

Treatise on the Practical Life

Evagrius Ponticus

Patristic · Nicene & Post-Nicene · Treatise

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INTRODUCTION

Composed in the late fourth century by a monk of the Egyptian desert who had fled ecclesiastical promotion in Constantinople for the cells of Nitria and Kellia, these chapters distill what Evagrius learned from Macarius and the early abbas into the first systematic map of the monastic interior life. The eight tempting thoughts catalogued here, gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, pride, became, through John Cassian, the seven deadly sins of the Latin West, making this short treatise one of the hidden roots of medieval moral psychology. Evagrius was posthumously condemned for his Origenist speculations, and much of his work survived only in Syriac translation or under borrowed names, which is part of why a text this consequential reads as so little known. Expect aphoristic, diagnostic prose: each chapter a clinical observation on how a particular passion moves in the soul.

Prologue

Since, most beloved brother Anatolios, you have recently written from the Holy Mountain to me, staying in Skete, and you have asked me to clarify the symbolic habit of the monks in Egypt—for you have thought that it is something neither without purpose nor perverse, having such a great difference from the other habits of men—well then, as much as we have learned from the holy fathers we will proclaim.

The cucullion, then, is a symbol of the grace of our Saviour God. It covers their ruling part and succours the infancy in Christ on account of those who ever try to strike and wound. As many as wear the cucullion on their head chant these words in power: ‘If the Lord does not build the house and guard the city, in vain has he laboured who builds and he who attempts to guard.’ \[Cf. Ps. 126, 1.\] Such words, on the one hand, work humility; on the other hand, they uproot pride, the ancient evil which cast down upon the earth ‘the Daystar which rises in the morning’ \[Isa. 14, 12\].

The denuding of the hands manifests the unhypocritical nature of this way of life. For vainglory is skilful to cover up and shadow the virtues, ever hunting glories which come from men and casting out faith. For he says: ‘How can you believe, receiving glory from one another and not seeking the glory which comes from the One God?’ \[John 5, 44.\] For the good must be preferable not for the sake of something else, but rather for itself. For if this is not granted, that which moves us to the work of the good will appear to be much more honourable than the work which is done, which very thing would

be among the most absurd of things: that one could conceive and say that there would be something better than God.

The analabos, again, that which is woven in the form of a cross around the shoulders, is a symbol of the faith in Christ, which faith supports the meek and ever restrains the impediments and provides them with an untrammelled work.

The belt which cinctures their kidneys repels all uncleanness and proclaims this: 'It is well for a man not to touch a woman.' [1 Cor. 7, 1.] The myloten is worn by those who 'always carry about the death of Jesus in their bodies' [2 Cor. 4, 10], and who, on the one hand, put to silence all the irrational passions of the body and who, on the other hand, cut off the evils of the soul through participation in the Good; and who love poverty and flee avarice as the mother of idolatry.

The staff is 'a tree of life to all those who clasp it and a secure [support] to all those who are supported by it, as upon the Lord' [Prov. 3, 18]. And so, in brief, the habit is the symbol of these things, and these words are those which the fathers ever say to them:

The fear of God, children, renders faith sure, and continence in turn renders sure the fear of God. And patient endurance and hope render steadfast continence, from which things is born dispassion, of which the child is charity. And charity is the door of natural gnosis, to which Theology succeeds, and the ultimate blessedness.

And so let so much be said for the present concerning the sacred habit and the teaching of the Elders.

Concerning, then, the practical life and the gnostic life, we are now going to narrate, not as much as we have seen and heard, but as much as we have learned from them to say to others, the practical in one hundred chapters, the gnostic life divided into fifty in addition to six hundred chapters passing through in an abridged fashion; and we have hidden certain things and obscured others, so as 'not to give holy things to dogs and not to cast our pearls before swine' [cf. Matt. 7, 6]. These things, however, will be clear to those who have followed in the same track as they.

Treatise on the Practical Life. By the Same: 100 Chapters

Christianity is the dogma of our Saviour Christ composed of practical, natural and theological parts.

The Kingdom of the Heavens is dispassion of soul with true gnosis of existent things.

The Kingdom of God is gnosis of the Holy Trinity coextensive with the constitution of the mind and exceeding its incorruptibility.

