linked his love with His image, He strengthened his entity with His mercy, He made a covenant with His likeness, and He made the man master of all creation.

¹*Homilies on Cor., 10:4.*

²*De Opificio Hominis, 3:1.*

He created a path for him then and made him benevolent. For every time He talks with him it is as if he is talking to His image and whenever He affirms him it is as if he is with His likeness. For that reason He speaks to our people, utilizing our language¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

10. GOD CREATED MAN TO BE A PRIEST

St. Jacob of Serugh deems that God appointed Adam to be a priest, so as to offer Him sacrifices of thanksgiving and praising with pure hands and an immaculate soul. But after the nature of Adam was defiled, he lost the attributes of priesthood; hence, he hoped for his sons to practice priesthood in order to remove the anger that came upon him on the day he was driven out of paradise with Eve. **This is a distinct opinion never heard before among the Church Fathers.** Perhaps He intended for the general priesthood given to the believer to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise, to give alms and to practice personal and family worship so the Father will partake of it with pleasure in Jesus Christ our Lord.

- ❖ Since the beginning Adam was created as a priest to serve the Lord².
- ❖ Adam urged (Abel and Cain) to provide offerings to the Lord and to please Him with their respect.

Since the beginning he urged them to practice priesthood, to appease His anger, by offering sacrifice.

He sent a gift to the kingdom through both sons to remove the calamity that happened on the day he was driven out. With bitterness Adam explained to his sons why he was forced to exit paradise. He described to them his initial power, his weakness, and how he was expelled on the day of his scandal, saying:

Be two hands to me, and through you, I can do good things.

Go and reconcile with God who is angry because of our sin...

I will not offer a sacrifice to the Lord because I am not pure; I am full of sins that defile the sacrifice of my hand.

It is not easy for me to serve as a Bishop before His Holiness, for it is not preferable for the priest who is expelled to offer sacrifice.

The foot that walked toward the tree is not entitled to approach the priesthood for I am defiled.

The hand that harvested the fruit in Eden is not entitled to hover over the divine sacrifice.

.109	1995	:	1
.101	1995	:	2

It is not fitting for the mouth of your wicked father to be allowed to call the Lord to come to him.

Behold, my sons, offer sacrifices, because you are pure and please the Lord wisely by offering sacrifices.

Adam taught his sons these lessons from the beginning to demonstrate how to practice priesthood¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE KING WHO IS LOVED BY GOD

THE MAN IS A KING WHO IS IN POWER!

St. Jacob of Serugh provides us with a magnificent poem concerning the creation of man. He declares that after creation was completed and before the creation of man, the entire universe praised God, who created it from nothing. The universe asked God what to offer Him as a thanksgiving sacrifice, to thank Him for its existence, and for providing all its needs. The King of kings and the Lord of lords answered that He would set a live statue for Him to be honored, and any service or veneration offered to that live statue would be considered as if it was addressed to Him personally. Thus, He created Adam, then Eve, in His image and according to His likeness (Genesis 1:26). Accordingly, all inanimate creatures, plants, animals and the entire universe with its laws of nature competed to serve man for the sake of God.

- ❖ The image of Divinity was placed upon Adam. As soon as the world saw him it surrendered to him entirely.

Adam gave names for the universe and he obliged them to serve him, for his Lord granted him this creation as his own. It was essential for him to have his hand on all that his Lord had made, because he became the image of God¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

- ❖ God was as a King who constructed a great city, and beautified it with assorted works. In the middle of the city He placed His big and beautiful statue to indicate that He was the One who built that city and so its inhabitants may recognize Him.

God created the entire world and decorated it with a variety of works, and at the end He made man in His image, indicating that all the creatures are made for the interest of man and to serve him.

No matter if the King was near or far, He would be honored by His statue. Thus, the Creator placed His statue in the royal city so the (rational) creatures would know Him through Adam, His image. Also, through the physical construction of a statue He showed the power of His

metaphysical nature. When the Creator gave this statue to His creation, it was a perfect gift. So when all creation shows love to Adam it will be acknowledging its love to the Creator¹.

Fr. Theodore of Mopsuestia

A KING IN A PALACE

St. Jacob of Serugh believes that God created earth and everything on it and beneath it as well as the universe in order to prepare it for His representative or His ambassador on earth, man! It is as if He is preparing a royal palace for a king.

St. Clement of Alexandria says, "The man was free as a child in paradise... as a son is to God²."

Pope Athanasius of Alexandria describes the first man in paradise, saying: "Man has a mind that was focused on God entirely, without any blemish to restrict him" and that he was in the company of the angels. "He meditated on things that can be perceived by the mind and cherished his surroundings³."

St. Cyril of Alexandria reflected upon this thought, believing that Adam's mind "was always directed to see the divine truth."

St. Gregory of Nyssa describes the status of man in paradise as a king in power; thus, this clarifies the reason to create man on the sixth day after He completed the creation of the entire universe.

St. Gregory of Nyssa considers man a unique creature that was loved exceedingly by God. **God appointed man to be a king**; this is why He did not create him until after the creation of the entire world, for it represented the royal palace for the beloved king, man!

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). In the beginning, before the existence of man, God sought him and wanted him. Even before man made the move to ask for God, God sought man.

God, as the Bible describes Him, is the One who initiates love, for He is Love itself (1 John 4:8). He loves us in Him, for He sees us His creation that is made in His image. He provides for us each possibility for love itself.

What can I say about the care of God for mankind?

Let us look at the universe, everything in it and on it - the sun, the moon, the countless celestial bodies, the earth and all its endless resources, the sea and its wonders; everything was created by God for man! Let us view

²*Protrepticus 11.*

³*Contra gentes, 2.*

heaven, earth, and all creation; they are all there for our benefit.

Whoever looks at God's works for man should be amazed at His gifts in every aspect. It appears as though God oversaw everything and simply directed all His attention only to man and to each one individually.

When Potiphar's wife asked Joseph to betray her husband by committing adultery with her, he refused, saying: "Look, my master left me in charge of his house **and has committed all that he owns to my hand**. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he withheld anything from me but you, because you are his wife." Thus, Potiphar permitted Joseph to have everything to manage, but not to own; conversely, God gave man power over all that He created for him. He gave him dominion over the fish in the sea, over the birds in the air, over domesticated animals, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that crawls on the earth (Genesis 1:26-28). Man, who is now afraid of lions, dragons, scorpions, snakes, wild birds, horrors of the sea and earthquakes - all of which were once under his control and are still under his command. However, his sin has diminished his authority over them.

God wants me to love Him, so He took my hand, giving me everything. Hence, I would not ignore His love.

When stone is constantly battered, it will eventually break. How much more it would befit the heart of man to melt while receiving God's perpetual gifts and alms.

Wild animals can be tamed when we treat them kindly; how disciplined should rational man be who receives unlimited gifts from God.

If we want to soften the enemy's heart, we should offer a burning fire of love for his head. Should we feed him when he is hungry or give him water when he is thirsty, how grateful should we be when our Beloved provides us with all our needs for free?

Due to His love and His longing for our love, He tends to the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. He spoke with heavenly words, "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" (Matthew 6:26, 30)

Every day the Lord assures us that He loves us and He cares for us. He even gives attention to the hair of our heads, saying, "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:29-30).

He loves and while He loves He never stops working for the sake of

His beloved ones. As the Only Begotten Son Himself said, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17). And the Psalmist sings and says, "The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Psalms 145:15-16; cf. 104:27-28).

- ❖ Man has not yet entered into the world that once existed (i.e., until the sixth day)... For it is not appropriate for the ruler to be there before the existence of the affairs of which he will have control.

But once the body of his authority was ready, where the Creator had prepared everything as a royal dwelling for the incoming king, then He pronounced the ruler.

This royal dwelling is the earth, the islands, the sea, and the sky which is like an arch above all, surrounding them as a roof.

In that palace He stores richness of each type: the world's plants and animals, all of each that has flesh, soul, and life. If someone wants to count the material things as part of richness, he will also find all of it is beautiful and valuable in the sight of man, such as gold, silver, and precious stones to treasure.

The Creator sowed all of these things abundantly in the bosom of the earth, as if it was a royal treasure. Consequently, man will partake in some of it when he comes to the world and will have power over some of the others. When man enjoys these treasures he will give thanks to the Giver of the good things, and when he looks at the beauty and the greatness of it he will be attracted to the power of its Creator, which is imperceptible¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

- ❖ Holy, Holy are You, O Lord and Holy in everything and with unsurpassed tantalization is the light of Your essence. And inexpressible is the power of Your wisdom. No manner of speech is able to define the deep expanse of Your love for mankind.

You, as a Lover of mankind, created me, a man. You had no need of my servitude. Rather, it was me who was in need of Your lordship.

Because of the multitude of Your compassions, You formed me when I had no being.

You constructed the sky for me as a ceiling. You made the earth firm for me so that I could walk on it.

For my sake You tamed the sea. For my sake You have revealed the nature of the animals. You subdued everything under my feet.

You did not permit me to need anything from among the deeds of

¹ *De hom. Opif. 2.*

Your honor.

You are He who formed me and placed Your hand upon me. You wrote within me the image of Your authority. You placed within me the gift of speech. You opened the gates of paradise for my delight. You gave me the learning of Your knowledge. You revealed to me the tree of life and revealed to me the thorn of death.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

- ❖ My God... You have put everything under man's feet (Psalm 8), so he would dedicate himself to You. Therefore, You did not appoint a master to rule over him except for Yourself; instead, You made him a master with power over Your creation.

You created everything for the sake of his body, You made his body for the sake of his soul and his soul is for You!

Therefore, it is appropriate for us to focus our minds on You and shower all of our love on You, so that we may reach our goal of being united in joy with You. You are the source of our goodness. Also, we should not use creatures that are beneath us unless they are to be used for Your service.

Would You provide for our souls any less than what You have provided for our bodies? Because of our eyes, You have sent light to shine from the sky to the earth, creating the sun and the moon as tireless servants. The sun gives light to your children during the day and the moon illuminates the night for them.

In order for man to breathe, You created pure air that envelops him.

For the sake of his ears, You created for him various melodies.

For the sake of his sense of smell, You made for him perfume and fragrances.

For the sake of his sense of taste, You have provided him delicious food.

For the sake of his sense of touch, You created his surroundings.

To assist man in his work, You brought to him domesticated animals, the birds of the sky and the fruits of the earth.

Out of the earth comes medicine that heals the illness of our bodies, for there is no disease without a cure!

O my God, how compassionate You are! How gracious You are!

You know my body very well, because You are the one who created it; we depend on You in the same way as the vessel trusts the hand of the potter.

St. Augustine

- ❖ The world is protected by Divine Providence, for there is no place that

does not acknowledge this guardianship!

The Divine Providence is the implementation of the promises of the Divine word, for He is the One who formed this world and He is the Engineer and the Artist for that world.

- ❖ Nothing would have beauty without the discernment of the power of the Word, who is the image of God - His mind, His wisdom and His care.
- ❖ Why was man created? To glorify God.
- ❖ God is seen through the creation He made for the sake of man.
- ❖ The most catastrophic affliction of the soul is the lack of knowledge of God who created all for the sake of man. He gave him a mind and the power of speech with which he can apply diligently to have a fellowship with God, meditating and glorifying Him.

St. Anthony the Great

- ❖ God in His goodness formed man out of the ashes of the earth, converting him to a great substance, i.e., the body.
- ❖ He breathed into him a soul that never dies but will live forever.
- ❖ He gave him power over all to enjoy and to exploit his surroundings and also to give it names.
- ❖ God in His goodness assisted man so no imperfection would be left for him. He said, "It is not good for man to be alone." He knew exactly how to provide for his happiness, which includes delighting in Mary's immaculate Child and the Church.

Tertullian

MAN LEADS THE WORLD

The wise man said that God created man to lead the world with holiness and righteousness (Wisdom 9:2-3). Thus, God looks at man as His deputy to lead the world, i.e., to manage all things with holiness and righteousness. God would love for each man – regardless of his age, or his ability or his position – to be an active leader, with a heart that fosters love for mankind and all earthly creation. God would love him to be a leader who can ensure the safety of his brotherhood, the animals, the birds, and even inanimate objects. He could be a leader with a big heart like his Master, who loves all, prays for the sake of all, and works for all happily, full of joy.

- ❖ He established the sky and placed all lights in it - the sun, the moon, and all the planets that traverse the horizons.

The sky never asks anything, yet He decorated it with beautiful

panoramas that astonish the eyes of the viewers.

The sun has no power to ask for a great light to illuminate all creation.

From the beginning He adorned all kinds of birds and animals with gorgeous colors.

He graced creation and in its perfection the beauty never changed.

He made the house of creation perfect; as it is said, "He decorated it with beautiful images."

The house is erected from a marvelous building. He filled it beyond comparison with indescribable decorations.

And when He perfectly furnished the house within, the Creator wanted one who was full of beauty to reside in it.

From the ashes He created Adam, and breathed into his face the breath of life.

He perfectly made him so he became an example full of wonder.

He made him in His image, and filled him with glory and splendor.

He made him brilliant so he became brighter than sunlight because of the glory given to him by his Master when He created him.

St. Jacob of Serugh

- ❖ The saints are called kings in the language of the Bible, because they were capable of going beyond bodily emotions and controlling their lustful pleasures. They were able to cool the flame of greed, break through haughtiness and pride, crush the voice of envy, and quench the fire of passion.

They are considered kings, because they learned not to surrender to temptation, but rather to accept and control it.

They will be placed on the throne of eternal glory forever and will enter judgment on others.

Thus, the Lord says to the Laodicea Church, "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21).

It is not contradictory for the Lord to declare elsewhere that His disciples will come on twelve thrones (Matthew 19:28). With the twelve thrones He explains Judgment Day, and the Son's throne indicates the significance of His judicial power.

Pope Gregory (the Great)

- ❖ The nature of humans was created to rule over the rest, for it is in the likeness of the King of all. It was given a live image to share the example of His rank and His name. It does not wear a purple garment; it does not show its rank by the use of a king's rod and crown. He set an example by

not wearing this attire. Instead of purple raiment it wears virtue, which is truly the greatest of the king's garments. It relies on the immortal blessing rather than the king's rod, and instead of the king's crown it adorns itself with the crown of righteousness.

Hence, humans will become fully in accord with the beauty of this example in everything pertaining to the dignity of kingship¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

- ❖ "Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). In short, Paul the Apostle held that those who believed in Christ shed the weight of their sins as if it was an old gown. Those who were cleansed from their sins and were illuminated by the light of righteousness wore a new lustrous gown, **the king's gown**. Therefore, he said, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

St. John Chrysostom

THE HARMONY OF MAN, THE KING, WITH THE HEAVENLY HOSTS

The man in Paradise enjoys freedom and kingship. The King of kings appointed him to be a king, enjoying the power over earthly creation while being blessed with its richness and the beauty; hence, he will glorify the Creator who loves mankind. On the other hand, living in Paradise is a state of harmony and rhythm between man and the heavenly hosts for they are God's creatures that are full of love.

- ❖ There was a time when rational creatures were just a single chorus moving toward the Leader of that paean, enjoying victorious harmony which comes from the Leader and his commandment.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

St. Gregory also said that this harmony included heaven and earth, where Adam and Eve enjoyed the company of the angels, but they were corrupted by sin and consequently they were driven out of this fellowship. Adam's offspring became as if they were living in an abnormal world, awaiting the moment of return and to enjoy the unity of the Divine Chorus².

¹ *De Opificio Hominis, 4:1.*

² *In Psalm. inscrip. 2:6*

8

Man is the Ambassador of Heaven

DIVINE LOVE AND THE BELIEVER AS AN AMBASSADOR OF HEAVEN

Bear in mind that for us as true believers, we should carry the Heavenly Jesus Christ in our hearts, so heaven becomes not distant from us, but much closer than anything else around us. We carry Him with **St. Simeon the Elder** on our inner arms, and we go with him in a procession around the altar.

May we rise with Peter, Jacob, and John to be with Heavenly Christ on the Transfiguration Mountain and to see the glory of the Heavenly Lord. Thus, we cry, saying: "It is good for us to be here!" We walk the entire path of our life with our Heavenly Christ who rose from the dead. We repeat the words of the disciples of Emmaus, asking, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road?" (Luke 24:32) Our lives will become an enjoyable dialogue with the Heavenly One, so we may enjoy what the Samaritan woman gained, which led to giving up all she owned. She left her water pot which signifies all that is temporal, and rushed to her people, calling them to meet with the Heavenly One who told her everything she ever did (John 4:28).

