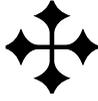


THE RELEASE OF THE SPIRIT

By
His Holiness Pope SHENOUDA III



**COPTIC ORTHODOX
PATRIARCHATE**



See of St. Mark

THE RELEASE OF THE SPIRIT

**BY :
H. H. POPE SHENOUDA III**

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THE HISTORY OF THIS BOOK

It is a collection of articles entitled, "The Release of the Spirit" written for the Sunday School Magazine from the year 1951 . I was then the editor of that magazine before starting my monastic life.

These articles were published in the form of a book in the year 1957 including some of my poems which were published in the magazine as well..

It was my first published book and it gained the approval of many and was reprinted many times.

The fourth edition included some meditations and poems which I wrote while still a monk before my ordination as a bishop. It included also an introduction which is in fact another article on the release of the spirit.

To the fifth edition, another introduction was added on the same topic. We hope-God willing-that we may add other articles to the coming editions on the same topic..

POPE SHENOUDA III

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[1]

THE RELEASE FROM THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN* *

If we start to talk about the release of the spirit we shall be faced with the following question :

What is to be released from the spirit ?

The answer is that the spirit, while on earth, strives to be released from many things which this book will tell you about..

However, there is something else on earth which I think the spirit cannot be released from however it tries! .. To be released of this thing is a joy only to be attained in the eternity.. But what is this thing?

It is the release from the knowledge of sin:

When God created man, He created him simple, pure, no knowledge of sin at all and not even the details or the names of sin.. That was before he ate from the tree of the knowledge of

* This article is a preface to the fifth edition.

good and evil.. He was as innocent as a child and perhaps more.

Therefore, when Eve was tempted by the serpent she had no knowledge.

The serpent lied and said to her *"You will not surely die"* *"..you will be like God"* Gen. 3.-5 But as Eve knew nothing about lying she believed the serpent. She did not suspect the truth of its words because she knew nothing about doubt.

Adam and Eve knew nothing but good. They did not know evil. But when they ate of the tree they began to know it..

A new knowledge entered the life of the man ie. the knowledge of sin..

This and other knowledge as well disturbed the natural purity of mankind. This proves true the words of the Wise Solomon, *"..he who increases knowledge increases sorrow"* (Eccl. 1:18).

Perhaps the first thing which Adam knew was being a man and Eve a woman... Sexual knowledge began to penetrate his mind, then his feelings.. He recognised that sex is something shameful and so he began to cover himself.. Then he knew fear and tried to hide himself behind the trees..

As the time passed, man knew many sins..

Such knowledge was implanted in his mind and waged spiritual wars against him from time to time. Even when he did

not fall in such sins, he condemned the others for them.. He now lives in the dualism of good and evil', things permitted and others forbidden..

I wonder when will he get rid of this dualism? When will he restore the purity of his mind? When will the knowledge of evil quit his mind whatever its source was, through the mind itself or through experiencing and practising it.? When will man get rid of 'the memory of the evil that entails death'?

I do not think that this may take place on earth at all but in eternity as St. Paul the Apostle-being already poured out and the time of his departure at hand-said to his disciple St. Timothy, "***Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness..***" (2 Tim. 4:8).

Finally, man will be crowned with righteousness.. that righteousness which commits no sin and knows no sin.. He will be crowned with the holiness without which no one can witness the Lord.. But when will this take place? The apostle gives the reply saying, "*.. the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge will give to me **on that day**, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing*".

This crown of righteousness is the desire which the spirit longs to attain..

While on earth, we sin everyday and everyday we need to repent. There is no person without sin even though if his life on the earth is one day only..

When shall we be actually released from the knowledge of sin? When shall we know nothing but God alone and the light surrounding Him, the light which has no darkness . This will happen when we spit the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil which our forefathers ate at that time.

Only then we shall restore our previous rank.

In eternity, we shall rather be in a state better than that of Adam in the Paradise.. Adam and Eve were in a state of righteousness but liable to fall.. but in eternity we shall have the crown of righteousness, which righteousness is not subject to falling..

It we shall be in a better state than that of the first man before the fall. then, at least, we shall be like him in innocence, purity, simplicity and knowing no sin..

We shall forget sin with all its forms, details and memories.

There will be nothing in our minds except the active spiritual life, God's love, contemplating on the heavenly matters which no eyes have even seen nor ears have ever heard nor have occurred to the heart of man..

Then it can be said that the spirit is completely released..

As for the spirit while one earth, the utmost thing it can attain is to be released from the domination of sin, material and flesh.. In this case it can live freely "*..delivered ,from the bondage of*

corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."
(Rom. 8:21).

Do you feel that your spirit has attained this liberty?

This liberty is the release of the spirit - its release from any bandage which may hinder its way to God.. But how can this be achieved?

At this point I shall leave you with the meditations which I wrote most of in the early fifties before starting my monastic life..







[2]

THE RELEASE UNTO THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD* *

I confess before You, O Lord, that I ought to have changed my trend of writing. I confess-in shame-that I often talked to people about virtue but little did I talk to them about You, though You are all in all...

However, to be able to talk about You, I have to know You.. But how can I attain to this knowledge, being a limited man, and You the unlimited God! And further how can I know You, while You are incomprehensible and inconceivable; You are the light that cannot be approached and no human being can see You and remain alive!..

I tried to ask about You from Your holy people who knew You well or partly. just as St. Paul the Apostle who ascended to the third heaven but he said that he, "*.. heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter*" (2 Cor. 12:4).

St. John the Beloved also saw an open door in heaven and saw the throne of God but he described the revelation just in symbols which did not give the full real picture...

* This article is a preface to the fourth edition

Sometimes I ask myself, 'Is it a kind of pride that I try to know You though I know not my own self and I ignore many human and material matters? Since I do not know my real self, how can I know the Creator of this self?

I still do not know Your heavens and Your angels, how can I know Your Godhead then?

I only know what You reveal to us.. and You only reveal what we can endure. If You do reveal to us more, our human nature will be struck with astonishment, and our minds will be unable to understand. No terms will be sufficient to express what is revealed and we have to confess that whatever we see cannot be put into words..

In my attempt to know You, I try to go beyond books with whatever deep knowledge they contain, and even beyond mental knowledge. This allows the spirit-being released-to have a wider scope which surpasses the limits of the mind... However, the human spirit is limited.. in its capacities, in its talents and in its knowledge.. Besides, it suffers much due to the thickness of the human material body..

O Lord, how would I know You then in the eternal kingdom! "*Face to face*" as St. Paul says! I stand bewildered before these words.

In Your kingdom, in spite of the glorious resurrection and the spiritual enlightened bodies, we will certainly remain as we are - limited human beings.

There, You will reveal to us something more about Your Godhead which we know not while we are in this present world, and so we shall rejoice and become happy. Then, You will reveal to us more and more, gradually, as far as we can endure. Perhaps if You reveal much more, our souls would cry out-in deep love- 'that is enough 'You will make our hearts and souls greater and wider so as they can take more of You into them... While You remain, O Lord, as You are... unlimited... we remain as we are, limited and knowing little about You .

Along the times which have no end in eternity, we shall enjoy knowing You, we shall taste and see how good You are. We shall know more about You every now and then and so we shall be nourished with this pleasant satisfying knowledge but never shall we comprehend You.

Then, when shall we know You the true knowledge?

Our Lord Jesus Christ says, "*And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God...*" (John. 17:3).

Thus, to know You is not a matter which needs years and days but it will take the whole eternal life which has no end.

If this is the case concerning eternity, what can we say about our ignorance while we are on earth? Do we really have any knowledge ?

So, I entreat You, Great Creator, to forgive me because I talk to people about virtue more than I tell them about You.. This is due to two reasons:

- **The first** is that I haven't the knowledge or capacity - all that I know is that I pray to You in order to reveal to me something about You. Whatever You reveal to me I disclose to people so that they may taste the kingdom of Heavens while being on earth.

- **The second** reason is that when I talk to them about virtue, I want them to prepare their hearts to know You.. I want them to raise incense every day and night on the altar of their hearts to be ready for the Holy Offering.

We cannot know by ourselves.. but we want-through Your grace- to prepare ourselves to know You.. This knowledge comes from You.. through what You reveal to us, not through any mental or even spiritual effort on our behalf. Any striving of our minds and souls, though necessary, is just a kind of prayer or supplication. Such striving is a means through which the cloud may fill the House, and the fire burn in the bush and so God may reveal Himself and every heart would give worship in awe and sing thankfully saying 'You gave me the gift of knowing You'

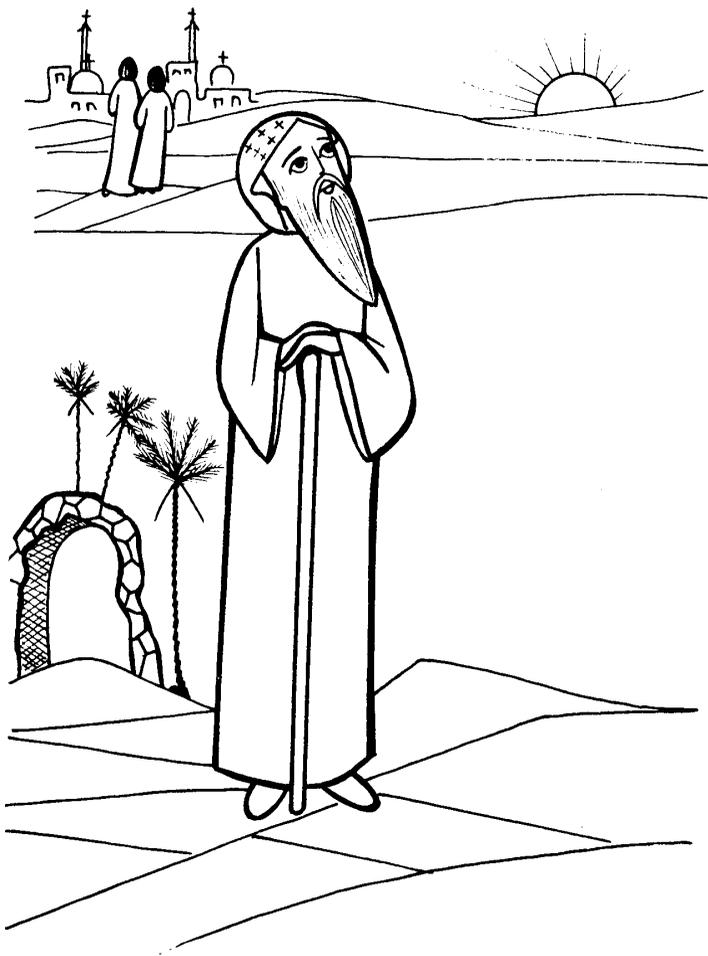
This divine knowledge is the precious pearl which made the merchant sell all that he had to buy it.

Such things which the merchant sold represent the various human branches of knowledge which take up all our time and give us no chance to know You. They hinder us from sitting at Your feet with Mary (the sister of Martha and Lazarus) to receive the living water which You pour in our hearts and which whoever drinks of, will never thirst.

I wish that we would seek such knowledge, with all our hearts. Then we shall find it within us, deep in our hearts, where You dwell and where Your holy temple lies that which You consecrated with the Holy Chrism .

25 December 1973 - 16 Kihak 1690







[3]

THE RELEASE OF THE SPIRIT

The release from bonds

It was seven O'clock in the evening, and silence {surrounded} every-thing when my father monk and I began to set our feet on the sand of the desert. We walked from time to time contemplating on matters beyond human utterance. A long time passed without our being aware until we stopped at the gate of the monastery to discuss together.

✠ Impressions and bonds:

I do not mean by the 'release of the spirit from the body' what Simeon the Elder meant when he said: "*Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word..*" .. What I mean is **the release of the spirit while still in the body; its release from any bonds encompassing it.** Only then, one can experience complete peace and live the free life of God's children.

Do you know, dear brother, that a child, after being baptised, has his spirit free, in the original condition in which it

was created..? Do you know what happens to it afterwards? The world, the customs and the environment implant in it many impressions. Many bonds bind it and hinder its movement towards God to be united with Him and abide in Him. What God's children seek is to be freed from all this.. to have their souls released from the bonds of the world and the environment and from the bonds of the senses and human wisdom...

At this point the father monk said: 'Perhaps some think of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, "*unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matt. 18:3). that they mean, "Unless you become as young as children.." No , He wanted to say, "Unless you become as great in spirit as children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.'

✠ **The bonds of the senses:**

St. Macarius the Great once met a monk who was fought with self-righteousness, he thought he had overcome adultery, love for money and anger.. St. Macarius began to ask him about his feelings on seeing a woman.. The monk replied that he would discern that she was a woman but would fly away lest he should feel lust.. St. Macarius asked him again what his feeling would be when he saw some money in the desert.. The monk said he would be able to distinguish money from stones but he would abstain from the love of money.. The saint asked him a third time how he would feel if someone insulted him.. The monk replied that he would feel that he was insulted but would not let anger remain within his heart. Here, St. Macarius told

the monk that he was still frail and needed to strive more and the saint began to teach him..

The bonds of the senses, dear reader, make a person discriminate between a man and a woman, between an old woman and a young girl, and between a beautiful girl and an ugly one..

Such bonds also make one discriminate between money and stones..

What about praise and insult then?

Once a monk asked St. Macarius for advice.. St. Macarius ordered him to go and praise the dead. He did so but no one replied to him. The saint then ordered him to go and insult them, but when he did no one replied either.

Then St. Macarius said to that monk, 'You also must be like the dead since you have died to the world.. **You must not be affected by anything whether this be praise or insult'**..

Once a rich man brought some money to the monastery in order to be distributed among the monks.. the abbot wanted to teach that person a practical lesson, so he put the money aside and rang the bell. When the monks gathered the abbot asked them to take their need of the money as an expression of their love for the rich man. But the monks looked at the gold as if looking to stones and took nothing of it in spite of it. Their behaviour had so great effect on that person that he asked to be a monk..

The world and the flesh, dear brother, have many impressions on our senses. This makes us look upon the worldly and material things as being more beautiful and attractive than they really are and as having a deeper effect. However, when the spirit is elevated and released partly-from the bonds which hinder its way, the senses will be elevated accordingly . In other words , they will be released from the worldly feelings and you will have a new spiritual understanding of matters.

You can feel this if you were away from your family for a long time, and on you return they embraced you in excessive love and longing.. You felt overwhelmed by their love, but would you, amidst this love, feel that the person who embraced you whether your father or mother, your sister or brother was a man or a woman!

The same is the case of the person who rescues others in fires or drowning accidents. If such a person felt that whomever he was rescuing was a man or a woman, a girl or a boy, he would expose himself and that person would be in danger of death.

I think this demonstrates that the spirit is superior to the senses. There are even times when the senses are partly or completely suppressed because the spirit is engaged in things which are greater.

So in your spiritual life, you have to get rid of the bonds of the senses . Then you will have a different view of things, you will not be overcome with lust: whether the lust of the flesh, the

eyes, the lust for money or women or the pride of life. You will be like the angels of God in heaven, and see everything as good as the Lord Jesus Christ said in the Sermon on the Mount, "*If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light*" (Matt. 6:22).

These were not the only thoughts which my father monk and I discussed, for we talked about things more profound. We discussed the attitude of the senses 'when one tries to understand and meditate on theological matters. The senses are physical and limited and thereupon are not able to approach God Who is unlimited. The senses are also fallible and often mistake between what is wrong and what is right.

Even the apostles were mistaken when they returned to the Lord joyfully saying, "*Lord even the demons are subject to us in Your name*", the Lord replied to them, "*Nevertheless do not rejoice in this.*" (Luke 10:17,20).

Likewise, the murderer who kills for revenge or honour, feels content as if he has done a great deed. It is a wrong feeling certainly.

You also, my beloved brother, may have various feelings during your prayers, fasts, seclusions and meditations. Examine them well for they may be unsound human feelings. Try to free your spirit from the bonds of the senses.

Another point which I like to draw to your attention is that when one is completely involved in meditating on theological matters, one becomes unaware of the world and of the things around them. For example Hanna was in the

temple praying in bitterness from her soul before the Lord . She was not aware of anything around her. Eli the priest thought she was drunk and reproached her saying, "*How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!*" (1 Sam.13,14).

If you are completely involved in your prayers and meditations, you will not be aware at all of anything that may take place around you. There may be some people talking near you or there may be some noise or various scenes but you will not be aware of anything because you are absorbed in spiritual matters. Your senses are partly passive and it is your spirit which acts. I think some consider that the spirit in this case is caught up! I remember an example of this - St. John the Short who used to spend long times in meditations during which people talked to him but he never heard their voice or knew what they were saying. Some tried to repeat what they said but he only exclaimed what the thing they wanted was and the more they repeated their words, the less he heard . "the reason is that his spirit at times was involved in other matters which were more important, far deeper and nearer to the hearing and the memory. Sometimes people asked him certain questions but the saint used to reply to them with theological meditations which had no relation whatever with what they asked. In fact, he did not hear what they were saying, because his spirit was released from the senses..

✚ **The release of the spirit from the human wisdom:**

Now, I wish that the spirit would be released from the human wisdom as well! because, "*Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*" (1 Cor. 1:20), and again, "*The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.*" (1 Cor. 3:20). The Holy Bible tells us also, "*.. the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written 'He catches the wise in their craftiness'. "* (1 Cor. 3:19).

The human mind-since the beginning- is defective and limited. The mind was better in the beginning when God created it, for God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. The human mind-after its creation- was subject to sin and to the world with its ideas, researches, experiences, customs, traditions, systems and formalities which had an impression on the mind . This made the mind liable to issue wrong judgements and made it unable to comprehend or approach God on its own. Those who think themselves wise and intelligent and trust in their own wisdom and intellect are the farthest from spiritual and theological matters. Therefore St. Paul the Apostle said,: "*And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power...*", "*... we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual*" (1 Cor. 2:4,13).

Have you now seen , my beloved brother, how vain human wisdom is... ! Would God then abolish wisdom in general? No, but He supports it.. Listen to what St. Paul the Apostle says in the same epistle, "*However, we speak wisdom among those who*

are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery". (1Cor. 2: 6,7).