Whatever one loves (eros) he certainly aspires to, and what he aspires to he struggles to attain. And desire is the beginning of every pleasure; desire, then, begets sense-perception, for that which is without a share in sense-perception is also free of passion.

The demons wrestle nude with the hermits; they arm the more negligent of the brethren against those in monasteries and entourages who are working on virtue. The second war is much lighter than the

first since it is not possible to find on earth men more bitter than demons, or accepting at one time all their villainy.

On the Eight Thoughts

The most general thoughts are eight in all, in which is contained every thought. First, the thought of gluttony; and, after it, the thought of fornication; third, that of avarice; fourth, that of sorrow; fifth, that of anger; sixth, that of acedia; seventh, that of vainglory; eighth, that of pride. Whether all these thoughts trouble the soul or do not trouble the soul is among those things which are not within our power; for these to persist or not to persist, or to set passions in motion or not to set in motion, is among those things which are within our power.

The thought of gluttony suggests to the monk the quick fall from his ascetical endeavours, portraying the stomach, liver, spleen and dropsy, and a long illness, and the rarity of necessary things and the lack of doctors. It often brings the monk also to the remembrance of certain brothers who have fallen into these passions. Sometimes this thought persuades those very persons who have suffered such things to meet the continent and to narrate their own misfortunes, as though those things had happened on account of their asceticism.

The demon of fornication forces \[the monk\] to desire various bodies; and it attacks with greater fierceness those who are continent, so that they stop their continence as leading to nothing; and, polluting the soul, it bends it towards those works; and it makes the soul speak certain words and also hear, as if the object were present and seen.

Avarice suggests a long old age and the weakness of the hands for work, famines which will be and illnesses which will occur and the bitter things of poverty and as shameful to accept from others those things which are necessary. Sorrow, then, sometimes occurs as a result of the deprivation of desires and sometimes follows on anger. As a result of the deprivation of desires, it occurs in this way: certain thoughts by anticipation lead the soul to remembrance of home and parents and the former way of life. And when they see the soul not resisting but following and dissipating itself in pleasures which occur in the intellect, then taking the soul, they immerse it in sorrow as though the former things were no longer existent and neither able to exist any more because of the present way of life. And the wretched soul, as much as it dissipated itself in the former thoughts, being humiliated, that much contracts itself on account of the latter thoughts.

Anger is a very quick passion; it is said to be a boiling and a movement of the temper against him who has committed an injustice \[against the monk\] or who is thought to have committed an injustice. This very thing, anger, the whole day makes the soul savage, and, moreover, during the prayers, it seizes the mind, mirroring the face of the person who has grieved \[the monk\]. It happens that when anger persists for a long time and is transformed into wrath, it provides disturbances by night, wasting away of the body, pallor, and attacks by venomous beasts. One could find these four things which occur after wrath to follow many thoughts.

The demon of acedia, which is also called 'the noonday demon' [Ps. 90, 6], is the heaviest of all the demons. It appears to the monk around the fourth hour and it circles about his soul until the eighth hour. At first, it makes the sun appear slow to move or motionless, showing the day to have fifty hours. Then it presses [the monk] to look continually towards the doors and to leap out of his cell, to stare at the sun to see how far it is away from the ninth hour, and to look around here and there, perhaps one of the brothers [has come]. Moreover, it presents a hatred for the place and towards this way of life, and towards the labour of the hands; and [it presents the thought] that charity has gone from the brothers and that there is no one who consoles [the monk], and if, then, during those days, there might be someone who has sorrowed the monk, the demon adds that to the increase of hatred. It leads the monk also towards the desire for other places in which he can easily find the necessary things and exercise an art or trade which is rather easier and more advanced; and, it adds, pleasing the Lord does not depend on being in a place; but, it says, everywhere the Divine is to be worshipped [cf. John 4, 21–4]. It joins to these things also the remembrance of familiars and of the former way of life; it shows the time of life to be long, bringing the pains of asceticism before the eyes; and, as one says, it sets in motion every mechanism so that the monk, abandoning his cell, leaves the arena. Another demon does not follow immediately on this demon; a peaceful condition and an unspeakable joy succeed to the soul after the struggle.

