

the hesychast a prayer that is turbid and careless, for everywhere Scripture tells us to guard the soul's organs of perception. If a monk submits his will to the law of God, then his intellect will govern in accordance with this law all that is subordinate to itself. It will direct as it should all the soul's impulses, especially its incensive power and desire, for these are subordinate to it.

We have practised virtue and done what is right, turning our desire towards God and His will, and directing our incensive power, or wrath, against the devil and sin. What then do we still lack? Inward meditation.

27. If some shameful thought is sown in your heart as you are sitting in your cell, watch out. Resist the evil, so that it does not gain control over you. Make every effort to call God to mind, for He is looking at you, and whatever you are thinking in your heart is plainly visible to Him. Say to your soul: 'If you are afraid of sinners like yourself seeing your sins, how much more should you be afraid of God who notes everything?' As a result of this warning the fear of God will be revealed in your soul, and if you cleave to Him you will not be shaken by the passions; for it is written: 'They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion; he that dwells in Jerusalem shall never be shaken' (Ps. 125:1. LXX). Whatever you are doing, remember that God sees all your thoughts, and then you will never sin. To Him be glory through all the ages. Amen.

EVAGRIOS THE SOLITARY

Introductory Note

Evagrios the Solitary, also known as Evagrios Pontikos, was born in 345 or 346, probably at Iborra in Pontus, although according to another opinion he was a native of Iberia (Georgia). A disciple of the Cappadocian Fathers, he was ordained reader by St Basil the Great and deacon by St Gregory the Theologian (Gregory of Nazianzos), and he accompanied the latter to the Council of Constantinople in 381 (the second Ecumenical Council). Evagrios was never ordained priest. After a brief stay in Jerusalem, he went in 383 to Egypt, where he spent the remaining sixteen years of his life. After two years at Nitria, where he became a monk, he moved to the more remote desert of Kellia, dying there in 399. While in Egypt he had as his spiritual father the priest of Kellia, St Makarios of Alexandria, and it is probable that he also knew St Makarios the Egyptian, the priest and spiritual father of Sketis. In the person of these two saints, he came into contact with the first generation of the Desert Fathers and with their spirituality in its purest form.

In the numerous writings of Evagrios there may be discerned two tendencies, the one 'speculative' and the other 'practical'. On the 'speculative' side he relies heavily upon Origen (c. 185-c. 254), borrowing from him in particular certain theories about the pre-existence of human souls and the *apokatastasis* or final restoration of all things in Christ. These theories were condemned at the fifth Ecumenical Council (553). On the 'practical' side he draws upon the living experience of the Desert Fathers of Egypt, mainly Copts, among whom he spent the last years of his life. He possessed to an exceptional degree the gifts of psychological insight and vivid description, together with the ability to analyse and define with remarkable precision the various stages on the spiritual way. Here his teachings, so far from being condemned, have exercised a decisive influence upon subsequent writers. His disciple St John

Cassian, while abandoning the suspect theories that Evagrius derived from Origen, transmitted the 'practical' aspect of Evagrius' teachings to the Latin West. In the Greek East the technical vocabulary devised by Evagrius remained thereafter standard: it can be found, for example, in the writings of St Diadochos of Photiki, St John Klimakos and St Maximos the Confessor, as also within the Syriac tradition, in the *Mystic Treatises* of St Isaac of Nineveh. The works included by St Nikodimos in the *Philokalia* all belong to the 'practical' side of Evagrius, and contain little if any trace of suspect speculations.

Several of Evagrius' works have come down under the name of other authors. This is the case with the writing *On Prayer*, which in the Greek *Philokalia* is ascribed to Neilos; but recent research has made it plain beyond any reasonable doubt that this is a writing of Evagrius.¹

¹ See the studies by I. Hausherr, 'Le Traité de l'Oraison d'Evagre le Pontique', in *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*, XV (1934), pp. 34-93, 113-70; and *Les leçons d'un contemplatif. Le Traité de l'Oraison d'Evagre le Pontique* (Paris, 1960). The Evagrius authorship of the work *On Prayer* is accepted by a previous English translator, John Eudes Bamberger, in his introduction to *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos; Chapters on Prayer* (Cistercian Studies Series, No. 4, Spencer, Mass., 1970 [i.e. 1972]).

