

ISACCO DI NINIVE

discorsi spirituali

e altri opuscoli



**EDIZIONI QIQAJON
COMUNITÀ DI BOSE**

ISAAC OF NINEVEH SPIRITUAL DISCOURSES

Chapters on knowledge, Prayers, Contemplation on the
Subject of Gehenna, and Other pamphlets.

**Introduction, translation and notes edited by
Paolo Bettiolo**

QIQAJON EDITIONS COMMUNITY OF BOSE

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Preface To The Second Edition

The publisher's decision to reprint these *Chapters on Knowledge* posed several problems for the writer.

The greater familiarity gained in these years with Isaac's texts, though minimal and perhaps fallacious, seemed to demand a thorough revision of both the *Introduction* and the published version; the interest of so many of his further unpublished pamphlets then suggested numerous additions to the work translated here, whose position, in the *corpus* of his writings, was confirmed as truly central.

I ultimately chose a median procedure. The *Introduction* to the *Chapters* remains unchanged: in fact, too difficult a rewrite would have resulted. Corrected instead is often the translation of the text and modified and enriched are sometimes the notes. This is still a provisional and questionable work, but I hope some sentences are now clearer. I have followed the centuries, then, with some other writings of Isaac, whose presence here I would like to quickly justify.

First of all, the *Chapters*, in the manuscripts that attest to them,¹ are accompanied by 30 prayers.² The connection between the two sections is not extrinsic, the result of the later care of an editor. Isaac himself emphasizes at the end of the centuries "the height of the mysteries reposed in this book," which "was not [the product] of our own power," "for clearly grace was its ordering." This is why he writes that he wished to have in his wake the "conversations [proper] to hidden prayer," words "which also proceed from a gift of grace," the assiduous recitation of which is "support" and effective aid to the intelligence of that.

However, the *Prayers* is not the only text that has been added. There are still a few other pamphlets that it seemed good to include. Thus attached here are translations of two short treatises useful for better understanding the status of pure prayer and contemplation, nodal points of Isaac's meditation.³ They have been followed by two further writings whose subject is the investigation of divine charity, the discussed heart (mind you!) of his "sweet doctrine." One is a "Contemplation on the Subject of Gehenna, as far as it is possible that it is given to the nature of man the grace to glorify [God] concerning these mysteries",⁴ which I believe allows a renewed understanding

1 To those mentioned in footnote 19 of the *Introduction* that follows here must be added others, on which cf. footnote to an article of mine, forthcoming at *Parole del'Orient*, entitled: "Poverty and Knowledge - Notes on the Gnostic Centuries of the Evagrian Tradition in Syria."

2 In the Oxford ms, from which I translate, the *Chapters* are read on ff. 20 v°-110r°; the Prayers, after a brief introduction (ff. 110r°-112r°), which is also translated here, are read on ff. 112r°-118v°.

3 In the Oxford ms they are read on ff. 170v°-171r° and 174r°-176r°, respectively.

4 In the Oxford ms the pamphlet can be read on ff. 179r°-186r°.

of the eschatological meditation not only of Isaac, but also of a relevant part of the Antiochene tradition in its own major interpreters - along lines quite different from the Origenian ones, but finally converging with them. The second, which I take from the so-called "third part" of our author's writings, betrayed by a manuscript in the Issayi collection in Tehran, concerns "On Creation and God"⁵ and well seals the tone of the overall testimony of the solitary and bishop of the church of Persia, whose unworthiness he also claims to be authoritative: "making the interpretation of divine charity, unspeakable to the created tongue."

For this is the point: *He emptied his soul*, says the divine Book (Phil. 2:7a). "The interpretation of this-which the blessed Paul said with unspeakable wonder-is the intelligent narrative of divine charity, for [the Lord] so loved the creation that it was called God and the name of his greatness became his..." To this *alone* in agony the Christian is given, gives himself. All here is the magisterium of Isaac: he emptied himself - for charity.⁶

There would be nothing more to add, but the invitation of some has induced me to close this reissue of the *Chapters* with a brief note on prayer, the work par excellence of the believer. It is a brief recapitulation, probably not at all foolish, for "not everyone is to inquire into these distinctions, but only those who in themselves have become spectators or servants of the thing or who have grown up in the presence of fathers [who] such [were] and have received the truth from their mouths and in this and as many occupations have spent their days, in questions and answers as to what is true" (B 22:206)⁷.

It is so: only the child-like sweetness that I feel in repeating these words, faithful and strong, perhaps mitigates my unkindness. Those who read - and among them most who I love - they hear and in them quietly work. Isaac and my dead, as they say, welcome and bless this uncertain fruit of common toil.

Paul Bettolo

5 This is not the place to discuss the problems posed by this additional section of Isaac's writings. In the ms indicated the treatise is read on pp. 22a-26a.

6 On this I would like to refer to a further contribution of mine, perhaps highly debatable, forthcoming at Irénikon: "'With the Purpose of Charity': God and Creation in the Meditation of Isaac of Nineveh."

7 For the criteria of citation cf. note 18 to the Introduction below. The texts added to this reissue will hereafter be cited, in order, as: Prayers (or Prayers:Introduction, for the short section devoted to them, noted in footnote 2); holy quivers; On higher practice; On Gehenna; On creation. The abbreviated title is followed by a cross-reference to the page or pages where the quoted text is read in this book

Introduction

When Iván Karamàzov, over-excited on the gloomy evening before his deposition at the trial for the alleged patricide carried out by his brother Mìtja, entered the room of the ailing Smerdyakov, he noticed on the only table in the room "a large book with a yellow cover." The subsequent dramatic conversation was thus to distract his attention from it. Indeed, Smerdyakov reveals to him that he was the author of the murder, but at the same time accuses him of having been its direct inspiration. Later, however, when for the entrance to the landlady's room his host hastily covers the money, evidence of the crime, with "that one book, thick and with a yellow cover," he "mechanically" reads its title: Sermons of Our Holy Father Isaak the Syriac.

This was a volume that had belonged to Grigòrij, servant of Iván's father, with whom Smerdjàkov had lived as a son. In his solitary occupation with "sacred things," Grigory "read the Martyrology," paused over the book of Job, but in particular he "stubbornly" applied himself to the "sermons" and "sermons" of his Syrian father: "he understood almost nothing about it," Dostoèvsky notes, "but perhaps because of this he appreciated and loved that book more than anyone else.

There are no other mentions of Isaac in *The Brothers Karamazov*, but a recent Soviet edition of the work, in the notes commenting on the text, refers several times to the writings of this father, whom Dostoevsky owned in a version printed in Moscow in 1858. These are illuminating references, relating to Dean Zosima's teaching on the love of God. They are found, for example, in the margins of his words on forgiveness, addressed to the woman, widowed for three years, who visits him, or those on hell, "suffering from no longer being able to love," which also, perhaps, will find alleviation because of that charity that induces even the damned to late but convinced submission, to humility then, and thence, invariably, to some joyful sharing of self.

So that difficult and heavy book really covers the money of the crime, witnesses God's invincible charity.

Life and Writings

Two tidbits are transmitted to us about Isaac's life. One can be read in chapter 125 of *Liber Castitatorum*, according to the title given to it by P. Bedjan, its second editor, *Book of Founders of Monasteries in the kingdom of the Persians and Arabs*,⁸ written probably compiled between 860 and 870 by Isho'dnah, metropolitan of Basra, or Basra, in southern Iraq (hereafter A). The other, published in a collection of *Studia Syriaca* by I.E. Rahmani in the early 1900s,⁹ the first in a series of short profiles of Nestorian monks who lived between the 6th and 8th centuries, is anonymous and proceeds perhaps from circles connected with the convent of Rabban Shabur, in Bet Huzaye, present-day Iranian Khuzistan, where Isaac seems to have spent the last years of his life and been buried (hereafter B).⁷

Both agree in some few pieces of information that are decisive for his biography.¹⁰ We are told that, a native of Bet Qatraye and a monk there, he was noticed there by Mar George, the Catholicos,¹¹ when he traveled to that region. He would then take him with him to Bet Aramaye and there, in the monastery of Bet 'Awe, consecrate him bishop of Nineveh. Let us dwell on these indications.¹²

Geography first. The Bet Qatraye encompassed the western coastal region of the Persian Gulf and the islands facing it in its northern part, opposite Fars, Persia. It was a rich region for trade (the route to India passed through its ports), but also for the fishing that took place in its waters, particularly pearl fishing. Still, in ancient times its own land was fertile, known for the dates and grains it produced, and its cities industrious, famous for the cloth woven there.

It was the trade ports that justified the rapid spread of Christianity in this area, whose churches would become suffragans of the metropolitan of Fars.

Chronology, then. Mar George was a Catholicos of the Persian church between 661 and 680/81.¹³ More: we can specify the date of his journey to Bet Qatraye, to which we shall have occasion to

8 Cf. J.B. Chabot, "Le livre de la chasteté, composé par Jésusdenah, évêque de Basrah," in *Archéologie et Histoire*, Paris 16 (1896), (t) pp. 63-64; (v) 53-54 - here the news is footnote 124 -, or P. Bedjan, *Liber fundatorum monasteriorum in regno Persarum et Arabum*, Paris-Leipzig 1901, p. 508.

9 Charfet 1904, (t) p. 33; (v) 32 s.

10 For a recent reconstruction of this biography cf. E. Khalifé-Hachem, "Isaac de Nineveh," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 7/2 (Paris 1971), coll. 2041-2054, especially 2041-2042, and G. Bunge, "Mar Isaak von Nineveh und sein 'Buch der Gnade'," in *Ostkirchliche Studien* 34/1 (1985), pp. 3-22, especially pp. 3-4.

11 "Catholicos" (transliteration of the Greek adjective meaning "universal") is in Syriac a noun technically used, beginning in the 5th century, as the title of the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, capital of the Persian empire. That city became, most likely from the beginning of the third century, not only the seat of the metropolitan of Bet Aramaye, that is, the bishop who presided over the ecclesiastical province of central Mesopotamia, but also the "primatial see" of the church of Persia as a whole, its actual ecclesiastical center. The Catholicos of Persia, later, between the mid-5th and 6th centuries, would also assume the title "patriarch," taking over the authority and dignity lost by the bishop of Antioch, on whom until then at least formally he had depended, because of that church's deviation from the righteous faith of the fathers, at least in the judgment of the Persian bishops.

12 For the information given here and, in part, on the following pp. cf. especially J.M. Fiey, "Diocèses syriens orientaux du Golfe Persique," in *Mémorial Mgr. G. Khouri-Sarkis*, Louvain 1969, pp. 177-219, especially 209 ff.

13 On him cf. D. Bundy, "Georges Ier de Kaphra," in *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie ecclésiastiques* 20 (1983), coll. 625-627.

return, thanks to the decrees of the synod he presided over there, signed "in the month of 'iyar of the 57th year of the reign of the Arabs,"¹⁴ thus in May 676. Isaac's life is thus situated in the second half of the seventh century. Before following his slender footsteps let us summarily consider the environment in which he was formed.

The churches of eastern Syria, a region said to have been evangelized by the apostle Thomas and Addai with his companions Mari, Ahha and Haggai, all counted among the seventy-two disciples of Christ, always led lives relatively isolated from those of the Greek and Latin Christian communities. Their growth in an empire often hostile and antagonistic to the Roman one was reason enough for the difficulty of constant communication with them, even with the patriarchal one in Antioch, with which they also maintained a more traditional bond of communion. To this must then have been added dogmatic reasons.

The Christological discussions that divided Christendom in the fifth century and led to the two great councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon also lacerated the church of Persia. Toward the end of that century a doctrinal choice prevailed in it, not without contrasts destined to last, that effectively separated it from the "Roman" churches of the West. It then became a Nestorian church, according to the intelligence of Christ defended by the patriarch of Constantinople Nestorius and the great theologians of the Antiochian tradition whom he inspired, Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, and condemned at Ephesus in 431. The Catholicos George, in an extensive letter of 680,¹⁵ formulated it thus, in terms that have become traditional: "Who was able to accomplish our salvation but God the Word? Our salvation is accomplished by him who is also our Creator. For in a most convenient manner, God the Word, by the will of his Father, for the salvation of us men and the renewal of all creatures, to turn us from error to the knowledge of his divinity, came voluntarily, without leaving the bosom of the Father, into the bosom of the holy virgin Mary. He who, according to the preaching of prophecy, is the offspring of the seed of David and Abraham (cf. Mt. 1:1), has formed himself in a wondrous way, beyond the power of nature, a body in which is a soul endowed with intellect, and has dwelt in it and joined it to himself in the one unity of his filiation..." And thus, we note, is unique the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The full humanity - body, soul and intellect, according to a Pauline anthropology as well - that the Word united to himself from Mary's womb is not opposed to his divinity, as person is opposed to person. Jesus is not an elect, an anointed one of God, in the manner of the ancient patriarchs and prophets: in a mysterious and ineffable way he is the Son of God. His humanity finds its identity in the triune person of the Word. The church of God confesses this miracle in all its complex fullness. In fact, George goes on to reiterate what has already been said, "if even the body and soul [in him] are connatural to us in their sensibility and intellectuality, even so, through union with God the Word, who assumed what he united to himself in order to manifest his hidden-ness through him and to show in him the great power of his divinity for our salvation and the renewal of everything, we confess a [unique] Son of God and say that he is in his divinity and in his humanity, and although [there are] two natures-God

14 These decrees can be read in J.B.Chabot, "Synodicon Orientale ou Recueil de Synodes nestoriens," in *Notices et Extraits des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale* 37 (Paris 1902), (t) pp. 215-226; (v) 480-490, here p. 216/482 (the first figure, here as elsewhere in the case of quotations from ancient writings, refers to the text, the second to the version).

15 Published by J.B.Chabot in "Synodicon Orientale...", inop. cit.,(t) pp. 227-245; (v) 490-514.

by nature and hypostasis and man by nature and hypostasis¹⁶ -, we also confess and glorify him as a [unique] Son of God, now, at his second advent and always" (234/499-500).

So our salvation, but more, the perfection of all creation, is the work of the God-man. The Nestorian church intends to keep intact and firm the confession of the full divine-humanity of Christ, the term of the whole divine economy, in formulas that keep its two dimensions intact: True, perfect God, but also true, perfect man.

Are the terms of this double affirmation inadequate-beyond intentions, because of their cultural implications-to account for the unity of the Son? This is - we said - what the majority of the bishops there gathered in council, and in particular Cyril of Alexandria and his followers, had already suspected and judged in Ephesus. The church of Persia, however, has always defended itself against this accusation, and George, in the letter we quoted, exhorts at length the places in Scripture that prove the straightness of such a dogmatic tradition and the testimonies of the same "fathers, patriarchs and bishops, who were in the Roman empire," which confirm it: not only Nestorius and Theodore, but also Ignatius, Athanasius, Ambrose, Gregory the Theologian, Amphilochius, Chrysostom, and Cyril himself, the great opponent, "the disrupter of the churches, the corrupter of the true confession of Christians in the land of the Romans" (242-244; 510-513).

In this tradition Isaac lives, his terms he uses, of it he is original interpreter, as we shall see.

The seventh century was a difficult time for the church of Persia: a time of vast political upheaval, frequent wars, serious doctrinal disputes, externally as well as internally, and renewed "autonomistic," if not frankly schismatic, drives in some of its ecclesiastical provinces.

The conflict between Byzantium and the Sassanids reached an abrupt turning point in the first decades of the 600s. At the end of 627 Heraclius reported before Nineveh a decisive victory over the enemy armies, which was followed by the collapse of Persian power. But the full territorial recomposition of the "Roman" empire in the east and the shattering of the adversary empire were to prove a far from transitory arrangement: beginning in 634 the Arabs invaded the region and gradually occupied it all.

Military operations and political events also affected the life of the church. Monophysite preaching, championed by the radical heirs of the Emilian Christological tradition, which insisted on the "one nature of the Word of God, incarnate"-and for this "one-sidedness" had been condemned at Chalcedon in 451-which had always been lively, now assumed renewed momentum in Syria. At the same time, the Nestorian church itself since the late 6th century has been shaken internally by doctrinal crises affecting the very terms of the confession concerning the unity in Christ of divinity and humanity. It is a schism, however, on which we must focus our attention here.

It was noted above that the Bet Qatraye churches were canonically dependent on the metropolitan of Fars, whose see was in the city of Rew Ardashir. "Mother province of the great Sassanid empire" because Ardashir, the founder of the new dynasty, was a native of Istahr, its administrative center, a Persian land and not a "foreign" one, like the "country of the Arameans," where Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the capital, was also located, Fars had always aspired to a hegemonic

¹⁶ It is particularly this aside, which confesses in Christ not only two natures but also two "hypostases," that reveals the reasons for the condemnation of Nestorianism by the Greek and Latin churches. The term hypostasis in fact indicated predominantly the concrete individual, and the formula then seemed to highlight, in spite of everything, a certain weakness in understanding the unity of Christ, which appeared too extrinsic. Jesus seemed to remain really one man among others, not too different from David or Paul, despite the grace that invested him. But then all Christian newness and all salvation were compromised.

position in the empire, and even its church hardly recognized the primacy of the bishop of the "royal cities." This schismatic tendency is recurrent in the ecclesiastical history of the region: one episode of such difficult relations pits, in the seventh century precisely, the metropolitan of Rew Ardashir, Simon, against the Catholicos Isho'yaw III (649-659), one of the major figures in the church of Persia at this time, George's immediate predecessor.¹⁷

The break in communion was then occasioned by the forcible severance of relations between Seleucia-Ctesiphon, which had come under Arab control as early as 635, and Fars, whose resistance would not be broken by Islamic armies until 650. After this date, however, Simon refused the traditional act of submission to Isho'yaw, who had recently been elected, opening a crisis with multiple repercussions. The one we are interested in here is the subsequent rebellion against the Catholicos of the bishops of Bet Qatraye, for he then addressed letters to the laity and monks of those churches in which he invited them to break in turn from communion with their pastors, such now in name only. From them we may infer some early features of the ecclesial life proposed to the faithful at that time.¹⁸

"The perfect faith of Christians," writes Isho'yaw, "is confirmed by two demonstrations, namely, by the conducts of holiness-whose apex is, according to this tradition, in the observances of the monastic life-and by the mighty divine works performed by their hands. But more than by these two, by the buying with one's death the life of one's faith-that is, by martyrdom, to which he now in fact calls the church of Bet Qatraye in the proof of its fidelity to the Catholicos against the bishops, who did not hesitate before acts of bloody persecution [Christians] admirably implement these three [demonstrations] because they first received the power of the Holy Spirit in the mystery of baptism; but the Spirit is conveniently and justly given by the priestly power given to the holy church of God by the laying on of hands and apostolic succession, which, in the holy church of Christ our Lord, is handed down according to the canons" (XXI, 278/201).

Therefore, the Christian, who, according to an exegesis of Jn. 10:10, receives "life" in "the knowledge of the truth" (cf. Jn. 8:32), and "something more," namely, "the grace of the Spirit," by baptism, "in this church on earth and in that of heaven" (XVII, 260/188), broken communion with the legitimate priesthood, is deprived of the foundation that sustains the hope of his faith. In the bishops of Bet Qatraye, who have severed themselves from the church, "there is therefore not even a demonstration of power: neither in the conducts of holiness, which are type of the life after the resurrection, nor in the performance of the mighty works of God, which are usually administered by the saints of our Lord for the healing of the sick and the destruction of evil spirits. They have thus rendered [their worshippers] bereft of the demonstration of faith" (XVIII, 263/190). Hence Isho'yaw admonishes, "Guard therefore, beloved brethren, guard your souls, venerable ones, from communing with these men, that you may be worthy of God's grace!" (ibid., 267/193). And, if all the faithful are called to this vigilance, "zeal for God's truth" (XX, 273/198) must animate especially the "solitary brethren," "who have consecrated themselves... as a holy offering to the God who [is] over all and who guard... the type of heavenly conducts to demonstrate Christianity,... refuge of the afflicted,... thurible of spiritual fragrances to splendor the glory of our Lord,... hidden coadjutors for the bishops,... in the struggle of prayer" (XIX, 271/196).

17 On him cf. J.M.Fiey, "Isho'yaw le Grand - Vie du catholicos nestorien Isho'yaw III d'Adiabène (580-659)," in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 35 (1969), pp. 305-333 and 36 (1970), pp. 5-46; on the episode that interests us cf. in particular, in the second part, pp. 34-42 and in J.M.Fiey, "Diocèses syriens...," in *op. cit.*, pp. 187-189.

18 Isho'yaw's patriarchal letters can be read in *Liberepistularum, Parstertia*, R.Duval ed., CSCO, Louvain 1955, (t) 11, pp. 219 ff.; (v) 12, pp. 159 ff.

All the more intense, Isho'yaw insists, must be this full and proper custody "of the charity of Christ, our Lord, it which is for us the soul of life in the holy church in all the ends of the earth, the bond that unites in spiritual concord all distant peoples, and the eternal light for souls who believe well" (XVIII, 262/189), in the last times the world is living, on the eve of Satan's advent (.,268-269/194-195).

What Isho'yaw sketches is a church brought together in charity by the Spirit, "according to his laws," which also ground and regulate priestly ministry in the community. Such a church is capable of asceticism and mighty works, testifying to the manifestation of God in Christ, to the new, heavenly life that invests the world from him, in fervent expectation of the coming end times. And this perception of living "in the difficult time of the end of the world," as George would write in his synodal letter of 676,¹⁹ must be subtracted - it should be noted - from a reaction that is by no means caducous to the upheavals of those years. It is also an indication of an eschatological tension that has always been very strong in the church of Persia, the main reason for the harsh discipline that characterizes much of its behavior.

Isho'yaw's exhortations failed to prevent the schism. Indeed, the bishops of Bet Qatraye around 666 rebelled against Rew Ardashir's own church, erecting themselves into a metropolis. Because of this, the Catholicos George, a man whom Thomas of Marga in his *Book of Superiors, or Monastic History*, written around 840, still celebrates at length for his meekness and humility, decided in 676 to travel in person to that distant region. There he composed the crisis by actually acknowledging the situation produced, and, in addition, since he had found "some things that needed to be renewed," he provided for them in a synod "with the provision of righteous laws that would guard those who observed them within the terms of the fear of God."²⁰

It is interesting to quickly skim through the canons promulgated on that occasion because they allow a more concrete depiction of the life of the Christian communities in that region.

First concern of the synod: the knowledge of "the truth of Christianity" by the faithful, hence the insistence that bishops and doctors carefully preach "the faith" during Sunday and festive liturgies (canon 1). Knowledge of the "doctrine of the Books" is then urgently required especially of those who "out of love for God and contempt for visible things wish to separate themselves from the world and live the chaste life in the nativism," the monks (can. 12). Only from the Scriptures will they learn "well" why they have chosen this, and this seems to prove all the more necessary since many are those who "bestow the habit on themselves" and live wanderers, outside of any observance of the rules laid down by the fathers, "in the absence of all that is befitting their conduct" (ibid.). Many canons are devoted to describing the life and duties of the bishop, the true center of community life: to him are entrusted the preaching, instruction and correction of the faithful (cann. 2-5,10,11,19). There are many more provisions concerning the choice and conduct of clergy (cann. 7,8,10). Finally, numerous directives are devoted to the faithful on the subject of marriage: can. 13: "lawful conjugation" is to take place before the cross, "the instrument of our life and the cause of our salvation"; can. 14: unions with pagans are to be avoided; can. 16: Christians are not to follow the pagan custom of taking several wives. They are then pointed out to them the obligation of daily communal prayer, morning and evening (can. 15), and the convenience of composed behavior when leaving church after Sunday liturgies (can. 17).

¹⁹"Synodicon Orientale...", in *op. cit.* p. 216/481.

²⁰ Ibid.

They are therefore restless and fragile communities those described, tempted by paganism, heresy, and indiscipline, which must be patiently educated by example and word to a more conscious and strong life in Christ, in his church one which is, in a privileged way, the assembly of the faithful gathered on Sundays, for the mysteries, around the bishop (can. 15). After all, already by the early 8th century Christianity seemed to be rapidly disappearing from the region, as had happened a few decades earlier in the more southerly 'Uman, whose churches had gradually switched to Islam with an apostasy facilitated by ecclesiastical tensions.

In these communities, which also had given and still gave in those decades to the church of Persia great monks and doctors, Isaac grew up. Here, "instructed in the Books of the church and commentaries, he became [himself] a monk and doctor" (B). Here the Catholicos in 676 would meet him and, partly because he may have been a relative of a famous exegete of the great school of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, take him with him on his return to Bet Aramaye, the patriarchal province and central region of Mesopotamia.

The lives report at this point two events chronologically close to each other. George at first is said to have consecrated Isaac bishop of Nineveh in the convent of Bet 'Awe, one of the main Nestorian monastic communities of the period, where the Catholicos himself had lived.

Subject to the metropolitan of Erbil, center of the Adiabene, Nineveh, on the Tigris, was in those years frontier land for the church of Persia. The strong pressure of Monophysite propaganda had achieved notable successes in the surrounding region, and Isho'yaw III, in 657-58, had only with difficulty been able to stop the construction of a Jacobite church in the city itself, indeed "by the latrines situated in front of the gate of our city," as he expresses himself with intentional roughness.²¹ So when Isaac arrived there in the second half of the 7th century, the situation there was, presumably, difficult. Here, "after five months, he resigned his episcopate, for a reason known to God." So A; B presents a text just a little different: "but because of the acumen of his intellect and his zeal he did not endure the pastoral care of his flock except for five months and returned to his quiet, having asked the pope"²², who granted it to him.

Isaac was a solitary, and as such he had to live. He then headed for the mountainous regions of Bet Huzaye and "dwelt there in quietness, with the solitariess of the place" (A). Later he settled in the convent of Rabban Shabur, there built on Mount Shushtar by this holy monk who lived until about the middle of the century. The two lives tell us that in his later years he became blind from intense application to the study of the Scriptures (A), "and the brothers transcribed his teaching and called him Didymus the Second, because he was quiet and gentle and humble and his speech was mild. He ate only three crushes a week with some legumes, and he did not enjoy cooked food.... After this he grew old and advanced in years and migrated to our Lord, and was laid to rest in the convent of Mar Shabur" (B). We do not know the date of death.

Isho'dnah informs us that "he wrote three things that were not accepted by many. Daniel rose against him because of what he had said." He adds, "I believe that jealousy arose against him." We do not know precisely when this Daniel bar Tubanitha (son of the blessed) lived: a bishop of Tahal in the seventh century, he was the author of several works including a four-volume Ecclesiastical

21 On the episode cf. J.M.Fiey, *Mossoul chrétienne*, Beyrouth 1959, p. 19.

22 Pope" in Syriac can be either proper name or designation of the Patriarch of Alexandria or the Catholicos of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Since there is no pope among the metropolitans of Erbil known for the seventh century - cf. J.M.Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, Beyrouth 1965, p. 64 -, I prefer to think that here the author of B is simply alluding to George, by whom Isaac had just been consecrated bishop.

History.²³ Ibn al-Salt, a Nestorian monk of the convent of Mar Yonan, in al-Anbar, a city in Bet Aramaye, who lived in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the author of three pamphlets in which he collected in his own Arabic version maxims extracted from the works of Isaac, held in great honor in that convent, also mentions the "refutation of his doctrine" made by Daniel, but without indicating the arguments.²⁴ He does, however, report in this connection a brief episode, narrated to him by a pious monk, his friend. One day Metropolitan John ben Barsi had visited the latter and having found some books of Isaac with him, he had set about reading them "until the setting of the sun, without turning his head away from them." Then the guest had asked him precisely for a judgment on the objections made to Isaac by Daniel. This is the answer: "Is it possible for a man like you to ask me such a question? Mar Isaac speaks the language of heaven, Daniel the language of earth. The doctrine of Isaac agrees only with the best of monks..." (109). Although he does not say which points raised perplexity - but we shall see that Isaac himself in some of his pages hints at them discreetly -, Ibn al-Salt had nevertheless earlier at length set out the reason why this father's writings were reserved only for those who had already "deepened the study of the Holy Books" and had already "detached themselves from the harmful passions of this world" (75-76): it is his teaching on God's mercy. Isaac's doctrine, in everything "conformed" to that of the Lord, is a doctrine of mercy, is penetrating testimony to God's mysteries of mercy, which are revealed only to a loving heart and can be spoken of, demurely, only between faithful and loving hearts.

B says: "And he composed five volumes, known to this day, [full] of sweet doctrine." More generically A reports, "He drafted works on the divine conduct of solitaries." This is not the place here to analyze and verify these or other indications. Today in fact we have several of Isaac's writings, mostly unpublished, with the exception of the extensive collection published by Fr. Bedjan at the beginning of the century.²⁵ Among them are also the Miscellaneous Chapters on Knowledge presented here.²⁶

These are four hundred "sentences," mostly short and divided into four centuries in compliance with the rules of this type of wisdom literature quite widespread in monastic circles, especially since

23 On him cf. J.M.Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne III*, Beyrouth 1968, p. 135

24 On Ibn al-Salt cf. J.M.Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne III*, pp. 237-238; his text is edited and translated by P.Sbath, *Traité religieux, philosophiques et moraux, extraits des oeuvres d'Isaac de Ninive par Ibn al-Salt (IXe siècle)*, Le Caire 1934 (quotations are taken from the French version of the pamphlet).

25 Mar Isaacs Ninivita, *De perfectione religiosa*, Paris-Leipzig 1909. An English version is given of this text (A.J.Wensinck, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, Amsterdam 1923) and an Italian one, limited for now to discourses 1-38 (Isaac of Nineveh, *Discorsi ascetici/1. L'ebbrezzadella fede*, edited by M. Gallo and P.Bettolo, Rome 1984). In the following paragraphs the quotations from this text are introduced by a B followed by the discourse and page designation. For discourses 1-38, the page number is that of the Italian version; for later discourses, that of the Syriac text (which is made clear by an [s.] proposed to its indication).

We note that part of the collection of writings published by Bedjan during the 9th century was translated into Greek. It is this Greek version that provided the basis for, among other things, the Slavonic version of Isaac, first published in Moscow in 1787, which Dostoevsky read, among others.

For a tune-up on Isaac's writings and the manuscript tradition see now especially G.Bunge, "Mar Isaak von Nineveh...", *inop. cit.*, pp. 5-10.

26 Until recently only a single, severely deficient and defective copy of this writing was known in the Parisian codex BN syr 298 (10th cent.). Recently S.P.Brock identified in a manuscript preserved in Oxford, Bodl syr 7 (10th-11th cent.), a further copy of it, intact (ff. 20v^o-110r^o). Finally, the presence of a relatively large anthology of these centuries in the early part (ff. 1-90v^o) of the manuscript Mingana syr 86 (13th cent.) should be noted.

The version of the text published here is based on the Oxford ms.

the work of one of the great masters of the Christian spiritual tradition, much loved, as we shall see, by Isaac himself, Evagrius Ponticus (+ 399). Perhaps at least part of them was intended to clarify and develop places in our father's further writings: so would invite thought, for example, the text of the enigmatic sentence 1:41, which Bedjan actually read among other glosses in the margin of one of his passages in an unfortunately now lost manuscript. However, the centuries now form, as a whole, an independent writing, which can be read as such while taking into account its particular composition. There is in fact no necessary development within them, nor from one to the other. Although several sentences often follow one another according to an obvious thematic continuity, to the point that sometimes the caesura between them appears quite arbitrary,²⁷ the subject matter then can suddenly change abruptly. Moreover, the very text of a single sentence may sometimes be difficult for us to understand, drafted as it is in a synthetic and strongly allusive form, although often, and we shall try to demonstrate this in some cases, it can easily be explained against the background of Isaac's overall teaching and the exegetical and spiritual sources, very traditional and well known to his first readers, which he uses.

Before attempting a brief sketch of this "life-filled doctrine" (B), one last note. Are these Centuries by Isaac? I believe the question can be answered in the affirmative not only on the basis of the manuscript tradition, which unanimously attributes them to him, and the obvious continuity of teaching between them and Bedjan's edited writings. We have, again, the explicit attribution of a sentence (1:9) to him in the work of a slightly later monastic writer²⁸ and, what is more, in the Centuries themselves there is a precise reference by the author to an earlier writing of his that we can accurately identify. Indeed, he notes in 2:84, in clarification of what he has just quickly set forth, "I have drawn up at length for this purpose a little of the very [possible] in Discourse to a Pupil, by way of introduction to meditation useful for conduct in quietude." The Discourse referred to here is the 35th in the Bedjan edition, articulated precisely in questions and answers between a pupil and a teacher "on sound observances and all sorts of virtues," in the section dealing with what it is useful to ponder in order to avoid being attacked by "passions through idleness of mind." This referral thus confirms the attribution of the writing to Isaac.

²⁷ For example, the second centuria of the text we follow consists of 105 sentences. Noting this irregularity, the copyist, in the margin of No. 100, notes that it is probably attributable to an erroneous notation of the preceding chapters: for in them "there is no necessity of division." Perhaps therefore some of them constituted, against the custom of the genre (but this also happens elsewhere, and in 2:44 Isaac explicitly apologizes for it), one long text, only later divided.

²⁸ Cf. further note 5 to the first centuria.

The "Sweet Doctrine"

Alive and life-giving is God and the love of life animates his creature. It also tribulates it. In trembling and fear is restrained the angelic creation, which in its first, impetuous rising experienced the terrible, double power of its vital freedom, intolerant of rule (3:87); it knew the fall (3:80), "precious stone slipped into the abyss" (4:89), and for a long time almost despaired of itself. In suffering and sorrow for death, his own death, is every man restrained, and he marvels and sheds bitter tears at the "unsteady constitution of the world," he, who loves life invincibly (B 35:265-267).

"But after the coming of Christ their sorrow was dissolved" (3:80). So for the angels; so also for man, who upon hearing the Scriptures, "as one who has come upon a light, rejects from himself the burden of sadness" and experiences "great joy," because at last he has found "an excellent and firm hope" (B 35:267).

"After the coming of Christ": in him, in his death and resurrection, the varied wisdom of God has shone forth to the worlds (cf. Eph. 3.10) aimed at "gathering all things into one through the economy of Christ" (3.81). But exultation does not yet undo the pangs of sorrow. The "sweetness of the hope-filled verses," which is also capable of distracting man from "his former love," the beautiful land of God (B 35:268), engages him in a hard following, often, perhaps always, marked by sloth; and even the angels must still "bear the burden" of the former sorrow, though now "joyfully," because "they have received news of the future deliverance" (3:80).

Alive and life-giving is God; his creation, yearning for life, must all patiently learn in this world, in this "school of short duration," the way to "the Father's house," the abode of eternal life (B 5:110). But in what does this life consist?

"One is the cause of the existence of the world and the coming of Christ," Isaac observes, "the revelation of God's great charity" (4:79).

There is no being or intelligence except in charity, the beginning and end of creation, the "power of the kingdom" (4:77). Charity concealed, hinted at, finally manifested in Christ, in his death that precisely because of the insults and spitting that prepared for it, because of the "difficult passion of the cross" in which it was consumed, fully attests to it (ibid.).

Charity one: "toward men and holy angels," "toward sinners as toward the righteous" (4:87). Unifying charity, too, because all destined to become one in Christ, when, "through him, all beings endowed with reason will be brought near to God the Father, the first and the last" - angels and men, indeed, but elsewhere Isaac says more forcefully "all," simply -, in a church that will then have "fulfillment in work, in the world to come" (1:91; cf. also 1:92; 4:81).

Charity that does not remove differences, note: man will subsist in his "natural body" (1:62), without it "being denied for being honored because of the change" (1:10) of the resurrection. He will persist in his duplicity, so creaturely inferior to those "fiery hosts," "imprint of the first light," which "with the venerable murmurs of their sanctifications" watch over the "fiery throne," "not prevented by the flesh from peering keenly into the mysteries of his holiness" (4:86).

It does not take away the differences, no. It is "evangelical," fixed to the gospel, eschatological contemplation (1:5). The "vehemence of God's charity for creation" reverberates in the "coming of Christ into the world," and this, in turn, has no other "mirror" than "the ways of his humiliation"

(4:80): the insults and spitting, let us repeat, the difficult death. The intoxication of the kingdom, this forgetful, loving watchfulness before God, will still, always, focus on the "exact contemplation of Christ's passion and humiliation" (4:82), will be intelligence, spiritual, certainly, not sensitive, of this event.

Not in the heights is to be sought for God, where imprudently the angels rose before the fall, where all the more improperly man looked, but in humiliation, in a humiliated man. In "communion with Jesus" it is and will be given to men and angels to come to the "essential, thrice shining contemplation of creative Beauty" (B 25:226). He alone, "that one, Jesus, who holds the scepter of the kingdom," receives "without mediator" "the revelations of the essence itself," "the holy Trinity" (B 27:236-237). All is gathered in him, looks to him, is by him, by his Spirit, introduced into the presence of the Father, with whom he wanders and rests.

Let us take a step back. Innumerable are the beings God has created, and their diversity is difference of vital power, inseparably desiring and seer. The "restless" quivering of life (3:76) in those who have intellect, in those who in it unfold and are open, with movement at once willed and immediately, to the understanding of self, of other, of everything, reaches out to the vision of essence, unceasingly desires it. The "refusal of pause," the uninterrupted motion, so characteristic of "receivers," of creatures caught in their nakedness raised toward God, offered to him, vessels that he alone fills, is all directed toward the refinement of vision. Being is the power of vision, of seeing and being seen, a power that is here always renewed, transmuted and growing, for even the angel unharmed by malice (3:21), even that spiritual nature which, because of its concentration in God, does not even know sinners nor "ever served in their classes" (4,85), now, in this time, continually rises up, also works unceasingly (3:22) at the progressive "loving penetration" (B 27:239) of the "incomprehensibility of God's eternal intelligence," the generator of his manifold, unequal contemplations (B 26:231).

Every order, angelic, human, demonic, is defined in this essential visual refinement, in the relative clarity of its inner movements, which are both its mirrors and eyes (B 25:223), "reception of the first Light" and its witnessing reverberation (,222).

Light, Light from Light, light after Light, in innumerable, different glow (cf. 4:86); Father, Son, creature: these are the names, admittedly provisional and, for God, by no means inadequate, that proclaim the mystery of being, from the last manifestation, unveiling of charity.

But these orders are thus distinct, different in power of contemplation, in accordance with the simplicity of their being (whether or not it is bound, impeded in its capacity for discernment by the thick veil of the body) or the voluntary clarity of their inner quivers. And this distinction originates a service, generates transmission of knowledge: between the creatures who confirm themselves in their beautiful, natural purity - or tend toward it - a teaching bond is established, entirely devoid of envy. The one who precedes in change, in the ever more intimate contemplation of beings who in themselves, in their limpid interiority, are glory of God(cf. 1:37, 38), guides the other's change (cf. 1:6), enlightens him on his path. And now, after the coming of Christ, the angels, who in him more powerfully have penetrated, as far as it is possible, the mystery of the future century "which they did not know before" (3:79), more powerfully direct man to the intelligence of nature and Scripture (3:56), "ministers in the service of God's will" (3:57), eager too for the kingdom.

"They purify us - therefore - with their revelations, and make us temples for the Spirit of holiness," but, and it is time to meditate on this, "they cannot sanctify the soul" (3:91). Different is

the order of the mysteries of the kingdom, the order of charity proclaimed in Christ, in the humiliation of Christ, from that of the many creaturely revelations, of the very revelations concerning God's wise economy in the world, his providence and judgment in it: nothing the creature knows of it of himself, nothing he understands of it, nor that he scrutinizes natures or Books, whether angel or orthodox father, straight man and temperate in his conduct (3:56). Nothing creatures can teach or learn from each other of "monadic knowledge" (3:57), in itself one, unique, proper to the assumption in Christ, eschatological. Only the Spirit can reveal it, "and in this, when we have come to this revelation, there is neither great nor small ... but all are raised to one fulfillment" (ibid.). It, equal in itself, "without change or variation," makes equality: "rich and poor," "givers and receivers," the different are all equally transcended by it. Fruit of grace, in it "knowledge is equal" (ibid.).

In it the creature is constrained, even, and we must well understand this.

"If a nature inclined [to error] receives the exact truth here, it dies from the vehemence of [its] inclination.... When then the fullness of nature comes, in the world not inclined [to error], nature will no longer be afraid to know the truth of God, that it may not deviate to the left through confidence" (B 26:231-232).

Intelligence, will, freedom, power of dual inclination, toward right or left, for good or evil, in submission or rebellion: this, too, defines the creature. Man or angel are not at first, in themselves, "bound." they decide their own way, although they will then be so bound by their choice, for there where freedom "inclines and remains," there it generates "another power" that constrains it, there it "has become external and subject to violence and, to put it bluntly, it is captive and has no dominion over itself" (ibid., 230), even if irrepressible is that right discernment which "testifies that it is good for them to believe in Him who brought all things into existence and to heed the word of His commandments and practice them" (B 44:319 [s.]).

It is serious about freedom: the perception of it, the desire for it, the desire to force every limitation for it has engendered malice and sin in the creature (cf. 3:87, 88) and it "has fallen like a thunderbolt from its glory" (3:87; cf. Lk. 10:18). And he who has not fallen, we said, has since then known fear and hesitation, fears the very familiarity with God that is, until Christ, an inner experience of his own creaturely light, for it draws him to an exaltation in which he almost inadvertently forgets that this light of his is created and appropriates it, with imperceptible as much as decisive movement. Better therefore to pause in remoteness, in fear, waiting. This is what angels can do.

This mortal man cannot... For man is, in his body, subject to death, from all time: "we are not mortal because we sin, but because we are mortal we were driven to sin" (3:2), Isaac notes. Man's very "constitution" makes it clear that he was destined for death "even before he sinned" (4:89). Thus, in his eminently unstable balance, because of the power and at the same time the corruption of his flesh, he is easily induced into sin, easily decided upon it. Certainly his inwardness is clear: "we [all the children of the church] believe that God did not passionately make his image," which is "not ... the body, but the invisible soul" (B 3:62). Hence "the silence of the world naturally reawakens" in it "the little motions of intelligence, by which it enters into God and remains there in awe" (.,61); and, if it is collected and guards the body with quiet but firm vigilance, it will know only "peaceful motions" (cf. B 38:320), which will neither disturb nor distract it; on the contrary, they too will orient the whole man to God's willed growth. But this creaturely beauty and

composure is soon broken: in the interiority sprouts arrogance, in the exterior immoderation. And the world, the solidarity that binds living to living, element to element, that holds everything in mutual compassion and influence, whether angel or man alters it, becomes a place of perverse bonds that hold every existent in error or insecurity. Thus certain man cannot abide in fear, and sins.

And thus freedom, if not suppressed, is everywhere impeded and by itself almost denied. But in another way we wanted to consider the constraint that invests it and, it does, revokes it altogether. We were not to speak of that violence to which the creature subjects herself, but of that which subjects her, which comes from God, in which alone she can know "the exact truth" of the Essence, "according to what seems good to her" (1:2).

For neither angel nor man can, free, hold themselves before God without dying. "As the magnet stone aspires to itself the atoms of iron," so "the saints will be raptured at the divine beckoning to enter into the bliss of meeting with our Lord" (1:92); "when the spiritual operation reigns over the intellect, the orderer of the senses and thoughts, the freedom of nature is taken away and from then on it is conducted and does not lead" (B 22:209); in the kingdom, finally, "reason will be constrained both in men and angels" (B 29:245). Inclination can only subsist in God's retreat, for the creature to be, to know its own existence, to make proof of it; at its coming into power inclination is destined to perish, all contention ceases, all resistance is overcome: the creature irresistibly confesses the truth, it cannot escape the Spirit's overbearingness, it is as a thing that others move.

The whole creature, we insist: angel, demon and man, righteous and sinner. All: even demons, let us make it explicit, even if only "as of late, by the grace of Him who created them" (3:77), they who "since they have descended have not yet been persuaded to look up" (3:21). Those who have intelligence and will, whatever their order and history, whatever their determination, have or have not, if man, crossed the veil of corporeity that screens out the intelligible, the invisible (cf. B 1:42), to grasp fully what is and not betray it into "half-use," only carnal (B 26:229); those who have intelligence and will are all "led," captive, to the silent and adoring knowledge in which they go astray.

So one is charity, one, in itself equal, the operation of the Spirit in its eschatological fullness. It by its very transcendence to creatures, to whom it also destines itself, equalizes them: worldly distinctions, though they endure, are now irrelevant. Then, "outside of [God] nature will be unable to consider anything else" (3:49).

And if intelligence focuses on Christ, in his determinacy, it is certainly not according to a sensible way that he is grasped, we said. Those who persist in a material representation of him "lack in regard to the truth" (1:9). Surely he not only misunderstands the newness of its economy, but also understands little of the creaturely power itself, capable of turning and pausing in the invisible. "Reprehend those who at the moment of prayer raise in their intellects a sensible image, and instead of the one thought, simple and solitary, of the understanding of the incomprehensibility of our Savior ... delight in the phantoms of their minds" (2:59). These, in their "hallucination," do not know "the suffering of thought," the "unbearable pressure" that torments it (2:60), the immaterial but by no means determined apex, in wakefulness full of discernment, of creaturely movement. And yet even this "emptiness of mind," humble heart of the creature, the extreme fruit of its labor, already it ripened into righteous confidence almost only in the encounter with Christ, is

wholly transcended. What will happen in the Spirit, what the angels and some believers now experience only in part, as a foretaste (cf. B 29:245), is indeed foreign to the world: "nothing like it has ascended into the heart of man" (2:59; cf. 1 Cor 2:9).

Stranger, indifferent to creaturely hierarchies, abolishing freedom, charity clearly contradicts all justice: "Call God righteous no more... Though David called him just and righteous, yet his Son has revealed to us that he is good and gentle: He is gentle," it is written, "with the wicked and ungrateful (Luke 6:35)" (B 50:357 [s.]). Christ's word defines an irreducible opposition, highlights and sanctions a struggle that man's heart foresaw, confirms a difficult disorder in the time that the law seemed to have to govern.

"Mercy and justice in a soul [are] like a man worshiping God and idols in [the same] house: wherever mercy is opposed to justice" (,345 [s.]).

God in Christ thus apparently humbles his creation. Men, looking to present error and suffering and to that future light of "equal clarity" (2:7), often ask in amazement and bitterness, "Why did you not make us so ... from the beginning and [not] place us in future glory?" (4:88). Truly "this too is hidden and concealed from creatures, that He might have placed us first in a carnal world and in the constitution of now. Certainly not to examine us," Isaac continues, "whether we were good or bad:" God, who knew everything from "the beginning," surely had no need for this. "The exact cause of this is hidden, though a little is given to us to know and discuss" (3:70). And these insights we would now like to gather, even though we know that "the exact truth" is now concealed and, above all, that "further on, perhaps, not even this consideration will be needed" (ibid.). It, too, will be overpowered; it will end its risky ordeal, which tends to prevaricate beyond that limit from which the creature "must ... turn back, clothed in fear and doubt" (1:3), in firm if painful obedience.

But before this extreme inquiry, one more digression because Isaac, as he speaks to the brethren about this mystery, stops himself and invites them not to distrust his words of now-the words of mercy-as if they would "dissolve" his previous words, the words of hard asceticism conforming to the demands of creaturely purity. Rather, they must understand "that, having [before] walked by the manifest way of the Books," he had not "introduced [his] word into [their] hidden-ness," that hidden-ness in which God himself dwells. Yet both paths are true, "for this is the mystical knowledge and that is the common knowledge of the manifest way that the Books have given us" (4:90). So there are two levels of intelligence in the Scriptures, and those who examine them righteously will find no contradiction between them: the letter of the Books, received in faithful obedience, leads the heart to await the revelation of their "intelligible science," to rejoice, whether it is given to it directly or only through hints, by the conduct and words of others. After all, "the mysteries revealed so that all may know God," those on which the Scriptures most clearly insist, are "higher" than any other revelation (B 19:199), even though it, "intended for a man's rejoicing and persuasion" (ibid.) so that it may convince him "of the life prepared for the righteous after the resurrection" (1:65), is a necessary, vital and constant goad, given by God to confirm his church in hope.