The thought of vainglory is a very subtle sort of thought and it occurs alongside those who have accomplishments, wishing easily to publish their struggles and hunting after the glories which are from men [cf. 1 Thess. 2, 6]: figuring demons crying out and women being cured and some sort of crowd touching the monk's garments. It then prophesies to the monk the priesthood and it presents those seeking him at the doors, and how, if he does not wish, he will be led away bound. And thus making the monk exalted in these vain hopes it flies away leaving it either to the demon of pride to tempt him, or else to the demon of sorrow, which brings to him thoughts opposed to these vain hopes; it also sometimes happens that it gives over to the demon of fornication the just-now bound and sacred priest.

The demon of pride becomes the purveyor to the soul of the most severe fall. It seduces the soul not to confess that God is its helper, to think that it itself is the cause of its accomplishments and to be puffed up against the brothers as ignorant because they do not all know this very thing concerning it. Anger and sorrow follow this demon and, the last evil, an ecstasy of the mental faculties, frenzy and a multitude of demons seen in the air.

Against the Eight Thoughts

Reading, vigil and prayer stop a wandering mind. Hunger, toil and the anchoritic life wither inflamed desire. Chanting of the psalms, long-suffering and mercy put a stop to temper aroused. And these things done at the appropriate times and in the appropriate measures. For the excessive and inopportune are for a little time only; and those things which last but a little time are damaging, rather, and not helpful.

Whenever our soul aspires to various foods, then let it be reduced to bread and water, so that it becomes grateful for even that small mouthful. For satiety desires various foods; famine, however, thinks that its fill of bread is blessedness.

A lack of water contributes greatly to chastity. And let the three hundred of the Israelites with Gideon who conquered Midian persuade you \[cf. Judg. 7, 5–7\].

As life and death occurring to the same person at the same time is not among the things that are possible, so charity existing together with avarice in a person is one of the things that are impossible. For charity is destructive not only of money but even of this, our very temporal life.

He who flees all worldly pleasures is an unapproachable tower to the demon of sorrow. For sorrow is the deprivation of pleasure either present or expected. It is impossible to repel this enemy when we have an attachment to something earthly. For there it sets its trap and works sorrow, and certainly wherever it sees us to have been inclined.

Anger and hatred increase the temper. Acts of mercy and meekness reduce even what temper already exists.

‘Let not the sun set on our anger,’ \[Eph. 4, 26\] so that at night the demons do not greatly frighten the soul and make the mind more cowardly towards the war the next day. For the fearsome apparitions arise by nature from disturbances of the temper; nothing else, then, makes the mind thus a deserter as temper disturbed.

When, having laid hold of a pretext, the irascible part of our soul is deeply disturbed, then the demons suggest as good our taking up the anchoritic life, so that we do not, solving the causes of our sorrow, free ourselves from the disturbance. When the desiring part is greatly heated, then, again, they make us lovers of our fellow man, calling us hard and savage, so that, since we desire bodies, we encounter bodies. One should not be persuaded by these but rather do the opposite.

Do not give yourself to the thought of anger, battling in the intellect against him who has sorrowed \[you\]; neither, again, to the thought of fornication, imagining the pleasure to a greater extent. For the one darkens the soul while the other calls it to an inflaming of the passion; each, however, makes your mind to be filthy; and, during the time of prayer, imagining these images and not offering to God pure prayer, you immediately fall into the hands of the demon of acedia, which very demon springs upon such conditions and like a dog tears the soul to pieces as if it were a fawn.

The nature of the temper is to battle against the demons and to struggle in view of some pleasure or other. Wherefore, the angels, suggesting to us our spiritual pleasure and the blessedness from this, exhort \[us\] to turn our temper against the demons. The demons, again, drawing us towards worldly

pleasures, press the temper hard to battle, contrary to nature, against men, so that our mind, darkened and falling from gnosis, becomes a traitor to the virtues.

Watch yourself lest you ever drive one of the brothers to leave, having provoked him to anger, and you not be able in your life to avoid the demon of sorrow during the time of prayer, the demon having become for you ever a thorn. Gifts extinguish rancour. And let Jacob persuade you, who insinuated himself into Esau's good graces with gifts, Esau who had gone out to meet him with four hundred men [cf. Gen. 32, 7]. But let us who are poor fulfil the necessity with a meal.