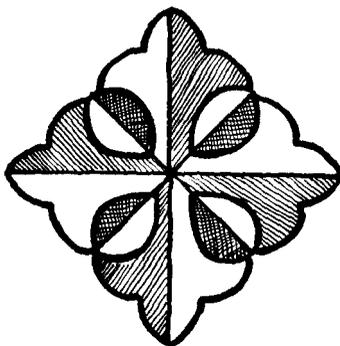
So, if you want to learn God's intentions, release your spirit first from the human wisdom. Stand before God as ignorant and lacking every knowledge and understanding. Only then, you will be filled with knowledge.. that knowledge which is spiritual and perfect not human and deficient, "*For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.*" (1 Cor. 2:10). St. Paul certainly meant this when he said, "*If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.*" (1 Cor. 3:18).

Once, a man with a withered hand came to the Lord Jesus Christ asking Him to be healed. The Lord ordered him to stretch out his hand and the man stretched it out and it was restored as whole as the other (Matt. 12:10,13). This miracle demonstrates the power of the Lord but likewise it shows how the human wisdom must vanish. If that man had given a chance to the human wisdom to interfere he would have argued 'How can I stretch out my hand though it is withered? Is it possible that a withered hand be stretched out? And if I can stretch it out, why do I need to be healed? May You heal it first so that I may be able to stretch it out?' This would have been the case, but that man made himself a fool that he might become well. He ignored human wisdom that says a withered hand cannot be stretched out. It is the same wisdom which does not believe that a mountain can be removed from its place as that a person can walk over the water or that one must not be concerned about tomorrow...

Human wisdom even made people examine God , His attributes and doctrines as if with a microscope! It also made some people accept only what conforms with their views regarding the Bible and the Church laws and refuse whatever their intellect does not approve of ...

On the other hand, God's children accept everything simply without any objections.. They say: 'O Lord, do You want us to walk through the Red Sea? Well then, we shall walk because certainly You will prepare for us a road across it so that we may not be drowned..'

There is a legend which says that the waters of the Red Sea were not divided when Moses stretched out his hand with the rod over the sea but only when the first person put his feet in the waters.. It is just a legend but it has a sublime spiritual meaning.







[4]

ENCLOSED WITHIN FOUR WALLS

Spirituality in the desert or on the mount differs in its manner from spirituality in the city.

One of the most troublesome bonds for a worshipper in the city is being enclosed within four walls.

I have experienced this myself when I was-some years ago-on a camp in a desert spot called Almaza, a few miles from Heliopolis. I used to go up a hill in that desert with one of my brethren in the Sunday Schools for prayer and meditation. From that spot, within the range of vision on the horizon, appeared Heliopolis, that splendid suburb with its buildings, streets, road construction and the inhabitants as a tiny insignificant thing . Only lights were visible from that altitude .

We felt that our souls were set free from the limits of length, width and height, from splendour and magnificence, and from exaltation and elegance.. A splendid palace seemed to us the same as a small house, for nothing appeared as it was. We felt spiritual happiness and pleasure in sitting on the sand on that high hill, a happiness which we never felt in the city.

When we returned to Cairo on a holiday, I tell you truly, my beloved brother, I was disturbed by this noisy capital (Cairo). I walked in the streets feeling an out-bursting volcano in my head caused by the clamour of people and the noise of cars, trams and various means of transport. I recognised amidst this noise that I would not be able to think in an orderly, systematic and uninterrupted way as I did while on that high hill..

When I closed the door of my room and stood to pray, I was unable. The four walls of the room seemed a strong barrier which prevented me from enjoying God. So, I did not pray but I came out of my room and walked very far away trying to find a quiet high spot where no buildings existed and where few inhabitants and little civilisation was found. After nearly an hour, I found a place which had a little of my requirement. I returned home depressed and longing for my high hill again..

The months of the camp ended and we returned to the city where I was forced to get used to pray within the four walls. Yet the memories of the high hill remained in my mind till now... To make up partly for this, I used to go up with my young friends after the Sunday lesson to the roof of the church to have a look on Cairo. We saw it from there also, in the darkness of the evening, nothing could be seen except the shadows of buildings with their white spots of light.

Your spirit, my beloved brother, wants to be set free, to fly like a bird which flies from one branch to another. It wants to be like the angels who are always singing praise to God without any bonds or restrictions. If you cannot attain this constantly, at least let this be on certain occasions...

This makes me imagine that meditation can be reached more easily and deeply by sailors, farmers and inhabitants of the mountains and deserts. I imagine also that we shall have the same ability when we get rid of the bonds of the body and go high into heaven where God, the angels and the saints are.

I discussed this matter with my father the monk and he revealed to me another spiritual, experience.. He told me how, at the beginning of his monastic life, he was secluded in his cell for twenty eight days encompassed within four walls seeing no one and dealing with no one. He spent that period in hard struggle between himself and God. It was really a hard time in which his soul was sifted but at last the spirit was able to come out- free from its numerous bonds and get to God.

Thereafter, the monk came out of his cell feeling that it was the same to him, to be encompassed within walls or to be free out of walls...

At this point, I reveal to you a deeper and more sublime level of spirituality.. The first level was feeling bored within the four walls.. but the next level is **to be unaware of the four walls..** In this case you sit in your room so absorbed in your prayers, meditations or readings that you are no longer aware of anything around you. You live in another world beyond the senses. So, you do not know whether you are in your room or in an open space in the monastery and whether your cell has walls or not. You do not even know whether heaven has come down to you on earth or you went up to heaven while still on earth.

Let me whisper in your ears, my beloved brother, that there were certain persons who could not realise whether they were in the body or out of the body such as St. Paul the Apostle (2 Cor.12:2), Saint John of Assiout and the spiritual old father..

The topic of the release of the spirit from the bounds of place, leads me to meditate on another subject which is 'the revelations'.

We have heard about the revelations experienced by St. John the Beloved and St. Paul the Apostle. The time is lacking to mention what was experienced by St. Anthony, St. Shenouda and the other saints who left their places and experienced living environments where they saw things which cannot be described or expressed in words

Here I remember a story told to me by one of our beloved brothers about a priest who was full of the spirit. When that priest was praying the holy Mass, he came to the words ".. he lifted his eyes up..." and he also lifted his eyes, and here... a deep silence prevailed in the church... Minutes passed while the holy priest was looking up in silence, astonishment and distraction. A long time passed and the congregation was silent looking at their priest attentively. Then the priest lowered his eyes and went on with his prayers deeply and fervently not aware of the pause which passed. When one of his followers told him after he finished prayers- of what had happened and required him to explain the matter, he was confused and refused to reply. But pressing on him, the priest said that when he looked up, he saw the church as if with no dome or ceiling and there was a long ladder between the altar and heaven. He

looked at it for just a second or more (as it seemed to him) and then went on with his prayers...

I wonder how some think of monasticism as a Way for ministry while I see it only as a way to heaven. In monasticism seclusion, contemplations, and continuous striving help the spirit to be released and united with God.

My beloved brother, I think there is still much to be said in this respect..







[5]

GREATER THAN HEAVEN AND EARTH

This time I was not walking in the desert or sitting at the door of the monastery, I was with my father the monk in front of his cell in the mount to continue our previous talk concerning **He who is greater than heaven and earth.**

My beloved brother, a spirit which desires to be released, knows well its own worth. It knows how magnificently great it is and how much greater it is than to be humiliated by the flesh, the environment or by the devils.

God's beloved, to have an idea about this matter, we have to examine it together. We have to also remember the past, the present and the future in order to recognize what a hidden power we have which we are not aware of. We have to remember that man is the only being created in God's image and likeness (Gen. 1:27). So when you are asked to introduce yourself, say, firmly and confidently, **'I am the image of God'**.

Being the image of God, you are immortal and not liable to perish at all. For is it possible that a person created after the likeness of God, the Immortal, would perish?!

See then how great you are than the high mountain, the great sea, the blazing sun and the shining moon. You are greater than the wide desert and the spacious plain, and even greater than the atom which destroys and all the power of nature. All these things pass away as the Holy Bible says, "*Heaven and earth will pass away..* ", but you will not, for the Lord Jesus Christ promised you an eternal life (John. 4:14) You, the image of God...

✠ You are the king (ruler) of the earth and all that is in it:

You, my great brother, are the only divine creature who, of all the earth and what is beneath or on it, are given by God the gift of intellect and utterance given to angels. You are the creature who is given the ability to know God and worship Him and whom God is pleased with... The nature which you sometimes think greater than you, is only made by God to serve you. You can subjugate everything in it according to your will and your power..

Therefore God first created everything then last of all He created you to dominate over all the other creation...' to dominate over the fowl of the air, the fish of the sea and over the cattle and all that is on the earth '(Gen. 1:26,28). Do you see how you ought to rule over everything though you think yourself weak and fear the hawk, the whale, the lion and other beasts which are in fact your weak servants that served you before?..

Do not think that you had this before the first sin only, for the righteous in every age has this dignity and authority. **Let us examine some examples from the Old Testament: Samson** tore apart the lion with his hand and killed it; **Daniel** was in the lions' den and they did him no harm; **Jonah** was swallowed by the fish but it vomited him without daring to injure him, and the **three lads** were in the fire furnace but the fire became for them cold and peaceful. **The same can be found in the New Testament: St. Mark** and his lion is one example. Another example is St. Paul who the viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand, but he shook it off into the fire and felt no harm; so the people were amazed and said he was a god (Acts 28:3-7). You also are given the power to trod the serpents and the scorpions and every power of the enemy^{* *}.

Oh, my beloved brother, would you know the value of your soul which you imprison because of your sin in a prison of humility, cowardice and fear! It peeps from behind the bars of your prison looking for its past glory and wishing to be set free if you do allow it.

✠ **You are the divine creature:**

You, Valiant, are a divine creature whom God the Son addressed saying, "*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine.*" (John. 15:4). You, at whose door God knocks wishing you to open for Him so He may enter and dine with you and you with Him and makes His home with you. (Rev 3,20; John. 14:23).

* The Prayer of Thanksgiving

You are the image of God and you have His attributes.. See how the Lord Jesus Christ - glory be to Him - says about Himself "I am the light of the world" *then says to you and your brethren, "You are the light of the world"* (Matt. 5:14).

You are required to strive to be like God for the Lord of glory says: "*Therefore you shall be perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*" (Matt. 5:48). You are the person whom God is delighted to call His son, though He did not will to call the angels or archangels His sons. He called you alone, you, the divine creature.

You are the person whom the Lord poured water and washed his feet and wiped them with the towel with which He was girded.

The members of your body are the members of Christ as the apostle says in (1 Cor. 6:15).

You alone are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you (1 Cor. 3:16).

You, whom the angels desire to be like.. and who alone partake of the holy flesh and blood of the Lord.. whom the Lord wished to be one with Him and with the Father (John. 17:21).

✠ **You are whom the angels minister to:**

"The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him and delivers them" (Ps. 34:7).

Did you not see, my beloved brother, how the Lord sent two angels to save Lot from Sodom! How He sent His angel and closed the mouths of the lions for Daniel! How Elisha was aware of that and said to his servant, "*Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them... And Elisha prayed... Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire.*" (2 Kin 6: 15-17). How also the angel of the Lord brought food to Elijah while he was sleeping under a broom tree, so he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights. (1 Kin 19:5-9). And how the angel of the Lord carried Hebbekuk to give food to Daniel in the den (Dan 14:35-38).

The time is lacking to tell you, the Lord's beloved, about the ministry of the angels to you and your brethren, their concern about you and their intercession for you. Truly, you are an important creature...

✠ **You Who Are Called A god:**

You, my beloved brother, are the person who is called a god by God and people.. "*I said, 'You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High'*" (Ps. 82:7). God had also said to Moses, "*I have made you as god to Pharaoh*" (Ex. 7:1). What is meant here is not divinity but domination..

Whatever the meaning is of these two verses, they certainly show your greatness in the sight of God..

✠ **You Have The Power To Bind And Loose In Heaven:**

If you are reasonably exalted because the Lord Jesus Christ ascended to the Father to prepare for you a place in heaven and will come again to take you , *"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Matt. 25:34), would you not rather be exalted because He gives you the keys of the Kingdom! For the Lord said, *"Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"* (Matt. 18:18). Moreover, He gives you the authority to forgive or not ^{*}*.

All this is given to you, who are in the image and likeness of God and whose form the Lord took when He came in a flesh like yours . Though His divine nature never departed His human nature even for a second or a twinkle of the eye.

✠ **You Are God's Friend:**

Remember how God - in His supreme wisdom - before destroying Sodom, revealed His will to His friend Abraham, *"Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?"* (Gen 18:17,18).

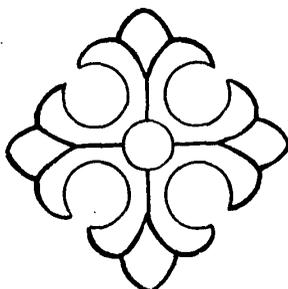
* This authority of course is given to the priests. But the priest is a man and this article speaks about man as a human being whatever his role may be and whatever generation he may belong to.

He even let Abraham argue the matter with Him blaming Him with familiarity and liberty saying, -"*Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?... Far be it from You to do such a thing as this... far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" (Gen. 18:23-26).

It is indeed familiarity and not mere words from a servant to his master or from a creature to the Creator.. They are words of a person who is sure of his worth in the sight of his friend..

Moses also did the same thing while talking with God concerning his people because God wanted to destroy them, he said: "*Yet now, if You will forgive their sin-but if not I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written "* (Ex. 32:33)... Certainly, this is familiarity and friendship!!

Now, brother, have you recognized the value of your soul and its greatness in the eyes of God? Would you let a deceitful devil play with your dignity though God has' given you the power over all the devils? I do not think you do..







[6]

HE WAS FAST ASLEEP

He was fast asleep when the angel whispered in his ears, 'Till when will you live thus, a mere shadow of another person who dominates own you as he wills?' The voice was lenient and sincere, so the sleeping person was not disturbed by it but replied calmly, 'What do you mean, my master the angel?' The angel replied, 'I mean that you have lost your personality with regard to your thoughts and your spiritual life.. and now you have the personality of another person. That person exalted himself and became exalted in your eyes to the extent that you took him for an example. You began to follow his steps in everything; if he is elevated, you are elevated also and if he falls, you fall with him. You adopt his views and follow his deviations. Moreover, you defend his views more than he himself . You take his principles as incontestable; suffice you that the person whom you worship has uttered them once.'

The person who was sleeping felt that all the words said by the angel were true but he tried to justify himself and said: 'Is there any harm, my master the angel, if I follow him as long as his views are sound and faultless?' The angel answered him, 'How do you know that all his views are sound? Do you think that your master is infallible? Is it not possible to find that he is at fault, being a human being? And if he is wrong, how would

you know since you listen only to his views and accept nothing else? You even refuse to listen to any person who may oppose the ideas of this (master); and if you do listen, it is with the spirit of argument. You try to criticise and refute any idea without understanding it just because it contradicts your master's views!!'

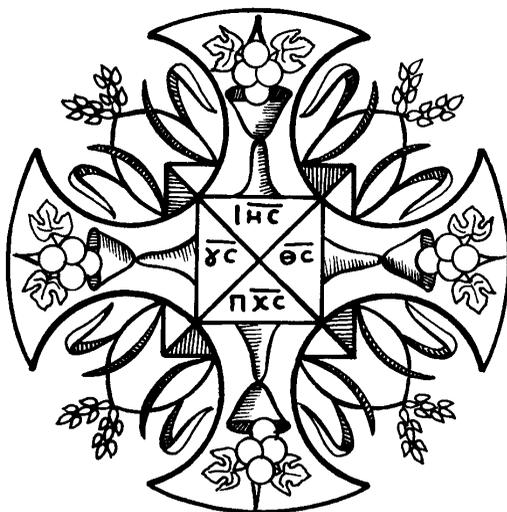
Here, the sleeping person rubbed his eyes bashfully to realise whether he was awake or asleep while the angel went on, 'Your spirit is imprisoned; it wants to be set free but is not able to because it is tied up with the fetters of that person... He gives you only the knowledge he wants you to learn and reveals to you whatever facts he wants. Even your own knowledge which you acquire from other sources must be reviewed by him.. You have completely lost your personality and behave no more by yourself. Whenever you face a problem, you seek his help; and whenever anything befalls you, you do not try to find a solution for it but wait till your master comes and solves it. Even if you take a decision concerning such a matter, he may cancel your decision in any way and whenever he wants without any objection on your side. The utmost thing you can attain in your life is to be a faded image of that person. You have lost the personality which God gave you when He created you.. and at the same time you cannot adopt his personality fully because the spiritual, mental and social circumstances which formed your personality differ from those which formed his. I imagine you rocking unsteadily between both ways.'

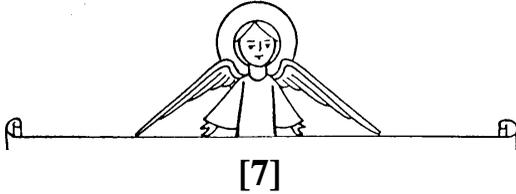
The sleeping person listened to all this speech feeling that it had touched his heart. He even felt within himself that he had become weary of the authority of that (master).

This gave him the courage to ask the angel to find him a solution; he said, 'Oh my master the angel, how dare I argue with my master?' The angel replied, 'I tell you, though the case is different, that God likes His children to be of strong personality and He even allows them to discuss with Him. Remember how Jeremiah addressed God saying, "*Righteous are You, O Lord, when I plead with You; yet let me talk with You about Your judgments. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously?*" (Jer. 12:1)... Listen also to Abraham arguing with God - glory be to His name-says, "*Far be it from You to do such a thing as this... Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" (Gen.18:25). Moses also spoke to his creator in the same manner; he said, "*Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people..*" (Ex. 32:12).

Here, the sleeping person asked the angel, 'Now, my master the angel, what do you want me to do?' The angel replied, 'Do not be under the control of a certain person. Listen to many, and read the writings of many, consider whatever views you want but have a discerning spirit which can distinguish between a sound opinion and a wrong one. Adopt only what conforms with your spiritual and mental nature, and what fits your social and practical circumstances and your age also. Know that there are various paths that lead to God but perhaps the path which fits the others does not fit you in particular.. Yours is the path which the Lord has chosen for You - in particular - not any other path.'