In short, we witness in our world to the presence of Heavenly Christ who rose from the dead. He grants us His Holy Spirit, who shapes us to become like a heavenly icon. He turns our earthly hearts to a new heaven, so that eternal life will become a life that we can taste and feel. We practice it in our lives; we witness it as ambassadors for our Heavenly Christ and for heaven's representatives and we wish for earth to turn into heaven!

- ❖ You should desire to be in heaven and long for what belongs to heaven, **for He ordered us to turn earth into heaven**, to behave and talk as if we are there while we are still on earth. This also should be the purpose for our prayers that we offer to the Lord. Nothing should hinder us from reaching the perfection of high powers just because we dwell on earth but it is possible, even while dwelling here, that **we can do everything as if we were already in the highest.**¹
- ❖ Truly, Christ came to abolish what is obsolete and to call us to a greater

¹ In Matt. hom., 19:7.

country.

He is doing everything to free us from unnecessary affairs and from being attached to earthly matters. He also pointed this out to the heavens, saying, "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things" (Matthew 6:32). Those people toil for the sake of everyday life, they don't care for forthcoming events or for any heavenly thought¹.

- ❖ "Seek those things which are above" (Colossians 3:1), **for giving attention to these things frees us from earth, and transfers us to heaven**².

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ When the will of God is fulfilled by us who dwell on earth, as it is fulfilled by those who are in heaven, then **we become like the dwellers of heaven for like them we will bear the image of the heavenly One** (1 Corinthians 15:49) and we will inherit the heavenly kingdom (Matthew 25:34). Then coming after us are those who are on earth, praying to become like us, for we are in Paradise³.

Origen

- ❖ The perfect servant of the Lord does not have anything besides Christ; if he has anything besides Christ then he would not be perfect⁴.

St. Jerome

- ❖ We are committed to pray for those who are still worldly and have not yet begun to become heavenly so that the will of God will be implemented even in them...

As the will of God is fulfilled in heaven, i.e., fulfilled in us, for with our faith we have become heavenly, it will be fulfilled on earth in those who have not yet believed - those who are still worldly from their first birth on earth. They will be born from water and spirit and will begin to become heavenly⁵.

St. Cyprian of Carthage

- ❖ We have the right to be there in the presence of God in heaven; we are the ones who maintained His teachings while we were on earth and we rose to heaven to be as one with God the Father who we knew on earth. God the Word, the Holy, has made everything, taught us and still teaches us

¹ *In Matt. hom.*, 22:4.

² *Baptismal Instructions*, 7:14.

³ *On Prayer* 26:1.

⁴ *Ep.* 14:6.

⁵ *On the Lord Prayer*, 17.

everything, and He directs us in all good things¹.

St. Clement of Alexandria

¹*Paedagogus* 3:12.

9

MAN IS CALLED TO SEE GOD AND TO RECEIVE DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

MAN IS CALLED TO SEE GOD!

How then is man, who is incapable of seeing his soul or determining its location in his body, called to see God the Invisible? "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

I previously published a book entitled '**Seeing God through the Church Fathers**' in Arabic. Please refer to this book.

While the Holy Bible in both Testaments emphasizes the incapability of man to see the Divine essence, Isaiah the Prophet enjoyed God's presence (Isaiah 63:9), Jacob wrestled with God (Genesis 32:24-30). Moses spoke with God face to face, his face radiant from the splendor of God's glory (Exodus 33:11; Deuteronomy 34:10). David the Psalmist asked God to shine His light upon him (Psalm 4:6), and Paul the Apostle talks of seeing God (Romans 1:19-20; 1 Corinthians 2:3-8; 12:13; 1 John 3:1-2).

The true Word and His Only Begotten Son are the only Way to see the Father, who is one with Him. Nobody on earth or in heaven competes with Him in this regard. No one compares with Him; not Abraham, the father of the fathers, or Moses, the receiver of the Law, or any of the prophets or any of the heavenly order.

He is the only Son, the true One, who remains by Himself in the depth of the Father's bosom and will never separate from Him. He is the source of His delight, able to declare of Him, and to reveal His Divine mysteries and His great plan. Thus, through Christ we attain a clear declaration about the Father of Whom no one had yet seen. This is the grace and this is the Divine truth that has become ours in Christ, which is "**the knowledge and the vision.**"

God is spirit, thus the flesh cannot view Him; therefore, the Incarnate Son of God grants us new spiritual birth so we may see Him Who is invisible (Hebrews 11:27). We live by Him, for He is the only One to open the seals of the scroll (Revelations 5:9), so that the mysteries of God the Father may be revealed.

❖ When you hear that the Divine majesty is greater than the heavens, its glory is unspeakable, its beauty is indescribable, and its nature is unapproachable, do not lose hope to see what you desire, for you are

capable of doing so. You have the ability to perceive the Divine, because the One who created you gave you this amazing gift.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

❖ I beseech you to join me with love and faith and to accompany me while we yearn for our beautiful city; cry for the sake of our heavenly home and truly believe that we are strangers here.

Then what will we see? The Gospels tells us, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

You will come to the fountain that showered you in the dew of light.

Instead of the ray of light that was sent through tortuous ways to the heart of your darkness, you will see the light itself in its purity and splendor.

You will see and examine that light that now purifies you.

John himself says, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

I feel that your souls are rising with me to the highest heavens, but corrupted bodies make souls heavy and this earthly tent makes it difficult for the mind to think.

I am almost done with this book and each one of you is going to his work.

It is better for us to participate together in this all-encompassing light, it is better to take pleasure together, and to rejoice together. When we depart from each other hopefully we will not depart from Him¹.

St. Augustine

THE SECRET OF OUR HAPPINESS IS SEEING GOD

For a long time **St. Augustine** lived while the eyes of his heart were incapable of seeing God, believing that living with God deprives one of happiness and is a waste of time. When he met God he discovered the secret of true happiness and he acknowledged what it meant to "see God," not just in this world through faith but also in the other world where we meet Him face to face.

❖ We received the promise to see God face to face; this is the goal of our endeavor and the utmost pleasure.

❖ O man, God created you in His image. Would God give you the eyes to

¹ Cf. *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Tract. 35, 8-9: CCL 36, 321-323).

see the sun that He made but not grant you the eyes to see Him? He granted it to you also!

He gave you two eyes, you have been granted both, but by giving more attention to your outer eye than your inner eye and through rejecting the latter you have become ill and injured.

Yes, this will be chastisement for you if your Creator has the desire to declare Himself to you; this is a punishment for your eye before it is healed.

Thus was the case with Adam in paradise, for when he sinned he hid from God's face. When he had a virtuous heart with a pure conscience he was glad to be in God's presence, but when that eye was injured through sin, he began to fear the Divine light. He fled to the darkness, and hid in the trees to escape God's justice, fearing any shadow¹.

- ❖ "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). This is exactly what our angels see.

"Our angels" refers to how once we are saved from the power of the darkness and receive the covenant of the spirit, we move to Christ's kingdom; hence, we become like the angels².

St. Augustine

GOD CAN BE VIEWED BY THOSE WHO ARE ABLE TO SEE HIM

During the latter half of the second century, **Father Theophilus of Antioch** sent three books defending Christianity to his heathen friend Autolycus.

In the first seven chapters of the first book, he spoke of the possibility of seeing God, for his friend asked: "Can you show me God?"

- ❖ If you say, "show me your God," I reply, "show me yourself, and I will show you my God."

Give me proof that your eyes can see and your heart's ears can hear.

Those who can see through their bodily eyes are able to recognize earthly matters and what belongs to this life. They can distinguish differences between light and darkness, black and white, beautiful and ugly, that which is well-coordinated and similar from what is inconsistent and awful or terrible and mutilated. Thus, in the same way through the sense of hearing we discern between sharp and violent sounds, and what is

¹ *Sermon On the N.T.* 38:5,6.

² *City of God*, 22:29.

soft and muted. It is the same regarding the eyes and the ears of the soul, for with it we can see God.

God is seen by those who are able to see Him, because they have their souls' eyes opened.

All have eyes but some are dimmed by cloudiness. Hence, they don't see sunlight. This does not mean that the sun is not shining because the blind can't see it.

O man, the eyes of your soul are closed, because of your sin and iniquity. It befits man to have a pure soul that is like a polished mirror. If rust is found on the mirror it is impossible to see a man's face on this mirror. Thus, when sin is found in man, he cannot see God.

Show me that you are not an adulterer or corrupt, you do not spoil your children, you are not arrogant or speak evil of others, you are not lustful or envious, proud or haughty, you choose not to quarrel, you are not greedy or disobey your parents and you don't sell your children, for this leads to darkness. So as eyes are blinded from mist that blocks them from seeing the sun, thus evil does, O man; it leads you to darkness and you don't see God¹.

❖ If you will, you can heal!

Submit yourself confidently to the hands of the Physician, and He will remove the mist from the eyes of your heart and yourself.

Who is the Physician? He is God, who heals and gives life through His word and His wisdom.

When you shed corruption and wear purity, truly, you will see God. With your soul God will give life to your body and when you become immune to death you will see "the One who never dies" if you have faith in Him now².

St. Theophilus of Antioch

❖ To see God means to be in the light and sharing His purity. To see God means immersion in Him and sharing the superiority of the life Giver. So those who see God share life with Him³.

St. Irenaeus

SEEING GOD AND ACKNOWLEDGING HIM

❖ Darkness is the ignorance which causes blindness from truth and knowledge. But when we accept enlightenment, ignorance vanishes and

¹*Theophilus of Antioch to Autolycus, Chapter 2.*

²*Theophilus of Antioch to Autolycus, Chapter 7.*

³*Adv. Haer. 4:2:5.*

our vision is clear.

- ❖ When we were baptized the sins that block the Divine Light were removed. We gained insight of the Free Spirit which has no obstacle, for it is full of light. With it we meditate with the Divine then watch as the Holy Spirit descends upon us from above. This is eternal modification for the vision that is capable of seeing eternal light, for a person likes those who are like him; thus, the one who is holy likes those who are with holiness, the holiness which owns the light... "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8).
- ❖ Acknowledge Christ, accept insight from within and recognize your light, so you can better see God and men. Sweet is the word that gives us light, for it is more valuable than gold or precious stones and it is more delicious than honey and the honeycomb (Psalm 19:10)¹.
- ❖ For what would man ask after obtaining the unapproachable light².

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ If you believe that Paul was transported to the third heaven and to the Paradise where "he heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Corinthians 12:4), then you may be sure that you will learn many things which are larger and greater than what was revealed to Paul, who after hearing the inexpressible words came down from the third heaven. But you won't come down, if you carry the cross and follow Jesus, our High Priest, who has passed through the heavens (Hebrews 4:14). If you follow Him, you will pass through heavens, rising not just above the earth and its secrets, but also above the heavens and its secrets³.
- ❖ "God blessed Isaac," as the text says, "and Isaac dwelt at Beer LahaiRoi," i.e., the well of vision (Genesis 25:11). This was the outcome of the blessing that God granted Isaac, to dwell at the well of "Vision." This is a great blessing for those who can appreciate it. May God grant me this blessing, to be worthy to dwell by the "Well of Vision"⁴."
- ❖ The one who rarely attends church, who rarely drinks from the fountain of the Word, and who casts from his mind all he has heard once he leaves church and occupies himself with other matters - this man does not dwell at the "Well of Vision." Would you like me to tell you about him who never turned away from the "Well of Vision"? It is Paul the Apostle who

¹*Stromata: 5:12.*

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³*Exhortation to Martyrdom, 17.*

⁴*In Gen. hom. 11:3.*

said, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18)¹.

- ❖ Seeing God is not physical; it is mental and spiritual. Therefore, the Savior was keen to use the right word when He said, "No one knows the Father except the Son...." Notice that He did not say "see." Elsewhere, those who were allowed to see God were given "the spirit of knowledge" and "the spirit of wisdom," so that they may see God by the Spirit Himself (Isaiah 11:2)².
- ❖ We are not allowed to know God through our physical eyes, but through the eyes of understanding. These eyes behold the image of the Creator and, with Divine criteria, gain the ability to know God³.
- ❖ God is light (Isaiah 19:60) and consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24). He is light to the righteous and fire to the sinners...
Without God's compassion and His help no one can see His face, because God manifests Himself to those who seek mercy.
In any case, the Bible stated that no one has seen God (John 1:18), but it is said that God manifests Himself to the righteous⁴.
- ❖ And now, even if we are found worthy to see God with our minds and our hearts, we won't see Him as He is, but according to His measure of His care for us⁵.
- ❖ Even if we are found worthy to see God...we won't see Him as He is but as He sees what is appropriate for us⁶.

Origen

SEEING GOD AND PURITY OF THE HEART

- ❖ The one with a pure heart shall see God (Matthew 5:8), but the one who does not have a pure heart will not see what others see.
I believe that we need to understand something similar regarding Christ, for when He was seen in the flesh not everyone who looked at Him was able to see Him.
They saw Him physically, but they could not see Him as Christ; His disciples saw and acknowledged the greatness of His Divinity⁷.

¹ *In Gen. hom.*

² *Comm. on Song of Songs 3.*

³ *Contra Celsus 7:33.*

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⁵ *Comm. on Matt. 17:19 on 22:1.*

⁶ *Comm. Matt 17. 17ff.*

⁷ *Homilies in Luke, Homily 3: 3-4.*

Origen

- ❖ While the pure heart can actually see God, no one has seen God.

What is naturally invisible becomes visible by energy for He allows us to see features of His nature¹.

- ❖ Divine nature exceeds all rational understanding and, it is not available to any of man's capabilities. Therefore, Paul describes God's ways as far from being examined (Romans 11:33), indicating that the human mind lacks the understanding of God's essence. This signifies that there are many ways to examine and understand, because it is possible to see God who made everything with wisdom (Psalm 103:24) by returning to the wisdom manifested in the world.

By looking at creation we form an image in our mind, not by the Divine essence but by the wisdom of God who made everything with understanding. By following this way we can say we saw God and we understood Him. We see His goodness, not His essence².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

- ❖ Brothers, our entire job in this life is to provide a cure for the eyes of our hearts with which we see God! This is the purpose of our celebration of the holy sacraments and the objective of preaching the word of God!
- ❖ How foolish are those who seek God with those bodily eyes, for God can't be seen without the heart. As it is written elsewhere, seek Him with a pure heart, because the pure heart is the right and sincere heart. And because this light cannot be seen without pure eyes, God cannot be seen unless those who seek Him have a pure heart³.
- ❖ Do not submit to the notion that you will see God in flesh, because this idea will lead you to prepare your physical eyes to see Him. Therefore, you seek a physical face for God.

Be careful for Who He is - that you speak to Him sincerely (i.e., to You my heart has said)...and Your face is what I seek... Look for Him with your hearts.

The Holy Bible speaks of God's face, arms, hands, feet, His throne and His footrest...but do not think that it is intended for human bodily members.

If you want to be God's temple you need to destroy the decaying image (i.e., conceiving God as if He is a human image in flesh)!

¹*Hom. In the Beatitudes, 6 PG 44:1269.*

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³*Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, 1:8*

The hands of God imply His power.
His face is His knowledge.
His feet are His presence.

His throne is meant to be you if you desire... Yes, because what is the throne of God if it is not the place where He dwells? And where does He dwell except in His temple? "For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Corinthians 3:17). Be watchful to receive God!

"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Let the Ark of Covenant enter your hearts and let Dagon fall if you wish (1 Samuel 5:3)¹.

St. Augustine

- ❖ The soul of man is like a beautiful mirror; if it is clean the soul is able to look and see even the hidden, but if it is dusty and dirty the soul would not even see itself or its ugliness².

St. Jacob of Serugh

IF YOU RAISE THE VEIL YOU CAN SEE GOD

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). Origen advises us to remove the veil from our faces, and do not expect others to remove it from our faces.

- ❖ Those who confess their sins say, "We lie down in our shame, and our reproach covers us" (Jeremiah 3:25). We are accustomed to talking about the veil that covers the face of those who do not return to God. Because of this veil, when Moses is read (2 Corinthians 3:15) the sinner does not understand because the veil lies over his heart.

Regarding the veil, we say shame is the veil. As long as we have acts of shame then without doubt we also have the veil. As it is said, "The shame of my face has covered me" (with a veil) (Psalm 44:15).