It is important to grasp this tension sustained by the Spirit, because it orients the whole Christian life and defines in particular the role of the solitary, the solitary man invested by the grace of a first taste of the new life - and such men are rare, few in every generation - in the community of believers. For he is given to it so that "even the enemies of the truth, though unwilling, may confess that there is for Christians a sure hope" (B 11:159); he is thus a privileged witness to the

eschatological mystery that moves the church to go out of the world, into the wilderness, to meet the Father, a sign to the nations of the great fulfillment to which everything is called.

Paul is the authority to whom Isaac constantly refers in this regard. For Paul "wrote much about [spiritual] [realities]," but these are things that "man cannot perceive unless he has partaken of the Spirit" (4:18). And Christians all need to gather themselves together in quietness, in the "silence of the world," and pray that they may somehow share in that "persuasion of thought of which Paul speaks" (1:38), "that [their] hearts may be comforted and draw near in charity to all riches of persuasion and to the intelligence of the knowledge of the mystery of God the Father and of Christ" (Col. 2:2 quoted according to the Syriac version).

"Faith [itself] - in fact - is a movement full of persuasion, arising in the mind by the grace of God, relating to things which it is not possible to commit to paper, through letters, but which it is possible for a faithful mind to know" (1:64).

If the life of the individual believer or a church does not want this prayer, this "silent conversation with God" (1:54), it is doomed to confusion: "Prayer, separated from contemplation, is full of sloth and is prayed with difficulty" (1:42). Only "wakefulness in contemplation... confirms [in men] the gladness of exact persuasion" (1:24); only the intelligent, who in this silence "stoop to the abyss of humiliation" (1:25), receive the "persuasion that gives joy" (ivi), or, put another way, truth "dwells from itself in the movements of those who in their own lives have become crucified (cf. Gal 6:14) and have aspired (cf. Ps 118:131) life from within death" (1:26).

Crucified to the world is exemplarily the solitary, a figure of the stripping in which the creature accomplishes his purification and by which he passes to his clarity, in the "exact knowledge of the mysteries" (4:2). According to the beautiful progression of sentences 1:84-92, introduced and punctuated by prayer and not coincidentally concluded by a great eschatological meditation, such a stripping is mortification of the body, in quiet, "bodily destitution" and weeping; mortification of the soul, in inward recollection; mortification of the spirit, "in wonder" to be projected by the Spirit of God "in the midst of a type [of] the future ... ascending to those rooms (Jn. 14:2) which [are] not of flesh and blood (cf. 1 Cor. 15:50)" (1:89). It, again, is true "elevation to the cross," "crucifixion of the body" and at the same time "elevation to contemplation," the one the task of freedom, the other "of a [divine] operation" (B 34:261).

Crucified to the world, in exodus from the world, however, is every Christian, drawn by his "gentle" Lord in the wilderness to "lucid vigil" and fasting, "the source of all beauty," in which to overcome Satan, who at the mere sight of "this weapon" is now cast into terror (cf. Mt. 4:1-2; B 35:274-278).

Perhaps not all who come out of Egypt will already enter here, as far as it is possible, Jerusalem, "the term of blessedness that God promised to our fathers," Isaac observes, taking up a traditional exegesis of Israel's exodus, a type of the Christian life, but even "the fruits gathered from the land around her and from her countryside (cf. Nm 13:23)" are "glorious," and in any case "it will be beautiful [even if only] to occupy a part of it and tread its soil" (3:64): "not small are the pleasant suavities in which we shall dwell, though we shall be fought over by other peoples" (ibid.).

Indeed, the tenderness promised, given, should not mislead: the earth is school, hard school, we said; this time is a time of struggle: "Believe me, my brethren: sloth, torpor, heaviness of limbs ... are [also] the accomplished practice of God," if sustained with patience. Not only are "enlightenment, ... purgation of thought, gladness and exultation of heart, consolation of sweet

tears" (4:23). Work, toil, perseverance are needed, especially in silence, outer and inner. Then soon on those who wait there will again breathe "a clear breeze," the air on their heads will clear. But the invitation is pressing, in times that Isaac judges unfavorable: "Wherever we come, even if we can sit [only] for two days with our souls, let us sit! And even if for one day... Not only in monasteries, but even if [we are] on the way of the king, and even if for an hour [only]... every day, even if we can be quiet [only] for a little while, under a cliff or in a ruin" (3:61).

Only in this way will those who thus love and humble themselves in the love and humiliation of God in Christ be violently introduced, as they read the Scriptures, into the intelligence of the mystery: "Truly I know some who, as they were cast down to the ground, stuck out their tongues and filled them with dust and picked them up and lifted them up by the vigor of the suffering they had received from the verses". In this prostration, then "joy ... suddenly flows into the heart and like a wave [it] submerges all its movements" (2:60). Indeed, one who bears the blows of charity "makes its signs evident, noticeably, in his appearance. Immediately his face blushes and exults, his body burns. Shyness and composure are banished from him; he becomes almost unrestrained. The strength of constancy is eradicated from him, vehemence and turmoil dominate in him. Behold, his life in his eyes since then [is] as nothing compared with the Friend" (B 33:257).

But before and during and after, always, is humiliation, and we will all pass through it, men and angels: "Truly, Lord, if we do not humble ourselves you will not cease to humble us" (B 34:262).

So, in this movement, knowing that the intelligence we seek is spiritual and that it is vain to attempt to kidnap it because it is the fruit of grace, let us listen to the few words of Isaac, of a humble man, for "the sweetness of [a humble man's] words is to the hearing of the wise more than [what is] honey to the palate of those who taste of them (cf. Ps. 118:103): he is esteemed by all as God, though he is uncultivated (lit.: idiot) in his speech and vile in his appearance," and "one inquires into the meaning of his poor sayings as into the word of a philosopher" (B 82:577 [s.]).

So the world is so that God's charity may be poured out on everything. This is the ultimate intelligence of Scripture: the rest is economy, pedagogy to this revelation in which only a clear heart, devoid of envy, rejoices. Of course the creature sinned, and God knew that he would sin, and he knew of his pain, his sickness, his bewilderment, his disheartenment. But that did not hold him back. And the coming of Christ -- mind you -- has no essential relation to sin: the incarnation and humiliation of God the Word hold in themselves such wonders "in comparison with which sin is nothing". "Let it not be that we investigate like children such a mighty mystery!" (4:78). After all, "not even one righteous will be found who at the coming of judgment does not stand in condemnation" (4:87). "For there is none righteous, not even one: the apostle confirmed the word of the prophet (Rom. 3:10; Ps. 13:3)... Sin had sealed the totality of our nature" (4:99).

But what then does this long, painful history teach us? What can the freedom of the creature between grace and grace?

"It agreed that now the will of each of us should be manifested in comparison with His acts. Not for Him, but for us, so that even the multitude of His mercy, which He would manifest, would become sweeter to us [placed] in comparison with our inequality-the discontinuity, the contrary resolutions of our acts-as the Book said:He to whom little is remitted loves little (Luke 7:47). Vehement is the love of him to whom much is remitted" (4:87).

This Isaac says we learn: a more vehement love, in humility. This we learn, and then, docile, we pass on. God's charity showed itself in the humiliation of the cross "that we might be made [his]

prisoners through [that superabundant charity of ours that [proceeds] from the perception of this" (4:78). This we learn, we will learn all. "If one will say, What advantage will [come] to the children and the rest, to those who are not aware of it? We are persuaded of this: they shall be made perfect with the [whole] universe" (4:88 Elucidation). Mere idiotic and inebriated word, of naked faith, which overwhelms those who support it, but in God. And the conduct of those who live by it is then by no means bare and quiet and devoid of zeal, grievance, albeit because of the truth: "Whoever seems to be zealous for men on account of the truth, he has not yet learned the truth.... For when he has learned it, he will also desist from zeal for it," for the place of the Spirit is "wholly full of peace" (4:77). He who is in the "clearness" of God is "full of mercy toward all men," and his "heart shall be grieved for mercy to them, and shall be on fire, as by a fire, without [making] distinction of person" (B 71:492 [s.]; cf. also B 4:85). Isaac relates that an elder was asked, "What is a merciful heart? And he said, The burning of the heart for every creature, men and birds and animals, and for demons and all [that] is, for at the remembrance and sight of them his eyes shed tears because of the vehemence of mercy, which with much vigor oppresses the heart. The heart fails, nor can it bear to hear [narrate] or investigate any small offense or suffering of any creature, and therefore it offers with tears, at every moment, a prayer even for the dumb [animals] and the adversaries of the truth, even for those who offend him, that they may be guarded and invigorated; again, even for the reptiles, because of the much mercy poured out from his heart, without measure, in the likeness of God" (B 74:507-508 [s.]). And humble mercy is indeed the image of God (cf. 2:38 and B 1:48).

The Sources

The previous summary exposition has deliberately avoided any mention of Isaac's non-scriptural sources, yet relevant, to his spiritual experience no less than to his teaching, is the contribution of tradition. Indeed, Isaac appears again and again, to those who read him aware of the content of exegetical and monastic writings prior or contemporary to him, a bold but consistent interpreter of the faith of his church.

This is not to deny its originality, to belittle the wholly singular testimonial power of its existence, the fruit of intelligent, frank obedience and grace. Certainly not, but it is astonishing at times to recognize in his pages, even the most penetrating, the very letter of teachings that are by no means common, to catch the light that illuminates the elements of a sometimes opaque tradition in the school compilations that reproduce it, which are sometimes its only vestiges today.

There are two great authors, often quoted by Isaac, whose doctrines most vividly shape his life and thought: Theodore of Mopsuestia and Evagrius Ponticus; the greatest representative of the Antiochian school, exegetically and theologically hostile to Origenism, on the one hand, and one of the greatest continuers and interpreters of the Origenian legacy, on the other.

The whole framework of Isaac's discourse derives from Theodore. The position of two catastasis, of two constitutions of the world, the present and the eschatological; the characterization of the former as pedagogy to the latter (the world as "school"); the transcendence of the latter, a place of incorruptibility and charity, to the former, marked by creaturely inclination and error; but also, to a great extent, angelology and the emphasis on man's natural mortality, with what this implies in order to salvation history; and, finally, the more usual terms of Christology, albeit sober, evangelical and very little inclined, in Isaac, to school formulas: all these are elements of sure dependence on Theodore. And, again, the many interpretations of Scripture directly or indirectly taken from the books of the man who is, according to Nestorian tradition, its commentator par excellence, cannot be overlooked.

But, at the same time, constant is the reference to Evagrius, "the faithful witness of the Word" (1:10), "the illuminator of the mind" (3:92), "the greatest of the Gnostics" (B Appendix II,614 [s.]). He is the guide who aids in discernment in order to the experiences of contemplation; he is the master of pure and spiritual prayer, the passionate custodian of the limpid immaterial gaze that catches the glory of God and, in it, the rising of Christ; he is the interpreter of the monadic vision, beyond thoughts and differences, in the time of the end.

It may be surprising this dependence on two authors whom tradition has willed, and who are indeed, in so many "theological theses" and, perhaps, in cultural and spiritual sensibilities, quite distant from each other. But this is after all a very usual fact in the church of Persia. If it has been possible to write recently that Theodore himself, although he reacted briskly to some of Origen's speculations, even in fact took up his insights, rewriting them in terms that he judged to be more in conformity with Scripture,²⁹ it is now certain that the intellectual circles in Syria that promoted and partly executed in the early fifth century the great translations of his works were also responsible for the version of Evagrius' writings³⁰ ... Not without corrections, however.³¹

29 Cf. R.Macina, "L'homme à l'école de Dieu," in *Proche Orient Chrétien* 33 (1983), pp. 39-103, here 96-97.

The earliest and most widespread translation of this author's Gnostic Chapters, for example, his major doctrinal work, has brought slight but decisive changes to the Greek text, and the direction of these retouches goes in the direction of harmonizing the writing with the Antiochian theses, with the consequent expulsion of the more accentuatedly Origenist statements. One case in point: in it falls all mention of the double creation, the first relating to the intelligible world and the second, subsequent to the fall, to the sin of that, relating to the sensible world, the locus of divine pedagogy aimed at the reintegration of creatures, all of them - angels, men, demons -, into communion, in Christ, with the one and triune God.

It is this version that Isaac knows and cites (= S1), not the other, later version, which is more faithful to the original but always looked upon with suspicion in Nestorian circles, as a malevolent corruption of an admirable writing by an ungodly one (= S2). This is the version on which the "spiritual" Syriac tradition is shaped from the early 400's onward. And it is no accident, then, if, for example, alongside Evagrius, John of Apamea plays a large role in Isaac.

Indeed, this Syrian author of the first half of the fifth century is also an early, privileged witness to the encounter with Evagrius of the monastic circles of the Syriac area, still strongly characterized by the old, great tradition of their church.³² And John is probably decisive for the whole articulation into three ages of the solitary life, proposed by Isaac, and certainly also affects his considerations regarding the "new world" and the centrality of hope in the Christian life.³³

Finally, it is the monastic literature, taken as a whole, that gives reason for some of our author's disagreements with individual features of the teaching most prevalent in Nestorian schools.

Let us examine just one case: the reading of books. Isaac, though so knowledgeable about readings, not only strongly discourages those who wish to confirm themselves in the solitary life from reading "any book, whether scholastic or worldly, outside the books of the New [Testament] and [those] relating to the conduct of solitaries" (4:72), even if it were to make them "ascend into heaven." He also insists on the distance that separates the very work of commenting on the Scriptures, practiced in the schools, from a perfect intelligence of them: "It is one thing to have erudition in the Books and knowledge acquired by exercise over them, and another to have knowledge of the truth of the Books themselves. That is strengthened by protracted study and the work that [is accomplished] in teaching; this arises from the practice of the commandments and [from] a clear intelligence turned to God" (3:99). This is why the solitary person can and at certain times even must refrain from reading exegetical works.

But this is, indeed, a traditional theme of tension within the churches between various attentions not only to the text of Scripture, but perhaps also to the mystery itself. Just one example. A contemporary and countryman of Isaac's, Dadisho Qatraya, defended in those years with strong polemical vigor the rights of a spiritual reading of the Books, appealing to Theodore of Mopsuestia himself, also a proponent of a "historicizing" exegesis of them. "Even the blessed Theodore, the

30 This is what J.W.Watt has demonstrated in *The Syriac Adapter of Evagrius' 'Centuries'*, a communication presented at the 1979 Oxford Patristic Congress, of which, by the courtesy of the author, I have a typewritten copy. Watt also insists, p. 7, on the similarity of the Origenian and Theodorian worldviews, beyond the differences.

31 On the following cf. A.Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalai Gnostica" d'Evagre Pontique et l'histoire de l'origénisme chez les grecsetchez les syriens*, Paris 1962, pp. 200-258.

32 Cf. A.de Halleux, "La christologie de Jean le Solitaire," in *Le Muséon* 94 (1981), pp. 5-36, here 20.

33 Cf. E.Khalifé-Hachem, "La prière pure et la prière spirituelle selon Isaac de Nineveh," in *Khoury-Sarkis*, pp. 157-173, here 169-172.

Interpreter," he wrote, "says of the Psalms of David that when they are recited in prayer by holy men, according to the purpose that befits them, they drive out demons from us and bring the holy angels and the [same] Lord of angels, Christ, our Lord, closer to us. And it is manifest that in saying, 'the purpose that befits the psalms,' he does not point to his own historical interpretation, nor to the explanation [found] in Basil and John [Chrysostom], for that one suits the scholars, this one the worldly. Rather, he calls the spiritual interpretation of the psalms produced, in the time of the singing of the psalms, by the solitaries and holy men, the 'purpose that suits them.'" And Dadisho thus concluded that this clarification had seemed necessary to him in order to "silence the mouths of imbecile and foolish men" who "insuperbate for a knowledge of learned words" and "despise the saints when they produce demonstrations from the Books." ³⁴

This is not the only point that opposes Isaac to his contemporaries. He himself does not hide the resistance that some of his directions seem to encounter, especially on the need for inner silence, entirely devoid of thought and image, or, more nodal, on the extent of divine mercy.

Yet this last point is also, albeit discreetly, a traditional element, and not only, as we mentioned, in the Origenian sphere. Isaac devotes an entire pamphlet to the spiritual intelligence of Gehenna, proclaiming its final extinction, and here he also cites in defense of his theses pages from Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia. ³⁵

After all, his teaching has not remained without effectiveness. If, for example, we turn again to the Russian milieu from which these notes originated, we can see that Dostoevsky is not the only one in it who picked it up. Fr. S. Bulgakov, one of the major figures in the Orthodox spiritual and theological renewal of the early part of the century, dealing in his late years with the apocatastasis of fallen spirits, with the possibility of Lucifer himself repenting, renouncing self-love in order to concur in the full exaltation, in Christ, of the charity of the living God, also refers on this point to the decisive testimony of Isaac, "through whose medium the whole order of saints has spoken." He is the repository "of the revelation about demons," about the "torments of hell," "suffering of love"; he, "one of those glorious men who have the gift of a compassionate heart." ³⁶

34 The text in *Commentaire du livre d'Abba Isaïe (logoi1-XV) par Dadisho Qatraya(VIIes.)* R. Draguet éd., CSCO, Louvain 1972, (t) 326; (v) 327, here pp. 155-156/120. On this Dadisho polemic cf. R. Macina, "L'homme à l'école de Dieu," in *POC* 32 (1982), pp. 263-301, here 277-285.

35 The pamphlet, still unpublished, is contained in the Oxford manuscript that contains our centuries. Cf. S.P. Brock, *Lost and Refound: Part II of the Works of St. Isaac of Nineveh*, communication to the 1983 Oxford Patristic Congress, p. 4 of the typescript text, kindly sent to me by the author.

36 Cf. S. Boulgakov, *Epouse del' Agneau*, Lausanne 1984, pp. 405-406.

Leave

At the end of this by no means insufficient introduction, two brief thoughts.

An exhortation to read, first of all. Isaac's text is not always easy, and the translator may have perhaps, here and there, further obscured it. Sometimes the periods are long, complex, full of incisions or repetitions that can fatigue. His own teaching may sometimes appear confused or idle, for example in the minute indication of the various orders of knowledge, material, immaterial, in which we perhaps perceive only scholastic pedantry. Again: it may displease us, the children of the century, in its firm, convinced striving for a bare, watchful presence to God, oblivious, it seems, to the beautiful multiplicity of his creation.

I invite a light and friendly reading. Isaac is one of the greatest witnesses of the Christian faith: the churches all confess him. Let us read him in prayer, in evangelical simplicity, exploring what is understood, holding with patience what is obscure, returning to his words with gentle insistence.

I urge believers to read, forcefully: they owe the world a clearer, quieter and more unarmed image of their Lord, on their faces, on their limbs, in their acts, in their thoughts. Chastity and humility: in this they must work, to be virgins like the Mother of God, like her submissive and hilar. Isaac is a good witness of this way, of the grace that soon invests her, beyond sloth, toil, sorrow, which are also her part, which are also perfect gladness. I invite them to become idiots in Christ, knowing a little of the travail.

A second thought: an act of gratitude. Everything is substantiated by transmission and gift, in the order of body, soul, intelligence, no less than in that of the Spirit. Thus we have watchful guardians, and sensitive ones, at least, we can name them, albeit discreetly. I think of prayerful family members and friends, whether in town or in a convent; those who are suffering; those who are "far away," according to an election we do not scrutinize, beautiful and sweet, with sorrow, or struggling, like Jacob, who wants to know the Name and for this in the Scriptures has blame and blessing. It is fitting and glad to remember them, handing them these pages in confidence.

And finally, taking up with playful earnestness the annotation of an ancient Syrian copyist, "on the sinner who has labored and transcribed this text for the help of anyone who will read it be mercy in the two worlds. Amen and amen."

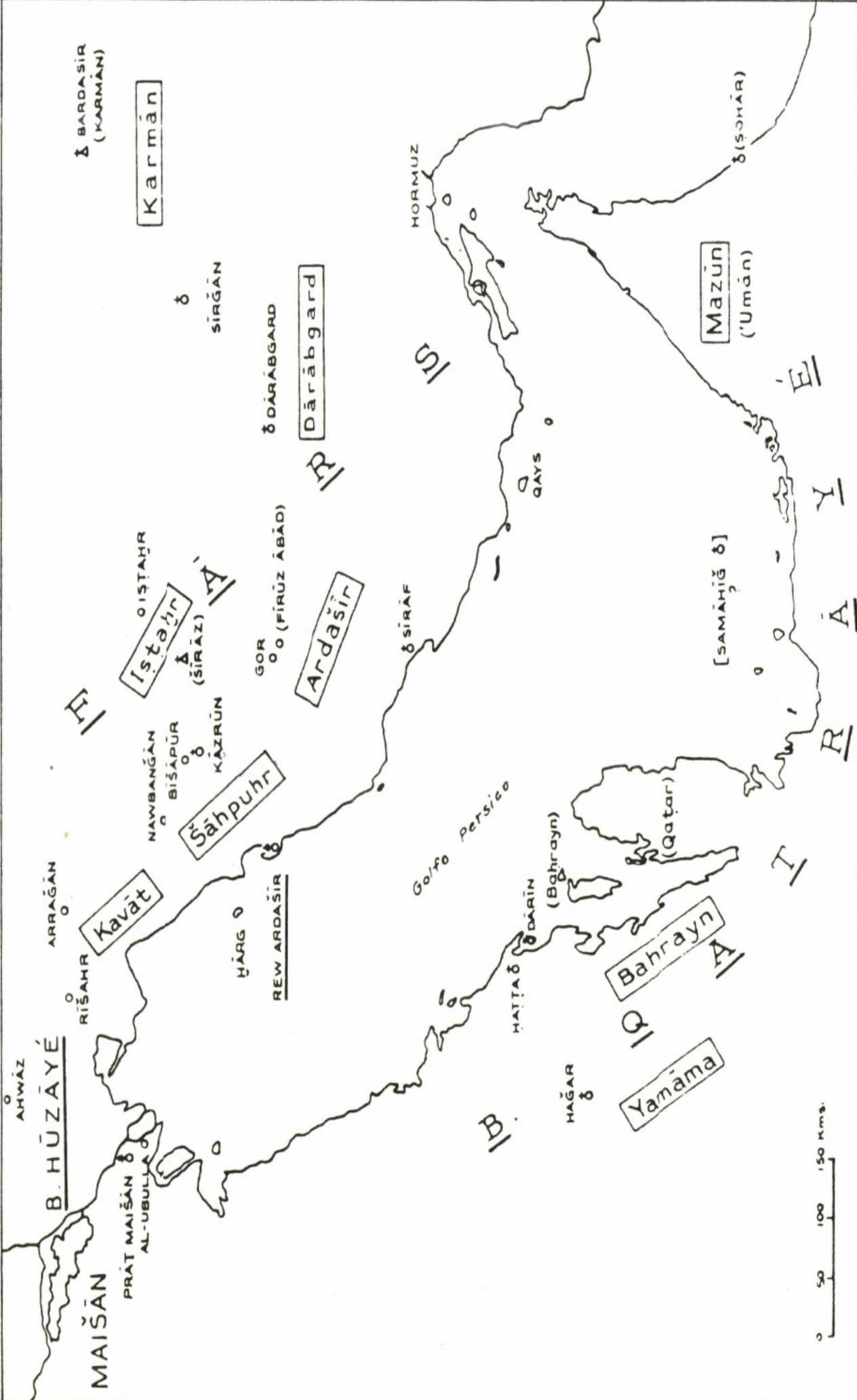
* Some general warnings:

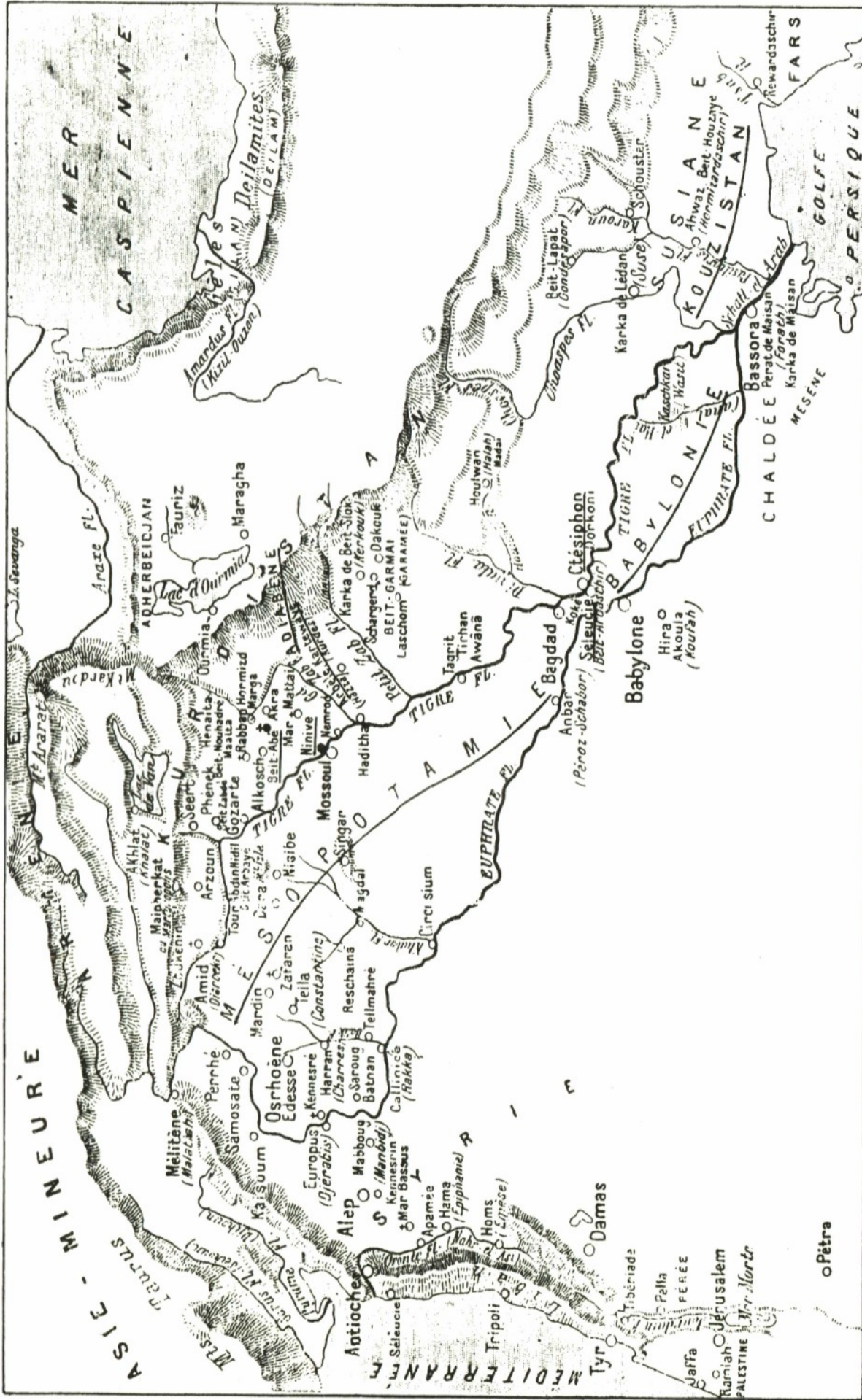
- the text of the biblical quotations corresponds to the Syriac text used by Isaac, which sometimes diverges from that of our versions;

- Psalms are given according to the numbering of the LXX;

- pp. 45 and 47 give two maps concerning the regions where Isaac lived: the Bet Qatraye (cf. especially pp. 10 f.) and Mesopotamia (cf. especially pp. 18-19);

- in the translation, the words placed in square brackets are our own additions intended to make the text easier to read.





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OF THE SAME MAR ISAAC, BISHOP AND SOLITARY, DIFFERENT CHAPTERS ON KNOWLEDGE, IN WHICH [ARE FOUND] LOFTY CONTEMPLATIONS AND PERFECT KNOWLEDGE, DENSE AND WONDROUS INTELLIGENCES AND GREAT MYSTERIES. THEY SERVE THE JOY AND GLADNESS OF THE SOUL AND ITS GROWTH IN SPIRITUAL [THINGS].

First Discourse Of The Gnostic Chapters

1. God is truly a father to beings endowed with reason whom he begat by grace so that they might become the heirs of his glory in the future time, to show them his riches, to their inseparable delight.
2. Truth is concealed in its being from all that it has created, and beings endowed with reason, having become because of it, dwell far away from it, at a great distance. In due time truth will reveal itself to them from itself [itself], according to what will seem good to it, but its end no, not at all: for its end is concealed in its Essence.

Elucidation. [By] truth understand the exact knowledge of the essential Nature. If the [knowledge] of here are all mysteries of the future one, even if we speak of the [knowledge] of the angels, then the truth proper to the mysteries is still completely guarded by silence.

3. Every word, in its being said of any thing, is said according to three orders: either according to what [the thing] is, or above what [it] is, or below what it is. Word and thought, however, have the power to think God according to one [order]: it is not possible for anything that he has created to move its knowledge beyond that limit, but it must again go back clothed in fear and doubt.
4. The *essential*³⁷ vision of those who have already been instructed in the knowledge of the six days [consists in]the exact understandings related to them, which are said [to be] the movements [that take place] in the natural constitution of the intellect. Their objects³⁸ devoid of essence [are instead, for example] the sensible ostension, in the service of the Lord's will, [which was produced] in Paul's sending (cf. Acts 9:3-6).
5. We can distinguish four excellent mutations that overtake nature endowed with reason. The first change, in one who awakens from abject behaviors; the second change, in one who [passes] from the wandering of the intellect to the perception of truth in second beings; the third change, in one who [passes], by spiritual knowledge, from the previous step to the movements of his natural creature-hood; the fourth change, in being moved [proper] to eternal life, according to Gospel contemplation.³⁹
6. Those who were first in honor, were first in change, and those who were first in change, led the change. Therefore great therefore is the rejection of stops by the receivers.

³⁷ *Essence* in this chapter translates the simple transliteration of the Greek word οὐσία (ousia), used by Isaac with reference to the ultimate consistency of the creature (and only of it). Hence the essential vision, in an integral and shrewd intellect, is finally the gaze set upon creation, here recapitulated all in the memory of the six days in which it was built, and upon itself. Next to such essential vision here then are recalled those fantastic, in which God sometimes gave Himself to be known to His saints.

³⁸ Glossa in the margin: Those produced in the way of signs and visions for the saints.

³⁹ Cf. Evagrius, KG 2.4 (= Les six centuries des "Kephalaia Gnostica" 'Evagre le Pontique, A. Guillaumont éd., PO 28/1, Paris 1958. The text of the sentences is always quoted according to recension _{S1}, read by Isaac): "We know... the distinction of four mutations. The first, as the fathers say, is the passage from malice to virtue; the second is that from disobedience to the second natural contemplation (= contemplation of the sensible world); the third, the ascent from this to the knowledge of natures endowed with reason (= contemplation of the intelligible, incorporeal world); the fourth is the passage of all things at the holy Trinity."

7. The indication of [different] times runs parallel to the movement of bodily realities. Where they are not bodies, [they are] not changes either. Where they are not mutations, neither are times. Where they are not times, not even bodies. Where they are not bodies, not even highs and lows in a substance, but in each of the substances there is equality, according to the equality of substances in the in-compound essences. But if there is no equality of distinctions, there [are] also forms and colors there, and by them the contemplation of every principle will pass.
8. Natures endowed with reason first learned to make use of the sensitive sound of the word from the Creator, and its first use was the glory offered to the Creator by [his] works, as it is written in Job (38:7 LXX).⁴⁰ We too, the sons of man, have received from the Creator the sounds of the sensible word, in a sensible way, and it runs to us by being transmitted from the fathers to their progeny.
9. Those who say that in this world the vision of our Savior [takes place] in a way other than contemplation are the companions of those who say that in the future world the delight of his kingdom [is tasted] in a sensible way and that there [there will be] use of elements and crassness of substances. Both have failed in regard to the truth.⁴¹
Glossa in the margin: Pay attention to this chapter and its word!
10. In [the Savior's] likeness [they] shall also become his brethren, both those on the right and those on the left, except for degrees and distinctions in glory (cf. 1 Cor. 15:41). In his likeness [they] will then be raised from earthly forms to a very glorious form, without the body being denied for being honored because of the change it will have received by being raised from its former form. Evagrius, the faithful witness of the Word, [says]: If the human body is part of this world [and] the form of this world passes away, it is clear that the form of the body will also pass away.⁴²
11. The grace that provides for our life provides in the hearts of those who in the freedom of their conduct, by the excellence of their will and diligence, have become worthy to become [as] sons for God, of the motions [by which they address] God as to their own father; in those who, in their practice, are servants [disposes of the motions that address] him as to a lord, and in those who are strangers to him in their various actions moves [impulses that address] his greatness as to a judge. See how even the gospel, full of life, lays down these three dispositions in regard to God: there is where he is called father, where he is master of the house, and where he is called king and judge.
12. Man is enlightened in accordance with his good conduct toward God and is brought nearer to the freedom of the soul according to [his] being drawn to knowledge and [is led] from knowledge to knowledge superior to it insofar as he approaches [having] a free mind.

⁴⁰ This is a traditional teaching in the Nestorian church, which the Catholicos George also alludes to in the doctrinal letter we cited in the Introduction. God on the first day creates, in silence, even the angels. Now, "for twelve hours the spiritual natures remained in darkness, with all created natures. For the instruction of the spiritual ones our God said, 'Let there be light' (Gen. 1:3), and immediately, with the voice, was the admirable nature of light. And the spiritual natures marveled, and were moved to the glory of the Creator of light," according to the word of Job (230/494).

⁴¹ This sentence is quoted in one of his writings by Joseph Hazzaya, an 8th-century Nestorian monastic author: cf. A.Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies*, Cambridge 1934, (t) p. 268 (f. 150r°); (v) p. 157.

⁴² KG 1:26. Cf. also 3:25: "The spiritual body which beings endowed with intermediate reason (= men) will clothe on the last day is none other than this body, which [they now] undress..." (with cit. of 1 Cor. 15:42).

13. The non-intellectual light [is] the elemental light. In the new world a new light will arise and there will be no need for the use of anything sensible and elemental. Intellectual light [is] the mind enlightened by divine knowledge that pours unimpeded into nature. In the spiritual world [there will be] a spiritual light: for neither does that darkness resemble this, nor does that light [resemble] this.
14. Do not dispute around the truth with those who do not know the truth and do not hide the Word from those who yearn to know it.
15. Profit with thy silence more than with a word of knowledge him who cannot profit by knowledge. Stoop down with him according to his infirmity, and, according to the type of the fowl, speak with it a tongue similar to its own, that you may drive it out with knowledge to life.
16. Do not be troubled at all by the words of those who neither quarrel through hardness [of heart] with the truth nor speak evil through malice, but ignorance molests them. Let them rather enter through the door of your ears as well as the babble of babes.
17. After the transgression of the commandment God had revealed himself to men as a judge. In the middle revelations, according to the order of the Lord, as to Noah, Abraham, and [those] after him. It is written: My servant Abraham, and: My servant Moses. From the coming of the Christ onward [take place] revelations indicating the order of his fatherhood—that he is father indeed nor had will of lordship and judgment with us.
18. It is good that we say: Woe to ourselves! What contemplation we deprive ourselves of through our sloth!
19. Woe to us, who know not what will our Maker had toward us and of what greatness He will make us worthy, and whose habit [is] with earthly things and their stench! It agreed that we should become intoxicated with hope and be constantly, with our memory, in that great and stupendous abode of ours and migrate with our thoughts, at all times, there where our Factor will ultimately make us dwell... Our dwelling will [indeed] be in the heavens (cf. Phil. 3:20) and we will become heavenly, in that life to which there is no end and which will have no change, where God has arranged this good for us, and has sown in us the hope of it in Christ, as the blessed Interpreter also said on the firmament: *Now therefore, being in this constitution, we dwell in this region, that is, within this visible heaven and earth. But in the future constitution, when we become incorruptible and devoid of inclination, we shall all dwell in heaven, where Christ, our Lord, he who was taken up from among us and for us, is now, in heaven - he who has also shown us [to be] there our dwelling place.*
20. Do not think it is idleness to much linger in worship before God; [think] that not even psalmody is as great as it. There is no greater thing than it in all the virtues practiced by the sons of man. But why do I speak of the virtues since he, by [his] continuity with God, lays down the same virtue? It is the sign of death to the world and the way of exact penance, according to the word of the Interpreter; [it is] the humiliation of the body and intelligence, the cessation of evil thoughts, the dissolution of desires, the preparation of the soul for the perfect exodus from the body, in mystery, and a great readiness for the charity of God. In it are found all the goods from here and the future.

Let not this work be small in your eyes: if you can, compile it without ceasing (cf. 1Th

5:17), denying everything and yourself and being assiduous only in it. If thou shalt have given thyself to it, make no word of thy bliss with the earthly tongue. I say that what from here takes place in you [are] things unspeakable and stupendous. It is indeed the perfect exodus from the world, [or,] rather, from corruptible conduct. It is the end of all work, the reason for all commandments and the fulfillment of all virtue.

21. *You are priest forever* (Ps 109:4b). The forever [means] that Christ, our Lord, acts as priest and performs the work of the priesthood, in atonement for us, even now, that is, continually, until he has brought all of us up to himself. For then there will no longer be any need for him to exercise the priesthood for us with victims of reconciliation, because of the perfection which, through him, all nature will have received, but [instead] he will pour out on us abundantly the gifts of the Father. For sacrifices and prayers [are] where [are] sin and inclination.

Elucidation. This chapter coheres to what comes after it and confirms the theory.

22. The priesthood of Christ is that he presents to the divine nature dwelling in him prayer for the whole nature of beings endowed with reason. For if, when he dwelt on earth, he did this with solicitude, as we see in the gospel, in many places, now he does it even more, and [the] apostle testifies to it. "He entered," he writes, "to appear for us before the face of God" (Heb. 9:24). Understand that for us: for all of us he went up first and sat at the right hand of God and intercedes for us. Not only for the sons of man, but also for the holy angels. For the holy angels communicate in affinity with him in his soul; [we] have an extra part in him, because in both, in soul and body, we communicate with him.

God has not taken from among us in vain a first-fruits and made her ascend to heaven before time and seated her near Himself, at [His own] right hand: for through her He will give us [those] goods of whose knowledge [already] now the senses of the body and the movements of the soul profit. For he in the Spirit reveals God to him with whom he is pleased.

Elucidation. Certainly not by presenting a prayer of words, but, instead of prayer, by making everything perfect in work, with power.

By Evagrius: The high priest is the one who pleads with God for all natures endowed with reason, separating them, by his mediation, from malice and ignorance.⁴³

23. After the satiety of the belly it never happens that the trial of thoughts and the moving of the limbs does not approach us. Therefore avoid it, as it is written, *lest you should forget the Lord and commit wickedness*. For by the confusion of thought that is suddenly introduced into you, the intellect easily wanders [until] it adheres to vile deeds. There is no perfection in the belly, let us not deceive ourselves! To satiety adheres contempt, because of the motives of truthfulness that gush in us from within; to emptiness, on the other hand, being awake and chastity. Vigilance, however, should not only concern the body, but also the intellect.
24. Vigil in contemplation frees the intellect from opinions about God and confirms in it the gladness of exact persuasion.

⁴³ Evagrius, KG 5.46.

25. Those who rob knowledge are ravished [in turn] at pride, and the more they meditate, [the more] they become obscured. Those, on the other hand, in whose movements knowledge enters and dwells, lower themselves to the abyss of humiliation and receive within themselves, with light, the persuasion that gives joy (cf. Col 2:2).
26. They rob knowledge those who attack it without practice, that is, instead of the truth [they] rob a semblance of it. It dwells from itself in the movements of those who in their own lives have become crucified (cf. Gal 6:14) and have aspired (cf. Ps 118:131) for life from within death.
27. In accordance with the change in behavior, so in the motions of the sons of man the thoughts about the properties of God change. When they stoop in defect, they consider hard things about the Lord of all. And this [happens] because of grace, which knows how to give every temperament [its] food. *It is not good for the fool to live a pleasant life*, as Solomon says (Pr 19:10), [nor] for the servant to take hold of great things. Those who rise [up] to steadfastness of conduct will [instead] find God's property in the coffers. *No stranger and uncircumcised*, it is written, *shall eat of the mystery of the Passover* (cf. Ex 12:43 and 48).
28. Wakefulness in contemplation and the conduct of knowledge bring nearer to spiritual conduct one who has done the bodily labors and approached old age and whose body has been quieted only by separation from humanity and being awake and the solicitude of the intellect. Again and again the saying is fulfilled for him: *The night shall be lighted as day* (Ps. 138:12). He will need to be vigilant in this conduct for a little while against the evidence of blasphemy. If humility is found in him, he will be easily delivered by the light of faith that rises upon him, by grace. If, on the other hand, he perseveres in dispersion and [worldly] commerce, he will become obscured in contemplation and err in his intellect, and, approaching this conduct, he will be tried by blasphemy. For nothing so offends tranquility as [worldly] commerce and the dispersion of the senses.
29. The light of contemplation runs parallel to a continuous stillness and absence of outward impressions because the mind, when empty, continually holds itself erect and waits for what contemplation will arise in it. He, on the other hand, who disputes about this, not only causes others to err, but also deviates himself from the path, nor [does he] warn it, and runs after a shadow in the phantoms of his intellect.
30. When it is the time of battle and darkness, even if we are distracted, let us linger in prayer and genuflection on the ground. On the other hand, when [it is] not the urgency of battle and deep darkness, but the wandering [proper] of habit with casual thoughts, the part set aside for reading outweighs the lingering in prayer. Let us therefore mix them with each other: let us receive medicament from the Book and approach prayer.
31. Those who allow the satiety of food are to be admired, if they can guard their chastity without having their modesty disturbed, to say nothing of giving themselves thought to divine movements. They therefore are not clothed with flesh, nor are humors and temperaments disposed in their bodies, but are clothed with a spiritual body. But will it be that you control the thought, so that it is not moved, which with satiety is not possible, or [is] hardly possible? What will you do with the body and the gentle movements that cause the intellect to rise up in affliction (cf. Ps. 12:3), when it does not depend on its will to move or not to move, or that the turpitude of its movements be changed into a virtuous change?

Thoughts, it is in our power to restrain them, and that is if we watch much. Temperament, on the other hand, is not under our power. He therefore errs who says he is impassive with a full belly. Oh, were he persevering in observing things!

32. Purity is the destruction of memories through the fullness of thought [caused] by the multitude of contemplations. But neither does it remain without [undergoing] the trial of movements, nor is it without a body. [Thought here] is tried, however, but not subdued; [it acts] not as a fighter, but as their despiser. Then [it is] victor, not fighter. The excitements are bold, yes, but without germination in the memories, and the movements pour out devoid of bodily semblance. It happens [that] sometimes there is darkness, but not also struggle: it is prevented by the clarity of practice.
33. Impassibility is not insensible to the passions, but [is] non-receptive of the passions for the intoxication of the mind, in the glory of the soul.
34. Night and day let not this prayer fail from your heart: Lord, deliver me from the darkness of the soul. For it is the end of the whole prayer of knowledge. A darkened soul is a second Sheol; an enlightened mind is the companion of the seraphim.
35. Blessed is he whose heart has been opened and who has perceived what God will do to the kind of beings endowed with reason. It is admirable how intelligible natures endure this joy, [they] who know exactly this hope, where they [themselves] and we are invited.
36. Go ahead and say one to his brother, Love God!, it is very easy. But it is necessary to know how to love. The practice of the soul, which they call the hidden conduct, in thought, is generated in the heart by an unconfused stillness and [by] an outward practice united with humility. The considerations concerning the hidden things that stillness generates in the soul are numerous. Their distinctions are carried out by me in the section on the interpretation of the orders of observances. Its first seed is suffering of the heart: [it] leads to joy. The practice of the soul brings us closer to spiritual conduct, which is wonder in God. For it is the perception of His mysteries, which astonishes the soul, and [then] its movements are immersed as in a caligula. And, if one were to speak according to the type, it is like the cloud that hid Moses (cf. Ex 20:21), within which he set down to the world. All that there [happened] sensibly, here [happens] intelligibly. Since then a persuaded faith is confirmed in us. Faith kindles a fire in man, from his brain down to his fingernails. The vehemence of this fire is charity: it by its remembrance calls the soul at every moment to abandon earthly things and to wander in its movements in God.
37. Spiritual conduct is a senseless practice. Senseless practice, according to the word of the fathers, [is] the mind communicating with God in the revelation of his mysteries, to which [they] give the name of *naked intellect*. There is also where [they] call it *vision beyond the body*, according to the saying: *Then he sees in himself the light of the beauty of his soul, and in the moment of prayer, he sees in himself heavenly spectacles*, that is, he sees in his soul the glory of God which is the spectacle of his mysteries.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Cf. Evagrius, KG 3:6: "The naked intellect is that which has been fulfilled by the vision of self and has become worthy to participate in the contemplation of the holy Trinity"; or again 5:15: "The intellect, when it has undressed itself of the passions, shines all as light and, enlightened, becomes seer of all the works of God," and especially the so-called *Pseudo-supplement* Centuries 50 (W.Frankenberg, Euagrius Ponticus, Berlin 1912, pp. 462-464): "When the inner man has become Gnostic, then he undresses the old man of the passions; then he sees in himself the light of the beauty of his soul and, in the moment of prayer, he sees in himself heavenly spectacles."

38. It says *vision of the glory of God* that the intelligence of the greatness of his nature moves in him. It, by its own perception, leads him out of this world and [from] thence [he] is confirmed in the future hope. This is the persuasion of thought of which Paul speaks (cf. Col 2:2).
39. Good is placed in the nature of the soul just as fire is placed in the nature of stone and iron: it needs those who move it, who are the grace of God and the exhortation of man. What in these [happens] naturally and invariably, there [happens] through an independent and free will, not bound by necessity.
40. As long as one does not fear and forbid himself bad things, love for good things does not move in him with gentleness and fervor.
41. Let those who come across this book and see each of the chapters of knowledge written in the book, above the lines, not believe that this is done by mistake, for these chapters of knowledge are like an elucidation for the multitude of sayings in this book. Therefore they [serve] in a certain way to the intelligence and superabundant rest of the reader, and since this book is compiled by us as a reminder for our souls from the fullness of the contemplations of the Books-as it is written at the head of the book-and, a little, from the evidence that has passed over me, we have written over these chapters of knowledge each of the subjects so that the thought may be enlightened by them in the difficult understandings of their reading. For there are words, each of which, while giving to know its reading a meaning, is from within, in its meaning, different.⁴⁵
Glossa in the margin. Each of these chapters of knowledge in the first section is written above the lines.
42. Prayer, separated from contemplation, is full of sloth and is prayed with difficulty. This happens because of the thick darkness and this in turn [arises] because of the great dispersion of the senses. The dispersion of the senses leads to the dispersion of the intellect, and from here thick darkness springs up in thought. He who prays in contemplation has dwelt in delight, prays with gentleness and remains in prayer without struggle.
43. As the intelligibility of the Father is reflected in the holy angels, so the intelligibility of Christ is reflected in the sons of man.
44. He who is gladdened by the contemplation of the properties of Christ, dwelling in quietness, from there inherits by way of a down payment the future kingdom.
45. Rest actually blinds man, so that he does not look at divine realities as in awe, but investigates them as with an empty search.
46. The wonder of thought coheres to sitting alone, without dispersion, which sets in motion fervent and stupendous movements from necessity and works, through the wisdom it generates in thought.
47. What is watering for the plant, the same thing [is] a continuous silence for the growth of knowledge.
48. Speech for wisdom [is] like nakedness for the members of the body.

