

On The Thoughts

Evagrius Ponticus

Patristic · Nicene & Post-Nicene · Treatise

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INTRODUCTION

Written in the late fourth century by a monk of the Egyptian desert who had fled ecclesiastical prominence in Constantinople for the solitude of Kellia, this treatise maps the interior warfare of the ascetic with the precision of a tactician. Evagrius traces how the eight principal thoughts, gluttony, avarice, vainglory, fornication, anger, sorrow, acedia, and pride, advance in formation against the soul, a schema that John Cassian would carry westward and Gregory the Great would refashion into the seven deadly sins. The analysis is unsparingly technical: thoughts are dissected by their objects, their sequence, and the traces they leave in the mind's imagination of God. Read it slowly, as a manual of self-observation rather than a discourse to be followed at speed.

Of the demons which are opposed to the practical life, the first during the war to engage in battle are those which are entrusted with the appetites of gluttony, those which suggest avarice to us and those which call us out to the glory of men. All the others march behind these, receiving, in their turn, those who have been wounded by the first. For it is not possible to fall into the hands of a spirit of fornication not having been thrown down by the spirit of gluttony. And it is not possible to disturb the temper if it is not battling for food, money or glory. It is not possible to elude the demon of sorrow having been deprived of all these things or not having been able to obtain them. Neither will one avoid pride, the first-born of the Devil, not having banished the root of all the vices, avarice [cf. 1 Tim. 6, 10], if, indeed, also 'Poverty humbles the man,' according to the wise Solomon [Prov. 10, 4]. And, to sum up, it is not possible for a man to fall into the hands of a demon, not having first been wounded by those in the front rank.

That is why also, at that time, the Devil brought forth to the Saviour these three thoughts, first exhorting that the stones become bread; then promising the whole world if he would fall down and worship; and, third, saying that if he would hear, he would be glorified, having suffered nothing from such a great fall. To which things our Lord showed himself superior, and ordered the Devil to retire to the rear, teaching us also by means of these things that it is not possible to repel the Devil not having held in contempt these three thoughts. [Cf. Luke 4, 1–13.]

All demonic thoughts (logismoi) introduce into the soul mental representations (noemata) of sensible objects, being imprinted in which things the mind carries around in itself the forms of those objects.

Further, from the object, the mind knows the demon that has approached, as: should face of the him who has injured or dishonoured me occur in my intellect, then the thought of rancour will be convicted of having approached. If, again, a remembrance of money or glory should occur, then manifestly from the object will the thought be recognized which is oppressing us. And in the same way for the other thoughts: from the object you will find the thought which is present and making the suggestion. I do not say that all memories of such objects occur on account of the demons—since by nature the mind itself, also, set in motion by the man, recalls the imaginations of objects which have come to be—but as many memories as draw with them, contrary to nature, temper or the desiring part. For because of the disturbance of these powers, the mind, in the intellect, commits adultery or gives battle, being unable to receive the imagination of God who has legislated for it, if, indeed, that splendour discloses itself to the ruling part [of the soul] in the time of prayer in accordance with the deprivation of all mental representations in respect of objects.

A man could not avoid impassioned memories not having taken a care to the desiring part and temper, consuming the first in fasts, vigils and sleepings on the ground and taming completely the second with long-sufferings, avoidances of rancour and acts of mercy, for out of these two passions almost all demonic thoughts stand in battle array, those which cast the mind into ‘ruin and destruction’ [1 Tim. 6, 9]. It is impossible for someone to prevail over these passions if he does not completely despise food and money and glory—and even his own body, on account of those [demons] that make an attempt to cudgel it. There is every need, therefore, to imitate those who are in danger at sea and who jettison the tackle on account of the violence of the winds and of the waves rising up in insurrection. But in this matter care must be taken precisely lest we jettison the tackle, doing it so as to be seen by men, since then we are far from our reward and another shipwreck worse than the first will receive us, that of the demon of vainglory blowing a contrary wind. That is why our Lord, in the Gospels, training the pilot-mind, says: ‘Take care not to do your acts of mercy before men so as to be seen by them; if not, you do not have a reward from your Father who is in the Heavens.’ [Matt. 6, 1.] And, again, he says: ‘When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the public squares so that they appear to men. Amen, I say to you, they are far from their reward.’ [Matt. 6, 5.] And, again, he says: ‘When you fast, do not become gloomy like the hypocrites for they disfigure their faces so that they appear to men to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they are far from their reward.’ [Matt. 6, 15.] But one must attend here to the Doctor of Souls, how he cures the temper by means of acts of mercy, cleanses the mind by means of prayer and, again, completely withers the desiring part by means of fasting—from which things the new man is formed who is renewed ‘according to the image of him who created him’ [Col. 3, 10], in whom ‘there is’, because of the holy dispassion, ‘neither male nor female, neither’, because of the one faith and charity, ‘Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, slave or freeman, but all things and in all, Christ.’ [Col. 3, 11.]

One must investigate how in the imaginations during sleep the demons imprint and give a form to our ruling part, for such a thing seems to occur to the mind when it sees by means of the eyes, or hears by means of the ears, or by means of some sense or other—or from the memory, which imprints the ruling

part not by means of the body, except that whatever things it had by means of the body, these things it sets in motion.

The demons, in any event, seem to me to imprint the ruling part when they set in motion the memory. For the [sense] organ is held inactive by the sleep. How, again, the demons set the memory in motion is to be investigated. Or perhaps it is by means of the passions? And this is apparent from the fact that the pure and dispassionate no longer suffer this sort of thing.

There is also a certain movement of memory either simple, occurring through our own agency, or else occurring through the agency of the holy powers, according to which we meet with saints in our sleep and speak with them and dine with them. (However, it is to be noted that whatever images the soul receives into itself with the body, these images the memory sets in motion without the body. And this is clear from the fact that we suffer this often and in sleep, while the body is at rest.) For as it is possible to remember water with thirst and without thirst, thus it is possible to remember gold with avarice and without avarice, and so on in the same way for the other things. That the mind should find such and such varieties of imaginations is a token by which the evil arts of those [demons] can be recognized. At the same time, this also must be known, that the demons have made use of external objects for the sake of imagination, as the sound of the waves for those who are sailing.

When our temper is set in motion contrary to nature, it contributes exceedingly to the goal of the demons and it becomes most useful to all of their practice of the evil arts. Whence, night and day, no one of the demons ceases to disturb the temper, but when they see the temper bound by meekness, then they loose it immediately on the basis of just pretexts so that, having become more keen, it also be of use to their savage thoughts. For that reason, it is necessary not to inflame the temper on the occasion of either just or unjust things, nor to give an evil sword to those who are making the suggestion—which very thing I know many to have done many times and to have been set on fire, more than there was need, on the basis of trivial pretexts.

Tell me, then, on account of what do you fall quickly into a battle if, indeed, you despised food and money and glory? Vowing to have nothing, why, then, do you feed the dog? If, then, that one barks and attacks people, it is clear beforehand that, within, it has acquired some things and that it wishes to guard these things.