Outline Teaching on Asceticism and Stillness in the Solitary Life

In Jeremiah it is said: 'And you shall not take a wife in this place, for thus says the Lord concerning the sons and daughters born in this place: . . . they shall die grievous deaths' (Jer. 7: 1-4). This shows that, in the words of the Apostle, 'He that is married cares for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife', and he is inwardly divided, and 'she that is married cares for the things of the world, how she may please her husband' (1 Cor. 7: 32-34). It is clear that the statement in Jeremiah, 'they shall die grievous deaths', refers not only to the sons and daughters born as a result of marriage, but also to those born in the heart, that is, to worldly thoughts and desires: these too will die from the weak and sickly spirit of this world, and will have no place in heavenly life. On the other hand, as the Apostle says, 'he that is unmarried cares for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord' (1 Cor. 7: 32); and he produces the fruits of eternal life, which always keep their freshness.

Such is the solitary. He should therefore abstain from women and not beget a son or daughter in the place of which Jeremiah speaks. He must be a soldier of Christ, detached from material things, free from cares and not involved in any trade or commerce; for, as the Apostle says, 'In order to please the leader who has chosen him, the soldier going to war does not entangle himself in the affairs of this world' (2 Tim. 2: 4). Let the monk follow this course, especially since he has renounced the materiality of this world in order to win the blessings of stillness. For the practice of stillness is full of joy and beauty; its yoke is easy and its burden light.

Do you desire, then, to embrace this life of solitude, and to seek out the blessings of stillness? If so, abandon the cares of the world, and the principalities and powers that lie behind them; free yourself

to stability. Hunger, exertion and withdrawal from the world wither burning lust. Reciting the psalms, long-suffering and compassion curb our incensive power when it is unruly. Anything untimely or pushed to excess is short-lived and harmful rather than helpful.

On Prayer: One Hundred and Fifty-Three Texts

PROLOGUE

When suffering from the fever of unclean passions, my intellect afflicted with shameful thoughts, I have often been restored to health by your letters, as I used to be by the counsel of our great guide and teacher.¹ This is not to be wondered at, since like the blessed Jacob you have earned a rich inheritance. Through your efforts to win Rachel you have been given Leah (cf. Gen. 29:25),² and now you seek to be given Rachel also, since you have laboured a further seven years for her sake.

For myself, I cannot deny that although I have worked hard all night I have caught nothing. Yet at your suggestion I have again let down the nets, and I have made a large catch. They are not big fish, but there are a hundred and fifty-three of them (cf. John, 21:11). These, as you requested, I am sending you in a creel of love, in the form of a hundred and fifty-three texts.

I am delighted to find you so eager for texts on prayer – eager not simply for those written on paper with ink but also for those which are fixed in the intellect through love and generosity. But since ‘all things go in pairs, one complementing the other’, as the wise Jesus puts it (Ecclus. 42:24), please accept the letter and understand its spirit, since every written word presupposes the intellect: for where there is no intellect there is no written word. The way of prayer is also twofold: it comprises practice of the virtues and contemplation. The same applies to numbers: literally they are quantities, but they can also signify qualities.

I have divided this discourse on prayer into one hundred and fifty-three texts. In this way I send you an evangelical feast, so that

¹ St Makarios of Alexandria (see p. 53).

² Here Leah symbolizes the practice of the virtues and Rachel contemplation.

you may delight in a symbolical number that combines a triangular with a hexagonal figure.¹ The triangle indicates spiritual knowledge

1. The number 153 recalls the draught of 'great fishes' caught by Simon Peter and the Apostles (John 21:11). In this passage Evagrius makes use of a numerical symbolism widely employed in the ancient and mediæval world:

i. A *triangular* number is the sum total of a continuous series of numerals, starting from the number 1. Thus 3 (= 1 + 2), 6 (= 1 + 2 + 3) and 10 (= 1 + 2 + 3 + 4) are all triangular numbers.

ii. A *square* number is obtained by numbering from 1 but omitting one numeral each time. Thus 4 (= 1 + 3), 9 (= 1 + 3 + 5) and 16 (= 1 + 3 + 5 + 7) are square numbers.

iii. To obtain a *pentagonal* number, two numerals are omitted each time: 1 + 4 + 7 + 10 . . . etc.; to obtain a *hexagonal* number, three numerals are omitted: 1 + 5 + 9 + 13 . . . etc.

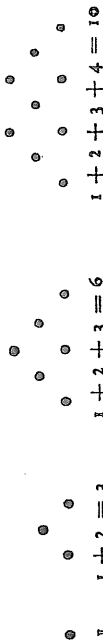
iv. A *circular* or *spherical* number is one which, when multiplied by itself, reproduces itself again as the last digit: e.g. $5 \times 5 = 25$; $6 \times 6 = 36$.

Applying this to the number 153, Evagrius concludes:

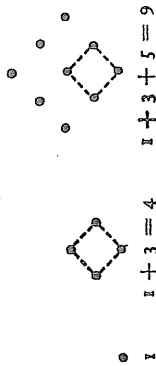
a. 153 is *triangular*, being the sum of all numerals up to 17 (inclusive).
 b. It is *hexagonal*, being the sum of 1 + 5 + 9 + 13 . . . up to 33 (inclusive).
 c. It is the sum of 100 (a *square* number) and of 53; and 53 is in its turn the sum of 28 (a *triangular* number: = 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7) and 25 (a *circular*/*spherical* number: = 5×5).