⁴⁵ Cf. Introduction, p. 20

49. Christ the Lord is both the firstborn and the only-begotten. For the two things are not situated in one nature, for he becomes the firstborn of many brethren, but [he is] only-begotten for there is no other generation before and after him. The two things are fulfilled [respectively] in God and man, who were united in one person, without the [properties] of nature being confused by the union.
50. When our thoughts wander and grieve for every path because of the threats of the Books, because of the condemnation of our sins, we have no other refuge from fear but only the fact that, although we are sinners, God has reconciled with us in the death of his Son. God sent his only begotten Son at a time when there was not the slightest trace of the fear of God in the world: "*I was found by those who had not sought me*", it is written, "*and I was made to be sought by those who had not asked for me.*" (Isa. 65:1a).
51. The saying: *Your judgments[are] like the great deep* (Ps. 35:7) has the same meaning as that: *caligin beneath your feet* (Ps. 17:10). By: *under your feet* the psalmist means the things that exceed him: for the contemplations of God's judgment and providence and his economy in beings endowed with reason are inscrutable.
52. The intelligible *fog* [is] the intellect devoured by wonder at the insight in inspiration that suddenly falls upon the soul and keeps the intellect still, while all visible things are hidden from it, in ignorance and in-apperception of the object of their consideration. They cause the intellect to be called quiescent like the fog that envelops things and prevents bodily vision.
53. Living martyr is the true penitent. Tears have overcome blood, for the operations they possess, and penitence martyrdom. [Tears and penitence] precede [blood and martyrdom] in the coronation. These receive the crown with all, those, on the other hand, even before all. Two crowns therefore seem [to receive] an exact penitent.
54. Let the purpose of psalmody be a silent conversation with God, in quiet and unperturbed supplication. Let us not multiply the recitation, like fools, while with our thoughts we wander through garbage, but come out of it when we are deprived of the goods that a prudent intellect is wont to gather in those moments.
55. Do you therefore want to adorn your body in a laborious posture or do you seek to gladden your soul? Say with science *five words* (1 Cor. 14:19), and get out of there when you are intoxicated. If, however, your purpose aims at a further position, it is also possible [by keeping] the tongue silent to prolong the position with a long vigil, without being prevented from reciting. The heart [then] advances in intelligence because of the great tranquility of the sayings.
56. All knowledge therefore is divided into two parts, into a sensible part and an intelligible part. The first is called practical, which is virtue, and the second contemplation. And the first part, again, is divided into two other parts: into a material practical and [into an] immaterial. The material is accomplished among other people; the immaterial is what one accomplishes in oneself.
57. Species of the material part [are] the service of the sick, the welcoming of pilgrims, the washing of the weary, the giving of alms to the indigent, the word of consolation [addressed] to anyone who is sorrowful and afflicted in his heart (cf. Mt. 25:35-36), the teaching useful

for the growth of the lives of our companions with the rest of the [actions] by which love of neighbor is accomplished according to the will of God.

58. Species of the immaterial practical part, which it is not possible to practice outside oneself, are chastity, fasting, weeping, reading, officiating, stillness, prayer with the rest of the [actions] resembling these. The first [part] is called the half part, the second part the parts, that is, embracing the whole practical part. The material part is not enough to free the intellect from the materiality of thoughts, which is the passionate motion. The second part, on the other hand, purifies the soul from material motion and brings it closer to that greater part which is called contemplation. This is why true solitaries intend to practice virtue constantly in this immaterial part, so that, purified by it, they are easily introduced from material thoughts to contemplation.
59. There is a particular prayer and there is a general one. In a general way, according to the saying, *Thy will be done* (Mt 6:10 and par.). In a particular way, according to the saying: for this I thrice called upon my Lord (2 Cor. 12:8). Since we have an adversary, nature also needs many things. We also clothe a soul inclined [to error]: we cannot be continually able to pray according to a general way. Even the perfect do not normally persevere in this [prayer]. Behold! We see that even the saints knew distinctions in prayer, in the manner of the blessed Paul and the rest of the apostles. Even the Psalms of David were placed by the fathers in the church for this, because there are distinctions of prayers in them. Therefore, as the foundation of life, we place at the beginning of our invocation, in all the appointed hours, the prayer given us by our Savior and, after it, the prayers which the Spirit has composed for our instruction and delight by the mouth of the blessed prophet, which are his canticles. After these, in the other remaining hours, let us accommodate our prayer as nature shows us, in accordance with her illness that obliges us to invoke the Factor on her behalf. A varied prayer helps the sickness and infirmity of thought and to love nature. Then, in the time when the mind will be healthy and rise in [its] high order, the will will roll toward God.
60. Just as it is impossible for the hearing to receive a word without composition of sound, so it is impossible for the mind, in its interiority, to deal with passions without matter.
61. Just as it is impossible for the nature of demons to show itself to the eyes without taking on the guise of the senses we clothe, so it is impossible for it to move its thoughts within the heart and blind the mind in us without the phantoms of the senses and objects.
62. I have the temerity [to situate] the purpose of the contemplation of the future world in the visible being of the holy angels, when we will all become gods by the grace of our Creator. For this is its purpose [from] the beginning: to bring the whole creation of beings endowed with reason to an equality, without there being any distinction between these and those, not because of duplicity nor because of simplicity, although the natural body does not fail. But such things then will no longer come to investigation.
63. There are many who, having knelt down and attained a pure and contrite prayer, sever their movements and terminate a genuflection filled with advantageous prayers, believing that they have ceased from psalmody or the desire for reading because of much delay in this great work, of whose profit they are not persuaded. But they do not know, those admirable ones, that we also make use of psalmody and reading for that [prayer], in order that the intelligence, by their recitation and meditation, may be purified from wandering and move

clearly into prayer, which is [that] conversation with God for which [it is] every [other] thing.

64. Faith is a movement full of persuasion, arising in the mind by the grace of God, relating to things which it is not possible to commit to paper, through letters, but which it is possible for a faithful mind to know. It too, however, is revealed to the healthy; the sick, on the other hand, whose food is legumes, is not given the nourishment of the healthy.
65. Prostrate yourself before God, that He may make you taste the delight that ascetics receive in the hour of office and prayer! They, in the prostration of their intellect, are persuaded of the life prepared for the righteous after the resurrection, by the stillness that falls upon them from God, in the time of prayer, out of all will and freedom and understanding of nature. The intellects, made splendid by the guarded stillness, in the position of prayer will clothe the future glory not only in the night hour but also in the daytime.
66. Strengthen in the office your mind with the splendor clothed for the flame that reading kindles in it.
67. Sweetly meditate on those books that make you know the purpose [constituted] by intoxication for God and draw your intellect to awe in times of prayer.

Elucidation. Meditate on the admonition concerning the reading [given] by the teachers of the fear of God in accordance with the various stature. Where the order of perfection is spoken of, it is good for the solitary to have a reading that [educates] him for [that] purpose, but where the solitary has need of the observances of virtue and [of] the struggle against the passions, it is not fitting for him to read other than the books of the solitary fathers.

68. Contemplation appears to us to be twofold as to the understanding of intelligible natures. For other is the contemplation that we intuit hidden in the mystery of the hour of their generation, and other is the contemplation to which their modes of life and the natural gifts they have received from the Factor point. The one indicates the creaturely mystery of the universal resurrection, in what order and at what instant the mysterious act of resurrection will be administered. With the other [one indicates] allusively the new conduct in which in that life beings endowed with reason will have existence, how it has pleased the magnificent grace of the Creator to make them worthy of the region of spirituality, so that from each of these contemplations we know obscurely the mysteries of the new world which those blessed essences bear [in themselves], which the Creator has been pleased to point out to us and [which] he has foretold from the beginning of this world... The things [that is] which at the fulfillment [of the ages] would be done by him to the creation, the excellence of the second existence which it would receive, in what manner its advent would take place and its mode of being in that constitution.
69. Philoponus⁴⁶ is not he who dislikes the rests of the body, but he who dislikes the customs of the body.
70. When the passions [present] in the soul have weakened and have fallen silent, [then] one will easily prevail even over the desires of the body.

⁴⁶ *Philoponus*, meaning *lover of labor or of toil*, is traditional title of the ascetic (or a particular order of ascetics) in Greek-speaking churches and is here exact translation of the Syriac term used by Isaac.

71. Not any [man] of few labors is a lover of rest, nor is anyone who uses them powerfully a philopon [for that matter]. There is one who practices few works, whose soul, however, is full of mourning. He makes up for those labors which the body turns away from himself because of his own infirmity by the labors of the heart, and by a continual presence to himself he cools his thoughts, so that the passions of the body do not attack him through the senses. There are those, on the other hand, who work mightily, according to the power infused in their bodies; from time to time, however, they compensate for their labors with dissolute rests subsequent to them, and by wandering here and there, they derive [no] benefit from their toil: by their occasional labors arrogance is increased in them; by the dissolute works of their bodies, the fury and desires of the body.
72. Those who practice righteously [the solitary life], it behooves them to have [as] the purpose of works, so as to make the intellect impregnable from passion and to keep it sound in its immobility, and [again it behooves them to have as] the purpose of knowledge, in order to bring the intellect nearer to the gift of divine vision, which is the fulfillment of contemplation.
73. When the enemy has seen that the soul of the solitary is shrewdly disposed to struggle against him and provokes him by his elusiveness in everything, then he procures to bind his thoughts at every opportunity to the worldly. For he does not know how to prepare a greater snare than this. Hence, without ceasing, he easily subjects him as often as he pleases to the three [strongest] passions: the passion of lust, envy and fury. Once the solitary has been caught by the former things and his hands and feet have been bound, he has stumbled and fallen always by one of those; it is [then] too much for him to care again for the observances or purity of prayer.
74. Boastful is not he who, having been praised, rejoices in praise, but he who procures for himself the means for it.
75. He is humble in thought whose thought not even when rightly praised feels complacency.
76. The intelligible perception of grace manifests itself within the intelligible practice of penance.
77. The intelligible practice of penance [is] the hidden man's weeping, poured out in his heart out of an understanding of his Father's charity and not out of fear of condemnation. With it he applied himself to the assiduous meditation of God, in the hidden supplication of thought that sustains suffering as a victim and thinks of God at all times.
78. The intelligible perception of the intellect, which takes place in the practice [exercised] in stillness, is the delight of a joyful hope that gushes into the inner taste of the heart from within mourning, in relation to a grieving charity. Such is the saying: *Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted* (Mt. 5:4).
79. When therefore a man in his practice, in the way of virtue, has come to the joy of hope, [all] affliction has ceased and the burden of his practice has become light to him. Hence he abandons the practice of fear and begins the practice of charity; he casts from himself fear and dread of the way, and his heart then begins to be moved at every moment by trust. Her heart finds support, her thoughts rejoice and she does not see this world at all. Since then, therefore, some hope relating to future things is continually moved in his soul, he is filled

with joy at every moment, and this world is hidden from his eyes, without his knowing why. Only, his soul rejoices at every moment, as if he were in the new world.

These and as many things he sees continuously within his stillness, within his soul. For they occur, as we have said, in the time when the soul has begun to separate itself from the commonality with sin, and the heart, through a continuous stillness, has begun to be purified from the diversities of various memories in figures, which excite the limbs of the old-hearted man.

80. When it has begun in the son of man this being moved by hope in his thought and within his heart suddenly germinates, at every moment, without reason, joy, that which from here [originates], behold, he no longer knows toil nor the burden of sloth nor the fear of death. Truly I know, brother, that he has come to this because he has become utterly intoxicated, to the point that, wanting to glorify God and confess his joy, his tongue was broken and did not loosen to bless God, but then he stammered like a child and spoke to God like a little boy to his father. Joy intoxicates the whole man. We say of that joy that makes the heart clear and becomes for him the access to the intelligible revelations of the intellect, which is the vision in prayer. This is the first savor by which men enter the divine harbor; it is the fulfillment of penance and the consolation promised in the gospel. Yet from time to time it is taken away from him, so that he is humbled and doubts and troubles and darkness assail him. But again [then] he rejoices and delights. My brother, this happens from a continuous stillness and a complete withdrawal from commerce with the sons of man, when we deal with these and as many readings.
81. May God make me worthy to taste the delight reposed in exact penance, that on which the true penitents feed daily, who do not despise weeping and mourning and [call them] the work of youth, for they eat of those honeycombs of which it has been said (cf. 1Sam 14:27).
82. Indeed, in addition to spiritual vision, weeping was also honored by the fathers. In the section on blessed Arsenio, therefore, it says: Let the lids of your eyes be guarded perfectly by continual weeping. But why do I say of them, when the eyes of blessed Paul, that strong one, that perfect vessel of the Spirit, did not cease weeping the whole period of three years, as blessed Luke writes of him in the book of Acts (cf. Acts 20:31)?
83. For until a man has come to taste faith in the way of his conduct, he rises in weakness and infirmity and immiserates in every passion and burdens all the work of virtue upon him.
84. My Lord, who hast brought me out of the world sensibly by the vigor of thy holy right hand, make me worthy of the intelligible exit [from it], in the divesting of the motions of the corporeal world, that I may follow thee fully, seeing outside of thee nothing but the wandering in the hidden-ness of thy glorious mysteries. You, my Lord, purge my heart of earthly meditations and hold my motions at the future hope.
85. Mortification of the body is that one becomes a stranger to all his acquaintances, his region, his family and his people (cf. Gen 12:1) and inhabits a foreign land and chooses for himself a quiet region, because he has quenched himself from all turmoil, and in it dwells poorly, in bodily destitution, alone, guarding himself from all mingling with men and [from] visible commerce and consolation. Persuade by mourning, weeping and compunction of heart God to cleanse him from the commonality with sin and to strip him of the members of the old,

sinful man, which are worldly movements. This mortification births us to the mortification of the soul.

86. O Only-begotten One, who [proceeded] from the bosom of the Father, the beauties of whose Essence cause the spiritual worlds to rise at every moment in amazement, and [who] for the sake of mortals hid thy glorious radiance in the veil of a flesh (cf. Heb. 10:20) [made] of our members and showed thyself to the world in a vile aspect, thou, my Lord, make me worthy to forget by thy grace the temporal world, in desire of thee, and not to remember the corruptible flesh in which the ruler of this gloomy world holds me. Draw, my Lord, on my hidden mind the mysteries of your hidden-ness with spiritual traits, and in my hidden-ness I will delight in you, in movements that see without compound eyes.
87. Mortification of the soul is that one should not covet in his heart the goods of this world and his passing rests, nor take delight in the wandering of his thoughts in the desires of earthly things, but [that] his intelligence should continually, with impatience and in unceasing expectation, yearn for the hope of future [realities], and [that] all the consideration and commerce and worry of his heart should wander in those [things] which will happen to the sons of man after the resurrection in the new life, and meditate and consider them in all their moments, so that it may happen that because of the much solicitude of the motions of his soul in these reflections his soul may be attentive to them even when he is in the grip of sleep, and in them he may reverie and wander in the motions of his sleep. Verily, this is indeed the mortification of one who died with Christ, that is, who died the death of Jesus who is the resurrection of all worlds. This mortification cannot be achieved without the operation and help of the Spirit. Such mortification begets us to spiritual mortification.
88. Christ, who in your charity died for us, you, make me die to sin and strip me of the old man, that I may rise in newness of mind before you at every moment, as in the new world. You, the God who does not enclose the heavens and the heavens of heavens, who chose of among us a rational temple to dwell, make me worthy to become the dwelling place of your charity: in its perception the saints forgot themselves and became foolish after you, and in their intoxication at every moment joined themselves to you (cf. Heb. 3:14), for love of you, and did not turn back again. For you intoxicated with the wonder of your mysteries those who had drunk from this sweet fountain because they thirsted for your charity.
89. Mortification of the spirit is that the mind be raised to the vision of the unspeakable and divine realities by a [spiritual] operation, and [that] all thoughts of earthly things be silent in it, and that it be found, in wonder, in the midst of a type [of] the future, in understandings of realities that do not belong to the mortal world, receiving with spiritual senses, by way of a foretaste, the kingdom, ascending to those rooms (Jn. 14:2) which [are] not of flesh and blood (cf. 1 Cor 15:50). This is what the [verse] means: Thy kingdom come before the time,⁴⁷ which we are commanded to ask for in prayer, to consider at every moment and [for

⁴⁷ Cf. Mt 6:10. Actually this verse (which Isaac somehow has present elsewhere as well: cf. 2:59 and B 2:53) belongs to a paraphrase of the Our Father recited on the Sundays of Lent during the night office (cf. J.Mateos, Lelya-Sapra. Essai d'interprétation des matines chaldéennes, Rome 1959, pp. 183-184). Its attribution is uncertain. In the mss it is attributed to Babai (+ 628), now to the Catholicos Isho'yaw II of Gdala (628-646), but it seems more likely to be attributed to Bai'ai (+ after 432), one of the great hymnographers of the church of Persia. Because of the interest in this liturgical source Isaac presents, I reproduce it in full below:

Our Father who [you are] in heaven, holy in his nature, make your worshipers worthy to sanctify your name.

Thy kingdom come, in mystery, before the ages, as if we were already in its conduct.

which] we are to prepare unceasingly. [Of it] we are commanded by our Savior, with diligence.

90. You, the hidden mystery which has been manifested in our aging body (ITm 3:16), manifest in me the mystery of the renewal of the saints, for they receive [as of] now, as a down payment, the certainty of future goods. O you, [the one] who in the stripping of his flesh laid bare the archons and rulers (Col 2:15) and caused our nature to be clothed in the robe of incorruption (cf. 1Cor 15:53-54), you, my Lord, strip me of the corruptible man in the mystery of renewal and insinuate into my hidden members the movements of the new man (cf. Col 3:5 ff.) which in baptism you made me clothed in mystery and [which] in the world to come will be given in work, for the delight of all who love your charity, who have suffered afflictions for you here.
91. The word about the unity of believers in the Father and the Son addressed by the Son to the Father in the form of a prayer in the hour of passion (cf. Jn. 17:11, 21-23) is a mysterious foretelling that will find fulfillment in work in the world to come, when the realities of this world will receive fulfillment and that constitution will begin. When our Lord has been exalted with the hosts of the heavenly powers celebrating his greatness, after he has judged the earth with a judgment tempered by mercy and all those who [are] worthy of it have also been raised with them from this middle region to the eternal region, [there] where the Father and the Son and the Spirit are, without limit, and the mediator Jesus, the man [assumed] from among us, he, through whom we have invisibly seen the Trinity as in a mirror (1 Cor. 13:12) and through whom all receive the delight that flows from the *fountain of life* (Ps. 35:10), then through him all beings endowed with reason, the first and the last, will be brought near to God the Father, and there they will receive indivisible and eternal joy.
92. For the fathers hand down that in the hour when the saints will be raptured (cf. 1Th 4:17) at the divine beckoning to enter into blessedness in the encounter with our Lord - the power [present] in him indeed draws them as the magnet stone draws to itself the atoms of iron -, then all the legions of the heavenly powers and the hosts of the sons of Adam will be gathered into the one church, and the purpose of the Creator's intelligence, at which he looked from the beginning of the world's existence, when he created creatures by grace, will thus be fulfilled. For to this exodus He aimed, with its distinctions, the whole long course of

May we do your will on earth without fear,

[so] as in heaven there is [no one] who harms us.

From 'us every day the bread of our need, for the nature of mortals is always needy.

From before our constitution you have known our mischief:

In your charity you have constituted us,

In your mercy cancel our debts.

Since we have become indebted to your Essence and have failed one another, let each forgive the other and you, Lord, us all.

May we not rise in the temptations of demons and excitements, for they are cruel and we are weak.

In your mercy, Clement, deliver us from the Evil One, for you alone can overcome his tyranny.

Thine [is] the kingdom and the power and the glory give to us to be in it heirs of thy Beloved and to render to thy lordship, together with thy saints, the glory due to thee, for ever and ever.

Amen.

this world, which served by its changes as [its] lord the beings endowed with reason. Then the scattered of the kingdom (cf. Jn. 11:52) will delight in a world to which there is no fulfillment, and the delights of whose life [know] no change.

93. Material victim is the bodily victim with whom the soul communicates through a virtuous will.
94. Immaterial victim is the soul victim with whom the body communicates through honest submission.
95. Victim without footprints is the worship of the mind that scrutinizes Spirit in an immaterial word and in all its movements bows its head before that Greatness.
96. Immaterial knowledge in prayer is more excellent than prayer without imprints.
97. The immaterial knowledge in prayer is the spiritual perception in prayer. Pure prayer is the material word without imprint in supplication.
98. There is a material word devoid of material imprints in prayer and there is an immaterial word devoid of imprints in prayer. With one of these he communicates the Spirit of holiness; with the other, the virtue of a firm will and the grace that succors secretly, inadvertently, because of the absence of the [proper] perception of knowledge.
99. Even in virtuous consideration there are movements informed by objects. These [take place] not only in the passions, but also in [motions] that are clear and virtuous. Not, however, in prayer.
100. Any imprint of object in prayer is, in the time of prayer, a harm to the intellect. When it [proceeds] from weakness or from the creative act, [this] is not responsible for it. But if there is any that [are formed] by consent, because the intellect blackens in non-combat, the solitary stands before God in guilt, whether his position is in passion or without passion, unless he is in the mind with a virtuous understanding.

End Of First Discourse

Second Discourse Of The Gnostic Chapters

1. As the movements of the air indicate by their changes that it has a governor, so does thought by its opposite changes, right and left, indicate that battles and aids of grace ceaselessly coerce its movements, so that it may be directed by them gradually, day by day, to the learning of [things] new.
2. There is a word clothed in matter that bears no imprint of matter; there is [one] unclothed in matter that bears the imprint of matter; and there is [one] that, being simple, bears [no] imprint. When, therefore, one moves in prayer a simple word, un-imprinted, it brings to completion the word clothed [with matter] and [it] turns, also, toward Him who is before all things and [all] brings to completion.
3. The requisite for the second state of that which will be brought to completion, in everything, in equality, moved the state of this [world] from the many distinctions, which [preceded] it, according to the fulfillment foreseen by the intelligence of the Sower, [fulfillment which] moves him to arrive diligently at the sowing of the seed, looking to the whole providence turned to the requisite for the exodus of that which he has first brought to the act.
4. The first item was [that] of the contemplation of the essential divinity; the second, [that] of the mysterious distinctions of the substances of sowing.
5. By accomplishing virtue in the material part we see the distinctions of [this] part only; [accomplishing it] on the other hand in the immaterial part [we have] the contemplation of [all] its distinctions. More excellent than either [is] the practice without designations, in the transition from virtue to elevation beyond its distinctions.
6. First herald of the first light [is] the sensible light, and [this] itself guided the luminaries to the light.
7. Do you see how that [light] which, after having moved, first, by its equal clarity, through its beauty, the first spheres to the primal praise of the first light, has, the same, in the distinctions of the subdivision of its parts, deprived the second brethren of light with its luminaries and drawn to itself the praise of the first contemplation, at the end of the course [of the world] [is] still she the garment of him by whose knowledge everything became?⁴⁸

⁴⁸ The chapter in its Syriac text is obscure. It is likely that this in its second part is altered and, perhaps, lacunar: indeed, at least one verb seems to be missing, and the translation is therefore entirely conjectural. But the chapter is also particularly obscure in its meaning. If, taking into account the preceding sentences, we follow the traditional Nestorian exegesis of the first verses of Genesis, which seem to be recalled here, we can affirm, according to the commentary of Isho'dad of Merw (9th cent, in CSCO, Louvain 1955, [v] 156): 1) God on the first day created "in silence" even spiritual beings (ibid., p. 15.11.8-9 and then p. 20, 1.29 ff, for silence); 2) at the end of that day He created light, using the voice: "for from it [the angels] learned to know their Creator" who used the formula: "I, God, have said, Let it be this" (cf. pp. 18:1.4 ff.; 21:1.4 - 22:1.4. Reading the biblical "God said, Let there be light" instead of: "I, God, have said..." is from Theodore bar Koni, in a passage in his Book of Scoli parallel to this one from Isho'dad, attributed to Theodore of Mopsuestia: cf. CSCO, Louvain 1981, [v] 431, I, 52, pp. 67-68); 3) voice and light, as we have seen in 1:8, move the angels (here "the first spheres," with probable allusion to the spherical body, devoid of articulation into limbs, proper to "spiritual" bodies) to the praise of the "first light," God (ibid., p. 18:11.16-19); 4) the primeval light is "diffused light" "without shadow, similar to [that of] the time before the rising and setting of the sun" (ibid., pp. 22, 1.23 - 23, 1.1); 5) then, on the fourth day, God "divided the diffused light into three parts," fixing it in the sun, moon and stars (ibid., p. 37:11,20-28); 6) however, as we read in the margin of Ex 13:21 (CSCO, Louvain 1958, [v] 179, pp. 34:1.31 - 35:1.19), Isho'dad juxtaposes the "diffused light" with that by which "the bodies" of the resurrected will shine (cf. Mt 13:43), according to the very light of our Lord. It is in fact "created" light, for, as

8. Those in ancient times who spoke of monadic contemplation had received the teaching through bodies. The later ones, on the other hand, had for their teacher the monadic Life itself [lit.: in the proper sense], [the Christ], in the semblance of the body they wore.⁴⁹ Glory to the greatness of your charity that has no measure! Glory to the wonder of your grace that is incomparable! Glory to the incomprehensibility of your lowering which has raised the spiritual ones in astonishment without explanation [and] ultimately introduced them, in the truth of their bodies, to the contemplation of the eternal thought [of God] concerning their constitution!
9. Have a great opinion of your hope, O mortals! Acquire in yourselves deep intelligence of those things [that] will happen to you and [now] are hidden from you! It is not that your creation is a visible, external case, nor is the economy administered to you from the first day until now, with grand changes, small and comprehensible!
10. Parresia toward the cause from which contemplation is drawn and to which it comes is increased in the mind by as much as it relishes the distinctions of contemplation first, spiritual and monadic. Every mind [has] parresia in accordance with the proper measure of the distinctions according to which [it] is given [in] the gift of being enlightened, [or] rather

Theodore bar Koni best attests in the parallel passage (op. cit. III, 17, pp. 155-156) and especially in the commentary on 1Cor 15:35-53, to which he refers there (CSCO, Louvain 1982, [v] 432, IX, 21, pp. 160-162), it is the light that proceeds "from the sphere of our Lord's humanity" (ibid., p. 162). So the primal light is also the eschatological light of the risen body, that of Christ first, then that of all men. There remains, however, returning to our text, the difficulty of the aside, according to which the diffused light, once broken down into luminaries or otherwise divided, would "deprive of light" or "darken" its "second (?) brethren, drawing praise to itself." Is this an allusion to Christ, he, "by whose knowledge everything became," an epiphany of the "sun of righteousness" whose light veils that of every other being and who, in his flesh, already shines now, after the resurrection, with that same light created on the first day? I cannot answer this question, and the embarrassment in which I remain makes even part, at least, of the previous reconstruction suspect.

49 Here, as in 2:10 or 3:57, Isaac speaks of a "contemplation" or "monadic knowledge," and the expression requires clarification. *Ihidayoin* Syriac is an adjective meaning "alone" (in Greek), "lonely" (in this sense it is the usual translation of *monachós*), "only-begotten" (*monoghenés*; in this case, in the Christian context, noun-ified, it indicates Christ Himself, the only-begotten son of the Father, and thus, by extension, Christians, who have become in baptism, by grace, sons of God). *Ihidayuto*, then, the abstract noun corresponding to it, often translates the expression "solitary life," in Greek probably *monéres bios*. In the version of the Evagrian works, however, it renders the term *monàs*, monad, a term central to this author's speculation and highly controversial in its interpretation. As G.Bunge has shown in "*Hénade ou Monade? - Au sujet de de deux notions centrales de la terminologie évagrienne*" (Le Muséon 102 [1989], pp. 69-91), in Evagrius it indicates a "mode of being" (p. 81), the eschatological union of all creation, through Christ, with the divinity; in short: the one church of the kingdom of which Isaac speaks in 1:91-92.

Very early, however, most of Evagrius' readers misunderstood the term, interpreting it as the name of the deity, and, concerned about the pantheistic tone that some of his texts thus assumed, when they did not reject them, corrected them. This is also how the Syrian translator of the "common version" of Evagrius' Gnostic Chapters(S1) proceeded, who preserved the term, not without certain snags, only there where the context allowed for an "acceptable" interpretation, in the sense, as we said, of the "divine Monad." "Monadic knowledge" is then eschatological knowledge of God, in a manner not entirely dissimilar to Evagrian knowledge, although the monad is no longer the subject (= creation in God), but the object (= God himself) of contemplation.

I suspect then that here, in 2:8, when Isaac speaks of those who "had as their teacher the monadic life (*ihidayuto*) itself," he combines different texts. Nilus, a fourth/fifth-century Greek monastic author whose texts translated into Syriac Isaac quotes elsewhere (cf. B 4:84), in the introduction to his *Discourse on the Observances of the Monastic Life* writes, according to the Syriac version of the scripture: the solitary life "was manifested to men by the Savior ... it is therefore he who is the true solitary life [*ihidayuto*], the true solitary" (§ 2: so in the Syriac "only"; cf. The Syriac writings of Nilus the Solitary, P.Bettiolo ed, Louvain-la-Neuve 1983, [t] p. 76; [v] p. 125). So it is likely that the source of the expression here is the Syriac Nilus, read according to the "Evagrian" intelligence of the term *ihidayuto*: the Christ as the revealer of the Monad, of God (but, remember, divine unity is the ultimate foundation of monastic life, aimed at gathering man into "one" so that he may stand alone with the One, God: thus by this path Nilus' thought is also finally reached).

in accordance with the amount of light [with which it is flooded]. There is, however, no meagerness or greatness in reference to the distinctions: meagerness or sublimity of light, magnificence or modesty [are] in the mind, their receiver. Hence it is now approached by distinctions to the limit of astonishment, now [is moved] modestly by them. By this is indicated in fact the abundance or modesty of light in the receptor, which is the mind, and the limpidity or obscurity of vision.

11. The gift of light and the delight of joy do not follow from near every darkness, bitterness of struggle and gloom. These, however, absolutely precede every gift, either by an hour or a day or [by] months or [by] years. It is absolutely not possible for a good to come before the thought has moved into the cloudiness of great darkness and trial. Therefore, whenever the mind is about to come across the gift of some rest, first it is invited to great struggle and evils, and [only] on its way out of there does light come to it. The gift is powerful and high according to the weight of the tribulation. We see respected [this] same order in regard to all the saints, especially at the beginning of their access to divine grace, for when they are approaching it in a perceptible way, they enter into a great trial: now [one] enters into struggle with demons and now into hidden trials. Therefore, blessed is he who has not come to slothfulness nor given himself to trades and rests; [who has not] fled from quietness and [not] found refuge in recreation at the time of those examinations!

Elucidation. For it is clear that it is not good for the mind to effuse itself in every thought- and this is [characteristic] of those who wander and toil in the affairs of this world-but [it is good] for the mind to effuse itself in the knowledge of God through the observances of quietude, and at all times to bind itself to the meditation of God, without becoming clouded by the care of many things.

12. The fathers say that in the time when a man has begun to separate himself from the sin that dwells in him and to come out from under the dominion of the spirit of this world, it happens to him what happens to the woman for whom the time of childbirth is near, for sin tribulates him night and day, so that his soul is almost close to perishing, and a myriad of trials come upon him. But when the air before him has just begun to clear and he has seen hope from afar, then his heart prevails over the one who rises against him and brings back a complete victory over sin; with each passing day, joy comes upon him, and then even the difficult changes that assail him easily pass away from him, until little by little he comes to the harbor of mercy, which all the saints, afflicted and tribulated for God, have waited for after their long labors.
13. Understand that the flame that falls in the heart at the moment of prayer - and the limbs are loosed, the senses clenched, the tongue weakened, and [man] ceases from all motion with the intellect, in genuflection, [still] in its place, for a long space of time - proceeds from the reading of knowledge, in which the exact truth is clearly indicated. When man has approached prayer, the remembrance of the wholesome words relating to God, which he meditated on a few moments before, inflames the praying intellect in their intelligence.
14. As long as one has not become worthy of the revelation of the divine mysteries, which is known by the intellect in [its] accomplished purity through the operation of the Spirit of holiness, intelligible delight is tasted, by those who walk on the path of knowledge with this purpose, whether in the meditation of psalmody or in the hour of reading or prayer or

meditation of the mind. As long as they are not worthy of the [divine] operation in the intellect, those who for the knowledge of God face great trials every day and joyfully prepare for death, whose spirits do not grow dull and who do not slacken their quietude, delight in the joy in God in this partial astonishment and [in this] intoxication of the heart, in the understandings that [they] receive from time to time, obscurely.

15. The fear generated in man by divine solicitude, perhaps for fear of error, while his ship is quietly advancing by the winds of joy and heart-elevating intelligences, generates in his heart a divine sadness which really constitutes the fortifications of the soul. Hence pure and passionate prayers are generated in him, bearers of joy and sadness, that is, [of] hope and fear, for he thinks, Perhaps I walk out of the way, or, May I not suddenly err [far] from God, by one of the paths of error! Hence [that man] acquires great humility in his thinking, and, because of this fear, his heart is not exalted by the good things that come to him.
16. Faith in our Lord is the soul's refuge in the time of trials and sadness; the confession of its infirmity is the refuge of its practice.
17. Those who have been confirmed in the future hope and have become worthy of joy in the Spirit no longer seek to remain in this life, but their hearts quiver and yearn, that they have not already left this life and happiness in it. They know what I say who by this thought have become mad and for whom the world has been shaken by the unbearable delight that has moved in their hearts and filled them. Just as doubt has been abandoned altogether by the great persuasion received by their thought, [so] at that moment the thought is burned [with desire], [and they wonder] when, then, they will leave the body and see exactly the inheritance, they who, by the grace of God, have become worthy of this joy from the One who freely pours out the gift of this faith on the children in Christ, not in proportion to works, but by His immeasurable benevolence, and causes them to delight abundantly in what He wills even in this sad and corruptible life. Among what [is found] on [this] earth what is comparable to the faith of the heart given as a gift, from time to time, for [their] delight, to some, by the mercy of God?
18. Oh! how weak [is] the power of ink and the tracing of letters to indicate in a book the exactness of the thing, compared with the knowledge of those who have become worthy in deed of the gift of the delight of spiritual goods, by the abundant grace of God!
19. Glory be to him who has become the mediator for us toward those goods and through whose medium we have become worthy to receive, know and perceive in faith that which eye did not see, ear did not hear and the senses of the soul could not perceive (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9; Isa. 64:3) of those goods which [are now enclosed] in the firstfruits among us, [the Christ], the one who is indeed the image of Him who is invisible (cf. Col. 1:15)! For the divine nature has joined to itself that which it has taken of among us for the hope of beings endowed with reason in those [goods] which were kept from the beginning with him and [which] it has now set forth in the open. He has pointed some of them out to us, through him, to make[us] certain of their rest, kept for us in the renewal that this constitution [of the world] will receive through him.
20. The movement of fury in nature is not reprehensible when it takes place in us out of natural impetuosity. Just as [in the case of]the passion of hunger and [the] quivering of desire, which [have] their [own] reasons, nature itself quivers in them and they are not subject to

reproach for their movement, so also this [movement] of fury is not blameworthy when it moves in someone for the reasons that arouse it in us, but [it becomes so] when we make use of it in actions or give it room in us in [its] lingering in intelligence, in the consideration of thought about it. Therefore we are not reprehensible by the fact of becoming enraged, but if we enact this [impulse] by impetuously directing an imprudent word to offend someone; we are also subject to reproach for any gesture, even a very good one, committed in that [impulse] by impetuosity, when we perform it against someone by instigation of fury. The frequency, ease and continuity of fury, however, are indications of a great sickness of the soul. In those who take care of themselves it becomes habitual beginning with sloth and the affliction of intelligence, because they give up without healing their souls, not being solicitous in acquiring forbearance in their sorrows. In those who begin, on the other hand, [it becomes habitual] from great love of desires. There is still [someone] in whom the passion of fury is stirred by pride or vainglory.

21. [As for] the passion of lust, unless [it] is moved by a created cause, it is impossible for nature in its usual quiver to direct ardent and irrepressible attacks against us with celerity. This [passion], however, comes to us even without an external motive occasion by an abandonment from above, [actuated] with the purpose of battle. We do not then give up in this situation except for these two reasons: either because we rebuke and despise someone in this regard, or because of a presumption about ourselves that has lasted for some time in our intelligence, [whereby] we have confirmed [this] thought and persuaded ourselves of the power of our soul and [the fact] that we have prevailed [over this passion] by our own diligence, misunderstanding the divine operation that by His gift accomplishes all virtue in us. There are some fathers who say that the devil also directs this passion against us, out of envy. [But] this is not credible, [i.e.] that he, of his own will, without the abandonment that [proceeds] from a divine nod, can do this or any other thing that offends. He otherwise would not have left you in quietness even for an hour. There is guidance with us, and these causes produce abandonment [on his part]. However, there is nothing that silences both the [lust] that [proceeds] from abandonment and that which is moved in us by a cause created through the senses or remembrance or voluptuousness [as] swiftly as these [things]: prayers in genuflection, with continual prostration before the cross, afflicted by humiliation of heart, and an imposed hunger.
22. Even if it happens that the wrestler is overcome or plagued by any passion, which we hate and whose fear is always confounded in our souls and by which we are moved, in what manner it may be, though he be in hatred of it, [this] is by no means ascribed to him as a sin by the justice of God, because the resipiscence of the soul is not slow to follow the plague, [and it is] a medicine before whose power the plague does not remain in him. One then recognizes in him his hatred from the terror and suffering that fell in his limbs at its remembrance.
23. Humility is the virtue of a sound intellect, to which it does not happen, as long as it remains in man, to be abandoned in any [permitted] trial because he is tried in body or intelligence by any passion or pain, bodily or psychically.
24. We are fully aware of the fact that, by divine judgment, whatever passion we love and delight in, even if we do not practice it, is subject to the punishment of its guilt. We will [therefore] receive its punishment, either here or in the future world, as if [we] had in fact

fulfilled it, whether the desire of lust or envy or malice toward anyone or any [other] passion, because we took pleasure in our hearts in that to which we knew perfectly well that the divine will was contrary, and deliberately delighted in it and cherished the memory of it.

25. When vainglory is produced in a carnal intelligence, it delivers us to the passion of lust. When, on the other hand, [it is produced] in a psychic intelligence, it nourishes in us the plague of pride. It [foments] the one [passion] with praise of the body, the other [with complacency] for the excellence of observances or knowledge.
26. The acquisition and discovery, in minds, of spiritual wisdom means a ready understanding of the defects [present] in the soul. [This] will have notice of the exact assumption of the former to the extent that it is enlightened by the knowledge of the latter. The distance from what was first mentioned is easily indicated by the failure to perceive these.
27. When, during one of the divine works or in the trials [faced] for them, you see in your soul a power and patience out of the ordinary, thanks to which you endure easily, without being tribulated according to the usual of nature, and indeed some exultation adheres to the heart and [incites it], while the fatigue and difficulty of the situation are lessened and mitigated and [that power and patience] make zealous thinking, you understand that in that moment the operation [of God] is near you and that in that work the divine action is favorable to you.
28. When you see that one of the passions, though you hate it, or a thought, whatever it may be, move in you in an unusual way, frequently, be in fear, for they have reason. The power of our Lord, to whom all things are easy, can then, by the suffering of the prayer which with solicitude is presented to it, make what we have come across without our negligence pass from us, and make our heart wise in the knowledge of such an obscuration, and give its fulfillment to the good outcome [of the affair].

Elucidation. Through the meditation of prayer and the consideration and fear of thought, the intellect is enlightened, thanks to the operation of God who coerces the fear of God, and it escapes and is freed from the error proper to the hearing of Satan, who is wont to enslave man through the darkness of the soul. Prayer, on the other hand, since it is thought of God, naturally enlightens the heart.

29. There is a sorrow that is believed to be for God, on account of sins or on account of divine things that we do not possess or whose lack causes us to suffer, while it is a snare of Satan, which he hides from the thought that he has exercised himself limpidly in the fear of God, as it is written: They have hid snares from me in the way of my steps (Ps 141:4), and: They have prepared on my paths the devastation of their nets (Ps. 139:6). For He, through the sadness [felt] for God, wants to deprive him of joy and delight in Him and, through the fear of sins, draw him to despair. We know that we are manifestly inflamed by Satan [to] every fear for sins or [to] sadness for virtue, to which the hope of God's mercy is not conjoined, but [which] invariably extend in one [direction] and generate in us despair!
30. Christ, who vivifies all things, who through the corruption of the kind of the sons of man, concealed in your divinity from the eyes of the seraphim, through a human body you made yourself seen to the world, you, make me wise in your way! Give me, my Lord, wisdom, that I may know how to approach your greatness! Make the hope of you arise in my heart, that I may be intoxicated with it at every moment and forget the mortal world in the

pleasure of your hope! My God, make me worthy of the oblivion that appears at every moment on the saints, for being moved by the hope of you! Truly, my brethren, if I were to tell you that at that moment the semblance of folly is seen in the son of man, when [his] heart is illumined by this thought, believe me in this for I do not lie.

31. Solitude makes us partakers of a divine mind and brings us closer in a short time, unhindered, to clarity of thought.
32. In the time of the setting of the light and the suffocation [for lack] of air use with solicitude the outward means, I say the resting on the knees, the protracting of the supplication, etc. For suddenly the air will become clear and the sun will rise again, without warning, and sometimes send [its] rays as far as half the firmament.
33. A deserted region, because of the great privation that reigns in it, makes us in fact acquire mortification of the heart and confirms the heart [itself] and joins it to God, by the continual looking into him, necessarily, night and day.
34. Humility is the term of the gathering of the intellect. Inasmuch as the intellect disperses, [it] maims it of the limbs of humility. If you then say that it also happens that it gathers [yes] its thought, but ponders evil, show me [only] one of the passions of malice rising in the intellect deprived of the forms of objects. If the intellect is informed by matter, there [is] also no recollection there. But if matter [?. The text brings: gatherings] is dispersed, it is really clear that the intellect is also free from the images of the passions.
35. Stillness of the intellect is the state [necessary] for the [presence of] truth in the soul, for, indeed, truth is known without image. Truth is the clarity of the thought of God rising in the intellect.
36. Any thought impresses upon thought the object toward which it moves. Truth, since it is without image, does not impress the intellect, in its meditation, with any matter or composition of thoughts. It is well said by a Gnostic clothed in God: intellect that looks at God is free from impressions and matter.⁵⁰ So any image placed in the intellect is beneath truth. The consideration of God places the intellect above images.
37. Passion no longer reigns over dead thought to the world. Death to the world is continuous expectation of death. [Assuming] love for any one thing, the memory of it moves with celerity and fervor in thought. When then the love fades, likewise the memory [of the thing] remains in one for a long time, but, when it still remains, it remains in a cold and simple way, and that memory does not disturb us in any [way]. This is the death of which I spoke. When in itself there is no love in us for anything, even the passion related to it falls asleep in us, and we are troubled neither by the memory of it nor by the sight of it. When, on the other hand, we are troubled by its memory or sight, let it be known that [the thing] still lives in us because of the love we bear for it.
38. Mercy is demonstration of the image of divine mercy given as a gift from the bowels [of God] to those whose hearts are directed toward it and [who] hate the world and deny it because of its name. For it is not possible [that] men who abide in this world, either in its glory or in its government or in its rest or in its possession,⁵¹ become worthy to receive this wondrous gift of mercy, because it quivers in the clarity of intelligence. For I have never

⁵⁰ Evagrio, KG 1.46.

seen a man made captive by any of the things I have said in the passion of his thought, in whom perfect mercy has been found. Some, still, are deprived of it by ignorance. Therefore, the more their thought is covered with each of those [things], the more this is impeded, but inasmuch as [they] separate [themselves] from it, in the weight [itself] of their separation quivers in them this incomparable virtue, and inasmuch as they purify themselves from the restraints of the world quivers in them bowels [of mercy]. The absence of mercy and wickedness therefore proceed from the great abundance of the passions. Because the heart is hardened by the passions, [these] do not let it move with perseverance, and it does not know how to have compassion on any one nor to grieve in what requires it nor to suffer for the ruin of its neighbor, though it see[s] it, nor to grieve for those who fall into sins, but, because of the passions that have been said, fury and envy are powerful and vigorous in [such men], and it happens that [one] is moved by foolish zeal, as if he wanted to take vengeance instead of God, nor is there room in his soul for perseverance. You will find the distinctions [enclosed] in this chapter, as we have said them, in every man. The fact that one gives something to the poor, this part is the smallest and least part of mercy, and is valued nothing in comparison with the principal parts accomplished in the heart, of the taste of whose passion the intelligence partakes. But why shall we [ensure] that we do not now have even this minor part? Even when one passes to another a piece of bread, he who sees looks upon this as something great. What is clear is that without the previous parts God does not accept even this one.

39. See that you are not dominated by the passion of those who are sickened by the desire for the correction of others and almost of themselves want to be censors and correctors of all the stains of men. This is a hard passion, and it becomes clear in those who are abandoned by the Lord's providence.... Especially since you are not an igumen and a leader, but one of the servants, and there are others like you. This work is up to the igumens. If you then say, I do this out of charity, you will not ask for this charity. Truly it is better for you to find yourself falling into the act of lust than into this disease. And say no fault of any one in his presence, nor make mention of it before any one, but even if others [shall] say to thee of one, Thou art much acquainted with his faults, thou shalt say, I know not this fact. For even if I had heard of it by hint, it would not be permitted to me, by the wounds of my soul, to keep this remembrance in me and to think of it. If there is the charity of God in you, prepare by prayer the healing of his soul, that is, leave his correction to his Lord, who is more wise than you.

If God cannot correct him, although you pray, perhaps neither [could you] by your power. If he is your disciple or your servant, hardly speak to him once, and if he does not correct himself, separate yourself from him.

This is the fulfilled way of the perfect solitaries, custodians [of themselves].

If he is your friend, detach yourself from him, if he hides himself from many and the steadfast, especially if he is aware of his stain and hears his reproach, but [he] despises him.

51 *Side note:* It is not that those who have glory or possessions, or who are princes or magistrates cannot be merciful, but those who are caught up in passion for these things cannot be clear.

Elucidation. [This] is in fact similar to what Mark the Solitary said: *It is better to pray passionately for your neighbor than to reproach him for all his sin.*⁵² And again: *Do not oblige him who does not obey one word with a second, but you acquire for yourself the profit that he has despised through your forbearance. Your forbearance will benefit you more than his correction.*⁵³

40. Wherever you are, be solitary in your intelligence, alone and foreign in your heart and not mixed [with the world].
41. Do not count the whole conduct and stupendous works in it with the lack of notoriety and reputation and escape from everything. Escape will also be increased and guarded by lack of notoriety.
42. If every meeting of the eyes and hearing leads to the growth of inner thoughts, what will be too much in the work of those who, after running after the former with solicitude, force the latter into silence?
43. This, too, escapes many-and they neither [understand it] nor are [persuaded by it]-that we solitaries do not shut ourselves behind a door to practice virtue, but to be dead even to virtue. Virtue is practiced by the living, it, which can be practiced even among many. For if we demand virtue from the quiet-and our steadfast brethren who [live] in community practice this very same-why in addition the flight and the burial of the cell? In fact for nothing. We therefore expect to receive from quietness something that cannot be found among the many, while remaining suspended from the lids of our eyes. If we run to the practice of virtue, what impediment to virtue from dwelling with many? Abiding with many will never prevent fasting or officiating or almsgiving or the rest of [works] such as these. It [indeed] enables one to practice them even more, and moreover we do not know that virtue is outside those [actions].
44. Spiritual delight, given in a hidden practice, is not to be counted with virtue. For it is the mistress of virtue. Virtue is every work done for God in the outward and sensible body. Therefore we practice virtue in the community, and [only] after education in it do we enter the quiet, waiting to be worthy of it. What is clear is that even the voice of a bird clouds it, how much more a continuous going in and out and the sight of many! Behold, we see that many spiritual fathers do not possess a body with which to practice the works of virtue, yet they do not want to loosen the quietness, but closed the door in front of them, they prostrate themselves inside, standing only in quietness. Was it convenient, then, for them to slacken the quiet by the fact that they have no works? The pleasure of solitude does not allow them to pay attention to the continuous sight of the assembly. For it is more pleasurable for them a [single] prayer offered to God in quietness, prostrate in their hearts in sweet passion and humiliation, than the myriad of works and prayers offered to God outside their cell and all the excellent visions and trades of the world and every procession and feast.

Term of virtue are solitary commerce and silent, intellectual meditation in God. For the solitary there is no feast on earth; the solitary's feast is his mourning, and in place of the labors in which others glory with mutual delight for him [there is] affliction in quietness.

⁵² Mark the Solitary, *De lege spirituali*133, PG 65,921 BC.

⁵³ Mark the Solitary, *De his qui putant se ex operibus justificari* 200, PG 65,961 BC.