But I am persuaded that such a person is far from pure prayer, knowing well that the temper is the destroyer of such prayer. In addition to these things, I wonder that such a person has also forgotten the saints. For David cries out: 'Cease from anger and abandon temper.' [Ps. 36, 8.] The Ecclesiast orders: 'Separate temper from your heart and put off evil from your flesh.' [Eccl. 11, 10.] And the Apostle commands: 'Let hands be raised up in every place [in prayer] without anger and quarrels.' [1 Tim. 2, 8.] Why do we not learn from the secret and old custom of men to expel the dogs from their houses in the time of prayer, and this hinting that temper must not be present in those who are praying? And again: 'Their wine is the anger of dragons.' [Deut. 32, 33.] Nazirites, then, abstained from wine [cf. Num. 6, 3]. One of the wise men of the pagans judged that the gall and the loin were inedible by the gods, not knowing, I think, what he was saying. Of these things I myself think that the first is a symbol of anger and the second of irrational passion.

Concerning that we ought not to take care on account of clothing or food, I think it is superfluous to write since the Lord himself, in the Gospels, has forbidden it: 'Therefore do not take care in your soul what you shall eat or what you shall drink or with what you shall be clothed.' [Matt. 6, 25; 6, 31.] For this is without disguise a thing of the pagans and of the unbelievers, those who refuse the providence of the Master and who deny the Creator. Such a thing as this is completely alien to Christians, those who have believed once and for all that the two sparrows which have been sold for a penny [cf. Matt. 10, 29] are under the husbandry of the angels.

However, there is also this custom of the demons: after the unclean thoughts, also to cast in those of anxious care, so that Jesus turns aside, there being a crowd of mental representations in the place of the intellect [cf. John 5, 13], and thus the word does not bear fruit, being strangled by the thorns of anxious care [cf. Matt. 13, 22].

Therefore, having divested ourselves of the thoughts which arise from anxious care, let us cast our anxious care upon the Lord [cf. Ps. 54, 23; 1 Pet. 5, 7], being content with what is at hand [cf. Heb. 13, 5]; and, using a poor life and clothing, let us strip ourselves in broad daylight of the fathers of vainglory. If someone believes that he behaves in an unseemly fashion wearing a poor habit, let him look at the holy Paul 'in cold and nakedness' [2 Cor. 11, 27] expecting the 'crown of justice' [2 Tim. 4, 8]. But since the Apostle called this world a theatre and a stadium, let us see whether it is possible for one having clothed himself in thoughts of anxious care to run 'towards the prize of the higher calling of Christ' [Phil. 3, 14] or to wrestle 'with the principalities and the powers and the world rulers of this darkness' [Eph. 6, 12]. I myself do not know, even instructed by this sensible inquiry itself: for that athlete will manifestly be impeded by his frock and he will easily be dragged about, just as the mind will be by thoughts of anxious care, if, indeed, the word is true which says that the mind will adhere firmly to its own treasure. He says: 'Wherever your treasure is, there also will be your heart.' [Matt. 6, 21.]

Of the thoughts, some cut off and some are cut off. And the evil thoughts cut off the good thoughts, while, again, the evil thoughts are cut off by the good thoughts. Therefore the Holy Spirit attends to the thought which is placed first and judges us or accepts us on the basis of that one. What I am saying is of this sort: I have a certain thought of hospitality and I have this for the sake of the Lord, but this thought is cut off when the tempter attacks and suggests that I offer hospitality for the sake of glory. And, again, I have a thought of hospitality for the sake of being seen by men, but this is cut off when a better thought insinuates itself directing our virtue towards the Lord, rather, and obliging us not to do these things for the sake of men. If, therefore, through our works we further abide in the first thoughts, being tempted by the second thoughts, we will have the reward only of the first-placed thoughts, since being men and wrestling with demons we do not have the strength always to possess the correct thought uncorrupted nor the evil thought untempted, having acquired the seeds of the virtues. However, if one of the thoughts which cuts off remains for a long time, it is established in the place of the thought which is cut off, and, set in motion, further, according to that thought, the man acts.

Of the thoughts which are angelic, human or from the demons, we learned from much observation that the difference is this: First, that the angelic thoughts busy themselves with the natures of objects and trace their spiritual reasons (logoi), as: for the sake of what gold has come to be; why, having a sandy texture, it has been sown somewhere below in the parts of the earth and why it is found with much labour and pain; how, having been found, it is washed and surrendered to fire and thus is placed in the hands of the artisans who are making the lamp of the Tent and the incense burner and the censers and the bowls [cf. Exod. 25, 31; etc.], in which no longer does the Babylonian King drink [cf. Dan. 5, 1–3], on account of the grace of our Saviour. Cleopas, however, bears a heart burning from these very mysteries [cf. Luke 24, 32].

The demonic thought neither knows nor understands these things: it insolently suggests the sole acquisition of sensible gold and it foretells the luxury and glory which will be from it.

The human thought neither quests after the acquisition nor delves into what gold is a symbol of, but it simply bears into the intellect the mere form of gold, having been separated from the passion of avarice.

The very same word (logos) practised in a mysterious way will be spoken, according to this very rule, in reference to the other objects also.

There is a demon called the 'wanderer', appearing to the brothers especially about the time of dawn. This very demon leads the mind about from city to city and from town to town and from house to house, the mind making supposedly mere encounters and meeting certain acquaintances and speaking at greater length and corrupting its own familiar condition on account of those who meet [it] and bit by bit becoming far from the gnosis of God and from virtue and receiving forgetfulness (lethe) of the profession.

He who is living the life of solitude must keep an eye on this demon, whence it came and whither it ends. For it works that long circuit neither pointlessly nor by chance, but it does these things wishing to corrupt the spiritual condition of the hermit, so that being burnt out by these things and drunk from the many encounters, the mind immediately falls into the hands of the demon of fornication or that of anger or that of sorrow, which very demons treat with indignity the brightness of the hermit's spiritual condition.

But if, indeed, we have the goal to know clearly the wickedness of this demon let us not quickly speak anything to it or denounce what has happened—how it works the encounters in the intellect and in what way it draws the mind bit by bit towards death—because it will flee from us. It does not condescend to be seen to be doing these things and we will learn nothing further of those things we have been zealous to learn. But let us allow it to complete the drama one more day or even two, so that learning exactly its fraud and after that convicting it with a word, we cause it to flee.

But because it happens that, during the time of temptation, the mind, being clouded, does not know exactly what is happening, let this happen after the departure of the demon: Sitting, remember by yourself those things which have happened to you, whence you came and whither you went and in what place you were apprehended by the spirit of fornication or of anger or of sorrow and, again, how these things happened that happened. Learn these things well and commit them to memory so that you have evidence to convict it when it approaches, and inform against the place hidden by it, and that you will no longer follow it any more. If you wish it to be summoned to frenzy, convict it the moment it appears and show with a word the first place into which it entered and the second and the third. For it is very violent, not bearing the shame. Let a proof that you have spoken opportunely be the fact that the thought has fled from you: it is impossible for it to stand, openly convicted. A most heavy sleep succeeds to this very demon when it is defeated, and a deadness with a great coldness of the eyelashes and numberless yawns and shoulders weighed down and numb, all of which things the Holy Spirit will dissipate through intense prayer.

The hatred which is against the demons contributes for us greatly to salvation and is useful to the working of virtue. And we do not have the strength to nourish this hatred in ourselves even as some good offspring, since the spirits, which are lovers of pleasure, corrupt this hatred and call the soul out again to friendship and habitual intercourse. But the Doctor of Souls cures through abandonment this very friendship—or, rather, gangrene which is difficult to cure. He permits us to suffer something fearsome from them day and night, and the soul again runs back to the archetypal hatred, being instructed by the

Lord to say, according to David: 'I have hated them with a perfect hatred; they became enemies to me.' [Ps. 138, 22.] He hates the enemies with a perfect hatred who neither in action nor in the intellect sins, which very thing is a positive proof of the great and first dispassion.