The following diagrams show the manner in which the various series quoted above correspond to the names which denote them:

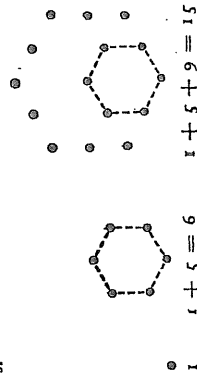
i. *Triangular numbers:*



ii. *Square numbers:*



iii. *Hexagonal numbers:*



of the Trinity, the hexagon indicates the ordered creation of the world in six days. The number one hundred is square, while the number fifty-three is triangular and spherical; for twenty-eight is triangular, and twenty-five is spherical, five times five being twenty-five. In this way, you have a square figure to express the fourfold nature of the virtues, and also a spherical number, twenty-five, which by form represents the cyclic movement of time and so indicates true knowledge of this present age. For week follows week and month follows month, and time revolves from year to year, and season follows season, as we see from the movement of the sun and moon, of spring and summer, and so on. The triangle can signify knowledge of the Holy Trinity. Or you can regard the total sum, one hundred and fifty-three, as triangular and so signifying respectively the practice of the virtues, contemplation of the divine in nature, and theology* or spiritual knowledge of God; faith, hope and love (cf. 1 Cor. 13:13); or gold, silver and precious stones (cf. 1 Cor. 3:12). So much, then, for this number.

Do not despise the humble appearance of these texts, for you know how to be content with much or little (cf. Phil. 4:12). You will recall how Christ did not reject the widow's mites (cf. Mark 12:44), but accepted them as greater than the rich gifts of many others. Showing in this way charity and love towards your true brethren, pray for one who is sick that he may 'take up his bed' and walk (Mark 2:11) by the grace of Christ. Amen.

1. Should one wish to make incense, one will mingle, according to the Law, fragrant gum, cassia, aromatic shell and myrrh in equal amounts (cf. Exod. 30:34). These are the four virtues. With their full and balanced development, the intellect will be safe from betrayal.

2. When the soul has been purified through the keeping of all the commandments, it makes the intellect steadfast and able to receive the state needed for prayer.

3. Prayer is communion of the intellect with God. What state, then, does the intellect need so that it can reach out to its Lord without deflection and commune with Him without intermediary?

4. When Moses tried to draw near to the burning bush he was forbidden to approach until he had loosed his sandals from his feet (cf. Exod. 3:5). If, then, you wish to behold and commune with

Him who is beyond sense-perception and beyond concept, you must free yourself from every impassioned thought.

5. First pray for the gift of tears, so that through sorrowing you may tame what is savage in your soul. And having confessed your transgressions to the Lord, you will obtain forgiveness from Him.

6. Pray with tears and all you ask will be heard. For the Lord rejoices greatly when you pray with tears.

7. If you do shed tears during your prayer, do not exalt yourself, thinking you are better than others. For your prayer has received help so that you can confess your sins readily and make your peace with the Lord through your tears. Therefore do not turn the remedy for passions into a passion, and so again provoke to anger Him who has given you this grace.

8. Many people, shedding tears for their sins, forget what tears are for, and so in their folly go astray.

9. Persevere with patience in your prayer, and repulse the cares and doubts that arise within you. They disturb and trouble you, and so slacken the intensity of your prayer.

10. When the demons see you truly eager to pray, they suggest an imaginary need for various things, and then stir up your remembrance of these things, inciting the intellect to go after them; and when it fails to find them, it becomes very depressed and miserable. And when the intellect is at prayer, the demons keep filling it with the thought of these things, so that it tries to discover more about them and thus loses the fruitfulness of its prayer.

11. Try to make your intellect deaf and dumb during prayer; you will then be able to pray.

12. Whenever a temptation or a feeling of contentiousness comes over you, immediately arousing you to anger or to some senseless word, remember your prayer and how you will be judged about it, and at once the disorderly movement within you will subside.

13. Whatever you do to avenge yourself against a brother who has done you a wrong will prove a stumbling-block to you during prayer.

14. Prayer is the flower of gentleness and of freedom from anger.

15. Prayer is the fruit of joy and thankfulness.

16. Prayer is the remedy for gloom and despondency.

17. 'Go and sell all you have and give to the poor' (Matt. 19 : 21);

and 'deny yourself, taking up your cross' (Matt. 16 : 24). You will then be free from distraction when you pray.