Our brother, do you not count separation from [worldly] commerce, mourning, suffering of thought and outpouring at every moment in genuflection before God as work? Are only fasting and many repetitions [of verses] counted work by you? Do you not deem honest labor the work of the heart and perseverance in solitude? Will you not deem blessed and close to God he who, though he eats and sleeps every day, yet all his days keeps the dwelling, lonely hardship, of solitude? He who, though once a day he rests in himself, being a sufferer, has prostrated himself before God? And tell me: why is it that many, or [indeed] almost the whole community of Christians, though they support with pleasure and strength the work of the body, and though they joyfully practice all the virtues that have been said, dare not lay hold of this?

Do not grieve yourself, O weak brother as to the body that dwells in quietness, that you do not have the work of the body, for your share is greater [than that] of those who exercise themselves in all the work and in the principal virtues [placed] outside of quietness. Great is the gift that [God] has given you, which is perseverance and love in quietness, more than those of the body given to them.

This chapter I have in fact lengthened it beyond the custom [observed] in all the other chapters because I see that, behold, from this opinion derives in many a no small defect, for although they serve the conduct of quietude for their own enlightenment and humiliation, because of the great ardor they possess and contempt for the world, [as well] they despair of the fact that only the body has no works, since they cannot fast and watch and work in the body, as many do.

Many insipid and haughty in body forbid themselves by their empty words the so great and admirable work of confinement and quietude with themselves, which is given to some only as a gift from God that they may endure in the weakness of their limbs the difficulty of solitude and the labor and sorrow of their hearts, by which they are terrified and fearful of men of performance and valor.

Truly the work of a hundred brethren who fast and serve in turmoil and trade [with the world] does not equal the practice of a [lone] solitary, if only [he] guards himself from trading with mankind and perseveres unceasingly within the gate, without anyone entering and exiting from him! It is clear that I am not speaking of those who observe quietness [only] nominally, while every day they go in and out, and anyone enters their doors easily, but [I am speaking] of those who do not open their doors from Sunday to Sunday and have no conversation or commerce with anyone, and who the appointed weeks sit with their doors perfectly closed, or who throughout the year, with the exception of the saving mysteries alone, are no longer met by anyone, and who do not approach the processions of festivals and assemblies at all.

If there is a solitary who is capable of this grace and [who] has received this gift from God, and one of the igumens or leaders of the cenobia of brothers prevents the solitary from this gift, either because of rests and bodily practice or because of envy, he has to do with God and [will] answer for it before the tribunal of Christ.

Elucidation. True knowledge of the divine nature is the spiritual delight that can receive its perception in exact persuasion from the Spirit's revelation. Virtue, lacking this knowledge, is afraid of the Highness and [is only] one's confidence in the recompense of one's labor and conduct, and not in the free mercy of God.

45. The psychic body proper to the soul [is] the righteous knowledge of the wholesome nature, in which you will take refuge in the time of darkness and blasphemous thoughts or impudent motions of the mind, pretermitted cases, ungrateful thoughts and the rest. Sometimes it is required of necessity for us to understand the wholesome response [to be opposed to a situation], in order to the hidden protection and rest of the heart and to fortify the thought, either in the motion of sadness that surprises the soul by the great tribulation and trials of loneliness or [in that] of motives [of disturbance] that arise from other parts; in it [then] we find a very [great] relief.

We do not always, but nevertheless often, silence these [occasions of bewilderment] by prayer; sometimes then the thought is not patient in prayer alone, because of its zeal.

To understand at once what sustains it is proper to a healthy and wise nature and the help of prayer, beginning both from the remembrance of the Books and from the wise motions of nature [aimed] at the strengthening of the intellect. But let not our soul be at all idle in these [movements], except for a time, until this work has helped us clandestinely and within the heart, with a voice not audible, except with difficulty, lest we be laughed at by demons, since they strengthen themselves against us by this habit and turn us away from prayer and meditation on the pleasure [placed] in commerce with God.

Elucidation. Reclaim through supplication, that is, by turning your gaze from them to God, demonic thoughts, rather than being day and night in quarrel with them.

46. The word of the right thief (cf. Lk 23:42) has the appearance of faith and conversion. Those who will believe and plead as he did, no doubt will not be far from partaking with him of the promise received, whether murderers or lustful, provided they put an end to their former ways.
47. They know the power of divine mercy, which instructs, guards, and guides our childhood, those who subtly investigate at every moment the course of thought [and see] how many times we educate, cleanse, prepare, and promise, but in the time of the work we find ourselves vain and miserable in all our promises, while, after neglecting ourselves, humbling ourselves to the abyss, and coming, for our part, to despair, we suddenly find ourselves skillful and diligent in every work and virtue, splendid and fervent in our every motion, without the beginning of the journey resembling this at all. For we begin in sickness and infirmity, in the corruption of motions and the great burden of the heart. By these changes we know God's solicitude for the growth of those who devote themselves to virtue, as he guides them in a temperate manner, on the type of the air. As soon as he has brought them nearer to the knowledge of his charity and to the perception of the hidden guidance that [is] with them, growing in spirit and delight, they will know their own weakness and the continual gifts and graces of God and welcome humiliation, lest they rise

up and fall into Satan's judgment. A continuity of goods, without ceasing, in the conduct of mortality brings one closer to perdition than to delight and help.

48. Men, by the use of sins, become susceptible to instruction, while by error of intellect and pride they receive the punishment of demons. For these two things are causes of blasphemy. From the judgment of the former [proceeds] correction, [from that] of the latter, perfect perdition.
49. Do not want to be freed in your conduct from the bondage of the yoke of the law until you have perceived without [any] doubt that the libel of deliverance from your bondage has been written on your mind, and [until] the violence of the motions of freedom [has] compelled you with stupendous violence [to this], without your wanting to come out of [your] age. Beware of those who free themselves from themselves, while in their movements they are [still] servants, though they do not [confess it]. Since it is not pleasant for them to remain in humility in the servitude of the Lord, which is a pleasant submission, they pay at every moment in tribute to the Adversary sluggish motions and subject to inclination.
50. Take care not to err behind the hallucinations that the demons show you wanting to mock you. Such a thing happens mostly to two kinds of men: either to ignorant men, very uncouth, who rise up in their thinking and perceive demons, and [these] show them hallucinations, sometimes while they are awake, sometimes while they are asleep, and sometimes they even make [them] hear deceptive voices-and such men by their ignorance are abandoned in the error of the demons, until they fall into their hands-or to men who have acquired the great work of wakefulness and are constant in quietness. The demons, after terrifying them with fears, when they have seen that they despise them and their visions because of their faith in Christ, since they are aware that [the demons] have no dominion even over inanimate nature and [know] that they are surrounded by chariots and horses of fire that guard them, as was also seen with the blessed Elisha - at the encouragement, that is, of the young man, when the holy prophet prayed (cf. 2 Kings 6:17) -, and [each of them knows, again,] that the trial is of the Lord, who as by an examination had forsaken him that he might triumph in it, as if to the further shame of the insolent, and that the power of the Lord's help might be clearly manifested to him, as adhering to him, guarding him, and surrounding him in the midst of all adversaries... when they [the demons, therefore,] have been undone in this first way, they turn and show him a second way, for they are seen by him in a glorious vision, as on a chariot of fire, and in a great fancy, according to the likeness of the King, clothed with flame and led in triumph by the assembly of the demons almost as by angels. For they deceived many of the ancient fathers in this way, and while these were not undone by fears, they were overcome and erred by the shadows of truth, and said of themselves, We have seen the Christ in a revelation of him, or, Angels have shown themselves to us... But there are also some that prayer has awakened.

We [therefore] do not err behind them, but let us stick to humility, and we will be saved, as that wise elder said: If there is an angel, [it would come] from me indeed, as from whom? That you were not sent by someone else.... I am a sinner and do not seek to see my Christ here.⁵⁴

54 E.A.W.Budge, *The Book of Paradise*, London 1904: "*The Sayings of the Fathers*" XV, 28 + 36, (t: vol. II) pp. 624 and 626; (v: vol. I) pp. 823 and 824-825. An Italian translation of the Latin version of these texts in *Desert Fathers-Sayings*, edited by L.Mortari, Rome 1972, pp. 289 and 290.

Elucidation. He is called uncouth not only [who is] uncouth in education, but he who is uncouth as to knowledge. There are those who scrutinize the Books, but in their science they are far from the intelligence of truth; yet hardly those who have deprived themselves of the Books have acquired righteousness in knowledge.

51. Holiness is that one be sanctified by prayer and the power of the holy operations of the Spirit.
52. Until our hearts are sanctified by the Spirit of the Lord we cannot clearly discern the hidden motions that [proceed] from the operation of demons or angels or nature or from being moved by the Spirit of holiness.
53. Until our word is sanctified by the power of the Spirit, it does not happen that it has power over demons and that natures, both [those] endowed with reason and [those] dumb, submit to it.
54. Until we are cleansed from the operation of sin, the operation of the Spirit of holiness does not dwell in us, so that we become vessels of holiness for the descent of the Lord.
55. When you rise vigilantly in the office of the psalms, while your soul and body are ready in all demureness - [this work] in which are hidden myriads of treasures for those who [officiate at it] with discernment -, ask God covertly, in your heart, first to open before you *the fountain of life* (Ps. 35:10) that is wont to gush in those moments upon the souls who have denied the passing world [and] who see in themselves, at every moment, the death of Jesus [imprinted] upon their hidden limbs. And silently, with the purpose of prayer, psalm without concern for quantity, but [that] you be given the key be it even one verse, to introduce you into the treasury of his spiritual intelligence, opened by the grace of the Spirit of holiness: for you ask God that [you] may be brought near persuasion. But there suffering and silence are needed, to speak before him with great intellect, so that you may receive from him what you need for your neediness. For in the glorifications of God the vigilance of the intellect and the preparation of the heart are necessary, for how [else] will you receive [otherwise] the imprint of the Spirit in the hour of prayer, so that the intellect will abandon its corporeality and be lifted up by the memory of God's greatness, in the prolonged conversation with him, and aroused to the knowledge of his glory?

From the distinctions placed in the verses of the Spirit understand then that by what I have said I do not prevent the protractedness of prayer. For it is possible for one to protract his prayer in one word for three nights and [three] days. Neither is there [cause for] impediment or blame in the thing, if a solitary person were to make use all the days of his life of a [single] verse of his prayer or office. But since in the frequent changes of the psalms there are many distinctions by which the intellect is aroused to wonder in God, for this we make use of frequent changes. However [let it be done] without disturbance.

56. But it is not fitting that we allow those who are beginners in conduct or young in age to approach these things. Nor do such doors [moreover] open to them, for when they stop the psalms, they are full of evil thoughts, since they do not know the way to something else. [It is therefore] not fitting, either, that they dispose their intellect to the consideration of the verses. Let them rather work in [their] repetition, fully, until they have reached the

[necessary] stature and their body has fallen by asceticism. Work and stillness sow the spiritual seed in them. Behold, I testify to you the truth: Those who deprive themselves of continuous stillness, [even] if they hang upside down in every work of solitary life, will not be worthy of approaching these mysteries.

57. Every gift given by God, the power of which is knowable, in the recipient, by means of a manifest sign, is given in proportion to the virtue of observances, which is in the body, while every gift relating to the knowledge of intelligible [realities] and spiritual mysteries is given in proportion to purity of thought. The first suffers no hindrance to its practical fulfillment from the familiar mingling [of one] with many, but only from man's own will and freedom. As for the second, there are many hindrances to it and frequent obstacles to one's purity. Indeed, the custody of a long time is overthrown by the vision of the eyes of a moment, and even a voice, without vision, moves the heart of the lonely one and brings him out of the peace of his intelligence.
58. When you fall face down before the cross, in the prayer that begins the officiate, before you begin the officiate, ask this of God-and ask it in the sorrow of your heart-that he may give you patience in it, so that without sloth you may persevere in the repetition of the verses, without the battle of disturbance being in you, and say, Lord, during all this officiate give me bright motions that look to you in the verses that come out of my mouth.
59. Reprehend those who at the time of prayer raise in their intellects a sensible image and, instead of the one thought, simple and solitary, of the understanding of the incomprehensibility of our Savior, in the hour of supplication delight in the phantoms of their minds. We, on the other hand, let them and their fellows delude themselves with their hallucinations, and in the time of the power of prayer, preparing ourselves with all recollection let us turn the senses of our souls to the Spirit of God, in simplicity of heart, holding back none of the figures which the mind arouses with compound thoughts, [but] waiting in faith for the sun of his knowledge to rise in our hearts, as he knows, in clear thoughts relative to his greatness, high in us. Whether in body or without body, I know not (2 Cor. 12:2), says the blessed Paul, so much was the order of revelation subtler and higher in its movements than the semblances of the memory of visible things and every thought, consideration and knowledge that the mind can recall and assimilate in this world.

What happened to the blessed Paul happened for the instruction of every creature, because what in prayer is seen in a revelation [made] to the mind and the things it will see in the new world are not similar to the senses we clothe and the vision, colors and figures of the elements of this creation. Therefore, when in the time of prayer we await future things-according to our Savior's commandment: *Thy kingdom come we await*⁵⁵ -, we do not boldly depict in our thinking, according to our own knowledge, that which in its ways is incomprehensible to creatures. For it is written: *Nothing like this has gone up in the heart of man, and the tongue knows not how to speak of that which God will give to his friends* (1 Cor. 2:9; Isa. 64:3), which here makes incomprehensible meander in our hearts through the Spirit of revelations, for those who wait.

60. But they will say in amazement: Is it not better for us to fix in our intellect those things [rather] than to wander in evil thoughts? Oh, senseless wise men! As if all the way and

⁵⁵ Cf. Mt 6:10a and par, and note 11, pp. 77-78.

movement of the soul were these two: either to gaze at the semblance and composition of the image and figure or to wander in bad thoughts! Where is the suffering of the thought, which one receives from the insight of the verses, and falls in him like a flame, from his head down to his feet, the vehemence of which heats the whole body in the likeness of a burning furnace, so that he is crushed to the ground by its unbearable pressure, for the pain that torments his heart, to the point of clenching the earth between his teeth by the acuteness of the suffering of prayer?

Truly I know some who, as they were thrown to the ground, stuck out their tongues and filled them with dust and picked them up and lifted them by the vigor of the suffering they had received from the verses, after falling face down. Where also is the joy that suddenly flows into the heart and as a wave [of it] submerges all the movements, and ravishes the heart in unspeakable intoxication, so that scarcely [does he] resemble a man, as if he had been raised beyond the body and was not on the ground, because of the rapture of the heart in that wave? Where is the intellection that suddenly scrutinizes and silences the tongue in astonishment and keeps the man without remembrance and thought, in the wonder that falls upon him by the unusual perception that the intellect receives from the verses-and is motionless in all his senses and mind?

Of all these things are deprived those who in prayer bind themselves to figures and semblances. [But] where are also those who say that the psalms are not to be recited? As before God, I speak the truth: I know a man who was made worthy to experience all these things from the office of the psalms, by the mercy of Christ's grace. And each of these things not once or twice.

These things, therefore, are proper to men as lacking and weak as we are, for not because of our conduct, but because of His bowels [of mercy] He comforts us from time to time during our meditation and prayer, but not with the magnificences that do not belong to men as lacking as we are, but to great men who have come to the grace of purity; which are great revelations and unspeakable mysteries, the wondrous perception of the realities of the future world and the delight of supernatural knowledge.

61. There is therefore a power with man, and whenever it departs from him, immediately fear approaches [his] heart and the soul is weakened in all its intelligible limbs and impoverished at all in all knowledge, and that man in that hour is stripped altogether of the confidence of faith and becomes in his thinking as well as a little child. But when it approaches him again, immediately courage coats the soul and the heart becomes firmer than a mountain and fears none of the creatures. Nothing terrifies his heart, not the fear of demons nor [that] of beasts nor [that] of wicked and perverse men; neither [does] bodily diseases nor nakedness nor lack of food terrify him, and, the end of all things, not even death, which is terrible to nature. In short, [man] is clothed with zeal, in the likeness of embers of fire (cf. Zech 12:6), and nothing in God's creation terrifies his thinking, not its sight nor its remembrance.
62. I believe this is the power by which the blessed martyrs triumphed over the suffering of martyrdom, by whose courage they trod the tribulations of persecutors. For it also the solitary fathers despised the trials of demons.

63. Some martyrs saw this [power] sensibly, and it was seen by many of them, in the time of the thickening of the torments, in a manifest way. There were those who [saw it] in the form of a mantle stretched over him; those who [saw it] in the likeness of a man's hand, protecting him, and those in the form of a beautiful child, standing near him. Not only at this sight did they gain courage, but they became utterly insensible to all the torments that came upon them. As they amputated a large number of [their] bodily limbs or their body was torn and soaked in blood, or during the cutting off of his limbs, stripped of flesh and skin, [their] thoughts did not suffer at all. Many times the suffering of the body was also taken away from them, as one of them said. [He], as they cut off and cast off a great number of the limbs of his body, to each one who was cut off was filled with intoxication and made a hymn of joy go up to God, with his mouth full of laughter and exultation. When [it] came to cutting off one of the lower limbs, a knee, in this member he suffered, and when they asked him why for all [the others] he had been quiet and joyful while they were being cut off, for this one instead he raised a cry-and for this one even the persecutors had regained strength, as if the martyr of God had been weakened in the struggle-he told them what he really was: Know that for all [the limbs] which you cut off I did not suffer, and my thoughts were wholly in heaven, but in this I was forsaken that I might suffer, so that I might know that I was a man. It was not a power of nature that [assisted me] until now.⁵⁶
64. This is the power that guards in an invisible way, in the terrible wilderness, the solitary from the offenses of the demons, while they know not whence [comes] this, that a human nature, for a period of forty or fifty years, cohabiting with the beasts, remains in the terrible struggle of the demons without his thought being offended or saddened by anything. He thus appears as dwelling in heaven, while his heart rejoices night and day and is filled with the joy of angels. They see this power intelligibly the solitary ones who guard themselves in every struggle of their work. And if one establishes a sign, he perceives at every moment when it departs from him and the hour when it approaches him. [He] perceives it by the change produced in him, by the unspeakable power he suddenly sees in himself or by the weakness of nature, [seeing] how far it descends shortly after this change has passed away from him. From this power receives increase the course of the observances of solitaries. Many times then it also changes the temperament of the body along with the thought. Those who have perceived this, understand! My brethren, it behooves us to carefully consider this intelligence! For we are brought nearer by this continuous vision to perfect knowledge and unspeakable perception. He who instructs himself in this knowledge acquires great, unending humility and unshakable faith in God.
65. *Firstborn of all creatures* (Col 1:15): of those endowed with reason, visible and invisible, because he was first begotten to the life of the other world, beginning with the resurrection from among the dead.
66. He is correctly firstborn in respect of us, for before him there is [no one] who was born on high, and well he is called firstborn not only in reference to us but also to the bodiless natures, because their creation also aims at that generation.
67. If Jerusalem is the *city of the great king* (Ps. 47:3) which was designated by the name of that which [is] in heaven (cf. Heb. 12:22), by whose name the Book called this [earthly] - there

⁵⁶ On the subject of this chapter cf. B 35:294-296, where a different but similar episode to the one narrated here is reported.

indeed the true figure was prepared -, then the name of image (cf. Gen. 1:26), improperly ascribed to Adam, aimed at the fulfillment of the actual truth of the designation, preceded [then] by the [mere] word, which would be fulfilled [in Christ].

68. It was fitting that all creation should pay worship to the image of the King (cf. Heb. 1:3). Again, it does not seem to us that any man has hitherto been worshipped even by angels: the name of Image conveniently belongs to him whom the whole creation aims at, the visible and the invisible, and [whom] it worships and has called by the name of God, he, through whose medium everything will be presented to God and in whose manifest body we have seen the incomprehensible concealment.
69. As for existence, none of the holy angels is more senior than one of his fellows in his creaturely nature: for the Lord divided as he willed ranks and honors after they had come into existence. Instead, in the knowledge and ardor of charity there are first, middle, and last. No one, therefore, [who is] in the lower degrees precedes in revelation or preempts in knowledge those [who are] in the degrees above his own, not even in what [these] tarry to understand of what, according to order, [is] in the degrees below his own.
70. In all the orders of intelligible natures there is ascent given, from day to day, but, descent, not at all, without there being absolutely [any] term to the ascent, beginning with that which is the eldest and first of among the orders, down to the last, since each day they rise beyond the place from which, until then, they were excluded.
71. What in this first constitution comes to us through the transmission of existence and the gradual growth of the body, [both] suave, has happened to the holy orders in the mind, in accordance with their intellectuality and growth, which is intelligible. In us, transmission takes place from body to body; in them, instead of this, the one mind receives growth from [another] mind. As pupils, they grow entirely in mystery, we, on the other hand, in a manifest way.
72. When the intellect receives the perception of the beauty of its nature, then it grows in the mysterious growth of the angels. Hence it becomes worthy of communion with the angels, in the revelations of its mind, because it has risen in the first order of its creaturely nature, which naturally receives also the contemplation of the Prototype.
73. The first pleasure of intelligible revelation [is] the contemplation of God's solicitude, whose power of direction is perceived by the intellect in sensible events. The second pleasure is [the contemplation of] his solicitude in beings. The third pleasure, the contemplation of his creative activity. The fourth pleasure, the contemplation of his wisdom in [beings]. The power of the incomprehensibility of his thought [is] then in the unequal changes of his judgments.

In the first vision [pleasure] begins to produce itself from human resources: this is the first faith of the intellect. In the second vision it rests and is confirmed in trust in the Factor. In the third vision it is devoured by its charity, like a child hearing its parent. In the fourth order it is hidden in the gloom of its *wisdom full of distinctions* (Eph 3:10). In the fifth flicker it stands astonished at the incomprehensibility of its intelligence, rebellious to [all] explanation.

74. The mind is instructed through these five distinctions in spiritual perception since, beginning to glow in hidden things and clothed in these degrees, it is held in the first order of its creaturely nature. [It is given] continual ascent and descent by all degrees, at all times, in accordance with the thoughtfulness and negligence, the darkness and light that come from them.
75. These five distinctions of the changing growth of the mind are contained in the one age of spiritual knowledge. They lead it up to the second order of knowledge in Spirit, which is the order of the first creation, akin to the revelation of intelligible natures and called natural constitution. The same thing then is said [thus] by a knower in revelations, head of the Gnostics: *The growth of the knowledge of beings endowed with reason is in the vision of corruptible and incorruptible realities. Its learning in the corruptible, its perfection in the incorruptible.*⁵⁷
76. For it is said by the fathers that when man has become worthy to see the radiance of his soul during prayer, then he becomes worthy, in his mind, of the mystery of angelic revelations and becomes worthy to receive in revelation incomprehensible realities. They call the soul's radiance its splendor because, when it is purified from all commonality with sin, in the time of prayer, when the soul shines in the movements of prayer and officiating, its radiance rises upon it in the likeness of the sun;⁵⁸ from them thought is drawn by spiritual operation, with some understanding, toward divine and mysterious realities. They call this splendor the first creation of the soul. For sometimes they give it the name of radiance, sometimes of its splendor.
77. The fathers call simple the knowledge of those who derive the notion of those mysteries from the teaching of reading and [listening] alone. They say, on the other hand, that the knowledge of those who are moved by a spirit of revelation in the wondrous movements that quiver in the intellect, by the unspeakable exultation of the heart, is spiritual. Let us scrutinize our soul, when we see that in it these [intelligences] move, [to know] whence knowledge of them comes to us and, again, if they are apprehended, in what order our intellect quivers toward them. As the intellect stares at them with wonder and as something unspeakable, the heart flies and burns with irrepressible exultation, and man cannot sustain it. He who can understand let him understand, [but] not according to an order of mere words, to which the taste [of the thing itself] is not joined.
78. Understand then when thought has thinned out, [far] from crass consideration, and has begun to meet the light from the fact that it easily grasps the wonder of verses, whether of recitation or of letters, and immediately the heart is moved with exultation and silences the tongue. Ask for no other demonstration, to dull your soul, than that it should fail from the exultation of which I have said, which is moved in the heart by hearing or remembering the divine words. Who will be patient before its sweetness? And what body will be able to stand before it, when it falls in him this quiver that makes the heart soar?

⁵⁷ Evagrius, KG 2.33

⁵⁸ On the "radiance of the soul" (or, more properly, of the intellect) cf. Evagrius, e.g. *Gnostikos* 147 (Frankenberg, Euagrius Ponticus, p. 552): "Receivers of the knowledge of God are those [men] who have risen above the passions, they who in the time of prayer see the radiance of their intellect arise upon them"; or *KG* 5:15: "The intellect, when it has divested itself of the passions, shines forth all as light and becomes a luminous seer of all the works of God."

79. Do not love rest, lest you become a source of darkness, lest you become a vessel of wickedness. Do not believe, my brother, that without labor one is freed from the passions or that light shines in him, to his delight. We see that all the gifts of the Spirit have been given by God to industrious men. No one has ever received gifts from God in repose, nor has He enlightened his thought with knowledge, nor has his heart received the *parrhesia* to invoke Him, nor has the warmth of anything as equal quivered in him. Venerable men, our early fathers, stripped off the old man and became worthy of the renewal of the soul through works. When you hear these things, do not consider work only abstinence from food or only standing erect. Fasting and officiating do not lead a man to clarity alone, but I speak [also] of the patience that [proceeds] from frequenting men and continually falling down before the cross, when you partake of these things and those things that conform to your strength; [I speak again] of much humiliation of heart and the rest of trade with the conducts of knowledge, which are written in the books of enlightened and Gnostic men for growth in divine things, these you will find in no less degree also in these chapters of knowledge.
80. See that thou be not negligent in any of thy offices, but before thou fall asleep toil thy body in the office and in many prayers, so that when thou sleepest the angels may guard thy body and soul all night long [far] from terrible visions, from unclean fancies, and from the offenses of demons, because thy bed and thy sleep are sanctified by hymns to the Spirit and by the work of prayer. When you fall asleep, it never happens, except in sickness, that you do not see your body fall on the bed in great fatigue, because of the multitude of the work which you have previously performed for many hours with frequent prayers and hymns and canticles. We shall never approach the bed in rest without all night long the rebellious demons mocking us.
81. Wonderful question from a simple brother and answer from an elder. The brother asks the elder and says, Abba, I love continuous genuflection. The elder says to him: I believe that you desire perfection. In fact, I see that you propose to leave the body. Continuous genuflection is the gateway to perfection. The saints come out of the body with this conduct. If, therefore, you propose to do this work, fulfill the covenant! For it is the obliteration of the life from here and the abandonment and contempt of all that, behold, is from here. The [saying]: *Behold, we have forsaken all things and followed you* (Mt 19:27) finds fulfillment in man by this conduct. For it is not possible to really progress in this work and care about anything. Therefore, as far as it is possible, do not abandon your times to your own will. For the hour will come when you will not even remember. For sometimes you will find yourself as intoxicated, but do not ask this at the beginning: it will manifest itself in its own time. However, it is not much space [that lies] in between. Until, therefore, compulsion, which is not [subject] to your will, comes to you, guard your laws well; it will take place then, when, though you will, you will not be left in them. Therefore, blessed is he who has begun, has come to a good end, and has endured the trials that have come to him in this practice without his soul failing and he has ceased the path. More than blessed, then, if, after he has come upon the thing, he has not become negligent and ceased [the practice] and has gone back and been satiated, for his treasure is great, more than a mountain. [This treasure] in fact is found small at its beginning, and he, because he is not accustomed to spiritual realities, [is] troubled by it, believes that this is the term and does not know that it is still [only] the smell [that] he has smelled. Many, different, wonderful things have come to him, but he has not yet entered in. When you pray, therefore, say this in your prayer:

Merciful God, send me from the height of your holiness the gift of penance, by which you bring me closer to your lordship. God, open my heart to the perception of that which helps me, [to] that keen perception before which no thought of negligence resists, that perception which casts turmoil over tranquility in the passions.

82. The infirmity of the body does not prevent the readiness of a firm conscience from doing good, if the will is not sluggish. Nor does the hindrance of actions [prevent] rewarding a will filled with divine movements.
83. The day of nature endowed with reason [is] that it understands the mystery and penetrates [more and more] into it. This is the [meaning of the saying]: *The righteous shall shine as the sun in their Father's kingdom* (Mt. 13:43).
84. ⁵⁹ When between office and office you sit [intent] on applying your intellect to the meditation of God, add also this [consideration]. Think: How from what was not at all did you come into existence? Who made you, so that you were from that which you were not to this which you are? And, to speak according to the Book: How, although you were created in the beginning in a beautiful way, by your own will did you come into what you became, through malice, by the counsel of the Deceiver, even though the purpose of your creation by the Factor did not tend to this? And again, What did you become of your own will and in what hour [are you], without [any] expectation, and to what hope were you suddenly called by the abundance of the mercy of Him who called you in Christ Jesus our Lord and turned you back to the clarity of your first origin in God? And though you remained in your disobedience and persisted in what you had fallen into, He did not neglect you, but of Himself provided for you these goods and came to vivify you, while you did not even know how to call for yourself. And again, [consider] what you are now in this life here and what you will become in a short time, to what corruption your constitution will come and how you will still become, from what you are, as [when] you were not, without remembrance, without name and memory in all the further steps of this world. But what shall I say? What is admirable: from what corruption again to what constitution, and from what room to what abode [you will be called], but also [I will speak] from the comparison of things here with things there and of this conduct with that life, from what opinions [you will be drawn] to what exactness of science and vision. I have drawn up at length for this purpose a little of the much [possible] in *Discourse to a Pupil*, by way of introduction to meditation useful for conduct in quietude.⁶⁰ In those moments genuflect in prayer in your place, continually, confessing Him who ushers you from non-existence to existence and from the corruptible constitution to that high and glorious glory and life.
85. Dispose yourself, therefore, to the thing, so that there may be room, absolutely, between the night and morning officiating, for meditation useful for your growth in divine science, in all your days. This part of the practice of waking is also important. Do not assume that all waking consists only in the repetition [of verses] and rests only on the posture in and of itself. Although here [is] the foundation, likewise the vigil of the solitaries possesses

59 In the margin of the opening thirteen lines of Judgment 84 we read, "These things according to the simple purpose and external figure of the Book for him whose intellect has not yet been able to comprehend the divine purpose internal to the manifest verses of the Books."

60 Cf. B 35:287-291.

numerous forms by means of which it is fitting for the soul to grow and approach spiritual knowledge.

86. Balance of sleep is clearly the balance of the belly. We guide and approach our sleep according to our will: it is placed in our hands. For when we have provided for the belly with measure, we easily awake before the hour, with advantage to our soul because of the lightness of the body, so that there is time for practice in both [its] species.
87. Do the same thing also during the hours of the day, dividing them into parts. Some for reading, some for officiating, some [again] for meditation. When this will give rise to sublimity, because of the clarity of the movements, we shall come to the fulfillment of the rest. If here, then, the mind becomes dulled, increase a reading suitable to the time. For there is his copious source, from which pure waters flow to him limpidly.
88. Then when meditation is united, in its clarity, with prayer, then there the word of the Lord who said, *Where two or three gather together in my name, there I [am] among them* (Mt. 18:20): soul, body and spirit or mind, meditation and prayer. And the three come to awe, and sometimes [one] does not even come to prayer.
89. As long as the power of the Spirit has not joined with the meditation of thought, wonder in God does not mingle with its movements.
90. Until thought becomes clear, it has no part in the operation of the Spirit.
91. When the movements have begun to become clear, then the heart humbles itself and it is as if it dwells in an abyss. It approaches clarity from this humility.
92. Love solitude, even if you are too weak to [observe] all the righteous acts that [are required] in it. Therefore, one prayer presented to God alone is better than a hundred officiations celebrated among men. Truly do not compare the work of a hundred days in bustle and custom [with many], even if the solitary fasts and celebrates the office, with the sleep of a single night in which he sleeps alone! In your solitude pray continually thus: God, make me worthy in my heart of the suffering of mourning. God, erase thou from my heart the customs of the world. This prayer will lift you up into the mysteries of Christ, if you take care to translate it into your conduct.
93. In labor among men there is pride, in infirmity in the quiet shattering of the heart.
94. Out of the stillness the heart is not humbled; out of the humiliation of the heart, the heart is not set on fire by multifarious movements, and with that all the observances of the solitary are dust and ashes.
95. Despise those who glory in ornate vessels, the office of the assembly and the support of the table.
96. When thou seest that thy ship in its course runs limpidly toward the harbor, and that at every moment clear and suave breezes propel it, and that, behold, thy wares come egregiously into thy hands, especially [then] be afraid and groan, lest thy liberty suffer a change from quietness, and thou be seen to become solicitous of a contrary course [to the former], and all the watchfulnesses on the long way be not thwarted, being thou rapt, by occasions, toward the softness of the will.

97. For there were many [those] who began with works and poverty and mortification in passing things, with continual prayers, tears, many prostrations on the ground and a humbled life and impassibility, long confinements, quietness and making themselves strangers to men and all the things I have enumerated, but their fulfillment [then] was in rest, fame, trade with the rich and judges, advisers and brokers of great affairs, some for fraternities, others for the worldly. They [afforded] also the sight of women and their counsel and [their] instruction; their cells have become houses of business and a place for the gathering of villains, and in place of former mortification they have chosen for themselves a riotous life and customs steeped in blindness, and have ended their lives in the observance of corporeality, after all the exactness of their [previous] observances and the splendid life of before, when they did not indulge in seeing even a man's face and conformed to future realities, in the emulation of those who are bodiless, in all the solicitude of their observances in the life of quietness.
98. [For] every passion that moves in you with the purpose of combat, in whose battle with you fear and sadness adhere to you, though sometimes [you will] be overcome by it, yet mercy is prepared for you, especially because you have not relaxed or failed in defeat, but, though full of suffering and sadness and mourning, you have turned readily and courageously to fight against it and have armed yourself and gone down to battle against it. Thus you will find understanding in every passion. The soul captive in condemnation, on the other hand, is the one who is reckless in regard to sins, shamelessly and fearlessly instructed by wicked deceit, and who knows no repentance, since not even [any] suffering for its prevarication is found in it, but, on the contrary, at all times procures the means [suitable] for the fulfillment of its sins.
99. Suffering [suffered] for God is a medicine for him who [is] affected by it: "*Sadness for God*", it is written, "*works repentance in the soul and brings it back to life.*" And not only for him there is hope of healing, but also his friends intercede for him with God in the case of his lack, because in it he suffers and is saddened.
100. God wants to give healing to every man, always, if the sick person obeys. His greatness does not abhor difficult and fetid diseases, but the more evil and fetid the diseases, [the] greater is the solicitude He shows toward the sick person, if [he] obeys and is converted. For [God] does not bind His door, nor is there time and weather for Him. At every moment when one invokes Him, He is ready to help him, nor does He despise the sick person because of [his] bad illness, if [they] promptly invoke Him, but He endows him with additional care because of the difficulty of his illnesses that tend to death.

Side note. In this talk there are five extra chapters as to number. Perhaps the alteration is in the notation. For in the earlier ones there is no necessity [for the division made].

101. Those who after their bitter and hard falls have received penance as a gift and have been recognized as servants of God, because of His graces in them, and have become worthy of the former *parrhesia*, know what purpose God has toward their sick souls in view of penance.

Elucidation. That is, that which was predetermined by the Creator's intelligence and his

intellect for this, so that he would first bring up the intellect according to a cause that [is turned] to a cause [further to it].

102. The contemplation of God's judgment and providence, because of the wonder of their incomprehensibility, is situated in doubt as in a haze even for the spiritual.
103. The fact of understanding in a divine way is a fervent and luminous being moved, as [seen in] those who by the bliss of natural life and the incorruptibility of their works trace the mystery of the conduct of after the resurrection.
104. In those [beings] who possess what they are without corruption and who, outside of eternity, remain gods in a translational sense, in them is also the designation of this [being gods], so that it is said [that they are].
105. Corruption [is] in the conjoined, incorruption in the unconjoined. To the one adheres the second natural contemplation, to the other the contemplation of that which, in its distinctions, precedes that which was first as to its existence.⁶¹

End of the Second Discourse

⁶¹ The "natural second contemplation" is the knowledge of the varied wisdom of Christ (cf. Eph. 3:10), "of which he used and [with which] he created the worlds" (Evagrius, KG 2:2); it is the contemplation proper to the second beings, the conjoined, composed of soul and body. The simple, the non-united, the spiritual natures, that is, access the "knowledge of the true," which is "the monadic knowledge of the Monad" (Evagrius, KG 2,3), "prior" to all other contemplation, "more ancient" than the natures themselves endowed with reason (Evagrius, KG 2,19), for Isaac the angels, created, for him, before man.

Third Discourse On The Gnostic Chapters

1. There was a time when there was no name for God and there will be a time when there will be none.
2. We are not mortal because we sin, but because we are mortal we were driven to sin. The power of freedom, placed in the middle, made [it] come into use either for life or for death.
3. Some of the beings endowed with reason are without designations while others [receive] many designations. Without designations, the former; the distinction of designations [is found] instead in those who have been naturalized in bodies.
4. In the way that non-rational light was charged with the distinction of bodies, so we see spiritual distinctions in the living Light.
5. If the luminous elements have been arranged in the bodily [realities] for the use of the bodies, but there will be a time when the [properties] of the senses will not be worthwhile for their discernment, it is clear that [then] it will also become superfluous to use what had become for it.
6. In the way that all designations and appellations relating to God began with him [beginning] from creation, so all names and appellations relating to spiritual natures began from the economy [implemented] in our world and are named among us. For in the worlds of intelligible natures among them there is no name or designation or appellation for any of the substances, but they in their world are all without name and designation. All their innumerable worlds [lit.: all the endless numbers of their worlds], natures that are not numerable, give each other news of themselves without those distinctions, in high knowledge, devoid of name and sign. All men will be with them in this mystery in the resurrection.
7. Virtue [is] an occasion of life, [but] also of death. Of life for the solicitous, of death for the unsuspecting. In the manifestation of its distinctions you will in fact find the use of both sides.
8. The equality in virtue [is] its sensible use in the good as well as the bad. The opposition between them [resides] in its intelligibility. The same [may appear] also in that which [is] contrary to it.
9. If all that bears the mark of the second natural contemplation in the future world will be abolished together with all its figures - indeed, it is said: *The figure of this world passes away in all its orders* (1 Cor. 7:31), it is clear that contemplation relating to it will also cease with the vision.
10. If there will be nothing of that which moves contemplation relative to bodily [realities] and the intellect will have no need of the senses nor of that in which they dwell, but their perfect extinction will precede the beginning [of the new world], it is clear that even the memory of that in which the senses have dwelt will be completely extinguished in nature and it will quiver all in that which will then acquire state [= reality].

11. Dutiful prayer is that which obeys a divine will, which is generated in us by the consideration of the divine laws: love for them compels us, by the study [placed] on their fulfillment, to utter fervent questions concerning them. The care of intelligence in the fulfillment of the commandments is pure prayer, [and] even the suffering of the heart for their disregard is computed as pure prayer. Sorrow for God is prayer or, rather, the magnificent words and grave motions that prayer generates in the mind, and he whose heart is kindled and burns in these thoughts, his mind, praying, prays even when he is not in a state of consciousness, and all his motions are stupendous prayers that rest in God, and the suffering of his heart fulfills in him the function of the cross.
12. The wise words moved by prayer draw all the parts of the soul [and] its charity with sweetness to God, beginning with the admirable magnificence of the verses, and arouse the soul to look keenly at God and intuit[it].
13. I do not say wisely accomplished prayer [that] dictated by the wisdom of this world and by an erudition [made] of words, full of foolishness, which shames the soul in prayer before God because of the vainglory it excites in her: [such words] drive out help from the soul. But I say [accomplished prayer] those wise words, [uttered] in prayer, which germinate from the wisdom of God and the brightness of the soul, which the fervent motions [present] in the heart cause to flow because of that love for the true life which precedes prayer, warms the heart and proffers words that do not [come] from the will, which remembrance forces to germinate. How often do tears sprout from the fervor of the heart and the help of God! This is the prayer that [the fathers] say is pure.
14. Thought is not free from material imprints and thoughts in any pure prayer; otherwise it is not a prayer, but a revelation has happened. Only in this order does thought become free from image and semblance and rise above imprints and matter, as Evagrius says: The intellect that looks to God in the time of prayer is free from imprints and matter,⁶² which is a higher revelation than speech.

For the rest, any prayer that is voice, however pure the thought in it, cannot be above impressions. It is not in our [power] that, in the hour of prayer, foreign thoughts move or do not move, but it is [in] our [power] that we meditate on them or do not meditate on them. For how often does one pray in purity and fervor when, without pretext and not of his own volition, the movement of his prayer is marked by the crassness of matters! However, it does not happen according to a passionate manner or even in accordance with the purpose of the motion of meditation that many times there are also tears in it without a manner, [that] the movement [of his soul] is [directed] to future realities, with all the fervor of prayer, and [that it] fights and draws the thought from the crassness and then remains without perceiving anything else. For if thought has not become worthy, in a spiritual perception, of the revelation that [occurs] in prayer, it is not possible for its motions, in the hour of prayer, to be found above the footprints. The being moved beyond matters, so that it is found, in its feeling, superior to the flesh, in human nature happens only by spiritual conduct, which is a higher order than nature. Insofar as [man] has not become worthy of this, in the conduct here he cannot bring to memory anything of that for which prayer moves, which is absolutely beyond the semblance of this world, unless, as I have said, he

62 Evagrius, KG 1.46.

has become worthy of a spiritual revelation in his mind. Inasmuch as he walks below this order in [his] knowledge [and] in his behavior, it is not possible for him to be above the mark of this world in his thoughts. For even if he moves the meditation of his invocation toward heavenly things, he will only be able to assimilate them to earthly things, if, in the time of prayer, in his perception, he has not by chance become worthy of spiritual conduct, which is beyond all figure of this world (1 Cor. 7:31), in something that is higher than the intelligence of the sons of man.

If, however, the one who prays does not sustain the combat with his motions, so that his thought does not remain close to the phantoms that attack him [lit.: his thought] in the hour of prayer, when he has been negligent and has allowed them to linger in his thought, he will gradually lose the purpose of prayer and begin a conversation with them. But the work of the one who prays is this, that he be on vigilance in his prayer to purify his mind and [that] without ceasing he loosen it from that which binds it to things, until he has come to spiritual conduct and is elevated beyond the struggle, in prayer, to the elevation of thought beyond all forms of this world.

15. Attention to thoughts is the offspring of attention to the senses. Application to the latter is indicative of care for the former. Willful lack in one is the necessary precondition for the fall into the other.
16. The victim of reconciliation is humility offered with invocation to God from a dead heart, in remembrance of the faults of which man is guilty before the Life of the worlds, both those which he has previously committed and [those] in which man sins and fails every day. He [then] awakens his soul and [wrests it] from them and turns to penance at all times in remembrance of God's mercy. God is pleased with this prayer more than with any sacrifice or offering.

Elucidation. That is: in the time of questions [men] are aroused to the perception of the aids that God provides. Not that [they] receive them because of their questions, but in the time of questioning they are aroused to what, although they have[it] always, they do not know that it is from God.

17. Man cannot offer to God, without a gift from him, even a single suave [hymn of] glory that [proceeds] from the heart. The multitude of men know this by hearsay [say]; those who have experienced it in deeds, [know] it because they receive proof in the application [made] for it. God's rests [are] in souls who always invoke reconciliation for their wrath by turning to him.
18. Until man humbles himself, divine help does not come near him. God's grace continually stands at a distance and watches man, especially in the hour of prayer. When the thought of humility moves in him, immediately it approaches him bringing a myriad of helps.

Elucidation: Let the intelligent reader mind his intelligence and be lenient with everything and remember the saying, *I have become all things to all things, etc.* (1 Cor. 9:22), and let him not ask here for intelligence according to the foreknowledge of God, but according to common knowledge. We know, too, that it is and is not truth, but let us take the side of

freedom and whatever this very creation is to the enlightened, let us glorify the mystery of the economy of him who willed that the ways of his means should be covered!

19. The help given in the hour of prayer is greater [than that proper] of all other times in which man works. Therefore, also, especially in this hour [there is] for Satan struggles against man, so that man does not approach God in his thoughts.
20. Every wisdom of this world, the remembrance of which happens in prayer, in that hour is found to oppose the soul and prepares harm for it. The wisdom of the Spirit, on the other hand, humbles the soul and awakens it to sense God as in wonder, and approaches the soul to the abyss of humility through the truth that shows it without a veil.
21. The invisible natures, [i.e.] the higher creation, which are called firstborn in the heavens, grow in a renewal of every moment. They do not descend at all to the worst from that in which they have dwelt by [their] virtue [since] the first day they were created. For they never sustain the trial of mischief, but [are] altogether above it and love the things above, except only those who since their descent have not yet been persuaded to look to [re]ascent.
22. If one then says, wishing to be very wise: It seems therefore that you say them devoid of inclination, these have understood in a very defective way. If they were devoid of inclination they would not undergo [any] change, but would therefore in fact rise in their place and, as they did not descend from what they are, even rise, [they] could not rise. Thus is nature bound and without inclination: for it cannot effect [any] change, either upward or downward, and it [cannot] increase or decrease. For he who can grow from what he is, could also, if he wished, go backward, and he who is such, is subject to inclination, and it is clear that he who has such a power, when he directs his inclination toward one side only, is so because of the superabundant love of good and [because of] the brightness and attention that proceeds from here.
23. The saying, *To your house befits holiness* (Ps 92:5) has the same meaning as that, Holiness is given to the saints (?). For we are we, the beings endowed with reason, the house of the Lord, and when we purify his house as befits the Lord, with distancing ourselves from all [that] [is] evil, then his sanctification comes and dwells in us, for holiness is given to the saints, in the concord of the will.
24. *To your house befits holiness* (Ps 92:5): it is good that the house of God be conveniently filled with holiness and decorum. For it is fitting that he who desires to become the dwelling place of the Spirit of holiness should cleanse his soul of all evil, so that it may, if possible, become like heaven. For just as *heaven* is pure of evils and is the *throne of God* (cf. Is 66:1) and the dwelling place of the seraphim, and all spiritual goods are plentiful in it, so the soul that in its solicitude wishes to become the dwelling place of divinity must purify itself of all hateful motions, fill itself with all sorts of hymns of glory, and then the Lord will dwell in it and the decorum of his holiness will fill it, while all around it the spiritual natures will surround it, because it befits them to honor the dwelling place of the Lord. First man purifies himself from evils and fills himself with good odors, and then the Lord sanctifies him with the Spirit.
25. One must admire those who have promised to abstain even from thoughts concerning woman and [yet] easily receive her person, even though they know that Satan fights with the saints through woman, and say that after meeting with her, not to mention sight and

conversation, [they] remain without memory of her. If [however] the thought that suddenly quivers about such things sometimes puts us in danger of struggle, how much more [will we be in danger] when the things [themselves] are set before the senses and by their exact vision inflame the thought that abstains from them!

26. That ascetic who easily welcomes the sight of a woman, welcomes with pleasure in his innermost self also the memory of her. He who abhors the former, it is clear that [he] shakes off from his thought also the remembrance of it, to extinction of the fire. The propensity for the one indicates the pleasant reception [reserved] for the other: if by the remembrance, to the sight; if by the sight, to the thought.
27. Mask your mind from bodily thoughts to taste that suavity which does not fall under composition of tongue.
28. The hope of future realities makes the intelligence forget the memory of earthly things. Continuously lift up your thoughts and look to those rooms to which you will eventually ascend!
29. Despair drives man out of clear thoughts and buries his heart in the earth. The disposition to hope makes the heart clear and continuously intoxicates it, so that it forgets in its desire earthly things and wanders in its motions to heavenly rooms. For the heart is easily made clear through expectation.
30. The taste of the kingdom is the motion of joy that reaches out in the soul beyond [its] power, toward future realities. The body before it breaks down in all its limbs, for it is overcome in its patience by the vigor of the quiver that softens even the bones and joints in the intoxication that transcends the order of nature.
31. Do not believe that the heart of man moves toward [things] expected in hope before he has despised visible and corruptible things and trodden down temporal life. Powerful indeed is that joy and the faith that generates it from the thoughts of the soul, but it cannot be contained in the soul together with joy [for] the things of the body. That joy does not quiver in him whose thoughts rejoice and grieve seeing these, because his heart is still restrained by the allurements of adolescence and the rest of the body burdens him, nor is it possible for him to despise it zealously because of his fear of them.
32. Man easily encounters the possession of the soul, which transcends the findings [possible] to the bodily senses, in despair about the life of the body and the abandonment of its customs.
33. When the intelligence is firm in its hope, even though the body is weak, the soul is not vanquished nor diminished in its wealth. [It gives] instead continuous weeping when, while the intelligence is still weak, the body is humbled and ceases to run.
34. See that the infirmity of the body does not prevent you from a life of solitude. For your gladness is twice doubled in the fatigue of the body in a quiet life with God. Take care not to give yourself to the two diseases that generate immortal death, which are the idleness of the body and the relaxation of the soul through the senses. Sickness accompanied by mindfulness does us no harm at all.