When we fall into the hands of the demon of acedia, then with tears let us make the soul into two parts, the one consoling and the other being consoled, sowing good hopes in ourselves and intoning this incantation of the holy David: 'Why are you sorrowful, o my soul, and why do you trouble me? Hope in God, for I will confess myself to him, Deliverance of my face and my God.' [Ps. 41, 6.] One should not at the time of temptations abandon his cell, weaving supposedly reasonable pretexts, but rather one should sit inside the cell and patiently endure and receive bravely all those [demons] that come upon him, and, most especially, the demon of acedia, which one being heaviest of all, certainly makes the soul extremely tested. Fleeing such struggles teaches the mind to turn out to be unskilled and cowardly and a fugitive.

Our holy and most practical teacher used to say: 'Thus must one ever prepare the monk, as one who will die tomorrow; and thus, again, to use the body, as living together [with the monk] for many years. The one cuts off the thoughts of acedia,' he said, 'and makes the monk more zealous, while the other guards the body whole, and ever preserves the continence in equal measure to the body.' It is difficult to elude the thought of vainglory. For what you do towards its destruction becomes for you the beginning of another [thought of] vainglory. The demons do not oppose themselves to each one of our correct thoughts, but to some of those correct thoughts are also opposed those very vices according to which we have been conformed.

I knew the demon of vainglory to be harried by almost all the demons and standing insolently on the corpses of the demons which were giving chase, and manifesting to the monk the greatness of his virtues.

He who has attained to gnosis and has harvested the pleasure which comes from it will no longer be persuaded by the demon of vainglory even should it present to him all the pleasures of the world - for what could the demon even promise that would be greater than spiritual contemplation? Insofar as we are without a taste of gnosis, let us work on the practical life willingly, showing to God our goal, that we do everything for the sake of his gnosis.

Bring to remembrance your former way of life and your ancient faults and how, when you were passionate, by the mercy of Christ, you passed towards dispassion and how again you left the world which had many times humbled you in many things. And reckon this too for me: who is it that guards you in the desert and who is it that expels the demons that gnash their teeth at you? For, on the one hand, such thoughts work humility; and, on the other hand, they do not admit the demon of pride.

On the Passions

Of those things we have impassioned memories, of those same things we first accepted the objects with passion. And as many objects, again, as we accept with passion, of those objects we will have impassioned memories. Whence, he who has conquered the demons who are acting despises what is done by them. For the immaterial war is more bitter than the war realized in material objects. The passions of the soul have their occasions or starting-points from men; the passions of the body, from the body. And continence cuts off the passions of the body, while spiritual charity cuts off those of the soul.

Those \[demons\] which rule over the passions of the soul persist until death; those which rule over the passions of the body retire more quickly. And, on the one hand, the other demons are like the sun which rises and sets, laying hold on some one part of the soul; the noonday \[demon\], on the other hand, has the custom to envelop the whole soul and to suffocate the mind. Therefore, the anchoretic life is sweet after the emptying of the passions; for then the only memories are mere memories, and the wrestling no longer prepares the monk for battle, but for contemplation itself.

One must attend whether the conception sets the passions in motion; or the passions, the conception.- For, on the one hand, some have the first opinion; on the other hand, some have the second opinion.

It is the nature of the passions to be set in motion by the senses. And, if charity and continence are present, the passions will not be set in motion; if these are absent, the passions will be set in motion. More than the desiring part, the temper requires medicines, and, on account of this, charity is called 'great' \[cf. 1 Cor. 13, 13\], for it is the rein of the temper. This very thing that saint, Moses, in his Physics symbolically named 'the battler with the serpent' \[Lev. 11, 22\].

The soul has the custom to be ignited towards thoughts in consequence of the bad odour which prevails among the demons, when, the demons approaching, the soul is seized, having been conformed by the passion which corresponds to the demon which is disturbing it.

Counsels

It is not possible at all times to maintain the usual rule and it is necessary to pay attention to the season and to make an attempt to keep the possible commandments, as much as is possible, of course. For the demons themselves are not ignorant of the seasons and other such things. Whence, setting themselves in motion against us, on the one hand they impede what it is possible to do, and on the other hand they try to force us to practise what it is not possible to do. For, on the one hand, they also impede those who are ill from giving thanks for their sufferings and pains and from exercising long-suffering in regard to those who are attending on them; and, on the other hand, again, they exhort those who are exhausted to keep continence and those who have been weighed down to chant psalms in an upright position.