So those who do not participate in shameful acts will not wear a veil. This is what Paul the Apostle said: "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

If we want to remove the veil that resulted because of shame we should do glorious works. Let us keep in mind the word of our Savior: "All should honor the Son just as they honor the Father" (John 5:23). Also, as Paul the Apostle said, "Do you dishonor God through breaking the Law?" (Romans 2:23)

Removing the veil is our responsibility; it is our duty alone.

¹*Sermons on N. T. 3.*

When Moses met with God, he actually took off the veil. It is evident that Moses, at times, represented his people. When Moses did not go to God – representing his people who did not go to God- he covered his face with the veil. But when he met with God, representing those who meet with God among his people, he took off the veil. God did not order Moses to "cover your face with a veil" but when Moses discovered that people could not see his glory, he put a veil on his face. **Also, he did not wait for God to tell him, "Remove the veil," every time he returned to the Lord¹.**

Origen

ENTERING THE CHAMBERS OF THE KING

- ❖ "He was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Corinthians 12:4). Any words we think that Paul heard, he heard from the King. Did he hear these words while he was in the chambers, or just from outside? I believe that these words were to encourage him to preach of them later or to prepare him so that if he persevered to the end he himself would be able to enter the chambers of the King. And also according to the promise written by Isaiah the Prophet, "I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places that you may know that I, the Lord, Who call you by your name, am the God of Israel" (Isaiah 45:3).²
- ❖ When the voice of the dove is heard in the Promised Land it befits us to see Christ teaching in person; **we see Him face to face** and we no longer see Him in a mirror, like a secret³.
- ❖ If knowledge is made known to those who are worthy of it, they attain it in a mirror while it is like a mystery in these current times. If it will be fully declared then it is foolish to think that it would not be the same for the rest of the virtues⁴.
- ❖ He encourages the soul and urges her not to be idle but to approach Him and attempt to see Him; not through windows or in a mirror as though a mystery, but to approach Him and **see Him face to face**. Because if the soul cannot see Him, He will stand behind her, not in front of her, and behind her back and behind the wall⁵.

Origen

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² *The Song of Songs, Comm., Book 1:5.*

³ *The Song of Songs, Comm., Book 4:14.*

⁴ *On Prayer 11:2.*

⁵ *The Song of Songs, Comm., Book 3:13.*

SEEING GOD THROUGH THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- ❖ As the sun sets on a pure eye, so the Holy Spirit will show you in Himself - the image of the One who is invisible. By meditating with joy in that image **you will see the greater beauty of the Creator**¹.
- ❖ This invisible beauty is comprehended by the eyes of the body but only through the mind and the soul.

When He shines His light on one of the saints, the saint will be left in lamentations, because his longing for God cannot be endured. So he will say while being troubled from life on this earth, "My sojourn is prolonged" (Psalm 120:5). "When shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:2)

When the saints feel the heaviness of their current life, as though they were imprisoned, they can hardly control themselves while being under the passion intensified by the touch of Divine Love in their souls.

Truly, because of their eager anticipation of seeing Divine beauty, they pray to meditate in the joy of the Lord forever. Normally man likes what is attractive; what is captivating and desirable will actually be good².

St. Basil the Great

IN HEAVEN WE SEE HIM FACE TO FACE

- ❖ As of now we are limited by physical senses and mental thinking. But as we strive to cast our inner souls to be like the righteous and the saints we are filled with the indescribable vision of God. One day that vision will fill us completely. At that moment we become like the angels of God³.
- ❖ In the forthcoming world God will see all His sons and daughters who are blessed with pure hearts (Matthew 25:34). God's will is to declare Himself - for He is for all- and there is nothing to hinder our vision.

As Ambrose of Milan said, no one has the ability to see God the way He truly is. But there are instances where God reveals part of Himself to some individuals. This could happen so that man will be able to see God clearly because of certain conditions. Then God makes Himself known clearly; this is absolutely the work of grace. However, at times we are under difficult circumstances and not ready to see God - this is because we did not sow grace in our inner souls and we did not ask God to grow in grace⁴.

¹ *De Spiritu Sancto*, 9:23. PG 32:109.

² *The Long Rules*, Question 2.

³ *St. Augustine: On Seeing God*, 21.

⁴ *St. Augustine: On Seeing God*, 23.

DIVINE LOVE AND THE GIFT OF THE MIND AND UNDERSTANDING

We talked earlier about the human mind and the Christian faith¹ where we acknowledged that God has given us a human mind, made it capable of understanding in order to be a rational being that can comprehend what surrounds him and also to seek God's knowledge. As **Origensaid**, [As the eye normally seeks light and sight and as the body with its natural desires seeks food and drink, thus the mind naturally desires to know the truth of God and to find reasons for everything. And this desire is from God².]

God, the Lover of mankind, wants us to worship Him with understanding and discernment.

- ❖ He who comes to church does not come without discernment, like a wild animal. No one habitually visits a physician unless he is forced by illness to seek a cure³.
- ❖ God made the brain as a house of the mind, so it may dwell at the top, like God⁴.
- ❖ The mind is darkened by lust which leads it to a lack of comprehension...Those who indulge in gluttony will debase their souls to become flesh⁵.

St. Jacob of Serugh

HOW WONDERFUL TO SEE GOD!

- ❖ Who saw Him before, then was not able to see Him again? Who heard His voice then was able to live without hearing His voice again? Who breathed in His bouquet and would not come at once to enjoy being with Him?⁶
- ❖ No action is able to destroy the defiled devil's plans, such as looking at God.

One of the brethren said to me: "Once I was sitting while my mind was taken by seeing the Divine. Afterward I exhaled a great sigh. When

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² *De Principiis* 2: 2: 4.

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the devil, who was standing there, heard me he was tormented as though struck by lightning; he then shrieked loudly and immediately fled."¹

❖ Blessed is the one who enters within himself and in amazement will be able to see You, marveling at the beauty of Your mysteries that emerge from within².

❖ Blessed is the one who carries excitement in his heart at all times, for he sees You constantly in himself.

Blessed is the one who kept You as a treasure inside himself, for he will enjoy being with You forever and ever.

Blessed is he who lives within himself and fixes his eyes on Your aura, for through Your beauty his person will shine at all times.

Blessed is the one who is within his heart, Your Spirit speaks and He replies to all his soul requests³.

**St. John Saba
The Spiritual Elder**

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YOU ARE CALLED TO BE THE DWELLING OF GOD

God in His love to man, His amazing creature, did not leave him in need for anything of His outstanding work. Perhaps the most precious thing given to man in the garden was the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden from time to time (Genesis 3:8). Before Adam and Eve fell in sin they did not need an altar to offer animal sacrifices, for both were offering the sacrifices of thanksgiving and praising and following heavenly orders. They were not called to establish the house of the Lord, because they were in the presence of God, no matter where they had to be. They were not alienated from God or far away from Him.

But after they rebelled and their spirit alienated from God, they needed an altar to offer sacrifices so they could feel the presence of the Divine. And with the foundation of Israel as the people of God at this time, Moses the Prophet set up the Tabernacle where God declared His dwelling among His people (Exodus 29:45) and unfurled the brightening of His glory to His people. This Tabernacle, at first the only one affiliated to the Lord until Solomon's Temple, was the best gift provided by God to mankind to partake with Him.

Solomon's Temple was distinguished by the spirit of happiness, joy, and cheer; therefore, people met there and around it during holidays to exercise heavenly blessings and taste the sweetness of God in their midst.

Until this time the Jews who remained faithful had a singular dream - rebuilding the temple. However, the temple was no longer needed because Jesus the Lord of glory turned shadow into truth and Solomon's Temple no longer represented His Divine presence, for the word of God has been made incarnate. He offered us the temple of His body which rose from the dead, providing everlasting life (John 2:19-22).

The word of God incarnate has come, declaring His dwelling in the midst of His people, in the heart of each true believer. He taught His disciples to preach that "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). The church as a whole is His temple and His kingdom; each member in the church is a temple of the Lord. This gift has become a source of joy, praise, and appreciation for each believer. Christ purchased us for Him by His precious blood in order for us to become members of His body and He becomes a head for us, where He dwells in us.

As we cherish this great gift, it gives us eternal pride; it allows us to enjoy the spirit of joy and hope, for He opens the doors of His heavens. On the other hand, it is appropriate for us to show our appreciation for this gift by our behavior, as befits His temple, by keeping His precepts and by asking His Holy Spirit to constantly sanctify us.

- ❖ Let us do what we must, remembering that He is within us; we are His temple and He is our God who dwells in us. This will become very clear to us if we love Him sincerely¹.
- ❖ You consider yourselves the stones of the Father's temple, which was built for God; you were exalted on high by Jesus Christ's tool - the cross - and by the rope of the Holy Spirit. Your faith pulls you to the top, and love is the path that leads you to God.

So then you are the companions of those on the road who carry God (*Theophoroi*), carry the temple (*Naophoroi*), carry Christ (*Christophori*) and the ones who carry the holies (*Agiaphoroi*)².

St. Ignatius of Antioch

- ❖ Place an incense altar in the depths of your hearts. Be the sweet fragrance of Christ³.

Origen

- ❖ The kingdom of God is within you; it means the joy that is planted by the Holy Spirit within you. This joy serves as an icon and a pledge of the eternal joy which is enjoyed by the souls of the saints⁴.
- ❖ If any person followed Paul as an example, and became a chosen vessel, bearing the name of God (Acts 9:15), through His head all the limbs of the body of the church would be united in harmony. **If this person talks he wouldn't be talking for himself but as if he is the head.** Therefore, Christ is the One who is speaking, as Paul explained in 2 Corinthians 13:3. So the throat connects the true word with the sweet, melodious voice of the Holy Spirit. Sacred talk beautifies the throat, and then the throat feeds all the members of the body with these lovely teachings. The spine works together in harmony with the body through the connection of peace and love⁵.
- ❖ The person in whom God dwells is like a sofa for God to sit on. Such a

¹In Ephes. 15:3.

²In Ephes. 9:1, 2.

³In Exod. Hom. 9.

⁴De Prop. Sec. Deum.

⁵Commentary on Song of Songs, Homily 7.

person no longer lives for himself; **Christ lives in him and he proves that Christ talks through him**, according to what St. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13:3. So this person could be worthy of His sofa - this sofa is born from Christ and carried by Christ¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

- ❖ Look at yourselves and you will find that Christ is within you. If Christ is within you, how much more would He be with your teacher².

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ As the driver holds the bridle leading the livestock where he wants, the same is for the Lord in the highest where He leads His creatures and directs them in heaven and on earth where He wants. He dwells in heaven, seated on the right hand of Greatness, and also on earth. **He is closely united with all the saints and dwells in them.** He is in the highest, but also with those who live on earth³.
- ❖ Combining two substances together results in one complete entity... The man was made in the image and likeness of God; he has two eyes, two eyebrows, two hands and two feet. If there is a man with one eye or one hand or one foot this is an unfortunate birth defect, for the bird with just one wing cannot fly.

It is also the same for human nature; if he remains naked and keeps to himself without attaining union and partnership with Divine nature then he will never become forthright and perfect. He will stay naked, worthy of the blame of his particular nature because of his inferiority and corruption. The soul herself is called to be a temple for God, a dwelling for Him, and a bride for the King. He says: "I will dwell in them and walk among them" (2 Corinthians 6:16).

Thus, God was delighted to descend from holy heaven and assume your earthly nature. He took flesh from the ground, and made it one with His Divine Spirit so that you, the earthly one, would be able to attain His heavenly spirit. When your soul couples with the spirit and the heavenly spirit enters your soul you become a perfect human being with God - His heir and His Son⁴.

- ❖ Be fervent in spirit because this exhilaration from God casts out all

¹Commentary on Song of Songs, Homily 7.

²In 2Cor. hom 29:4.

Les Homélie Spirituelles de St. Macaire, Spiritualité Orientale, no. 40, Abbaye de Bellefontaine.

passion, removes all weariness from man, and makes him a dwelling for the Divine. So thus man becomes a temple for God, as it is written: "I will dwell in them and walk among them." (2 Corinthians 6:16, Leviticus 26:12)¹

St. Macarius of Egypt

- ❖ It is said that we are one in communion with God, for He says, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

If the Holy Spirit were a creature we would not have partnership with God by Him. If we had united with a creature we would have been alienated from Divine nature, for we did not participate in Him. But now, since we are called to partake with God, this indicates that our holy anointment and the seal we have are not from a creature's nature, but from the nature of the Son who unites us with the Father by the Spirit in Him. This is what John taught us – as it is previously said – when he wrote, "By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit" (1 John 4:13).

But if by partaking in the Spirit we participate in His Divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), it would be foolish to say that the Spirit comes from a creature's nature and not from God².

- ❖ Now God dwells and stays in us, as it is said by the prophets: "I will dwell in them and walk among them" (Leviticus 26:12; 2 Corinthians 6:16). For how should those who are against us and lack knowledge tell us how the Holy Spirit dwells in us? And this led Paul the Apostle to call us the temple of God, for it is not God in nature.

If the Holy Spirit were a creature, then how could it be said God will destroy those who defile the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:17); i.e., the body, where the Holy Spirit dwells, would become defiled? Since the Holy Spirit dwells in us we obtain all that belongs to God the Father in nature, and also what belongs to His Only begotten Son³.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

HEAVEN IS NEAR US!

If the Word of God lowered heaven and came down to us, establishing His kingdom within us, so that heaven comes closer to us than

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the nearest location on earth, it is because His kingdom is within us. When we pray to our Heavenly Father we do not look up as if He is far away; we look within us.

❖ Reaching the heavenly palace is easier than reaching Brittany or Jerusalem because the kingdom of God is within you.

Anthony and the hosts of Egypt's monks, Mesopotamia, Pontus, Cappadocia, and Armenia, did not see Jerusalem but the door of the paradise nonetheless was opened to them.

Blessed Hilarion, even though he was a citizen and a dweller of Palestine, did not see Jerusalem except for one day. For while he was near holy places he did not want to ignore them, yet he did not want to confine God to places with boundaries¹.

St. Jerome

THE SANCTIFICATION OF OUR FREE WILL

The desire of the Word of God to establish His Divine kingdom within us, which is priceless, has no effect on His sanctification to the freedom of mankind's will.

He provides us with the potential and gives us the freedom to have either His kingdom or Satan's kingdom to be created within us. How wonderful the superlative love of God is toward man! How awesome is His great appreciation for freedom!

❖ Within you there is the knowledge or lack of knowledge of the truth; being pleased with virtue or with lewdness is how we prepare our hearts for the kingdom of Christ or for Satan's kingdom².

Father Moses

ESTABLISH WITHIN ME THE FOUNDATION OF THE TEMPLE

Paul the Apostle says, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16) "For we are God's fellow workers; **you are God's field, you are God's building**" (1 Corinthians 3:9). "For he waited for the city which has foundations, **whose Builder and Maker is God**" (Hebrews 11:10).

If we are God's building, and if God is the Maker and the Creator of His city which is in our hearts, our souls should be delighted for He is the One who works within us.

Because of His love and His modesty He allowed us to work with

¹ Ep. 58: 3.

² Cassian: Conf 1: 13.

Him for the sake of His kingdom, whether by preaching or witnessing for Him before others or through perseverance with our personal struggles, supported by His grace. For He always urges us to work, saying, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day" (John 9:4). "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17). Thus, it is appropriate not to cease working for His kingdom, not from our own capabilities but with the richness of His superior grace.

Thus, we can exclaim, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Psalm 127:1).

❖ Prepare me, O Lord Jesus Christ, to participate in building Yourhouse...

I am eager to offer pure gold for the Seat of Mercy (Exodus 25:17), for the Ark of the Covenant, for the Golden Lampstand or the candles.

If I have no gold, I will offer silver for the boards and its sockets (Exodus 26:25).

Please Lord, allow me to offer precious stones to adorn the garment and the vest of the High Priest. And if I am poor, I will offer to the house of the Lord a goatskin so I would not appear to be barren, without fruits.

Let us build the Tabernacle of the God of Jacob, Jesus Christ our Lord, and adorn it¹.

Origen

❖ The righteous man could be called "heaven," for it was said about him: "For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Corinthians 3:17). Therefore, if God dwells in His temple and the saints are His temple, so the phrase "who is in heavens" means truly "who is in the saints²."