18. If you wish to pray as you should, deny yourself all the time, and when any kind of affliction troubles you, meditate on prayer.

19. If you endure something painful out of love for wisdom, you will find the fruit of this during prayer.

20. If you desire to pray as you ought, do not grieve anyone; otherwise you 'run in vain' (Phil. 2 : 16).

21. 'Leave your gift before the altar; first go away and be reconciled with your brother' (Matt. 5 : 24), and when you return you will pray without disturbance. For rancour darkens the intellect of one who prays, and extinguishes the light of his prayers.

22. Those who store up grievances and rancour in themselves are like people who draw water and pour it into a cask full of holes.

23. If you patiently accept what comes, you will always pray with joy.

24. When you pray as you should, thoughts will come to you which make you feel that you have a real right to be angry. But anger with your neighbour is never right. If you search you will find that things can always be arranged without anger. So do all you can not to break out into anger.

25. Take care that, while appearing to cure someone else, you yourself do not remain uncured, in this way thwarting your prayer.

26. If you are sparing with your anger you will yourself be spared, and you will show your good sense and will be one of those who pray.

27. If you arm yourself against anger, then you will never succumb to any kind of desire. Desire provides fuel for anger, and anger disturbs spiritual vision, disrupting the state of prayer.

28. Do not pray only with outward forms and gestures, but with reverence and awe try to make your intellect conscious of spiritual prayer.

29. Sometimes as soon as you start to pray, you pray well; at other times, in spite of great exertion, you do not reach your goal. This is to make you exert yourself still more, so that, having gained the gift of prayer, you keep it safe.

30. When an angel comes to us, all who trouble us withdraw at once; then the intellect is completely calm and prays soundly. But at other times, when the attacks of the demons are particularly strong,

the intellect does not have a moment's respite. This is because it is weakened by the passions to which it has succumbed in the past. But if it goes on searching, it will find; and if it knocks, the door will be opened (cf. Matt. 7:8).

31. Do not pray for the fulfilment of your wishes, for they may not accord with the will of God. But pray as you have been taught, saying: Thy will be done in me (cf. Lukè 22:42). Always entreat Him in this way — that His will be done. For He desires what is good and profitable for you, whereas you do not always ask for this.

32. Often when I have prayed I have asked for what I thought was good, and persisted in my petition, stupidly importuning the will of God, and not leaving it to Him to arrange things as He knows is best for me. But when I have obtained what I asked for, I have been very sorry that I did not ask for the will of God to be done; because the thing turned out not to be as I had thought.

33. What is good, except God? Then let us leave to Him everything that concerns us and all will be well. For He who is good is naturally also a giver of good gifts.

34. Do not be distressed if you do not at once receive from God what you ask. He wishes to give you something better — to make you persevere in your prayer. For what is better than to enjoy the love of God and to be in communion with Him?

35. Undistracted prayer is the highest intellection of the intellect.

36. Prayer is the ascent of the intellect to God.

37. If you long for prayer, renounce all to gain all.

38. Pray first for the purification of the passions; secondly, for deliverance from ignorance and forgetfulness; and thirdly, for deliverance from all temptation, trial and dereliction.

39. In your prayer seek only righteousness and the kingdom of God, that is, virtue and spiritual knowledge; and everything else 'will be given to you' (Matt. 6:33).

40. It is right to pray not only for your own purification, but also for that of all your fellow men, and so to imitate the angels.

41. See whether you stand truly before God in your prayer, or are overcome by the desire for human praise, using prolonged prayer as a disguise.

42. Whether you pray with brethren or alone, try to pray not simply as a routine, but with conscious awareness of your prayer.

43. Conscious awareness of prayer is concentration accompanied

by reverence, compunction* and distress of soul as it confesses its sins with inward sorrow.

44. If your intellect is still distracted during prayer, you do not yet know what it is to pray as a monk; but your prayer is still worldly, embellishing the outer tabernacle.

45. When you pray, keep close watch on your memory, so that it does not distract you with recollections of your past. But make yourself aware that you are standing before God. For by nature the intellect is apt to be carried away by memories during prayer.

46. While you are praying, the memory brings before you fantasies either of past things, or of recent concerns, or of the face of someone who has irritated you.

47. The demon is very envious of us when we pray, and uses every kind of trick to thwart our purpose. Therefore he is always using our memory to stir up thoughts of various things and our flesh to arouse the passions, in order to obstruct our way of ascent to God.

48. When after many attempts the cunning demon fails to hinder the prayer of the righteous man, he slackens his efforts a little, and then gets his own back when the man has finished praying. Either he provokes the man to anger, and so destroys the good effects of the prayer, or else he excites him to senseless pleasure, and so degrades his intellect.