Concerning the demon which makes the soul to be insensible, why is it necessary even to speak? For I have feared even to write concerning it: how the soul abandons its familiar spiritual condition during the time of the sojourn of this demon; casts off the fear of God and piety; considers sin not to be sin; does not consider transgression to be transgression; remembers hell and eternal judgement as a mere word; really, 'mocks at the fire-bearing earthquake' [Job 41, 21]; and on the one hand supposedly confesses God and on the other hand does not know what God has commanded. It strikes the breast, the soul being set in motion towards sin, and the soul remains insensible. It discourses from the Scriptures and has been completely hardened and does not listen. You bring forward the reproach of men to the soul and the soul does not reckon the disgrace among the brothers; and the soul does not understand, like a pig which closes its eyes and breaks through a fence. Thoughts of vainglory, if they persist, bring on this demon, of which, 'If the days were not cut short, no flesh would have been saved.' [Matt. 24, 22.] And, moreover, it is a demon of those who rarely meet the brothers, and the reason is manifest beforehand: on the occasion of the misfortunes of others or of those who are oppressed by illness or of those who are unhappy in prison or of those who fall into sudden death, this demon is chased away, the soul being pricked bit by bit and coming to sympathy, and the hardness which has been constituted on account of the demon being dissipated—we lack these aforesaid things on account of the desert and the rarity of persons among us who are ill. The Lord, in the Gospels, certainly expelling this demon, commanded us to see the ill and visit those in prison. 'For I was ill and you visited me, in prison and you came to me.' [Matt. 25, 36.] However, this must be known: if one of those who are living the life of solitude, falling into the hands of this demon, did not accept obscene thoughts or did not abandon his house from accidie, then he has received chastity and patient endurance coming down from the Heavens and he is blessed on account of such a dispassion. As many of those who have professed piety who deliberately choose to abide among seculars, let them be on guard against this demon. For concerning this demon I am ashamed before men to say or write anything more. All the demons teach the soul to be a lover of pleasure; only the demon of sorrow, then, does not condescend to practise this, but corrupts even the thoughts of those [pleasures]] which have come into our mind, intercepting and drying up every pleasure of the soul through sorrow, if, indeed: 'The bones of a sorrowful man become dry.' [Prov. 17, 22.] And if this demon wars moderately, it makes the anchorite tested, for it persuades him to approach none of the things of this world, and to make a detour round every pleasure.

If it persists more obstinately, it gives birth to thoughts which advise the soul to lead itself out in an underhanded way, or which constrain it to flee far from the place, which very thing has been concluded and has been suffered by the holy Job when he was being greatly troubled by this demon: 'Would that I were able to lay hands on myself or that, having asked another, he would do this for me.' [Job 30, 24.] The symbol of this demon is the viper, the beast of which the venom given philanthropically destroys the venoms of the other beasts, but, taken without measure, destroys the very living being. Paul committed the man who had transgressed in Corinth to this very demon [cf. 1 Cor. 5, 5], for which reason he writes again with haste, saying to the Corinthians: 'Confirm charity to him, lest such a one be swallowed up in greater sorrow.' [2 Cor. 2, 7–8.] But he knows this very spirit, straitening men, to become the means of repentance [cf. 2 Cor. 7, 10]. Whence, St John the Baptist calls those who are pricked by this demon and who are fleeing to God for refuge 'the brood of vipers', saying: 'Who showed you to flee from the future wrath? Bear fruit, therefore, worthy of repentance and do not think to say in yourselves: we have Abraham as our father. For I say to you that God is able from these very stones to raise up children to Abraham.' [Matt. 3, 7–9.] However, everyone who imitates Abraham and goes out from his land and his relatives has become stronger than this demon [cf. Gen. 12, 1].

If anyone has prevailed over temper, he has prevailed over demons. If one has been enslaved to temper, he is completely alien to the monastic life and a stranger to the ways of our Saviour, if, indeed, the Lord himself is said to teach the meek his ways [cf. Ps. 24, 9]. Therefore the mind of those who live the life of solitude becomes hard to hunt down when it flees to the field of meekness. For the demons have feared almost none of the virtues as much as meekness. This virtue Moses, that great man, acquired, being called 'meek more than all men' [Num. 12, 3]; and the holy David pronounced it worthy of the remembrance of God, saying: 'Remember David and all his meekness.' [Ps. 131, 1.] But even the Lord himself commanded us to become imitators of his meekness, saying: 'Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find repose for your souls.' [Matt. 11, 29.] If, then, someone were to abstain from food and drink but to inflame his temper with evil thoughts, he would be similar to a boat sailing on the high seas with a demon as pilot. Therefore care must be taken, with as much strength as we have, for our dog, and one must teach it to destroy only the wolves and not to eat up the sheep, showing every meekness to all men [cf. Tit. 3, 2].

Alone of the thoughts, the thought of vainglory has much material and encompasses almost the whole inhabited world and it secretly opens the door to all the demons, just as someone who has become the wicked betrayer of a city. For that reason, it greatly abases the mind of him who is living the life of solitude, filling him with many words and objects and causing the ruin of his prayers, through which he is zealous to heal all the wounds of his soul. All the demons, when they are defeated, join in increasing this thought; and, again, by means of it, all the demons receive entrance into the souls, making, really, 'the last worse than the first' [Matt. 12, 45]. From this very thought is engendered the thought of pride, the thought which threw down from the Heavens to the earth the seal of similarity and the crown of beauty. 'But leap away from this place and do not persist,' [Prov. 9, 18a] so that we do not betray our life to others and our way of life to the merciless. These things banish this demon: intense prayer and to say or do nothing voluntarily of those things which contribute to accursed glory.

When the mind of those who are living the life of solitude gets hold of a little dispassion, then, having acquired the horse of vainglory, it rides through the cities taking its fill of the unmixed praise from the glory [of men]. This mind, the spirit of fornication meets providentially, and, closing it up in a pigsty, teaches it no longer to abandon its bed before complete health nor to imitate the unruly of those who are sick, those who while they still bear in themselves the relics of the illness, give themselves over to journeys and untimely baths and fall into the illnesses which come from relapse. For that reason, remaining [in our hermitage], let us rather pay attention to ourselves, so that, advancing in virtue, we become difficult to move towards vice; so that being renewed, then, in gnosis, we receive in addition a multitude of various contemplations; and so that being raised up again during prayer, we see more clearly the light of our Saviour.

I am not able to write all the villainies of the demons and I am ashamed to recount at length their evil arts, having feared for the simpler of those who will meet with this writing. However, hear the villainy of the spirit of fornication. When one acquires dispassion of the desiring part, and the shameful thoughts, therefore, grow somewhat cold, then this thought introduces men and women playing with each other and makes the anchorite the spectator of shameful deeds and gestures. But this temptation is not one of those that persist for a long time. For intense prayer and a very scanty diet with vigils and the exercise of spiritual contemplations expel this demon like a waterless cloud [cf. Jude 12]. There is also the case where this demon lays hold on the flesh, prising it out towards irrational excitement. And this rogue contrives countless other things for his purposes, which very things it is not necessary to publish and to commit to writing. The seething of the temper set in motion against this demon is very useful against such thoughts, which very temper the demon has certainly feared when it [the temper] is agitated on account of these thoughts and is destroying utterly its [the demon's] mental representations. And this is the 'Be angry and do not sin,' [Ps. 4, 5] useful medicine brought forth to the soul in temptations.