❖ Christians who are called for this tradition need to understand that these words, "who is in heavens," mean "who is in the saints and the righteous," for God is not limited by a particular place. The sky is the part elevated above material objects in the world, yet it is still materialistic; therefore, it is bounded by space to certain limitations. If we believe that God dwells in the sky then the birds will be better than us because they live closer to God. But it was not written, "The Lord is near the tall ones or the mountain people," but it says, "The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart" (Psalm 34:18), indicating humility. If the wicked are called "earth," so the righteous shall be called "heaven." It was said of them, "**For the temple of**

¹Origen in Exod. Hom 13.

²Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, 2:5.

God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Corinthians 3:17). If God dwells in His temple and calls the saints His saints then the saying "who is in heaven" means "who is in the saints," for it is appropriate to compare the righteous and the wicked spirit, just as we compare heaven and earth in terms of materialism¹.

St. Augustine

- ❖ John saw the holy city descending from heaven, **the foundations of the walls were adorned with all kinds of precious stones**, and it has twelve gates (Revelation 21:10-21). Christ reigns in this city, and its inhabitants themselves are dwellers and gates, houses and inhabitants. Christ dwells within them, and moves within them, saying: "I dwell and move in them."

Think of the soul that is holy and is so holy to be described. It embraces Christ, Whom heaven is not big enough to contain. He moves within it! So certainly **it must be a large house in which He walks**.

It is said, "You are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you" (1 Corinthians 3:16). Let us prepare our temple, so Christ will come and find His dwelling in us. Our souls will become Zion; a tower will be erected on the highest and will always be on top, not the bottom².

St. Jerome

- ❖ Faith is composed of many things and reaches perfection through many ways. It is like a building made out of many significant parts, rising to the top.

My dear, remember that stones are placed in the foundation of the building and the whole building rises above these stones until it is completed. Thus, the cornerstone is our Lord Jesus Christ who is the basis of all our faith. Upon Him our faith is founded -the building of the faith counts on Him until it is complete.

The foundation is the beginning of the entire building... it cannot be disturbed by waves, or harmed by winds; storms cannot destroy it because the building is established on the rock of the true foundation.

If I called Christ the "Cornerstone" it did not originate from me, for the prophets had preceded and prophesied about Him and called Him the "Cornerstone."

Let us now learn about the building that is erected upon the stone. For man first believes, when he believes he will love, when he loves he hopes, when he hopes he is justified, when he is justified he is complete and when he is complete he becomes perfect – this is when he becomes a house and a

¹ *Sermon on the mount* 2:17.

² *On Ps. Hom. 46.*

temple, a dwelling for Christ. As Jeremiah the Prophet said, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these. For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, then I will cause you to dwell in this place" (Jeremiah 7:4-7). Once the prophets said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them" (Leviticus 26:12, 1 Corinthians 3:16, 2 Corinthians 6:16). The blessed prophet said, "You are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you" (1 Corinthians 3:16). Also, our Lord said to His disciples, "You in Me, and I in you" (John 14:20).¹

St. Aphrahat

Chastity is described by **St. John Climacus** as an angelic nature; it is a permanent dwelling for Christ and a Paradise for the heart in the midst of this life. It is hard for man to deny his earthly nature.

❖ Also, prayer after reading (the holy word) revives the soul and stimulates its determination toward God's love. Prayer is good, for it stamps a clear idea about God in the soul; by remembering the dwelling of God in the soul, God will stay in her. By remembering God constantly, without being occupied with earthly concerns, we will become a temple of God².

St. Basil the Great

There is no communion between light and darkness, between Christ and Belial (2 Corinthians 6:14-15); it befits us not to ignore evil, no matter how simple it looks, even if it is just a passing thought. Trust in our Savior, the Forgiver of our sins, and the Savior of souls from corruption. This is how the Spirit of Holy God prepares us to become a holy dwelling for the Lord. If the Word of God, the Lover of mankind, exalts His life to make us a holy temple where the Holy Trinity lives in us, so does the enemy of good; he exerts all his efforts to make us a defiled temple that works for the kingdom of darkness. Our Christ makes us a tabernacle or a temple that celebrates communion with Christ, Who is our joyful feast. And the enemy of the good wants to make us a hell which does not know joy and praise but only worry, anxiety and bitterness!

❖ While the enemies desire to eradicate the faith of David because they did not see their signs in his heart, they are truly trying hard to place it on "the road" (i.e., in any path). They erect their signs as if in a forest of trees where the trees are incinerated rapidly or chopped by axes! (Psalm 74:5-7; Jeremiah 46:22-23) The fire may devour the forest and burn even Lebanon's cedars (Zechariah 11:1). They did so to defile the tabernacle of the name of God which is within us. While we are the temple of God (1

¹ *Demonstrations, 1:2-3 (Of Faith).*

² *Ep. 2: 4.*

Corinthians 3:16, 2 Corinthians 6:16), **we are also the tabernacle of God where the feasts of the Lord are celebrated**¹.

St. Ambrose

- ❖ Those who defile the soul and change her from a dwelling for the heavenly God, the Heavenly Jerusalem and a house of prayer, to a den of thieves... deprive themselves of what is precious and take away the best of what the soul has. They then become worthless.
- ❖ If evil is not removed first we cannot accept goodness. Goodness destroys weak buildings which lack faith, for it is the master who builds the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, not man (Hebrews 8:2). Paul the Apostle said of it: "You are God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9).²

Origen

- ❖ No one should say in his heart, "God does not care about the sins of the flesh." Paul the Apostle said, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). "Let no one deceive himself" (1 Corinthians 3:18).

A man may say, "My soul is the temple of God, not my flesh," citing the following: "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass" (1 Peter 1:24).

What a bitter explanation! The flesh is called grass because it dies. But to become aware that one dies at a certain time will not resurrect with sin. Do you want a clear explanation about this point also? Paul the Apostle himself says, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" (1 Corinthians 6:17-20)

Do not ignore the sins of the flesh; know that your bodies are from God. When you ignore the sin of the flesh, do you ignore a sin that you commit against the temple? Your body itself is the temple of the Spirit of God which is within you. Beware to what you do to the temple of God.

If you choose to commit adultery inside these walls of the church, is there any kind of evil greater than this? Now, you yourselves are the temple of God. In your coming and going or in staying in your houses or if you are awakening, in all of these you are a temple. So beware of the temple lest it will leave you and you will be destroyed.

When the apostle talks of adultery and underestimating sins of the

¹*Prayer of David, Book 4, 7:28.*

²*Fragments from Catena on Jerm. 70.*

flesh, he asks, "Do you not know that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit that is within you and is for you, given to you from God; you are not for yourselves." You have been purchased for a great price. Should you denigrate yourselves, remember your price¹.

- ❖ Whoever wants to offer a gift must be with pure intentions; therefore, if we want to offer any gifts in our hearts (i.e., in the internal temple of God)...and we remember something done against our brother(i.e., we offended him), then reconciliation must take place.

But if he was the one who offended us, then he has done something against us. In this case there is no need for reconciliation, because you do not ask forgiveness from those who offend you, but you must forgive him so the Lord will forgive your sins.

Reconciliation with your brother is more than just approaching him; by being reconciled from within with your emotions you submit yourself by apologizing to your brother, in the presence of God to Whom you want to offer your gift. Accordingly, if the fellow you offended is present you can calm him down by your pure thoughts. Also, by asking his forgiveness you will help him to return to his love and kindness toward you. This could happen if you precede and submit yourself first before God asking for His forgiveness; you will then go to your brother, not in shame, but driven by strong love. Then you can go back to your first thought, which was offering your gift².

St. Augustine

- ❖ It is clear that we are the temple of God if we succeed in doing goodness. If someone is a temple for God, accordingly, everything in this temple will be for God...but where there are many vices there is no temple for God³.

Father Valerian

- ❖ What is the treasure your heart tends to like and searches for? Does it have the complete and full tendency toward God? If your heart does not care for God, tell me what it is that keeps you from doing it? Certainly there are evil spirits(i.e., Satan and his soldiers) who draw the attention of the mind and shackle the soul. Satan is very cunning and he has all kinds of tricks and falsehood; he captures the pastures of the soul and its thoughts. He does not permit the soul to pray the right prayer and move closer to God.

The nature of mankind tends to form a partnership with the demons and evil spirits, just as it has an inclination to form a

¹*Sermons on New Testament Lessons.*

²*Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, 1:27.*

³*Homilies, 11:4, 5.*

partnership with angels and the Holy Spirit. It is possible for the soul to be a temple for Satan or for the Holy Spirit.

Now brethren, examine your minds – with whom do you have your partnership? Is it with angels or demons? And for whom is your temple? Are you a dwelling for God or for Satan? What is the treasure that fills your heart, is it Grace or Satan? It is like a house that is filled with foul odors and dirt and should be completely cleaned, organized and filled with every good smell and with all the treasures so the Holy Spirit will come instead of Satan and will find comfort in the hearts of the Christians¹.

St. Macarius of Egypt

- ❖ He who believes in Christ will acknowledge the Holy Spirit that dwells in him, through the cleansing of rebirth, and become Christian. But those that lapse and serve the lusts of the world serve materialistic life. Paul says that those who became spiritual act according to the acknowledgement to their faith. However, they may live materialistic lives and insult the Holy Spirit that dwells in them.

Theodore of Mopsuestia

- ❖ St. Youanis, who was clothed with the Spirit, lived with the freedom of the Spirit by praising the cross and the passion of Christ, dying from sin but living in Jesus Christ by doing what satisfies His good will and purifying the temple of his heart with the Holy Spirit. Thereupon, St. Youanis was ordained a priest. When the Archbishop placed his hand on him, a voice from heaven was heard to say three times: "Axios," i.e., worthy.

Paradise of the Fathers

- ❖ Take care of yourself, both within and out, so you do not condemn or blame anyone. Because the man of prayer is the one who stands before God, talking to Him and praising Him, devoting himself to God, glorifying Him at all times. He is the one whose belt is fastened to his waist with his vessels; he carries oil borne by his powerful stature and his power comes from God. He fights against devils and carries fruit to God. His heart is pure; he is a temple of God and a dwelling for the Holy Spirit. He is a house built on the rock; he is patient, gentle, and vigilant. His sorrow is godly and not of the world (2 Corinthians 7:10). He rejoices and delights in God with great hope in his heart. He is silent, surrounded by peace. He forgets that which is left behind and reaches forward to what is ahead (Philippians 3:13). He sheds his previous nature and now displays

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his new character. He can tolerate those who reproach him. He is a sweet and fruitful tree. He is like a gentle lamb with no evil in him. He takes the initiative to do good, truthful in everything and not foolish. His remarks are valuable, he does not turn astray (Proverbs 4:27). He is bright from both within and out. He is like a sweet plant in good soil, which brings hundredfold of fruit. He is firm like a lion and perfect in everything¹.

St. Stephen of Thebes

- ❖ The body foolishly seeks comfort in two ways that stress his soul with discomfort and confusing thoughts. These two ways are losing control of one's hunger during fasting and losing self-control of sight and touch. Because of these lapses, the temple of God is corrupted through the careless thoughts of worthless things.

St. Isaac of Nineveh

- ❖ A wise one, who commits to remain in his cell, is like a temple for God because his cell truly is always filled with the aroma of the fruits of his good work. The glory of God manifests to him in his cell.

St. Paul

- ❖ If you embrace long-suffering and patience, no evil spirit can dampen the Holy Spirit that dwells in you, and the Holy Spirit will rejoice and be delighted. The dwelling of the Holy Spirit within you will give you the joy of God and overwhelm you with His peace... but if anger rages in you the Holy Spirit will abandon you, because He won't find a clean place to dwell.

God dwells where there is long-suffering, but the devil dwells where there is anger.

When two spirits dwell in the same place they fight against each other. This will cause suffering for the person in whom they dwell. If you put a very small piece of charcoal in a jar of honey, would it spoil the whole jar of honey? Won't that piece of charcoal absorb the sweetness of honey, causing the jar to become bitter and lose its usefulness?

Long-suffering and patience is sweeter than honey and useful... but anger is bitter and not useful.

If anger mingles with long-suffering, anger will corrupt and spoil it and the prayer of the angry becomes useless before the Lord².

Fr. Hermas

- ❖ Dear brother, let us leave the past behind us according to the apostolic

² *Shepherd: Commandments 5:1.*

word that says: "Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Let us become one heart in the easy yoke of Christ, and link ourselves in His love, for he says, "God is love"(1 John 4:8).If someone says he follows love, he should not have anything detestable toward Christ at all. Let us pay more attention to purify our hearts from the burdens of those not reborn, which are rejected by God **because we "are the temple of the Living God"**(2 Corinthians 6:16).**The Divine does not dwell in a temple that is full of defilements.** So let us enter our chambers and gain some serenity, for enough has been done; let us pray that our quiet life be according to His will, glorifying His Holy Trinity which is faultless.

St. Barsanuphius

- ❖ Without purity of the heart, fasting cannot be accepted. Dear one, remember that it is better for the man to purify his heart, control his tongue, and refrain from doing evil... For it is not appropriate for man to mix honey with bitterness. If man refrains from bread and water while fasting, he should not mix his fast with blasphemy and curses.

You have one door for your house, which is the temple of God; it is not appropriate for the door that allows the King to enter to be used as a disposal for excrement and dirt.

When the man fasts, refraining from whatever is detestable and partakes in the body and the blood of Christ, he should pay attention to the Son of the King, who entered his mouth. It is inappropriate to let any detestable words come from his mouth¹.

- ❖ Why did our Savior teach us, saying: "Pray to your Father who is in the secret place and keep the door shut"? I will explain as best I can. Through the words of our Master we learned that when you pray, your heart is in the secret place while keeping the door shut. But what is the door that you should keep shut? **It is your mouth, because it is the door of the temple where Christ dwells.** As Paul the Apostle said, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God? (1 Corinthians 3:16) For God to enter the inner human of this dwelling, this dwelling should be cleansed from everything unclean, while your door (i.e., your mouth) is shut.

If this is not so, how could you understand this sentence? Assume that you were in the desert where there is neither house nor door, how could you not pray in a secret place? If it happened that you were on top of a mountain, how would you not be able to pray?

Our Savior also explains how God knows the will of the heart and the

¹*Demonstrations, 3:2 (Of Fasting).*

mind, as the Lord says, "For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:8). And also, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24). Elsewhere Isaiah says regarding the wicked, "When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear" (Isaiah 1:15). Ezekiel the Prophet said, "And though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them" (Ezekiel 8:18). He said this regarding the dishonest prayer which is unacceptable. Listen to each word with understanding and keep to its meaning¹.

St. Aphrahat

❖ The Lord Himself explained the reason of His baptism: "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Building the church was among His many blessings, for it was after the fathers and the prophets when the Only Begotten Son descended to be baptized. The Divine fact that was mentioned regarding the church became clear and, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psalm 127:1). For man cannot build or guard; "unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Psalm 127:1).

I dare say that man cannot follow his path unless the Lord is with him and guides him, for it is written: "You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him" (Deuteronomy 13:4). "The Lord leads the steps of man" (Wisdom 12:24).²

St. Ambrose

St. Basil has a spiritual explanation for the response of the Lord to Moses when Moses asked God to show him His glory (Exodus 33:20), where he says:

[What does He mean by saying, "I have a place for you," unless He meant the place of vision in the spirit? When Moses was in this place he was able to see God appearing to him in a way he could recognize Him.

This is the place that is particularly dedicated for true worship, for it says: "Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see; but in the place which the Lord chooses" (Deuteronomy 12:13-14).

Then what is the spiritual burnt offering? It is the sacrifice of praise!

In which place should we offer it unless in the Holy Spirit?!

From whom did we learn this? From Christ Himself who said, "The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:23).

¹*Demonstrations, 4:10 (On Prayer).*

²*In Luc. Ch 3.*

When Jacob saw this place, he said: "Surely the Lord is in this place" (Genesis 28:16). The Spirit is the place of the saints and the saints are a special place for the Spirit, **for they offer themselves to be a dwelling of God and they are called the temple of God.** As Paul talks about Christ, saying that he speaks in the presence of God, he also talks in the Spirit with His secrets and the Spirit also talks in him¹.]

¹ *St. Basil: On the Holy Spirit, 62.*

11

MAN AND PARTICIPATION IN GOD'S GOODNESS

DIVINE LOVE AND GOD'S GOODNESS

"God is love" is His nature. He loved us since the beginning and His love will remain forever. This love is the other side of His unlimited goodness which cannot be described.