49. Having prayed as you should, expect the demon to attack you; so stand on guard, ready to protect the fruits of your prayer. For this from the start has been your appointed task: to cultivate and to protect (cf. Gen. 2:15). Therefore, having cultivated, do not leave the fruits unprotected; otherwise you will gain nothing from your prayer.

50. The warfare between us and the demons is waged solely on account of spiritual prayer. For prayer is extremely hateful and offensive to them, whereas it leads us to salvation and peace.

51. What is it that the demons wish to excite in us? Gluttony, unchastity, avarice, anger, rancour, and the rest of the passions, so that the intellect grows coarse and cannot pray as it ought. For when the passions are aroused in the non-rational part of our nature, they do not allow the intellect to function properly.

52. We practise the virtues in order to achieve contemplation of the inner essences (*logoi*) of created things, and from this we pass to

contemplation of the Logos who gives them their being; and He manifests Himself when we are in the state of prayer.

53. The state of prayer is one of dispassion, which by virtue of the most intense love¹ transports to the noetic* realm the intellect that longs for wisdom.

54. He who wishes to pray truly must not only control his incisive power and his desire, but must also free himself from every impassioned thought.

55. He who loves God is always communing with Him as his Father, repulsing every impassioned thought.

56. One who has attained dispassion has not necessarily achieved pure prayer. For he may still be occupied with thoughts which, though dispassionate, distract him and keep him far from God.

57. When the intellect no longer dallies with dispassionate thoughts about various things, it has not necessarily reached the realm of prayer; for it may still be contemplating the inner essences of these things. And though such contemplation is dispassionate, yet since it is of created things, it impresses their forms upon the intellect and keeps it away from God.

58. If the intellect has not risen above the contemplation of the created world, it has not yet beheld the realm of God perfectly. For it may be occupied with the knowledge of intelligible things and so involved in their multiplicity.

59. If you wish to pray, you have need of God, 'who gives prayer to him who prays' (1 Sam. 2:9. LXX). Invoke Him, then, saying: 'Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come' (Matt. 6:9-10) - that is, the Holy Spirit and Thy only-begotten Son. For so He taught us, saying: 'Worship the Father in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24).

60. He who prays in spirit and in truth is no longer dependent on created things when honouring the Creator, but praises Him for and in Himself.

61. If you are a theologian,* you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian.

62. When your intellect in its great longing for God gradually withdraws from the flesh and turns away from all thoughts that have their source in your sense-perception, memory or soul-body temperament,* and when it becomes full of reverence and joy,

¹ Intense longing.*

then you may conclude that you are close to the frontiers of prayer.

63. The Holy Spirit, out of compassion for our weakness, comes to us even when we are impure. And if only He finds our intellect truly praying to Him, He enters it and puts to flight the whole array of thoughts and ideas circling within it, and He arouses it to a longing for spiritual prayer.

64. While all else produces thoughts, ideas and speculations in the intellect through changes in the body, the Lord does the opposite: by entering the intellect, He fills it with whatever knowledge He wishes; and through the intellect He calms the uncontrolled impulses in the body.

65. Whoever loves true prayer and yet becomes angry or resentful is his own enemy. He is like a man who wants to see clearly and yet inflicts damage on his own eyes.

66. If you long to pray, do nothing that is opposed to prayer, so that God may draw near and be with you.

67. When you are praying, do not shape within yourself any image of the Deity, and do not let your intellect be stamped with the impress of any form; but approach the Immaterial in an immaterial manner, and then you will understand.

68. Be on your guard against the tricks of the demons. While you are praying purely and calmly, sometimes they suddenly bring before you some strange and alien form, making you imagine in your conceit that the Deity is there. They are trying to persuade you that the object suddenly disclosed to you is the Deity, whereas the Deity does not possess quantity and form.

69. When the jealous demon fails to stir up our memory during prayer, he disturbs the soul-body temperament, so as to form some strange fantasy in the intellect. Since your intellect is usually preoccupied with thoughts it is easily diverted: instead of pursuing immaterial and formless knowledge, it is deceived, mistaking smoke for light.

70. Stand on guard and protect your intellect from thoughts while you pray. Then your intellect will complete its prayer and continue in the tranquillity that is natural to it. In this way He who has compassion on the ignorant will come to you, and you will receive the blessed gift of prayer.

71. You cannot attain pure prayer while entangled in material

things and agitated by constant cares. For prayer means the shedding of thoughts.

72. A man who is tied up cannot run. Nor can the intellect that is a slave to passion perceive the realm of spiritual prayer. For it is dragged about by impassioned thoughts and cannot stay still.