The demon of anger also imitates this demon and himself invents certain close relatives or friends or kinsmen outraged by unworthy persons, and sets the temper of him who is living the life of solitude in motion to say or to do something wicked towards those who have appeared in the intellect, which images it is necessary to take a care for, and quickly to snatch the mind away from such images, so that the mind not, by persisting in these images, become, a smoking firebrand [cf. Isa. 7, 4] during the time of prayer. Those who are irascible fall into such temptations, especially since they are easily incited to violent movements. These very persons are far from pure prayer and the gnosis of our Saviour Christ.

The Lord bestowed on man the mental representations of this Age as sheep of a sort to the good shepherd. For he says: 'He likewise gave the Age into his heart,' [Eccl. 3, 11] yoking temper and the desiring part to him to help him so that, on the one hand, through temper he drive away the mental representations of the wolves, and, on the other hand, through the desiring part, he cherish the sheep even when he many times is smitten by the rains and the winds. In addition to these things, he also gave a pasture so that he might pasture the sheep, and a place of freshness and a water of repose, and a harp and a lyre, and a rod and a staff, so that from this very flock he both be fed and clothed and collect alpine fodder. For he says: 'Who tends a flock and does not drink from its milk?' [1 Cor. 9, 7.] It is therefore necessary that he who is living the life of solitude guard this very flock night and day lest one of the mental representations become the food of beasts or fall into the hands of robbers, and, if therefore

such a thing should happen in the wooded vale, then that he snatch it out of the mouth of the lion and the bear.

The mental representation concerning the brother becomes the prey of wild beasts if with hatred it is pastured in us and concerning the woman if with shameful desire it is nourished in us, and the mental representation of silver and gold if with avarice it lies in the courtyard, and the mental representations of the holy charisms if with vainglory they are tended in the intellect—and in regard to all the other mental representations, it happens in the same way when they have been stolen by the passions.

It is necessary not only to keep the mental representations by day, but also to guard them at night in keeping vigil. For it occurs that one loses one's proper possession imagining shamefully and wickedly, and this is what is said by the holy Jacob: 'I did not bring to you sheep that had become the prey of wild beasts; I restored that which had been stolen by day and that which had been stolen by night and I became burned together with the heat of the day and the frost of the night, and sleep departed from my eyes.' [Gen. 31, 39–40.] If, then, something happens to us on account of the toil and the accidie, running back for a bit to the rock of gnosis, let us hold intercourse with the harp, striking with the virtues the harp strings of gnosis. Let us then again graze the sheep below Mount Sinai so that the God of our Fathers also call to us out of the Bush [cf. Exod. 3, 1–6] and also grant to us the reasons (logoi) of the signs and wonders.

Of the unclean demons, some tempt the man as man and others agitate him as irrational animal. And the first, when they approach, cast into us mental representations of vainglory or pride or envy or condemnation, which very things affect none of the irrational animals. The second, when they draw near, set anger or desire in motion contrary to nature. For these very passions are common to us and to the irrational animals, concealed by the rational nature. For that reason, the Holy Spirit says to those who have fallen into human thoughts: 'I said: you are all of you gods and sons of the Most High. You will die as men and fall as one of the rulers.' [Ps. 81, 6–7.] Towards those who are being set in motion irrationally, what does he say? 'Do not become as the horse and the mule, in which animals there is not understanding, with the muzzle and the rein you will press tight the jaws of those who do not draw near to you.' [Ps. 31, 9.] If, then, 'The soul which sins, that soul shall die,' [Ezek. 18, 4; 18, 20] then it is apparent beforehand that men who die as men will be buried by men, whereas those who die as irrational animals, that is, who fall, will be eaten by vultures or ravens, the young of the second of which call upon the Lord [cf. Ps. 146, 9], while the young of the first defile themselves in blood [cf. Job 39, 30]. 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.' [Matt. 11, 15; etc.]

When one of the enemy draws near and wounds you, and, according to the passage in Scripture, you wish to turn his sword against his own heart [cf. Ps. 36, 15], do in the way that we say: When you are by yourself, divide the thought that was cast into you by the enemy, which very thought: When does it occur? And from what objects was it composed? And which of those objects is the one which especially oppresses the mind? What I am saying is this sort of thing: Let the thought of avarice be the one which was sent by the demon. Divide this thought: into the mind which received it and into the mental representation of gold and into gold itself and into the passion of avarice. Ask, further, which of these things is sin. Whether it is the mind, and, if so, how? The mind is the image of God. But is it the mental representation of gold? But who would ever say this who had a mind? But is gold itself sin? And for what reason has it come to be? It therefore follows that the cause of sin is the fourth, which thing is not a thing which exists substantially nor the mental representation of an object, nor, again, the bodiless mind—but a certain pleasure hateful of men which is given birth out of the free will and which obliges the mind to use evilly the things created by God, to circumcise which very pleasure has been entrusted to the Law of God.

And while you are examining these things minutely, the thought will be utterly destroyed, analysed into its own contemplation; and the demon will flee from you, your intellect by this very gnosis having been raised on high. If you wish to use the demon's own sword, but desire first by your own sling to conquer him, take out a stone, you also, from your shepherd's bag [cf. 1 Kgs. 17, 48–51] and seek the contemplation of this: how angels and demons draw near to our world, whereas we do not draw near to their worlds; neither are we able to unite any further the angels to God; nor do we deliberately choose to make the demons more unclean; and how the harbinger of dawn which rises in the morning was cast down upon the earth [cf. Isa. 14, 12] and 'considers the sea as an unguent-box and the Tartarus of the Abyss as a captive and causes the Abyss to boil like a cauldron,' [Job 41, 23–4] throwing all into great agitation by his evil and wishing to rule over all. For the contemplation of these particular things greatly wounds the demon and causes all his host to flee. But these particular things occur to those who have been purified a little and who see to a certain extent the reasons of things which have come to be. The unclean do not know the contemplation of these things, neither will they be heard if they learn from others to utter the incantation, much dust and noise having been formed during the course of the war on account of the passions. For it is necessary for the camp of the Philistines to keep completely quiet so that Goliath, alone, meets our David [cf. 1 Kgs. 17].

Let us make use both of the division and of the form of war against all the unclean thoughts.

When certain of the unclean thoughts are quickly put to flight, let us seek the cause whence this has occurred, whether because of the rarity of the object, or because the matter is hard to procure, or because the enemy could not prevail against us because of the dispassion which is present in us.

If a certain one of those who are living the life of solitude, annoyed by a demon, were to think deeply on being entrusted with the spiritual governance of the capital city, he obviously will not persist in imagining this thought, and the reason is intelligible from what is said. If, then, this happens for all cities, and even the most insignificant, and the anchorite reckons in a similar way, then he is blessed on account of the dispassion.

And similarly with regard to the other thoughts: the method of this sort will be found through examination.