35. Justice is the practice of beautiful [actions] [performed] by us towards men according to the law of nature and the Book. Virtue is the practice of beautiful [actions] [performed] by us towards God, without intermediary between us and him, out of the solicitude of a good will. He who walks in the former is righteous, he who walks in the latter is a virtuous man. The hope of the wise solitaries, from the righteous path, to which they expect the course of their observances to come, is more internal than either. It does not stop at righteousness and moreover neither does it remain in virtue. These are rooms which it passes through in the path of its way and to which it renounces: it directs the course of the way toward the Cause.
36. As the second part is more excellent than the first in its degree, so the third part [is more excellent] than the [other] two. And just as, when one has begun the second, there is no way that one does not give suspension of the first, so, when the third part has appeared from within our practice, there is no way that the previous part does not make room for it and vanish [already] before its coming. Therefore we must honor each thing in its time and place, so that our freedom because of the flesh does not become empty. For when we no longer give place to the practice of the [actions] second in order, it is necessary that we care without laziness that those which precede them do not remain unexercised.
37. The tears that happen in the time of prayer or, again, the sweetness of the verses that falls into the heart and sweetens it - and the tongue attaches itself with love to the repetition of each [of them] without being satiated by it, not being able to stop and move from one to another because of its suavity - or, again, the partial joy that happens from time to time during reading or even during meditation, are the taste of the help of God's grace, tasted without clarity by the solicitous in their observance, as if to confirm and extend the soul forward in virtue, so that it may increase its diligence.
38. That the intellect during the office or prayer, continually, suddenly, unwillingly, after having been for a long time quiet, should rise up and cause the body to rise from its order, this is *the great door* (1 Corinthians 16:9) which has begun to open before man, is the operation of God's gift and is not [one] of [those] small gifts or [those] partial consolations addressed to every man. Let us run after that, my brother, and let us ask and establish that as the purpose of our practice. Nor is it convenient to say too many words about these [things]: [what has been said] so far is sufficient for the purpose.
39. The goal for beings endowed with reason is the intelligibility of the perfect [realities], which, for those who work at it, is internal to the hidden perception of each of them.
40. If [it is proper] of the rational light to lead to the Light first without hindrance, and the same [happens] even now among the first beings endowed with reason, them whom the saving word has taken as a figure of mystery (cf. Lk. 20:36?), it is clear that those who are in the incorporeal world will receive in this same [world] the inheritance of light, and not in the [world] devoid of reason and crass, as the crass in knowledge lie.
41. For just as impassibility is not that passions do not move in the soul, but that a pleasing perception of their excitement does not operate in it, so also pure prayer is not that the phantoms of things do not move in the intellect, when it prays, but that the intellect does not look at them with invitation and remain in conversation with them. From this it is clear that in it there is also struggle and [that] without struggle prayer is not prayed "par", except for a brief moment, from time to time, for angelic help. This alone is the rest from the battles that

we have, since nature, by angelic operation, is hiddenly strengthened against the motions, according to the word of the fathers. It [is] not an elevation beyond fantastic movements or the body: the cessation of thoughts and motions or of the impetus of reflections and the overcoming of them do not belong to the order of the practice of prayer, but [to that] of awe in revelation.

42. Pure prayer is that the mind should not wander in what the demons make move in thought or what nature [itself] makes move either from a memory or from a motion of temperament.
43. Even in pure prayer there are many statures, according to the stature of the thoughts of the person offering them.
44. The more the thought is raised beyond love for what [is] in this world, the more, in the time of prayer, it also receives rest from the semblance of thoughts. When then it is perfectly raised beyond love for the things here, then the thought does not remain at the prayer, but is also raised beyond the purity of the prayer, because the east of grace arises continually in the prayer and it is drawn [away] from the prayer, from time to time, through the holy operation.
45. In correspondence with the diminishing of love for temporal things [there is] also diminishing of their consideration; in correspondence with the diminishing of consideration [there is] also the diminishing of thoughts, and in correspondence with the diminishing of thoughts, purity of soul, and the operation [of the Spirit] is given to the soul in prayer in proportion to it. For it is clear that almost of necessity it is subsequent to the elevation beyond love of visible and temporal things and also to bodily detachment and manifest liberation.
46. The more the thought, in the moment of invocation, is below pure prayer, [the more] it is, in its prayer, through the weakness of the motions of the soul, in submission to the wills of the flesh. When [it is] actually in the purity of prayer, it [then] rises, in its practice, into the accomplished order of psychicity (*The quality of being psychic . Synonym: psychicity.*). When then in prayer it goes beyond the purity of motions, it is found to rise in spiritual conduct to which even the degrees of prayer are inferior, as in future conduct. The practice and use of prayer are proper to man insofar as they are accomplished in the mastery and knowledge of psychicity. In this world there is no thing higher than prayer nor greater than it among all the conduct of the soul, but in fact in the new world even this will fail and men will move in a higher order than prayer. This order is administered from time to time, in the hour of prayer, to the perfect saints even in this world.
47. Every contemplation of holy angels by men in this world leads them up to the order of their natural creatureliness, which is called the [order of] second knowledge, beyond purity. For the mysteries administered beyond that order were not proper to the power of angelic teaching and dominion, since so far [only comes] even the power of the movement of the order of the natural knowledge of the spiritual hosts, for they too, when they become worthy of being moved beyond that order, [are] worthy of it by grace and not by a natural power and knowledge that [proceeds] from transmission.
48. These are the angelic motions by which the soul is hiddenly enlightened, which vibrate in us by the constancy [of the angels] with us and by their ready charity for us, in which nature gradually progresses, as by some guidance: first they covertly move in us the beauties of

virtue, in the manner in which everyone as well feels this sensation present in us from time to time, for sometimes suddenly there is moved in man some fiery ardor and fervent longing for good, which many times is found present even in actions [performed] outside the fear of God. It springs without cause from man's interiority, in a rapid resipiscence by which he is raised beyond all usual thought and is ignited beyond measure by remembrance and love of beautiful things. They say this is an angelic operation that takes place by the good will of the philanthropic Lord. Not only righteous men perceive this movement, but also publicans and harlots (cf. Mt 21:31-32), wicked men and murderers. By it for the most part they [angels] draw us from evils to virtue and draw us from evil deeds to purity; by it also evil doers have been converted and have pleased God, as is said, and have not only come to purity of practice, but also to purity of conscience; and they have not only purified themselves from evil deeds, but also from thoughts and considerations relating to them. How often in those whose land is good (cf. Mt. 13:8) that fervent fire which they received from the beginning does not subside until they have come, by it, also to the order of perfection and [have] not received perfect purity! Thus [the angels] protract us from malice to virtue and through virtue approach us to purity and, in purity, bring us out of it by the two knowledges that [are] superior to it, of which the one is the natural constitution. The term of every formation that [proceeds] from them [comes] up to this order, beyond which is said [to be] the vision of the holy Trinity, which is itself the term of the revelations of knowledge, in which happens every movement of the kingdom of heaven for angels and men, in all the endless extension of that conduct.

49. Every revelation of [that] spiritual knowledge, superior to the contemplation of bodies and [to that] incorporeal, proceeds from the perception of the revelations of the future world; the two [previous] are [instead] contemplation of beings. In them is every term of perfection here, but knowledge of the future world in beings endowed with reason rises even beyond those two orders and is knowledge of the Essence. Every revelation that we, both angels and men, receive here from this mystery proceeds from a revelation of the new world. In the new world, then, in beings endowed with reason there will not move [any] contemplation relative to beings, because their motions will be removed from sensible and intelligible things: for these are knowledge and not knowledge. There in fact the mind will not wander in numerous knowledge, but will be placed in the knowledge of the One, in awe, without interruption. These are [according to] an order of gradualness; beyond there will in fact be [no] need for gradualness, but [it will be] a being moved without ceasing into God: nature will not go out of him to consider anything else.
50. The wings of a prayer to which beautiful observances are not consistent will begin to come off.
51. There is pure intelligence and there is spiritual intelligence. Pure intelligence is when, [as to] thoughts relating to the things that belong to this world, the remembrance at us [of them] is without passion. Spiritual intelligence, when [it] is moved from the thoughts of their remembrance to the contemplation of these [same thoughts]. It does not [then] happen that they remain in her only in a pure and passionless way, but that [it] peers with a spiritual eye within them and also suggests the taste of the Spirit with the [characteristic] perception of its movements. It is possible that that is acquired by labor and vigilance, this on the other

hand [is] by the exercise and consideration of the spiritual purpose [proper] to the knowledge of a practical mind.

52. Different is the practical body of virtue and different is the practical mind of virtue. The virtuous practice of the body purifies the soul from passibility; the virtuous practice of the mind gives sight to the soul and from the darkness of ignorance brings it closer to the knowledge of truth.
53. Not all [those] who toil in virtue possess knowledge, but all [those] who toil in it possess practice, with virtuous discernment.
54. There is no Gnostic who in his conduct is devoid of virtue, but [of] the virtuous who do not possess knowledge [you will] find many. Therefore, let us run after knowledge, for it makes even the virtue of conducts perfect in our soul, and let us bring out our minds toward the vision of wisdom [reposed] in divine things! If our soul is devoid of knowledge, not even the practice of virtue remains pure in us.
55. There are movements of revelations produced in us by the holy angels and there are some that [proceed] from the operation of the Spirit of holiness.
56. Every revelation relative to God's economy in this world and the movements of contemplations relative to beings and the consideration and knowledge of virtue, down to the order of our creaturely nature, we learn through the holy hosts and [from these] are hiddenly enlightened [concerning them] by a commandment that [proceeds] from God. But the revelation concerning the holy Nature and the perception of the contemplation of the future world-[things] these still hidden from creatures and concealed in the secret intelligence of the Creator until the time of their revelation, established by God, which [he] will bring forth for the whole creation; things, [again], which God will show up there to the worlds-... the revelation concerning these and as many mysteries is [therefore] drawn covertly, within our minds, by the Spirit of holiness. [These] are not mysteries for the knowledge of which matter is found from the creatures or the Holy Books, or about which the orthodox fathers know how to discuss or reflect, or which are subject to the power of angels or are subject to transmission. Nor is it something which it is possible to bring forth from the mind or upon which intelligence is able to reflect, but the Spirit alone knows the mystery, and the mind which [receives] it... although those [= angels] always enjoy [this] mystery, while men from time to time.

The same [thing] you understand [happens] also among the spiritual hosts. They know the revelations that are transmitted to one another, angels and archangels, [from] host to host, and some of them are also transmitted to men, that is, they [learn them] and are enlightened [about them] from one another.

57. Since all revelation concerning the realities of here and the guidance of what God wants us to perform in this world for universal salvation and help are performed through the mediation [of the angels], who are constituted ministers in the service of God's will (cf. Ps 102:21b) for the conduct of all [that is] from here, they [the] receive them from one another, order from order: [these dispositions] indeed agree in the service of creation for the [good] outcome of events. [The angels], then, also enlighten one another [about] the mysteries of their causes and [about] their understandings. But it is not possible for them to teach or

learn from each other the revelation of the mysteries of monadic knowledge,⁶³ as the rest [of] those [things] mentioned above. There is no pupil or master there, but each of the beings endowed with reason who have become worthy of this mystery receives from himself alone, within a design of his own mind, without a mediator, for his own delight, secretly, the delight of [this] knowledge and such a revelation. Up to this mystery there are masters and disciples, there is superior and inferior, there are great and average, but in the perception of this grace the knowledge is equal, for there is no ascent and descent in it. Not that now [such a being] has known and perceived and delighted less, while at other times he will be instructed or enlightened more! On the contrary, he receives in all fullness, without defect, absolutely, every fulfillment, without addition or diminution, and in this, when they have come to this revelation, there is neither great nor small, as in the rest of the other revelations, but all are raised to one fulfillment, without change or variation, and there [are] no rich and poor, nor givers and receivers.

Blessed Evagrius also testifies to these things in the chapters of the Centuries, saying: *In the second natural contemplation some are powerful and others subject to the powers. In the monad, on the other hand, there [are] neither powerful nor subject to the powers, but all will be gods.*⁶⁴ He then says of the equality in the first and last [contemplation] proper to revelation: *In the contemplation of beings there is ascent and descent, [as] well as diligence and negligence, but not so in the contemplation of the holy Trinity. [This] is - he says - an equal vision in which [there is] no ascent and descent.*⁶⁵

58. Some revelations [made] to the pure occur through angels, others through the illumination of the mind. The soul, when it has been purified, can naturally scrutinize distant things as well as near, the concealed and hidden as well as the manifest, in the likeness of the eyes of the angels, whose sight passes through all bodies and is not [hindered] by them, but are keen and bright, [capable] of seeing all [things] hidden and distant. For the soul is also connatural to them, and when it has come to equality with them in conduct, it is enlightened as they are by hidden things, and neither error nor ignorance afflicts it. Yet there is no revelation in which it precedes them by its science: for the soul is second in revelation in comparison with those [made] to the angels. Therefore, in accordance with the purity of its mind, which is its eye, it too scrutinizes and is moved by things hidden by the power of the Spirit of holiness, in whose light it also sees the clarity of the angels and saints all [living] on earth, for he is the light of all spiritual. When, therefore, the soul has reached this stature, it becomes seer of hidden things, as they are, and now it learns from them something about something, now it scrutinizes from itself [itself], with its pure sight. [All] this happens in accordance with stature and persons and the thing [itself]. [Seers] know [then] the clues of the two modes of revelation, whether it is received from without, from angels, or whether it shines from within, by the power of clarity.

Revelations in the senses do not need purity, but only those that [occur] in the mind, and this is their clue.

63 Cf. note 2, p. 117.

64 Evagrius, KG 4.51.

65 Evagrius, KG 5.63.

59. [As to] all the revelations manifested to a man by the holy angels, their revelation in manifestation of things or actions occurs in these ways, according to the demonstrations of the spiritual Books and the teaching of the holy men, with their stories: [according to] one way, as in a dream, in the immersion of sleep; [according to] the other way, manifestly, through the senses, in the visible types of a sensitive vision or voice, as to Jacob and Joshua bar Nun, to Isaiah and Daniel, to the twelve [minor prophets] and the rest of the prophets, to Zechariah the priest and the rest of the other saints, for some [had revelation] through a sensitive vision, manifestly, or in the sounds of speech; with others it was conversed in sleep and as in dreams, and thus hidden things were made manifest to them. These are the ways arranged for every revelation proceeding from the angels, for the manifestation of things to come and the teaching of that [which] shall be done.
60. The revelation that [proceeds] from the Spirit of holiness and [takes place] in the visual faculty of the enlightened mind of a pure soul, on the other hand, has a unique mode, distinct from the [previous] distinctions. That is, it takes place only in the perception that [resides] in the heart, in a hidden revelation that does not [take place] in the external senses, as [happened] to Samuel, Elisha, Peter and the rest of the holy seers who scrutinized with the luminous eye of the soul distant things [and] also understood with ease, quickly and without delay, the thoughts of men and the movements and operations of angels and demons; and [as happened, again,] to many other saints who manifested and exposed the thoughts and intelligences and wills of [individual] men and actions that would take place years or centuries later, which by God alone were known. We find many of these things also in the stories of the solitary men who received the science of hidden things and penetrated even into the depths and chambers of souls.

The holy angels see with those eyes with which the pure souls of the saints also see; not only that, but they are also worthy of communion with God in the revelation of His mysteries.

61. The soul of the solitary person is similar to a fountain of water, to which [lit.: as] the holy fathers also compared it, because whenever it is quieted from all motion of hearing and sight, the solitary person sees God and himself clearly and draws from it clear and soft waters, which are the sweet thoughts of the [natural] constitution. When, on the other hand, he has approached them, by the cloudiness which [he] receives from them the soul is made like one who walks by night, when the air is covered with clouds, so that the way and the path are not visible before him and he easily wanders through regions of desolation and noxiousness. But when he has quieted with his soul, like one on whom a clear breeze blows and on whose head the air is serene, he begins again to shine before him and sees himself and understands where he has become and where he is asked to go, and he sees from afar the room of life.

But since our wicked generation does not set hand to find this fully, my brother, - that is, to find a region [suitable] for exact stillness, like the previous generations - wherever we come, even if we can sit [only] for two days with our souls, let us sit, and even if for one day. Not only in monasteries, but even if [we are] on the way of the king, and even if for an hour [only]. For it is past the time that you know: let us not wait for disposition and preparation, but let us invoke every day, though we may be quiet [only] for a little while, under a cliff or

in a ruin. Wherever quietness falls into our hands, let us tighten it well and stay a day or two with our soul. Thus the wise acquired their souls in this little time of their lives. May death not surprise us suddenly, where it will find us, and we do not achieve our expectation

Elucidation. The visions from afar, which [see] the room of life, indicate the various understandings relating to spiritual rest that shine daily in our soul within stillness. Understand also the various perceptions!

62. My brethren, the time of our life is short, our art long and difficult, and the goods we are promised unspeakable.
63. It is not that [it is that] until one is completely purified, [until] then [he] does not perceive the spiritual goods and indications of the new life, but day by day, in the measure that he overcomes the passions, he sees in his soul the traces of purity. With each passion he overcomes, immediately shines [in him] the good opposed to it, and, inasmuch as he purifies himself from sin, so, little by little, in proportion to his purity, he encounters in himself spiritual repose, and, by as much as the mind is freed from the bonds of thought relating to the passions, by as much the dawn of knowledge shines in his heart.
64. My brethren, let it not be a molesting thing in our eyes when a thought makes us consider, Who can come to purity of heart, so that he may rejoice in the rest and beatitudes therein? By this thought the thing becomes molesting to us, and we cease our waiting and toil for it. On the other hand, it is not a molesting or small thing, nor does man suddenly enter and dwell in purity of heart, nor in a moment, without knowing it, does he reach his beatitudes and perception and the mysteries of purity, but it is a wide land with vast borders, in which those who walk toward it encounter numerous stupendous goods and delights, as far [from] there, even if by way the Philistines make war on them or in it they encounter no spiritual sign or rest.

Know that the children of Israel did not come out of Egypt immediately, nor did they enter and occupy the promised land immediately and suddenly, but they came out little by little. And [remember] that up to that time, until they came to the city, by the pains of the way they had not seen any of the goods of the land, but [as well] they occupied little by little the lands of the peoples whom they destroyed and inherited [thus] the goods of the land. They inhabited the land of promise all those peoples by whose names the passions are designated: [for] every people whose land they destroyed and whose land they occupied, they inherited [part] of the land of promise.

It is not a small land the land of promise, by whose name clarity is designated, nor is it a narrow place: until [we] have entered it and occupied it all, we shall not actually perceive its goods and glory. Rather, the land of the territories of clarity is a land whose boundaries are wide and great without end, and [it is a] land of abundant goods, whose boundaries change. Even if we keep few citadels of it and [only] some parts of its borders, the pleasant suavities in which we will dwell are not small, even if we are fought over by other peoples.

Therefore let us hearten ourselves, my brethren, and look and run to it! Even if we do not reach the term of bliss that God promised to our fathers, yet we shall certainly not be

deprived of a portion of it. Know that Joshua bar Nun and the men who explored the land did not enter Jerusalem, within the citadel, though they brought the people glorious fruit, but [only] from the lands around it and from its countryside (cf. Nm 13:23). So also we: if we do not enter the city [itself], but inhabit part of its borders and the environs of the clearing, [as well] it will be beautiful to occupy a part of it and tread its soil.

65. Sweet are the occasions of passions, my brethren, but not like the fruits of righteousness. Bitter and sad are the occasions of righteousness, my beloveds, but not like the end of sin.
66. Passions and virtues are not substances, but shine in our soul from occasions. Whoever understands this well, how will he still, in conscience, loving in thought the latter, openly increase the occasions of the former?
67. Sweet are the occasions of sin, but bitter is the outcome of their fulfillment. Bitter are the occasions that increase virtue, but very sweet are the fruits that shine from them. Neither the sweetness of the former nor the bitterness of the latter lasts long, but the outcomes that [follow] from them remain in those who seize them.
68. He who takes the world of education for the true inheritance of rest and his joys for the exact possession [of that], when he emigrates from it empty, then, in the empty exile, he will know how he was mocked by them all.
69. Adorable is He who in His incomprehensible wisdom first placed us in the life of instruction, [in] a carnal world; who put an end through death to His wandering, mother of torments, and prepared for us a glorious world whose life is not burdened with sorrows.
70. The world has come into existence by grace and with mercy [God] governs its affairs, and however much we grieve his clemency every day by the change to the wickedness [proper] of our foolishness, his charity does not cease to provide for us great goods, day after day, and to increase our aid, as if it were certain to raise us to future conduct. Then will the riches of the Creator's sublime charity be known to us, when, after those conducts that increase fruits of destruction and await perfect perdition - oh! I do not know how to speak of it -... after this, from the dust into what decorum He will restore our creation and to what semblance and glory He will draw it and lead us to the point of becoming gods, all of us, and children of God! How beautiful and desirable it is [to bring back to memory, at this point, the word said somewhere by the blessed Interpreter: It is therefore clear that God has come to the constitution of creation [moved] by great goodness and deep charity! It is hidden and concealed from the creatures also, so that He placed us first in a carnal world and in the constitution of now. Certainly not in order to examine us, whether we were good or bad, so that from this we might be touched by a different remuneration [for life] from here, as it seems to many... How is it possible that He thought this and came from this to place the creation of this world He Who from the beginning, from before He began the constitution of creation, was not only aware of what He would create, but also of what He would become from all creatures, both from men and from invisible natures? The exact cause of this is concealed, although a little is given to us to know and discuss. Thus it seemed good to him to conceal the exact truth of it now; further on, perhaps, not even this consideration will be needed.
71. If God is indeed Father, he who has begotten all things by grace; [if] beings endowed with reason [are] children; [if] this world [is] type of a school in which he instructs [our]

childhood in knowledge and [corrects it] in accordance with [its] insipience; [if] the future world [is] the inheritance, in the time of the completion of the [mature] age(Eph. 4:13), [and if] there is then a time when children will become men, [then] the Father will certainly also change the countenance of instruction into jubilation, in the world of [adult] men (cf. Eph. 4:13), when also the children will have been raised beyond the need of correction. *Your judgments are uninvestigable!* (Rom 11:33)

72. To thee glory, the hidden from all and the arcane in his judgment, who foreknows in his [pre]science the whole, before his constitution! Though thy charity was deeper than the sea, thou hast spread before thy suavity the veil of hardness, in reproach of our inclination. For if you had wanted to give us the perfection of knowledge [from] the beginning, you would not have placed us in this world. Instead, now you show to the infirmity of your creatures those [things] which are not [proper] to your nature, while you have made secret those which [are], the exactness of which you have not bestowed fully even on the heavenly and higher essences, until their time arises, according to the term set by your incomprehensible intelligence for the revelation of their concealment. In this expectation the invisible creation is in groaning for us, [waiting] when the hope of which it has received knowledge in the economy of the Christ will come to manifestation, [when] they too will escape the violence of inclination and, we, the blows of mortality.
73. How stupendous is the meditation of your constitution, O man! More stupendous than it [is then] the mystery of thy awakening. Again: it startles much, to inquire into it, the beginning of thy composition, but greater and more wondrous [is] the glory of thy resurrection. Sad is my soul unto death (Mt 26:38 and par.), yet in faith I am encouraged because of him who first died and rose again and [who] by his resurrection gave the consolation of hope to mankind.
74. Do not be saddened by thy entrance into the silence of the tomb, O mortal, beautiful more than all, corrupted by the offense of death, for, behold, God has subjected to a limit this thy silent humiliation and thy immemorial emptying from all. How beautiful thy constitution and how bewildering thy corruption! Nor let sadness grieve thee for this, for thou shalt clothe it [again], set on *fire and Spirit* (cf. Mt. 3:1 1b), bearing the exact image of his Factor. Let not your doubts about the greatness of this hope trouble you, for, behold, Paul comforts you on this: *He will cause the body of our humiliation to be changed and make it conform to the body of his glory* (Phil. 3:21).
75. Do not grieve because, behold, for many years we shall be in the corruption of death, under the dust, until the fulfillment of this world has come upon us. For this does not burden us, since the reality of death, this whole period in which, in the tomb, we sleep, is for us like the sleep of a night. For behold: the wise Creator has made death light for us, so that we do not feel its hardship at all. It is difficult for us only until we have received it, but [then] we have no more perception of our corruption and dissolution of our compound, except as [of] the sleep of a night when we rise in the day. And as in the morning we have slept and awakened, so the long sleep of the tomb and the stretch of years [spent] in it are mild for us.
76. Five are the powers of the soul, which the soul endowed with reason possesses in its joint essence, namely, natural desire - I say: [that] of the soul the wrathful power, its auxiliary -

for wrath is naturally ordered to move after desire the motion of vitality, which quivers in her without stillness; simple rationality and compound rationality.

77. Two of the five powers of the soul cease with its separation from the body in perfect distinction: they are the wrathful power and compound rationality. For none of them is useful for future conduct: there is nothing there that the voice proclaims, nor any opposition to good things against which zeal is of use. Two more of them, again, are guarded without quiver until the time after the resurrection, that is, until the use of the word future⁶⁶. All the use of the conduct that [is] in the heavens resides [lett.: is] indeed in them: one is the simple rationality, which is the Gnostic intellect in which [the soul] is moved in the contemplation of that Essence which is the whole end of the kingdom of heaven and within whose awe is kept the intellect of all beings endowed with reason, first and last; [the other is] the desire of its nature, from which it is moved to delight in the great charity of the Creator, by which then will [be made] perfect the whole nature of men and at the same time of angels and [of] demons. The angels are in it even now, fulfilled; men from time to time; demons not at all, but they will be [made] perfect [in it] ultimately, by the grace of Him who created them. There remains only one among all the natural [powers] of the soul, which alone remains with it in separation from the body, until it receives its spouse again, at the strong nod of the Creator, and that is the motion of vitality. This one [power] remains with her so far, and with it [the soul] girds the other world. The soul that has sinned and been justified with the body, it is not right that it should receive suffering and joy alone.
78. In these three powers the angels also move here, they who hold the future conduct: they are the vitality and intellectuality and holy desire of their nature, which is the ready divine charity. In their world, on the other hand, there is no rationality and wrathfulness: these are not in the angels' conduct, for no zeal or speech moves in them. Instead, they show them when they descend to our world, and just as they take on the semblance of our senses and are seen by us, though it is not so in their nature, in the same way they are seen and seem to us [to act] with fury and speech, for they [make] use of them for us-in their world, however, there is no use of them-just as God also makes use of speech and fury, though His nature is higher than both. In this mystery men will be in the resurrection: "*In the likeness of the powers of heaven,*" it is written," *whose creature hood dwells in great silence and awe*", [or], rather, in the likeness of God.
79. The intelligible natures have become infinitely more excellent in knowledge from what they have understood in Christ, our Lord, things they did not know before; in these, who came for their deliverance and fulfillment and ours.
80. At first [at first] the creation of the spiritual ones, though in inclination, knew not the malice that flowed from it, but as all were confident and rising, they suddenly saw one of them falling from the glory in which they were, a leader of multitudes, and many with him. In all fell trembling and fear, and their creation was moved by the fear that entered and dwelt in it. And hence then dwelt in them the fear of the Creator, as if they despaired of themselves, for they thought that therefore they would all fall; hence they received news of the greatness of his vigor, and thus they knew that all are stirred up by his beckoning. This fear indeed made them acquire great vigilance. Henceforth, therefore, seeing the inclination they had [in themselves] and the fall that [had come] from it, which was for many of them, they were

66 In the text: "word," corrected later with recall in the margin.

quiet in themselves-the whole creation of angels-not knowing that there would be a time when they would be delivered from it. But after the coming of Christ their sorrow was dissolved. Now it bears its burden joyfully, for it has received news of the future deliverance. *It now cries and groans* - it is written *-from its burden, because of what it is now in; but they are [also] encouraged because of the hope of things to come, for now they have known, they, who did not know before, that they might be comforted by this news* [lit.: by the news of them], *that they will be out of the pains here and [out of] fear.*

81. After the coming of Christ the intelligible natures have acquired excellent knowledge of the wisdom of God, for they have seen with what variety he has worked the economy toward us, to gather all into one, through the economy of Christ. When we have received those [future realities], we all, as many as are now solicitous in the fear of God, if we have persevered in it, will become one, dwelling in heaven among the many blessed with the invisible powers and with our Lord, the Christ. There we shall all be seen [to be] one church with our Lord.
82. All that he would excellently accomplish later, at all creation, was not seen by God at the end, but was arranged and prepared by God to be worked from the beginning, from before all generations. It was hidden and concealed in him, and unspoken. His mystery from the end was manifested through prophecies and received actualization [lit.: exit] through the economy of Christ, our Lord. All things then shall receive fulfillment when our Lord shall arise from heaven, over all things, and shall raise us up from the dust, and shall give renewal and deliverance from sorrow with us to the whole creation, and shall raise all things up with him to the heavenly abode.
83. The fulfillment of the natural course of the world of elements [is] the beginning of the foundation [read: position] of the world of light, and the fulfillment of the course of thought in the natures of creation [is] the beginning of the motions relative to the Creator, which are the end of the world of glory.
84. He wonders [lit.: there is question]: Why do all the revelations that [come] from God happen in the saints in the hours of prayer? Because there is no time as suitable for holiness as the time of prayer.
85. When prayer flows within the bounds of purity it is found in natural movements; [it is] found instead in spiritual fulfillment when it is absorbed in non-knowledge.

Understand this not [as] the cessation of cases and occasions, but [as] that which is beyond necessity.⁶⁷
86. If the solitary will be raised by revelations to the throne of divinity, if he despises the psalms, he will be delivered into the hands of demons. The boundary of pride begins here in man, when he thinks great things of himself. *Your command now transcends* [that of] *those who make use of the psalms* - this is what Satan said to Ptolemy the Egyptian when he showed himself to him in an impure revelation, says Palladius in the book of Paradise⁶⁸ .

⁶⁷ The period is written in the margin of the following chapter in the Oxford manuscript, from which we translate, but at the end of No. 85, and below, in the text of the Paris one, which we therefore follow here.

⁶⁸ Cf. E.A.W.Budge, *The Book of Paradise*, (t: vol. II) pp. 167-168; (v: vol. I) pp. 200-201, or *Les formes syriaques de lamatière del'Histoire lausiaque*, R.Draguet éd., CSCO, Louvain 1978, (t) 298, pp. 221-223; (v) 399, pp. 152-154.

Do not lose yourself in the office of psalms and do not torment your body in bodily works, but work only in the works of the soul and look to me continually in your mind and I will show you my glory. And so he was mocked by the demons and forsaken by God so that, even, they lifted him up and threw him to the ground, forsaken in their hands, and put the irons on him. He drank the water of the washings of the blessed brethren, but with difficulty he came to self-consciousness, for he no longer made use of his former practice in quietness, he who had formerly conducted himself in great observances and had dwelt for not a few years in a quiet region devoid of everything [lit.: barren].

87. Know, my brethren, of where the determination of evil happened in natures endowed with reason. *That morning star which rose at dawn* (Isa. 14:12 LXX), because it was belittling in its eyes to be subject to a rule according to the determination of creatures, therefore it was abandoned by the power that held it and *fell like a thunderbolt* (Lk. 10:18) from its glory.
88. From the desire for freedom began the thought of mischief in creatures and the endless number of the two hosts of spiritual natures, of which one is called archons and the other dominions and principalities. The one of them in a moment has fallen from the glory of its blissful and luminous nature and from dwelling near heaven and cohabitation with the highest [and], behold, like a despicable reptile of the earth crawls into the abyss. As for all those whose ways have gone astray and who have begun to be held back by her net, at first she asks this of them, to love freedom and come out from under rule and law, for then she can sow in them, according to her will, her things, since the divine power, hidden in submission, on account of our Lord does not let her approach them [first], until they have subjected themselves to her yoke of their own will, and, whenever she wants to approach them to sow in them thoughts, that power blows toward her and scatters her from them. Then it seeks a means and persuades them by blandishments to come out of its own will from under the holy service.
89. Let us guard the limit of submission, my brethren, lest we fall into the hands of the demon of pride and thus be abandoned by the [divine] solicitude that sustains us and surrounds us, so that it may try us through impudence, so that we may know that we are creatures and not desire that freedom which belongs only to the Factor! There is no need then for the young and those who are slothful to be held by pride, and by it [the demon] to bring them to the temptations of lust. These, having shirked [just] a little from the work [provided for] by the rules, immediately begin to think of vile things and by themselves become corrupted. That is why the rule is good for perfects, middles and beginners, and the work crowns them [all] and sows humility in them and causes them to guard the wealth they have acquired so that it will not be diminished by [Satan].
90. There is angelic thought and there is angelic contemplation. Angelic thought, when there falls in us [a thought] concerning the virtues or fervent penance or stupendous motion relative to the nature of things, according to what Evagrius said of the contemplation of gold, as to why it is gold. Angelic contemplation, on the other hand, when a vision relative to their mysteries falls into our soul. The first thing is [proper] to the cohort of steadfast brothers, this, on the other hand, only to holy and great men.
91. The holy angels purify us by their revelations and make us temples for the Spirit of holiness, and the Spirit of holiness sanctifies us by its revelations. Angelic revelations cannot

sanctify the soul: they [bring it] nearer only to purity from the passions. Not all the revelations that [proceed] from the angels purify [then] the soul, but only those that through intelligence move toward secret understandings, contemplations and mysteries, which are the revelations of knowledge, by which the soul is brought nearer to concealed knowledge. In contrast, revelations that occur in the senses and in the likeness of visions do not procure purification for the soul, although it is a great thing for a man to see visions of angels. However, he is not approached by this to purity, but [only] by those [visions] that [take place] in the mind. When [the soul] has been purified by erudition in science relating to hidden things, the Spirit dwells in it, and it is sanctified by the holiness of its revelations and through the revelations is made clear. Then the soul is enlightened in the likeness of the sun, so that it understands *height and depth, length and breadth* (Eph 3:18) of all incorporeal knowledge, and scrutinizes the secrets and distance and depth of [divine] thoughts. But until it has received revelation from the Spirit of holiness it does not receive the deep vision of secret things, to manifest the thoughts of men and the motions and operations of angels and demons and souls, to know the events that have not yet been.

92. All the revelations revealed by the holy powers about the state and existence of objects and acts are made known and revealed to us through visions and sensible types, whereas everything related to their contemplation [is revealed to us] in a hidden way and through movements of the intelligence moved by the illumination they effuse in us. For it is clear that they do not become manifest through semblances, senses and teachings, but through the thoughts they excite in us in silence, in the soul that is suddenly enlightened, as the holy Evagrius, the illuminator of the mind, says: *The holy angels, when they approach us, fill us with spiritual vision*,⁶⁹ that is, [with] illuminations and understandings and contemplations of all sorts. On the other hand, one is the order and manner of the Holy Spirit's revelation, adorable in its nature, that is, [manifested] only in the motions of the soul. All the orders of His revelations are without semblance, whether they relate to acts and things, or to their powers or to sensible [realities] or to intelligible [ones], and man understands them in silence, without seeing anything or hearing any sound, but the soul is enlightened from within and sees that it receives hidden things, that is, a higher revelation and the order and stature of spirituality. When one has come to this order, then one is a spiritual man.
93. The kingdom and Gehenna are not the retribution of good and bad works, but the retribution of [opposite] wills.
94. Chastisement on God's part is not a purpose [in itself] nor [is it] vengeance against those [lit.: the vengeance of those] whom he has made, but [it is] for the correction of the offenders and for the admonition of others. Where they have no need of chastisement and condemnation, neither does God grieve them with anything for the purpose of prevention: for he is not pleased to chastise, but to raise up. For out of fear of inclination even chastisements are in fact used. Where there is no fear, neither are they. [The] blessed Interpreter testifies to this in the book *On the Priesthood*, saying: *Fear is useful to our vigilance, and proof of this is [the fact] that in the future world fear will be taken away. [There] only charity will dominate. For when [God] has taken away sin, he will also take*

⁶⁹ Evagrius, *Praktikos* 76 (Evagre le Pontique, *Traité pratique ou Le moine*, A. et C. Guillaumont éd., SC 171, Paris 1971, pp. 664-665).

away punishment with it; when punishment has been taken away, then fear will also be taken away.

95. Virtue is not the offspring of a beautiful practice, but of a beautiful will.
96. [As for] good and bad deeds in which the will has no part, on those who perform them there does not accrue a retribution corresponding to their [outward] perception.
97. The will, therefore, when, aiming at something else, disposes the body, according to the perception of [outward] practice, to the use of the opposite, can gain a hidden retribution in nothing like its manifest practice. This [discernment] is not possible for men. Purely, everyone's wage is determined according to the work he does. Therefore, the practice of the kingdom of heaven and [that] of Gehenna are accomplished in the concealment of the heart and in the non-conformity [lit.: similarity] [to it] of actions.
98. Beautiful works are one thing and righteousness is another. How often beautiful works are also implemented by corrupt thinking! Righteousness, on the other hand, is a ready will that aims at God's satisfaction.
99. It is one thing to have erudition in the Books, and knowledge gained from exercise over them, and another to have knowledge of the truth of the Books themselves. That one is strengthened by protracted study and the work that [is accomplished] by teaching; this one arises from the practice of the commandments and [from] a clear intelligence turned to God.
100. The whole course of the motions of the intellect in spiritual motion is contained in three knowledges, which are said [to be] beyond purity: in one it is instructed, in the other it is made perfect, in the third it is crowned. Two of these [are proper] to the natural course, one [is] beyond nature. The first is called natural knowledge second; the next, knowledge first and natural; that by which he is crowned is the [knowledge] of the adorable Trinity, the exact mystery of the Spirit.

End Of The Third Discourse

Fourth Discourse Of The Gnostic Chapters

1. Completion of penance [is] the beginning of purity; completion of purity [is] the beginning of clarity; way of purity [are] the works of virtue; being made clear [is] instead the work of revelations.
2. Purity is stripping of passions; clarity, stripping of opinions and mutation of intelligences into exact knowledge of mysteries.
3. The intelligible sensible [characters] of God - [those] that is, which in His charity He has taken upon Himself for our benefit - are the type of the sensible notions; for them the Holy Book makes known to our senses the intelligible [characters] of the non-sensible world, although they are not indicative in a proper way, but according to what God said to Moses: *I am the Lord who revealed Himself to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob in El Shaddai God, and I did not show them the name of Lord* (Ex 6:3). For what is by pupil order between *El Shaddai God* and *Ehyehasherehyeh* (Ex 3:14), the same [is] between the indicative [characters], which [are] for our true knowledge concerning them, and the truth of knowledge.⁷⁰
4. All questions concerning God, when indeed [they] meet him with an open eye, will cease before him, and the intellect only then will know him as the eternal one who foreknew them, the truth of whose Essence is not impressed on the mind by matters. For God is known by incorporeal natures, which [already] now are in the virtue of the intellect, outside of them.
5. There is no [thing], by which God is now naturally signified, that is with him eternally, without beginning; neither that remains with him, as he is, without end.
6. For if we are to grasp the eternal in those [realities] which by nature [are] allegorical clues [and] which are naturate from a [given] time,⁷¹ so that the enclosable from time delimits the efforts of our meditation, yet it will never be possible for us to transcend them to that whose truth is known without mediators.
7. The fathers say perfection of the motions of the mind the stability of the state according to in the intellectual discoveries [proper] to the transmissible order of the path of purity. They [are] not, however, the crown of a runner intellect (cf. 2 Tim. 4:7-8). What is inferior to it,

70 f. Isho'dad of Merw, commentary on Ex 6:3 (*op.cit.*, p. 23): "The [saying]: 'The name of Lord have I not shown them' means: Your fathers have known of me that I am God, the Maker of heaven and earth... because I rescued them from their adversaries and showed my providence to them and made promises to them that I would take care of their seed (and, we observe, according to Theodore bar Koni, in the *Book of the Scoles*, CSCO, Louvain 1982, [v] 432, VI, 75, p. 33, 'El Shaddai is translated: God of promises'). But 'the name of Lord,' that is, the radiance of Lord, I did not [show it] to them, for it was not yet the time.... Again: 'The name of Lord I did not show them,' i.e.: *Ehyehasherehyeh* (Ex 3:14), this I have made known to you." Earlier, in the margin of 3:14, Isho'dad had noted, "*Ehyeh*: the Existent One; *asherehyeh*: which is... The Existent One who was and is. This is the incomprehensible tetragrammaton, this is [this] the ineffable, venerable name.... Of all the names given to [God] only two agree with Him most, although they do not express His nature: the 'Existent Who Is,' in the Old [Testament], and 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' (Mt. 28:19), in the New."

So, connecting with this exegetical tradition, Isaac asserts that the same intervening difference between the two names of God mentioned in Ex 6:3 (the second of which is read with reference to Ex 3:14) is found between the "sensible" characters of God, graspable here, in the world, from his working "for our benefit," and the "intelligible" ones, peculiar to the future world, which are, they, "the truth of knowledge."

71 That is, whose nature received existence at a given moment in time.

and in the order of transmission and in the first encounters, nurtures what is proposed to the pupils.

8. Crown a pure intellect not perfection, but that which aims at perfection.
9. They say [that] perfection and that which precedes it are rediscoveries of the natural course, in the confines of purity.
10. As for all those things by which the intellect gradually progresses and is drawn to the fulfillment of its motions, when it encounters revelation, which [is] the term of the mysteries, these motions of its will be absorbed, in forgetfulness, at the mediator [Jesus], just as [if] they had not come into existence at all. This order dominates in the indeterminacy of future conduct.
11. The fathers say [that] spiritual perception in the contemplation of bodies and [that which is] incorporeal is natural to the rational intellect. When it applies to the latter, *it rises* - it is written - *in the fulfillment of its natural motions*; when to the former, in the second order, after the fulfillment. For what is known in that which is second by position is said [to be] a supernatural gift.
12. Many have thought that spiritual conduct [is] a multitude of thoughts about everything or beautiful advice or the ordering of thoughts or meditation on something. There are then some who have thought that it is a phantasm which reflection deals with; others that [it is] a vision visible to the eyes; and some, [finally], have thought [it is] a composition of the deep mind relating to wisdom, but they do not know that any of it is there, whether advice or thought or intelligence or meditation or vision. Others, because of a brief joy quivering in them from the ardor of faith or meditation on the Books, or because of a brief rest from the passions have thought about themselves that they have come to spiritual conduct, and they do not know that these and as many [experiences] in comparison with spiritual conduct are as well as a child who does not yet speak in comparison with a man who scrutinizes and is instructed in the knowledge and doctrine of Scripture. Others thought about themselves to conduct themselves in spirituality because of the frequency of prayers and the multitude of works with which they corrected themselves; others because of the signs and wonders performed through them; others because of the prediction of future things and the gift of prophecy, which they had received; others for visions and encounters with angels, face to face, things which, although they are all great and stupendous and it is worthy to be proclaimed blessed whoever has become worthy to receive one from God, nevertheless they are much milder in weight of greatness of spiritual conduct and are far removed from it in space and are infinitely distant and far removed from spirituality. Not everyone who has received these has also perceived spiritual conduct; however, those who have become worthy of it absolutely have those as well.
13. Spiritual conduct is the wonder of the mysteries, which is learned neither from men nor from angels, but [which] arises in the soul by the Spirit of holiness, in the fulfillment of the commandments, through the understandings of the divine mysteries quivering in the mind.
14. For when man has restrained himself from the sins [committed] in actions and has conquered the thoughts [present] in the intelligence, against which he is incited [to struggle], and has purified himself of the consideration of their combats, then thought begins to quiver in motions relating to hidden things. After that it transcends even the

understandings of the world of bodies and is lifted above the consideration of spirituals, its companions, and marvels in God, not at the wonders of those [operations] which [are addressed] to us, but at his nature, in the total stillness which falls upon him: this is the perfection of the saints in this world, as the fathers say, which is a small savoring of the future gift. For these are the revelations of the mysteries of the new world, which nature endowed with reason will delight in in the resurrection.

15. In spiritual conduct there is no labor or battle, no toil of the body or struggle with thoughts. Nor [will there be] consideration, trade or care of thoughts, for it is not subject to the freedom of the will nor to the counsel of the motions of the soul.

In all conduct subject to the dominion of the will there are [instead] battles, and it needs the work of the body and thought.

Therefore, since they are subject to the dominion of the will, in these two conducts, which the multitude of solitaries observe [and] which are the practice of virtue and the hidden conduct of thought, there is also labor and struggle and they are enclosed in meditation and [in] the care of the soul and require instruction and assiduity of thought [fixed] on them. Spiritual movement [on the other hand] is not subject to man's freedom, nor is its practice attainable through instruction and teaching [proceeding] from others. For thinking this many have perished, for they had believed that tenacity of thoughts and the art of the will would necessarily lead to spiritual conduct and [that] it would be acquired through teaching, instruction, labor and the will of the soul, and [that] all solitaries under heaven would lead themselves into spirituality. Now, on the other hand, since it is found by purity of heart acquired in remoteness from all labor, in body and in intelligence, one out of ten thousand solitaries worthy of spiritual conduct in this life is hardly found.

16. There are, again, many others who have been educated by little notes written in the books of holy men, [who] have cleansed their words, made deep discourse about it, and [who] have believed that they have come to spiritual conduct even in fact, nor have they considered and thought that this practice is not knowable by men through the art of words, education, or teaching. The mysteries of God are not taught by ink and words unless they have been sown by him [himself] in the heart through admirable understandings relating to his greatness, quivering in the depths of a pure mind.
17. All those who have been instructed in the promises by hearing and ink and have acquired in the senses the knowledge of the future mystery cannot move beyond sensible things into the understanding of the new world; if even one [is] learned and quick and subtle, he will not know this unless he has had part in the revelation of the Spirit.
18. Blessed Paul wrote much about spiritual [realities], but man cannot perceive from his letters what he tasted unless he had part in the Spirit.
19. Worthy of God may it seem to you who performs the practice of divine things with sadness, but more worthy of attention may he be deemed worthy of attention in whose hands their fullness comes in joy, out of that, and [who], though found capable of this [joy], yet lends himself obediently [even to sadness].

20. A virtue completed in rest by one who is called practical and wise in God will be satanic and unbecoming to God and is accursed, if it is possible for him [to] accomplish it without [rest] and [if] he expects to receive the practice without work, whether you speak of the work of the intelligence or [that] of the body, in the times when the implementation [of it] is accomplished by him. It is not that, when laborious [moments] come upon him, then he thinks, My God, and the action is actually accomplished.

Understand me these things, both those things that covertly and unmediatedly proceed from you, and those whose implementation is brought to completion in matters and externality [lit.: in prosopa].

21. Beware also of demonic thinking which, in the expectation of goods, teaches you foolishness and shows you stumbling in the paths of right knowledge and things foreign to those of wise providence.
22. Whoever does not receive upon himself, rejoicing in them, the heaviness, tedium, and sloth [present] in the office, so that he bears its difficulties exultingly, and [together] the suffocation and dullness and the rest of the pains of the cell, as by the accomplished practice of God, but desires full relief from them, though he does not want to deliver himself into the hands of the spirit of fornication, and instead of the pure victim of his body, which he has neglected to approach through them to God, he presents the fetid victim of his limbs daily to Satan.
23. Believe me, my brethren: sloth, torpor, heaviness of limbs, turmoil and cloudiness of thought, and the rest of the mundane things that are left to ascetics in [their] sitting in quietness, are the accomplished practice of God. Do not think that enlightenment in the office, purgation of thought, gladness and exultation of heart, consolation of sweet tears and clear commerce with God are themselves alone the divine practice.