When we are required to sojourn in cities or towns for a little time, then let us be together with secular persons maintaining our continence, certainly, with a greater strictness, lest our mind, being made gross and deprived of its customary carefulness by reason of the present circumstances, do something that we would not want, and become a fugitive under the blows of the demons.

Tempted, do not first pray, before you say certain words with anger towards him who is afflicting you. For when your soul has been conformed by the thoughts, it happens that not even your prayer will be pure. If, however, with anger you say something towards them, then you confuse and completely obliterate the mental representations (noemata) of the enemies. For it is the nature of anger to work this very thing even on the better mental representations (noemata).

It is necessary to know well the differences among the demons and to note their seasons. We will know from the thoughts; the thoughts from the objects; which of the demons are rare and heavier and which unintermitting and lighter and which suddenly leap upon \[the man\] and seize the mind towards blasphemy. It is necessary to know these things so that, when the thoughts begin to put their proper materials into motion, then before we have been greatly put out of our familiar condition, we say something towards them and note which one is present. For thus we ourselves will easily make progress with the help of God and make those \[demons\] fly away in pain and full of admiration for us.

When the demons, battling against the monks, are unable to accomplish anything, then, withdrawing for a bit, they keep watch which of the virtues is in the meantime neglected, and, suddenly making an attack on that virtue, they tear the wretched soul to pieces.

The wicked demons bring to their aid the demons which are even more wicked than they. And, opposed to each other in their dispositions, they agree only on the destruction of the soul.

Let not the demon trouble us which seizes the mind towards blasphemy against God and towards those forbidden imaginations which I have not even dared to commit to writing, nor let this demon cut off our zeal. For the Lord is 'he who knows the heart' [Acts 1, 24], and he knows that not even when we were in the world were we frenzied with such madness. The goal of this demon is to make us stop our prayer, so that we do not stand before the Lord our God nor even dare to extend our hands [in prayer towards him] against whom we have conceived of such things.

A certain word spoken or a movement of the body which occurs becomes a sign of the occurrences in the soul, through which sign the enemies perceive whether we have their thoughts within and are in travail, or whether, rejecting them, we are paying attention to our salvation. Only God, who has made us, knows the mind, and he does not require signs so as to know the things hidden in the heart.

The demons wrestle with seculars more by means of objects; with monks, for the most part, by means of the thoughts. For the monks are deprived of objects because of the desert. And as much as it is easier to sin in thought than in action, so much more difficult is the war in the intellect from that which is joined by means of objects. For the mind is an easily moved sort of thing and hard to restrain from the lawless imaginations.

We have not been commanded to work, to keep vigil and to fast continually, but it has been legislated for us that we 'pray unceasingly' [1 Thess. 5, 17]. For the former, curing the passionate part of the soul, also require our body for their practice, which body because of its own weakness is not adequate to the labours. Prayer, however, prepares the mind to be vigorous and pure for the battle, for it is the nature of the mind to pray—and without this body—and to give battle to the demons in favour of all the powers of the soul.

If some one of the monks should wish to gain an experimental knowledge of the savage demons and to receive the habit of their art, let him pay attention to his thoughts and let him note their intensifications and their relaxations and their mutual connections and their times, and which of the demons are they who are doing this and which follows which demon and which does not follow the other. And let him ask from Christ the reasons of these things. For the demons are altogether savage with those monks who share in the practical life in a more gnostic way, wishing 'to strike down with arrows on a moonless night the upright in heart' [Ps. 10, 2].

Having kept observation, you will find two of the demons to be very swift and almost to run ahead of the movement of our mind: the demon of fornication and the demon which seizes us towards blasphemy against God. But the second is but for a little time and the first, if it does not set our thoughts in motion with passion, will not impede us towards the gnosis which is of God.

To separate the body from the soul pertains only to him who joined them. To separate the soul from the body is within the scope also of him who aspires to virtue. For our fathers call the life lived in solitude a meditation on death, and a flight from the body.