It is necessary to know these things for the sake of our zeal and fortitude, if we have crossed the Jordan and are near to the City of Palms [cf. Deut. 34, 3] or if we are still living in the desert and smitten by the foreigners. The demon of avarice seems to me exceedingly various, and skilful in contriving deceits. Many times, constrained by the consummate renunciation, it immediately feigns the steward and the lover of the poor; it receives the not-yet-present foreigners in a more lawful manner; it sends ministrations to others who are in want; it visits the prisons of the city, and, supposedly, it redeems those who have been sold; it cleaves to rich women; it secretly shows those men who ought to be well-treated; and it admonishes others, again, who have a fat purse to bid farewell to it. And, in this way, having bit by bit thoroughly beguiled the soul, it encompasses it with the thoughts of avarice and delivers it to the demon of vainglory, which introduces a multitude of those glorifying the Lord on account of these very ministrations; certain persons little by little even speaking with each other concerning the priesthood; it further foretells the death of the present priest and adds that the anchorite would not be able to escape, having done countless things; and thus the wretched mind, entangled in these very thoughts, fights with those men who do not admit these things, and readily bestows gifts on those who do admit them, and approves the prudence of these persons. He surrenders certain persons who rise in rebellion to the judges and gives orders that they be exiled from the city. Well, then, these very thoughts being within and turning to and fro, immediately the demon of pride comes on by surprise and forms continual lightning bolts in the air of the cell and lets loose winged dragons and finally works the loss of the wits.

But let us who have prayed for the destruction of these very thoughts live together with poverty in thanksgiving, 'For we brought nothing into the world and, manifestly, neither are we able to take anything out; having, then, food and clothing, let us be content with these things,' [1 Tim. 6, 7–8] remembering Paul, who said: 'Avarice is the root of all evils.' [1 Tim. 6, 10.] All the unclean thoughts which persist in us on account of the passions lead the mind down to 'ruin and destruction' [1 Tim. 6, 9]. For just as the mental representation of bread persists in him who is hungry because of the hunger and the mental representation of water in him who is thirsty because of the thirst, thus the mental representations of money and possessions persist because of avarice, and the mental representations of foods and of the shameful thoughts which are begotten from those foods persist because of the passions. But also in regard to the thoughts of vainglory and in regard to the other mental representations this similarly will become manifest. It is not possible for a mind strangled by such mental representations to appear before God and to be crowned with the 'crown of justice' [2 Tim. 4, 8]. For also in the Gospels that thrice-wretched mind, dragged down by these very thoughts, excused itself from the meal of the gnosis of God [cf. Matt. 22, 2–7]. And, again, he who is bound hand and foot and cast into the outer darkness had his garment completely woven out of these very thoughts, which very thing he who called declared not to be worthy of such a wedding, since the wedding garment is the dispassion of the rational soul which has denied worldly desires [cf. Matt. 22, 11–13]. What, then, the cause is of the fact that the mental representations of sensible objects, when they persist, destroy gnosis utterly will be said in the chapters on prayer.

Let no one of those who live the life of solitude take up the life of solitude with anger, pride or sorrow; neither let him flee the brothers when he is troubled by thoughts such as these. For ecstasies occur from passions such as these, the heart from mental representation to mental representation, and from this one to another, and from that to another, bit by bit falling into a pit of lethe. We have known many of the brothers to fall into this very shipwreck, whom the remaining brothers with tears and prayer brought back again to a human life. Certain ones, having caught an irreversible lethe, no longer had the strength to find their first condition and, until today, we humble men see the shipwrecks of our brothers. This very passion occurs for the most part from the thoughts of pride. When someone takes up the life of solitude having a condition of this sort, he first sees the air in the cell to be fiery, and certain lightning bolts to be shining out by night around the walls; then voices of persons giving chase and being chased; and chariots with horses figured in the air; and all the house filled with Ethiopians and tumult. And from the exceeding cowardice, further, he falls into ecstasy and becomes exalted and from fear he forgets his human condition. For this reason, it is a necessity to take up the life of solitude with much humility and meekness, and with spiritual words to console the soul of this one and to speak the words of the holy David to it: 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all those things he has given in turn, he who has forgiven all your transgressions, who has healed all your illnesses, who redeems your life from corruption, who crowns you with mercy and compassion.' [Ps. 102, 2–4.] These things and the such-like speak to the soul just as a mother searching more sorely for her own child in a festal assembly lest one of the criminals snatch it up and depart; and certainly, through intense prayer, ever call the soul towards the Lord.

The demons do not all tempt us at once, nor do they cast thoughts into us at the same time, on account of the fact that it is not the nature of the mind to accept the mental representations of two sensible objects during the same period of time. For we said in Chapter 17 that an unclean thought does not occur to us without a sensible object. Even if our mind, being extremely quick in its movement, joins our thoughts to each other, one must not think, despite this, that all the thoughts are constituted during the same period of time. For the potter's wheel does the same sort of thing, on account of the great rapidity of rotation joining two pebbles to each other which have been fixed at the ends of one diameter of the wheel. It is permitted to you, having formed within you the face of your father, to test whether, while this remains, there occurs in addition also a second face, or whether once the first face has left then after that one, the second face is formed. For if it were possible in the same period of time to accept the mental representation of gold and the mental representation of him who has sorrowed [us], then, at all events, it would also occur that, at the same time, we would fall into the hands of the demon of avarice and the demon of rancour, which very thing is among those things that are impossible, on account of the fact that the mind, just as I said, cannot receive at the same time both the mental representation of gold and that of him who has sorrowed [us]. Therefore, in times of temptation, it is necessary to attempt to transfer the mind from the unclean thought onto another mental representation and from that to another, thus to escape that evil taskmaster [cf. Exod. 5, 6; etc.]. If, however, the mind, containing the object, does not change course, it is immersed in the passion; and then it is at risk, travelling towards sin in act. And such a mind, really, stands in need of much purification and vigil and prayer.

As many men as have contemplated certain things in the natures on the basis of the objects themselves have also provided the proof from those things which they contemplated. In most things, my proof is the heart of him who is reading and this if the heart should be intelligent and experienced in the monastic life. I have said this on account of the natural principle which now lies before us, which is verified by him who is reading on the basis of those things which occur in his intellect. Here, one must commence one's reasoning with the fact that it is the nature of the mind to accept the mental representations of all sensible objects and to be imprinted according to those sensible objects by means of this very body, taken as an instrument. For whatever might be the form of the object, there is a necessity of this sort that the mind receive the image, whence the mental representations of objects are also called 'likenesses', by virtue of the fact that the very same form is preserved in those [mental representations]. Now, just as the mind accepts the mental representations of all sensible objects, thus also of its own organ [i.e. body]—for this also is sensible—certainly, however, without the face. For the mind cannot form this in itself, not ever having seen it. Further, our mind, with this figure within, does everything, and sits and walks and gives and takes in the intellect. And it does these things and also says as much as it wishes with the celerity of mental representations, sometimes taking up the figure of its own body and extending its hand so as to receive something of those things which are given, sometimes putting off this figure and quickly putting on the form of the neighbour as if it were giving something with its own hands. Without the forms of this sort, the mind would not do anything, being both bodiless and deprived of every such movement. It is therefore necessary for him who is living the life of solitude to watch over his mind during the time of temptations, for the mind is going to seize the figure of its own body, as soon as the demon stands near to it, and, within, to engage in battle with the brother or to touch a woman. For such a one Christ in the Gospels also called an adulterer who has already committed adultery in his heart with the wife of his neighbour [cf. Matt. 5, 28]. Without this very figure, the mind would never commit adultery, being bodiless and unable, without mental representations of this sort, to approach a sensible object. And these are the transgressions. However, pay attention in yourself how the mind clothes itself with the form of its own body without the face, while again, it models the neighbour whole in the intellect, because, encountering him entire beforehand, it also has seen him thus.