I say truly and according to my understanding: [about] the thoughts of blasphemy, vainglory, and the hateful motions of fornication, which are wont to violently oppress the solitary in quietness, or [about] passion for oneself, even if the solitary is still found, at times, weak before them, but patiently without leaving his cell, likewise this is counted as a pure victim and holy and godly practice-only excepting pride. For he perseveres in the Lord's fight in every [event], right and left, that happens to him [while holding] his place, if its occurrence is not [caused] by slackness and negligence. In fact [these things] happen to him only with the purpose of battle, if he is not overcome and comes out of [that] place of struggle that is persevering sitting in the cell. If they, which are forms of struggle scattered on the way, in the conduct of solitaries, seem to you excessive for the practice of God, how will you dare to wait for the practice of joy, when you do not put into account, with order, the sorrows that [you suffer] for it?

24. If there is one among the solitaries who, without necessary reason, is negligent in the seven offices canonically established for the salvation of those who wrestle with demons, and this one says to you: I am preserved from submission to the spirit of fornication, even though he is an old man in conduct - both that which [consists] in action and [that] in thought -, know in all exactness, without doubt [any], that he deceives thee, procuring to cover his own shame and to evade self-perception, in order not to leave rest and subject himself to the rule.

25. There is a divine operation which adheres to the pure practice of solitaries and [which] from time to time overshadows the solitary in the quiet of the cell, and [then] an unspeakable exultation, without his knowing the reason for it, suddenly falls upon his heart and in those hours separates him from all customary thoughts. In fact, some of the fathers give that hour the name *limpid region*; others call it the *air of freedom*, and others say the *pure region of nature*, since [man then] is as in the new world and is intoxicated with God in every work he does.⁷² Some abide in this delight and stillness from battles for the duration of days, many even for six days, or even seven, and [then] the gift is again taken from them and they become obscured, but after [some] days they still find that same [gift] and are filled with delight. As a matter of fact, whenever the solitary person finds himself rising in this grace, he should not be subject to the law, not to the office nor to the prayers nor to the reading nor to any of the canons established for creatures, because it does not depend on his will. But after leaving that region, if he despises the canons [as well] as the customs established for solitaries-therefore outside of the cases of necessity that happen, or the necessity of a sickness-even if he is like an angel in his conduct, he will be delivered into the hands of demons, though not immediately, though after a short time, absolutely.
26. If there is one who considers sloth and dullness or cloudiness of thought, commingled by spiritual providence with clear practice, out of the way and [therefore] an error, and teaches and announces to you one joy-filled order without interruption, know that he leads you out of the way of God and wants to deliver you to the error of demons.
27. The passions of the body, which are desire and fury and the love of idle trades, etc., are silenced through fasting, the office of the hours and a quiet sitting. The passions present in the soul-that is, wandering without knowledge-which are envy and vainglory and pride, etc., are obliterated through prayer and reading and the knowledge that [proceeds] from them. He who wants to appease the passions present in the body or overcome the ignorance of the mind without them, fatigues himself; through them, on the other hand, the vain thoughts of neglect, from which the darkness in thought is generated, are also nullified.
28. A solitary body begets a solitary thought. To the extent that the body is mixed, so is the thought mixed.
29. Just as a vessel is not cleansed of dirt unless it is scraped and cleared with alum and lye, so the heart is not cleansed of passions unless the body is harassed by torment and loneliness.
30. There is a practice that shows you finite paths and by its ways and its form teaches you humility and knowledge, [which] makes you love [more and more] God, makes you His familiar and causes you to become His neighbor. There is [another] which, as soon as you show much diligence, makes you turn to the edges of the way, sets before you a long course, and, when the exit stands before you, prevents you from seeing [it] and makes [advance] your way in circles. Both, beginning with the people who practice them, go to the one Lord, but not everyone sees the one finished and near. Let those who read understand the consistency of the chapters.
31. Nothing is more beloved by God and honored in the eyes of the angels and more disheartens Satan and frightens demons and terrifies sin and brings forth knowledge and attracts mercy

⁷² On the theme of the "limpid region" cf. the notes of G.Bunge, "Le 'lieu de la limpidité'. À propos d'un apophthegme énigmatique: E.A.W.Budge II, 494," in *irénikon* 55 (1982), pp. 7-18.

and destroys sins and makes one acquire humility and makes the heart wise and procures consolation and unifies the intellect, than a solitary, kneeling on the ground, found continually [intent] in his prayer. This is the harbor of conversion that with tears all the assemblies of penitence thoughts want. For it is treasure of fortitude, washing of the heart, path of purity, way of revelations and ladder of the intellect. This makes the mind like God and gives it to receive Him in future realities in its motions. This restores in a short time the debt of long neglect. This contains within its boundaries distinctions of different works in many forms.

There is no [thing] as great as the continuity of psalmody in a chaste habit. If one despises it, more or less, because he is devoured by the desire for this worship, he is therefore not counted as negligent, but as one who has been drawn to the most excellent degree, to the greatest work and practice by which he is worked and made familiar with God, and has received a far more internal gift.

Contempt for the psalms is equal to insolence when one stops them out of pride or [when] you abhor them according to the heretical form of the Messalians or [when] their fulfillment is disregarded out of sloth. But contracting their part in the humble form of unceasing worship, this is fullness of work in them and not their emptying, at all; this also imprisons the body and makes the intelligence wise in new things, by the spirit of the gifts, and makes it holy by its sanctifications. [Worship] is worked by any practice; it is therefore next to gush forth by reason of consolation; it makes its works like honey, and for those who sustain them [it is like] a honeycomb: it is sweet, for those who perceive the sweet pleasure of that which is within its works, to sustain for it even the cross.

32. The purity of prayer is the silence of habit with bodily thoughts and the vehement movement of that which benefits the soul.
33. Purity of heart is the clear intelligence, without struggle, possessing continuous quivers not [dependent] on the will toward hidden things and the diminution of memories that the [realities] of the flesh trace in the mind.
34. You will not desire to pray then, after you have purified yourself from the wandering of thoughts, but the wandering of thought will be destroyed by the continuity of prayer and the great work for it. If you were to begin prayer then, after you have seen thought become perfect and superior to every memory of this world, you would never pray, because [just] from prayer something similar happens to thought, as they say, in those who for a long time have been working at it and have found exact chastity from themselves, and this with difficulty, for a few hours and not in all time. These things, as they say, happen to thought only rarely and with the protraction of prayer. It is never heard from us that one asks from thought such things [or], more, impassibility before prayer: he, behold, not [wanting] to pray and worship and ask without [first] thought having risen above the semblance of all that [is] here, asks for perfection before practice. And if it is at all possible for this to happen, that [i.e.] the thought remains silent from wandering in all that [is] here and from [its] memory, then however not even prayer there is need because the thought has been fulfilled and has become in God and God in him.

Tell me then, you who ask this directly: do you desire it to be so always or from time to time? If from time to time, [it is desired] badly by you, because you ask in part that of which it is possible continuity may be given; if, on the other hand, continually, know therefore that you desire [so far] from here future perfection, according to the intelligence of the Messalians.

35. Not allowing the things that show themselves to thought while we pray, this is ours. That thought should remain silent, expelling from it the [objects] that [show themselves to it], and [that] it should be above struggle and semblance, this [the] power of nature cannot [do]. If then, in thought, you want it to retract itself in part from wandering and make room for pure prayer, retract yourself from matter and the care of what is superfluous and from the wandering of the senses. For you will find room from wandering for pure prayer to the extent that they withdraw from them. This [will happen] in part, and it will not be so entirely, but with assiduous care some rest will be obtained. In fact we will not even be judged for this, because the semblances of thoughts have moved in us. We will therefore have condemnation or grace for allowing or not, that is, for approaching them or being cleansed from them.
36. I have not said this to allow wandering and to give license to thought or to show indulgence for the injury that [proceeds] from it, but I am careful that you do not desist from prayer because of it. Let us not cease from the invocation because we are not worthy nor are we in a beautiful way, but, humbled by looking at the misery of our nature-as with our power we are not capable of anything-we afflict our souls and always offer, as offenders, a prayer to Him who is capable of everything, crying out [and] confessing with the young men in the furnace, they innocent, we on the other hand guilty: *We have sinned and been ungodly before you (Dan 3:29). To you, O Lord, victory in all things, and to us confusion of countenance (Dan 9:27). It is not possible for us to open our mouths before you because of the shame and ignominy of our sins (Dan 3:33).* And with the holy Jeremiah we cry out, we, the unclean: *You, Lord, are forever and your throne from generation to generation. Forsake us not forever and make us err not for length of days. Turn us to you, Lord, and we will turn (Lam 5:19-21a).*

Therefore, with all this, we are vivified, and we pray; we are devoured, and we pray; we are innocent, and we pray; we are entangled in guilt, and we pray; we are soiled with the blood of our wounds, and we pray; we are fallen, and we pray; [the Lord] passes over us (cf. Ex. 12:13), and we pray; we are darkened, and we pray. Let us not at all desist from our invocation because we are not such as to be [worthy of it] and as befits the things of prayer. For our Lord said: *The healthy have no need of the physician (Mt. 9:12 and par.).* Let us not wait until we are healthy to approach the physician then, but since we are sick, seek [even] more this, to hasten to him and to appear before him through invocation. If we have wanderings [of the mind] or falls or sickness, let us entrust everything to God in prayer. The cessation of prayer is the stipulation of obedience to him by whom we are oppressed. As long as we implore [God], [this] indicates that we are not lazy but willing in that which is proper to her.

37. The paucity and harshness of retribution depends not only on the quantity and manner of sins, but mostly on the quantity of knowledge. Perhaps then also on temperaments,

occasions and times. Man is judged more by comparison with the latter than by the weight of the former [things].

38. There is no [thing] more beloved of God and quicker as to the fulfillment of our invocation to him than when one asks forgiveness for his transgressions and strength and help for their correction; this then easily prevents their punishment as well, even if they are very serious. Undoubtedly He who cares that we are corrected will also welcome his requests. If, however, in the requests for forgiveness the intelligence is not poured out in supplication for correction, neither are the [requests] for forgiveness welcomed nor is he preserved from punishment, but, even if he multiplies the prayer, it is not heard, lest he become an occasion of imitation even by others, since he is left without retribution.
39. Every chastisement or oppressive case that is by way of punishment, to perish, according to the purpose of its sending, happens [and] breaks in with its threats quickly and is full of snares, without change; and if, yes, [there is] change, [it is] in a greater evil and not in its moderation. In that which happens by admonition and correction and bears the mark of mercy, on the other hand, relief and tribulation are conjoined together; it breaks through and is moderated. For the other, however [there is] only one way, wholly full of harshness.

Understand thus also the hidden battles. As for the one which now disposes, now relieves, one day arouses and one day rests, know that he who keeps himself in the midst of it runs by the way common to all and [that] in it there is instruction and instruction. But in that to which tribulation and affliction are joined without change there is the sign of abandonment by God. I do not speak of the battle that [depends] on the slackness and affliction that [proceed] from sloth-not even fittingly, in fact, that these should be called battles-but [I speak of those] of those who keep themselves in the ranks, with watchfulness, and guard carefully their senses and thoughts, against which battles take place by [divine] provision.

There are still molestations that [proceed] from ignorance in thought, and gloom and sloth and sadness and disturbance. This molestation has no end in those who deprive themselves of patience, but a wise intelligence does in fact know how to expel it by humility and confession [of praise] and obey the advice of men of knowledge, who have [tried] the battles, though they seem idiotic in comparison with others as to education in writing and instruction in speech.

40. Other is the knowledge of battles and other the knowledge that [proceeds] from doctrine and skill in the movements [of thought]. Knowledge of battles needs proof. How often are the possessors of intelligence and wisdom by their doctrine troubled in this, while the unlettered and rough in knowledge possess it through practice!
41. Just as it is not possible for one to learn the art of archery in the midst of assemblies or in the square, but in an utterly deserted and empty region, a place suitable for horse racing and arrow shooting, because the trajectory runs unimpeded to the fixed target, so it is not possible for one to learn the art of spiritual battles and the artfully calculated trajectory that [is directed] to the divine target; [that] he learn the art of thoughts and the wisdom of spiritual navigation for this terrible sea and know the resources and the many pitfalls, if he does not remain in continuous stillness and emptiness of everything from which the mind is

restrained and dissipated or [whereby] he ceases from continuous supplication. He who does not do so, falls.

42. All the work of this unified conduct in stillness consists of three ages: an initial age, a middle age and an age of fulfillment. At the first age coerce the fear and bitter suffering of sadness, because of the memories of former things and the terror that rightly coerces them. To the second, the sign of incitements and various consolations, because by them a wise penitent approaches the gifts through the purity he acquires from weeping and penance.
43. When, by means of his continual quietness and laborious asceticism and the consideration of his sins, which oppresses him and causes him to suffer [and] to which long weeping is also usually accompanied, [one] has completed the [first age], in dense labor and in the various modes of penance, in the memory of Christ, *our hope* (1 Tim. 1:1), and has begun to make progress in the second, the sign of his penitence is changed to exultation, without his wanting it, because he watches and fears that the second age in quietness is not a deception.
44. This then is the sign of it: hope begins to appear in thought and consolation begins to mingle little by little with his penitence, and joy-working thoughts quiver from time to time in him, and he sees in himself that he can easily gather his thought from digression. These things [happen] when he has fully entered this age, for thought is changed into [another] thought, the usual one into another thought not similar to it, and it is not natural the [things] that fall into the intelligence, but he begins to intuit also mysterious understandings, hidden in the psalms and reading and the rest of the sensible events, and the *theoría*⁷³ of the works of his practice. The sweetness then begins to mingle with his practice, either with his fasting or with the verses of his officium or the rest of the works of his practice. As soon as the prayer has begun, the senses have withdrawn, not by the will, and the thoughts have begun to gather, for they have perceived a freer air, superior to the struggles, and he sees that the ship of his thought runs clear, through growth in prayer and virtues, [more and more] ahead, day by day.

These things, with others greater than themselves, are consistent with the middle age, until man is raised by Christ's gift of mercy to the conduct that is beyond nature.

45. As long therefore as you are still in the first age, labor especially in the long office of the Psalms, [in] much recitation and [in] the work of reading the Books, accompanying them with a protracted hunger, which by its fervor purges and cleanses the body. This is capable of bestowing the remission of former sins, through its laborious hardships, more than any [other] work. It is the great power of penance, and the former habits, by which you had been accustomed to the turpitudes of transgression of the Law, are humbled by hunger.
46. When then by heavenly help you have already approached the second age, according to the word of the fathers, and have begun to perceive in yourself your coming to it from the signs that were described before, because you see some of them in your soul, diminish a little your former labors, without severing the roots of their continuity, but because you mutate some of them into others, working in prayers and invocations even more than in the psalms - not ceasing these, but because you give them a greater space, making room enough for them, more than for recitation, even in the office, in addition to those [made] in the other

⁷³ The sense, that is, or intelligible richness proper to the works, of monastic observances.

hours. Hence, then, you will see the *parresia* that you receive day after day in prayer, and your heart prevailing over the humbled thoughts and passions, and your thought continually exulting and rejuvenated by prayer. And you will see yourself at every moment as having become another, because of the renewal you will receive with the help that [proceeds] from grace, and *the divine power that covers you* (cf. Luke 1:35)⁷⁴ in guarded stillness.

47. Since man begins the conduct of thought, which is the continual meditation on divine things, and until he comes to the spiritual conduct, which is the wonder in God, he needs more than any [other] work of the prayers of violence, performed in genuflection, without ceasing fasting at all, but taking of his food just enough to keep his body up in all this work of prayers, When then he has approached that conduct which is the third age and has begun to walk within its boundary, behold, hence he is [to be] out of all conduct of violence, since he is drawn at all times to those [actions] which were then violently performed by the compulsion of pleasure. By putting an end to violence, wonder draws him to them, without [his] will. For he is continually visited [lit.: found] by the delight of the understandings, fallen on his face, and in prayer there [are] neither thought nor sense, nor there [is there] digression or meditation though there is perception. I do not speak here of the perfect wonder at the adorable nature of the *Lord of the Lordships* (Deut. 10:17; 1 Tim. 6:15), by whom the mind is lifted up beyond the lower [realities] and any perception, but I do say that wonder falls in the soul at *his economy full of distinctions* (cf. Eph. 3:9-10), which [is accomplished] in the worlds and [in] the generations, and at what is wrought every day and at every moment precisely in man, whether secretly or manifestly.
48. When the intellect is moved by grace into spiritual realities, by the sweetness of knowledge it puts an end to [all] thought and memory, for a long time, being quiet and amazed. I do not speak of total recollection, when the motions of the intellect are changed into astonishment in divine contemplation [or], rather, it remains [completely] motionless for a whole day or two or more. What [proceeds] immediately from contemplations or other revelations [is] not the total cessation of thought and the exodus of nature from knowledge to non-knowledge, superior to knowledge, as the fathers say,⁷⁵ but [here] intoxication and

74 The verb *aggen* (covered, protected, dwelt) recurs in the Syriac version of two important verses of the N.T.: in Jn 1:14 ("and dwelt among us") and Lk 1:35 ("the power of the Most High will cover you"). Particularly with reference to this second place in the spiritual literature of Syria it takes on, partly through the influence of pseudo-Macarian texts, a technical sense related to the operation of the Spirit on and in the individual: see S.Brock, "Maggnanuta: a Technical Term in East Syrian Spirituality and its Background," in *Mélanges A. Guillaumont*, Genève 1988, pp. 121-129 (on Isaac pp. 121-123). To the texts quoted there may be added, for example, what an author a little later than Isaac, Simon of Taibuteh, writes in *A Discourse said on the day of the consecration of the cell, on a brother's exit from the coenoby*, still unpublished (and which I read in Vat. syr. 509, ff. 50a-61a, here 5 la): "And if you are not assiduous [in sitting] in your cell, in the likeness of a hen sitting on eggs, until the cell has mercy on you and draws you to itself, grace will not cover you (cf. Lk. 1:35) nor will the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and of divine charity germinate in you." Note that the operation of grace can also become the operation of the very places where, all surrendered to God, the Spirit most clearly visits us: the cell, indeed, but the desert, especially (cf. further 4:54).

75 The probable reference is to the Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite, whom Isaac surely knew: cf. for example the quotation from *De divinis nominibus*, in B 22:208. The theme of the excellence of non-knowledge is found developed in several places in his writings: cf. at least, in that same work, VII, 3 (Dionysius Areopagite, *All Works*, Milan 1981, pp. 354-355; for more, cf. H.C.Puech, "La ténèbre mystique chez le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite," now in *En quête de lagnose I*, Paris 1978, pp. 119-141, especially pp. 123-124 and 127-129). It is important to emphasize this debt because it is in clear tension, if not contradiction, with the Evagriian legacy. For Evagrius, the intellect "is by its very nature an image of the divine nature. It was created 'in the divine vision' and remains 'capable' of it by virtue of its original 'nature,'" although such "receptivity" "must properly be called a grace" (I.Hausherr, "*Ignorance infime*," now in *in epistola*, Rome 1966, pp. 38-49, here 43 and 45). For him, there is no surpassing of the intellect (ecstasy), but recollection within it, to the rising in it, through union with Christ, of the divine light. Isaac also witnesses here a philologically precarious

fervor of heart are accompanied by peace and joy. Total amazement in prayer and perfect absence of perception of things here do not happen in any of the spiritual knowledge and pleasures, outside [that']one. Moreover, even if astonishment happens in a man and the palate of his mind tastes spiritual delight, in fact he is not [thereby] also external to the knowledge of here, but the thoughts are entrenched within him, though quenched by the usual consideration: therefore the knowledge is guarded in him and he hears and perceives. He is, however, certainly entrenched [far] from rambling and has no access to the meditation of anything but is admired and is silent for the pleasure of the spiritual understanding that has fallen into him or is bowed down to the ground for the compulsion of this unspeakable sweetness. And since the body cannot bear to support it, since his senses are clenched and his limbs firm, he falls without will face to the ground, drawn out in his thought from earthly things, as if his ship rested in future conduct, there being in him some deep perception and without regard for what [is] here. All this is drawn from the pleasure of spiritual understanding that he intuits. They know what I say who in themselves have received proof of it.

This is so. That then nature, for the duration of [whole] days, as it is written of the fathers, is beyond thoughts, knowledge and sensation, this happens only in the perception of God. In the rest, even if the intellect is quieted, it has in it the perception of here. As [regards] God, [on the other hand], when the intellect has a revelation, there remains in it [no] perception.

49. The door [that leads] to joy in our Lord opens before you to the extent that worldly thoughts fade in intelligence. As long as you do not perceive this joy, there is no way for your thoughts to tighten a continuous recollection in prayer. All the holy fathers found diminishment in the struggle against thoughts, which is rest from rambling, in the waning of thoughts themselves. Whereas, on the other hand, thoughts dwelt in the intelligence with their multitude, they had not been able, by their strength, to find, in the sign of combat, the recollection of thought in prayer, until the thoughts had received quiet by their waning. But it is not possible to find this amidst constant encounters with human men and human things. If then you will say, I am not capable of all this continual captivity, without ceasing, or of detachment from the world in sitting [in a cell], then, my brother, be patient also not to ask for that which those who have led themselves above the world possess, quietness from the turmoil of thoughts, which is, it, the cause of joy, and recollection at the time of prayer in an eager thought of God, which here becomes worthy of purity of heart because it continually makes secession from the world, beyond the will, through continual rest in God in thought. Indeed, thoughts wane or multiply and man approaches purity or an overabundance of struggle also in accordance with the place of dwelling.
50. How often does the lonely man perceive the being moved of thoughts beyond the flesh, even as he diminishes his labors, because of the remoteness of habitation! And this for the great death to men.
51. Man receives stillness from thoughts to the extent that he turns away from the settlement of the world and enters lonely and desolate places and [his] heart perceives the distance from

"connection" between conflicting traditions. Between Pseudo-Dionysius and Evagrius it was nevertheless being attempted in that same century, but in the Greek sphere, also by Maximus the Confessor (cf. I.Hausherr, "*Ignorance infime*," inop. cit., pp. 48-49).

all nature of man. For, my brother, in a desolate place the sorrow that [proceeds] from thoughts is not great, nor are we fatigued by the great combat with them. Indeed, the sight of a desolate place naturally causes the heart to die to worldly motions and shrouds it against the pressure of thoughts.

52. Just as it is not possible for the vision of one who stands near smoke to be clear, unless he has moved away and shifted from there, so it is not possible to acquire purity of heart and quiet from thoughts without a solitary life, far from the smoke of this world, which exhales before the senses and blinds the eyes of the soul.
53. Let no one demonstrate an empty science and contradict this: when we are in a [human] settlement we have the thoughts of the settlement, but when we are in a desolate place we have the thoughts of the desolate place; when we are with many, we have the thoughts of the many, but when we are loose from everything we possess a solitary intelligence. What are the thoughts of a desolate place? The motions that come out of a dead heart. It is not possible that, dead to the world in our motions, we are not moved in God. It is necessary for the stillness of worldly motions to make room for the quivers in God and [that] in the vexations of the body we acquire a solitary intellect.
54. Consume your body in tribulations and labors in those places, that is, in desert regions, for thus shall its purity remain in it, lest your body, fallen, through customs come again to sloth and be full of passions. Thus we may not be deprived of our former labors, and we shall quickly have access to the freedom of the soul, superior to the world, through the quiet from the thoughts with which the desert *covers* us (cf. Lk. 1:35), and we shall grasp at every moment, in our soul, through the renewal of the mind, the divine nods and easily receive the gift of God.
55. For if, my brother, thou seest that thy soul faileth by reason of the labors and afflictions of quietness and loneliness, by reason of the fact that it is saddened by this [mortal] life, for it seeth that even now it hath begun to fail by reason of the body, which is already ready to give way, and seest then that the thought at this sight is weakened, oppose to it a just thought and the intelligence of the fear of God, of Him who is indeed, and comfort thy soul knowing that a short life in righteousness is better, according to God's will, than long days in the provocation of [his] wrath, remembering also the life of the earlier saints who did not think of themselves rather than of God's will and [who] all endured such a life, whether in [human] settlements or in desolate places, until they forsook and left this *body of humiliation* (Phil. 3:21), because of which they found and accomplished with difficulty the way of the fear of God. They in the hour approaching their departure from the world rejoiced greatly because they had been able by the few tribulations here to escape the evils that strike the soul to make [it] perish and had been found in familiarity with God at the time of their exodus.
56. If you desire elevation beyond the passions, learn first the pitfalls [present] in battles. I will therefore speak a word to you, and you listen to me: you shall not attempt to overcome the passions in combat. The passions are not won in combat, but you shall weaken the passions and not give battle to them at all like the inexperienced. You will never enter the battle for purity of soul: those who want to enter the region of purity under this sign will never perceive even peace of thoughts, for they will not rise above the cloudiness of intelligence,

nor will they reach the regions of clarity. You, on the other hand, take away from the passions their nourishment because it is [this] the purpose of art. See what each of them nourishes and be thou insidious toward them. Having weakened the passions, [even] the thoughts have been diminished, for they are their smoke; having diminished the thoughts, the intellect is quenched from vehemence; having quenched the intellect, it is easy for it to recollect within its region and can see [its own] nature. Through the recollection of the intellect we will easily enter purity, by the gift of Christ.

57. As long as man stands in battle and still gives battle, it is not possible for him to meet the light of the intellect or [to] perceive the peace of thoughts. *There is no [glad] announcement in the day of battle*, as Qohelet (8:8) said, and all that is accomplished of the divine [actions] is done with much labor and tribulation, for there is no consolation in any of man's labors: whether he approaches prayer or officium or asceticism, he can accomplish [them] all [only] in violence, for all his practice is still [full] of sloth. Instead, he is consoled somewhat by reading, but he is sometimes obscured even in this, because in his practice aimed at God he still walks in the region of darkness. This is the time of the examination of the soul, in which man's will is examined by the sorrows [suffered] for divine things, if he bears willingly the tribulations [endured] for the truth, which press upon the body and the mind. When by God's grace the time of strife has passed [away] from him, then he enters, in his soul, the region of joy, and with each passing day he finds in his soul a stupendous change, according to the word of the fathers. But until he has risen beyond this region of strife neither does he find true consolation or is elevated beyond the conduct of violence, which is all full of sloth.
58. When therefore the solitary person has passed to the other [region] and has perceived rest from the passions, then he encounters the light of intelligence and becomes worthy, through peace from thoughts, of the recollection of the intellect, and in the recollection of the intellect he enters into that light of intelligence of which the fathers say.⁷⁶ The disturbance of many thoughts is a sign of a multitude of passions.
59. Purity is the quiet region of nature, which the door of the passions keeps closed. If man does not open this door, he does not enter the quiet region of nature. If one has become worthy of reaching it, he-as I believe-receives the perception of his own renewal from the pure nods moved in his mind.
60. For man, with the cessation for him of the order of agonism in entering the next order, begins the priesthood of the intellect, which is the order of the inner man's conduct.
61. When man has gathered himself with divine aid from the consideration to him outwardly and from [the fact] that he has become many, [and] has become a man [in himself] one, then from here he begins to see in himself new things and finds in himself sensibly and secretly hints and signs, and from here he tastes in mystery the renewal of which in the end all will become worthy, for many times even in the midst of the hours of the day he perceives in himself that the intellect is gathered in itself, without concern for itself, in an inexplicable silence. Let those who read understand! This happens to him even in officiating and sometimes in reading. Even the dreaming and the movements in the dreaming of those who

⁷⁶ Cf. note 8, p. 77.

have become worthy of purity of soul are different from [those] of those who are passionate in thought or still fight in battle against the passions [lit.: those].

62. When you desire to know your stature, which you are, or whether your soul stands on the way or out of it, and your steadfastness or defect, test your soul in prayer: for it is the mirror of the soul, in the spectacle of its spots or [of] its beauty. There falsehoods or beauties of thought are manifested. It explores whether it is neglected or solicitous, whether one works only in body or intelligence or both, whether one recedes in his thinking from the world or is bound to someone or something. In the time of prayer you see clearly by what the intellect is moved or in what motions it quivers: [whether] in [those] of God or in those of nature and the world, [whether] it is strong against the passions or weak. You will ask an inquiry of your soul about all these things better than at any [other] time in [that of] prayer. This I say if you are cautious and doubt that you [can] easily understand your own by the subtlety of your conduct. In the time of sloth, if one has not been blinded by manifest passions, he knows himself even outside the times of prayer, but these [counsels] will be guarded for conduct in quietness and the length of time in it. For there the ways become thin and one falls into doubt, whether he is in a good way or a bad way.
63. We should also know this: more excellent is the consolation given to man in prayer and office than that [given] in the reading or viewing of creatures, although these also are great stature. There is in fact also a distinction between the consolations that men of [perfect] stature receive as well from the Books and verses that make them admired, and those that console and rejoice intermediate men. Understand then that it is more humbling the consolation which the solitary man receives from external matters in the movement of the tongue or through sight and hearing than that which falls into his mind from the heart without mediator, in a solitary way, or through prayer which is more internal than the lips or is manifested to him suddenly and without matters. This is a revelation of the Spirit and is the type of prophecy, for the heart, prophesying, prophesies, since the Spirit manifests to it hidden things, over which even the Holy Books have no power. The pure mind can know what has not been allowed to be manifested to the Book, even more than has been delivered to the Book. Yet the source of all this is reading, and from it proceeds the beauty of thought.

Elucidation. All this is generated by reading, and pure prayer is also generated by reading. The recollection of thought proceeds from reading, and from it all that is delivered and comes to perception in the mind. Any prayer not generated by the great continuity of reading resembles a body that has no feet and wants to run. I say reading that which is suitable for the intellects, which [makes them] move with its understandings to their purpose.

64. Since we are going to speak of matters relating to prayer, due to the fact that many also wish to learn the stature of their soul, in what [degrees] is that which is known in prayer, we will briefly distinguish the stature therein. Make thyself subtle in thy motions and purify and gather thy intelligence from digression, and let us pay great attention to the intellect, until we pass into that admirable room which is cessation of all observance, for within it is divine rest! For the whole firm course of man's beautiful conduct, of those who have despised the spectacle of visible and corruptible things, aims at this, at becoming worthy of pure prayer and delighting in it.

65. First actually guard this remembrance in your intelligence: we are not about to speak of the things [placed] above nature, but [of] those which are [proper] to nature and are placed in the order of pure prayer-many doubt them! -, because of the fact that in them [takes place] the race of a multitude of solicitous and illustrious brethren: it [indeed], in [this] room and according to the change of its stature, passes through each of them and them nature must [then] pass over to those [that transcend it].

This reading is for those who are vigilant and possess the law of prayer and are disciples of stillness. Work and investigation in these things -- guarding in prayer the terms of one's thought and learning the change of its motions -- will instead seem a vain occupation to him whose conduct, manner and stature are different.

See therefore and examine the path of thought in the times of prayer, under what sign its course is, and see [whether] its prayer flows fluently and copiously or briefly and poorly, and [whether] the latter [eventuality] depends on the stuttering of thought or whether it is restrained in leaning forward by the much light of intellection. The prayer of some is flowing, [that] of others [is] different; the prayer of some is quiet, [that] of others is trembling and fervent; some pray from the depths of the mind, others in the flow of thoughts; it comes out of the groans of some, or otherwise unbearable empites gush from within it. Hence, from the distinctions that have been made, the stature of each is in fact also clear, which he has grown even from the accidentality of the movements present in each stature.

Also from the proper continuity of movements, then, the man who is in the order of penance knows who has begun to see the splendor of his soul or [who] is walking in the part of the way of penance or [has] accomplished it and begun to receive the first-fruits of the delights, that is, the gifts that [come] after penance.

However, all this is proper to the solicitous. For the part of the slothful is not in any of the things that have been said, but [here is the part] of those who bear the burdens of the things pertaining to prayer, to whom it is proper, of necessity, to take care of the law of it.

However, let us come to what is true and briefly shed light on smaller than high stature.

66. The frequency of movements during prayer is not a high part in pure prayer, though beautiful, but it is [characteristic] of ardor, when it occurs with the purpose of penance and is mixed with it with suffering or consistent with a beautiful joy. It therefore proceeds from the second or third order. I do not say that you walk without a way when you are in this, but I said that in fact it is not among the major ones; it is [one] of the intermediate ones. On the other hand, the most valuable and principal [characteristics] present in pure prayer [are] the paucity and brevity of movements and the fact that in it, in the paucity of prayer, thought looks on as if in admiration. And hence one of [these] two [possibilities] happens to the thought in the brief motion that quivers in it: either it is locked in silence, by the power of the knowledge which the intellect receives in the verse, or it is held back in pleasure by that which is moved with the purpose of the prayer, and the heart is exercised, without change to anything else, in the desire of inexhaustible charity.

These are the main [characteristics] of pure prayer, and you will have these clues in the time of prayer. See in which of these distinctions the thought is in the [various] parts of the prayer, [whether] in the first or later distinctions.

67. The abundance of the words of the prayer, which the heart gushes forth fluently and richly, and the frequency of different motions are a sign of the ardor and an indication that the thought has not yet perceived the light present in them nor hitherto experienced the knowledge that in the hour of prayer illumines the inner eye, but [that] it receives power from that which the heart gushes forth, that is, the lips. If the thought perceives the power of that which it prays and shines in the inner truth of the words, this is the signal: this perception does not let it advance or increase the richness of the words, but immediately obliges it to one of the two [possibilities] which we quickly explained before.
68. We also know this: the extent and duration of the prayer do not depend on the copiousness of the words, the length of the verses and their change, but on the source of the knowledge and power of the verses manifested in that hour to the thought. From this we learn that when the thought is enlightened in prayer, the insight does not arise in him at every word of the invocation or every verse of the office, but that one little verse receives power and shines, and it turns to perception from that verse that has been enlightened in him: until then there had been a stream [of words] bursting forth and going out. As long as the light of that verse rises in thought, nature cannot abandon it and move on to another verse; if it has shunned it, then it can move on to another. In whichever of them it is enlightened, there it remains, for it is quiet and stands. How [is] then [possible], when the thought is in a beautiful way, the flow of frequent movements, long words and the flow of various verses? If [it is] so, when one has prayed with exactness in the opening of intelligence, he cannot yet turn to the manifold.
69. With this I do not praise the impediment of thought, but the fact that it is kept from flowing by great illumination. Nor do I despise frequent prayer or impede long officiating, but I shed light on the excellent order that [is] in them, show the gifts in them, and point out the stature of each one's thought in prayer and officiating. Therefore let the light of our thought in the hour of supplication not investigate the abundance of the verses of the prayer and the richness of the words in it, but [investigate] this: whether, even in the case [such richness] is modest, the thought is seen to easily receive the power therein and to be cloaked with the internal delight in the words placed as the organ of the prayer, and [whether], through them, the intellect receives the outpouring of words transcending the composition, within which is placed the silence of the understandings, which is the exact prayer of the incorporeal nature in us, which is the Gnostic mind.
70. Do not be tedious about the length of the office and the extent of our prayers and the many repetitions in them because what I have said is generated for us by the work [aimed] at the repetition of the words and [by] the patience of the lingering in them. We only know not to deem them and judge them the fruit, but the root, for without them the fruit would not even be seen, and it will fall into our hand. We also know that just as the fruit is sought by us every day and every moment to nourish and delight in it, so we also deprive ourselves of the fruit that through them sometimes is seen, if we despise and tear away as if they also did not

serve, which are the root. Let no man forsake the indispensable continuity in them as long as they clothe the flesh. Let no one here be troubled: they have a term.

71. It is not fitting that he who [has] the stature and has possessed the yearning for God, after coming out of the world should remain long in the assembly, in the coming and going with many, but after a little while, having learned the course of the fraternity, the order and purpose of the habit, and the manner of its humiliation, should resolve to be alone in the cell, lest he should acquire the habit of the many, and the simplicity of his beginning should not be changed into cunning by habit with the unsuspecting brethren present among us. I have seen many who, at the beginning of their exodus from the world, as soon as they came to the fraternal house, were clear and innocent, and who, after a [certain] time, by excessive community life, became cunning and reckless, nor again found their former innocence. Therefore decide for trade with one elder alone, who bears upon himself the testimony of fine observances and [the] knowledge of quietness; with him alone have trade and practice and learn the conduct of quietness. From then on, do not have commerce with others, for then, in a short time, you will become worthy to taste knowledge.⁷⁷
72. After God has made you worthy of the gift of quietude for you to do penance alone, you should not wander through many books. Clarity does not happen by great doctrine and [by] various books [read], but by solicitude in prayer. In what does knowledge of many books and their interpretations really benefit recollection of thought and purity in prayer? Any solitary person, after abandoning the conduct of the world, who reads any book outside the books relating to the conduct of solitaries, whether scholastic or worldly, has [already], beforehand, destroyed the purpose of the way of solitaries and then [only] his thought has stooped to seek delight in them. Even if they make you ascend to heaven, it does not profit you to read books, except those that teach the conduct of foreigners.⁷⁸ For perfection of knowledge and clarity of thought the books of the New [Testament] and [those] concerning the conduct of solitaries are sufficient. After you have come at least a little to clarity, read [as well], and you will not be harmed. Behold: I have borne witness to you about everything.

Elucidation. For our charity advises each person, in accordance with the age in which he is, to adhere to the book suitable for the purpose. The medicine is in accordance with the pain. He who comes more or less to the health of the soul profits from everything.

These tips are for those who in their purpose are penitent and have a desire for purity.

73. If you seek true consolation in prayer, cure your conscience. [If] you seek correction of conscience, cure prayer. The cure of each works in its companion purification. The correction of conscience makes the purity of prayer and the purity of prayer procures the parousia of conscience.
74. Purity is not guarded by confusion nor the remembrance of God by consideration of affairs and mingling with things. For many, having thrown themselves into such turmoil for the sake of righteousness, cease the greater part of righteousness. Thinking that all the

⁷⁷ The text of this chapter can be found published in Appendix I of B, pp. 582-583.

⁷⁸ That is, solitaries, who make themselves strangers to the world by abandoning it both in body and soul. For they live far from men, gathered in God.

distinctions of righteousness and all the commandments of our Lord are said to a single man and [that] he is bound [so as] to keep them all, they do not know that each of the commandments of our Lord is said in relation to a class and [that] not all the commandments are useful to a single person. Otherwise how does the saying: *Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted* (Mt 5:4) resemble the saying: *Blessed are the peace-makers for they shall be called children of God* (Mt 5:9)? How is it that he who sits in weeping and wailing and crying day and night gives [all] himself in going about and pacifying the angry and making peace among the many? Or like the saying, *Be vigilant and pray always* (the v. quoted here is, albeit with inversion of exhortations, that of Eph. 6:18),: *Enter your chamber and shut your door and pray to your Father who[is] in hiding* (Mt 6:6) resembles that: *I was sick and you visited me, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was in prison and you came to me* (Mt 25:35-36)? How is it that you command people to watch and pray in their own rooms, to visit the sick and roam the prisons and take care of strangers? But the saying, *Go into your chamber and watch and pray to God in hiding* (Mt 6:6) is consistent with that, *Blessed are those who mourn* (Mt 5:4), so that prayer may be made clear through weeping and quietude, and through prayer [one] may receive the consolation of those who weep, which is not accomplished by weeping unless he dwells alone with himself. In the world, too, is this the law of weeping, that one, in the days of mourning, cares for nothing but weeping alone, devoid of the care of other things. Weeping is a solitary suffering found only in the heart, and it is not possible for one to be persuaded to his weeping if in himself he finds consolation in relation to what he weeps for. In fact even without the manifest weeping there is the hidden weeping, effused in thought. He then who bears in his heart continual suffering for his sins, or [he] on whose heart sadness spreads at the remembrance of our Lord's humiliation or for the suffering relating to sinful men, [or] perhaps is made sad and sorrowful on account of heavenly things, on account of their continual expectation, not being consoled by anything of this world unless he finds the object of his desire, for which he suffers, these are a continual penitent,⁷⁹ even without visible tears on his body. He who has acquired within himself one of these [perceptions] continually weeps in his concealment.

Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted (Mt 5:4). Even if your consolation tarries, illustrious penitent, do not grieve: before you pass from this world your bliss will arise for you and it will then melt you from the body.

75. Initial principles of the conduct of solitaries [are] privation, stillness and the absence of ties toward man and thing. The practice in it [is] endurance of events, humility and prayer. The fruits that [proceed] from it, access to hope and the delight of joy in God. The good outcome of this [is] receiving the keys in order to the glorious mysteries of the Spirit. The end of the way is the relish of charity and the parousia that [proceeds] from this toward the One whom one has loved.

It is manifest that he by whom the beginnings of the way-that is, deprivation and quiet-are not known, neither has humility and prayer. Deprived of these, of necessity he is also

⁷⁹ Lett.: "whiner," because of the continuous weeping he pours out because of his sins.

troubled by sins; he who is a sinner not only has no place in the kingdom, but has also acquired a certain place in Gehenna.⁸⁰

76. Do you want to know the man of God? Learn [to recognize] him by his continual silence, his weeping and the continuity [with which he waits] for his soul.
77. Do you want to know the man whose heart is broken? [Learn to recognize him] by his much talking, [by the] disturbance of his senses and the fact that he quarrels about whatever is said, in order to win in it. He who has tasted the truth does not even quarrel about the truth. He who seems to be zealous for men on account of the truth, he has not yet learned the truth, such as it is. For when he has truly learned it, he will also desist from zeal for it. The gift of God and his knowledge are not a cause of agitation and shouting, but where the Spirit and charity and humility dwell it is [a place] wholly full of peace, and this is the sign of the coming of the Spirit, that he in whom he has taken up residence is made perfect in them. The truth is God. The thought that has perceived God does not even have a tongue to speak, he has dwelt in his heart in great rest and has no motion of zeal nor quarrel, no motion of fury nor [other] motion [immediately] on account of faith, no desire for anything, nor does the will of his soul desire to do, but his soul dwells in great peace, without speech, and in great stillness. In fact man is moved by ignorance [to work zealously] for the sake of the ignorance of others and their correction.
78. If zeal were useful for the correction of men, why would God the Word have clothed a body to turn the world with gentleness and humble ways to his Father and stretched himself on the cross for sinners and delivered that holy body to passion for the world? But I say that God did not do this for any other [reason] than [that] to make known to the world the charity that he has, so that we might be made prisoners of his charity through [that] our superabundant charity which [proceeds] from the perception of this, so that through the death of his Son the great power of the kingdom of heaven, which is charity, might be made possible. Our Lord's death was not to save us from sins, not at all, nor for any other [reason] than [that] only that the world might perceive the charity that God had for creation.

If all this wondrous action of His had been only for the remission of sins, it would have been enough for Him to save in some other [way]. Who would have resisted if He had done what He did by a simple death? However, He did not do His death that way, in a simple way, so that you might understand what this mystery is, but He tasted it in the bitter passion of the cross. [And] what need was there even of the insults and spitting? Death was enough; His death alone, without the other things that happened, was enough for our salvation. Oh, the life-filled wisdom of God! Now have you understood and perceived why the coming of our Lord and all things following it took place, until with His [own] holy mouth He clearly narrated the reason for it? For it is written: *So God loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son* (Jn. 3:16) - which is the [fulfilled] economy for its renewal.⁸¹

We, therefore, do not fear to assume this intelligence of the mysteries of our Lord's

⁸⁰ The text of this chapter can be found published in Appendix I of B, p. 583.

⁸¹ In the margin, "Commentator's elucidation. How then does he say that he gave his only begotten Son, since it is very clear that it is not possible for the deity to suffer? But by conjunction they are one and, therefore, even if the other is the one who suffered, likewise the whole thing is referred to the deity."

economy, for this [rather] altogether detracts from the death of Christ and His coming into the world, that we make our salvation from sin the cause of it. Was it then [so] altogether stronger the power of sin than the divine power, that [this], wanting its destruction, could not destroy it except by the death of Christ-that is, [by] the mystery of our Lord's economy- so that it almost freed us from the bondage of sin? Then, if we look only at the outward appearance of the Book, if we had not sinned there would have been no coming, of the Christ, nor would the Christ have died, for it would not have been possible for God the Word to clothe our body, that which He clothed for the sins of the world. And if death had not ruled over us with the tyranny of sin, there would have failed, it seems, this mystery of revelation in the flesh, and men and angels would have been deprived of all this light and knowledge. Shall we therefore conveniently give thanks to sin, for which we have received all these goods? And shall we claim to it the cause of all these wonders, since the holy angels also received the great good of now through sin, since it made them worthy of the mystery of Christ's coming? For if sin had not been committed, we could therefore say that for us and for them there would have been [no] hope of the future world, so that we would delight in it as now. Why then is sin blamed, since it has procured all these goods? Thus, if our Lord's death and his passion and the whole mystery of his coming and his life on earth had been wholly for our salvation from sin and for our deliverance from Gehenna - he himself being the judge and he the one who suffered and rendered the debt, and there [were] no other mysteries hidden in that, in comparison with which sin is nothing, since it needs all this solicitude, to the point of subjecting the Son of God to all these insults, then, as I have said, claim sin as the cause [of] all these wonders, as if we had had none [of them] if we had not been subjected to its operation and sin had given us that of which, had we remained in righteousness, we would not have become worthy.

Now it is not so. Let it not be that as children we investigate the Lord's economy and such a powerful mystery in order to the persuasion concerning Him and remain outside the Book! Even if it is not permitted to every man to open this door and to take out of the way the term set by nature, still, in the silence of the tongue, which is the hidden and mysterious region, it is permitted to the children of mystery to investigate in awe and admiration the economy of God and the hidden and concealed riches within the [character] manifest of the verses of the Books. Those who by grace have received knowledge and obtained the gift of understandings and have entered within the mysteries that are bodily traced by ink do not know the wonder-filled economy of Christ only in things manifest and known.

Glory, adoration, and thanksgiving, in the first-fruits of our kind, now and at all times and for ever and ever to the Trinity, adorable mystery, which has caused to be lifted up for us the secret of its distinct essential hypostases in the mystery of charity, which it has manifested in our flesh to delight in everything. Amen.⁸²

79. One is the cause of the existence of the world and the coming of Christ into the world, the revelation of God's great charity, which moved both into existence.⁸³

82 The text of this chapter can be found published in Appendix I of B, pp. 583-586. A Latin version of it, with brief commentary, had been published in 1932 by I.Hausherr under the title, "Un précurseur de la théorie scotiste sur la fin de l'Incarnation," now in *Etudes de spiritualité orientale*, Rome 1969, pp. 1-5.