73. When the intellect attains prayer that is pure and free from passion, the demons attack no longer with sinister thoughts but with thoughts of what is good. For they suggest to it an illusion of God's glory in a form pleasing to the senses, so as to make it think that it has realized the final aim of prayer. A man who possesses spiritual knowledge has said that this illusion results from the passion of self-esteem and from the demon's touch on a certain area of the brain.

74. I think that the demon, by touching this area, changes the light surrounding the intellect as he likes. In this way he uses the passion of self-esteem to stir up in the intellect a thought which fatuously attributes form and location to divine and principal knowledge. Not being disturbed by impure and carnal passions, but supposing itself to be in a state of purity, the intellect imagines that there is no longer any adverse energy within it. It then mistakes for a divine manifestation the appearance produced in it by the demon, who cunningly manipulates the brain and converts the light surrounding the intellect into a form, as we have described.

75. When the angel of God comes to us, with his presence alone he puts an end to all adverse energy within the intellect and makes its light energize without illusion.*

76. The statement in the Apocalypse that the angel brought incense and offered it with the prayers of the saints (cf. Rev. 8:3) refers, I think, to this grace which is energized through the angel. For it instils knowledge of true prayer, so that the intellect stands firm, free from all agitation, listlessness and negligence.

77. The bowls of incense which the twenty-four elders offered are said to be the prayers of the saints. By a bowl should be understood friendship with God or perfect spiritual love, whereby prayer is energized in spirit and in truth.

78. When you think that you do not need tears for your sins during prayer, reflect on this: you should always be in God, and yet you are still far from Him. Then you will weep with greater feeling.

79. Surely, when you do realize where you are, you will gladly sorrow and, like Isaiah, will reproach yourself because, being unclean, and dwelling in the midst of an unclean people – that is, of enemies – you dare to stand before the Lord of hosts (cf. Isa. 6:5).

80. If you pray truly, you will gain great assurance; angels will come to you as they came to Daniel, and they will illuminate you with knowledge of the inner essences of created things (cf. Dan. 2:19).

81. Know that the holy angels encourage us to pray and stand beside us, rejoicing and praying for us (cf. Tobit. 12:12). Therefore, if we are negligent and admit thoughts from the enemy, we greatly provoke the angels. For while they struggle hard on our behalf we do not even take the trouble to pray to God for ourselves, but we despise their services to us and, abandoning their Lord and God, we consort with unclean demons.

82. Pray gently and calmly, sing with understanding and rhythm; then you will soar like a young eagle high in the heavens.

83. Psalmody calms the passions and curbs the uncontrolled impulses in the body; and prayer enables the intellect to activate its own energy.

84. Prayer is the energy which accords with the dignity of the intellect; it is the intellect's true and highest activity.

85. Psalmody appertains to the wisdom of the world of multiplicity; prayer is the prelude to the immaterial knowledge of the One.¹

86. Spiritual knowledge has great beauty: it is the helpmate of prayer, awakening the noetic power of the intellect to contemplation of divine knowledge.

87. If you have not yet received the gift of prayer or psalmody, persevere patiently and you will receive it.

88. 'And He spake a parable to them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to lose heart.' So do not lose heart and despair because you have not yet received the gift of prayer. You will receive it later. In the same parable we read: 'Though I do not fear God, or man's opinion, yet because this widow troubles me, I will vindicate her.' Similarly, God will speedily vindicate those who cry

¹ For 'immaterial knowledge of the One', the Greek text in the *Philokalia* reads 'immaterial and multiple knowledge'. We have adopted the emendation suggested by Hausherr.

to Him day and night (cf. Luke 18:1-8). Take heart, then, and persevere diligently in holy prayer.

89. You should wish for your affairs to turn out, not as you think best, but according to God's will. Then you will be undisturbed and thankful in your prayer.

90. Even if you think you are with God, be on your guard against the demon of unchastity. For he is very wily and jealous: he tries to outwit the activity and watchfulness of your intellect and to draw it away from God, when it stands before Him with reverence and fear.

91. If you cultivate prayer, be ready for the attacks of demons and endure them resolutely; for they will come at you like wild beasts and maltreat your whole body.

92. Prepare yourself like an experienced fighter, and even if you see a sudden apparition do not be shaken; and should you see a sword drawn against you, or a torch thrust into your face, do not be alarmed. Should you see even some loathsome and bloody figure, do not panic; but stand fast, boldly affirming your faith, and you will be more resolute in confronting your enemies.

93. He who bears distress patiently will attain joy, and he who endures the repulsive will know delight.

94. Take care that the crafty demons do not deceive you with some vision; be on your guard, turn to prayer and ask God to show you if the intellection comes from Him and, if it does not, to dispel the illusion at once. Do not be afraid, for if you pray fervently to God, the demons will retreat, lashed by His unseen power.