But it is impossible that these things be seen in the temptations, how this occurs and is thus quickly accomplished in the intellect, if the Lord does not rebuke the wind and the sea and make a great calm and lead out him who is sailing upon the land to which he was hastening [cf. Matt. 8, 26]. It is necessary, therefore, for him who is living the life of solitude to pay attention to himself 'lest there occur a secret word in his heart, an iniquity' [Deut. 15, 9]. For at the time of temptations, once the demon has stood near, the mind is going to seize the figure of its own body.

Having been set in motion from this very contemplation, we have provided the definition (logos) of the unclean thought: for a demonic thought is an image of the sensible man composed in the intellect, imperfect, with which [image] the mind, being set in motion passionately, says or does something lawlessly in secret towards the image which is formed by the mind in succession [to the first].

If one of the anchorites should wish to receive the gnosis of discernment from the Lord, let him first willingly work those commandments which are in his hands, omitting nothing, and thus, during the time of prayer, 'let him ask' gnosis 'from the Lord who gives to all generously and without reproach,

and let him ask doubting nothing,' neither tossed by the waves of faithlessness, 'and it will be given to him.' [Jas. 1, 5–6.] For it is not possible to receive gnosis of more things when one neglects what one already knows, so that one does not by transgressing much become guilty of more sins.

And it is blessed to be a slave of the gnosis of God. For it is dangerous, really, not to do those things which are commanded by gnosis, but it is blessed if one should do all that which is taught by gnosis.

The mind, being impassioned, moves round and round and becomes difficult to restrain when it looks on the materials which are productive of pleasure. It ceases from its wandering when it has become dispassionate and when it meets with the bodiless [powers], those who satisfy its spiritual desires for it. It is not possible to acquire gnosis, not having renounced the first renunciation, and the second and the third. And the first renunciation, then, is the voluntary leaving behind of worldly things for the sake of the gnosis of God.

The second is the putting aside of vice which comes to one by the grace of our Saviour Christ and by the pains of the man.

The third renunciation is the separation from ignorance concerning those things which naturally become manifest to men in proportion to their condition. Thus those who live the life of solitude during the day are tempted by demons and fall into various thoughts; at night, again, in their sleep they battle with winged asps, are encircled by carnivorous beasts, are engirdled by serpents and are thrown headlong from high mountains. It also occurs that, having been awoken, they are again encircled by the very same beasts and they see the cell fiery and smoking. And when they do not give themselves up to these imaginations nor fall into cowardice, immediately again they see the demons transformed into women indecorously playing the coquette and wishing to play shamefully. The demons invent all of these things wishing greatly to trouble the temper or the desiring part, so that there occurs the war that is wont to be fought against the anchorites. For extremely quickly during the next day is the temper tempted when it has been previously disturbed during the night; and the desiring part easily takes up obscene thoughts having been set in motion during the imaginations of sleep.

The demons bring on these imaginations, opening a road for themselves, as I said, for the next day, or, having previously disturbed the anchorites during the previous day, wishing to humiliate them even further at night. And the irascible and hot-tempered of the brothers fall more into the fearsome apparitions whereas those who have taken their fill of an excess of bread and water fall into the shameful imaginations. But it is necessary that those who live the life of solitude keep vigil and pray not to enter into temptation, and that they keep their heart with every guard, putting an end to temper with meekness and psalms and withering the desiring part with hunger and thirst. Beneficence and acts of mercy are extremely helpful in the case of imaginations of this sort. And this the wise Solomon teaches clearly in Proverbs. He says: 'If you sit, you will be fearless; if you sleep, you will slumber pleasantly, and you will not fear an alarm coming upon you nor the approaching attacks of the impious. For the Lord shall be over all your ways and will support your foot that you not be shaken. Do not forbear to do good to the poor man when your hand shall be able to help; do not say, go and come back, and tomorrow I will give you; for you do not know to what the next day will give birth.' [Prov. 3, 24–8.] When the demons are unable greatly to disturb the temper or the desiring part at night, then they fabricate dreams

of vainglory and bring the soul down into a pit of thoughts. The dreams of these demons are, as to say in outline, of this sort: Many times a certain person saw himself rebuking demons and healing certain bodily passions, or wearing a pastoral form of dress and grazing a flock. And having been roused, immediately he receives the imagination of the priesthood, and, during the whole day, besides, he takes a full account of the things that are in the priesthood.

Or, as though the charism of healing is going to be given to him, and, further, he sees beforehand the signs which occur and he imagines those who will be healed, the honours which come from the brothers and the giftbearings of those who are outside [the monastic calling], as many from Egypt and as many from beyond its borders as arrive driven towards him by his fame.

Many times the demons cast those who are living the life of solitude into an inconsolable sorrow, showing certain of their own people to them to be ill and to be in danger by land or by sea.

It happens also that the demons foretell to these same brothers through dreams shipwrecks of the monastic life, throwing them down from high ladders which they are ascending and, again, making them blind and to be groping about the walls. And the demons make countless other marvels of such sorts, making use of the sound of the wind to suggest the advent of demons or of savage beasts or narrating certain narratives so that the anchorite neglects the hours of the services. It is necessary not to pay attention to these [demons], but, being sober in the thought, to refute them utterly which do these things for the sake of the deceit and the error of souls.

For the dreams which are given by angels are not of such sorts but they have much serenity of soul, unspeakable joy, absence during the day of impassioned thoughts, pure prayer and—certain of the angels—also reasons (logoi) of things which have come to be, gently coming forth from the Lord and revealing the wisdom of the Lord.

If one of those who are living the life of solitude should not be given to be disturbed during the imaginations which occur in sleep on account of the frightful or obscene apparitions, but should also be accustomed to grow angry with the female figures which approach him shamelessly, and to strike these, and if, again, touching female bodies for the sake of healing—for the demons also set such things before one—he should not be accustomed to be excited, and should admonish, rather, certain of the figures concerning chastity, then he is blessed, really, on account of such a dispassion. For a soul which has accomplished the practical life with God's help and which has been loosed from the body enters into those very places of gnosis in which the wing of dispassion might grant it rest. From those places, further, it will also receive the wings of that Holy Dove and will fly through the contemplation of all the Ages and come to rest in the gnosis of the Worshipful Trinity.

Of the unclean thoughts, some are seen in the road of virtue, and some next to the road. And as many as prevent the commandments of God from being kept—these sojourn next to the road. As many, again, as do not persuade us not to keep the commandments, but suggest that they be kept in such a way as to appear to men—all of these are seen in the road, since they corrupt our goal or the manner in which the commandment must be kept. Wherefore it is necessary that he who keeps the commandment keep it for the Lord and work it cheerfully. He said: ‘He who does acts of mercy, in cheerfulness.’ [Rom. 12, 8.] What is the benefit if I unclothe myself of the thought of avarice through beneficence and that of gluttony by continence, but I then clothe myself with other thoughts of vainglory or sullen discontent? At all events, I will rely to an extent on this, that during the time of prayer I will suffer from these latter thoughts whatever would have occurred to me on account of those former thoughts, namely to fall from the light which shines around the mind during the time of prayer. Concerning these very thoughts, the blessed David also writes: ‘In this very road in which I was going they hid a snare for me.’ [Ps. 141, 4.] And, again: ‘They have extended ropes as snares for my feet. Near the path they placed a stumbling block for me.’ [Ps. 139, 6.] For the [Greek] word, *echomena*, appears to me to mean ‘near the path’.