Let those who evilly nurture the flesh and 'provide for it towards desire' [Rom. 13, 14] condemn themselves and not this very flesh. For those who have acquired dispassion of the soul by means of

this very body, and who have to an extent given their attention to the contemplation of existent things, know the grace of the Creator.

On Those Things Which Occur During Sleep

When, in the imaginations that occur during sleep, the demons battling against the desiring part themselves show, and we run towards, meetings with acquaintances and banquets of relatives and choruses of women and as many other things as result in pleasures, then in this particular part of the soul we are ill and the passion has strength. When, again, they greatly disturb the irascible part, forcing us to travel roads on the edge of precipitous canyons and bringing forth armed men and venomous and carnivorous beasts, and we, then, are frightened before such roads and we flee being pursued by the beasts and men, let us make provision for the irascible part and invoking Christ in vigils, let us make use of the medicines already spoken of.

The natural movements of the body in sleep that are free of images notify us that our soul is to a certain extent in health; the fixing of images is a token of illness. And consider the vague and unformed persons a token of the passion which is old, but the persons in sharp relief a sign of the present wound. We will detect the sure signs of dispassion during the day, on the one hand, through the thoughts; at night, on the other hand, through the dreams. And we say that dispassion is health of the soul and that its \[i.e. the soul's\] nourishment is gnosis, which very thing alone has the custom to unite us to the holy powers, if indeed it is natural that union with the bodiless \[powers\] should result from a like disposition.

On the Condition Which Approaches Dispassion

There are two peaceful conditions of the soul, the one given forth from the natural seeds, the other, however, coming to pass on account of the withdrawal of the demons. And humility with compunction, tears, limitless yearning after the Divine and measureless zeal towards the work \[of monasticism, asceticism, etc.\] follow upon the first. Vainglory with pride, dragging the monk down in the elimination of the remaining demons, follows upon the second. Therefore, he who keeps the borders of the first condition will detect more quickly the raids of the demons.

The demon of vainglory is opposed to the demon of fornication and one of the things that are not possible is that these should assault the soul at the same time, if indeed the first proclaims honours, while the second becomes the purveyor of dishonours. Therefore, whichever of these two, if it has approached, oppresses you, weave in supposition in yourself the thoughts of the opposing demon. If you are able, as they say, to drive out one nail by another, then know yourself to be near to the borders of dispassion, for your mind had the strength to destroy with human thoughts the thoughts of demons. To repel, however, the thought of vainglory by means of humility or the thought of fornication by means of chastity would be a very deep token of dispassion. And try to do this concerning all the demons which are opposed the one to the other, for you will also know at the same time by what passion you have been conformed the more. However, with whatever strength you have, ask from God that the enemy be ward off in the second way.

In whatever degree the soul makes progress, to that same degree greater opponents succeed to it. For I am not persuaded that the same demons ever stand by the soul; and this those know who more quickly give their attention to the temptations and see the dispassion which lies before them being levered out by the demons which succeed.

Perfect dispassion in the soul occurs after the victory over all the demons which are opposed to the practical life. Imperfect dispassion, however, is spoken of in regard to the strength up to this time of the demon that is wrestling with the soul.

The mind will not advance nor depart that good departure and come to be in the land of the bodiless \[powers\] if it has not corrected what is within. For the disturbance of the familiar \[parts of the soul\] is accustomed to return it to those things from which it has departed.

Both the virtues and the vices blind the mind. The virtues, so that it does not see the vices. The vices, again, so that it does not see the virtues.

On the Signs of Dispassion

When the soul begins to make the prayers without distraction, then the whole war is constituted night and day round the irascible part.

A sure sign of dispassion is a mind that has begun to see its own light and which remains still in regard to the apparitions which occur during sleep and which remains in an undisturbed state when it sees objects.

The mind has its full strength when during the time of prayer it imagines nothing of the things which pertain to this world.

The mind which has accomplished the practical life and which has drawn near to gnosis has little or no perception of the irrational part of the soul, gnosis having ravished it high above this world and having separated it from the things which are sensible.

The soul has dispassion, not the one that does not suffer in relation to objects, but the one that also remains undisturbed in regard to their memory. The perfect \[monk\] does not keep continence and the dispassionate \[monk\] does not endure patiently, if, indeed, patient endurance pertains to him who suffers and continence pertains to him who is disturbed.