95. You should be aware of this trick: at times the demons split into two groups; and when you call for help against one group, the other will come in the guise of angels and drive away the first, so that you are deceived into believing that they are truly angels.

96. Cultivate great humility and courage, and you will escape the power of the demons; 'no plague shall come near your dwelling, for He shall give His angels charge over you' (Ps. 91:10-11). And they will invisibly repel all the energy of the enemy.

97. He who practises pure prayer will hear the demons crashing and banging, shouting and cursing; yet he will not be overwhelmed or go out of his mind. But he will say to God: 'I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me' (Ps. 23:4), and other words of this kind.

98. At the time of such trials, use a brief but intense prayer.

99. If the demons suddenly threaten to appear out of the air, to

make you panic and to take possession of your intellect, do not be frightened and pay no attention to their threats. For they are trying to terrify you, to see if you take notice of them or scorn them utterly.

100. When you stand in prayer before God the Almighty, who created all things and takes thought for all, why are you so foolish as to forget the fear of God and to be scared of mosquitoes and cockroaches? Have you not heard it said, 'You shall fear the Lord your God' (Deut. 6:13); or again 'Fear and dread shall fall upon them' (Exod. 15:16)?

101. Bread is food for the body and holiness is food for the soul; spiritual prayer is food for the intellect.

102. When you are in the inner temple pray not as the Pharisee but as the publican, so that you too are set free by the Lord (cf. Luke 18:10-14).

103. Try not to pray against anyone in your prayer, so that you do not destroy what you are building, and make your prayer loathsome.

104. Learn from the man who owed the ten thousand talents that, if you do not forgive your debtor, you yourself will not be forgiven. For it is said, 'He delivered him to the tormentors' (Matt. 18:34).

105. Detach yourself from concern for the body when you pray: do not let the sting of a flea or a fly, the bite of a louse or a mosquito, deprive you of the fruits of your prayer.

106. We have heard that the evil one attacked a certain saint so fiercely as he prayed that, when the saint lifted up his hands, the evil one changed himself into a lion and raising his front legs fixed his claws into the saint's thighs; and he kept them there until the saint lowered his hands, which was only when he had come to the end of his usual prayers.

107. There is too the case of that great monk, John the Small. He lived the hesychastic life in a pit, and his communion with God was not interrupted even when a demon in the form of a serpent wound itself round him, chewed his flesh and spat it out into his face.

108. You have surely read the lives of the monks of Tabennesis. When Abba Theodore was preaching to the brethren, two vipers crawled under his feet; but he calmly made an arch of his feet and let them stay there until he had finished his sermon. Then he showed the vipers to the brethren and told them what had happened.

109. We read how, when another spiritual brother was praying, a viper came and wound itself round his leg. But he did not lower his hands until he had finished all his usual prayers; and because he loved God more than himself, he was not harmed at all.

110. Do not let your eyes be distracted during prayer, but detach yourself from concern with body and soul, and give all your attention to the intellect.

111. Another saint living the hesychastic life in the desert was attacked, as he was praying, by demons who for two weeks tossed him like a ball in the air, catching him in his rush-mat. They were completely unsuccessful in distracting his mind from fiery prayer.

112. When another monk was practising inner prayer as he journeyed in the desert, two angels came and walked on either side of him. But he paid no heed to them, for he did not wish to lose what was better. He remembered the words of the Apostle: 'Neither angels, nor principalities, nor powers . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of Christ' (Rom. 8: 38-39).

113. The monk becomes equal to the angels through prayer, because of his longing to 'behold the face of the Father who is in heaven' (cf. Matt. 18: 10).

114. Never try to see a form or shape during prayer.

115. Do not long to have a sensory image of angels or powers or Christ, for this would be madness: it would be to take a wolf as your shepherd and to worship your enemies, the demons.

116. Self-esteem is the start of illusions in the intellect. Under its impulse, the intellect attempts to enclose the Deity in shapes and forms.

117. I shall say again what I have said elsewhere: blessed is the intellect that is completely free from forms during prayer.

118. Blessed is the intellect that, undistracted in its prayer, acquires an ever greater longing for God.

119. Blessed is the intellect that during prayer is free from materiality and stripped of all possessions.

120. Blessed is the intellect that has acquired complete freedom from sensations during prayer.

121. Blessed is the monk who regards every man as God after God.

122. Blessed is the monk who looks with great joy on everyone's salvation and progress as if they were his own.

123. Blessed is the monk who regards himself as 'the offscouring of all things' (1 Cor. 4: 13).

124. A monk is one who is separated from all and united with all.

125. A monk is one who regards himself as linked with every man, through always seeing himself in each.

126. The man who always dedicates his first thoughts to God has perfect prayer.

127. If you want to pray as a monk, shun all lies and take no oath. Otherwise you vainly pretend to be what you are not.

128. If you wish to pray in spirit, be detached from the flesh, and no cloud will darken you during prayer.

129. Entrust to God the needs of your body, and it will be clear that you entrust to Him the needs of your spirit also.

130. If you receive what has been promised, you will reign over all things; and, keeping these promises in mind, you will gladly endure your present poverty, spiritual and material.