To the demonic thought are opposed three thoughts which, when it persists in the intellect, cut it off. These are: the angelic thought, the thought which comes from our own will inclining to the better, and the thought which springs up out of human nature, being moved according to which, even the pagans love their own children and honour their own parents.

To the good thought, only two thoughts are opposed: the demonic thought and the thought which comes from our own will deviating to the worse. Out of nature no evil thought comes. For we have not become evil from the beginning, if, indeed, the Lord has sown good seed in his own field [cf. Matt. 13, 24]. For we do not, if we are receptive of something, at all events have the power of this thing—since also potentially able not to be, we do not have the power of the non-existent, if, indeed, powers are qualities whereas the non-existent is not a quality.

For there was a time when there was not vice and there will be a time when there will not be [vice]. <There was not a time when there was not virtue nor will there be a time when there will not be [virtue]>. For the seeds of the virtues are indelible. And that rich man in the Gospels persuades me who, having been condemned to Hades, felt mercy for his brothers [cf. Luke 16, 19–31]. To show mercy is the most beautiful seed of virtue.

If one aspires after pure prayer and to lead a mind free of thoughts to God, let him become master of his temper and let him keep watch over those thoughts which are born of it—I mean, those thoughts which occur to us from suspicion and hatred and rancour, which very thoughts, especially, blind the mind and utterly destroy its heavenly condition. And the holy Paul has exhorted us to this, saying: ‘to raise up towards the Lord holy hands without anger and quarrels’ [1 Tim. 2, 8].

But an evil custom has followed those who have renounced the world and, often entering into lawsuits with members of their own families, they battle for the sake of money or property which ought to be distributed to the poor. These persons, according to our reasoning, are being mocked at by the demons and they are making more strait for themselves the road of the monastic life, igniting the temper in defence of money, then seeking, again, to extinguish the fire with money, as if one were to prick his

eyeball with a needle so as to apply a collyrium. For our Lord ordered us to sell our possessions and give to the poor [cf. Matt. 19, 21], but certainly not with a battle and a trial in court. 'It is necessary that a servant of the Lord not do battle,' [2 Tim. 2, 24] but, also, to him who wishes to go to law with him over the tunic to add also the cloak [cf. Matt. 5, 40]; to him who strikes the right cheek to offer also the other [cf. Matt. 5, 39]; and to be zealous, further, not to depart having received the money, but lest, having fallen into thoughts of rancour, we die, if, indeed, 'The ways of the rancorous' lead 'to death,' [Prov. 12, 28] according to the wise Solomon. However, let him who possesses such money know that he has seized the food and shelter of the blind, the lame and the leper, and that he owes an accounting to the Lord in a day of judgement.

There are certain of the unclean demons, which very ones ever sit beside those who are reading and endeavour to seize their mind, many times taking starting-points from the very Holy Scriptures themselves and ending in evil thoughts. There are also the times when they coerce us to yawn contrary to custom, when they impose a very heavy sleep quite foreign to the usual—as certain of the brothers imagined as being according to an unfathomable natural opposition; thus I, having often observed this phenomenon, understood it—and when, laying hold on the eyelashes and on the whole head, they freeze it by means of their own body—for the bodies of demons are extremely cold and similar to ice. Wherefore we feel the head to be drawn with a grinding as by a cupping glass. They do this so that, when they have drawn off to themselves the warmth which lies within the skull, then, further, the eyelashes, slackened by the dampness and coldness, slip round the pupils of the eyes. At any rate, many times, touching, I have laid hold on the eyelashes frozen as if with ice and the whole face deadened and shivering. And, further, natural sleep by nature warms the bodies and fills the face of those who are healthy with a blooming colour, as can be learned by experience itself.

The demons, however, make those yawns which are contrary to nature and stretched to the utmost by making themselves small and fine and attaching themselves to the inside of the mouth. But this up to today I have not perceived, even if I have often suffered it. I heard this when the holy Makarios was speaking to me and when he brought forth, as proof, the fact that those who yawn seal their mouths [with the sign of the cross] according to an ancient unspoken tradition. We suffer all of these things because we do not pay attention with soberness to the reading, nor do we remember that we reading the holy words of the Living God.

Since there also occur successions of demons—the first during the war having grown weak and not being able to set in motion the passion which is dear to it—having observed these things closely, we find them to be thus: When the thoughts of a certain passion are rare for a long time and there suddenly occurs a boiling and movement of this passion, although we have given no cause at all through negligence, then we know that a worse demon has received us in turn from the first, and that this new demon, keeping watch with its own wickedness, has filled up the place of the demon which has departed. But this new demon also altogether understands our soul, warring against it with a much greater violence than is customary, our soul having fallen all at once from the thoughts of yesterday and the day before, no pretext having crept in from without. Let the mind therefore flee towards the Lord when it sees these things; and, receiving the helmet of salvation, putting on the breastplate of justice, drawing the sword of the Spirit and lifting up the shield of faith [cf. Eph. 6, 14–17], let it say looking up to its own familiar

Heaven with tears: 'Lord' Christ, 'strength of my salvation,' [Ps. 139, 8] 'incline your ear to me, make haste to rescue me, become for me a God who protects and a place of refuge to save me.' [Ps. 30, 3.] Certainly, with fasts and vigils let it 'polish its sword' [cf. Ps. 7, 13]. For seven whole days it will be afflicted, being battled against and being 'pierced by the flaming arrows of the evil one' [cf. Eph. 6, 16]—after the seventh day it will know the demon to have become similar little by little to the demon to which it succeeded—; standing its ground, besides, a whole year, for the most part being wounded rather than at all wounding, until the demon should come near which succeeds to this one, if, really, according to Job, 'We fall at their hands for a fixed time and our houses are pillaged by the lawless.' [Cf. Job 12, 5.]

When the demon of gluttony, fighting many times and in many things, should not have the strength to destroy the continence which has been established, then it casts the mind into the desire of the most extreme asceticism, among which things it also brings forth those who were around Daniel and that poor life and the seeds [cf. Dan. 1, 6–16]; and it brings to remembrance certain other ascetics who have always lived in this way or who have begun to live thus; and it coerces the anchorite to become an imitator of these, so that, pursuing an immoderate continence, he fall short even of a moderate continence, the body not being sufficient on account of its native weakness—in reality blessing with the mouth and cursing in the heart [cf. Ps. 61, 5]—not to be persuaded by which demon I think to be just, neither to abstain from bread and oil and water. For this very diet the brothers have found by experience to be extremely good, and this not towards satiety and once a day. For I wonder if someone satiated with bread and water will be able to take upon himself the crown of dispassion, dispassion, I say, not that which impedes sins in act—for this is called continence—but that which cuts off the impassioned thoughts in the intellect, which very thing Saint Paul called the spiritual circumcision of the spiritual Jew [cf. Rom. 2, 29]. If one is discouraged by what has been said, let him remember the Apostle who was the 'vessel of election' [Acts 9, 15] and who completed his course 'in hunger and thirst' [2 Cor. 11, 27].

The demon of accidie also imitates this demon, suggesting to him who exercises patient endurance the taking up of the most extreme life of solitude and calling him to jealousy of St John the Baptist and of the first fruit of anchorites, Anthony, so that, not having supported the chronic and inhuman solitude, he flee with shame, abandoning the place, and that demon, boasting, should further say: 'I prevailed against him.' [Ps. 12, 5.]