Through His love He created man in His image and His likeness so that man would acknowledge the sweetness of the Divine goodness within him. In other words, goodness is not a group of commandments or regulations with which man should comply, as when someone deprives himself from pleasure and lust demanded by his body. Goodness in its essence is to enjoy the participation with God, who is full goodness. The man partakes in the likeness of God so that each morning he explores a new taste of God's goodness which overflows through the great love of God and His mercy.

The goodness has its own sweetness which man can taste through his meeting with God of goodness, being a partner with Him and enjoying His immeasurable grace.

DIVINE APPROACH AND MAN

St. Gregory of Nyssa taught that God, Who loves mankind, provided many options for the good of man. God created His beloved man to let him participate in His goodness and enjoy it as much as possible in consideration of the fact that he is made in the image of God and His likeness. God gave man a life that is different from all the other creatures on earth. He granted him mind and wisdom that attract him toward his God, eager to be like Him and to grow in His knowledge.

❖ He cannot hide His light, leave His glory without a witness, or His goodness without enjoyment of it. He cannot let all that is pertinent to Divine nature not be used for the good of the man to share and enjoy. If man had come to His presence for this purpose (**i.e., to share with God in His goodness**) then certainly he was created with the capability of enjoying all that is good. The eye enjoys seeing true light that comes naturally from the sun's rays. The sun's rays have an innate ability to attract the eye to what is identical. It was essential for irrational

creatures, whether they live in the water or in the air, to have a system that is adapted to their surrounding environment. Each creature has to find its complement, one in the air and the other in the water. Thus man, who came into existence to enjoy the goodness of God, must have someone naturally similar with whom he may share his attributes. That is why he was distinguished with life, mind, wisdom and all the characteristics that fit with God; therefore, through all this he could have the desire to match with what harmonizes with him¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

WHERE IS THE PARTICIPATION IN GOD'S GOODNESS?

Some people ask the following questions:

1. If God is so complete in His goodness, why is there evil? And what is the source of it?

2. Why did God create Satan and his angels although He knows they fall, turning the life of mankind into an unbearable hell?

3. Why did God give a body to man although He knows this body will stray from the right path through emotion and perception?

4. Why did God give man free will which he can use to destroy his life?

5. Why did God allow tribulations to arise, especially for the righteous?

6. Why did good God not create mankind with the heavenly Host so they would not perish?

These questions lead us to know the goodness of God as we ask Him to reveal the mysteries of His plan toward us.

❖ Whoever contemplates the current condition of man might believe that our discussion is futile, deploring that man does not now participate in God's goodness, but it is totally the opposite.

Where are examples of man being in likeness with God? Where are men free from lust (i.e., enjoying eternal life)? The life of man passes in the blink of an eye; he yields to lust, his fate is death and he is subject to all kinds of suffering, both physical and spiritual.

But the fact that the life of man at the present time is considered abnormal is not evidence that he was not created surrounded by goodness. For as long as man is the work of God who brought him into existence through His goodness it is not reasonable to believe that God created man surrounded by evil. Goodness is the reason for his existence...**God**

¹*Oratione Cat. 5.*

created man to participate with Him in His unique goodness. God provides man with natural ability to attain all kinds of perfection, so when he is in likeness with God, he will be attracted to what complements him¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

FROM WHERE DID EVIL COME?

Some eastern philosophies tried to introduce their thoughts to Christianity, such as the belief that there is a god of evil or the belief that God is the Creator of evil, as claimed by the Gnostics. But the Fathers of the Church were cautious to affirm that God is complete in His goodness and not a source of evil.

Evil in essence has no entity, as some claimed, have a creator who made it. Evil is the absence of the good; darkness does not exist but happens due to the absence of light. There is no substance to blindness; it is due to the absence of sight, and wickedness is due to the lack of virtue.

❖ You may ask, how did it happen that the one who was honored to be given all these great traits (i.e., goodness) replaced them with whatever is evil?

The reason is clear: **evil was never rooted in the will of the Divine.** If God was the Creator of the evil and the source of it, then there would be no fault to commit evil. Yes, evil begins somehow from within, manifested in man's will, **when the soul is pulled away from goodness.**

Vision is a natural ability, but blindness is just deprivation from natural sensory capability; thus, there is strife between virtue and evil. There is no other way to understand the concept of the evil except as the absence of virtue. By removing light there will be darkness, and there is no darkness in the presence of light. Thus, as long as goodness clings to man's nature then evil cannot come into being².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

❖ There is no existence for evil in itself but it comes from the soul³.

❖ We cannot say without speaking against faith that evil comes from God, for life does not give birth to death, night does not create light, and illness does not award health. Because God, Who is Goodness and Righteousness, cannot possibly create what is contrary to Him (i.e., evil).

It is correct to say that evil is not a true fact but rather it is the soul that feels comfortable adopting what goes against virtue. Evil is the result

¹*Oratione Cat. 5.*

²*Oratione Cat. 5.*

of our rejection of good, and the outcome of our negligence and carelessness.

We should not look for evil outside ourselves, for deep within lies an original corrupted nature. Each one of us should acknowledge that he is the origin of any abominable act in him.

As long as one exercises self-control evil will stay apart from you. Be advised that the origin of true deceit is when you surrender freely to your weakness. If this were not true it would not be possible to enact laws, conduct trials or punish criminals¹.

- ❖ God is not the One who is the source of the misery of hell (eternal death); it is we ourselves, because **the origin and the root of sin are in our freedom and our will**².

St. Basil the Great

- ❖ There is no existence for evil in itself because it is not part of the creatures and it is not substance. But it is the soul which, by deviating from virtue, becomes lustful and brings forth sin, suffering where it finds no comfort in itself. Thus, the soul itself produces evil and then agonizes from it. **St. Gregory the Theologian** says, "Fire is produced from a substance, and it burns this substance; thus, evil corrupts the wicked man."

Dorotheus

- ❖ Evil is nothingness³.

St. Augustine

- ❖ There is no spiritual entity for evil; it is the absence of good. It is the same as with darkness for it does not have an entity, but it is the result of the absence of the light.

St. Evagrius

- ❖ **Sin does not exist in nature and since it is detached from free will**, it is not in essence of itself⁴.

Fr. Maximus the Confessor

- ❖ St. Paul, the blessed, leads us away from sin and takes us to virtue. For if you do not sow good seeds, what is the advantage of removing the thorns?

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The one who carries "bitterness" does not find it necessary to be "nice"; the one who is "irritable" sees no need to be "compassionate." It is critical to struggle reaching this blessing (being nice and compassionate). He removed the bad seeds and now urges us to plant the good seeds.

"Be kind," because if the thorns are removed the field will remain barren and will again produce useless weeds; there is a great need to keep it productive with whatever is good.

He had taken away "anger," replacing it with "kindness." He removed "bitterness," substituting "compassion." He eliminated "malice" and "cunning," supplanting them with "forgiveness."¹

St. John Chrysostom

EVIL AND MISERY

St. Gregory of Nyssa addressed the problem of evil which destroys the life of man and makes him lose all happiness. Due to this problem, man sometimes desires death more than life and when he realizes that death is the end of human life, his life turns to misery. What did God do with the first man? He dressed him with a shirt made from a pelt! He put on his body the nature of death (the skin of a dead animal) as a garment to be removed, after reforming his nature, to carry eternity in his soul and body. This is what the Word of God provided, the Savior!

❖ Man grieves greatly when he thinks that his body will decompose and considers that the end of our life through death is a harsh matter. Also, he thinks that the extinction of our human existence through death is the greatest evil.

Let us think seriously through this desperate view, to the immense Divine goodness. **Those who participate in life (with God), enjoy the good side of it; they love life and they find it worthy to continue to live.** But our view toward man who spends his life in pain is different, for he considers death to be much better than a life full of pain.

Now let us discover who gave us this life - did He intend for it to be joyful or not?

We, through our free will, made a friendly bargain with evil, and if we combine our nature with evil from our involvement with lust, as in the case of sweetening a harmful substance with honey, thus, we distance ourselves from the path of happiness which our mind associates with pain and its causes. Therefore, when man returns to ashes like pottery shards he will rid himself of the evil he gained and will be reshaped anew to his original condition through the

¹In Eph. hom 16.

resurrection...

Moses tells us how our first parents, the first of the human race, were implicated in the sin of disobedience, leading them to lose their first happiness. Then God clad them in clothes of animal skin. In my opinion, Moses did not intend to use the literal meaning of "animal skin!" Which kind of animal could be slaughtered and then have its skin used for clothes?

The skin of an animal is removed after the animal is dead; it means that God, who heals us from evil by His wisdom, **allows death of the body after it falls**. This trait belongs to irrational creation, but in this case it does not stay with it forever. The garment is external - we wear it for a while and it does not last eternally. The distinction is that nature was created to be immortal... It is an external, not internal, cover. It sticks to the external element with the senses (the flesh) and not with the actual image of God. The element that belongs to the senses will decompose but not disappear, for disappearance means nonentity; decomposition is a return to the ashes where man came.

The element belonging to the senses of our nature will decompose until it is reshaped to its original image and unnatural components will be removed.

The soul joins the body in following wrong desires; hence, there are similarities between the death of the body and death of the soul. Regarding the body, death is the departure of life that belongs to the senses. But for the soul the word "death" explains the separation from true life... The soul does not decompose because it is not a component of the body, no matter how elementary it may be, so how could it decompose? **The imprints of sin must be removed from the soul and must be tackled by maintaining virtue in our current life so we may be healed from the corruption of sin.**

If we consider the final purpose of God, who is full of wisdom, it is not appropriate for us to present the Creator of the man as "**the Creator of evil**"; this is possible because of our lack of wisdom and our inability to comprehend. God knew that man would fall into sin yet He did not prevent what actually happened - so, what is the alternative? Should man not be created because of the foreknowledge of God that man will fall? Or instead, taking man back to his first condition (i.e., to the case of original blessing) through repentance, even though he was sinful?

It is irresponsible for us to call God "the Creator of evil" just because of our physical pain; this happened as an inevitable result of the instability of human nature. And if we refuse to believe that God, Creator of man, is not behind the reason for our pain then this thought is also very

irresponsible and it is found among those who judge between good and evil based only on their senses. They do not realize that internal goodness is irrelevant to human senses and evil is actually different from true goodness.

Who was the One who wanted the return of man to the original state of blessing? Who was He, who seeks to find the fallen one, to call the lost, to hold the hand of the wanderer and to lead him to the right destination?

Who could He be other than our great Lord? **God bestowed us life in the beginning. He has the right and the ability to retrieve what was lost.**

God and His incarnation, His growth from childhood to maturity, His food, His drink, His weariness, His sleep, His grief, His tears, the false accusation against Him, His trial, crucifixion, His death, His burial - all of these affairs mentioned in the Divine declaration lead to weaken the faith of fools. These fools deny the final outcome (resurrection) because of its painful beginning. They believe that resurrection is not in accord with divinity because they consider His death inappropriate.

I believe it is necessary to deemphasize the thought that the body is something imperfect. We should think of the good in it and what is contrary to it, demanding to know what might distinguish one from the other.

I believe if someone thinks deeply regarding this matter he will not even argue there is one disgraceful thing about the body. What really is shameful is evil conduct. But what is free from evil conduct is totally estranged from what is shameful. And what is irrelevant to whatever is shameful is considered goodness and whatever is good does not mingle with what opposes it.....

(This is how St. Gregory defends the incarnation of the Savior, because His humanity or His life among us as a man is not shameful; these matters are not sin or disgraceful as some people think).¹

St. Gregory of Nyssa

- ❖ The children of Babylon in Psalm 137:9 represent the evil thoughts...that we considered insignificant in the beginning; we should seize it, cut it off, and smash it against the rock, which is Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). We should kill it as the Lord commanded and not leave any part of it to breathe inside of us².
- ❖ I appeal to you to renew yourselves (Ephesians 4:20-24, Romans 12:1-2).

¹*Oratione Cat. 8:9.*

²*In Josh 15:3.*

Learn that it is possible to be renewed and separate the image of the swine from you, which is a characteristic of the impure soul. Also, cast away from yourselves the image of the dog which describes those who bark, howl, and speak with profanity.

Change is possible even though the image of the serpent was raised when the wicked were told: "Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?" (Matthew 23:33) If we are convinced that we are capable of changing ourselves from the likeness of vipers, hogs, and dogs, then let us learn from Paul the Apostle how this change (which depends on us) can occur. He expressed this by saying, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

If previously you were barking, and the Word reshaped you and changed you, then you have been changed from a dog to a human. If you were previously unclean and the Word touched you, and you submit yourself to the Word to reshape you, then you have been changed from swine to human. If you were a wild beast before and you listened to the Word that can tame and train and it was able to transform you into a human according to its will, as a result you won't be told later, "Serpents, brood of vipers."

If we ignore the lesson, we will lose the compelling truth that is ours, as the writer of the Psalms warns us.

Origen

SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE AND THE ENJOYMENT OF THE IMAGE OF GOD

We have learned a new concept for the spiritual struggle; when the Word was incarnate and lived among us, shared our life, provided a new picture for life without blame and then accepted the pain of death, the death of the cross. It is not a human attempt to pursue righteousness, but rather it is participation and being united with what He suffered. Being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. He is righteous, able to sanctify us in Him with the power of His grace.

The struggle of the soul is perpetual, constant, and yet is an enjoyable journey that never stops; she struggles, not by herself, but through the grace of God that works with it. **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, [The Divine hand should lead us to the Invisible.]

❖ To keep God within you befits the soul to be in accord with Christ who died for the world. Through death and removing everything that is not

fruitful the soul will be kept alive¹.

- ❖ The soul is in a constant journey of love but it is a blessed journey with God, and that journey never stops².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

THE GOODNESS OF GOD AND THE SANCTITY OF THE BODY

St. John Chrysostom tells us to consider the body as a servant and to care for it in the Lord. The body should work with the soul for the Lord. He says,

[Truly, God has given us eyes, a mouth, and the ability to hear for the purpose of having all our members serve Him. We should speak with His words, act like Him, always sing for Him with continuous praises, and offer Him the sacrifices of thanksgiving. Through this our conscience will become completely pure!

Just as the body becomes healthier when it enjoys pure air, it is more likely for the soul to enjoy practical wisdom when it breathes new life following this training.

Is it not true that if the eyes of the body are exposed to smoke they will tear and burn but if they are surrounded by pure air, pastures, springs and gardens, their vision will be sharp and in more peace? It will be the same for the eyes of the soul when it is fed by the pastures of the spiritual sayings; it becomes pure and sharp in eyesight; should it decide to go with the smoke of the earthly life, it will cry forever and it will keep wailing here and later. Therefore, **David** said, "For my days are consumed like smoke" (Psalm 102:3LXX³).

When **St. Gregory of Nyssa** spoke of wickedness and misery, he explained that the Savior refrains from becoming a man to live our human life because the body itself is not evil, but it is the will that deviates toward evil.

When man fell, God clad him in a shirt made from animal skin so man would learn about his death and seek to reach to his Savior who was incarnate for Him to provide eternal life for his body and soul.

- ❖ The body is not a source of evil, but the freedom of choice (free will)⁴.
- ❖ The body is the tool of the spirit - it works together with the soul¹.

¹*Hom.in Cant. 12 PG 44:1020 B.*

²*Hom.in Cant. 12 PG 44:1025.*

³*In Matth.Hom. 2:9.*

⁴*De Mortuis. PG 46:529A.*

❖ The Word has become flesh to change our body to spirit... and to sanctify the whole flesh with Him...For in Him the firstfruits are sanctified².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

❖ I call the will that is between the flesh and the soul: arise and show us that you divide equitably. Two participants are asking you to meet their needs, so distribute fairly if you are just³.

❖ Lust makes the mind dark and incapable of understanding. He who eats less food will keep his thoughts pure. He who eats too much food will bring his soul down to become a human body. He who keeps the body healthy is urging it to become a spirit.

The body is a slave and will obey you as much as you ask. If you offer too much to your body it will rebel against you.