It is a great thing to pray without distraction. It is a greater thing, however, to chant psalms without distraction.

Practical Principles

Demonic songs set in motion our desiring part and cast the soul into shameful imaginations. 'Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs' \[Eph. 5, 19\] ever call the mind forth to a memory of virtue, cooling our heated temper and withering the desires.

If those who wrestle are in a state of being afflicted and afflicting in return, and if the demons are wrestling with us, then they also, afflicting us, are afflicted in return. For he says: 'I will afflict them and they are not able to stand.' [Ps. 17, 39.] And again: 'Those who afflict me, and my enemies, they themselves grew weak and fell.' [Ps. 26, 2.]

Repose is conjoined to wisdom and toil to prudence. For it is not possible to acquire wisdom without war and it is not possible to accomplish the war without prudence. For to prudence has been entrusted the work of standing against the temper of the demons, prudence forcing the powers of the soul to operate according to nature and preparing in advance the road of wisdom.

The temptation of the monk is the thought which ascends through the passionate part of the soul and which darkens the mind.

The sin of the monk is the consent towards the forbidden pleasure of the thought.

Angels rejoice when vice is diminished; demons, however, when virtue is diminished. The former are servants of mercy and charity; the latter are subjects of anger and hatred. And the first, when they approach, fill us with spiritual contemplation; the second, when they draw near, cast the soul into shameful imaginations.

The virtues do not stop the attacks of the demons but they preserve us unharmed. The practical life is a spiritual method cleaning out the passionate part of the soul.

The operations of the commandments are not sufficient towards healing completely the powers of the soul, if contemplations appropriate to these commandments do not also succeed to the mind.

It is not possible to stand against all the thoughts cast into us by the angels; it is possible, however, to overthrow all the thoughts [suggested] by the demons. A peaceful condition, on the one hand, follows the first thoughts; a disturbed condition, on the other hand, the second.

Charity is the offspring of dispassion. Dispassion is the flower of the practical life. The observance of the commandments constitutes the practical life. The guard of the commandments is the fear of God, which very thing is the offspring of correct faith. Faith is an indwelling good which very thing exists by nature even in those who have not yet believed in God.

Just as the soul, acting by means of the body, perceives the members which are ailing, thus so, the mind, operating its own native operation, recognizes its own powers and, through that which is hindering the mind (nous), finds the commandment which will heal the power.

The mind that is warring the impassioned war will not contemplate the reasons of the war, for it is similar to him who battles by night. Having acquired dispassion, however, it will easily recognise the cunning devices of the enemies.

Charity is the end of the practical life. Theology is the end of gnosis. The beginning of the first is faith; of the second, natural contemplation. And as many of the demons as assault the passionate part of the soul, these are said to be opposed to the practical life. As many again as trouble the rational part, these are called enemies of all truth and adversaries to contemplation. No one thing of those things that cleanse the body remains with the body in those that are cleansed. Together, the virtues both purify the soul and remain together with the purified soul.

The rational soul operates according to nature when its desiring part aspires to virtue, the irascible part battles on behalf of virtue, and the rational part gives its attention to the contemplation of things which have come to be. He who progresses in the practical life reduces the passions; he who progresses in contemplation, ignorance. And there is at some time the complete destruction of the passions; of ignorance, then, they say that of one part there is an end, but of the other part there is not.

Those things which according to their use are good or bad become constructive of the virtues and the vices. It is the work of prudence, then, to use these things towards one or the other end.

Since, according to our wise teacher, the rational soul is composed of three parts, when virtue occurs in the rational part, it is called prudence and understanding and wisdom. When it occurs in the desiring part, chastity, charity and continence. When in the temper, manliness and patient endurance. In the whole soul, justice. And the work of prudence is to conduct as general the war against the opposed powers; and to defend the virtues, to stand prepared against the vices and to administer neutral things according to the seasons. Of understanding, to manage harmoniously all those things that contribute for us to the goal. Of wisdom, to contemplate the reasons of bodies and bodiless [powers\]. The work of chastity, to view dispassionately those objects which set irrational imaginations in motion in us. Of charity, to give one's very self into the hands of each image of God, as to the Prototype, almost, even should the demons be attempting to pollute them. Of continence, to shake off from oneself with joy every pleasure of the throat. Not to dread the enemies and to persevere zealously in terrible things are of patient endurance and manliness. Of justice, to work a certain agreement and harmony of the parts of the soul.