At this point the sleeping person got up of his sleep to find himself a new person having his spirit released and set free from any bonds, seeking truth wherever it is and giving no worship to a human being..





KNOW YOURSELF

My Beloved Brother, Do You Want To Be Perfect?

Do you want your soul to be released into a place where there are no bonds nor restrictions? Then, first of all, you have to rid yourself of everything, of every desire, knowledge and feeling which the world may have implanted within you.

You have to first deny yourself, and to stand before God as nothing.. know your real self.. Who are you? Are you not a mere handful of the dust of the earth..? **You are even less than the dust.. You are nothing..** There was time when you were not.. while the world existed.. without you.. Then God made you out of nothing'. First He created the dust.. then He made you of the dust. Why then do you exalt yourself Who are you to be exalted? Lower your head in bashfulness and humility, for you are nothing.. Stand before God broken - hearted and humiliated in spirit and remember your origin..

Now, have you recognised that you are nothing? I tell you furthermore that you are less than nothing, for nothingness is non-existence.. and non existence is better than the sin committed by man because, "*... every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*" (Gen. 6:5).

If you find something good in you, be certainly sure that it is not due to you, but to God because He alone is ultimately good, perfect and holy as the Lord says: "*No one is good but One, that is, God.*" (Matt. 19:17).

If you find something good in you, do not be puffed up and do not boast. Do not fight yourself with self righteousness but attribute every glory to God. It is His due not yours, for good is made by Him as He is the benevolent and creator of all good. He is even good itself, and goodness.. Without Him you are nothing, you can do nothing. So, do not rob God's glory and ascribe it to yourself. You may shine like the moon and your light increases till you become a full moon, but, in all this remember that the moon is a dark satellite which derives its light from the sun and has no light in itself. If the sun disappears, the moon will not appear because it is dark by its nature.. Now, would the moon dare speak of its light before the sun! It is the same with you, my beloved, in the presence of God.

On the other hand, if you find something evil within you, know that it is from you, because of the sin which was lying at the door having desire for you.. It was in your power to rule over it but you let it rule over you (Gen. 4:7) Nothing evil comes from God. God's nature does not conform with evil as we see when He made everything with His holy spotless and undefiled hands, "*God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good*" (Gen. 1:31).

Now, did you know yourself, my beloved brother? Did you recognise that self-denial must be the rule that governs your

relation with God? I do not mean that your self is something that is not worthily and so you ought to deny it out of humbleness!.. for we have seen that your self is nothing, ruin.. So, I do not like to use the words "be humbled" because a humble person is that who comes down from his place to a lower and less elevated position. But a person of no worth like me and you, mere dust and nothingness, cannot be humbled because he actually has no position to refuse nor dignity to forsake.. He is not elevated so that he may be put down nor eminent that he may be humbled. All that I mean by self-denial, my beloved brother is to know your self and thus you can realise that you have no worth whatever.. It is God who gives you, out of His loving kindness .If you love Him, some of His glory is given, a thing which you do not deserve but for His mercy, His humbleness and condescension.

Let us contemplate on the beautiful verse which says: "*God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world, and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are..* " (1 Cor. 1:27-29).

What does this mean? Does the kingdom of God fit only the foolish, the weak and the despised? No, for God had chosen before some learned men such as Moses the Prophet, St. Paul the Apostle & Arsenius.. He chose also some holy men who were philosophers like Athenagoras, Pentinus, and St. Augustine. God chose some of the Valiant such as Samson and St. Moses the powerful; He chose also some dignified persons like David the King and the princes Maximus and Domadius..

How Can Both Matters Come Together?

What is meant is not that God chooses only the foolish, the weak and the despised but perhaps that God-blessed be His name-chooses such persons who, though they attain great knowledge, power or honour, stand before Him as if ignorant, weak and despised..

Here is Moses, who was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, was not sent by God when he was selfconfident, depending on his human power. But God called him only when he said, *"Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the children of Israel our of Egypt?... I am not eloquent, neither before, nor since you have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech, and slow of tongue."* (Ex. 3:11,4:10).

St. Paul also who studied the law and was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, was not sent by God except when he could say, *'For it is written I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?... I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling and my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. "* (1 Cor. 1:19,2:3,4).

St. Arsanius was not made by God a father and a guide when he was teaching the princes Arcadius and Onorius in the palace of their father Theodosius the Emperor, but only when his soul was purified and could say, 'Arsanious the teacher of the Kings' sons, who studied the wisdom of the Greek and the Romans,' does not know the Alpha Veta (alphabet) which, an illiterate Egyptian knows'

Do you think, my brother who worship God, that you will lay a foundation in the church with your knowledge and culture! Oh you are poor! Truly I say to you that if you are not freed from dependence on your own knowledge, you will not approach God. God will not also bless your ministry because if you do succeed in your ministry, people will ascribe this success to what the world granted you of certificates and scientific degrees.. Thus God's glory would be robbed and given to the world.

My dear learned brother, God is able in this twentieth century to go again to the lake and call an uneducated fisherman to be an apostle and evangelist and this person will teach people better than you do. When God divided the Red Sea, He did not choose a rod of gold but just a plain rod which resembled millions of rods in the world.

So, be aware not to think of yourself highly or boast because of a worldly or a religious knowledge, or because of your spiritual readings or past experience.. But in spite of your increased knowledge and deep spirituality, stand before God everyday feeling your ignorance and deficiency and feeling that you need Him to guide you, as a beginner even though you are old. Stand before Him feeling that you urgently need Him to

protect you against the weakest devils and against the sins and transgressions which you consider the simplest or the slightest..

Let this be your feeling, for I have seen many people who read and write about deep spiritual matters but fall in the sins of the beginners... I tell you this fearing that out of confidence of your spiritual knowledge and experience, you would depend on your human power (arm) while the Holy Bible says, "*Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength*" (Jer. 1 7:5).

Know, my beloved brother, that any spiritual or worldly knowledge that does not lead you to humiliation and to the feeling that you are ignorant, is a false deceitful knowledge. It is a blow from the devil to make you turn from asking, requiring and knocking at the door... Feel then, my brother, that you are ignorant as the Holy Bible says, "*If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise*" (1 Cor. 3:18).

Before God, the wise and the fool are equal because both are ignorant and both are subject to the same death, and the same breath of air blows upon both of them.. Before God, the weak and the strong are equal also because both are weak for no one has any power in the presence of God.

Do you think, my friend, that you are powerful?

From where did you get this power? It is not yours of course because you are dust and ashes, you are nothing and ruin. This power is not also from another being other than God because He - blessed be His name - is alone the powerful and

every power is derived from Him. Is your power then from God? If so, why do you boast and swagger? Why do you use God's power in works not relating to Him? So, he that glories, let him glory in the Lord because He - the highest in glory - is the source of every thing that deserves boasting..

But if you are powerful through God though weak by nature, then say along with the blessed St. Paul, "*Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities... for when I am weak, then am I strong.*" (2 Cor. 12:9,10).

A person who thinks of himself strong will not be called by God because God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty.. So, be careful not to trust the power you claim to have because sin, "*.. has cost down many wounded, and all who were slain by her are strong men*". (Prov. 7:26). Rather say with David the Righteous, "*Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled*" (Ps. 6:2). Be sure then, my brother, that you are weak.. not because I told you so, but because it is a clear fact. Did you not fall into sin today?

Did you not sin yesterday and the days before? Then, you are not strong.. you are weak and a model of weakness.. you will remain so until you confess that you are weak and hasten to abide in the Father and the Father in you.

Let me whisper to you another piece of advice: Do not stay in your seclusion thinking yourself more powerful than the

others and imagining great projects you would have carried out if only you had been given the authority or had been in the place of the others.. You are not so powerful, my brother.. These are only day dreams or perhaps vanity.. for you are in fact weak.. Perhaps if you had been in the place of those sinners whom you condemn, you would have sinned more than them and showed more weakness. If you have conquered in the past or conquer now, it is due to God's presence with you not due to your power. Keep with God then and know that God will not be pleased to be with you as long as you worship yourself instead of Him.

Only one must work: God or you. If you believe that it is God who works and that you are nothing beside Him but you only stand to watch in wonder God's works, it is good that you believe so.. But if you think that it is you who works and that you have enough power to do this, be sure then, that whatever you do is in vain and you will fall and fail.

This does not apply only to your ministry and outer activities but also to your inner spiritual life. Again, if you think that it is you who strives to inherit the eternal life, you will fail.. and if you think that a certain sin has no more dominion over you, you will fall in the same sin even after some time and it will be a great fall...

The right thing is to feel that you are weak, in a land which brings forth thorns and thistles; and that you are weak before every temptation and sin. Say along with the psalmist, "*If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive, when their wrath was kindled against us.*" (Ps. 124: 2,3). Thus you will

cry out to the Lord and see how He will fight on your behalf and conquer. Then you will give glory to God not to yourself because the victory is His.

Lastly, I feel that there is much more to be said concerning this subject, so my beloved brother, remember me, in your prayers till we meet again and continue our meditations if the Lord's grace wills that we remain alive till then.







[8]

YOUR SELF AND THE PRAISE OF PEOPLE

I have previously talked to you about self-denial but there is still much to be said in this concern so that we may attain together the release of spirit..

Dear brother, do you want to get closer to God? Do you want to say along with the blessed St. Paul, *"having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better."* (Phil. 1:23). **Then be released First of your self, that self which you worship instead of God and which you try always to glorify and exalt before others.,**

Does the world glorify you, my beloved brother? And do you accept this? How wretched you are!.. **Do you not know that glory is due to God alone** because He is the Creator and the author of all creation? He alone is self-existent, eternal, powerful and present everywhere... Do you not know that when you glorify yourself or when you let others glorify you, you rob one of God's attributes and ascribe it to yourself!! It is the same temptation in which your father Adam fell, for Adam was not

satisfied with what God bestowed on him but aspired to exalt, himself and become like God!

Who are you, brother, that you may be glorified? **Does the dust have any glory or the ashes have any honour?** Or does nothingness have any respect and veneration?! Are you not a sinner like me! However, God protects you and conceals your defects from the sight of people... Does this give you, though a sinner and a weak person, the right to have any glory or dignity? Why then do you glorify yourself though you are aware of your nature and of all your sins, defects and weak points?...

Is it because people have not yet found out your lowliness or known all about your past? They have not yet discovered your weak points and your faults?.. Why do you deceive them though you know all this? Why do you deceive yourself for nothing? Do you thus misuse God's protection and concealment of your sins?..

Do you want God to reveal your thoughts, your feelings and your suppressed desires before people..!!

Besides, why do you seek a vain glory which will not accompany you after death nor avail you on the day of judgment before the Righteous Judge who judges not according to the opinion of people.. He needs not to do so because everything which is hidden is revealed to him and is apparent...

Is the praise of people still dear to you? Then know that **it is false..** for sometimes they praise you out of courtesy or

flattery or to encourage you or to show tactfulness.. Even if people are true and faithful, they will judge according to the outside. None can read your thoughts, know your intentions or examine your heart...

No doubt, my beloved brother, I bothered you with many thoughts; now I shall tell you a story. Let it be the story of Nebuchadnezzar.. (Dan 4:29-33) Do you know how he ascribe himself vain glory? Do you know what was his end? I wish that you would take a lesson from this story...

Have I annoyed you? Please forgive my weakness and my harsh talk.. But is it your habit to get annoyed whenever anyone talks to you frankly without flattering you or addressing you in a respectful way as the others do? . Why?.. Dear brother, you rather have to like this style because it reveals to you the truth about you. And you are in great need to know it for this is necessary for your salvation..

Now, let us discuss the matter together... **why do you want to appear great before others?** Is this due to inferiority complex? Do you feel that you are inferior, and in order to make up for this, you seek the praise of people by every means? If they praise you, you become pleased, and if they attack you, you defend yourself hard in order to appear blameless before them.. Even if they take a middle way neither praising nor attacking, you do not feel glad either but you try to beg their praise by telling them about your virtues so that they may admire and praise you...

Is not this true? If so, let us discuss the matter together further more...

It is good for you, my brother, to feel that you are not perfect but a sinner and a weak person the meanest of all people.. But, the remedy for all this is not to add a new weakness which is the love of the praise of people but to improve yourself and make yourself perfect.

Why are you concerned about the people's opinion concerning you or about gaining their praise? Would you not enter God's Kingdom unless people recommend you? know then that many of those who are praised by others will be cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone as the Holy Bible says, "*Woe to you when all men shall speak well of you.*" (Luke 6:26).

The praise of people, my friend, is temporal and passing for they have no firmness.. Once, they cried out for the Lord Jesus Christ as king and soon they changed and cried out "crucify Him, crucify Him". The praise of people is also false because they do not know the whole truth..

Here is a question which I am interested to know your answer of: **How do you feel when people praise you while you know your shameful hidden doings?** Do you forget - while they are praising you-those sins which if they knew about, they would dismiss you out? Or do you pretend to have forgotten? Do you consider such sins trouble's which must not appear at the time of your ecstasy created by the praise of the others? Then you are only concerned about the outside of the cup.. You only want to be like the whited sepulchres which

appear beautiful outward but are stinking within! Your only concern is the earthly life not the life to come.

Be frank, my beloved brother, in revealing your real feelings to yourself. First confess before yourself, then **pour yourself before your confessor** weeping bitterly and moaning.

Now, see how you ought to feel when people praise you:

1. **Think first that perhaps you are a hypocrite** and your outside differs from your real inside. Say to yourself frankly, 'I am a sinner and a filthy person.. When I sit before my confessor, I feel disgraced; when I count my sins I feel humiliated, low and base and I feel my meanness; and when I stand for prayer I feel undeserving to lift my eyes unto heavens... Why then do people praise me! Perhaps I am a hypocrite or a double-faced person who appears before people in a personality which is different from the real one! Or am I an actor? Perhaps I am so...'

2. **Feel that when people praise you, you receive your due on earth and lose the reward of heaven.** Thus you lose your crown for a trifling. When people praise you, you ought to feel sorry for the crown which you are about to lose.. This holy sorrow will purify yourself and make your spirit more free..

3. **When people praise you, feel that this may be embezzlement. You rob God's glory and ascribe it to yourself..** while the Lord Jesus Christ says, "*.. that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven*" (Matt. 5:16). So, if glory is ascribed to you in stead of being ascribed to the heavenly Father, you are considered as if robbing Him

whether you are aware or not... Therefore, when you pray saying, "*For Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory..*" blame your self which you want to be glorified and to rival God's power, for the psalm says,

*"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory"* (Ps. 115:1)

4. When people praise you, deny yourself and draw their attention to God. Without hypocrisy or pretended humility tell them that you are a sinner and a weak person and that it is God who deserves praise for such matters.. Address the same words to yourself as well and be convinced so that you may not be puffed with pride again.

5. When you find that a certain story or talk or some news would lead to your praise, try to change the course of the talk or at least do not be pleased but ascribe all honour to God contentedly.

6. When people praise you, remember the two beautiful verses which say, "*I do not receive honor from men.*" , "*And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself* ' (John. 5:41, 17:5). Learn them by heart and repeat them always within you.

7. When people praise you, remember your sins and let your conscience blame you in order that there may be a balance between your inside and the praise of people.

Lastly, if this is what you ought to do when people praise you, then it is a matter of course that you will not seek or beg such praise. We shall return to the same point once again in another article if the Lord wills that we live.. Pray for me...







[9]

YOUR SELF AND THE OFFENCES

My beloved brother, unless you are released from your 'self' which you worship in place of God, and which you exalt and elevate in front of people, you will never attain the eminence of the release of the spirit...

Perhaps you sometimes like to be praised by people.. and we have discussed in a previous article what you ought to do when others praise you.. Now, in this calm meeting I'd like to ask you,

'What do you feel and how do you behave when others offend you or mistrust you?'

Perhaps you would think that you are insulted.. and perhaps you would be much concerned about your dignity and the awe and respect due to you.. This would make you angry and furious.. You may avenge or defend yourself.. I do not deny you this right, for I am in the flesh like you and have experienced all such feelings or rather have been tempted by them... But come, let us discuss the matter together..

What benefit does anger avail you?.. It disturbs you, and destroys your nerves.. Moreover it deprives you of the peace of heart and of comfort.. Do you not remember the words of St. James the Apostle,

"For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. " (James 1:20).

Getting angry for the sake of your self is no doubt that kind of anger meant by St. James the Apostle.. I hear you saying that such anger relieves your sorrow and gives vent to the agitation suppressed within you! But why do you have such suppressed agitation which needs to come out? Of course the reason is obvious which is that you are much concerned about yourself! Be released, my beloved brother, from this self and you will have comfort..

If anyone insults you, **do not think of yourself being insulted, but of the person who insulted you**.. He is your brother.. and you-being a spiritual person full of love ought to think what can you do for that brother who sinned against you..

Of course, you do not want his precious soul to descend into hell, or that your insult stand in the way of his salvation.. Therefore you have to ask God not to count that sin on his behalf or punish him for it.. You have to pray that God may deliver him of such sin so as not to commit it again against you or others..

When you think of the brother who insulted you, **try to find out the reason which led him to do so**.. Perhaps he was ill, or nervous, his mind agitated or his strength exhausted or

overloaded with social, scholastic or financial problems.. **Consider what you can do for him..** Perhaps you can arrange for him a nice journey or a picnic or try to provide him with some means of amusement or entertainment.. If you find yourself unable to do anything for him, at least show compassion for him and ask God to give him special help..

People, my dear brother, are not wicked by nature, because when God made man, "*God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good*". As for evil, it comes to people from without; it is alien to them...

There may be other reasons which led that person to insult you.. He might have misunderstood you.. In such a case you can argue with him to convince him gently and lovingly..

However, there may be some persons who insult others merely because they like to do so, depending on their tolerance, to make of them a subject of their jokes and fun.

Avoid dealing with such persons, or address them, in a severe and firm but polite way to show them their faults and warn them against falling in such faults again..

This, you have to do not with purpose to avenge yourself or to retain a personal dignity but out of love for the person at fault. This would give him no chance to repeat the fault or fall again and destroy himself...

There is a great difference between blaming a sinner with a desire to take vengeance in such a way as to arouse his wrath

against you, and blaming him out of love in a firm but calm way so that he may feel that you love him...

This concerns your attitude towards the person whom you feel has insulted you.. but let me go a little deeper into your self to argue concerning your inner feeling..

1. Why do you consider the words of the others an insult or an abuse? Why do you not consider such an insult - as you take it to be - a plain word useful to reform yourself

If you get annoyed due to this, that is because you like to be praised and want all people to speak well of you.. You ought to rejoice, my brother, when people criticise and rebuke you.., because this is for your good. It purifies and benefits you in your coming life..

When someone criticises you, you thank him, for perhaps his voice is the voice of God..

I mean that God who loves you may have sent such a person to you to guide you and reveal to you your wrongdoing so that you may stop doing it.

2. Perhaps God is punishing you with such insults for other sins which you have committed in the far or near past.. When David the Prophet heard an insult, he said humbly, "*Let him curse, because the Lord has said to him: 'Curse David?'*" (2 Sam. 16:10).

My beloved brother, when someone insults you, remember your past sins and know that you are not perfectly pure so as to be beyond reproach...

3. Sometimes, God performs a successful act through you, but you take such success as a weapon to vaunt and right yourself with, feeling self-righteousness. So, God fearing that you may fall through pride, permits someone to insult you.. This may make some equilibrium within your feelings and eliminate your pride a little. Many of the persons who are insulted by others are proud.. while the Bible teaches us that the meek are raised by God from the dunghill and seated with the princes of their people (Ps. 113:8)

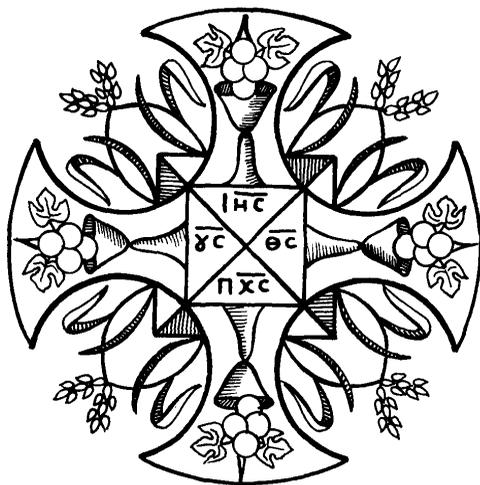
4. Perhaps your conduct has offended others though you are not aware, and so they insulted you... Therefore it is good to know the point of view of the person who insulted you for he may be right..

5. Such an insult may be a lesson for you to teach you love and long-suffering.. One of the spiritual fathers said about some monk who lived in seclusion not mixing with the brethren, 'Being with the brethren in the assembly is necessary for a monk, because if he cannot endure the quarrels of the brethren, how can he endure the wars of the devils in his solitude as St. Isaac says!!'

6. What harm is caused to you if someone judges you wrongly or thinks you are faulty? Would this hinder you from attaining God's Kingdom or would God judge you according to what the people say!

7. Or do you like to be praised and favoured by human beings who are created of dust like you? My friend, remember that your Master, "*.. was oppressed and was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth.*" and, "*He was numbered with the transgressors.*" (Is. 53:7,12).. He accepted that cross..

8. Lastly, my beloved brother, when you are insulted and when you feel annoyed and resent the insult though you are a sinner like myself, remember then how we insult God and how He endures patiently, loves us and accepts us! How great our compassionate God is! He has no likeness among gods...





[10]

BE RELEASED FROM YOUR 'SELF'

If you are still concerned about how people may judge you trying by any means to make them have a better idea about you, it will be difficult for you to attain the eminence of the release of the spirit..

Sometimes, people do not praise you or they praise others more.. In such a case, instead of being pleased and rejoicing because the devil of vain glory is unaware of you even for some time.., I see you seeking to trouble yourself.. You beg the praise of people in such a way that does not fit your dignity as a son of God.. by proceeding to talk about yourself..

Would you, dear brother, let me discuss the matter with you with the same frankness we used before?

1. Why do you talk to others about yourself ? Do you want them to admire you? Then tell me frankly, 'Do you, in your heart, admire yourself No doubt, there are many defects in you which you are in fact bothered about.. Why then do you want them to glorify a personality which you yourself are not convinced that it deserves to be glorified?'

2. If we do approve the principle of talking about oneself.. let me ask you, **'Do you give a true picture of yourself ?** Or do you mention only the bright points and leave the shameful and vile points which would make them hate you? My friend, do you not know that half the facts are not all facts? Does not your talk about yourself include then some deceit and lies? Do you not present only one side of a picture which has its defects.. those defects which you know well and your spiritual father also knows?

3. No doubt, you know also that talking about your 'virtues' would deprive you of the reward.. And certainly you have read the Sermon on the Mount and saw what the Lord said, *".. do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" and, ".. your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly"* (Matt. 6:3,4). I feel pity for you, my beloved brother because you strive much for a certain virtue and in a moment of rashness, in which the cursed self-righteousness prevails, the devil comes and robs you of all your striving.. And behold, all your labour is wasted in vain...

When I see you talking about yourself, I imagine you as a person who planted some plant and when God gave the fruit you set fire to it instead of reaping the fruit and rejoicing.. or you let the devil reap it for you!

My dear friend, whenever you feel a desire to talk about yourself, listen to the divine words singing in your ears, *"Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward"*. (Matt. 6:2).

4. Another harm results from talking about yourself which is obvious in the following story: Once, on a certain occasion I was talking with enthusiasm and admiration about a blessed person whom I love and esteem.. But one of my spiritual fathers said to me, 'Please do not proceed in this talk, because by this you gather the devils around him to fight him.. Leave him to labour calmly, for he is still a beginner and needs many prayers'. Thereupon I stopped talking, feeling that I did something wrong against such a person..

The devils cannot bear to hear about a person doing something good. So, if God does something great through you, let it be in secret between you and God. Do not talk about it lest the devils should envy and fight you; in which case you will not only lose your reward, but will also be subject to a hard war the results of which are unknown..

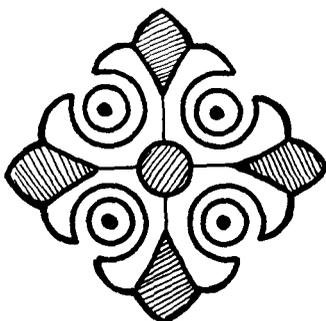
5. Those were some of the harmful results that befall a person who talks about himself.. But can you tell me of one advantage on the other hand that may be gained from praising yourself ? Of course the sinful feeling which a person feels when he sees the admiration of others for him is not an advantage.. It is in fact a sin which needs to be cured!! But there is a real advantage which I draw your attention to, ie. If the desire to talk about yourself presses hard on you and you are unable to resist it, then tell the others about your weakness and your shortcomings.. Tell them about your falling in sins and how you would have been like the people of Sodom had it not been for God's help.. Ask them insistently to pray for you that God may have mercy upon you..

6. Another word I want to tell you frankly though I hesitated long before whispering it in your ear is that **people feel disgusted of anyone who talks much about himself** .. They even call him the boastful or self-**conceited**.. Thus such a person shall gain neither heavens nor earth..

7. **Lastly, I want you to remember that the works which fight you with self-righteousness are not all due to your efforts**.. There are the surrounding circumstances which help you to perform such works, the role played by others in this concern and the abilities given you by God..

No doubt you would be exaggerating if you ascribe to yourself all this forgetting God's work through you..

I am afraid I have annoyed you, my beloved brother, with my frankness? Forgive me then this weakness and pray for me.





[11]

YOUR SELF IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Again, my beloved brother, I want to talk to you about your 'self; that which you sometimes love and trust more than God... Unless you deny yourself, you will never enjoy the beauty of the release of the spirit.

As love is the first commandment in Christianity, self-denial is the main path leading to love.. You cannot love God and people as long as you are concerned only about yourself and your pleasures.. So, be released first from this self, for the Lord-glory be to Him-says, "*Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*" (Mark. 8:34).

Thus, the Lord made self-denial the first requirement.

My beloved brother, let your aim be to conceal yourself in God so as not to have an independent existence separate from Him.. Say along with St. Paul the Apostle, "*It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.*" (Gal. 2:20).

If you ever wish to have glory, let your glory be from God and in God's sight.. and repeat always the verse which says, "*O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself.*" (John. 1 7:5). Do not seek glory in the worldly things because "*.. the world is passing away, and the lust of it*" (1 John. 2:17). But you, who are the son of God. "*.. you are the temple of God and.. the Spirit of God dwells in you..*" (1 Cor. 3:16). *You are born, .. not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*" (John. 1:13). That soul of yours is from God, a breath of His mouth.. In every Mass, you partake of the Holy Flesh and Blood of God to be one with Him and abide in Him as He wants.. Why then do you neglect such a great glory to seek another in the dust?

Why are you concerned about what others say of you and why do you become pleased when they praise you and defend yourself when they attack you? Why do you beg their approval by talking about yourself My brother, I am afraid you still love the dust and the glory of it! Is your self still an idol which you give sacrifices and offerings to? Deny yourself, my dear, and give all your love to God alone.. Say along with John the Baptist, "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*" (John 3:30).

I hear you grumbling, 'I do not want to decrease'.. Know then that you will not lose except the dregs that spoil your purity, and the worldly glory which is the dust that sticks to you.. You have to remove yourself of such glory to return clean as God has created you and as He wants you to be always.

That concerns your relations with the others.., but I want to talk to you concerning your look towards yourself and how you ought to stand in the presence of God.. If you want the release

of your spirit, stand before God as nothing.. Deny any knowledge or wisdom you have.. deny your intelligence and experience.. Stand in God's presence as an ignorant person who knows nothing.. But I do not mean that you feign ignorance or pretend this because God cannot be deceived and does not like those who pretend..

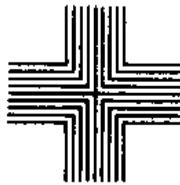
What I mean is to be convinced-in every matter-that your self must be concealed so that the Lord Jesus Christ may appear, not only before people, but also before yourself.. Say to Him, 'O Lord, I judge according to the appearances.. I am weak and cannot resist the devils.. The results of any work are in Your hand..' Ask God to intervene and guide you, or to dwell in you and work through you.. Then, when the required thing is performed, thank God because it is He who did it not you.. And when people come to praise you do not boast or pretend to be humble but seize the opportunity and chant to them the psalm which says, *"If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, let Israel now say-If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive... Then the waters would have overwhelmed us, the stream would have gone over our soul"* (Ps. 124: 1-4).

When you are fought with a certain sin, do not trust your power nor depend on your past triumph because sin, *"..has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men."* (Prov. 7:26).. But, be sure that victory is the Lord's and if He does forsake you in the slightest sins, you will be like the people of Sodom.. Chant then that beautiful psalm which says, *" .. You knew my path. In the way in which I walk they have secretly set a snare for me. Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me. Refuge has*

failed me; no one cares for my soul.. I cried out to You, O Lord: I said, 'You are my refuge, My portion in the land of the living... Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I... (Ps. 142: 3-6).

My beloved brother, you are nothing, and you have to admit this before God and before yourself.. Whenever you think that you are able to do something, come to your self and say: "*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt? "* (Ex. 3:11).

However, if God convinces you that He will be your mouth and will speak through your tongue and that you will be just an instrument, then proceed on your way. Though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you will fear no evil; and though an army encamps against you, you will be confident in this.. At such time remember me, the unclean dust, so that we may meet together.. there..





[12]

BE RELEASED FROM YOUR EARTHLY DESIRES

Do you know what things you ought to escape from? Escape from the interests, the hopes and desires... Escape from all such things if you really want to attain the release of the spirit.

My beloved brother, please let me go a little deep into your heart to talk to you frankly: **You have great hopes which you are much concerned about and which occupy part of your heart.** They even occupy your imagination and so when you are alone they come to you as daydreams and when you are asleep you dream of them.. You have certain aims which you know most and cannot deny.. You want to be of a great importance, you want to be known by others and venerated by them.. You have hopes regarding fame and good reputation, authority and power, hopes regarding wealth, social positions, knowledge, titles, future, appearances and credit.. You have certain desires concerning residence, food, clothing and various pleasures of the body.. You do not live in the world but in fact it is the world that lives in you, and dominates over your heart, your mind, your imagination and your will.. As for your spirit, it

is imprisoned within all this; it desires to be released of the fleshly desires.. as "*the flesh lusts against the Spirit*" (Gal. 5:17).

These hopes and interests make you miserable, my beloved brother, because not all of them can be achieved..

This of course makes you discontented.. You long for such things and this longing makes you unhappy.. So, you make your arrangements and seek the means to achieve them: you think, meet certain persons, write down papers, go and come, strive and try hard; then you sit and wait.. You may get bored and tired of waiting and of having hope.. You may get desperate and become anxious or feel afraid of failure. Thus you become unhappy and perhaps your labour and your attempts end for nothing and you do not attain your desire and this makes you more unhappy .

A more dangerous thing is that you may go astray because of such hopes and desires and fall in deceit, beating about the bush, fawning and flattery, lying or what is worse... This is what one of the wise men once said, 'A person will certainly fall in hypocrisy if he wants to hide something within himself.

I know that you feel tired and I pity you.. But when will you live in the fire of hopes! **What is amazing concerning such worldly desires is that they make you unhappy even though they are realised.** For when you attain what you desire, you will be pleased and such pleasure leads you to seek more.. as the Lord Jesus Christ said: "*Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again*" (John. 4:13).And when one feels thirst one seeks

water to quench one's thirst and the more one drinks, the more one will feel thirst and desire for water..

So, my beloved brother, I want to discuss the matter with you calmly.. Why do you hold fast to certain worldly desires while you know that "*.. the world is passing away, and the lust of it*" (1 John. 2:17). You are-like me-a stranger on earth and the hour will come when you will quit the world and all its possessions.. As you have come naked from your mothers' womb, you will return naked there (Job. 1:21). You will be forced to leave the world with its glory, wealth and fame and descend into a pit in the ground like any base person.. Whatever authority, pleasures or fame you attain in this world, this will not protect your mortal body against corruption or prevent the worms from feeding on your body leaving nothing of it.. On the day of judgement, you will stand before God destitute of all worldly possessions. You will keep nothing from the world except you works whether they be good or evil.

Therefore, my beloved brother, it is not good for you to confine your interests and hopes to this earth. Do you not remember that this earth brought forth to you thorns and thistles! It had once accepted the blood of Abel the Righteous.. and the cisterns hewn in it can hold no water (Jer. 2:13).

Take the example of the father saints who lived on the earth before us and whom the earth was not deserving to be trodden on with their feet.. Those holy fathers did not attain that holiness except when they emptied their hearts of the love of the world and the worldly things.. They had no longer any desire or lust, nor any possession in the world.. And because they did not

hold to anything in the world, it was easy for them to quit it and they even longed for that..

As for you, my beloved brother, you still have some worldly desires and, "*.. where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* " (Matt. 6:21). Your heart clings to the dust and its glory, so, the spiritual matters lose their value in your sight.. This is the same temptation with which the devil tried to tempt the Lord of glory, "*.. the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.* "(Matt. 4: 8,9).

Now, consider, if you do possess all such things and lose your soul which you imprison in a golden cage of desires, what will this avail you? Your soul wants to be set free...





[13]

BE RELEASED FROM THE INFLUENCE OF THE SENSES

You trust your five senses to a far extent and if your spirit opposes these senses, you reject your spirit.. When will you be freed from the influence of your senses and attain the release of the spirit..

You only believe the thing which you see with your eyes, hear with your ears, or touch with your hands.. You suspect anything else.. What is the reason for this!! The reason is simply that you still live in the flesh and believe in the flesh and its senses.

You look here and there and when you find no one to see or witness you, you commit the fault which you avoid to commit in the sight of others.. But do you think that really no one sees you! There are certain eyes which look on you in compassion and censure.. You do not see those eyes because you still live in the body... It is God who observes you and you do not see Him.. If you are in the Spirit, released from those deficient senses, you will be able to say along with Elijah the Prophet, "*As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand...* " (1 Kings 18:15).

Whenever you are encompassed with dangers, you look to the right and to the left and seeing yourself alone, you become afraid and terrified... **In fact God is at your right hand that you may not be shaken** (Acts 2: 25). You do not see Him because your eyes cannot see everything, for they are material and cannot attain the spiritual matters.. I wish, dear brother, that you would release your spirit from the influence of such bodily senses.. This spirit of yours, to *"..searches all things yes, the deep things of God"* (1 Cor. 2:10). Let is soar freely to see God at your right hand and whisper joyfully, *"... though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me. "* (Ps. 23:4).

The poor Gehazi, the servant of Elisha was very afraid seeing the great army of the enemy nearby and there was no hope whatever.. But Elisha who lived in the spirit was confident.. He saw with the spirit things which no eye could see and heard what no ears could hear.. He felt pity towards the young man and prayed to the Lord to open his eyes... *"Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha"* (2 Kings 6:17).. So he was comforted..

Do not trust your senses for they are weak and cannot comprehend the matters of the spirit. The widow of Zarephath of Sidon, saw with her human eye only a handful of flour in the bin and a little oil in the jar.. She thought that was only sufficient to make a cake for her and her son that they might eat it and die... But Elijah, the man of God saw something else with his spirit.. he saw that neither the bin of flour nor the

jar of oil would dry whatever she took from them.. This actually happened as we see in 1 Kings 17:14-16.

Elisha was standing at the River Jordan. His bodily eyes saw a river where one would drown if one walked through .. But his spiritual eye was not confined to this vision.. He saw the Jordan as a ground fit for walking through. So, Elisha took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him while he went up in the chariot of fire and struck the water. The water was divided and Elisha crossed the river(2 Kin 2:14). The bodily eye would see the mantle of Elijah just as a mantle but Elisha saw it with the spirit as a great power given by God and not a mere garment.

My dear friend, your eyes are deficient even regarding material things.., for there are some substances which you cannot see.. Though they exist, they defy your weak eyes.. You may only see them through a microscope..

If there is not a microscope available, and you cannot see such tiny bodies with your naked eye, would you then deny their existence, merely because you do not see them? If this is the case regarding material things.. what would you say concerning spiritual matters?

With respect to spiritual matters, let your spirit guide you, and do not force it to submit to the body.. Let it soar freely and swim in a world of divine matters as it is said: *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"* (John. 20:29)

Certainly, my beloved brother, you have heard before of the visions in which the spirit swims in the world of the angels and saints and see things which no mortal can see.. In such cases,

the spirit is released from the influence of the body and uses the members of the body merely for its spiritual purposes.. Hence, the senses yield to the spirit and not the spirit to the senses..

One day, someone told me that he had heard that St. George appeared in a certain church but he did not believe. He went to see by himself and to prove that it was only a false superstition and he went and saw nothing..

I do not want to make any comment concerning this story but I only present a point of view ie. such a person and others like him cannot see any visions because of their weak faith. They want to subjugate the spiritual matters to the senses of the body, while God reveals to the simple only the mysteries of His Kingdom.





[14]

I WANT NOTHING OF THE WORLD

This is the first thing which the person ought to say if he likes to attain the release of the spirit.

I want nothing from the world.., for the world has nothing to be desired.. but only temptations for the beginners..

I want nothing of the world, for the world is too poor to give me.. If what I want is available in the world, the world would be a heaven.. But it is still an, earth as I see.. there is nothing in it except material things.. in fact I search for heavenly matters, for the Spirit, for God..

I want nothing of the world, for I am not of the world.. I am not dust as they think, I am a divine breath.. I was with God from eternity, and God placed me on the earth.. But I shall leave it after a while and return to God.. So I want nothing of this earth.. *'I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father'* (John. 16:28).

I want nothing of the world, all that I want is to get rid of it, to be released from it, from the flesh and from the earth! I want to return to God-as before-to be again a holy breath not defiled by any worldly thing..

I want nothing of the world because I seek eternal immortal things and the world has nothing that is immortal.. All that is in the world is passing away, even the world itself will perish and come to nothing..I do not seek perishable things..

I want nothing of the world .There is He whom I ask to give me.. He who is rich and powerful, in whom I have found satisfaction and nothing is lacked .. He gives me before I ask Him, He gives me what is good and of benefit to me.. Since I have put myself in His hands I need nothing of the world.

I want nothing of the world, for the world does not give me benefit but with purpose to subjugate me.. Those who received what the world gave them became slaves to the world.. It gave them the pleasures of the body and took from them the purity of the spirit.. The world gave them the worldly enjoyment and took from them the blessing of the heavenly Kingdom.. Satan gave them all the kingdoms of the world and their glory to make them fall down and worship him.. He always gives all that he has to make people lose their souls.. As for me, *“I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ”* (Phil. 3:8).

This world takes more than what it gives.. It subjects those who desire it... So I want nothing of it..

I want nothing of the world, for I am superior to it.. I am a son of God - in the image of God and after His likeness.. I am a temple for the Holy Spirit and a place of dwelling for God.. I am the only creature who partakes of His holy flesh and blood.. I am superior to the world and the world is asking me to give it.. for I have the keys of the heavens and earth.. I, whom God, in His loving-kindness and humbleness, willed to make me the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13,14).

I want nothing of the world, because I want to live as my fathers did; those whom the earth was not deserving to tread on .. They lived so, received nothing of the world. On the other hand they were a blessing to the world.. For the sake of their prayers God sent water on the earth.. and for their sakes God preserved the world till today..

I want nothing of the world, because sin entered it and corrupted it.. In the beginning God saw everything and behold it was very good, as sin had not yet entered the world. Even the great sea creatures were blessed by God to be fruitful and to multiply.. But now, the marvellous picture which God has drawn is scarred. Therefore I reject the world which loves the darkness more than the light and I no longer desire anything of it.

I want nothing of the world, because I want You alone; You who loved me till the end and gave Yourself up for me; You who formed me out of nothing and was not in need of my service but it is rather I who was in need of your sovereignty..

Therefore I want to be released from the world and be united to You, who gave me the gift of knowing You .





[15]

LEARNING FROM GOD

There are some people who did not obtain any education. There are some who were taught by people and those are more ignorant.. But the true educated people are those who are taught directly by God.

When God created man, He gave him plenty of knowledge.. and whenever He needed more knowledge he was taught by God Himself.. If man has continued along this path, he would have become a scholar and would have deserved to eat of the tree of life and live for ever.. But the man accepted to take knowledge from another source than God and so he began to be ignorant.. His first lesson was from the serpent, and it resulted in eating of the tree of the knowledge and thus he became ignorant. Man seeks knowledge away from God and he only gains ignorance upon ignorance..

Man is God's temple and God's Spirit dwells in him.. the Spirit whom the Lord Jesus Christ said of, "*He will guide you into all truth*" (John. 16:13) and St. Paul said about Him, "*For the Spirit searches all things. Yes, the deep things of God.* " (1 Cor. 2:10).

However, due to the great misery and ignorance of the man, he seeks knowledge not within himself, from the Spirit of God dwelling in him, but seeks it outside, with people, and in the books which he thinks can give him life ... !

Thus, there are many scholars and wisemen in these generations while the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the sight of God.. St. Augustine walked along this path for a long time, seeking God outside himself, but when he found God, he sang to Him this everlasting song which says^{* *},

'Too late did I love You, O Fairness so ancient and yet so new! Too late did I love You! For behold, You were within, and I without, and there did I seek You.. I unlovely, rushed heedlessly among the things of beauty You made.. You were with me, but I was not with you..'

When Augustine found God within him, he became a saint...

You also, my beloved brother, will lose the way if you try to seek God outside you.. But sit alone, consider and meditate, go deep into yourself and seek God.. You will find Him there, in your inmost depths. You will see Him face to face and feel Him as a pouring and overflowing fountain of love.. Only then you will be greatly astonished and cry out in silent joy 'I have seen God'

This was the means which our father saints resorted to. They went out of the world leaving behind its crowd, tumult and

^{*} * The confessions of St. Augustine, Book X. Ch. Y-XVII-38.

noise. They left everything and sought God within themselves and they were able to see Him through continuous

Praise and meditation.. On the other hand, the ideologists, philosophers researchers and scientists sought God in the books and with people and could only suffer ignorance, mystery and weariness.

While I mention this I feel pain for them.. and also for some fathers who left the world to the desert but began to seek God in the books or in projects and ministry. In fact God was within their hearts wishing them to leave all these occupations and sit with Him. He wanted to reveal to them secrets which no one else knew and show them what no other eyes have ever seen.,

This applies not only to the monks but to all people.. Do you know, dear brother, what is the proper way for spiritual education? Certainly it is not to teach a person something new, for he possesses everything and the Spirit abiding in him knows much more than what you want to teach him.. But a proper way is to free a person from any wrong knowledge he actually has, ie. from any knowledge he obtained from the world or from people.

A child is born with a great beautiful idea about God within his heart, mind and imagination.. Then society begins to teach this poor child and provide him with ideas about God which differ from what he knows, and present to him certain pictures of God and the saints that limit his open imagination.. Thus the idea of the child about God and holiness is replaced by customary idioms concerning good and evil as known by people . The child takes of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil

which Adam and Eve ate from and he becomes ignorant like them.. Here comes the role of the true spiritual guide who must not provide the child with more knowledge but must drive out any false knowledge he had obtained from customs and from the wrong concepts of people regarding religion.. When his spirit is released from all this, he would know God the true knowledge because God is not far from him but dwells in him.





[16]

BE RELEASED FROM THE DESIRE TO BE TEACHERS

The desire to be a teacher involves a great danger.. So, avoid it, my beloved brother, and fly from it as far as you can.

You want to teach people.. Well, what things do you want to teach them?

Do you not agree with me, my dear brother, that **we are not yet mature enough nor have complete knowledge of all things?** There are certain things which we consider from one point of view only and so we misunderstand them. For example when we interfere to teach others religion, we do not teach it to them in its true concept but as we understand it in our age and in our particular level of spirituality and mentality.. But as we grow older and perhaps our spirituality and mentality develop and our understanding of religion differs.. what then would be the state of those who learnt from us in the beginning?

For this and other reasons as well, St. James the Apostle says, "*.. let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we*

shall receive a stricter judgement. For we all stumble in many things" (James 3:1,2).

Jeremiah the Prophet also says to God, "*Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth*" (Jer. 1:6). And Isaiah the Prophet speaking about himself says, "*.. I am a man of unclean lips*" (Is. 6:5). We have St. Bachomius as another example.. when people used to come to him seeking a word of benefit, he refused to speak but introduced to them his disciple Tadros. And the Spirit of God spoke on the mouth of that holy disciple..

Another old father when one of the young monks came to learn something from him, he said to him, 'Stay in your cell and it will teach you everything'. And the young monk returned to his cell benefiting from those words..

There are many other stories which I leave to you to read by yourself and take the benefit which God gives you through them. Here, before moving to another point I want to remark that many of the teachings of the holy fathers have reached us by one of two means: Either one of the monks wrote down the words of the old father during his talks with other brother monks, or the father himself recorded his meditations for his own benefit and they were found in his cell after his passing away and people benefited from them.

My beloved brother, there is a very great difference between the ministry of teaching which the Holy Bible entrusted to certain persons and the love of being teachers.. The last is of great danger.. It sometimes becomes a disguised devil.. The love of teaching is often accompanied by a hidden or apparent feeling of personal worthiness and of superiority to

others.. When such a person who loves to teach is given more chances to teach, this feeling grows within him. He even enters the church not with purpose to have benefit but to criticise and teach even the teachers. He never feels need to take but he always gives.. There will be a time when such a person finds nothing to give, for what he has will dry up...

Unlike this person were the fathers who used to learn continually and benefit from everything..

- **St. Anthony** the great monk was able to benefit from the words of a woman who was not ashamed to take off her clothes to bathe before a monk..
- **St. Macarius** also, the father of the desert of Shihit learned a lesson from a young boy.
- **St. Arsanius** who studied the wisdom of the Greeks and Romans learnt also from an illiterate Egyptian..

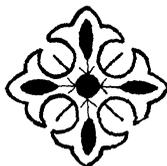
All those fathers had souls which flew like an active bee to gather nectar from every flower!

Another danger behind the love of teaching is to become so involved in teaching and you forget yourself. I remember this in regard to a Zealous person who used to read the Holy Bible not with purpose to get benefit but in order to prepare a lesson.. When he gave alms, this was not out of love for the poor but to be as a model to people.. He used to be cautious in his actions not being convinced with doing so but in order not to offend others.. Even when he sat with some people, he did not learn

something from them but his only concern was to examine what they said as a master and then wisely explain the proper situation.. He once said that when he stood to pray and it happened that God's Spirit worked within him giving him a certain feeling, or a certain meditation, he did not hesitate to stop his prayer and sit down to record such things to teach them to people.. Hence the means of grace have lost their objective in the life of such a person and teaching became everything to him.

Another word I want to whisper in your ear, is beloved to my heart, ie. What do you want to teach people? Is it religion? Do you think that religion is mere knowledge which one may fill the mind with? I fear most, my dear striver, that this way of teaching religion will turn it into a subject to be studied and people examine it like any branch of learning.. In fact, religion is spirit and life as you certainly know..

The Zealous person then asked me, 'But I am a teacher in the church, what can I do then?' I answered him, "I wish you to be alive in spirit, my dear brother. I'll tell you the truth, you do not in fact teach those souls entrusted to you but you love them.. Such souls which you see surrounding you are attracted not by your teaching but by love.. the 'love' which never fails because it is God's.





[17]

BE RELEASED OF THE FEELING OF POSSESSION

Many people think themselves rich and think they possess many worldly things...But as for you, my beloved brother, you were relieved of this feeling of possession since the time you realised that possession restricted your spirit.

Certainly, you have come to the world poor like me, possessing nothing in it.. You have come naked out of your mother's womb, not even possessing the swaddling clothes which you were wrapped in or the cradle in which you were lain... Anything you had afterwards is only a gift given by God to you.. This was not a possession but a charge entrusted to your hand for a limited time ie. your lifetime.. When you pass away from earth, you will be as poor as you entered it.. naked as you were born.. As for the things which you thought you have possessed in this world and which you were forced to leave behind, someone else will claim a right to possess them and

when he also passes away a third will claim the same right and so on...

Then you ought to know that you own nothing, not even yourself.. because you had no existence before. Before you existed you were nothing, then God created you.. When you fell, this self became possessed by death... But God purchased this self and redeemed it with His blood, so it became His own...

So, as you see you own nothing, not even yourself. Thus, a person who sins against himself is in fact committing sin against God Himself That is because he is corrupting a soul which is the ownership of God and corrupting a body which God-after taking possession of found pleasure in making it a temple for His Holy Spirit..

The same may be said of the person who sins against others.. It is a sin against God Himself whether directly or indirectly... David sinned against Uriah the Hittite and his wife Bathsheba but he addressed God saying "*Against You, You only, have I sinned*" (Ps. 51:4). He said so not only because he transgressed against God but also because he sinned against two persons belonging to God..

If you become aware of this, my beloved brother, you will recognise how dangerous is sins.. You do not possess your self so that you may dispose of it as an owner..

Regarding property, we have explained that we own nothing, but all we have is a gift from God.. You are just a person entrusted such property to manage it with honesty as a good

steward. You will be asked about it when God says to you, "*Give an account of your stewardship*" (Luke 16:2).

Therefore we find a very rich king like David realises the real state of matters and says, "*I am poor and needy*" (Ps. 70:4).. According to the wrong human measure David the King was not poor.. but in fact, according to a spiritual eye, he owned nothing..

Therefore also, the holy fathers vowed to live in voluntary poverty and considered this one of the main bases on which their monastic life depended.

This gives you the true meaning of doing charitable deeds.. You do not give out of your own property but you do give God's creation out of God's property.. If you know this, you will find no cause to feel self-righteousness or pride.. You will find no cause also to avoid the praise of others by praising yourself in a concealed way as by giving some money under the name of "a good doer".. Once I found a donor who wrote in place of his name "an evil doer who asks your prayers for him" I admired such a person..

The only One who can give of His own money to people is God..

So, I do not like to consider a charitable deed a virtue because it is not a favour done by the giver.. He is just a means to carry God's grace to others..

What is said about charity applies also to other good deeds which cannot be considered as a favour offered by anyone.

Another point attached to the charitable deeds is receiving thanks for them.. Let me ask you, my brother; 'how can you agree to let people thank you for something you have not given out of your own money. It is God's property, how can you receive thanks for it? How can you accept thanks? Give glory to God and hide yourself that God may appear who did all the work.

The feeling of possession restricts your spirit and makes you feel what you do not really have.. So, to escape from this feeling does not mean that you deny yourself but it means that you recognise the truth about yourself.. I pray that God may be with you...





[18]

BE RELEASED FROM THE INFLUENCE OF THE SELF

Be released, brother, from the bondage of the self.. And know that if you can agree with yourself and be free within, no surrounding circumstances can influence you.. For in such a case you can say that you have attained the release of the spirit..

Do you think, my dear brother, that the world has any power over you? Or that the offences and temptations can be the cause of your fall? No, you will be wrong if you think so.. The world or its temptations may be of some effect.. but the real cause of your fall is your inner self.

Unless you accept sin, love it or welcome it, you will not fall..

Joseph the Righteous lived in a sinful environment and he was encompassed fiercely by sin but he did not fall.. The reason was that he did not let the temptations enter into his pure heart.. So, it was easy for him to conquer the outer causes because he conquered his inside.

Do not say that you fell because the world is full of temptations but rather say that you fell because your heart yearned for such temptations and accepted them.

Take as an example two persons, each of them passes by a wine-shop.. One of them cannot resist the sight of the wine-bottles; so he enters and drinks till he becomes drunk... The other one passing by the wine-shop is not even aware of its existence or of the wine in it.. The wine does not offend him, it has no influence on him nor does it tempt him... There is one reason for this- because his heart is void of the yearning for wine and of its love.. His heart is pure within and nothing can affect it from without..

To conquer your spiritual life depends essentially on the result of the inner fight between yourself and you.. If you can crucify the self in you, you will deal with the outer world with a simple eye that sees everything good and beautiful as the apostle says, *"To the pure all things are pure"* (Tit. 1:15).

Some people avoid offensive surroundings.. This is good because God prevented us from standing in the path of sinners and from sitting in the seat of the scornful (Ps. 1:1).. But it is wrong that those people only avoid these surroundings and leave the beast lying within them full of the lust of the world and the things of the world... Such persons may succeed for some time but will soon fall under the pressure of the trial and the temptations that break into their lives... They love sin though they do not commit it.. and the person who loves sin will fall in it-even after a while-though he tries to avoid it..

Such persons avoid evil doings thinking that they make a sacrifice for God's sake.. In fact they are the same like the sinners in that they think that evil is pleasant and sin is good and desirable.. They still see the tree good for food, pleasant to the eyes and desirable (Gen. 3:6).. But they differ in one thing which is that they do not take of its fruit and eat... They did not conquer their inside.. God has not yet dwelt in their hearts, so they find in the world what tempts and offends them.. They find in the world their beloved desired sin though they escape from it fearing to fall..

It can be said that - in practice - those people obey God's commandments but do not love such commandments or even love God..

Such persons-if they are steadfast in striving-may be saved yet so as through fire (1 Cor. 3:15) But they may not be able to continue with their striving.. So they fall a great fall because their house is not built on the rock..

The right thing then is to set the spirit free so as not to be under the bondage of it and love of sin.. and to be free from the effect of evil.. When a person reaches. such a point, things which tempt others will not tempt him.. His holy nature does not approve of such things, so he does not respond to them.. On the other hand, he averts from them easily without any striving on his side.. Practically, he has stopped negative striving and began a positive one through which he tries to attain the depth of the spirit and the knowledge of God..

However, as we said before, a person cannot attain such a level unless he is purified within, and unless he conquers fighting the self which lusts against the spirit.

A person must be utterly convinced that sin is bitter and awful while God is good and life with Him is a joy..

In this internal war, a person must discipline his body and bring it to subjection (1 Cor. 9:27). He must even crucify the interests and desires of the self within him and not leave it crying out to make his heart lean due to its cries and enticements.. If he looks to the self according to God's measures, he will find it contemptible and shuns it saying with the apostle, *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me"* (Gal. 2:20). This is what the Lord Jesus Christ wants us to do, for He says, *"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it"* (Mark 8:35).

Yet, this cannot be realised except through a special help from God.. So, striving with oneself, must be accompanied by wrestling with God. Wrestle then, brother with Him in humility saying along with the righteous Israel, *" I will not let You go unless You bless me!"* (Gen. 32:26). Say also, *"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow"* (Ps. 51:7). And be sure that if you do conquer in such a war, no evil power can defeat you even though they gather up against you.

Therefore, to do all this, my beloved, you need a period of seclusion, a thing which was essential in the lives of God's children.. In such a period they could sit with themselves and

with their Creature and could come out with new weapons for their spiritual life which would push them along into the depth... Examine your life then and think carefully perhaps your need for such a period of seclusion is the cause of your fall.

A person who does not experience seclusion, does not know his real self.. He is often carried by the current not knowing where he is going.. He thinks with the mentality of the group following their path.. So, he falls and continues in his fall till he comes to himself and becomes aware of his fall..

As for you, do not be that person.. but give yourself certain times in which you can examine your conduct and remember the sublime principles which you were convinced of a long time ago.. You can also recall to your mind the lives of the holy persons who conquered and nourish yourself with God's words and with the sayings and stories of the lives of the fathers.. In such times, you can pour yourself fervently and deeply before God and take for yourself the daily bread which you cannot dispense with..

May God be with you, give you holiness from high and forgive us our sins .







[19]

THE WRETCHED

'Do you think that I shall be condemned alone for my sins? No, but you also will be condemned with me...for if the church had taken care of me, I would not have reached this condition'

Puffing the smoke of his cigarette into my face, a man said, 'Perhaps you are astonished of my condition now!' I looked to his long bright dressed hair, his hollow eyes, yellow teeth, and his fingers shaking nervously and I felt much compassion upon him... He is one of those whom the Lord Jesus Christ redeemed with His blood..

Before I could answer him, he continued bitterly, 'As you know I was not like this before... I was strong in spirit, of good character, attending the church prayers and meetings regularly... Then I became gradually languid until I stopped attending the meetings.. But no one from the church came to visit me or tried to make me return... My absence continued and I became more languid, my will became more weak and I descended step by step from my high level... and again no one came to visit me... At this point the devil visited me... when he came he found my heart empty, swept and put in order (Matt. 12:44) and my

will weakened.. The devil found no Bible beside me, no prayers nor spiritual fathers... Thus I was easy prey and I began to walk in darkness, the lovely darkness which people loved rather than light (John. 3:19), 'Here he shook his head calmly and said, 'Now I buy four cigarette packets every day'..

I whooped in astonishment and pain but he continued, 'I go to the cinema three times a week, and read impolite stories, I amuse myself with rude songs and make my company with a group like the devils of hell.. At the beginning of my fall, I resisted but I failed because my will was weak... But now, I do not resist at all..' Then he laughed in a sneering way and said, 'I may rather say that sin now resists me but fails because of the weakness of its will!'

All this time, while he was talking I was very sad but he looked to me in cruelty and said sharply, 'Do you think that I shall be condemned alone for my sins? No, but you will be condemned with me... for if the church had taken care of me, I would not have reached this condition!'

It is not important to tell you, my dear reader, the rest of the story of this youth for it resembles many other stories. But I want to tell you that I returned that night to my house filled with severe pain for him and for myself.. I began to ask myself frankly how many persons like him tumbled as a result of my neglect and not visiting them or caring for them? I began to review the names of the persons whom I did not visit for a long time and I felt great fear and dismay.. I feel very uneasy concerning them. I asked myself whether being in the ministry hindered ministry! The words of that youth rang in my ears, 'you will be condemned with me' I remembered also the words

of St. James the Apostle, "*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgement. For we all stumble in many things*" (James 3:1,2).

As this trouble continued for some time, I asked to be excused from the ministry but as they refused I prostrated myself before God and wept bitterly because I recognised how wretched I was..

I am wretched because I agreed to be a minister and did not say as Jeremiah the Prophet had said, "*Ah, Lord God! Behold I cannot speak, for I am a youth*" (Jer. 1:6). I am also wretched because I thought a lesson in the Sunday Schools was just a lecture which I had to deliver and leave calmly.

My dear readers, may all of you pray for me, and for every teacher in the Sunday-Schools because they also are wretched and needy like me.

Feeling all this pain and complaining of the responsibility of a small class, what would I rather say, my brethren, about the father priests? Are they not far more wretched than me? What can a priest do for five or ten thousand persons in his charge? What answer can he give when God calls him saying, "*Give an account of your stewardship*" (Luke 16:2).

In the first church of the fathers, the priest was aided by a group of deacons who worked with him, helped him in his ministry and ate like him from the offerings given to the church. But nowadays, a priests works alone. He needs your prayers that God may help him perform his duty..

And you, father priest, what made you seek priest hood? Did you aspire its superiority or its responsibilities? Do you not know father that you are responsible for all your flock, whether grown-ups or young, men or women, young men or young women.. You are not responsible only for those who attend the church but also for those in the places of entertainment and corruption, for every reckless youth in the roads, for every drunken in a bar and for every dispute within a family.

Yes father, if you do not know that you are wretched, you have to recognise this now... Go into your private room and weep bitterly... Put the whole matter in God's hands and say to Him that you are weak and the burden is heavy.. Strive and keep watch "*.. lest, coming suddenly, He find you sleeping*" (Mark 13:36).

If this is the case of the father priest, what can we say about the father bishops each of whom will be asked by God about nearly two hundred thousands or more whether priests or lay-men? Are not they very Wretched indeed? May you pray for them earnestly that God may help them carry out their duties?.. As for you father bishop, what thing made you desire this position? Is it the prestige or the responsibility? Did you desire the position and the authority, the tittle of "His Grace" or the membership of the holy synod? Or did you desire to save souls!

Let me ask your grace further about your responsibility.. If you compare the condition of your diocese when you first took it in your charge with its condition now.. is there any improvement or is it still the same? You have to go into your cell and weep bitterly, father bishop.. Remember how the holy

monks used to escape from this position because of its fearful responsibility. And when one of them was taken by force and ordained as bishop he cried out weeping before God and saying, 'O Lord, you know that I left the world and went to the monastery to seek my own salvation.. But now I return to the world though I have not attained salvation yet and is required to save others also.. O Lord, I am not able, You act with Your power' And God did act...

What about our fathers the Patriarchs , each one of whom God will ask about ten million in Egypt and much more in Ethiopia, Sudan and the Five Western Cities which are mentioned in the Holy Mass... What is to be said of those and of their serious responsibilities? Are not they also wretched? My brethren, you ought to pray for every Patriarch that he may be able to perform his duties and give a good reply to God when He asks him about his own soul and the souls of the bishops, priests, deacons, monks and laymen... and about keeping the church laws and spreading the Orthodox faith all over the world..

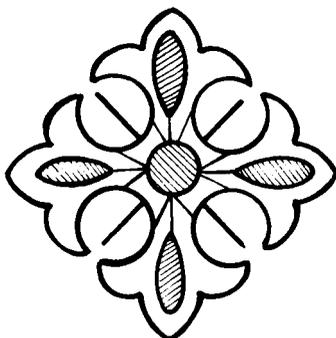
You also, who may be nominated to the patriarchate someday, you ought to refuse it and escape for your life.

But if you are called by God, remember its responsibilities and go into your cell and weep bitterly before God.

And you, my brothers the readers, do not look to God's ministers and to those who hold any responsibilities just like spectators praising them when they do good and condemning them when they do wrong... You rather pray for them that God's work may succeed through them..

You also, God's minister, be concerned with the responsibility not with the position... and when you feel the burden heavy for you, "*Cast your burden on the Lord and He will sustain you*" (Ps. 55:22).

Close the door and argue with Jesus,
in the darkness of the night.
Fill all the night with prayers with
wrestling and tears.





[20]

IT HAPPENED THAT NIGH

'Those persons devoted all their lives to God.. They spent every minute of their time in the ministry.. They considered the spiritual ministry their main work and other worldly affairs as secondary'

It happened on that night that I was alone in my private room, stretched on my seat and looking at nothing when a sinful smile passed on my lips... Perhaps I was thinking of myself as a minister... But something strange happened, I do not know whether my head became heavy and I fell asleep, or my thoughts strayed and turned into dreams, or God showed me a revelation.. **The only thing I know is that I looked and saw before me a group of angels of light who carried me on their wings and I went up...**

I looked down on the earth below me and found it diminishing little by little until it looked like a tiny luminous spot in space... I listened also to the noise of the world and heard it decrease and then turn into silence.. I felt my body becoming lighter and lighter until I felt as if I were a spirit without a body.. I looked around me in bewilderment and saw many

spirits swimming like me in the limitless space. I saw also thousands and tens of thousands of angels, the Cherubim each with six wings and the Seraphim full of eyes. The voices of all rose in wonderful harmony saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy". I found myself unconsciously chanting with them, "*Holy is God the Father... Holy is the Only-Begotten Son... Holy is the Holy Spirit*".

I woke up from my chanting on hearing a holy faint tune which no ear has ever heard before.. I went towards the source of the sound very eager to see what was there... I found, before me, at a distance, a beautiful luminous city hanging in the heavens and echoing hymns and songs.. Every tune filled my heart with joy and my soul with longing... Inside the city, far off, there were shadows that looked more beautiful than the angels.. There was Moses, Elijah and all the prophets.. There were St. Anthony, St. Athanasius and all the saints.. I saw also my fathers the bishops and priests - and my confession father.. There were also some of my colleagues the teachers of the Sunday Schools... I could not wait to see , I rushed towards that luminous city.. But.. to my amazement, I could not proceed because there was a valiant, awful, venerable and dignified angel who stood in my way saying, - 'Stop where you are! Where are you going?' - I answered, 'I am going into this great city, my master the angel, where I see my colleagues, my brethren and my fathers the saints'..

But the angel looked at me in astonishment and said, 'But this is the city of the ministers.. are you one of them? When I replied positively, he said, '**You are wrong my friend.. Your name is not in the list of the ministers'**.

I was overwhelmed by astonishment and cried in the face of that angel, who was in guard of the city, saying, 'How is that? Perhaps you do not know me, my master the angel! Ask about me in the Sunday Schools, in the meetings of the youth, in the churches and the assemblies.. Ask about me even in the city of the ministers itself, for many of my colleagues, the teachers of Sunday Schools know me well.'

- He answered me, 'I know you well.. and they also know you.. Yet you are not-in God's judgement-a minister'.

I could not bear these words and I fell on my knee weeping bitterly.. when another angel came and wiped away every tear from my eyes and said to me gently, 'My brother, you are in the place from where sorrow and sighing fled away. Why are you sorry then? Come and let us reason together. And we sat alone.. reasoning together.. He said, **'Those whom you see in the city of the ministers devoted all their lives to God.. They spent every moment of their time in the ministry.** Do you not agree with me that the lives of St. Paul and other apostles, the lives of the bishops, priests and deacons and the lives of the saints? As for you my friend, you were not devoted to the ministry but you served the world.. All your spiritual ministry was just one hour every week in the Sunday Schools.. And sometimes your service in other fields made you give God another hour.. For those two hours then you want to be with the apostles, the prophets and the priests in the city of the ministers?' During all this talk I was bowing my head in shame but I tried to overcome my bashfulness and dared to ask the angel,

- But I see in the city some of my colleagues the teachers of the Sunday Schools who did the same service like me'

- Here, the angel replied, 'No, they are not like you.. **Though they served one hour or more in the Sunday Schools, they spent the whole week getting ready for that hour..** They spent much time preparing the lessons, the illustrative media, and the means which would make the persons ministered to desire to hear the lesson, and above all praying for all this.. They also gave much care to examine the state of each pupil separately and to think of a way to reform him.. Add to this their involvement in visiting those persons, and inventing useful means to fill the time of those pupils during the week.. Besides they had other concealed services which you do not know. They considered the spiritual ministry their main work and other worldly affairs as secondary.. This does not mean that they neglected their responsibilities and worldly duties; No, for they were very faithful and successful in performing them. Such worldly affairs even comprised some service! Thus God counted them consecrated'

- I wondered at these words and asked him, 'How can I be a minister though I am busy with my worldly work?'

- The angel replied, 'Perhaps, my brother, you have forgotten the generality of the ministry! **You ought to serve God at any time and in any place** whether in the church, in the street, amidst your family, in the place of your work or wherever you go or exist..

There must be no separation between one's job and one's ministry.. In the city of the ministers we have teachers who were able to attract their Christian pupils to the Sunday Schools and could reform them and gave them continuous care.. We have also in the city, physicians who did not practice medicine merely for profit but were concerned first of all about the health of their patients whatever their financial condition was. They sometimes treated the patient and sent him the medicine free. They even established hospitals and dispensaries which offered medical care free of charge.. We have also employees who encouraged their colleagues to go to church, to confess and partake of the holy sacraments.. There are also, engineers, lawyers, artists, merchants and manufacturers.. who served God while, practicing their works.. Where you like them?

I was ashamed of myself and gave no reply.. But the angel continued blaming me severely,

- 'That was concerning your ministry within the scope of your job.. **What about serving your own family!** Joshua whom you see in the city said, "*As for me and my house we will serve the Lord*" (Josh. 24:15).. What about you? You did not serve your family but rather disputed continually with them.. You failed to be ' a model for them to follow.. What did you do for your friends, your neighbours and acquaintances? You used to visit them on the Nativity and Easter days but never talked to them about these occasions, about the new regeneration and the rising from sin.. On the other hand, you took part in their worldly joys and wasted many opportunities given to you to serve them... Do you consider yourself-in spite of all this-a minister?'

I bowed my head in shame for the third time, but I tried to give a reply saying,

-'But, my master the angel, you know I am of poor talents and it was impossible for me to perform all this service.'

The angel was astonished at my words and seemed as if hearing such a view for the first time. He addressed me sharply,

'Talents! Who said that without talents you cannot serve! My brother, there is what is called **silent preaching**.. You were not required to deliver a sermon but to be an example.. When people look at your face they learn meekness, cheerfulness and simplicity... When they hear you talking, they learn chastity, truth and honesty.. When they deal with you they find leniency, faithfulness, sacrifice and love of others. Thus they love you, imitate you and become godly though you did not preach them or deliver a sermon .. You could have prayed for them and your prayers would have benefited them more than your preaching'

For the fourth time I felt ashamed and confused and could not reply.. And again the angel continued , By silent preaching, you ought to have avoided offences. You ought to have refrained from any behaviour though it be innocent outwardly, if people were to misunderstand it and be offended by it.. Thus, you would have been blameless before God and people as the Holy Bible tells us, putting before you the words of St. Paul the Apostle,

" All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful"
(1 Cor. 6:12).

I contemplated on my life and found that in many cases I made others-though unintentionally- sin.. Here the angel cut my reflections saying leniently"

- "This is not all... I want to tell you besides, that I pitied you much, my dear human friend... I pitied you more when you were in the world.. and particularly at the times you suffered from self-righteousness.. As you looked at your numerous services you thought of yourself an example of ministry while you were not counted as a minister at all.. You may remember many other faults you made.

For example, yours was a formal service.. You used to go to the Sunday Schools as a weekly habit.. and to lead the prayers, take down the names of the present and the absent, and give prizes to the pupils who attended regularly and neglect the absent as if he was not in your charge.. Your service was void of the Spirit and love and so could not touch the hearts of the children. Your words and acts were not coming from your heart.., your chanting lacked the spirit of joy.., your prayers were not humble, meditative or imploring and your orders lacked the spirit of love.. Thus your service was not effective.. Even when you preached in the church, you did so because the priest asked you, and you promised and had to fulfil your promise.. Your main concern was to divide the subject into sections and put them in order in such a form that might attract the admiration more than gain the salvation of the souls.. Your voice-though being loud, harmonious and clear-was cold and had no life in it..

You felt happy when anyone praised you even though you did not show this, but you were not concerned about whether your words gave such a person new life or not..

Do you not see, my friend, that you served yourself rather than God and people! Do you not remember that you welcomed the service in famous great churches crowded with people rather than the service in small unknown churches! This is yet another evidence against you?

Moreover, your ministry lacked two things : the love for the ministry and the love of those whom you ministered to..

As for the love of the ministry, it is evident in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness..*" (Matt. 5:6) Were you hungry and thirsty for the salvation of the souls? Were you dreaming all the week of the hour which you were to spend with your children at the Sunday Schools? Did you feel pain for anyone who did not come and longed to see him not calming down until you met him and explained to him the lesson which he missed! **As for the second matter which is the love of those ministered to:** Did you really love them, and love them to the end as the Lord Jesus Christ did for His disciples? Did you feel compassion upon and give them abounding kindness? And the pupils themselves, did they love you likewise? Or were you all the time rebuking and punishing them by not giving them prizes and pictures? Who told you that this way was fit for reforming them? Love, my dear the man, is the main basis for ministry.. Unless you love those whom you minister to, you will not be

able to serve them.. and unless they love you, they will not benefit from you'

Here, my real self being revealed to me , I was ashamed but the angel looked at me very sympathetically and lovingly and said,

- 'I want to tell you an important fact which is that you ought to have spent a long time getting ready and filled up before starting the ministry.. But because you started early without having sufficient spiritual experience, you fell in many faults'

I looked at him inquiringly as if finding it hard for me to make any faults while I was responsible for correcting the faults of others.. The angel observing my look said,

- 'There was a boy whom you dismissed from the Sunday Schools for his disobedience and for not following the discipline; this made him more obstinate and led him to the street and to wicked company.. Thus he became worse and many serious harms befell him due to your behaviour.. especially after he had lost guidance and care.. Certainly you were responsible for that because it was your responsibility,

- I answered the angel, 'But sir, he used to interrupt the lesson and was a bad example for the others!'

Here the angel replied bitterly,

- 'Then, you dismissed him for that reason? Oh, you are poor! Did the Lord Jesus Christ send you to call the righteous, or the sinners, to repentance? Your blessed pupils, who were

the cause of your feeling self-righteousness, had their blessedness from God.. He worked within them.. But this naughty boy ought to have been taken care of by you.. For such a type you were called by God.. I tell you plainly, had you devoted all your efforts to reform that boy alone without doing any other service, that would have been sufficient to let you enter the city of the ministers.. You ought to have recognised the value of that soul and ought to have had much long-suffering..

A minister of the Sunday Schools who lacks these two qualities does not deserve to be a minister..'

- I said to the angel imploring, 'What do you think I ought to have done for that boy?

- He answered: 'You ought to have served him as far as you could.. to have examined his interior and dealt with him according to his state.. You ought to have prayed much for him.. and if you had done all this but it was useless, you ought not to have dismissed him but sent him to another class.. Perhaps another minister would have succeeded to achieve what you have failed to do.. If this solution had not been of any benefit, you could have allocated one or more classes for such naughty children where they could have had a special care according to their condition.. Such children ought to have been visited frequently and given sincere care making them near to your hearts.. and not dismissing them in any case.. They were not more wicked than Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman or the people of Nineveh in their bad state.. Who ministers to God never knows despair as long as he has humility in prayers and a loving heart.'

I regretted my past actions but the angel continued,

- 'There was another boy in your class who was absent for a week or two and you did not visit him.. You behaved like an official employee at the Sunday Schools and just wrote his name down as an absentee.. The boy, seeing that you did not visit him, came no longer and you, seizing the opportunity, wrote off his name from your list'

At this point the angel looked firmly at me and said,

'Why did you not visit him?' I felt weak before him due to his sharp voice and firm look, so I kept silent in fear.. But he repeated the question more harshly this time, 'Why did you not visit him?' I felt as if a storm was crushing my head and did not reply while the angel trembled and said in agitation,

- 'His spiritual condition now arouses pity.. and if he continues so, he will...'Here the angel's voice quivered, he stopped a little, then said,

- 'I and many other angels pray for him that God may save him.. However, if God responds to our prayers and sends him another minister who may be honest and the boy is saved, you will not be excused.'

His voice was faint and distressed.. I could not bear hearing it.. so I felt everything revolving before my eyes and I fainted and fell down..

When I came to myself I found the angel looking at me compassionately.. This encouraged me to speak.. I said,

- 'Please forgive me sir, there were thirty boys' in my class and I was not able to visit them all.'

- But he replied me, 'You also were tempted with the same temptation.. that of the number of those whom you minister to? God does not measure any service with the measure of the numbers.. but rather by the number of those who are actually renewed and saved.. I know it was difficult for you to take care of thirty boys with respect to discipline, visits, care and teaching It was even difficult for you to learn their names by heart.. You could not say as the Lord Jesus Christ said, *'I know My sheep, and am known by My own'*. (John. 10:14). Why then did you not confine your service to ten only for example?.'

Finding no answer for his question I preferred to keep silent.. But he continued,

- 'Do you know the main reason for your failure besides what we have mentioned? It is self-reliance.. You forgot to fast and pray for the ministry.. Your colleagues in the Sunday Schools, who are now in the city of the ministers, used to pray and to fast for their classes.. Every day they mentioned their children before God asking Him for each of them separately.. They used to ask the father priests to raise prayers in a special Mass for them.. Did you do that?

That was concerning your spiritual ministry.. What about your material service? Did you consider it a secondary matter? Did you not remember how the rich man perished because he

did not have compassion upon poor Lazarus? Did you not hear the words of the Lord Jesus Christ addressed to those on the left hand, "... *I was hungry and you gave Me no food, I was thirsty... naked... sick...* ". (Matt. 25:42,43). What did you do of all this? Did you not insist to have certain luxuries while your brethren were in bad need for necessities? Did you not...'

I could not bear more and cried out in pain 'Please sir, stop.. I realise now that I was not deserving at all to enter the city of the ministers. I was self-conceited.. to a far extent.. But now, having known everything, I ask for another chance to behave as a real honest minister'

The angel said to me, 'You had your chance but you did not make good use of it.. Now your days on earth have ended...'

I entreated him and wept and begged but he looked at me compassionately and lovingly, then left me alone and went away while I was still crying out, 'I want another chance... I want another chance' But he disappeared and I fell on my knees still crying, 'I want another chance', everything turning around me and I fainted again..

A long time had passed before I came to myself.. I opened my eyes to find myself, to my great astonishment, alone in my private room, stretched on my seat.. I looked around not believing, I looked again but it was true..!

Oh, how merciful You are God! Is it true I have another chance to be a good minister! I got up and raised my heart with a deep thanksgiving prayer.. I decided to tell my brethren the ministers everything to strive in order to deserve to enter the

city of the ministers. Thus, I took some papers and began to write, 'It happened that night...!'





[21]

"AND WILL LEAVE ME ALONE"

"INDEED THE HOUR IS COMING, YES, HAS NOW COME, THAT YOU WILL BE SCATTERED, EACH TO HIS OWN,.... " (JOHN. 16:32)

He Stood Alone:

He, the loving and kind-hearted, *"went about doing good"* (Acts 10:38). He moved from one village to another and from one city to the other, *".. preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people"* (Matt. 4:23).

However, he passed a life full of suffering. He was left alone by all in His kindness He left none.. Thus He was alone in His troubles and pains and faced oppression and persecution.. No one defended Him or supported Him.. He had trodden the winepress alone (Is. 63:3).

In the Garden in Gethsemane He prayed and spoke to the Father earnestly *"And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground"* (Luke 22:44).. He cried out in agony, *"Father, if it is Your will, remove this cup from Me"* (Luke 22:42)... But, His disciples, who were His friends and

beloved ones,.. left Him alone and slept.. Three times did He return to them and ask them to watch but they could not watch one hour with Him (Matt. 26:38-45).

When He was arrested, His disciples were scattered, each to his own and left Him alone as He had said before (John 16:32).. And when He was questioned, no one defended Him though He defended the most wicked sinners... In His passions, no one came to comfort Him.. It is indeed a lesson we take from the Lord when we find ourselves persecuted by others and left by all, even by our disciples.. and find ourselves standing alone..

Not only in His passions was He left alone but throughout His life also.. Once He was in the temple talking to the Jews about giving them His flesh and Blood but many of His disciples could not understand this; so, as St. John says, *"From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you also want to go away'"* (John. 6:66,7).

Another time, He invited some persons, but one of them asked to be excused because he bought a piece of ground and wanted to go and see it, the other asked to be excused because he had bought five yoke of oxen and was going to test them.. And the third was busy because he had married. The three made excuses though the invitation was for their own good (Luke 14:18-20).

The time would fail me, dear brother, to tell you about the Lord Jesus Christ who stood alone, *"He came to His own and His own did not receive Him"* (John. 1: 11)... He was the light

that "*had come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light*" (John. 3:19)..

All this took place in the past and still takes place now.. The same old picture: the Lord Jesus Christ is standing, the world involved in its pleasures, its delights and trifles, no one cares for the Lord Christ, not even one.. No one sits at His feet as Mary the sister of Martha did or leans on His bosom like John the son of Zebedee or washes His feet like the woman who was a sinner.. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself feels this loneliness and knows that the majority are away from Him... He even wonders saying, " *..when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?*" (Luke 1 8:8).

What about you, are you also leaving the Lord Jesus alone? Is there anything taking you from Him? Ask yourself..

He Was Unique With His Thoughts:

Few only thought of Christ.. Even those who thought of Him, talked with Him and listened to Him, those also had their own way of thinking which opposed that of the Good Teacher..

When the Lord went to a village of the Samaritans and they did not receive Him in that sinful city, the two disciples that were with Him (James and John) said to Him, "*Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them..!*" But He rebuked them and said, "*You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them*" (Luke 9:52-56).

Those two disciples were thinking in a way which differed from that of their Good Teacher because He knew that He had many chosen in that city.

This feeling of enmity towards the Samaritans was implanted within the disciples from their contemporaries the Pharisees, the Scribes and the others... But the Lord Christ was unique in His way of thinking.. He loved the Samaritans, pitied them and wanted to attract them to Himself... So, He told the people about the good Samaritan, and walked a long distance to restore the Samaritan woman who was a sinner.. He talked to the people of that city also..

The Lord had His own way of thinking concerning the gentiles as well.. Those were despised by the Jews but the Lord Jesus Christ praised the Roman centurion openly saying, "*Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!*" (Matt. 8:10). He praised also the faith of the woman of Canaan (Matt. 15:28).

In dealing with others, the Lord often had His own way while all others had a different way..

When the Jews gathered around a woman caught in adultery, in the very act, wishing-with one thought-to stone her; He was thinking in a different way, He said to them, "*He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first*" (John 8:7). So, all of them withdrew and He said to the woman, "*Neither do I condemn you ; go and sin no more*" (Matt. 8:11).

The Lord Jesus Christ was alone with His loving heart while the world, the cruel world which cared only for appearances, was amazed at Him... This is quite evident from the following two events: (The two blind men, and the children).

Once, the Lord was departing from Jericho, when two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by cried out, saying, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David".. Here, the multitude with their worldly thoughts feared that their cries would disturb the Lord of Glory, so they warned the blind men that they should be quiet.. But the Lord Jesus, the kind-hearted, called them and opened their eyes (Matt. 20:29-34). He does not get annoyed because of the cries of the people or their requests as others do.

The same happened when one day the children surrounded Him.. The disciples rebuked them thinking that He might be annoyed.. But He said, "*Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 19:14).

He Understood The Ministry In A Unique Way:

While all the people thought that the Lord came to rule over Israel as a sovereign king who would deliver the Jews from the persecution of the Romans..., the Lord Himself was thinking of a spiritual kingdom by which He would rule over the hearts of the people.. He told them on many occasions, "*My Kingdom is not of this world*" (John 18:36).

Thus, He understood the ministry to be a cross carried by the one who ministers along a land wet with sweat and tears... But such thoughts were not grasped even by the disciples..

So, we find that when He began to show His disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem, to be delivered to the hands of the people and be killed and buried, Peter the Apostle took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" But the Lord-glory be to Him-turned and said to Peter, "*Get behind Me, Satan!*" (Matt. 16:22,23).

I wonder how the world would have been saved, had the Lord followed the advice of the poor Peter the Apostle.!

On another occasion, while the Lord was putting before Him the cross, the disciples were discussing among themselves who would be first..! Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking Him that the two sons might sit, one on His right hand and the other on the left in His Kingdom! But the Lord trying to explain to them the true concept of ministry, said, "*You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?*" (Matt. 20:20-22).

The Lord was unique in His knowledge of the true ministry.. When He received the multitudes and spoke to them the words of grace for long hours, the disciples came to Him, when the day began to wear away, saying, "*Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food*" (Luke 9:12, Matt:14:16).. The disciples were not yet mature in

their thoughts... It seems that they thought the ministry was mere words said to the people! not love shown through works! So, the Lord replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat".

He Was Serving Alone:

The world is crowded with those who serve it.. and even those who rival each other.. Every enterpriser finds many to join him and assist him.. while the Lord-glory be to Him-is standing alone.. He said twenty centuries ago and still says "*The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest*" (Matt. 9:37,8). No one assists the Lord in His work, everyone says, "*Am I my brothers' keeper?*" (Gen. 4:9).

Dear brother, here are some cases * * I have seen myself...

- A family consisting of a poor woman and her husband and eight children.. The eldest was a rash youth and the next one was a young lad.. The income of the family did not exceed a few cents which the husband earned from selling lemons or something alike and which sufficed only for some bread which did not fill the hunger of the children.. They often had nothing to eat and the mother carried some of them to an orphanage or benevolent institution to beg some food for them. I need not tell you also about their clothes which covered only a little of their bodies.. God knows how they could bear the cold of the winter and the heat of the summer!.. Add to this the rent of the room

* Theses cases happened in the late forties and early fifties.

Where they lived and which they often were not able to pay and thus had to face the insults and curses from the house owner and threats to turn them out.

- Another woman, a widow and her children, who worked as a seamstress for a religious institution.. She fell ill for two months-perhaps for being weak due to malnutrition and as a result the institution dismissed her.. I do not know how she found medical treatment or how did she get the cost of the medicine.. but when she became well she found herself alone surrounded only by darkness.
- A third example, a young widow with two children who lived in a humble damp room downstairs for which she paid thirty cents as a rent. They were liable to have tuberculosis and other diseases.. Moreover, she was liable to abandon her faith, to fall in corruption and deviate.. How would she earn her living then? Would she work as a washerwoman? But she was weak because of malnutrition and could find no one to employ her..

There are many similar instances but the Lord Jesus Christ stands alone taking care of all, giving them food, relieving them of their pains, comforting them and teaching them patience and long-suffering.. He wants some of us to share with Him the honour of such a service though we are sinners... However, He finds the harvest truly plentiful and the labourers few.. He finds all of us scattered, each to his own leaving Him alone..

Who Suffers The Loss Of Leaving Him Alone:

Not the Lord Jesus Christ of course, because He is not alone but the Father is with Him.. Besides He is not in need of our being His servants but we are in need of having Him as our Lord..

When He calls us to stand beside Him in His loneliness, He seeks our good because *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Rom. 8:31).. Certainly who walks with Christ will find a spiritual pleasure. Therefore it is said, *"I sat down in his shade with great delight"* (Song 2:3). With the Lord one fears no evil as the psalmist says, *"..though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me, Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."* (Ps. 23:4) and also, *"Though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident"* (Ps. 27:3).

Behold, Christ is still standing at the door and knocking, waiting for you to open that He may come in to you and dine with you and you with Him (Rev. 3:20).

Do you still insist to leave Him standing alone.?







[22]

MEDITATION ON LIGHT AND DARKNESS

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning werethe first day." (Gen. 1:1 -5).

O Lord, You did not say, 'Let there be no darkness' but You said, 'Let there be light' and there was light, but the darkness remained and both existed together..

Why did You not put an end to the darkness since You found that the light was good? Why did You keep it? Why did You give it a name? And why did You give it power as You said, "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness" !

Why did You not make all the times day and light being Yourself the true Light, the unapproachable Light! Why did You allow the darkness to exist and be loved by people ' rather than the light? You could have abolished the darkness entirely as if it had not come into existence or could have prevented its existence... Yet, You let it be though it does not conform with Your nature. For what reason did You do that?

You let the tares and the wheat grow together until the time of harvest when the tares would be burnt.. Does the darkness also have time in which it will end?, at which time the sons of light will live in the light which they were unable to approach while they were in the darkness? But is it not true that the wicked will remain for ever in the outer darkness? Then the outer darkness is also eternal! but certainly it is outside the heavenly Jerusalem, far from God's children and a deep pit separates them..

When did the darkness come into being?

"..darkness was on the face of the deep". This was in the very beginning of creation, before God said, "Let there be light"! Since when then?

When God was alone in eternity, there was no darkness because there was nothing at all.. God was alone.. and He is Light.. Then the darkness came into being? When did this take place?, and how?, and for what reason? Please God, give me an answer for I do not know...

Did darkness precede light in the process of creation? What is the relation between this and the theory of nebula? No doubt

light came first.. while darkness-as a physical phenomenon-came into being as a result of the effect of the heat of the solar system on the face of the deep.. Thus, the vast waters evaporated quickly and this formed a thick layer of mist which veiled the light of the nebula.. So, there was darkness... However I do not like to think in such a material way but I shall meditate on the light in a spiritual way as I ought to do...

“..darkness was on the face of the deep".. This means that there was the deep. (ie. the waters), the earth and the darkness..

Neither the earth nor the waters knew God.. was darkness ignorance concerning God?

The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters but the waters did not recognise Him; was that what the apostle meant by saying, *"And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it"* (John. 1:5)? Then God said, *"Let there be light" and there was light.. Was that light"* the motive behind the beautiful verse which says, *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork."* (Ps. 19:1) ?

Was that the first light that entered into the world? But though it existed, the darkness did not end.. Why then was there darkness? O Lord, I do want to know.. Please let me understand.. Enlighten my mind and my heart to grasp Your words which give life...

There are other lights as well.. The sun, the moon and the stars are said to be lights..; the Lord said to His disciples, "You are the light of the world", the Son (God Incarnate) is Light out

of Light, He dwelt among us and we beheld His glory.. The Father whom no one has ever seen is then the unapproachable, Light.. Man's acceptance of God's action within him is called enlightenment.. Good in general is called light; righteousness, wisdom and knowledge are called lights as well..

In the beginning God created the light as a physical substance recognised by the senses... and God saw that the light was good.. But this light was the inferior degree of light, for there is another light which works in the living creation until it finds the person who can, through the Spirit, attain God Himself.. What is the nature of such light found in all kinds of plants and animals? How do they differ from the inanimate creation and surpass it? What is the relation of this creation with God before and after the creation of man ? God is the Light; He pours from His light upon the nature to be illuminated, and upon the mind, the soul, the senses and the spirit to have light.. But their light comes from the abundance of His light not from the essence of His light.. The same can be said concerning life.. God is the life..; He gave life to His creation, but this life is from His abundance not from His essence.. God is also an intellect and Spirit.., He gave man intellect and spirit as a gift of His abundance not of His essence... and so on..

But why did God see that the light was good? That is because it conforms to His nature... God is the Light and no darkness is in Him.. nor does He exist in the darkness otherwise it will be light.. Moreover, those who submit to darkness, will be cast into the outer darkness which means, will be far from enjoying God's presence..

Now, I'd like to ask, since God has divided the light from the darkness, how did it enter into man? How did it take a firm hold of him? How did man come to love it rather than the light? I leave the answer to these questions and the like to the meditation of everyone of us...







[23]

WHEN I SIT ALONE WITH MYSELF

O Lord, it is indeed a blessed hour when I sit alone with myself.. When I do sit alone with myself, it is in fact with You I sit because You are within me though I don't see You . This is not strange, for You were in the world but the world did not know You...

One of my great sins when I was living in the world was avoiding to sit alone with myself.

I had no time to sit alone with myself or more truly, I wasted the time You gave me, my Lord .Oh, for my foolishness, during such times, I sought a new involvement or a new responsibility to fill my time! as if sitting with myself was laziness!

When I was in the world I was aware - from a theoretical point of view-of the importance of being alone with oneself, but in practice I gave no heed to this... I would rather say that the devil did not allow me to do so for I was always busy, continually busy..

Therefore, O Lord, I was not aware of the treasure within me which is You..

When I sometimes did sit alone with myself, and did see a glimpse of that shining treasure, I used to conceal it under the pretext that I wanted a longer time to be alone with it.. In fact I wanted to go first to bury my father, to see my land and test my oxen!

But at last, Lord, when You did allow me on a certain day which I cannot remember exactly, to sit alone with myself a long calm time, I discovered the treasure that was hidden within me. Only then I sold everything and bought that treasure which is You.. And since that time I had You for myself..

Here I confess to You, my Lord:

Each time I sit alone with myself I feel that myself is more precious than the whole world as You have said, *'For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?'* (Mark 8:36).

And whenever I feel the value of myself, I look disdainfully upon the world and take from You the power to renounce everything.. And when I do renounce everything I look and find You before me encouraging me with Your words, *"Do not fear, for I am with you"* (Gen. 26:24).

Whenever I sit with myself, O Lord, and discover its interior and see what the strangers within it dared to do defiling your holies in it.. I confess to You everything and ask You to deliver me from the hand of foreigners.. The time passes quickly and I still have many things to tell You and to tell myself.. Thus my human comfort seems of little value.. I do not seek the company of others to have pleasure but rather have comfort in

loneliness, seclusion and calmness. This does not deprive me of being alone with myself which is very necessary for me and which creates within me humiliation and purity..

Sometimes, my Lord, when I sit with myself and examine it more profoundly, I find in the corners serpents and scorpions lying and resting within me.. They rather try to eat my very heart silently or stealthily and spit their venom into my blood, my thoughts and my feelings without being aware...

When I look at these serpents and scorpions they wake up and bite or sting my conscience, so I leave them asleep so that they may not make me suffer! But what is the use of leaving them so and closing my eyes in order not to see them and feel at rest! In fact I deceive myself and escape from it...

Is it not better to bring those serpents to light and fight them? O Lord, have mercy upon me for I am weak and I am aware of my weakness and inability to fight even the least of them... It is better for me to reveal them to You, my Lord, that You may fight for me, "*You will stretch out Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand will save me*" (Ps. 138:7).

When I sit alone with myself, O Lord, I discover my reality and recognise that I am dust and ashes in Your presence.. So I am humiliated and feel that the glory of the world is just a false outer paint which cannot change the self in any way...

When I sit alone with myself and feel how weak it is, I hold more fast to You realising that without You I can do nothing.. And the more I hold fast to You, the more You reveal Yourself

to me so I can see how fairer You are than the sons of men.. This makes me love You and love to sit with You rather than to sit with people... Each time I discover something new about You and my soul clings more to You...

Please, Lord, help me to leave people and be concerned more about myself to attach myself to You.. Then help me to forget myself and make You my only concern...





[24]

REVEAL TO ME YOURSELF

O Lord, It is not I who come to You, for I do not know the way well.. **My mind is limited and my soul restricted..** I am still in the flesh hindered by many things such as my lusts and desires.. My will sometimes stands in my way when I want to come to You!!

O Lord, I am also busy with things not pertaining to You! Many interests hinder me.. but, due to my great misery and foolishness, I do not try to rid myself of these interests but on the contrary I add to them every day.. So, it is You Lord who is able to come to me.. Come Lord, reveal to me Yourself and visit me who am a son or a servant.. You are all love.. You are even Love itself..

O Lord, it is not I who build for you a place in my heart to dwell in because "*Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it.*" (Ps. 127:1) ... Who am I to build for You a holy temple that Your Spirit may dwell within me? It is You Lord who built Jerusalem.. Come and do not wait for me.. lest You should wait and I come not...

I cannot know You by myself. O Lord, it is not through any effort on my side but through Your help... not through my

power but through Your grace.. You reveal to me Yourself in Your love...

But You will not reveal to me Yourself unless I love You.. Tell me then how can I love You unless You reveal to me Yourself.. So, please reveal Yourself to me so that my love for You may increase... because the more I see of You, the more I love You and the more I am attached to You... For how can a person love truly another being whom he does not know anything about nor has seen him or has only mysterious knowledge of him?

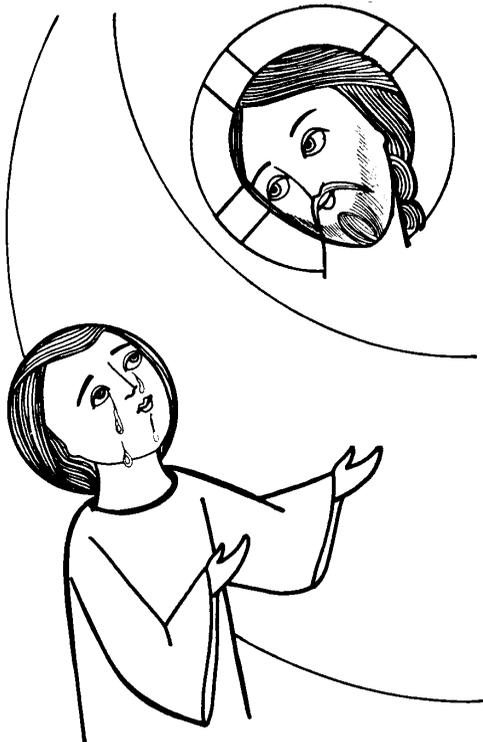
So, I pray to you to reveal to me Yourself for this is the only source by which means I can know You truly.. not through the others or through books but as the apostle said, "*.. we have seen with our eyes.. and our hands have handled..*" (I John. 1: 1)..

I cannot know You through perfect knowledge through books or through those who knew you, for even those cannot describe the inexpressible attributes which they saw in You and which no tongue can utter.. All that they can do is to fill the person who hears or reads about You with longing saying to him, "*Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good*" (Ps. 34:8)... But they cannot give a clear idea about our true nature! it is out of their power..

However, If You, Lord, do reveal to me Yourself how would I see Your countenance since without holiness no one can see the Lord! Holiness is beyond my ability because they have increased who trouble me and prevailed over me.. I am

weak before all of them, the world, the flesh, the devil the desires, the lusts and the thoughts..

I often fall and stumble.. Holiness is a dream which I long to have realised but how can I attain this! Does this mean that I shall never see You! Please, Lord, give me that purity of heart by which I can see Your countenance.. *"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow"* (Ps. 51:7).







[25]

LOVE OF THE WAY WHICH LEADS TO GOD

Why do I pray? Why do I fast? Why do I seek seclusion?
And why do I read?

Is it in order to be a man of prayers, or fasting or to be
known as a lover of seclusion or a man of knowledge?

Do I like to be a worshipper? Is this a lust I have for a
certain purpose?

Do I want to be exalted or to see myself a great man and the
means is to succeed and surpass the others along this way?

Am I concerned about myself; what is my position? How can I
attain it and when? How can I be promoted?

**Do I really love God Himself or the way which leads me
to Him?**

For example, do I love prayers or love God to whom I pray?

Sometimes I notice many imperfections in me:

When I recite all the psalms required from me, I feel happy.. not because I was talking with God but because this proves that I am successful in performing my worship duties as a monk!! On the other hand when I fail to recite all the required psalms I feel sorry... not because I did not enjoy talking with God but because I am unsuccessful monk... I feel the same regarding my fasting, my watching and my readings..!

It is absolutely a personal matter.. it is an evident selfishness which fills me with the desire to be exalted in my own eyes irrespective of my relation with God'!

When will the time come when I do not pray even one psalm, yet I feel happy because in spite of this I am abiding in God through other means of worship?

Do I pray to feel the pleasure and enjoyment of talking with You and to feel the happiness of being in Your presence? Or do I pray so that I may acquire a virtue by which I attain eternal life? Perhaps I do pray to talk with You and ask You to give me that life?

Is the prayer-from my own point of view-an objective or just a means?

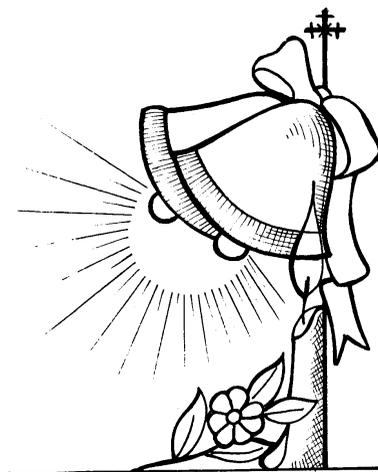
For example when one interrupts my privacy and my prayer I rage against him, I lose my internal peace and I lose my peace with people. Consequently I feel disturbed within me and lose my peace with God also.. This means that the prayer is an objective not a means and in order to attain this objective I must deviate and behave in a wrong way!!

Worship is just a way that leads to God.. but God is the aim.. Love is a way, ministry is a way but the aim is one ie. God..

Why then do we lose God in order to keep Him! and the way that leads to Him is in the form of desire!

Let us then love the way not because it is desirable-for it is indeed so-but because it leads us to God.. Let us hurry along the way and cross it quickly to arrive to Him..

It is perfection to make God Himself our way because He Himself is the way as He said (John. 14:6)







[26]

LEAVE ME NOW

This article is not for everybody. It represents a certain spiritual level and anyone who does not attain such a level cannot benefit of it.

O Lord, it is my nature to interfere always with things not pertaining to me.. I do not mean with the affairs of others and how they behave or how You act towards them though I sometimes fall in this mistake.. but I mean I interfere with my own affairs.. In fact my own affairs do not concern me but rather concern You!

My self is not my own.. it is Yours.. You have bought it with Your precious blood, so it became Your own - I no longer have the right to interfere with its affairs because You take care of it according to Your good holy will.. I have to look and give glory to You.

When shall I stop to interfere with my own affairs and leave this to You.. wherever You lead me I go.. and however You change me I turn to be? When shall I be satisfied with what You chose for me and not press on to change it as if You were not seeking my benefit?

When will my prayer turn from requests into thanksgiving?
Or when shall I find nothing to require because there is nothing
better than what I actually have?

When will the time come when my only work will be to do
nothing but leave myself in Your hands and forget myself there..
and to remember nothing but those hands that made me and
formed me, those hands that whoever they touched was healed..

When shall I have full faith in You that I may trust my life
into Your hands to manage it as You will.. because You are the
benevolent.. Then I shall not interfere with Your work or watch
secretly what You will do for me and how!! or think whether
Your action is acceptable or not!! and whether I ought to
interfere or not!

Ah, my Lord, how rude I am towards You! Though I am
ignorant I interfere with Your wise actions trying to stop them
and carry out my foolish counsel!! It would have been wise of
me had I kept silent and looked as a spectator not as a partner..
Then I would have seen wonders of Your wisdom...

O Lord, I think much of myself and not a little of you.. I
trust myself very much and does not trust You even a little.. My
self is my idol.. when will it be broken that I may worship You
truly? Since I cannot break this idol by myself because it is
beautiful in my eyes and beloved by me.. please Lord, destroy it
Yourself.. Then there will be none to rival You in my heart..
Thus I love You.. and there will be no rival for You in my faith..
thus I worship You..

O Lord, if I think of You as far as I think of myself.., if I depend upon You as far as I depend upon my own power.., if I do love You so much as I love myself.., then I shall be like those saints who denied themselves to know You..

When will You, Lord, release me of the self When? not to be a saint but to find You..

When will You bring my soul out of prison and let Your servant depart in peace? (Ps. 142:7, Luke 2:29). When shall I lose myself for Your sake that I may find You? Then I shall find myself again in You.. When shall I destroy myself for Your sake? then it will have life through You.. When shall I look upon myself and find it not but find You? When shall I look at myself and see You? When shall I look upon the world, upon people and see You? When will You be for me all in all and no one else?

"They will perish but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail" (Heb. 1:1 1, 12).

I was told to know myself and to go deep into myself.. but, my Lord, this self is the cause of all my troubles.. When shall I go into myself and find it not!

How often did I look and find myself hung motionless on the cross.. but when I looked more attentively I saw You and I felt happy.. I was not happy because I shall inherit the Kingdom but because I found You..

I think that I shall find You every time only there, in the valley of the shadow of death.. because though I walk *there* 'I will fear no evil, for You are with me' (Ps. 23:4).. You created us to have life but through our sinning we chose death for ourselves.. However, You, who are simple and everything is chaste before You, You sanctified death and made it a way to life!! Yea, the only gate to life.. for You say, "*He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it*" (Matt. 10:39), and, "*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me*" (Matt. 16:24).

In the first year of my monastic life, I read from some of Your saints that monasticism is to be released from all and attached to the One.. So, as far as I could, I was secluded away from the world and people but this did not lead me to be attached to You.. Perhaps the reason is that I did not choose seclusion for Your sake, but for my own sake.. so that I might be content with myself or gain people's approval...

In the second year I understood the release from all in another way.. ie. to be released from myself because it was for me all in all.

I wonder how shall I understand these words in the following years? I do not know.. I would hope that I forget them and forget thinking about their meaning because of being occupied with You..

When I met with the brethren in the monastery, I used to say that our meeting here on earth hindered us from being occupied

with God.. and perhaps would prevent us from meeting together with Him in eternity! But now, I would rather say that sitting with myself hinders me more!

I feel from time to time when I sit alone with myself in need to say to it, 'Leave me now, for this is good for us' Leave me so that I may be alone with God and deserve to enjoy His promises "**to abide in Him**".. Only then I can sit, not with myself, but with God who abides in me..







[27]

OUR LORD IS PRESENT * *

O Lord, You are present.. the weak are aware of Your presence and feel comfort... while the strong tremble when they remember that You are present.. Therefore the words "Our Lord is present" give delight and fear, give comfort as well as distress.

However, in spite of Your presence many people are not aware of it.. An example of those is Solomon the Wise who said, "*Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: And look! The tears of the oppressed, but they have no comforter...*" (Eccl. 4:1). Why then, O Lord, do You look and keep silent?

O Lord, show us Your mercy; give evidence of Your presence. Do not let them reproach us saying, "Where is the Lord your God?" Why, Lord, do You wait till the last watch of the night while the disciples are troubled in the boat and the waves beating fiercely into it? Why do You wait though the Holy Bible says that You will come and will not tarry?

* * This article was published in 1965

Make haste O Lord, make haste .. Even David the Prophet, complained of this tarrying and said, *"Make haste, O God, to deliver me! make haste to help me, O Lord!... You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not' delay."* (Ps. 70: 1,5).

We know that Your mercy will come, and that it is not for us to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority (Acts 1:7). So we shall wait always as the psalmist said,

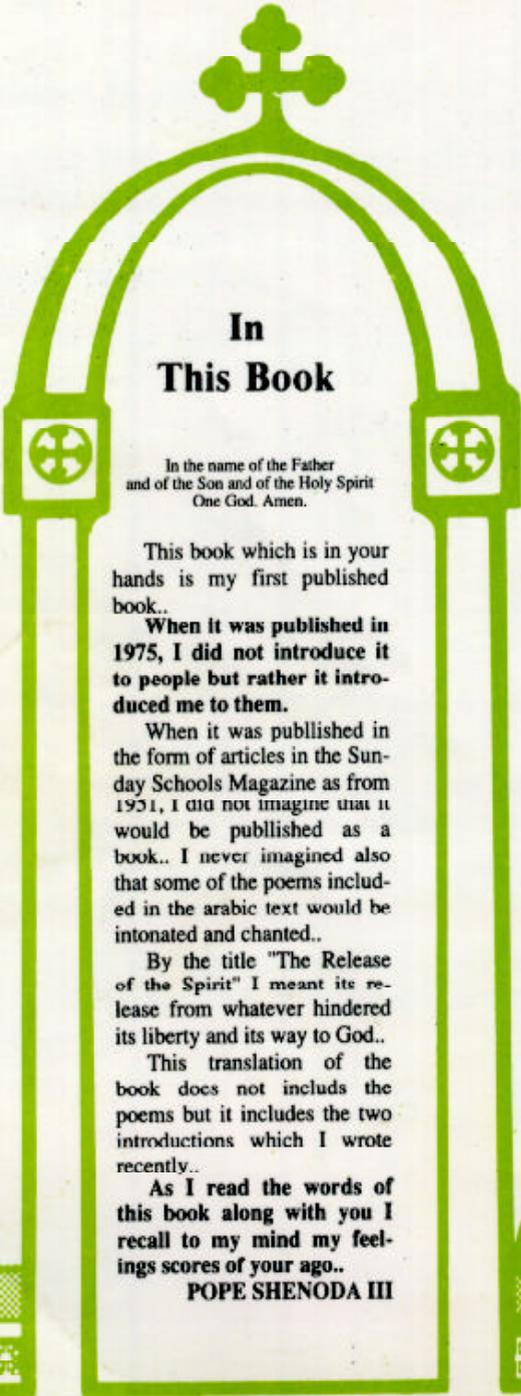
"My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning" (Ps. 130: 6)..

Here we are waiting, O Lord, with full confidence of Your presence. We are sure that You will act, powerfully, wisely and in the proper time which Your limitless loving kindness will determine.. We have before us the beautiful words of our Lord Jesus Christ, *"My Father has been working until now, and I have been working"* John. 5.1 7..

Work then, Lord; work for Your love , justice and goodness.. Work, that people may have rest and deliver their lives into Your hands... Then, they will meditate silently on Your action or chant while meditating-this beautiful song, *"The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace"* (Ex. 14:14).

They will meditate on Your works and sing in confidence saying, "Our Lord is present". Yes', truly "Our Lord is present".





In This Book

In the name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
One God. Amen.

This book which is in your hands is my first published book..

When it was published in 1975, I did not introduce it to people but rather it introduced me to them.

When it was published in the form of articles in the Sunday Schools Magazine as from 1951, I did not imagine that it would be published as a book.. I never imagined also that some of the poems included in the arabic text would be intonated and chanted..

By the title "The Release of the Spirit" I meant its release from whatever hindered its liberty and its way to God..

This translation of the book does not include the poems but it includes the two introductions which I wrote recently..

As I read the words of this book along with you I recall to my mind my feelings scores of your ago..

POPE SHENODA III