The body asks for habits so do not provide it with bad habits; otherwise, it will be strong against you. And if you cry out to him it will not listen to you. Assign to your body a certain measure of food and drink and do not ever let it become accustomed to irregular habits⁴.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE GOODNESS OF GOD AND THE UNITY OF MAN

Some people complain that God did not create them like angels without bodies that resist their souls. However, because of the greatness of the goodness of God, He gave us a kind of unity between the body and the soul - the same as between the mind, the emotions and the senses. Man cannot be split into elements that work against each other; man is more like a musical instrument with different strings. They work together with the Holy Spirit of God to create a significant, harmonious and happy symphony. The conflict between lust of the soul and lust of the body intrudes upon man. It is because man opens the door to sin that does not belong to him. It befits us to praise God for His goodness since He gave us this unity for our benefit.

St. Gregory of Nyssa considers the soul to be the only creature that carries the image of God to enjoy His eternal partnership. But he does not talk about mandichotomously. In his view the body is an assistant to the soul, participating in its struggle and its glory. In his sermon about perfection he says, ["To complete the Christian life, I mean life where the name of Jesus is

¹*De hominisopificio*. PG 44:161 AB, *In Christi resurr.* 3.

²*Adv. Eunomius 4.* PG 45:637A,B.

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invoked to show it, it is life where we participate not only with our minds and souls but also with all our behavior, so we become perfect and match with what Paul said: ‘May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ’" (1Thessalonians 5:23)¹].

GOODNESS OF GOD AND THE DIGNITY OF MAN

God did not create man to live as a slave to his brother, regardless of his age, his education or his status; this explains the goodness of God and His love to man. Truly, there are rich and poor, but they both need each other, and should not underestimate one another. They should not be arrogant or jealous of each other. Neither of them needs to feel small in front of the other. There is one Master, one Lord for all and there is also eternal heavenly inheritance.

St. Gregory of Nyssa believes that God created man with natural dignity; therefore, it is not appropriate for man to humiliate his brother since all were created with dignity.

- ❖ The Lord of the universe set forth a system that commits only irrational nature to serve man².
- ❖ He adorned man with the gift of free will. So whoever agrees with you through habits or regulations is your equal in the dignity of nature. He was not created by you, you did not give him life and you did not give him the features of the body and the soul³.
- ❖ **How can a man dominate the lives of others if he does not have power over his life?** Therefore, he must be poor in spirit and consider Him Who through His own free will became poor for us.

He should acknowledge that all are equal in nature and should not be rude or arrogant toward others. He should not display deceit so he may be truly blessed to be worthy of the kingdom of heaven, he should be humble in this life that passes rapidly⁴.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

GOODNESS OF GOD AND THE DIVINE CALL TO MAN

We have seen that the theological thought of **St. Gregory of Nyssa** is based on the call of man to enjoy seeing God and to participate in Divine glory; through restoration of his original nature to its original state, it will carry the image of God and enjoy being in likeness with Him. The nature will be attracted to God because He is the origin. It will live witnessing for Him

¹*On Perfection PG 46:285 A-D.*

²*The Lord's Prayer, sermon 5.*

³*The Lord's Prayer, sermon 5.*

⁴*Or. de Beuti. 5:1.*

through its new life that carries Divine power and will enjoy being with the heavenly. Briefly, we can explain the purpose of the Christian faith through the following points:

1. Be a witness to God through the new life in Christ Jesus

- ❖ There is no other way which man can glorify God except through his virtues that carry the testimony about Divine power as a reason for his goodness¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

2. A call to see God

We had previously spoken about "man is called to see God."

- ❖ The call is not to lead us to Mount Sinai but to heaven itself, which through virtue He made easy for mankind. **Also, we are not permitted to see Divine power but to participate in it, where He connects us with Divine nature.**

Furthermore, He does not hide that magnificent glory in the dark to make it hard for those who want to see it but first enlightens darkness with the light of His Divine teaching. He gives us purity of the heart so we may be able to see the glory of its unspeakable splendorous glory².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

The faithful are called to ascend the spiritual ladder to see God - there are two steps to follow:

First step: To see God through His Divine work and His power, for He says, "He is invisible in relation to nature, but becomes visible through His energies."³

Second step: To see God inside us, we see ourselves the way we should be; thus, we enjoy the kingdom of God within us and the image of God will be attracted to Him because He is the foundation.

- ❖ If the man is pure in heart, he will see himself, and will see what he desires to see, and thus, he will be blessed, because when he sees his purity, he finds the origin of his image⁴.
- ❖ What is this vision? It is the purity, holiness, simplicity, and other interesting implications for the nature of the Divine, in which God could be seen (or be contemplated).⁵

¹The Lord's Prayer, sermon 3.

²The Lord's Prayer, sermon 2.

³Or. deBeut., 6.

⁴Or. deBeut., 6.

⁵Or. deBeut., 6.

- ❖ "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). From this we learn that when the heart of man is pure from all earthly matters and temptations he will see the image of Divine nature in his inner beauty.

Truly, you are capable of perceiving the beauty of the Divine. Because He who created you provided your nature with this wonderful attribute, you are molded into the likeness of His nature's glories, as if He formed the picture sculpted in wax. Yet the evil that you poured over the nature that carries Divine image led you to lose this marvelous feature, hidden beneath a corrupted cover. **If by living a righteous life you cleanse your heart from the defilement that sticks like glue, the Divine beauty will shine again in you**¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

3. A call to angelic life

- ❖ Let us contemplate on heavenly matters while despising what comes from earth as we display the path of angelic life².
- ❖ The angel does not pray to God for daily bread because his nature does not need these things. The man who provides himself with just his basic needs and does not let futile thoughts drift to covetous desire is not much less than the angels. He is acting like them by not being in need of anything as long as he is satisfied from within with the essentials³.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

4. A call for unlimited perfection

The Christian is called to walk in the path of eternal perfection; he does not know any limit for his perfection or end of his path. He keeps walking delightfully until he meets his Christ, the eternal "path"!

- ❖ But regarding virtue, the perseverance to reach perfection has no limit. The messenger of the Divine and the great man who is firm in spirit walks in the path of virtue reaching forward to those things which lie ahead (Philippians 3:13).

He feels that coming to a halt on the path is not safe, because any goodness in its nature is unlimited; nothing will disturb the goodness unless there is something against it. As with life which is stopped by death, light is disturbed by darkness. Thus, all that is totally good does not stop unless it reaches a point where what opposes it starts.

¹*Or. de Beut., 6.*

²*The Lord's prayer, 3.*

³*The Lord's prayer, 3.*

We have clarified that anything with limit is not considered virtue¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

GOODNESS OF GOD AND FREE WILL

Both Satan and man sinned with full freedom and understanding so they were responsible for their sins. But Satan was created to be immortal, so when he falls he is under eternal judgment; if he had not erred he would have been like the righteous angels, living forever. But Adam was immortal in his death. When he erred he was sentenced to death, but he needed redemption, as we will see when we talk about "God my Savior," (Divine Love3-5) because man is prepared for life and eternity.

Man has a dynamic power that pushes him to goodness and to eternity. He yearns to return to the goodness he lost. But the will of the angel is aligned with either goodness or wickedness. After his first sin, which was done freely, the fallen angel no longer wished to do anything else except evil and he was not capable of doing anything else. But the will of man allows him to do whatever he pleases. From the first sin, in which he had full freedom and understanding, Adam chose death. But because of Divine love and the potential for him to be immortal, through the work of Divine salvation he was able to restore the condition that he lost.

Man is created to be immortal. Ahead of him the path of salvation is opened; if he acknowledges it with his full freedom, he will have the right to enjoy eternity. In this manner God did not let His image walk into death but provided him with the Divine blessing, which is capable of restoring him to eternity.

- ❖ It is like a scale with two hands. Death and life are placed on each; **free will is the arm that holds them together** and it inclines toward the side that pulls it.
- ❖ The big surprise is that the Engineer built His house and He gave this creature the choice of destroying himself.
- ❖ Adam enjoyed the freedom that took control of his senses and directed them. It led the senses to go wherever they wished; it took them to death or to life, because it has the ability to do so.

St. Jacob of Serugh

- ❖ God gave rational nature the blessing of having free will, and He granted man the ability to determine what he wants, so goodness dwells in our life - not forcibly or unintentionally but as a result of a free choice.

¹*Life of Moses. PG 44:300 B-301 C.*

Enjoying free will leads us to explore significant facts.

Normally, if anyone abuses free will he becomes an inventor of evil things, according to the words of Paul the Apostle in Romans 1:30. Whoever is from God is considered a brother to us, but those who reject partaking in the work of goodness carry out this action with their full will¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

- ❖ The grace of God is always there for those who gladly receive it. Thus, when our Master deems that a soul is attentive and cares for His love, He pours His richness abundantly on this soul, and gives her more than she asks².

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ He does not say: "You must drink, you must run, no matter if you want or not," but he says, "Whoever desires and is capable of running and drinking will win and be satisfied."³

St. Jerome

THE GOODNESS OF GOD AND THE EXISTENCE OF SATAN

We have previously published a book about '**Defeating Satan**' in Arabic, please refer to this book. We had seen that Satan, with his own will, pulled himself into darkness by separating from the Light. He insisted, still insists and will continue to lure the righteous people that God created to the kingdom of darkness. By being arrogant and stubborn, he fights a battle with the Light, but God, who is full in His goodness, transforms the war against us to become a way to be crowned forever in heaven.

Origen addressed Satan as a good creature who erred by his own will.

- ❖ Those who say Satan is not God's creature are wrong. Even though he is evil who is not fit to be created by God, nonetheless he was. It is the same when we say murder is not from God but from a man who was created by God⁴.
- ❖ It is absolutely clear from the words in Isaiah 14:12 that the one who was Lucifer, a son of the morning, fell from heaven. But if he was, as some claim, a creature from the dark, why was it said of him that he was like

²In Gen PG 53: 76, 77.

³Against Jovinianus, 1:12.

⁴In Job.tome 2. c 7.

Lucifer, the light carrier? Or he who is without light, how does he rise in the morning?¹

Origen

St. Augustine says that some Manians believe that Satan is the creator of creatures like the flies. St. Augustine answered them by saying that God is the Creator of everything; He uses even the creatures that may look insignificant and harmful to work for the good of man and to help him to lose his pride. [Brethren, please be advised that when we tackle our pride, it was created to cause us trouble. God was able to weaken the pride of Pharaoh's people, not by using bears, lions or snakes, but by afflicting them with flies and frogs. He beat their pride by utilizing the most worthless of creatures².]

- ❖ They ask, "Is Satan righteous because he is useful?" On the contrary, he is evil because he is Satan. But God, who is good and mighty, can provide good and pleasant things from the malice of Satan. What is attributed to Satan, his will by which he tries to do evils, and not God's providence which changes Satan's evil to the benefit for man³.

St. Augustine

- ❖ Satan is clever in battle, but he won't win if you stand firm against him; he will flee and retreat in shame. Empty individuals are the ones who fear Satan as a power⁴.
- ❖ Do not fear the threats of Satan at all, because he is paralyzed like nerves of the dead⁵.

Hermas

- ❖ Paul was like a good fighter, for he knew how to aim his strikes toward the enemy and repel them if they renewed their attacks⁶.
- ❖ It is like a fighter who comes finally to the battlefield. He lifts his eyes toward heaven... and trains his body, so he does not lose the fight. He anoints his body with the oil of mercy. He practices daily the features of virtue. He speeds up faithfully to reach the purpose of the round. He directs his strikes and shoots the arrows with his arms but not toward emptiness...the earth is the battlefield for man and the heaven is his crown⁷.

¹*De Principiis* 1:5.

² *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate*1:15.

³*Against the Manicheans* 2: 28: 42.

⁴*Hermas: The Shepherd, Command* 12:5:2.

⁵*Hermas: The Shepherd, Command* 12:6:2.

⁶ *Paradise* 12:56.

⁷*Letters to Priests* 49.

St. Ambrose of Milan

- ❖ If you say the enemy is very strong, and has full sovereignty over man, you are blaming God for being unjust when He condemns mankind because of their surrender to Satan. You believe that Satan is very strong and leads mankind with a force that cannot be resisted. Accordingly, you seem to consider Satan greater and stronger than the soul and then you tell me not to comply with Satan. This is like a fight between a youth and a young child, and when the child is defeated, he is blamed for his defeat. This is great injustice¹.

St. Macarius the Great

- ❖ Then, do not be afraid of Satan even though he is without a body when he approaches you. Nothing is weaker than this when he makes his move to approach while he is not clothed in a body. And no one is stronger than he who is courageous and brave, even if he is dressed with a body that is susceptible to death².

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ When Satan wages a war against man there is an angel who helps man although he is not aware of it. Such is what happened to the high priest Joshua, Son of Jehozadak (Zechariah 3:1-6), who was assisted by the angel. The angel rebuked the enemy; the prophet saw what happened but the priest saw nothing. Thus, the angels are around every man daily to fight the orders of devils lest they harm man³.

- ❖ Deliver me from evil because Your power is great. Don't leave me alone to fight the enemy without Your assistance; when You conquer him for me, I am the weak.

Don't let Your hidden assistance stay apart from me (i.e., Your power which does not test me) because I realize that I am weak.

Let all the fight be Yours, You are the One Who conquers; all victories for all winners are Yours.

Be the Defeater because the triumph befits You.

Lead me not into temptation. Deliver me from the enemy who stands against me - I cannot conquer him without Your help.

Receive the battle and take the victory that belongs to You. Deliver me from him! Through Your mercies, deliver me from Satan who fights

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²Resisting the Temptation of the Devil, homily 2:4.

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me because all triumphs befit You, and to You they are attributed.¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

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THE MAN AND PERPETUAL HAPPINESS¹

THE HAPPIEST CREATURE ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH

We have seen that God's relationship with man is, in its essence, an incomparable relationship of love. The King, the Belover of man, created him in the image of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He assigned him to be His ambassador and the deputy of heaven. He brought him into being as the creature of praise and to be part of the heavenly order as a creative musician or as a unique musical instrument for the Holy Spirit to play. In short, man is called to see God, to enjoy Divine knowledge and for God to dwell in him as a holy temple for Him. Man enjoys partaking in God's goodness; he is an active creature like his Creator for he is constantly growing, here and in the ages to come. It befits man to sing, perpetually announcing, "I am the happiest creature on the face of the earth!"

This is truly how it feels for one who is in contact with God, the Source of true joy and Who fills the soul with unlimited joy.

- ❖ Whoever receives God is happy².
- ❖ When you follow God you will search for happiness and you will reach God, for **He Himself is Happiness**³.
- ❖ First, return to yourself, and restore yourself to your Creator, for He is the Foundation of our happiness and our full goodness. Worshiping God is to love Him, to desire to see Him, and to hope and believe that you will see Him. **This is eagerness for bliss to reach God, for He is happiness manifest...**

Now we see Him in a mysterious way; when our love to God increases then we will see Him clearly.

O beloved ones, this love does not come to us according to our own will, but it is through the Holy Spirit that is given to us. How could we commune with God unless the Holy Spirit talks in our heart?

²*De beata vita, 2:11.*

³*Comm. On St. John's Gospel, 40: 90.*

(In heaven) there is no sin, and there is nothing valueless, but we will be connected to Him through love, which we ache to reach. We will live forever in that city illuminated by God. **We will find in Him the happiness which we struggle to reach now**¹.

❖ Man, the rational creation, is a great and a noble creature even when he weakens. **He cannot be satisfied with anything less than God, Who grants him joyous comfort.** Even man cannot bestow happiness upon himself.

Therefore, I say, happy is he who is with God.

❖ There is no one who does not ask for this happiness; everyone longs for it jealously for they prefer it above all else. Whoever asks for other things in fact asks for this aim only².

❖ In my opinion you cannot be happy if you cannot get what you love, whatever it may be. You will not be happy unless you love what you have; this is proper and good...

If you are asking for what you cannot possess, you will suffer. And if you are asking for what you don't need, you are deceived. And if you don't seek for what you should ask, you are mentally unbalanced.

❖ Let us join God with love and let us reach Him through prayer. **The entire essence of all our goodness is God.** We must not fail in this, and should not ask for more, for the first is dangerous and the latter impossible... **following God is the desire of happiness and reaching God is bliss itself**³.

❖ First, **return to yourself from what is outside of you**, then offer yourself again to He Who created you. He is the Source of all our happiness and our full goodness.

❖ Beloved ones, you may understand that **the joy of all joys could be reached through delight in the Trinity, by whom we were created in His image.**

❖ Wherever the soul of man tends to go, should she not direct herself to go toward You she will gather sorrow for her heart, even if she sticks to what she likes. If what you like does not belong to God the soul will be thrown into sorrow, because these beautiful things cannot take place without You...