131. Do not shun poverty and affliction, the fuel that gives wings to prayer.

132. Let the virtues of the body lead you to those of the soul; and the virtues of the soul to those of the spirit; and these, in turn, to immaterial and principal knowledge.

133. If you are praying to overcome some thought, and it subsides easily, examine carefully how this has come about; otherwise you may be deluded into attributing the cause to yourself.

134. There are times when the demons suggest thoughts to you and then urge you to rebut them with prayer; whereupon they withdraw of their own accord, so as to deceive you into imagining that you have begun to overcome such thoughts and to rout the demons.

135. If you pray to overcome a passion or a demon who is troubling you, remember the words: 'I will pursue my enemies, and overtake them; and I will not turn back until they are consumed. I will dash them to pieces and they shall not be able to stand: they shall fall under my feet' (Ps. 18: 37-38. LXX). Say this when needed and so arm yourself with humility against your enemies.

136. Do not think that you have acquired holiness unless you have reached the point of shedding your blood to attain it. For, according to the Apostle, we must battle unremittingly against sin even if it means death (cf. Eph. 6: 11-17; Heb. 12: 4).

137. If you do good to one person, you may be wronged by another and so feel injured, and say or do something stupid, thus dissipating by your bad action what you gained by your good action. This is just what the demons want; so always be attentive.

138. Be ready for the attacks of the demons, and think how to avoid becoming their slave.

139. At night the cunning demons try to disturb the spiritual teacher by direct attack; in the daytime, they attack him through other people, besieging him with slander, distraction and danger.

140. Do not try to avoid the fullers. Let them beat, trample, stretch and smooth; and your garments will be all the brighter.

141. So long as you have not renounced the passions, and your intellect is still opposed to holiness and truth, you will not find the fragrance of incense in your breast.

142. Do you have a longing for prayer? Then leave the things of this world and live your life in heaven, not just theoretically but in angelic action and godlike knowledge.

143. If it is only in times of adversity that you remember the Judge and how awe-inspiring and impartial He is, you have not yet learned 'to serve the Lord with fear and rejoice in Him with trembling' (Ps. 2:11). For even in a state of spiritual peace and blessedness you should still worship Him with reverence and awe.

144. Until a man is completely changed by repentance, he will be wise always to remember his sins with sorrow and to recall the eternal fire which they justly deserve.

145. If a man, still enmeshed in sin and anger, dares shamelessly to reach out for knowledge of divine things, or even to embark upon immaterial prayer, he deserves the rebuke given by the Apostle; for it is dangerous for him to pray with head bare and uncovered. Such a soul, he says, ought 'to have a veil on her head because of the angels' who are present (cf. 1 Cor. 11:5-7), and to be clothed in due reverence and humility.

146. Just as persistent staring at the sun in its noonday brilliance will not cure a man suffering from ophthalmia, so the counterfeit practice of fearful and supernal prayer – which is properly to be performed in spirit and in truth – will in no way benefit an intellect that is passionate and impure; on the contrary, such practice will provoke the wrath of God against the intellect.

147. If He who is in want of nothing and shows no favours did

not receive the man coming with a gift to the altar until he was reconciled with his neighbour who had something against him (cf. Matt. 5:23-24), consider how much we must be on guard and use discrimination if we are to offer at the spiritual altar incense that is acceptable to God.

148. Do not delight in words or in glory. Otherwise the demons will no longer work behind your back, but openly before your face; and they will laugh you to scorn during prayer, drawing you away and enticing you into strange thoughts.

149. If you seek prayer attentively you will find it; for nothing is more essential to prayer than attentiveness. So do all you can to acquire it.

150. As sight is superior to all the other senses, so prayer is more divine than all the other virtues.

151. The value of prayer lies not in mere quantity but in its quality. This is shown by the contrast of the two men who went up into the temple (cf. Luke 18:10), and by the injunction: 'When you pray, do not use vain repetitions' (Matt. 6:7).

152. So long as you give attention to the beauty of the body, and your intellect delights in the outside of the tabernacle, you have not yet perceived the realm of prayer and are still far from treading its blessed path.

153. If when praying no other joy can attract you, then truly you have found prayer.

The Philokalia

THE COMPLETE TEXT

compiled by

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Holy Mountain

and

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VOLUME ONE

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