The unclean thoughts favourably accept many materials towards their increase and are extended over the span of many objects. For in the intellect they cross great seas and they do not beg off journeying long journeys on account of the great heat of the passion. But those who in some way or other have been purified are rather more straitened than these first, being unable, because of the weakness of the passion, to be extended over the span of many objects. Whence, also, they are moved contrary to nature, rather, and, according to the wise Solomon, 'roam for a certain time outside,' [cf. Prov. 7, 12] and collect reeds for their unlawful brickmaking, no longer receiving straw [cf. Exod. 5, 7–12]. It is necessary therefore with every guard to keep watch over the heart [cf. Prov. 4, 23] so that it be saved 'as a gazelle from the net and as a bird from the snare' [Prov. 6, 5]. For it is easier to purify an unclean soul than it is to recall a soul once again to health which has been purified and then wounded once more, since the demon of

sorrow does not permit it, but is ever jumping into the pupils of the eyes and bringing forward, during the time of prayer, the image of the sin.

The demons do not know our hearts, as certain men think. For the Lord alone is he who knows the heart [cf. Acts 1, 24; 15, 8], ‘he who understands the mind of men’ [Job 7, 20], and ‘who moulded by himself their hearts’ [Ps. 32, 15]. From the spoken word and from the movements of the body of such a sort the demons detect the greater part of the mental representations of the heart. In regard to those very things which I was now intending to disclose clearly, our holy priest hindered me, saying that it was unworthy to publish things of this sort and to cast them into the hearing of the profane, if, indeed, it says, he who has commerce with a woman during her period is accountable under the Law [cf. Lev. 20, 18]. Except that on the basis of such symbols the demons detect those things which are hidden in the heart and from these symbols they take their starting-points against us. Many times, at any rate, we censured certain persons who were speaking evil, not having ourselves charitably disposed towards them. And that is why we have fallen into the hands of the demon of rancour and we immediately received evil thoughts against those persons, which thoughts, previously, at any rate, we did not know to occur to us. For which very reason, the Holy Spirit quite well also brings a charge against us, saying: ‘Having sat, you spoke against your brother and placed a stumbling block against the son of your mother,’ [Ps. 49, 20] and you opened the door to the thoughts of rancour and you greatly disturbed your mind during the time of prayer, ever imagining the face of your enemy and making a god of this—for what at all events the mind sees while it is praying, this it is worthy to confess to be a god. But let us flee, brothers, the sickness of slander, and let us never remember anyone evilly nor distort our faces upon the remembrance of our neighbour. For the wicked spirits take more than enough pains about all our gestures, and they leave nothing of the things which pertain to us unexamined, not a reclining posture, not a sitting posture, not a standing posture, not a word, not an entrance, not a glance. They study everything; they set everything in motion; all day long they meditate treacheries against us so that they might slander the humble mind during the time of prayer and so that they might extinguish that blessed light. Do you also see what St Paul says to Titus? ‘In the teaching, incorruptibility, a healthy word not to be condemned, so that he who is opposed might feel shame, having nothing mean to say concerning us.’ [Tit. 2, 8.] The blessed David also prays, saying: ‘Deliver me from the slander of men,’ [Ps. 118, 134] calling the demons also ‘men’ on account of the rationality of their nature. But the Saviour also called the enemy in the Gospels a man, the one who had sowed with seeds the weeds of vice in us [cf. Matt. 13, 25].

Christ raises the rational nature put to death by vice through the contemplation of all the Ages. The Father of Christ raises the soul which dies the death of Christ through the gnosis of himself, and this is what is said by the Apostle, the ‘If we die together with Christ, we believe we will also live with him.’ [Rom. 6, 8.]

When the mind, having unclothed itself of the old man, should put over itself the clothing which is the man from grace [cf. Col. 3, 9–10], then it will see its own condition during the time of prayer similar to the sapphire or to the colour of the sky, which very thing Scripture also calls ‘the place of God’ seen by the Elders on Mount Sinai [cf. Exod. 24, 10–11].

The mind would not be able to see the place of God in itself not having become higher than all <mental representations> which are in [sensible] objects. It will not become higher, however, if it does not unclothe itself of the passions, which are what, by means of the mental representations, bind it together with the sensible objects. And the passions it will lay aside by means of the virtues; the mere thoughts,

then, by means of spiritual contemplation; and this [i.e. spiritual contemplation], again, when, during the time of prayer, that light shines upon the mind that works in relief the place which is of God. Of the mental representations, some imprint and form figures in our ruling part while others provide gnosis only, neither imprinting nor forming figures in the mind (nous). For the 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God' [John 1, 1] puts a certain mental representation into the heart but it neither forms a figure in nor imprints the heart. And the 'taking bread' [Luke 22, 19] forms a figure in the mind (nous), while the 'he broke' [Luke 22, 19], again, imprints the mind (nous). The 'I saw the Lord sitting on a high throne and lifted up' [Isa. 6, 1] imprints the mind (nous) without the 'I saw the Lord'; and what is said appears to imprint the mind (nous) while what is signified does not imprint [it]. For he saw with the prophetic eye the rational nature raised up by means of the practical life and receiving in itself the gnosis which is of God. For there God is said to sit, there where he is known. Therefore the pure mind (nous) is also called the throne of God. And it is also said: 'A throne of dishonour is the woman'—that is, the soul (psuche)—'which hates justice.' [Prov. 11, 16.] The dishonour of the soul (psuche), then, is vice and ignorance. Therefore the mental representation of God will not be found among those mental representations which imprint the mind (nous), but among those mental representations which do not imprint the mind (nous). Wherefore it is necessary that he who is praying be separated absolutely from the mental representations which imprint the mind (nous).

And you will investigate if, indeed, as it is in regard to the bodies and their reasons (logoi), thus it is also in regard to the bodiless [powers] and their reasons (logoi). And in one way will the mind (nous) be imprinted when it sees a mind (nous) and otherwise will it be disposed when it sees the reason (logos) of that mind (nous). Hence, we know how the spiritual gnosis puts the mind (nous) away from the mental representations which imprint it, and presents it, then, to God without imprint, because the mental representation of God is not among the mental representations which imprint the mind (nous)—for God is not a body—but among those mental representations which do not imprint the mind (nous). Again, of those things which are contemplated which do not imprint the mind (nous), some, on the one hand, signify the substance of the bodiless [powers], while the others, on the other hand, signify their reasons (logoi). And it does not occur thus in reference to the bodiless [powers] as it occurs in reference to the bodies. For with regard to the bodies some [mental representations] imprinted the mind (nous) while the others did not imprint [it]. Here, neither mental representation imprints the mind (nous).

The demonic thoughts make the left eye of the soul quite blind, the one giving its attention to the contemplations of things which have come to be. The mental representations which imprint and form figures in our ruling part make quite turbid the right eye, the one which contemplates during the time of prayer the blessed light of the Holy Trinity, by means of which eye the bride in the Songs of Songs ravished the heart of the Bridegroom himself [cf. S. of S. 4, 9].

Desiring pure prayer, watch the temper closely, and, being fond of chastity, become master of your stomach. Do not give bread to your belly in satiety and in water distress it greatly. Keep vigil in prayer and put rancour far from you. Let not the words of the Holy Spirit fail you, and knock on the door of Scripture with the hands of the virtues. Then dispassion of heart will rise upon you and you will in prayer see the mind (nous) in the form of a star.