83 The text of this chapter can be found published in Appendix I of B, pp. 586-587.

80. Mirroring the vehemence of God's charity for creation is the coming of Christ into the world. Mirror of the charity of these, the ways of his humiliation.⁸⁴
81. As God has made known his highest charity, in which he brought the worlds into existence, in the economy of the Christ, in the repetition of this [charity] for us, so, as to its repetition in the Christ, he has shown that he will clearly show its meaning to beings endowed with reason in the future world.
82. The intoxication and ready charity for the Creator in the future world will operate in all the exact contemplation of Christ's passion and humiliation.
83. Just as this world was not enough to receive the glory of future greatness, so the weakness of this nature that we clothe is not enough to receive the mystery of what God will work in regard to creation in the new world.
84. My beloved ones, the mystery hidden in our Lord's economy is higher even than the remission of sins and the dissolution of death. My brethren, the hope now hidden from us is more admirable and elevated than what we now understand of it, to aid our growth. It is still convenient to understand in weak things the rest that is left, for not all the world rises [yet] in the perfect intelligence of faith and [in] the good conduct of children. For its multitude still needs to be instructed in things that are fearful and that do harm.
85. For just as the names and metaphors [and] even the passionate designations of wrath, fury, and judgment, [or] even the corporeality of the connotations, etc., referred to God from the economy [enacted] in creation, when one, by the power of the Spirit's operation, has risen to true contemplation, are too defective and weak in relation to its quality, so the weak verses which the Book refers to the cause of the coming of the Christ are too defective and low in relation to the true cause of its economy in regard to the worlds. [The] spiritual natures, those who do not even know sinners or [who] have never served among their classes, who have been raised to those degrees in the revelation of the Christ, testify to this.
86. Far greater is the economy administered in regard to the higher worlds and the mysteries revealed in them than [have] been in regard to us, although the occasion has been taken by us, as also in their nature and dwelling they are higher and subtler than we [in ours] and are nearer to God than we are, as if they were constituted second after God and [were] light following the Light and cubicles of the King and fiery hosts arrayed before the palace, capable [of complying] with his wills, not prevented by the flesh from keenly scrutinizing the mysteries of his holiness, far from passibility, resembling God as far as [the] creature is aware of it in the mind, first servants, even, of the mysteries of Christ, mediators for the inner sanctifications of his economy, guards of his fiery throne with the venerable murmurs of their sanctifications, superior to the corporeal world, natural mantle of glory and [of] invisible light, imprint of the first light.
87. All that the higher creation of angels has received, both in nature and in honor of now, beyond nature, exceeds what [our creation has received]. In the future world [God] will give us fully all theirs, without subtraction and defect of anything that they have received, without making the second part of the creation inferior to the first part, which are, now, the spiritual. Ultimately indeed he will make us perfect in all that is theirs, in spirituality and

⁸⁴ The text of this chapter can be found published in Appendix I of B, p. 587.

immortality, in the absence of hunger and impassibility, in the inner mysteries and in the upper region of the dwelling place, with the rest [of that] which now, as it seemed good to him, he has given first to them, without offense of the one part of creation in relation to the other, be it not! It is one his charity, toward us and toward the holy angels, toward sinners as toward the righteous, and [it] testifies to the assumption of our Lord of among us. Great is the necessity of our faults now, for by them are administered all the economies of God, and they, over which we shall be constituted, are of advantage to us and to the angels. Agreed, however, that now the will of each of us should be manifested in comparison with His acts. Not for Him, but for us, so that even the multitude of His mercy, which He would manifest, would become sweeter to us [placed] in comparison with our inequality, as the Book said: *He to whom little is remitted loves little* (Luke 7:47). Vehement is the love of him to whom much is remitted. For if he had not first been consigned to condemnation because of the greatness of his debt, he would have thought it due what he would eventually receive. For not even one righteous will be found who at the coming of judgment does not rise in condemnation.

88. For this reason also the diseases of the creation of now and the fact that He made us for a moment inferior to the angels and our position and education in this world, at first, and the inclination [placed] in us, which perhaps He made the occasion of all His economies towards us, in fearful as well as in glorious things, from the beginning until here, [and] of the concealment of His great mercy and His vigorous power,... all this is known to the intelligent, [but not] to the many, to those who persistently ask the Factor: Why did you not make us so, as they are, from the beginning and [not] place us in future glory? - they, who know not what they say nor the great reasons why the weak things are arranged, since from the things herein it was necessary that the pleasure of the kingdom of heaven should be confirmed.

Elucidation. If one will say, What benefit will [come] to the children and the rest, to those who are unaware? We are persuaded of this: they will be made perfect with the universe.

89. Whence would we have known the long-suffering of God if [there] had not been the sickness and weakness of nature? Whence would we have known the vigorous power of the Creator if there had not been the change of nature and the great power [inherent] in the elements had not been moved, in chastisements, against the unconvinced? How would the occasion of the Lord's coming and of the many things He showed in His economy in it have been established, as a demonstration of His greatness and a revelation of His charity? How would it have been possible for us to delight in the charity of the kingdom of heaven since the One who gave it to us was not visible, if a visible image had not been assumed by us in which we could see Him clearly? All future [realities] would be ghosts without the weaknesses of this world. Not even the invisible natures would have known that at a nod from the Creator their creation would have been established in that glory, had not the weakness of inclination, whereby it was negligence, brought some of them out from under the providence that governs everything and [had not] severed from them the [divine] ruling disposition and [had not] seemed like a precious stone slipped into the abyss. Therefore God, wise in all things, Lord of all things, ordered this world well in weaknesses and [well] decided to make it as it now proceeds, and did not change to anything else outside of his will, while he aimed at something else, at flawlessness or the absence of inclination or the

non-acceptance of opposition and weakness, while he intended this world to proceed differently, although the Book introduces and proposes other motives as well, now Satan (cf. Wis 2:24), now our disobedience to the first commandment (cf. Rom. 5:12), now different causes-while the true cause of everything is hidden and is with Him, in an altogether different way-according to the saying: *If Adam had not sinned death would not have entered into nature*, when it is manifest, and also his constitution [testifies to it], that for this he was created even before he sinned; or according to the saying: *The Lord repented that he made Adam on the earth and was saddened in his heart* (Gen. 6:6), as if the thing had surprised him at the last [moment], and he had not [seen it] from before he created and it was not thus written: The whole constitution of the world [is] in the intelligence of the Creator (Sir 23:20?); or according to the saying: *The clamor of Sodom is come up to me: I will go down, I will see if it be so* (Gen 18:20-21), as if he needed to learn... with the other things in place of which the Book, while aiming at other the purpose of God's economy, introduces and establishes different reasons, for the benefit of the pupils and for the insufficiency of those who still need instruction. However, God granted understanding of the purpose of the Book and the order and reason of its economy, administered to the first [men], afterwards, in a second age, to the initiates into the truth, [generation] which was more perfect than those of the first, as to the blessed Paul and [the] rest of his disciples after him, who through the Spirit received understandings and explanations.

So understand me also the mystery of the conduct of this world. It has been hidden in it, indeed, a certain sense, and God reveals in part the intelligence of something of it, of that which is concealed from all, from some, according to the time and growth of the world and people.

90. My brethren, if at times and in other chapters we have otherwise given subject matter to the meditation of these and as many [things], with a different purpose, we do not seem to you by our words [of now] to dissolve our [previous] words, but [understand] that, having above walked by the manifest way of the Books, according to [that] stature and [that] place [we have composed them, without having introduced our word into the concealment of the Books. Therefore and that one is true and this one is true, for that is the mystical knowledge and that [is] the common knowledge of the manifest way that the Books have given us. As long as it does not pertain to the stature of one, the hearing does not even receive its word. However, when God wants to bestow it, it helps man and his time has come and, by hearing, he [receives the] gift of it. Then he is introduced by the word into that other [knowledge], which is greater than this, and ever different [things] are revealed to him that cannot be communicated on paper and, with it, also the testimony of the heart.
91. Partial persuasion of thought is the help that man finds in prayer concerning whatever [he] diligently asks for, or [that] he finds in trial, from the question of prayer. Hence one gains confidence in prayer and is confirmed in his faith and acquires great persuasion in his soul, in hope in God.

Elucidation. God's clemency disposes a motion of his eternal will coming forth from him in accordance with man's prayers, out of his mercy toward us, not foolishly abrogating the deliberation of his essential thought in the direction of a holy man, but moving in him the motions of prayers relative to the things which he [himself] will accomplish, so that from

here he may become familiar with God in the hope of his intellect and take care of the custom of prayer, which is continual consideration of God.

92. [On] the first gift given to the solitary in a great and watchful stillness, when the second age-which is the intermediate stature of the practice of solitary life-is fulfilled and he has set his feet on the threshold of the third age-which is spiritual conduct-when the grace of the Spirit covers him (cf. Lk. 1:35): first he is given recollection of thought, and thence he enters into those great gifts, described by the fathers.

If this recollection of thought also happens during the second age-which is the work of psychicity-the help [proceeding] from God is given to one for a little while, only at the time of officiating and praying, in accordance with the custody of his quietness and his separation from men... [if this is lived] in a pure way, then, otherwise not at all, as the blessed John of Apamea also testifies: *His thought gathers for a short time, this because it is not at all pure from [all] wandering.*⁸⁵ When therefore [the solitary] has come to the fulfillment of this conduct of psychicity, then he gradually receives increase, and the gift grows and is invigorated because he has begun to see from afar the harbor. When then he has approached the place of the conduct subsequent to it, then that power fully covers him (cf. Lk 1:35), and hence it is given to him not only at the time of the office and prayer, but also in the rest of the other hours: he is always as if intoxicated with God, and his thoughts are continually, spontaneously gathered into the unspeakable mystery.

93. Sometimes he goes into a meditation or reads the Book, and suddenly [his] thought is clenched, and he is [motionless], for a long time. This is [something] of great men. For even the pausing takes place according to each one's stature: now indeed [one] pauses night and day or more, now less than that.

Elucidation. The work of psychicity is the conduct of penance, which is the intermediate stature of the conduct of the solitary life, that is, the step of penitents. The knowledge of psychicity [is] a deep intelligence, which does not [however] receive [however] the spiritual [realities], because [the spiritual dimension] goes beyond the knowledge of its soul.

94. Let no one be surprised if he does not expeditiously find this recollection of thought, even partial recollection, at the time of officiating and prayer. For it does not depend on the labors of the body alone, nor is it [proper] to little men, nor is it easily found in a short time, but it is given, in the great stillness and work of the heart, to those men who have completely forsaken the world and depose altogether the vision and hearing of men. If then one thus prepares his soul and for the love of God despises the body and the world, he is first made worthy of the partial one, as if to taste a little of it, and then of this, in the likeness of great harvests, and [finally] comes by the grace of Christ to the gift to which there is no comparison. This gift exhort us, beloved ones: let us sever and reject the world from us and rise up, let us run after the Christ!

⁸⁵ Cf. Jean le Solitaire, *Dialogue sur l'âme et les passions des hommes*, traduit par I. Hausherr, Rome 1939, I, p. 28: "He who in his intellect is psychic feels love for doctrine, but he is unable to collect his intellect in prayer except at the price of a great struggle. The gathering of his intellect is then of short duration [or], to put it better, it does not [last] a single instant. Why? Listen: since his soul is in the motions of distraction or in the reflections of knowledge or in the work of the body, because of this these things are stirred up in him at the time of prayer. He would not know how to look at God in a collected way, because his intellect wanders from ghost to ghost...."

95. But one will ask: In what is the thought in those moments, in its sublime recollection? According to what the Book said: *The stillness fell upon Abraham* (Gen. 15:12), and, as it said of Adam: *the Lord God's stillness upon Adam* (Gen. 2:21). The Greek in place of stillness says awe, and the blessed Interpreter, explaining the mystery of awe, says: *Awe calls the fact that one is outside the usual order and outside human perception.*⁸⁶ The solitary fathers then call this the recollection of the intellect that [proceeds] from grace and the first-fruits of the delights of the new world.
96. Until you have perceived at least a little of the motions of humility, by the help of our Lord, you will not feel the relish and help that [proceeds] from your works, nor will your thoughts gather from digression nor will you firmly and patiently sustain the cases that come to you, without disturbance and without agitation. When the thoughts of humility, because of God's mercy to you, begin to move in you firmly, first of all sloth will leave you and you will be given to continual confession, for whether you are hungry or full, whether you are thirsty or destitute or sick or harassed by someone, always you will confess, without your tongue ceasing for a [single] instant from thanksgiving. And thou shalt continually find thyself indebted to all men, always, for everything, and it shall seem to thee that no one lacks toward thee, but thou shalt find to be in thee the cause of every evil, for every vexation that has come upon thee.
97. Hear the truth of the word: until you have found humility, you will be tried more than anything else by sloth, and sloth will generate in you continual thoughts, and you will see the multitude of men lacking toward you, and, however well and according to due you aim at the goal, you will be that which is not good [to be]. Therefore everything will seem to you [to happen] upside down.
98. One sees the excellent modes present in his soul when he is already leaning toward the constitution that is within him.
99. Jesus, the beginning of our boasting, to thee let all mouths glorify; to thee let the hidden firstborn of our thoughts be sacrificed always; to thee let the flesh and bones of Adam's house render clear glory; to thee let us lift up, in the passion of charity, confession, rejoicing, because in thee we have learned the will hidden in thy Father from eternity. From you we have received goods while we awaited evils; in you knowledge has arisen for us while we walked in the confines of beasts. You have been taken up as the first-fruits for all our kind and have been brought near to divinity, so that you present our questions to the One who needs no questions. For our prayers are lifted up by you before God, and to our prayers you mix your prayers for us. You are the righteousness of everything, for by mercy you were taken up by everything, and for the sins of everything you were capable of the

86 Cf. Merw's Isho'dad in his commentary on Gen 2:21 (op. cit., pp. 73-74): "'And cast the Lord God stillness upon Adam': the Greek says: 'awe.' 'Simmachus then calls 'somnia' the fact that in it 'one is out of the usual order and out of human perception' because his intelligence is drawn by divine grace to scrutinize the things that are shown to him, according to the [saying]: 'Stillness fell upon Abraham' (Gen. 15:12) and, again, [according to] what [happened to] Peter (cf. Acts 10:10)." Same interpretation in the commentary on Acts in Theodore bar Koni (*Book of Scola VIII*, 54, p. 131): "'The Book says that 'at the sixth hour,' while food was being prepared for him, 'astonishment fell upon him' (Acts 10:10). It says astonishment that one is [placed] out of his usual thoughts, while awake, and that all his thoughts are gathered together and he is rapt in his intellect and looks at things as far off as at things near. And [this] is similar to [the saying]: 'Awe fell on Abraham' (Gen 15:12), and: 'Stillness fell on Adam' (Gen 2:21)." Same exegesis also in the commentary on Acts 10:10 by Isho'dad (cf. *The Commentaries of Isho'dad of Merw*, IV, M.D. Gibson ed., Cambridge 1913, [v] p. 20). As we note, the teaching is, in his own letter, quite traditional and may well go back to Theodore himself, as Isaac attests.

reconciliation of divinity. You were not offered by us to divinity as a first-fruits offered from the flocks: not even this discernment had then our nature. From himself the Suave was reconciled, and of his own will he took you up from among us, when we were not reconciled nor [this] had occurred to us, so that the righteous would not boast, saying that this happened because of him. *For there is none righteous - not even one* (Rom 3:10; Ps 13:3): the apostle confirmed the word of the prophet. Our malice has not been hard on you, for the knowledge of it is not [is] recent: you have been aware of the passions of our nature since before the constitution of our nature. Because sin had sealed the totality of our nature, this Good was reconciled to us.

Note in the margin of the beginning of the chapter. Prayer of thanksgiving by which we confess the good our kind has received through our Lord, the Christ, and supplication for all our kind.

100. Who will glorify you as [you] have been worthy, God, Father of all things, giver of goods without request? My Lord, let not hope in you fail from our hearts, so that by it the remembrance of you may be continually confounded in our understanding. He whom for the hope of the whole world you have raised from all things to you, let him be to you the fullness of this confession, for our sake . Do not fail, my Lord, on earth, to any of those who clothe his flesh and bones, but draw him to the part that is in heaven, and there shall the whole world glorify thee, rejoicing in its beginning, with that new Glory which a tongue of flesh does not utter. Amen.

The Fourth Discourse of The Gnostic Chapters is finished

Mar Isaac Of Ninevah: Other Treatises Placed By Him After The Gnostic Chapters To Illustrate And Elucidate Our Honored Conduct In Solitude

Now that by the grace of God, our vivifier, we have finished these chapters of knowledge, in which is [re]placed a great power - for clearly grace was their ordering: for my conscience testifies to me that in them there is an operation which was not [the product] of our power, [of us] men inferior to [righteous] conduct, and [that in us], still, [there is] no knowledge capable of raising us to the full height of the mysteries reposed in this book... since we have come here, after these chapters written with the help of our Lord we proposed to order in chapters distinct by numbers of the conversations [proper] to hidden prayer and, in itself, a support [to it].

Know this, too, my brother: the enlightened intellect does not need the various words of prayers. A single door of prayer alone is enough to protect the intellect behind it and to unite it with God. The changes [proper] of prayers, on the other hand, greatly help the vexed intellect to wander. For from here, and by the power that [proceeds] from them, the intellect suffers and acquires sweet prayer and lingering in genuflections and invocation of the heart and protracted supplications, which move from within, since at each of the words he comes across he happens [to be] like a man aroused from sleep. And because of them he always comes upon admirable understandings, for these words also proceed from a gift of grace and in them is hidden power, and always he is helped by familiarity with them and by reading them.

In the time of grace, when you have pleasing prayer and protracted genuflections, it is not necessary for you to rise much for canonical [prayers] nor to grieve on account of the cessation of [their] number, because, behold, [there] you have included what [is] in the number and put the canon under you, since all day long you cast yourself, face to the ground, before the cross - something in which every partial prayer and the officiate is included.

Let it not be manifest, behold, that you have put the canons under you. In the time of the great work do not return to that which is inferior: this word is said in a covered way by the blessed Mark because he knows that not everyone comes to pure prayer. Pleasure [itself] teaches those who [come to it] that there is no greater work than it.

When you happen to lack it, then it is good that one should not neglect canonical [prayer]. If you possess it in part, in part also concern yourself with canonical [prayer], until [the last] breath, for by the care for the canons again you will be enlightened and come to the [prayer] of continuity.

Any son first practices servitude to his father and then rules over his treasures. As the blessed Paul said: *As long as the heir is young, he is not distinguished from servants, but is [placed] under guardians and stewards, until he has come to the time appointed by his father* (Gal 4:1-2).

Guardians and stewards of your maiden age, that they may govern you, are the divine laws and the beautiful canons of your holy conduct, which bring you to *the measure of the perfect man in Christ* (cf. Eph 4:13 and Col 1:28).

For what advantage proceeds from laws and canons if not enlightenment, generated by them in the soul? But by them [precisely] one is corrected whenever he is obscured and errs - that is, by the prayer of the hours and the regular office. And just as one who loses his way goes up again to the beginning of the way and from there resumes the way and reaches where he was trying to go, so canons and laws correct one who is obscured when he errs and, when he approaches them, again set him on the path from which he erred. In its place we shall show what is the law of children, which grows man in freedom and gives him light, and what is the law of servants, in which man walks as a child and which does not let him go beyond himself.

This, too, we need to know: as long as for one the hours of the day are divided-some for officiating, some for reading; some for prayer, some for other works-when the hour of tribute comes, necessarily it must give the tribute [due to it] to [each,] distinct hour, and it cannot pass over and keep for itself what is due, because, in relation to each of the canons, it is fitting to fulfill what is due to it, in its time and place.

When one has been made adherent to God, without ceasing, in the continual outpouring that [takes place] in prayer-because continually he is poured out to the ground in the invocation to him [addressed] and his soul is confused by desire, in falling down before the cross... on him there is no law, nor canons or times or distinct and regular hours have power over him, but since then he is above all [that] and is with God, without limit.

Now, therefore, let us abandon these [considerations] and put[vi] an end to them, and let us approach, let us delight in the discourse with God, in the meditation of the prayers we are about to [pro]pose. For by them we shall receive into the soul the gift of holiness and the heavenly power of the manifestation of the mysteries.

Conversations of the Hidden Prayer, by Mar Isaac, which he arranged and adapted and composed with zealous and persuasive words and [made] of it a [single] body of [well] composed members, useful for the meditation of the hidden prayer. With these [words] one will have custom when he stands and when he sits, both when he works and when he walks within his cell and when he slumbers, until sleep seizes him, and, both when he is within and when he walks along the way, within his heart, secretly, have custom with them, continually stooping to the ground, wherever he stands, even if not before the cross, and joining the humiliation of his body with the motions of his prayer. by these [words] he will also be helped in those [things] that are proposed to him in accordance with the canons, and [they will be] an excellent place of help-filled arguments, which he will find from here in accordance with the change of his intellect, and [the] peace and [the] vexations that break in against him. so shall he use of these [words] which are fittingly arranged that [he] may find consolation therein, and by which his soul is sanctified and the grace of the spirit is made perfect.

1. From all my bones (cf. Ps 34:10) and from all my heart, in the bowing down to the ground of the head of my soul, is approached to you, glorious God who dwells in inexplicable silence, convenient worship, because you have built on earth, for my renewal, a tent of charity as the resting place of your will, a temple of flesh, shaped with the *oil of a sanctification* (cf. Ps. 88:21) higher than any [other] sanctification, and you filled it with your sanctifications so that in it all worship might be fulfilled and in it you might unveil the adorable, eternal hypostases of your Trinity and manifest to the worlds you have created in your grace the inexplicable Mystery and the Power unattainable to the motions of your works, come to being. The natures of the vigilant set in silence in amazement before the caligula of this eternal mystery and the flood of its glory innermost of [all] amazement, adored in the region of silence by all holy minds, worthy of thee.
2. I adore the footstool of your feet, my Lord, and your holy right hand that shaped me and made me man that I might have perception of you. And I have sinned and failed, in my soul and before thee, because I have left holy custom with thee and given my days to customs with desires. Please, Lord, do not impute to me sins of my youth and the ignorance (Ps. 24:7a) of my old age and the weaknesses of my nature, which has prevailed over me and plunged me into meditation on [objects] hateful, but turn my heart from the tumultuous wandering of desires and make the hidden light dwell in me. Thy benefits toward me always precede my wills [turned] to good and the readiness of my heart to righteousness. Thy

solicitude never retained the proof of my freedom, but in the likeness of the solicitude a father has for his infant son, so did thy solicitude chase me and the grace of thy fatherhood visit my miseries and did not intend to receive from me the proof of the will. You knew always of me that, as less than a child, *I know not whither I walk* (1Jn 2:11).

3. I beseech Thee, God: send me help from Thy high heavens, and turn away from my heart the evil operation and every will of the flesh. Do not reject me, Lord, from under your protection, lest my adversary find me and trample me down according to his desire and cause me to perish utterly. You are the one who gives conversion and a mourning heart to the sinner who is converted: through the consolation that [proceeds] from mourning and the gift of tears you soothe his heart from the burden of sin placed upon him.
4. I knock at the door of your clemency, my Lord: send help to my scattered motions, intoxicated by the multitude of passions and the vigor of darkness. Move within me a sorrow that sees my wounds, though not according to the vigor of my sins, for, my Lord, if I received a perception proportionate to my sins, my soul would fail for their bitter pain. Succor my miserable motions [aimed] at true conversion, and let me find refreshment from the rush of sins through the suffering that proceeds from your gift, for without the power of your grace even I cannot enter within myself and know my stains, so that at the sight of them I may quiet myself from the multitude of wandering.
5. The name of Jesus, the key to every gift, opened the *great door* for me (1 Cor. 16:9), that I might enter into the treasury of your riches and glorify you with the glory that [proceeds] from the heart because of your mercy, which came upon me at the end of days-because you came and renewed me in the knowledge of the new world.
6. My Lord, I glorify your holy nature because you have made my nature the sanctuary of your hiddenness and the tent of your mysteries and the region of your dwelling place and the holy temple of your divinity, the ruler of the scepter of your kingdom and the leader of your beings, the bestower of the glory of your eternity and the renewer of the fiery orders of your servants, the way to the knowledge of you and the door of the house of your visions, the term of your power and of your great wisdom: Jesus Christ, the only begotten who [proceeded] from thy womb and the *seed* (Isa 1:9 and Rom 9:29) gathered from thy creation, visible and intelligible.
7. Mystery higher than word and silence, made man for our renewal in voluntary union with the flesh, manifest to me the way, that from the limpid course of stillness I may be raised from the phantoms of this world to thy mysteries, and gather my intellect within the silence of prayer, and wandering thoughts be silenced in me by the bright habit of invocation and a full admiration of the mysteries therein.
8. I worship the throne of your greatness, my Lord, I, *dust and ashes* (Gen 18:27) and vilest among men. To it myriads of angels and unnumbered legions of seraphim approach with their fiery glories and holy motions, in the concealment of their nature, a spiritual worship - to you, the holy nature, hidden from the touch and knowledge of all [its] works -, because in your helps, my Lord, you are near to all things, in all times of need, and your door is open, in time and out of time, before the questions of all, neither do you tedious of sinners nor take away your greatness from souls stained with all kinds of sins, but all things you take away from evils without end. My Lord, even to me, whom you have made worthy, unclean

in all things, to fall on my face before you and to dare to receive the heaven of your holiness into my mouth -- I, who am a vessel of all uncleanness and who am not worthy to be numbered among those born of Adam give me, my Lord, to be sanctified by your glorifications and to be purified by the remembrance of you, and renew my life in change of mind and through [those] useful thoughts which you, in your grace, cause to meander within me. Be a guide to my intellect in my meditation addressed to you, and through the renewal of intellect that you cause in me, make me forget conduct in scandals. Move in me useful questions, in the conformation of my will to your will, for you are the *one who gives prayer to those who pray* (1 Sam 2:9 LXX). Impress in me a single will, looking to you at all times, and a thought that is not weakened in hope of you by the continual deaths [suffered] for you. Give me, my Lord, not to pray before you with words of unfeeling lips, but to pour myself out on the ground in hidden humiliation of heart and conversion of intellect.

9. God, who in your long-suffering toward my sins gives me the life of this world, do not deprive me of the life of the world to come, awaited in hope by those who here invoke you in torment.
10. Christ, whose charity has divided the saints from [their] people and family and from the quiet abode of humanity, and before the sweetness of whose charity the sturdiness of natural passions is silent in them - thou, my Lord, grant that I may be healed in thy mercy and be found in my life dead to every gladness of this world. My Lord, may the storms that rage in my limbs be silenced by your power, and may your charity divide me from the world and its customs. Paint on my intellect the one invisible image by which is won the motion of all sweetness of the memories of the temporal world and its figures.
11. I kneel before your greatness and prostrate myself on the ground before you, God, because, when I was not aware of you nor was I, you brought me into existence and, from before you gave me figure in the belly, you knew my tumultuous life and prone [to error] and did not refrain from creating me and giving me all the benefits with which you honored nature, although your knowledge preceded my sins. You, aware of my questions since before they were known to me and of my prayers since before they were prayed before you, give me, my God, in this hour also what you know that my weak nature needs, in the danger in which it stands. Thou knowest the tribulation of my soul, and by Thy hand its healing is disposed.
12. Power by which the ancient fathers overcame the vigorous and fearsome battles of the rebel and as unneeded, in a nature of many needs, showed on earth a likeness of future realities- and you made the seat of your revelations to them sepulchers of men and caverns and caves-, bring to an end in my heart the fervor of their thoughts, so that I may be invigorated by it and trample down the love of nature and the fear of adversity. Sow in me the knowledge of humility and the irrepressible vehemence of the thwarted path that [leads] to you. Shelter of the weak and straight path of those who are held back in error, asylum of all who rise in storms, demean thou the arrogance of the adversary against me, strike down the power of his snares against me, humble thou the height of his pride. Appear before my thoughts thy hidden paths and be to me consolation in the time of my sorrows and guidance in the place of danger.
13. *Sun of righteousness* (Ml 4:2 [3:20]), in whom the righteous have seen themselves and have become mirrors to their generations, open thou within me the door of the knowledge of thee

and give me a seer mind, walking over the stones of error until I come to the clear room to which our ancient fathers came, who pleased thee in all the excellencies of their conduct.

14. Sanctify me in your mysteries, make my intellect shine in the knowledge of you, make the hope of you arise in my heart and make me worthy of the persuasion concerning it within me. God, my Father and Lord of my life, let thy lamp shine within me, cast into me of thine that I may forget mine, place upon me the constraint of the wonder of thee that the constraint of nature may be overcome. Make the vision of your mysteries snake in me that I may perceive that which was placed in me in holy baptism. Thou hast placed within me a guide: it always shows me thy glory. Thou hast constituted me light and salt unto the world (cf. Mt. 5:13-14): that I may not become a stumbling-block to my fellows. Since I have come out of the world, let me not yet look in it on what I have denied in my promise to you. Cast upon my heart sweet reins, that my senses may not look out of the paths of thy law. Arm my motions as a ship of conversion, that on it I may exult in the sea of the world to the harbor of your hope. Let my intellect receive comfort in its temptations from the memory of you. Illumine before me the way with the splendor of the knowledge of you, for it is dark.
15. God, make me worthy of the understanding of the mystery of your painted charity in your arrangements concerning the sensible world and the constitution of your creation and the mystery of the killing of your Beloved.
16. Our Factor, aware of the weakness of my nature, hold back from me the vehemence of the adversary; uproot thou from my limbs the weed of sin; extinguish its fervor from my heart. Draw near the hand of healing to the sickness of my soul; bind my inner senses with the bond of the cross. Multiply in me the fullness of your charity from the understanding of the Crucified. Interior my intellect in the secret of the mysteries it bears. Configure in me the memory of your Beloved's humiliation; multiply in me wonder at his economy on my behalf.
17. God, who gave your Only Begotten Son to the world before you reconciled him to you, and who, after you reconciled him, made him inherit the throne of your divinity, do not forsake me, lest I return hopelessly to the tomb, and in the bonds of my sins *sit in darkness, as one dead forever* (Ps. 142:3).
18. We give thee thanks, God, for thy gift to the world, of whose riches creatures are not able to speak: that I also, who am a part of it, may not withhold the part of my thanksgiving which I owe thee. For this, let me give thee glory and confess thy name. Thou hast given to the world all thy treasure, that is, the Only Begotten One who [proceeds] from thy womb, and thou hast given to the help of all the throne of thy Essence: what more hast thou that thou hast not given to thy creation? The world is joined with God, and the Creator and the creature have become one. Glory to you for your inscrutable intelligence! Truly great is this mystery. Glory to you for your mysteries, which are hidden from us! Make me worthy, my Lord, to taste this great, hidden and arcane mystery, which the world is not yet worthy to perceive. Have You not revealed [a part of it] to the saints, to them, who in the body live above the world and are always above the motions of the flesh?
19. The fullness of the mysteries of Christ comes upon my intellect in the likeness of sea waves, and I wished to be silent and not to speak of them, my Lord, but they became in my heart

like fire that burns and blazes in my bones. My intellect rebukes me and shows me my sins; your mystery astonishes me and forces me into self-view, and in silence beckons me: Do not hesitate to approach you for fear of your sins, O sinner, for [precisely] by this meditation the dust of sin is driven out of your intellect.

20. Dissolver of our nature, dissolve [away] from me the hidden bonds, cast upon my inner members, and from before my outward senses the manifest impediments, that I may run, enter the paradise of your mysteries, and eat from the tree of life, from which Adam was not permitted to eat.
21. My Savior, guard me from the error of demons. My God, turn away from me the intelligence of sloth. My hope, pour into my heart the intoxication placed in the hope of you. Resurrection and light of all the worlds, Jesus Christ, place the crown of knowledge of you on the head of my soul; suddenly open before me the door of mercy; let the rays of your grace shine in my heart; be a guide at the feet of my thoughts, until I come to Zion, your holy mountain. Make me worthy of the city of holiness, into which the saints have entered at the end of their journey. My Creator and my hope, anchor of my life in the midst of the storms, staff of my weakness, honor of my obnoxiousness, lifter of my bowed head to the ground, deliver me not to the desire of my adversary; give no occasion to his boldness. Set a great pit (Lk 16:26) before me, so that he will not pass by me and disturb me. Make me worthy to fulfill in your conduct my short and fleeting life. Let me be found in your proximity at the end of my days; let me be found within your vineyard at the setting of the sun of my life. Make me worthy before the time of my transit - by grace, my Lord, and not because of my conduct - of the money of which you have made the laborers worthy. Make me worthy, even if for a tenth of the years of my life, to be found in your conduct, diligent. Let the world not imprison me in its habits full of oppressions, nor lock me inside the cage of its worries.
22. Christ, who conceals the Light like a cloak and who because of me stood naked before Pilate, let me be clothed with that power which thou hast made to dwell on the saints and by which they have overcome this world of strife. Yes, my Lord: may your divinity be gracious to me and lead me [you] beyond the world, so that I may be with you.
23. Christ: the many-eyed cherubim cannot look upon the glory of thy face. You, who for your charity received spittle on your face, make the shame pass from my face and give me an uncovered face before you in the moment of prayer.
24. Christ, who for the debt of our nature went out into the wilderness and overcame the prince of darkness and wrested from him the victory of five thousand years [before], compel thou to flee away from me him, who always compels the kind of men to sin.
25. The cross of ignominy (cf. Heb 11:26; 13:13) on which you ascended for me become for me a bridge to the heavenly room. May the crown of thorns with which your head was crowned become for me a *helmet of salvation* (Eph. 6:17) in the fervent day of battle. May the spit that your face has received prepare me for confidence before the tribunal of your coming. Thy holy body, stripped on the cross, by thy charity crucify me to this world and its desires. Thy robe drawn tears from before my eyes the mantle of darkness worn within me. May the water and blood that came forth from you become for me a scripture of emancipation from ancient bondage. May your body and blood, which have mingled with my body, cause the

first-fruits [of the Spirit] to remain in me, that I may not be deprived of the continual vision of you in that endless region. May the mysteries of faith, which I have kept incorrupt in my soul, preserve for me the glory, in the day when the world will be ready to welcome your coming, and fill there for me what is lacking in my conduct.

26. My Lord, at the fearful time when your body and blood are sacrificed for the salvation of the world, may all the fathers and brothers who are on mountains and in caves and valleys and rugged regions and in the wilderness be remembered on your holy altar; those who are hiding from the world and whose whereabouts you alone know, those who are dead and those who have existence and, before you, serve in body and soul you, the Holy One who dwells in the saints, in whom your divinity rests; those who have left the temporal world and have already become dead to its life because they have gone out in search of you, yearningly seeking, in the tribulations of their torments, you, the King of all the worlds and all the Orthodox fathers who for the truth of the faith have endured exile and the tribulations of persecution, and [finally] those in monasteries and convents and deserts, in the settlements of the world and in every region and place who study to please you in the works [sustained] on account of virtue. Accompany them, Lord, thy help and be for them ever helmet and send them continual consolation, secretly, and bind their intellect to thee, in all their struggles, and let the power of thy Trinity dwell in them, and let them serve thee until the fulfillment of their life, in good conscience and good conduct, and make them worthy of the harbor of rest while they are [still] in the body. And send succor, Lord, to those who rise up in the difficult battles of demons, [conducted] both manifestly and secretly, and let the cloud of your grace cover them (cf. Lk 1:35) and place on the head of their minds the helmet of salvation (Eph 6:17) and humble before them the power of the adversary and sustain them always the vigor of your right hand, so that by their thoughts they may not fail to look continually [turned] to you, and cause them to clothe themselves with the weapon of humility, so that a sweet odor may always emanate from them, according to your good pleasure.
27. Be remembered before you, my Lord, even those who are in strong afflictions and difficult diseases of the body, and send them the angel of mercy and give rest to their souls tormented by the raging tribulations of their bodies. Spare, Lord, also those who are cast into the hands of unrighteous, wicked and godless men, and quickly send the angel of mercy and rescue them from their hands. My Lord and my God, send thou consolation to those who are unjustly in all kinds of difficulties.
28. My Lord, *cover* (cf. Lk. 1:35) your holy church, saved by your blood, and let that true peace of yours, which you gave to your holy apostles (cf. Jn. 14:27) and bind her children with the holy bonds of indissoluble charity, and let not the rebellious dominate her, but let persecutions and tumults and battles, those from within and those from without, depart from her, and let kings and priests be bound by great peace and charity, their intellects always filled with the gaze turned to thee, and let holy faith be [as] a wall for thy flock. And by their prayers make me also, a sinner, worthy to be kept always under the vigor of your holy arm, which is the solicitude that holds all things. Amen.
29. My Lord, I beseech and invoke you: make all wanderers worthy of the truth of the knowledge of you, that they may know all your glory.

30. And be [thou] the advocate of all those who have passed through this world in meagerness of conduct and without faith, for the body thou hast taken from them, and from the one concordant assembly of the body of the world, into the kingdom of heaven ascend one: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Spirit of holiness, and there be delight without end, for ever and ever. Amen.

These meditations and this habit of invocation befit those who wait to receive in their inner man the grace of the Spirit of holiness. By these habits they are sanctified and in this will become worthy of the gift from above. And it behooves us to pray with suffering and to invoke with affliction God for all these things. And we have this thought for all men, and we pray with affliction for them as for ourselves, that so the Godhead may come and rest in us and dwell in us his will, *as in heaven, even on earth* (Mt 6:10b).

Have you also, our brother, this intention in prayer and meditation, in all your days, in the time when you are prostrate on the ground and in the rest of the other hours, hiddenly and within your heart. Even if it does not have the same disposition and [the same] order in words, let prayer have absolutely the same intention, always, so that by this will and meditation we may become worthy of the gift which our fathers received, whose bodies and souls became temples for the Spirit of holiness.

Of Blessed Mar Isaac. On The Various Holy Quivers and Limpid Course That Are Given To Us By The Clemency Of Our Lord At The Time Of Prayer

When it sometimes happens that by the movement of grace one is made worthy of the prayer of ardor, then in prayer there happen to him frequent motions without number and prayers that are quick and vehement, pure and fervent, like coals of fire. And in these motions [is] a mighty cry (Heb 5:7) rising from the depths of the heart, joined to humility which [proceeds] from the power of joy.

And where [are] these [things] coming from?

He in those moments received from prayer, in his motions, secretly, some help, and was moved in his soul the fire of ardor, by whose joy man is humbled in his thoughts to the depths.

And therefore there arise to him, in his prayer, these motions: pure and vehement prayers, which are frequent and because of their vehemence overflow and are very much inward in the heart, with a gaze not subject to inclination turned to our Lord. And because of the exactness of the thoughts of prayer ascending to him, to one at that moment it seems almost as if he were close to our Lord even in body.

When then he is made worthy of the prayer of knowledge, as soon as he has come upon the [even] slightest word of prayer, immediately the prayer dries up in his mouth and he absolutely ceases from all motion and, in his soul and body, comes to a motionless silence.

Those who have therefore walked this path will understand the clues of both forms of prayer that have been said.

Or perhaps there is someone who believes that one of these is the order and motion of spiritual prayer?

Let those who believe this understand that all these [forms] and countless others similar to them constitute the order of pure prayer and [are] pure, psychic thoughts quivering in man with the purpose of prayer. In spiritual conduct, on the other hand, there is no prayer.

Any prayer is beautiful thoughts, is psychic motions; in spiritual order and conduct, on the other hand, there are neither thoughts nor motion, but neither perception nor impulse of the soul toward anything, because nature comes completely out of these [acts] and everything [that is] its own, and [is] in an unspeakable silence, to which there is no explanation, because the operation of the Spirit of holiness moves [and] remains in it, transcending the domain of soul knowledge.

What shall we say then? Where there are no thoughts, what then is it possible to say about prayer and anything else?

If there is [anyone] who wishes to hear [something] exact about this order, read in the preceding parts the great discourse compiled by us on spiritual prayer⁸⁷ and from there he will clearly learn the

⁸⁷ In the margin of this passage a reader noted on the outer edge of the paper: The discourse is written in the first part. In fact it appears as XXII in the collection of Isaac's writings edited by Bedjan, pp. 204-213 of its Italian version. The title of the pamphlet reads: *On the many distinctions of prayer and the limits of the power of the intellect. Up to what extent [it] has the power to move its voluntary motions in the different forms of prayer and what is the limit placed on nature in prayer, since up to that point it is in its power to pray, but, when it has proceeded beyond that, prayer is no*

whole meaning of this thought concerning the conduct of prayer and the ways consistent with its purity and impurity and what spiritual movement is and why prayer is called elevation beyond the motions of psychicity, for there is no prayer in spirituality.

All these [arguments] are clearly stated by us there.

On The Subject Of The Higher Practice Of Thought, Which Is The End Of All Conduct Practiced In The Bodily Senses And Whereby Man Enters At Every Moment Into Perfect Conjunction With God

When, on the path of his conduct, man has come to the understandings of creatures, then he has been elevated beyond the [condition] in which prayer with him is [enclosed] within a [given] limit. For there there is for him more than establishing times and moments for prayer, and his situation has transcended the [fact] that, when he invokes, he prays and glorifies. Hence, behold, he always finds his senses quieted and his thoughts gripped by bonds of awe and is continually filled with a vision filled with a Glory devoid of the motions of the tongue or, sometimes, again [there is] prayer, while remaining [this state] beyond his portion, or [has] the intellect led by it as if into captivity and tears descending in the likeness of fountains of water and wetting the whole face, involuntarily, while the man is silent and has quieted down and is filled from within with a vision filled with wonder.

Many times he is not even left to pray, and this is indeed a station [set] beyond prayer, for he remains continually in wonder at the works of God, in the likeness of those who are made insane by wine. This is *the wine that gladdens the heart of man* (Ps. 103:15).

Let us then see to it that no one, hearing these things, through vain thoughts desists from prayer and psalmody, believing that it is [the work] of the will that the silence of which we have spoken is [the work] of the will, but let him who comes across such talk know that such an act does not proceed from man and that the thing is not [the work] of the will.

For we are silenced by contemplation and are stupefied by the mysteries that are moved in God's covetous intellect in the moments of prayer or even in the remaining times... However, such discernments quiver especially in the moment of prayer, because of the superabundant caution that [then] adheres to man.

I say prayer not only the appointed moments nor [only] the psalter sections and vocal songs.

Those who have come to this knowledge, more than by all the virtues are consecrated by prayer.

The occasion is taken by the understandings, and by the understandings, still, he is stupefied and turned to silence. For the man who has been enlightened sees with his mind's eye all of God's creatures and God's economy which always coheres with them and [his] superior solicitude full of mercy and which ceaselessly visits creation-now under the sign of the left and now in a right way⁸⁸, and the grace of God manifests to him the motives of the actions, concealed from many, which the Creator uses to stupendously aid each of natures - both those endowed with reason and those inanimate, and [manifests to him again] the invisible causes by which by that superabundant providence of charity the changes relative to the whole are brought about and the creative and economical power that guides creation with solicitude filled with wonder.

And when man receives at every moment the perception of these mysteries in the inner eye, called *spiritual contemplation*, which is the vision that [proceeds] from grace - as soon as he perceives each of those mysteries, at once [his] heart is stupefied with some astonishment, and not

⁸⁸ Remember that *left* and *right* indicate the painful and joyful instances of life, respectively, which arise for correction, instruction, fortification, and consolation of man.

only do his lips interrupt the flow of prayer and become quiet, but his heart also lays down his thoughts from the wonder that falls upon him and receives from grace the sweetness of the mysteries of God's wisdom and charity through a vision that knows acts and natures.

And this is the fulfillment of psychic conduct in the body and the [external] limit of spiritual practice accomplished in the intellect.

Whoever wants to come to taste His charity, let him ask our Lord that this door be opened to him.

I would wonder if it were ever possible, if there are some who have not approached it nor perceived [this] perception of the vision of the creatures and the economies in them [present], that they would perceive the love that imprisons the souls of those in whom it has stirred!

These are [the things] that open for us the door to the knowledge of truth superior to everything and [that] allow the intellect transit to the glorious mysteries of the adorable and divine nature.

One should rather be amazed at those who have lived out of quiet and much deprivation and dared to speak and write about this mystery of divine glory [present] in beings.

Blessed is he who has entered through this door into the experience of his soul, for all the power of ink is incapable of indicating with the letters and combinations of the word the sweetness of this mystery.

To many simple people the purpose of the philosophers' meditation has seemed [to consist in] tasting this habitual bringing of the beauty of all the mysteries of God. The blessed bishop Basil says this, making in one of his letters to his brother the distinction between this perception of creatures that the saints receive, which is *ladder of the intellect*, as blessed Evagrius said,⁸⁹ and elevation beyond all customary vision,⁹⁰ and that of the philosophers: *There* is a custom that opens the door for us to peer downward, into the knowledge of natures, and not upward, into the spiritual mysteries - calling that of the philosophers knowledge [turned] downward -, *because*," he says, "

89 Cf. KG 4:43: "In the ladder seen by Jacob, whose head reaches heaven and on which the Lord rests (cf. Gen 28:12-13), is the sign of the two contemplations: the ascension of purity and the virtue of knowledge." Cf. also the so-called Supplement to Centuries 43 (Frankenberg 458): "The ladder of heaven is the revelation of the mysteries of God manifested to the soul according to the measure of [its] growth. They ascend through the virtues as by steps toward perfect conjunction with God." To underscore the traditional trait of Isaac's considerations see the commentary that Babai the Great, one of the greatest Nestorian spiritual and theological authorities of the century (+ 628), certainly known to the circles frequented by our loner (who also to my knowledge never mentions it in his writings), devotes to this Evagrian chapter (Frankenberg 458,460). After recalling KG 4:43, Babai writes: "This contemplation [of the ladder] bears and gives the revelation of the mysteries of God that [takes place] in this economy [i.e., in the world and its affairs, placed under the sign of divine charity] through the angels. According to the measure of growth in the spiritual knowledge of beings endowed with reason, [this revelation] is manifested to the soul that leads itself consistently to the order of the progression of the various virtues, and as it reaches out by [successive] steps, through the virtues it practices, day by day from below upward, those mysteries hidden and [tràditi] through the angels make it ascend to perfect union with God in one Spirit and [lead it], by its pure vision, to participation in the blessed light that shines upon it at the moment of prayer. This is the [meaning] of the conjunction: that [the soul] be made perfect in likeness to the image of its Creator and be partaker of his knowledge, as [Evagrius] says in another place and according to what [also] the blessed Paul says: *We have been joined to the Christ* (Heb. 3:14), that is, we have been united [to him]." Note that for Babai these mysteries are placed under the sign of angelic mediation (and thus in the realm of creaturely knowledge, albeit illuminated by the Spirit). For Isaac, who is very attentive to these issues (re-read, for example, in the *Centuries* chapters 3:56-60, very close in some of their statements to these propositions of Babai), here it seems to be a matter instead of a properly spiritual revelation: the *perfect* understanding of the 'economy, after all, is unattainable by theology and is a gift of the Spirit even according to Evagrius.

90 Is there an allusion here to Theodore's teaching? Cf. supra what Isaac writes in *Centuries* 4:95.

can know it even those who are subject to the passions, while he calls knowledge of the spiritual mysteries [turned] upward the perception that the saints receive through their intellects by grace.⁹¹

Therefore those who have become worthy night and day are thus as if they have migrated from the body and are already rising in the world of the righteous.

And it is it the divine sweetness of which the pure-minded, stupendous Ammonas speaks: *It is sweeter than honey and honeycomb,*" he writes, *"and not many among loners and virgins have known it.*"⁹²

And it is it access to the divine rest of which the fathers speak, and the transit from the regions of passions to the clarity and motions of freedom.

And it is that which Evagrius, from frequent spiritual revelations, calls *the yielding of the hundredfold promised by our Lord in his gospel*, and well, amazed at the greatness of this sweetness, he called it *key to the kingdom of heaven.*⁹³

91 This letter, not Basilian, I believe, but not even so far reported among the texts attributed to Basil in the Syriac sphere (cf. J.Gribomont, *Histoire du texte des Ascétiques de s.Basile*, Louvain 1953, pp. 144-147), turns out to be attested, in two of its further sections, by two authors close to Isaac, Dadisho' Qatraya and Simon of Taibuteh. For the former see "Discourse on the Quietness of the (Seven) Weeks," in A. Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies VII*, Cambridge 1934, here (t) ff. 27a-28a; (v) pp. 225-226: "But that the conduct of quietness is honored and cherished not only by the solitary fathers, but also by the great teachers of the church, is clear not only from the Book of the Perfection of the Conducts of the Interpreter, but also from the things said by the blessed Basil the Great and John Chrysostom. For blessed Basil not only calls the solitaries righteous and splendid and perfect, but he also says they are great witnesses. And to his brother Gregory, after teaching him the great virtues by which the glorious crown of the perfection of the conducts of the solitary life is composed and made perfect, and [after] commanding him to run after it and to know it and perceive it and be made perfect by it, wanting to show him in a manifest way that without quietness and silence and reclusion it is not possible to be crowned by it, he says: *If you will, your enclosure is the field of those spiritual victories and the place of struggle in which those crowns are woven*, saying this: as those who weave wreaths of flowers stand within the enclosure of gardens and orchards, and [there] carefully gather flowers and weave wreaths, so also you will not be able to gather the flowers of virtues and weave with them wreaths of righteousness unless you dwell in quietness and surround yourself with the outer wall of your cell and be assiduous in the works that appease God, by which your soul will be crowned. This is the meaning of the [saying]: *If you will, your enclosure is the field of those spiritual victories*. What he added: And the place of the fight, in which those crowns - i.e., his intellect-are woven, [means] that, just as the athletes who fight before the king do not fight outside the circle drawn for them [and] neither are they crowned, if the foot of one of them falls outside the circle, for they are not crowned except by fighting within the circle, according to the law of the fight, so it is not possible for the solitary man to fight and be crowned outside the circle of his cell, for he is not crowned by the lawgiver, our Lord Jesus Christ, the heavenly king, with the crown of divine knowledge except when he dwells in his cell, in quietness, and a wall surrounds him, as the circle [surrounds] the athlete, and [there] he fights and wrestles with the passions and demons. The Spirit of Psalms says, *I have set on his head a glorious crown* (Ps 20:4). Therefore the blessed Basil adds and says: *For the solitary life and the deprivation of[all]human custom easily occasion those thoughts and come upon those discoveries expeditiously*"

Of Simon of Taibuteh, read instead the *Book of Grace* 4:65 (Vat. syr.562, f. 185r^b): "As it is mystically written by St. Basil to Gregory, his brother: The mouth and tongue are the cenobium in which the soul of the solitary practices the virtues, and the heart and mind are his cell, in which he sings and pronounces secretly, unceasingly, in the language of the spiritual, an angelic Gloria. And without their mutual agreement all work is torn."