¹*The Spirit and the Letter*, 5.

²*Cf. Confessions 13:8,9; On The Happy life, 11; Sermon, 306:3.*

³*Morals of Catholic Church.3:4; 11:18.*

Grant me to praise You for these things, O my God, the Creator of everything. But do not let the love of these trappings clutch to my soul.

These things offer no comfort, because they do not remain; they merely pass by our senses and disappear¹.

St. Augustine

- ❖ Being delighted with God's creation is a desirable thing; **it is considered bliss** for an individual who is a "mature" man acknowledging the image of God. But wandering in defilement while trying to mesmerize others is not desirable for the righteous.
- ❖ Many called themselves "human," but truly they are not. Some of them behave like animals while others behave like reptiles and they spread their anger like wild beasts. Therefore, David himself says, "Nevertheless man, though in honor, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish" (Psalm 49:12)...

But certainly the word "**human**" is used for he who was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). He protects his dignity in a proper way; he knows how to choose between good and evil. God gives His glory to His creation who rejoices in His work, and finds delight in Him (Psalm 104:31).

Thus, there was a man in the land of Uz called Job. "The region was wild and deserted, but it had an implant with a kind nature, who was Job"...Job was a treasure that was lacking in nothing. He was full of implanted grapes. He was perfect as any creation of the Living God. He made use of his virtues for truth and without hypocrisy, carrying out God's commandments... He worshiped God according to His wishes².

Father Hesychius of Jerusalem

QUESTIONS ABOUT HAPPINESS

Many psychologists wish to take man to the depths of himself so he can recognize hidden faults that should be avoided. They offer questions and ask man to find the answers so he can enjoy happiness. For instance³:

- ❖ Do you believe that your mind is only yours; no one else can control it or direct it?
- ❖ Are you able to control your emotions under any circumstances?

¹Cf. Robert Llewellyn: *The Joy of the Saints*, p.54, 241, 248.

²*Homilies on Job*, homily 1.

³Dr. W.W. Dyer: *Your Erroneous Zones*, Funk & Wagnalls, N.Y., 1976, p.5-6.

- ❖ What can direct your feelings, your senses and your behavior - your inner self or external circumstances?
- ❖ Do you live freely with truth, or does the sense of inequity and eagerness for justice seize your emotions?
- ❖ Does your conscience impart in you a sense of dread for whatever is wrong or right?
- ❖ Does a sense of desperation and frustration lead you to destruction, or do you always rejoice with feelings of success?
- ❖ Do you suffer from fear of the future, or does hope fill your soul?
- ❖ Do you suffer from a sense of inferiority no matter how much success you achieve? Do you hate your life?
- ❖ Do you have troubled feelings of isolation even if you are surrounded by many?
- ❖ Have you freed yourself from the worship of people, so that you do not rely on someone else and are not enslaved to his opinion?
- ❖ Do you always feel growth and renewal, or does boredom destroy you, locked in routine?
- ❖ Do you tend to postpone work?
- ❖ Are you able to love and be loved by others?
- ❖ Do you like to take and possess, or do you like to give?
- ❖ Are you always cheerful, bringing delight to other people's lives?

These questions by the psychologists are intended to pull the mind and heart of man to his depths. But our Christ bestowed us with blissful life when He said, "**The kingdom of God is within you.**" He offered positives to tackle all the negatives of the depths. Therefore, the soul will be satisfied, will rejoice and become truly the icon of Christ, Who became poor for us to make us rich through His poverty. He descended to our land to take part in our pain and to let the springs of the true happiness well up inside us. He came, so that we will have eternal life and we may have life more abundantly.

Our Christ is the source of all happiness. Through His Holy Spirit, He guides us to walk in the internal royal road. Thus, **we don't look for happiness outside of us**, but find it in our depths. This happiness is even able to affect others. He connects us to Him, and hides us in the body of Christ like live members in Him; accordingly, we will be able to rise above

every tribulation.

He did not promise to take away temptations and daily problems from us because this would deprive us of spiritual and mental growing, and at times bodily growth as well.

He promised to let us keep Him, who said, "Be of good cheer for I have overcome the world." Through Him, we take pleasure in the spirit of joyful hope in the midst of pain instead of despair, the spirit of power instead of fear, the spirit of love instead of anger and hatred and the spirit of inner peace instead of anxiety and confusion. This is our knowledge in Jesus Christ and our happiness that can challenge all problems and tribulations.

THE PLEASURE OF BEING WITH GOD SATISFIES THE SOUL

❖ When the soul is in love with God, she does not need anything else; when she walks with God, He is her source of food and drink...When Moses spent hours looking at God, he was illuminated by Him. Moses kept drinking from Him until his face shone like daylight.

The soul eats from God and grows satisfied; even the body itself lives without worries (Matthew 6:26-34). Moses lived for forty years without food and drink, yet never was hungry¹.

❖ Eating bread makes the body heavy and lazy, but the Word of Life gives wings for the soul to fly².

❖ When bread is eaten it adds weight to the one who eats it, but knowledge prepares the soul with wings to fly³.

St. Jacob of Serugh

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MAN IS A WORKER LIKE HIS CREATOR¹

DIVINE LOVE AND WORK

Because of God's love, He created Adam in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep (Genesis 2:15). God Himself is always working; He wants His image to taste the sweetness of work. Sin is the reason behind feeling ennuui from work and not enjoying its sweetness.

It is amazing, it was said: "God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...' male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:26-27).

He is God who is **working!** You may wonder about this aspect of God as a Worker, which man rarely focuses his sight on. I daresay it befits the image to be like the Original; stick to Him and ask for His grace to carry the true image, of which one of its qualities is **work**.

HIS PLEASURE PERTAINS TO WORK

After the great Artist brought into this world, which in its own right is significant in its beauty, and after He created the man as a king in power in his palace (Garden of Eden), "**then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good**" (Genesis 1:31). God was delighted with what He did, not because He felt any need for it, but because He pours happiness and joy on His beloved man.

Thus, He created us and brought us to the Garden of Eden; we did not need to work to eat, drink, and be delighted. But He wanted us to be like Him; thus, we tend and keep the garden and each one of us offers to his fellow man the work of his hands so everyone may rejoice with the work of shared love.

It seems to me if our first parents did not err we would be working without growing weary of it, and we would find our pleasure in sharing with love any work with people around us.

❖ In the beginning God gave us life free from worries and exempted from toil. But we did not make use of the gift in a good way; we corrupted our comfort and we lost paradise. Therefore, He made our lives difficult...

Sloth damages us and leads us to many troubles¹.

- ❖ God did not combine work with toil. If man had experienced toil from the beginning, he would not have been afflicted with hard work as a punishment. Man (in Eden) didn't work until he felt tired; he was like the angels².

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ We remember that we should be thankful to the Lord our God and our Creator.

We do not deny any fruit of His work; we use it in moderation and not to the extreme. Therefore, we do not fail to frequently go to markets, fields, crowds, stores, factories, hotels, in every work we have. We have all other relationships to express our life with You in this world.

With You we sail the seas, we join military service, we tend the land, we trade in commerce, and we sell in public the products made from our trade and factories³.

Tertullian

COLLECTIVE WORK

What a remarkable phrase said by **St. Cyril of Alexandria** about the work of God: "Every gift is from the Father by Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit."

Also, **St. Augustine** often spoke of the work of God regarding creation, salvation and Divine gifts. It is shared work for the Holy Trinity. Each hypostasis (Person) of the Trinity has His own part without being separated from the Other hypostases.

Thus, to examine Divine love, even in practicing work, it befits us to follow the example of God; to discover a chance for shared life among us in harmony, not living with bitter jealousy or cruel competition, but with a loving heart with others.

DIVINE COMFORT

In the USA some people find it very hard to work on Monday after the weekend, as if taking a rest is a call to feel the burden of work.

But of God it was said, "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day... then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it" (Genesis 2:2-3). God's rest on the seventh day is not laziness, for He is constantly working. "My Father has been working

¹*Homilies on John, 36:3.*

²*Homilies on John, 36:3.*

³*Tertullian: Apology 42: 1-3.*

until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17). He ended His work of creation but did not ignore it; He continued to protect it with His Divine care, giving attention to the salvation of the tarnished nature of man.

When Christ ended His work of new creation through His crucifixion and resurrection He ascended to heaven to rest, so what is the meaning of His rest, if not for Him to ascend to prepare a place for us? This is His true promise (John 14:2) which means He works for our eternal glory.

Our comfort is not escaping from work. We attain the comfort of the body and the mind not while we enjoy the holidays, but when we work even in our sleep and our comfort through love. We work with wisdom and understanding in all aspects of our lives - spiritually, mentally, educationally, socially, bodily, and psychologically. Man becomes creative in what he was given: to complete the work of his brethren in other disciplines of life.

A JOURNEY OF WORK IN THE COMPANY OF GOD

Some believe that work might take man away from thinking about God. God is delighted to be in the company of those who work and not with those who are lazy. **St. Basil the Great** asserts that there is no excuse for idle ones who are unemployed while yet capable of working. These individuals need to be like fish which sail the breadth and the depth of the seas searching for food¹.

- ❖ Each one should pay attention to his career, care for it attentively and fulfill his work faultlessly. His work should be done zealously, with energy, care, and vigilance, as if he is doing it at the sight of God².
- ❖ Avoiding the needs of the body does not absolutely negate the interest for our work. This is what matters: we do not labor for food which is perishable but for food which endures to nourish everlasting life (John 6:27). We work not only for our physical needs but also to give to those who have need (Ephesians 4:28). And on Judgment Day the Lord will say to us, "For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in" (Matthew 25:35)... He will punish those who did not work or toil to support those in need (Acts 20:35) and will banish them to everlasting punishment³.

St. Basil the Great

- ❖ All should live with their daily work from their hands. It befits us to refer to the commandment of love that Paul the Apostle cited, which prevented

¹ *Hexamaeron 7:5.*

² *Reg. Brev. Question 41.*

³ *Reg. Brev. Question 207.*

the rich from helping slothful ones. "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). These are the words of blessed Anthony that he said to this man, and he was an example for us to learn from him¹.

Father Abraham

- ❖ Be busy with what is for the Lord or with your work but don't stay without work².

DidascaliaApostolorum

¹*Cassian: Conferences, 24:12..*

²*Didascaliaapostolorum, P. 129 (Connolly).*

14

MAN IS A CREATURE THAT IS PERPETUALLY GROWING

DIVINE LOVE AND CONTINUED GROWTH IN GRACE, WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE

As the Word became flesh, it was said about Him, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature" (Luke 2:52), for by Him and in Him it befits us to grow in goodness and wisdom. When **St. Jerome** talked to Laeta with regard to raising her daughter Paula, he drew her attention to Christ when He was a Lad teaching in the temple, saying: [Let her grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men!" (cf. Luke 2:52) I wish for her to go with her parents to the temple of her true Father, and not leave the temple with them again. I wish that if people would look for her between the roads of the world and among crowds and relatives, they won't find her but rather discover her in the temples of the Holy Bible, asking the prophets and the apostles about the concepts of the spiritual marriage for which she is dedicated¹.]

❖ He who seeks perfection heads his heavenly ascent and directs his sight to the rising path; he cannot stop at a certain level of height, believing that his work is complete and that he need not go further. Rather, he hurries daily to rise to the top until death opens the door for him to reach the portal of the saints.

I say to you, o you who is in love with virtue, it is good for you to think seriously about moving forward.

It is worthy of you to consider that there are other lives greater than yours.

If you thought that by virtue you have climbed up as far as you can then your search is useless; you will begin to fall because of this excuse that lessens your soul and you will lose the beauty of humility².

❖ Forget what is behind and reach forward to those things which lie ahead (Philippians 3:13). The good deeds that you did should not be forgotten lest it keep you from conducting any other good work that you may do in the future. But when the sun rises on you every day, mark it as a start of

¹Ep. 107:7.

²Epistle 5.

the good deeds that you will do. Begin thus each day and never stop. Extend your mind to conduct good works without ceasing because you long to enter the eternal kingdom which has no end¹.

- ❖ I cry out with all my strength: if you find a place far from you, run to it, and if you find a place inside you, hide in it. Don't stop escaping and don't take rest from running until you reach your goal, Christ, who reached you (Philippians 3:13)².

St. Jacob of Serugh

- ❖ I beseech You to lead my mind with the laws of faith, and I will ask for You with all of my heart and all of my strength that You gave me.
I am longing to understand what I believe.
O Lord my God, my only hope, please hearken to me.
Do not allow my worries to weaken my will in looking for You and eternally asking for Your countenance.
You have created me to find You! Please give me power to look for You.
My strength and my weakness are in Your hands.
Please keep my strength and help my weakness.
Where You open the door, allow me to enter; where it is closed, please open it for my passage.
Please grant me to grow in remembrance of You, in recognition of You and in my love to You until You reach me with perfection³.

- ❖ My brethren, let us praise now, to be happy, not with comfort, but with our toil. It is like travelers who sing and give praises on their journey.
If you reach any success, it means you are walking forward.
Let your progress be in goodness, in the right faith, and in the life of righteousness... to sing and complete your journey.

St. Augustine

- ❖ Examine your actions every day, compare them with the events of the previous day, and pursue progress.
Proceed toward virtue to gain company with the angels.
Spend your time in a cloister, not for days or months but for several years, praising your Lord with songs day and night, following the example of the Cherubim.
If you start travelling in the path of righteousness using this method and end in the same way, you would be tested by this journey, which

¹Epistle 1.

²Epistle 25.

³On the Holy Trinity, 28:51.

would last for a short time. Afterward, with the grace of God, you will enter paradise with the lamp of your soul enlightened with glory, rejoicing with Christ forever and ever. Amen¹.

St. Basil the Great

- ❖ The mind that deserts He Who always exists, will not maintain his current condition. Therefore, while he struggles to reach a better stature, he needs to pledge to face his exertion against the current. If he is slow in his endeavor to ascend without effort, he will be carried backward to a worse condition.

Ascension needs striving, but there is no pursuit in descent. Therefore, the Lord admonishes us to enter through the narrow gate, saying: "Strive to enter through the narrow gate" (Luke 13:24).

If there is no endeavor from a fiery heart, the waters of the world cannot be overcome, and the soul will descend to lower places.

Pope Gregory (the Great)

- ❖ Let us hurry to traverse the virtues of patience and endurance of persecution... but once we reach the end of this path we will have found our target. It befits us to be vigilant and cautious so as not to stumble because of excessive negligence in our life: "But for me, my feet were about to slip." It is as if the prophet (David) is saying, "When we look for staying virtuous we should eagerly struggle not less than we were in our endeavor to virtue²."

- ❖ God asked the people of Israel to go to "Pi Hahiroth," (Exodus 14:2) which means the "serpentine road." Perhaps you are accustomed to thinking that the road which the Lord chooses must be smooth, easy and undoubtedly free from any difficulties and is effortless to travel. But it ascends and moreover it is a twisted path.

It is not a "slope" through which man strives toward virtue but an elevated road and the "believer" climbs it with great difficulty. Let us listen to the Lord in the Gospel saying, "Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life" (Matthew 7:14).

Origen

- ❖ Growing takes place gradually from childhood until maturity and perfection in Christ. Because faith increases and grows by the act of the Divine Holy Spirit, consequently, the fortresses of evil thoughts are destroyed gradually until completely demolished³.

¹On Renunciation of the World, (*Frs. of the Church, volume 9, p. 31*).

²In Josh 5:1.

³Sermon 50:4.

St.Macarius the Great

15

MAN AND THE GIFT OF THE BODY WITH ITS SENSES AND EMOTIONS

God created the body from dust and did not intend for the soul to crumble into dust, but to lead the body in reverence of God and His love, so both endeavor together and be crowned together.

Some of the Fathers believe that the triumph of man is the source of the wonderment of the heavenly hosts, who see man made of dust become a partner with them in heavenly life.

The fall of man into sin led to the corruption of his nature and distorted his understanding.

It became difficult, often impossible, for man to believe, even great and famous philosophers, that man will regain life after death and will share a personal and mutual relationship of love with God.

This is what led some of the philosophers to call for carnal pleasure as a source of happiness, so man enjoys every carnal pleasure in this world until his life ends without return. Through this concept the body with its pleasures and lusts has become the center of life for many.

This issue blocked man from the potential of knowing the truth of his inner depths.