The fruit of the seeds, the sheaves. Of the virtues, gnosis. And as tears follow on the seeds, thus joy follows on the sheaves.

Sayings of the Holy Monks

It is necessary to cross-question the ways of the monks who have travelled before [us\] correctly and to accomplish [our own labours\] in accordance with those ways. There are many things that one can find both said and done well by them. Among which things, this also one of them says: 'The drier and not irregular diet conjoined to charity more quickly introduces the monk into the harbour of dispassion.' The same one freed of apparitions one of the brothers who was disturbed at night, ordering

him to minister to the sick with fasting. Having been asked, he said: 'For by nothing thus as by \[acts of\] mercy are such passions extinguished.'

One of the wise men of that time came to the just Anthony and said: 'Father, how do you endure to the end deprived of the consolation which comes from books?' He said: 'My book, philosopher, is the nature of things which have come to be and it is here present whenever I wish to read the words which are of God.'

The Egyptian Elder Makarios, 'the vessel of election' \[Acts 9, 15\], asked me: 'Why is it that, when we entertain rancour towards men, we destroy the power of the soul to remember \[God\], whereas we remain uninjured if we harbour rancour towards the demons?' And when I was at a loss for an answer and asked to learn the reason, he said: 'Because the first is contrary to the nature, while the second is according to the nature, of the temper.'

I met at high noon exactly the holy father Makarios and, greatly burning from thirst, I requested water to drink. He said: 'Let the shade be sufficient for you. For many now travelling by land or sailing by sea are deprived even of that.' Then after I had put words through their paces for him concerning continence, he said: 'Courage, child. In all of twenty years, neither bread nor water nor sleep have I taken to satiety. For I have eaten my bread by weight; I have drunk water by measure; and, inclining myself to the walls, I have snatched some small part of sleep.'

One of the monks was advised of the death of his father. He said to him who brought the news: 'Stop blaspheming! For my Father is immortal.' One of the brothers asked one of the Elders if he would order him to eat together with his mother and sisters when he visited his home. He said: 'You will not eat with a woman.'

One of the brothers had acquired a Book of the Gospels only, and selling this he gave the proceeds to the hungry for food, afterwards uttering this saying worthy of remembrance. He said: 'For I have sold the very word which said to me "Sell what you have and give to the poor."' \[Matt. 19, 21.\]

There is close to Alexandria an island which lies in the northern part of the lake called 'Maria'. There dwells on that island a monk who is the most experienced of the host of gnostics. This very man declared that all those things that are done by monks are done for five causes: for the sake of God, for the sake of nature, for the sake of custom, for the sake of necessity or for the sake of manual labour. That same person used to say, again, that virtue is in its nature one and that it is moulded in the powers of the soul. He said: 'For the light of the sun is without form; it is its nature, however, to be conformed to the doors through which it enters in.'

Another, again, of the monks said: 'For this I strip away the pleasures, so that I stop the pretexts of temper. For I know the temper ever to be battling on behalf of the pleasures and greatly disturbing my mind and chasing away gnosis.' One of the Elders used to say that charity does not know how to keep reserves of food or money. The same said: 'I do not know myself to have been deceived by the demons twice in the same thing.'

It is not possible to love all the brothers equally; it is possible, however, to meet with them dispassionately, being free of rancour and hatred. The priests are to be shown charity after the Lord, those who purify us by means of the Holy Mysteries and who pray for us. Our Elders are to be honoured as the angels are, for they are those who anoint us for the arena and who heal the bites of the savage beasts.

But, now, let so much have been said by me to you concerning the practical life, most beloved brother Anatolios, as much as by the grace of the Holy Spirit, gleaning, we have found in the crop while our grape was aripening. If the 'Sun of Justice' [Mal. 3, 20] in his zenith shines on us and the cluster of grapes becomes ripe, then we also shall drink its wine which 'makes glad the heart of man' [Ps. 103, 15], through the prayers and intercessions of the just Gregory, who planted me, and of the holy fathers who now are watering me and by the power of him who increases me [cf. 1 Cor. 3, 6–7], Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom the glory and the power to the Ages of Ages.

Amen.