Note again the proximity of this "Basilian" text quoted by Isaac to an Evagrian testimony whose teaching is then found extensively in this father's writings. In *Gnostikos* 147, the text of which is betrayed in the Ecclesiastical History of Socrates, IV, 23 (PG 67,520B), Evagrius noted, "The Cappadocian Basil, pillar of truth, says: *Careful attention and exercise make better the knowledge that proceeds from men; justice, absence of wrath and mercy [improve] that which becomes [from] the grace of God. And it is possible for even [men] who are passionate to receive the former, but of the latter only the impassive are receivers who, in the moment of prayer, contemplate the splendor proper to the intellect, which surrounds them with light.*"

92 *Ammonii Eremitae Epistolae*, M.Kmosko ed., in PO X/6 (Paris 1913), here p. 19, 11.2-4.

93 These are again two places in the KGs close to, among others, the above chapter: 3:40 and 42. The text read by Isaac reads, respectively: "*The key to the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 16:19) *is the spiritual gift that manifests to the intellect the contemplation of spiritual practice and present understanding in natures and words [ilógoi] relating to divinity*"; "*The*

As before God I speak the truth: the bodily limbs are unable to sustain this sweetness and the heart is unable to receive it because of the greatness of its delight.

And what more is to be said, [except] that the saints have called it *perception of the kingdom of heaven*?

For the mystery of that future awe in God does not become the delight of the righteous there, in the kingdom of heaven, because of the understanding of the corporeal world and [its] affairs, but because by them as by a ladder the intellect is lifted up to Him who is the kingdom of the saints and [there] remains in awe.

Well this perception is called *mystery of the kingdom of heaven*, because in these mysteries, whenever the intellect is moved into them through the gift of divine power, we are in the knowledge of Him who is the true kingdom of everything.

hundredfold wages (Mt 19:29), which our Lord promised in his gospel, is the contemplation of beings. The *eternal life*, on the other hand [is] the contemplation of the holy Trinity, as it is written: *This is eternal life, that they may know you, who are the only true God, and him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ* (Jn. 17:3)."

Contemplation On The Subject Of Gehenna, As Far As It Is Possible For It To Be Given To Man's Nature To Glorify [God] Concerning These Mysteries

We use here the expressions of David and cry out in wonder: *How great are the deeds of your economy, Lord, very deep are your thoughts!* (Ps. 91:6). And we add: *Thy judgments are like the great deep* (Ps 35:7), and, with Paul: *No one has scrutinized his judgments, and his ways are unsearchable* (Rom 11:33), but, according to David: *All his works [are] in faith* (Ps 32:4).

Glorious and great, indeed, are His works. Oh, the incomprehensibility of his understanding, the un-investigability of the Lord!

For placed all this delight, unchanging and forever, and all this charity and all this superabundant mercy [internal] to his nature and the foreknowledge [proper] of his creative operation-with all this what, then, is the constitutive motive of the harsh reality of Gehenna?

All knowers of truth are astonished and amazed at this mystery. From this contemplation rebellious to inquiry are constrained and reduced to silence all Gnostics and beings endowed with reason devoted to the contemplation of the divine mysteries, and [thus] they worship the mystery of the wisdom of Him who agrees to be worshipped in silence, whose actions all are also admirable and adorable.

It is for us [a cause of] great fear to attribute to that nature fury or wrath or envy or something equally so, for it is not possible for anyone who is endowed with reason and has sense to come to such folly as to think this of God.

And, again, neither can we say that he will do this in revenge, although the Books propose, outwardly, this [explanation]. For it is foul to attribute this also to God, that on His part He should give Himself vengeance for evil [deeds], for even by that we would introduce a weakness into that nature, since He would make use of such a state, great and bitter, for vengeance - that [vengeance] which, moreover, we cannot believe is given even by such men as conduct themselves firmly and justly and think of all the [things proper] to the divine understanding, much less [therefore] by God... [That is] acting in vengeance for bad [deeds] which he had foreseen towards those whose nature he brought into existence with great honor and charity and whom he did not deprive of the flow of his grace, although he knew [both] them and all their conduct, and to whom he did not bear to recuse himself, even for a moment, from his solicitude, even after they had lived in numerous evils.

If one says: Here he endured them that his long-suffering might be known, in order [then] to torment them there without mercy, he has thought against God an unspeakable blasphemy, according to the childishness of his understanding, taking away from him that suavity and goodness and mercy whereby he really endures sinners and the wicked, and ascribing to him passibility, because he would not allow them to be chastised here on the ground that he prepared for them, in exchange for a magnanimity of short duration, a great evil.⁹⁴ Attributing this to God is not only not

⁹⁴ I recall that within the Evagrian tradition, passibility is ultimately resentment and anger. Just as the root of the vices is *philopsychia*, self-love, and gluttony and lust dishonor the body, so the soul is clouded properly by the memory of the

praise, but insult. Instead, to think of God justly is [to hold] that that gentle Lord, whose every act aims at the help of beings endowed with reason, directs this thought concerning judgment to the advantageous those who receive this harsh state.

For it is very hateful or, rather, full of blasphemy to think that God also holds hatred or indignation be it toward the nature of demons and to attribute to that glorious nature, as to an avenger, a defect or passibility or any thing done by way of retribution, whether of goods or evils.

Instead, everything it works toward us according to what it knows is best for us, whether in that which procures suffering or in that which procures rest, whether in that which rejoices or in that which grieves, whether in things that are obnoxious or in things that are glorious.

But everything comes to a [single] eternal good, both the judgment and the glory that everything receives from him, and not with the purpose of retribution-let it not be! -, but according to the benefit that will proceed from it.

As he has decreed against Adam death in the form of a sentence motivated by sin, and as he has shown it to come in condemnation-in fact, although this was not his purpose, he has shown it as if he had undergone it in retribution for his guilt-, [so] he covered his true mystery and concealed in an appearance [source] of fear his eternal thought about death and the purpose of his wisdom relating to it, the reality of which in truth, although at first [is] terrible and offensive and harsh, yet it becomes for us passage to the stupendous and glorious world - and without it it is not possible to pass beyond this [world] and be in that. And the Creator, having made it come, did not say, This comes to you by reason of goods and a more glorious life than this, but He showed that He made it come to our harm and destruction.

And again: when he brought those of the house of Adam out of paradise, he brought them out with angry faces, as if [saying]: Because you have transgressed the commandment, be ye out of it - therefore, as if the dwelling place of paradise were taken away from them because [they] were unworthy of it.

But within all these things an economy was arranged, and it finds fulfillment in those [realities] which [from] the beginning were consistent with the Creator's purpose and led to them, for not disobedience brought death to the house of Adam nor did transgression of the commandment cause them to leave paradise: for it is certain that [God] did not create Adam and Eve so that they might be in paradise, in a small part of the earth, but so that they might tame (cf. Gen. 1:28) the whole earth.

Therefore neither do we say that he brought them out because of the commandment they transgressed, because, [even] if they had not transgressed the commandment, they would not have been left forever in paradise.

You see that God, when the solicitude of his beckoning leads us to the things that he wills, according to what appears [takes] occasion of them from us, as he has cunningly devised them of his own [and] he has made them the access to goods and the correction of our corruption - things [therefore] which were arranged by him to accomplish [them] for our benefit [and] which, because he knew in advance our inclination turned to every evil, preceded the ruinous occasions that would

offense suffered, by envy of the good of others, by sadness, incupation and wrath because of it. In a word, which recapitulates this test of the custody of thought, it is visited by acedia, which suffocates and induces incessant wandering and discontentment counteracted only by resolute and patient sitting in the cell (or remaining in one's own state), in sleep or prayer, as one can and is given.

come from it. [Such] things were known to him alone, but little by little, from their presence [lit.: existence], they [became] known to us also, after our instruction and help [given] to us, which [proceeds] from them, because it is impossible for it to be otherwise than as it was arranged by him. Thus all his [measures], even if they appear to us otherwise, in him [are] not taken] as to retribution, but for the benefit that will proceed from them in those against whom [he will] use them: one of them is also this of Gehenna.

I hold that the wondrous exodus and the act of the great, unspeakable mercy of that glorious Creator will demonstrate this order of that reality and of the harshness of its torment, by which above all will be known the riches of its charity and power and wisdom, but also the unceasing vigor of the waves of its goodness.

It is not possible for that merciful Factor to have created beings endowed with reason in order to send them helpless to endless tribulation, given what He knew from before their constitution - how [i.e.] they would be, once created ... and He created them -, and, above all, for the predetermination of evils and the pursuit of vengeance [therein contained], which are [both] passions of creatures and not of the Factor.

For it is proper of those who do not know or do not understand what will happen from what they do or think to be moved by the vehemence of fury and to take revenge, as if an unexpected thing had happened to them, but not of the Creator, who knew all [aspects], first and last, of the actions and intentions of beings endowed with reason, from before the circular figure of creation was drawn.

Let no one, among those who seem to be zealous for the truth, think of us introducing anything new from us, [words] that our ancient Orthodox fathers would not have said, as if we were gushing out a thought not in accordance with the truth. It is possible for anyone [who] seeks it to approach the books of the blessed Interpreter, well filled with the gifts of grace, he, to whom the hidden mysteries of the Books have been confided for the education in truth of the whole ecclesial community and who has given light and wisdom especially to us Orientals: before the splendors of his treasures, inspired by the divine Spirit, is [by no means] inadequate the dung of our minds. For we do not repudiate his sayings - let it not be! -, but [we] receive them as [those] of one of the apostles, and we affirm that he is a stranger to the assembly of the church and errs from the truth whoever opposes his words and advances an objection to his interpretations and doubts his sayings.

Therefore, though we could show numerous places in a multitude of his volumes, yet he makes this very clearly known at the end of the first volume he compiled *Against those who say that sin is placed in nature*.⁹⁵

95 Isaac seems to me to be the only witness to the passages of Theodore and Diodorus transcribed here that recur, in dependence on his text and with imperfect quotation, also in the later *Book of the Bee* of Solomon of Basra (13th century): see on this the already cited notes of S.P.Brock, *Lost and Refound*, p. 4 and, for Diodorus' texts, also M.Brière, "Quelques fragments syriaques de Diodore, évêque de Tarse (378-394?)," in *Revue del' Orient Chrétien* 30 (1946), pp. 231-283, here 278-280.

I would like to point out that all of Isaac's meditation in this pamphlet seems to me to preserve traces primarily of reading Theodore's pages. The text he quoted is not tradited to us, which makes any sensible conjecture difficult. Some of his fragments, however, are preserved for us in a Latin version in the *Collectio palatina* edited by E.Schwartz in *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum-Concilium universale ephesinum I, V/1*, Berolini-Lipsiae 1924/25, pp. 173-176. Here their title, editorially, reads: *Against St. Augustine, who defends original sin and argues in a Catholic way that Adam was made mortal by reason of transgression*. Theodore argues there, with a thesis with which we are well acquainted, for Adam's original mortality, challenging the view of those who claim that "God would have commanded Adam to be mortal because of wrath and fury and would have punished all men, as yet unborn, with death for his one

+ Of the blessed Theodore Interpreter + For, after other things, clear, he says thus: *In the world to come, those who have chosen the beautiful here will receive, [together] with praise, the delight of good things. The wicked, on the other hand, whose lives have been all inclined to evils, when through punishment and fear, by which, in their intellect, they will have been [again] turned to order, they will choose the beautiful things, because they will have learned how much they have sinned and of having persevered in evils and not in goods, and will have received thereby the knowledge of the fundamental [lit.: principal] doctrine of the fear of God and will have been instructed to keep it with good will, they will become worthy of the delight of divine prodigality. Indeed, [the Lord] would never have said, Till thou hast given the last quadrant (Mt. 5:26b), if it were not possible that, having put away sins by punishment, we should be free from them; nor, again, would he have said, He shall receive many beatings, and: He shall receive few (Lk 12:47,48), if, having measured the punishments against sins, they did not ultimately receive fulfillment.*

The blessed Theodore conveyed in his books these [considerations], with others like them, in a clear and uncovered manner, in the evidence of plain and not obscure words, for the knowledge and instruction of those who love the truth, for it is good that we have these thoughts about God, the Factor of everything, and about His chastisement and about future judgment.

Since then, according to the word of our Lord, the testimony of two men is true (cf. Mt. 18:16), and particularly [that] of stupendous and illustrious and godly men, we will confirm our word through another witness, as truthful as the first witness, at whose fountain also drank the splendid luminary Theodore: [he] is Diodorus, high in intelligence, the great doctor of the church.

+ Of the holy Diodorus, bishop of Tarsus + And also the blessed Diodorus, stupendous among the doctors, master of that, hands down that thought and [es]poses it with authority in the *Book of Providence*, [in] the fifth discourse, and says thus: *For the good are kept a wage of labor worthy of the justice of the Factor, and for the bad, beatings, [but] not forever. Therefore not even for them will the future conduct of immortality be without utility, [although] for a short time, quickly, they will be tormented, according as [they] are worthy, in accordance with the measure of their crime and wickedness, being paid according to the measure of their deeds. But suffering for them will last a short time, being delighted in immortality forever.*

And returning to his word and specifying it, he says: *If, therefore, the wages of works are all the greater as the time of immortality is greater than the time of struggles - that is, of this world-while punishments are [absolutely] inferior to the greatness and multitude of sins, the resurrection from the house of the dead will come not only for the good, but also for the bad. For the goodness of God greatly honors, but torments with clemency.*

These are the words and thoughts of the blessed Diodorus. But also in the sixth discourse, after more, he says thus: *God conceals the measure of works by good wages; he diminishes, by the greatness of grace, the punishments of those who are beaten and shortens their length. Nor does he torment for as long as it [was] the time of failures, making them far less than what they would be*

crime." This "new" feeling, the Interpreter continues, "has no scruple to think of God what no one has ever dared to hold even concerning men who have righteous knowledge and take some care of justice, nor [is] confused by it" (*therein*, p. 174).

Mortality, sin - Adam's sin and the sin of his children -, divine economy - its reasons, its purpose and its style, whose intelligence is decisive in order to God's own intelligence - are all closely interwoven themes in the pages of Theodore as in those of Isaac. They deserve more careful investigation, including into the reasons for that distant, early controversy which, it seems, pitted Theodore against Augustine, for reasons neither idle nor without great consequence.

worthy of. Likewise also the delight of the good extends beyond [all] meter and time: for [their] wages are infinite. It is not known whether God's goodness will sustain to retain forever in the evils of guilt those who have made themselves guilty and to do [them] an [eternal] evil, as I have already said.

And repeating his word he says: *The deliberation of judgment and torment is indeed not such as to withhold then the delight of the kingdom* - with other similar [considerations] he says on the same subject and for the same purpose.

And in expounding these [reflections], [he also speaks] of the person of demons and their much inclination to evil, saying that not even all the greatness of their malice overcomes the measure of God's goodness.

These pillars of the church have these and similar admirable understandings and thoughts, which they draw to charity and awe for the Creator, concerning the economy, the future divine judgment, and the greatness of God's clemency, whose prodigality transcends and overcomes the evils of creatures by driving out of our minds a childish thought about God, [proper] to one who introduces malice and passibility into his nature and says that he changes with the times and circumstances. Immediately then they also teach us by what merciful thoughts and for what purpose is disposed by him the coming upon us of his chastisements and [his] punishments, [whether] here or there, and [they testify] that [they take place] because of the beautiful outcomes that [will] proceed from them and not because of our corruption in them nor because we endure them forever, and [they affirm] that he [they] makes them come as a father and not for vengeance - [which] would be a sign of hatred - so that, thinking and knowing this of God, astonishment before him may draw us to his charity, so that from it we may be ashamed to the point of correcting the conduct of our life here.

Let us, however, return to our subject and hold fast to our previous discourse, persuaded that all that our God, wise in all things, good, turned to us, actuates, [he] brings about, [he] brings about for our correction and not for perdition and evil, and [that] there is a term to his [actions] generating suffering, while [there is none] to his goods, since he brings about those so that [we] may receive a change from them and [make use of them] in order to the good.

Therefore therefore, that we may abide in it, he causes all sorts and all forms of chastisements or punishments to come [proceeding] from it, not to pay for past deeds, but for the benefit to be gained afterwards, not bringing their past existence up to the mind except to fix in us the hatred of sin.

The Books, as we have often shown above, present and remind us with healthy demonstrations this, that God is not the avenger of evils, but the corrector of evils. That is [the action] of the wicked, this [that] of a father.

He then shows that he brings goods and evils to come as to retribution, although this is not his purpose, but [that] to place in us charity and fear, because by this our conduct is made chaste while by charity we are raised into a virtuous intellect. And if not, what relation would the coming of Christ have to the actions of the generations before it? Does this great clemency seem to you the retribution of those ungodly acts? Tell me: if God is retributive and does what is His for retribution, what measure of retribution does it seem [present] to you here, O man? Show me!

Let us therefore not attribute to the [operations] of God, and which [come] to us from him, the intention of vengeance, but fatherly measures and wise economy and full will of our goods and perfect charity.

If [it is] charity, it is not retribution, and if [it is] retribution, it is not charity. Charity, when it gives offense, does not remunerate with its goods or with its correction the previous [actions], but looks at the profit that [lies] before it. It scrutinizes future things, not past things.

And if we think otherwise than this, according to this childish understanding he therefore would have been a weak Creator. I speak as a man: after, against his will, his construction had become corrupt, then would another means have been procured [by God] to prepare in place of his corruption [further] evils? Such knowledge concerning the Creator is weak!

If, on the other hand, we think that indeed in the course of creation an economy is hidden and scrutinize God's judgments, the bearers of a mystery, since, as we approach in contemplation the Creator's nature, those expressions and their use are inadequate, since they are not placed according to the knowledge and properties of that nature-as [it] results from the tally of actions-[then] come, let us cry out to God with the blessed David:*Your judgments [are] like the great deep* (Ps. 35:7)!

Truly this is the mind that has perceived something that [lies] beyond the body and deeper than voices and bodily figures, by the gift of spiritual knowledge!

We do not believe, because fury and wrath and hatred, etc., are said of the Creator, that he also does anything with wrath or hatred and envy. In the Books many forms far removed from his nature are attributed to God. And just as nature endowed with reason little by little was enlightened and made wise in the holy knowledge of the mysteries hidden in the discourse about God, so that it did not comprehend everything as it is written, but discerned, in the corporeality of the stories, the hidden economy and the eternal knowledge that governs everything, so we shall also know and perceive many things in relation to which our knowledge now seems [to be] the opposite with respect to that which we shall have then [lett.: with respect to those then], and [we shall know] that all the orders therein are the principles of all exact intelligence which we have now acquired [only as] in an opinion relative to the truth; many then and without end [are] also the things which herein neither hath He brought up to our intelligence, not in promises nor in fore-tellings.

Therefore we say that even in the case of the tribulation and condemnation of Gehenna, for all the time fixed to its dominion, that wise Factor, who takes his cue from the motive of the mischief of our actions and our will to perform his economy in which is hidden a wise and beneficial teaching, unexplained, together for angels and for men and for those who are chastened, both demons and men, has [present] some mystery.

If in fact the future world is all grace and charity and mercy and goodness, and [it is true] that even the resurrection from the house of the dead is a demonstration of God's mercy and charity and prodigality that does not retaliate, how would the economies in it [present] be [the expression] of the wages of our [actions] good and bad?

We speak of retribution when the one who will be the retributor is instructed in retribution little by little, in accordance with the goods and evils that have occurred, beginning with their [very] taking place, and he, with the change of actions, day by day, acquires a [correspondingly] changed knowledge, and his thoughts are caused [by something else] and receive beginning from time.

If, on the other hand, kingdom and Gehenna did not appear in the intelligence of our good God [as of] the existence of goods and evils, but the thoughts related to them are eternal and were known to him from before justice and sin were manifested, then kingdom and Gehenna are acts of mercy

that God established according to [an essential reason], on account of his eternal goodness, and not [acts] of vengeance, although he has placed the name of retribution on them.

Again: to say or to think that it is not [design] full of charity nor action mixed with mercy, this opinion is full of blasphemy and [is] an insult to God, our Lord, because, even though it delivers us to the fire because of passions and torment and all evil [actions], we [thus] attribute to the divine nature an enmity toward beings endowed with reason whom He has created by grace, or [we affirm] that He does something out of wrath and with vindictive intent, or [that] He thinks as one who exacts vengeance for Himself.

There is in no action of his [thing], the beginning and fulfillment of whose motion is not wholly [an expression] of mercy and charity and clemency toward us. In him then there is not [properly] a beginning of the motion of the actions disposed for us; in us instead [his operation] is known from time and has a beginning.

Admirable is the gentle clemency and boundless prodigality of God our Lord, who by grace multiplies threats and diminishes punishments, in order to the increase in us of charity toward him.

May his name be blessed. Amen.

Here ends the discourse composed in accordance with the divine intention on the contemplation of the great future judgment, inasmuch as it has been given by divine grace to our infirmity to give glory to God, the Father of all things, for His all-surpassing, all-giving understanding.

By Mar Isaac: On Creation And On God

Even if there was a time when the creation had not come into existence, still there is no time when God did not possess his charity toward it, for even if it was not, still for God there is no time when the creation is not in his knowledge. And if she did not know, because she was not yet created, God on the other hand continually had knowledge of all her distinctions and natures. He then gave it its existence when it seemed good to him.

God's true charity toward the creation is known by this, that after having accomplished its constitution in all its distinctions, he joined it all in one unity-his [realities] sensible and his [realities] intelligible [all] in one bond-and joined it to his divinity and made it ascend above all the heavens and made it sit on the eternal throne and made it god over all.

A degree according to nature even higher than this, which creation had assumed - will this persuade you, O man, of the truthful sign of God's manifold charity toward creation?

By what supplication did the creation assume this and what prayer did it approach for itself? And when did this rise to its heart and what conduct did it give in return for becoming god? What is it that we err in our thoughts toward the least mortal things and do not approach the great wealth assumed by us nor [perceive it]-that is, do we not meditate night and day on our decorum, [the fact] that we have already become gods?

Tell me then, O my beloved: if we were given every choice, so that we might choose for nature all that seems good to us and what [is] greatest, which of us would choose for our own sake or for nature all that God has deliberated for us?

Is there then yet another region beyond that to which creation has ascended? Again, what is the greater region of godhood? And behold: creation has become god.

For we do not approach [our] search to [operations] that are partial, in order to seek from them a testimony to the truth of God's vigorous charity toward his creation, but we approach it to the term [itself] of his riches and to that which encompasses the many parts of his charity in a single vision and causes us to investigate it synthetically. [This is a point] where our vision is not dispersed in [many] things-even though we are accosted to the partial [operations] of his charity so that the intellect may lean toward some of the stupendous and varied [actions] performed by him toward us, for it is possible that, to whatever [of them] we have approached, from it shines forth the sign of his fervent charity for the creation - but [where] we are approached to [his own] overall understanding, [there] where even the division present in the other [operations] is removed from our intellect; [there] where our intellect does not err in many [things], when we pursue it, but awe, which scrutinizes thoughts in the manifold, powerful pleading of intelligence, synthetically generates a single vision.

At the beginning of creation, when God created Adam, he, when he could not yet [distinguish] between right and left, as soon as he was made, desired the degree of divinity. What Satan sowed in him as mischief: *Be ye as gods* (Gen. 3:5) - and he lent faith to it in his boyhood - God actually fulfilled it, and at the end of days he was given the crown of divinity, because of the great charity of Him who created him. And well the fathers, moved by the Spirit whispering in them of the divine power that accomplished these [things]... to them he revealed the mystery and said, *The union of Christ with the Godhead revealed to us the mysterious union of everything with Christ*. This is the

mystery, that the whole creation through one has been approached to God in mystery; [this] then is propagated in the whole. Thus everything is united to him as the members to the body; he then [is] the head for the whole. This act was administered for the whole creation. For there will be a time when not even one part will be missing from the whole. For it is not a matter of the Creator's great counsel being propagated only to [partial] realities, but he will do that which is more when he has raised it up here [and] revealed it.⁹⁶

Glory be to you, our Creator and our Lord, who in the wholesome contemplation of your charity filled me with consolation and joy, lifted my thought from the depths of the earth and received it on the throne of your Essence, that it might wander in the riches of your nature and admire the unspeakable mysteries of your charity, that it might recede from the many parts of creation and ascend to the region of its Factor.

His unseen sight intoxicates me and his glory makes me admired. His mysteries incite me, his charity amazes me, for he brings his mysteries down to me and shows me his riches, and when I think my journey is finished, again they flood me, for they are more glorious than the rooms through which I have [already] passed. And again: when I think that I have stretched myself all the way into them, I return to see [those] themselves, having become before me a great sea, without end to cross and sweet to look upon, and in repetition its manifestations are different and its mysteries multiply and its visions change in the mind.

If in the [operations] He has administered for us and in our nature His mysteries are so infinite, who will exhaust those of His nature? And whence yet will [man] introduce [into himself] another nature, more capable of insight than [that] of the angels, lest he desist from their knowledge? If in the [things] in which [as well as] we have seen him and touched him the paths of his economy are so severed, through wonder, from [all] understanding before the path of the intellect, those of his invisibility what then will they be?

Oh, the boundless mercy of God toward His constitution! Let us look at this mystery in unspeakable insight! For in order that we might know that it [is] not that he joined the Essence to the creation because he was in need of it, but that he might draw it [to himself] and that he might make it a partaker of his riches and give it his own, so that the eternal goodness of his nature might be known, [for this] he placed the honor and glory of his divinity upon it, so that instead of the invisible God the visible creation might be called god, and instead of the uncreated and the al-above times he crowned with the name of Trinity the creature and that which [is] under [placed at] a beginning; and placed that precious name, for the honor of whose sanctification the [very] mouths of the vigilant are not [enough] pure, on its constitution-that is, on the emptying of which the divine Book speaks. This is that, *He emptied his soul* (Phil 2:7a), which the blessed Paul said with unspeakable wonder, the interpretation of which is the intelligent narrative of divine charity, for [God] so loved the creation that it was called god and the name of his greatness became his.

Great is this mystery! I am not aware of where I have thought to swim in this great sea and who has given me these mighty arms, for, behold, they swim with pleasure through the unexplored abyss and are not [fatigued by it], indeed, the more they see that the sea is extensive and its term invisible, [the] more they clothe sweetness and instead of fatigue joy [is like] a wall from within, in the heart - and, still, I am not aware of where I have been made worthy of this grace, to make the interpretation

⁹⁶ I could not identify the quoted passage. I only point out a distant assonance of its opening part with Chapter 7 of Evagrius' *Admonitio paraenetica* (in J.Muyldermans, *Evagriana syriaca*, Louvain 1952, p. 127): The intelligible perception of Christ revealed to us the perception in mystery (or: mystery) of everything.

of divine charity, which is unspeakable to the created tongue: the [same] angelic intellects are too weak to rise to the height of its contemplation and suffer great harm in enclosing in their thoughts all the riches of its charity.

But since we have not applied ourselves to this height to scrutinize, but to be delighted with it, this taste will come to us swiftly, because we have received the narrative of its help, and from then on we will cease and remain silent, after it has shown us that to which there is no end - I say God's charity for his creation -. And until the time has come when we shall in fact find, in the other world, prepared for the manifestation of charity, the prototype of its mystery, let us limit our discourse here, persevering in this consolation, a mirror [of that] (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12), and in the dark image of our knowledge relative to charity, in our faith, until the day of its great and glorious manifestation, when we shall see this invisible wealth of ours with us and near us.

What is equal to the wonder and joy present in [the things of God], [proper] to that which he prepares for us, without [our] supplication, in his eternal charity and boundless mercy?

God, rich in his mercy, for his much love, with which he loved us, etc. (Eph 2:4): to him be glory forever and ever. Amen and amen.

On Prayer - An Afterword

"Our Lord, from the night when *he sweated* (Lk 22:44), changed the sweat of labor [exercised] on a land that *grows thorns and thistles* (Gen 2:18) into the sweat that goes with prayer, that [man] might sweat in the work of righteousness" (B 28:241).

The work of prayer in the agony of passion even is the act at once extreme and somehow unique and proper to the Christian. Certainly the exact practice of the Lord's words leads one to understand that "each of our Lord's commandments is said in relation to a class [of men] and [that] not all the commandments are useful to a single person" (Chapters 4:74). Indeed, Isaac asks, "just as the saying, *Be vigilant and pray always* (Eph 6:18)... resembles the saying, *I was sick and you visited me...* (Mt 25:35-36)" (*therein*), thus enabling its implementation of near, if not equal, intensity? And he says this not because life in quietness, the place par excellence of prayer, averts the works of mercy: when they are necessary, "neither do we neglect them, since we *always* compel our souls to be inwardly full of mercy toward every nature of beings endowed with reason," so as to accomplish it "when the time is suitable for the work" (B 81:566-567 [s.]). For so commands the doctrine of our Lord, and this (to be understood: the cordial reception and solicitous care of those who visit us) is "[sign] distinctive of our quietness, and not [sign] fortuitous" (*ibid.*) – the our quietness, mind you: of us Christians, in each of whom "the mercy [of God] is made man" (*Letter to Mar Isho'z'kha*, ms of Oxford, f. 19r^o). It is distinctive and not fortuitous, then, because charity is "the power of the kingdom" (Chapters 4:78), the purpose of creation, perfectly manifested in its *repetition* in the crucified Christ (*ibid.* 4:79-81). What else, finally, can the Christian do but make the exegesis, in works and words, of the *emptying of his soul* (Phil 2:7a), "the interpretation of which is the intelligent narrative of divine charity" (On Creation, p. 241)?

But for this very reason we gather with God; *for this very reason we solitaires* - Isaac writes - "take care of the stillness" (and singular care), to be purified by it and to become capable, "even if [only] sometimes," of the "silence of the intellect" (B 81:566 [s.]) that out of a passion of loveolitar "wanders," mute and unceasing, to the Friend, "in him" (B 33:257).

In that silence man "is stupefied and turned to the Silence" -- which is God -- *by grace*, always. Always spiritual, the work of the Spirit, is indeed every revelation of the Mystery. It then, in order to be *truth and knowledge* and not to show only "something by clues and signs, conforming to the powers of man," in "images" given "by instruction," as a "work of consolation," to "men simple in knowledge and endowed with little intelligence of the truth," to children, finally, according to Heb. 5:13 (B 19:199-200), demands "pure prayer," in "great custody" of self (B 22:206), which is properly, we shall see, the cry of the humble.

This -- the prayer that invokes the coming of God's mercy -- is thus the work of the Christian, a manifold work, the ways of which need to be traced.

The Powerful Cry

The sweat of prayer is the work of justice, it is written. Now the order of righteousness is gathered into a "material" practice (which "is accomplished among people" and has as its modes "service to the sick, the welcoming of pilgrims...") and an "immaterial" one, "which it is not possible to practice outside oneself," and is chastity, fasting, weeping, reading, officiating, quietude, prayer... (*Chapters* 1:56-58). Up to here comes righteousness, in outward and inward righteousness and integrity. Up to here: up to pure prayer are "laments and prostrations and supplications and orations of the heart and sweet tears," motions all which up to it "lead intelligence, in the power of their freedom" (B 22:205-206). But precisely because of this, because it is the fruit of freedom, "in it there is combat," always (*therein*).

Not allowing [things] to show themselves to thought while we pray, this is ours. Let thought remain silent, expelled from it the [objects] that [show themselves to it, and [that] it be above struggle and semblance, this [the] power of nature cannot [do]" (*Chapters* 4:35); or again, "Pure prayer is not that the phantoms of things do not move in the intellect, but that the intellect does not look at them with invitation nor remain in conversation with them" (*ibid.* 3:41; cf. Also 3:42).

"Changes happen to every man, as to the air," Macarius had written, and Isaac comments, "Do you understand that, to *every man*? One is indeed nature. Think not that it speaks only to the lacking, while the perfect would be free from change" (B 72.495 [s.]). Every man "in this world" is always subject to struggle and humiliation in struggle, as together always sometimes experiences "joy and peace from God and chaste thoughts that pacify"-in Macarius' words, "All the saints are thrown into this work," in which they have abatements and consolations, so that neither are they lost, in pride, nor despair, disheartened (.,496).

"Know that God's solicitude has caused *all* these things to come to you so that you might be humbled," so that in the hour of serenity you might know "that [the fact of] standing is [not the work] of you nor of your virtue, but [that] it is grace that brings you on the palm of His hands so that you will not be shaken" (.,498-499).

The order of pure prayer is thus the order of humility, which "even without works atones for many sins": it "will make us children of God and, without practice, make us righteous before God" (.,499).

"Until you have perceived at least a little of the motions of humility *by the help of our Lord* [who made his garment of it, I observe, 'for the Word who became man clothed her and in it spoke with us'; for 'it descended as rain on fleece of lambs or as quiet drops lightly falling on the earth (cf. Ps. 71:6)' (B 82:574 and 575 [s.])], you will not feel the relish and help that [proceed] from your labors nor will your thoughts gather from rambling nor will you steadfastly and patiently sustain the cases that come to you, without disturbance and without agitation" (*Chapters* 4:96).

This whole text should be quoted here. Two traits I emphasize from it: the work of humility are the cessation of sloth and, with that, the continual confession, "whether you are hungry or full, whether you are thirsty or destitute or sick or harassed by anyone," for you will perceive without despair that "you are indebted to all men, always, for everything," and "it will seem to you that no one is lacking toward you, but you will find to be *in you* the cause of every evil, for every vexation that has come upon you" (*ibid.*).

Note the close connection between the absence of humility and sloth, the devastating *meridian demon* of Ps 90:6b (LXX), according to the exegesis delivered by Evagrius to later monastic meditation.

"Until you have found humility, you will be tried more than anything else by sloth, and sloth will generate in you continual thoughts, and you will see the multitude of men fail toward you, and no matter how well and according to due you aim at the goal, you will be what is not good [to be]. *Therefore everything will seem to you [happen] upside down*" (Chapters 4:97).

Grave then is acedia, the grim and wrathful outcome of sin, but it is inescapable evidence: "The fathers say that in the time when man has begun to separate himself from the sin that dwells in him...it happens to him what happens to the woman for whom the time of childbirth is near, because sin tribulates him night and day, so that his soul is almost close to perishing" (*Chapters* 2:12). In this agony one cries out "night and day," "Lord, deliver me from the darkness of the soul" (*ibid.* 1:34). "But [then], when the air before him is cleared, [then] with each passing day joy comes to him, and so easily pass away from him even the difficult changes that assail him, until little by little he comes to the harbor of mercy" (*ibid.* 2:12).

Pure prayer, humility - "the term of the recollection of the intellect" (*ibid.* 2:34) -, silence of this same intellect or worship: this is the way of the Christian, the way of mercy, precisely. "Do not think it is idleness to much lingering in worship before God," Isaac admonishes, and he concludes, "It [is] humiliation of body and intellect... and a great readiness for the charity of God" (*ibid.* 1:20).

Pure prayer is the "prayer of ardor," dense with orations "quick and vehement, pure and fervent as coals of fire," in which is "a *powerful cry* (Heb. 5:7) rising from the depths of the heart, joined to the humility that [proceeds] from the power of joy," by which "man is humbled in his thoughts to the depths" (Holy Quakes, p. 217). Yet this "frequency of motions during prayer is not a high part in pure, even beautiful prayer" (*Chapters* 4:66): "more precious ... [are] the paucity and brevity of the movements and the fact that in the paucity of [such] prayer the thought looks on as if in admiration" (therein). Here, on the extreme threshold of pure prayer, which is "the prayer of knowledge," when the word "dries up in man's mouth" and "he ceases absolutely from all motion," soul and body clamped by a "motionless silence" (Holy Quiverings, p. 217) "by the power of the knowledge which the intellect receives in the verse" or restrained "in the pleasure" of it (*Chapters* 4:66) - here "the heart is exercised, without change to anything else, in the desire of inexhaustible charity" (*ibid.*).

This knowledge, however experienced always the fruit of grace, *guards prayer*, which in fact, "separated from contemplation, is full of sloth and is prayed with difficulty" (*ibid.* 1:42).

So far man comes, *with the Lord's help*: beyond there is the "unspeakable silence," the work of the Spirit, where nature "has no will," is in "captivity," and God's power "leads it where it does not perceive," "so that [one] does not even know *whether [he is] in body or without body*, according to the testimony of Scripture (2 Cor. 12:2-3)" (B 22:209).

Beyond there is the intoxicated passion of love, for "charity is something fervent by its very nature, and when it is poured out without measure on man [it] makes his soul mad," while "his face blushes and exults, his body burns," and he "becomes almost unbridled," indeed, in paradox, at all "unbridled"- "with discernment" (B 33:257), overwhelmed by the sweetness of pleasure.

The Long Work Of The Officio

But there is a progression and complexity in prayer, consistent after all with the permanent human mutability that only humility endures without despair: this must now be further insisted upon.

There is a particular prayer and there is a general one," Isaac writes, and adds, "We clothe ... a soul inclined [to error]: we cannot be continually able to pray according to a general way," asking always and only: *Thy will be done* (Mt. 6:10; *Chapters* 1:59). Now "the psalms of David were placed by the fathers in the church for this, because in them there are distinctions of prayers," conforming to the different needs of our "disease, which obliges us to invoke the Factor on its behalf" (*ibid.*). "Therefore," he adds, "as the foundation of life we place at the beginning of our invocation, at all appointed hours, the prayer given us by our Savior and, after it, the prayers which the Spirit has composed *for our instruction and delight* [the two together, mind you!] by the mouth of the blessed prophet," the psalms (*ibid.*).

Thus, then, the Christian begins the work of prayer, in the time of his first infirmity: at appointed hours, punctually, according to the rule handed down by the fathers, he recites the *Our Father* and the *psalms*.

In this occupation he must persevere, patient: "While therefore you are yet in the first age," Isaac admonishes, "work especially in the long office of the psalms" (*ibid.* 4:45); or again, "Whoever does not receive upon himself, *rejoicing in them*, the heaviness, tedium and sloth [present] in the office ... but desires full relief from them, though he does not wish to deliver himself into the hands of the spirit of fornication" (*ibid.* 4:22); or again, "Do not be tedious about the length of the officium and the extent of our prayers and the many repetitions in them.... Let us only know not to deem them nor judge them the fruit, but *the root*, for without them the fruit would not even be seen, and it will fall into our hand... Let no one abandon the indispensable continuity in them as *long as they clothe the flesh*. Let no one here be troubled: they have a term" (*ibid.* 4:70).

Fatigue, tedium, sadness suffers the believer in the work of prayer, and *ever* so will he toil in it, *as long as he clothe the flesh* - while at the same time receiving joy from it also; while accepting, on its burden, the testimony of the fathers: *it has an end*.

Isaac tells of Rabban Shabur (as we know from another source) that this revered solitary, barely a generation ahead of him, would console a brother, who with him thus lamented the heaviness of his trial, "How shall I be made wise, since I taste death every day?" saying, "Know, my son, that for thirty years I *have* been waging war against demons [present tense, note! It is important to remember this in order to understand what follows], without any help for twenty years. When it was [past] twenty-five years, rest began to shine forth, and the more it came, [the] greater it was, and when it was [past] twenty-eight years it was greater and greater, and at the completion of thirty years the rest was so great that I do not know how much it is" (B 53:388 [s.]). As well: "I have war," says Rabban Shabur, and the other source I recalled (a monk a little younger than Isaac, Simon of Taibuteh) closes the loner's testimony with this further note: "Nevertheless, according to the word of the divine Paul, this is perfection, that *each one should consider his neighbor superior to himself* (Phil. 2:3), walking in the way which the holy fathers have trodden for us, without tedium, and the

Lord will protect our weakness" (cf. A.Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies* VII, Cambridge 1934, [t] f. 195a [p. 314]; [v] pp. 59-60).

Remember: changes happen to *every* man. No one here rises "in the order [in himself] one of the absence of inclination, without motion of passions, as [the] Messalians say [instead]" (B 72:495 [s.]), these "haughty, unscientific prayerers, who assure themselves that they can pray when they want a spiritual prayer," perfect (B 22:210).

Always in struggle and toil we pray; always distracted we spell out the words of the psalms. This is so, and if Isaac writes, "Let us not multiply the recitation [of the verses], like fools, while with our thoughts we wander through garbage" (*Chapters* 1:54), even elsewhere he insistently exhorts, "When it is the time of battle and darkness, *though we are distracted*, let us linger in prayer..." (ivi1:30). And again, "You will not desire to pray then, after you have purified yourself from wandering thoughts," for then "you would never pray" (ivi 4:34). Instead, "humbled by looking at the wretchedness of our nature - as with our power we are capable of nothing" (*ibid.* 4:36), *nevertheless* we pray: yes, "we are vivified, and we pray; we are devoured, and we pray; we are innocent, and we pray;...we are soiled with the blood of our wounds, and we pray... Let us not at all desist from our invocation because we are not such as to be [worthy of it] and as befits the [things] of prayer. For our Lord said, *The healthy have no need of the physician* (Mt. 9:12 and par.)" (*ibid.*).

So assiduous does the believer pray, and then "the wise words" of the verses "will draw to God all the parts of the soul [and] its charity," arousing it, by their "magnificence," "to look keenly into God and intuit[it]" (*ibid.* 3:12).

Thus grows that "silent conversation with God, in quiet and unperturbed supplication," which is the "purpose of psalmody" (*ibid.* 1:54). For this *root* bears the fruit of *its own* conversation with God, in the unflinching remembrance of him, to the point of worship in which it pauses, is stilled [a moment, an hour, a day...] thought.

There will never be "contempt" for this root: its passing "in the *humble* form of unceasing worship" is "the fullness of it... not the emptying of it, not at all" (*ibid.* 4:30). And always it will return to it, in this time of war.

More is not to be said, I think. Only the *evidence of prayer* remains, of that of the psalms and of one's own, to which the Father leads the son.

At the conclusion of this note I then quote the translation of the last section of the letter Isaac sent to Mar Isho'zkhā, a friend for whom he writes everything he does as a question, "beginning with the fervor of my charity toward you, whereby even at night, in my dream, I wander in you, in habit with you" (Oxford ms, f. 2r^o; the text below reads there at ff. 17r^o-19r^o). Here, finally, he precipitates all teaching.

I want to write you a few more words of prayer, and then I will bring this letter to an end. It seemed necessary to me to include them in the letter so that they might become matter of prayer for you and [your] thought, by the sense of the understandings in them, might acquire humility and cease from vain wandering, through the passion in them. And when you eat and drink and rise or sit or sleep or do anything; even when you walk on the street or are among many, in the concealment of your heart, be familiar with these words that I write to you. Together, even when you kneel down, when in your invocation you say the things that are necessary and needed, begin to pray with these [words].

*By what movements the thought is aroused
So that you look to God in the moment of prayer.*

When you pray, add these [words] to your prayer:

God, make me worthy to perceive that hope which is kept for the righteous at your coming, when you come in our body to make your glory known to the worlds.

God, whose charity caused the world to come [into existence] when it did not know thee, and [who] thou hast revealed thyself in part to the righteous in every generation, through the hints of [thy] revelations, awaken thou the mortality of my motions to the perception of thee, that I may hasten to thee and not desist until the hour when death shall terminate my journey in the harbor of silence.

Christ, harbor of mercy, [the one] who has made revelation of himself within a sinful generation; whom the righteous have waited for in their generations and who has revealed himself in his own time, for the joy of all creation, give me other eyes and other hearing and other heart, so that, instead of the world, I may see and hear and perceive, with a sight and hearing and perception [at all] unusual, the [things] kept by you in the revelation of your glory to the race of Christians.

Awaken in me, my Lord, the taste of the perception of you, so that I may be disposed, [far] from the world, near you, [just as] the world, in its sight, had captured me. As long as my eyes, in their sight, see corruptible [realities] and my thought has intelligence of [mere] corporeality, it is not possible for me to be perfectly free from the infirm and corruptible motions that [proceed] from them.

Make me worthy, my Lord, to obtain that vision over which corruption no longer has power, so that, when for its attainment I have forgotten the world and myself, the figures of the body may be blotted out before my eyes.

Christ, delight of our kind, consolation of our wretchedness, support of the humility of our nature that has faltered and fallen, hope of the rejected, precious name known among men, grant resurrection to my fall, awaken my mortality, instill in me the perception of life, bring my soul out of the prison of ignorance so that I may confess your name, blow into my limbs the air of new life, visit my corruption in the tomb and bring me out of the house of darkness. The east of your revelation visit me within the Sheol of ignorance.

The nature endowed with speech has been silent in me: move her still, my Lord, to the vitality of her nature, for the Sheol will not confess thee nor will they glorify thy name who go down into the pit.

I have no mouth to say anything other than, I confess to you a life like [this] mine today.

The senses are dumbed down, the motions have been silenced, the thoughts stripped away, and every operation of nature is devoid in me of true life. There is no memory of you in me nor confession of you in the Sheol in which I dwell, nor, in the perdition of my soul, [is there] the joyful voice of your glorifications. All my limbs, dead, await the pangs of resurrection.

It is not possible for Elijah to enter the desolation of the Sheol!

My God, let me hear your voice that awakens everything in secret. Decree for me, in mystery, the demonstration that [you granted] to Lazarus, your friend.

I know, Lord, that I have never been seen [to be] your diligent friend. I am of your flock and my adversary leads me and humbles me to the ground: God, make me worthy of the participation in the greatness prepared by you for your friends in the new world and of the perception of the knowledge of your charity and of the unbreakable union and indissoluble bond of the glad glance in you.

Do not refuse me your grace, my Lord. May I not be deprived of the knowledge of you, full of hope.

Lord, preserve me from the darkness of the soul. Merciful Christ, make me rejoice in the hope of you. Sow the hope of you in my thoughts and make me worthy, my Lord, of your mercy in the rising of your revelation from heaven.

When you come in your glory do not demand, my Lord, the judgment of my faults.

By your grace, my Lord, you brought me into existence, and by your grace make my body worthy of resurrection: let my awakening from the dust not be for judgment and confusion of face!

Do not arouse me, my Lord, because you endure judgment and deprivation of you, but arouse me from the dust, my Lord, for my delight and for the glory to which your will looked [from] the beginning, to bring to it the creation [all] of beings endowed with reason, once you had constituted it.

Thou hast not created me, my Lord, for the use of Gehenna: lest I become a vessel of perdition! Perdition, my Lord, is that one be deprived of the vision of you, who all things make one rejoice.

Make me worthy, my Lord, of the explanation of that hope which you willed [from] the beginning and for which you constituted me, that I might see your eternal glory, for which, when we were not, in your charity you willed the creation to be, to perceive you.

Supplicate in prayer with these [words] and with them be familiar in the moment of your invocation and be moved with longing and passion and fervently implore and make your heart burn in prayer in these and as many motions, until his mercy is made a man in you and the burning passion of his charity is aroused in your heart.

In these and as many customs the intellect is contracted within itself by gladness and little by little forgets the wandering and is absorbed in the understandings and freed from the likenesses, and the man suffers in his prayer and in his thought and passion is poured out [in him] mingling with faith, and his heart rejoices in God and rejoices in joy and exults in charity and hope is full and it is roused from sleep. In the moment of prayer the soul is raised from these habits [proper] to the prayer of knowledge to great delight.

The great motions generated in man at the moment of supplication happen from the superabundant yearning and much meditation of thought and assiduous habit with the prayer that everywhere adheres to man, in his consideration and habit, with some purpose of invocation.

The letter is finished.