The Bible and the Fathers of the Church called those men carnal people. Therefore, **Paul, the Apostle, desired to be delivered from the body of this death (Romans 7:24), not by destroying it, but by sanctifying it with the Holy Spirit of God, supporting and complying with the soul in Jesus Christ.**

- ❖ If you want to know what type of man God created in the beginning then go to paradise and examine the man that was created in the beginning. This body was not corrupted or dead. But it was like a statue of gold that was immediately taken from the hearth, emitting splendor, free of any depravity. Fatigue and sweat never caused him trouble. Worries never destroyed him; nothing could sadden him¹.
- ❖ If you want to know the truth about the body and its value take a closer look at the creation of the members of the body and at their shapes; see how accurately they work in harmony with mutual understanding and

¹*Homilies on Statues, 11.*

constancy. You can be certain that the performance of these members and the harmony between them is something more ideal and more hopeful than a city whose citizens respect its ordinances and are all wise people¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ The image of the likeness of God is within your soul and within your upright body so your body won't bend like the animals that bow before you.

He stretched you and made you upright and He directed your sight upward so you can see how beautiful your place is and solemnly contemplate it.

Turn your face toward your beginning, because the place where you now dwell is not for you.

The appearance of your body cries out that you are not from the earth.

You are a stranger and a settler in this place, so you need not think of what is not yours.

Do not bind yourself to the heaviness of the world, engulfing yourself in the duties of the image of the great Divine. You are the image of God so ask for what is above; do not demean yourself and ask for what is from the earth, like animals.

It is an insult to the image of the King to replace it with an image of a slave, thereby underestimating its value. This is an expression of contempt to this image.

O man, why don't you consider the value of yourself? (Psalm 48:11) Your head does not face down like the animals. Why do your actions make you look like animals? These animals think of nothing but food. Do not act like the animals that bend and bow before you lest you become like an animal and be in its image².

St. Jacob of Serugh

- ❖ The Lord took a body that does not shame Him; He is the Creator of all bodies. But who told us so? The Lord says to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you" (Jeremiah 1:5). If He was not ashamed of creating the body of man, would He be ashamed of the body where He hid His Divine? He creates children in the womb³.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

- ❖ It is impossible for the Savior to be hostile to human race, because

¹ PG 50:417-432.

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³ Catechetical Lectures, 12:26.

according to His abundant love He did not disdain the weakness of the human body, but instead wore it and came to the world for the general salvation of mankind¹.

- ❖ The system of a harmonic body helps comprehension of the goodness of nature... Whoever dedicates himself to a righteous life while living in this body will be prepared for immortality².
- ❖ Gnostics (i.e., the leaders of true spiritual knowledge) are above pleasure; they are not given to whims for they know what they are doing. Gnostics are greater than the world³.
- ❖ We agree that the soul of man is more important than the body. But the soul is not naturally righteous; conversely, the body is not naturally evil. There is middle ground between the two and so we prefer some and reject others. Thus, the system of man, who holds a significant place among amazing entities, inherently consists of different elements that do not oppose the body and the soul⁴.

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ What kind of mystery is within me? How do I understand that harmony which is for the body and the soul?

St. John Climacus

- ❖ The soul plays *con legato* on the body like a stringed musical instrument; the soul renders on the strings... by which it offers music that harmonizes with the path of the virtuous life...

The soul is the one that utilizes and the body is the one that is to be used. The soul is the one that commands and the body is under our leadership.

If there is someone who loves our souls then he loves us, but if he loves the beauty of the body then he does not love the person himself. He loves the beauty of the body which will soon vanish and disappear⁵.

St. Ambrose

- ❖ By no means should we despise the body, but we should reject its works. We do not revile the body which will reign in heaven with Christ. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. This does not literally mean

¹*Strom.* 7:2:8.

²*Stromata* 4:4.

³*Stromata*, 2: 22.

⁴*Strom.* 4:26: 164:3-5.

⁵*Death as a Good.*

flesh and blood as such; it means the actions of the body¹.

St. Jerome

- ❖ In the perspective of Plato, the body is a prison; in Paul's perspective the body is the temple of God because it is in Christ².

Tertullian

THE HUMAN SOUL IS NOT A SLAVE BUT THE MASTER FOR THE BODY

- ❖ If the body takes control over the soul and dominates it, it will enter into eternal darkness and death.

Lactantius

- ❖ The nature of the soul is great and beautiful in the way it was created...when it is considered the master of the body and when it does not receive orders.

The soul is also transcendent when it leads the body with sanctity without being disobeyed by the body.

When the soul is cleaned from all the whims of the body it will be able to look spiritually, and see the hidden mysteries. If an angel passes before the soul it will not be hidden from it. The soul will see the angels and the devils face to face³.

St. Jacob of Serugh

- ❖ In our society manufacturers build tools to fit their intended purpose. Thus, the Greatest Artist created our nature in a form that fits the significant features designed for the soul.

By shaping the body it is fit for kingship. Immediately the soul will show its lofty, regal features so that the body will move from its lowliness and be released from worldly possessions.

It will rule itself and move by its own will; no one has this feature except the King⁴.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

- ❖ Pay attention to the body, for it is a tool for the soul; it is the same as when we care for domestic animals so they may serve us. If the tool is not useful it hinders the artist, regardless of his skills and ability. It befits man to have appropriate judgment in everything so he does not stumble.

¹On Psalm 143, hom. 34.

²On the Soul 54:5.

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⁴De Opificio Hominis, 4:1.

St. Barsanuphius

- ❖ When thoughts lean toward God, they make the body a servant for Him and give it only what it needs to stay alive. But when they lean toward the body they become a slave for its lusts¹.
- ❖ Do not give more attention to the body. Let it work for what is appropriate then turn all your concerns to what is inside you. "For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things"(1 Timothy 4:8).

When the body weighs more than the soul on the scales, it harms the soul, and takes it down with its weight; it pushes it in the wrong direction, and corrupts its desires and motivations. As it is written, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh" (Galatians 5:17). But if you discipline the body by fasting you need to put it to death, even if you do it unwillingly. Then the body becomes obedient to who controls it... As St. Paul the Apostle said, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

St. Isaac says, "It is better to die while endeavoring rather than live in laziness. Those who die while trying to keep the commandments are considered martyrs, and they are like those who die for the faith of Christ²."

Father Maximus the Confessor

- ❖ Then there will be a kind of harmony between the body and the spirit; the spirit gives life to the body that serves without need of any food from it. There is no longer conflict inside us.
Also, since there are no enemies from outside that plague us we then no longer have enemies from within³.

St. Augustine

THE GIFT OF SENSES

St. Jacob of Serugh spoke many times about the blessing of the bodily senses, emotions, and abilities. The mouth and the tongue were not created just to taste food or to prattle with worthless and jocular talk but to participate with the heavenly in their praising of God. Eyes were created to see what supports inner vision, to enjoy seeing heavenly and spiritual things.

- ❖ The Lord made eyes to be the door of light to the whole body; with them,

¹ *Four Centuries on Love.*

² *Fr. Maximus the Confessor: Four Centuries on Love.*

³ *Enchiridion 23:9.*

the body can see all the beauty of the creation....

The Creator placed eyes on the top of the crown, so they may see the surrounding creatures from above¹.

❖ When the Creator created the mouth He bestowed it with sounds and words so it moves to praise.

Thus, whoever feels the presence of the Creator must praise the Lord who created him.

The mouth of man is not to be used for worthless gossip and improper words.

When the Creator created the mouth, He made it perfect so it may praise Him and not utter loathsome speech².

St. Jacob of Serugh

CONCERNING DIVINE LOVE AND THE CREATION OF MAN

WHY WASN'T THE SOUL CREATED BEFORE THE BODY?

St. John Chrysostom made a remarkable comment on the creation of man, saying God did not create the human soul first, lest she look at the creation of the body from dust, and become tainted with a feeling of inferiority or else despises the body and underestimates it.

❖ When God created Adam, He created the soul and the body together. If Adam didn't see his body created from dust, it means that God did not create the soul before the body so the soul would not see the creation of the body. Therefore, the soul does not know the folly and weakness of the body¹.

St. John Chrysostom

THE EQUALITY BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN

Our Lord Jesus Christ dealt with women in a way that challenged His era. The disciples were surprised when they saw Christ talking in public with the Samaritan woman (John 4:27). Jesus Christ was not annoyed to have his cloak touched by the woman seeking a cure for her bleeding for her to be healed; according to the Law, she was considered defiled (Matthew 9:20-22). He allowed the adulterous woman to approach Him in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:37). Also, He forgave the adulterous woman who the Pharisees wanted to stone (John 8:11). He did not hesitate to abandon the literalism of the Law of Moses to confirm the equality between woman and man in their rights and duties with respect to the bond of marriage (Mark 10:2-11, Matthew 19:3-9).

He was not accompanied by only the twelve disciples, but also with a group of women (Luke 8:2-3). Contrary to prevailing wisdom of Judaism at that time, He provided a woman the privilege to become the first witness for His Resurrection and also to be a witness to His disciples (Mark 28:7-10, Luke 24:9-10, John 11:18-20).

Also, He raised the status of the woman by choosing a woman to become a mother for Him, He was incarnate in her womb, she sticks with Him in His life, and she surpassed all humans and won superiority over the

heavenly hosts.

He often honored women in His talks and parables; He likened the kingdom of God with ten wise virgins. He also likened the kingdom of God with a woman who took yeast and put it in three bushels of flour and He talked about the woman who was happy to find the lost coin. He also talked about the unjust judge and the widow and about the woman who married the seven brothers who died one after the other. He also pointed out the Queen of the South, who by her wisdom came to listen to the wisdom of Solomon. Concerning two women who were grinding flour at the mill, He predicted what would occur when the great day of the Lord took place. It is as if Christ developed what is now called Women's Theology, which many theologians and scholars overlooked.

- ❖ Why did the prophet choose only man for the beatitudes? Does he want to keep woman away from this happiness? No, never - virtue is the same for both man and woman, because their creation was honored equally. Listen to the Book of Genesis: "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27). As long as their nature is one and their actions are the same, their rewards should be also the same¹.

St. Basil the Great

- ❖ We have seen by our eyes women and girls who endured the suffering of martyrdom at a young age, when the distress of life was added as a new element to their weak gender².

Origen

- ❖ Many women have become strong with the support of Divine grace and accomplished extraordinary works.

When blessed Judith surmised that her city was under siege, she asked the elders to allow her to go to the foreigners' camp.

She was vulnerable to danger because of her love for her country, but her people were under siege, so the Lord delivered the head of Holofernes to the hands of a woman (Judith 8).

Also, Esther, who was full of faith, put herself at no less peril to save the twelve tribes from destruction. She cried out to God, humiliating herself with fasting before the eternal God who sees us all. Due to her humble spirit, God saved her people, for whom she exposed herself to the risk for the sake of their salvation (Esther 7).³

¹*Hom. In Ps1, 6; PG 29:215 d.*

²*In Iudic. Hom 9: 1.*

³*1 Clement of Rome, 55:3-6.*

St. Clement of Rome

- ❖ Mary Magdalene, who earlier was a servant of death, is now freed...by the service of the sound of the saintly angels and by being the first preacher to carry the news about the joyous Resurrection¹.
- ❖ Each individual has the same nature and each can practice the same virtue. There is no human nature for woman that is different from man. Both have the same nature and the same virtue. If we say that sanity, justice and other similar virtues are considered masculine, then we must conclude that man should be a good person and woman should be wasteful and unjust. But this is shameful thinking. Woman is the same as man; she should commit to be mentally healthy, just, and virtuous in all walks of life, whether she is free or a slave, for there is one identical virtue for one identical nature².

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ When Paul spoke of the glory of man he balanced the sexes so that man would not be haughty and woman would not feel pressured. In the Lord woman is not separated from man, and man is not separated from woman. Each of them is a reason for the other, or rather, none is from the other, for God is the reason for all³.
- ❖ Women stood by the cross representing the weak gender, appearing to have more power. Thus, everything was changed completely⁴.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ There is work that is suitable for man and work suitable for woman... It is not an easy thing for man to equate himself with woman⁵.

St. Ambrose

WHY THERE ARE POOR AND RICH IN THE WORLD?

St. John Chrysostom distinguished between two groups of assets. General assets are those God offered to all humans without private ownership, such as air, sun, and water, etc. These are basic and necessary for life and so no one can claim ownership of them. But that which is not necessary God allowed to be privately owned, such as gold, silver and precious stones, etc. So the rich practice their love to the poor, and the poor offer their gratitude to the rich.

¹ *Comm. on Luke, ch. 24.*

² *Stromata 4: 8.*

³ *In 1 Cor., hom., 26:5.*

⁴ *Hom. 85. PG. 59: 506.*

⁵ *Letters to Laymen, 78.*

- ❖ Let us not underestimate our God Who sees poor people in need; thus, He supports our needs from His richness. We have the needy, but **we ourselves are in need**. Let us give so we may take. In fact, what do we give? What do we like to take in return for this little, temporal and earthly amount? "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).¹

St. Augustine

- ❖ The creature in need should be equal to those more fortunate, and whoever lacks something should fill his dearth from those who have plenty. This is the law that is offered by the Merciful to man regarding the needy... Mercy is the tendency of love to those who are in distress. While the source of cruelty and violence is hatred, thus, mercy comes from love - without love, there is no mercy... The man who holds this belief is blessed because he reaches the top of virtue².
- ❖ Don't show contempt by rejecting them, and don't consider that they have no value. Once you contemplate the person of Christ then you will realize their dignity. They took it upon themselves to carry the person of our Savior. Because this compassionate people lent themselves to Him, so through them He lets cruel people and those who hate the poor feel shame. It compares to those people who carry the picture of their emperor against those who want to use violence against them so they will feel shame when they see the picture of the leader. The poor are treasures of the blessings that we are expecting, and they are guards to the doors of the kingdom. They open it to the merciful, and close it to the cruel and those who have no mercy. The poor are the strongest defendants and the best defenders. They do not accuse or defend with words but the Lord looks at what happens to them. Every time they cry out their voice reaches the One who examines hearts; the sound is stronger than the shout of the herald³.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

- ❖ Regarding richness and poverty - if possible you will be challenged to take from one and give to the other.
 You also say, why do I honor this one with his gold, while another is in need of his daily bread?
 Why is this one so rich that he forgets God, while his companion is in such need that he complains against the Creator?

¹*Sermons, 206:2 PL 38:1041*

²*On the Beatitudes, homily 5. PG 44:1252.*

³*Love for the Poor, PG 44:453.*

Why does someone care about counting his gold yet fail to do so while another dies of hunger because of his need?

O the imperfect one who is from Him, God's plan is hidden. Do not offend the Planner who is full of goodness.

It is considerate of Him that He created richness and poverty; in both cases He is able to revive he who is patient.

The world is a place that contains the rich and the poor; they are to help one another.

The rich are there to have compassion over the poor, to care for them, and to pay for all their needs.

The poor are there to comply and not to complain; to work and satisfy the rich.

If the poor have not bent their necks then they would not submit to serve the rich.

The poor would have been angry if they had found even a little power and would not have bowed their heads as the poor do; the work among the rich would have been disrupted, his concerns would have been omitted and his needs would not have been satisfied.

Thus, the wisdom of God managed the existence of the poor in order to facilitate the mission of conducting the work of the rich; the needs of the poor would let them bow before the rich, to be committed to them and complete their work.

Thus, it is essential for the poor to be under the control of the rich and it is more necessary for the rich to treat them with mercy.

The poor should be patient and be able to endure illness and poverty without complaint.

It is kindly of the rich to have compassion over the poor, and pay for all their needs. He should not be arrogant or haughty and should not think that the poor does not belong to his race. He should not boast or brag when dealing with the poor because it is known that the origin of both is the same and both are equal. Both of them are placed in the body like the right and left hand, by He who made the body and the world as it seems good to Him.

Look at the body which has a less honorable member; this member is given more honor than the other members (1 Corinthians 12:23). O rich one, the poor is one of your members and the Lord has made you to respect him and care for him. He is from the same dust and clay as you; he is the son of your race, he is from your body, so do not look at him as a stranger (Isaiah 58:7).

Who would find his body naked and not cover it, or find it uncovered and would not care and clothe it?

The poor is weak yet he is part of the body like the right hand so get close to him and support him as if he is the right hand.

Do not think that God loves you and gave you abundance, and at the same time He hated the other and made him poor. He gave you richness yet did not add a member to your body; what is outside you is not yours¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh
