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## The Ascetic Ideal and the New Testament: Reflections on the Critique of the Theology of the Reformation

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**IF THE MONASTIC IDEAL IS UNION WITH GOD** through prayer, through humility, through obedience, through constant recognition of one's sins, voluntary or involuntary, through a renunciation of the values of this world, through poverty, through chastity, through love for mankind and love for God, then is such an ideal Christian? For some the very raising of such a question may appear strange and foreign. But the history of Christianity, especially the new theological attitude that obtained as a result of the Reformation, forces such a question and demands a serious answer. If the monastic ideal is to attain a creative spiritual freedom, if the monastic ideal realizes that freedom is attainable only in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and if the monastic ideal asserts that to become a slave to God is ontologically and existentially the path to becoming free, the path in which humanity fully becomes human precisely because the created existence of humanity is contingent upon God, is by itself bordered on both sides by non-existence, then is such an ideal Christian? Is such an ideal Biblical— New Testamental? Or is this monastic ideal, as its opponents have claimed, a distortion of authentic Christianity, a slavery to mechanical "monkish" "works righteousness"?

### The Significance of the Desert

When our Lord was about to begin his ministry, he went into the *desert*— *eis tēn herēmon*. Our Lord had options but he selected— or rather, "was lead by the Spirit," into the desert. It is obviously not a meaningless action, not a selection of type of place without significance. And there— in the desert— our Lord engages in spiritual combat, for he

“fasted forty days and forty nights”— *nêsteusas hêmeras tessarakonta kai nyktas tessarakonta hysteron epeinasen*. *The Gospel of St. Mark* adds that our Lord “was with the wild beasts”— *kai ên meta tôn thêriôn*. Our Lord, the God-Man, was truly God and truly man. Exclusive of our Lord’s redemptive work, unique to our Lord alone, he calls us to

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*follow him— kai akoloutheitô moi*. “Following” our Lord is not exclusionary; it is not selecting certain psychologically pleasing aspects of our Lord’s life and teachings to follow. Rather it is all-embracing. We are to follow our Lord in every way possible. “To go into the desert” is “to follow” our Lord. It is interesting that our Lord returns to the desert after the death of St. John the Baptist. There is an obvious reason for this. “And hearing [of John the Baptist’s death] Jesus departed from there in a ship to a desert place privately”— *anechôrêsen ekeithen en ploiôi eis herêmon topon kat’ idian*. When St. Antony goes to the desert, he is “following” the example of our Lord— indeed, he is “following” our Lord. This in no way diminishes the unique, salvific work of our Lord, this in no way makes of our Lord God, the God-Man, a mere example. But in addition to his redemptive work, which could be accomplished only by our Lord, our Lord taught and set examples. And by “following” our Lord into the desert, St. Anthony was entering a terrain already targeted and stamped by our Lord as a specific place for spiritual warfare. There is both specificity and “type” in the “desert”— In those geographical regions where there are no deserts, there are places which are similar to or approach that type of place symbolized by the “desert”— It is that type of place which allows the human heart solace, isolation. It is the type of place which puts the human heart in a state of aloneness, a state in which to meditate, to pray, to fast, to reflect upon one’s inner existence and one’s relationship to ultimate reality— God. And more. It is a place where spiritual reality is intensified, a place where spiritual life can intensify and simultaneously where the opposing forces to spiritual life can become more dominant. It is the terrain of a battlefield but a spiritual one. And it is our Lord, not St. Anthony, who set precedent. Our Lord says that “as for what is sown among thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceit of riches choke(s) the word, and it becomes unfruitful”— *ho de eis tas akanthas spareis, houtos estin ho ton logon akouôn, kai hê merimna tou aiônos kai hê apatê tou ploutou sympnigei ton logon, kai akarpos ginetai*. The desert, or a place similar, precisely cuts off the cares or anxieties of the world and the deception, the deceit of earthly riches. It cuts one off precisely from “this worldliness” and precisely as such it contains within itself a powerful spiritual reason for existing within the spiritual paths of the Church. Not as the only path, not as the path for everyone, but as one, fully authentic path of Christian life.

## The Gospel of St. Matthew

In the *Gospel of St. Matthew* (5:16) it is our Lord who uses the terminology of “good works”— “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and may glorify your Father who is in heaven”— *houtôs lampsatô to phôs hymôn emprosthen tôn anthrôpôn, hopôs idôsîn hymôn ta kala erga kai doxasôsîn ton patera hymôn ton en tois ouranois*. Contextually these “good works” are defined in the preceding text of the Beatitudes. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”— *makarioi hoi praeis, hoti autoi klêronômêsousîn tēn gēn*. “Blessed are they who are hungering and are thirsting for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied”— *makarioi hoi peînôntes kai dipsôntes tēn dikaiosynēn, hoti autoi chortasthêsontai*. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”— *makarioi hoi katharoi tēi kardiāi, hoti autoi ton Theon opsontai*. Is it not an integral part of the monastic goal to become meek, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, and to become pure in heart? This, of course, must be the goal of all Christians but monasticism, which makes it an integral part of its ascetical life, can in no way be excluded. Are not the Beatitudes more than just rhetorical expressions? Are not the Beatitudes a part of the commandments of our Lord? In the *Gospel of St. Matthew* (5:19) our Lord expresses a deeply meaningful thought— rather a warning. “Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven”— *hos ean oun lysēi mian tôn entolôn toutôn tōn elachistōn kai didaxēi houtôs tous anthrôpous, elachistos klēthēsetai en tēi basileiāi tōn ouranōn*. And it is in this context that our Lord continues to deepen the meaning of the old law with a new, spiritual significance, a penetrating interiorization of the “law.” He does not nullify or abrogate the law but rather extends it to its most logical and ontological limit, for he drives the spiritual meaning of the law into the very depth of the inner existence of mankind.

“You heard that it was said to those of old... but I say to you”— *ékousate hoti errethē tois archaiois... egô de legô hymin*. Now, with the deepening of the spiritual dimension of the law, the old remains, it is the base, but its spiritual reality is pointed to its source. “You shall not kill” becomes inextricably connected to “anger.” “But I say to you that everyone being angry with his brother shall be liable to the judgment”— *egô de legô hymin hoti*

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*pas ho orgizomenos tōi adelphōi autou enochos estai tēi krisei*. No longer is the external act the only focal point. Rather the source, the intent, the motive is now to be considered as the soil from which the external act springs forth. Mankind must now guard, protect, control, and purify the inner emotion or attitude of “anger” and, in so doing, consider it in the same light as the external act of killing or murder. Our Lord has reached into the innermost depth of the human heart and has targeted the source of the external act. “You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who is seeing a woman lustfully, has already committed adultery with her in his heart”— *ou moicheuseis. egô de legô hymin hoti pas ho blepôn gynaika pros to epithymēsai autēn êdē emoicheusen autēn en*

*têi kardiâi autou.* From a spiritual perspective the person who does not act externally but lusts within is equally liable to the reality of “adultery.” “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and you shall hate your enemy’. But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those persecuting you so that you may become sons of your Father in heaven”— *êkousate hoti errethê, agapêseis ton plêsion sou kai misêseis ton echthron sou. Egô de legô hymin, agapate tous echthrous hymôn kai proseuchesthe hyper tôn diôkontôn hymas.*

## **The Inadequacy of the Critique by Anders Nygren**

The Christian idea of love is indeed something new. But it is not something so radically odd that the human soul cannot understand it. It is not such a “transvaluation of all ancient values,” as Anders Nygren has claimed in his lengthy study *Agape and Eros* (originally published in Swedish in 1947 as *Den kristna kärlekstanken genom tiderna. Eros och Agape*; published in two volumes in 1938 and 1939; two volumes published in one paperback edition by Harper and Row in 1969). Although there are certain aspects of truth in some of Nygren’s statements, his very premise is incorrect. Nygren reads back into the New Testament and the early Church the basic position of Luther rather than dealing with early Christian thought from within its own milieu. Such an approach bears little ultimate fruit and often, as in the case of his position in *Agape and Eros*, distorts the original sources with presuppositions that entered the history of Christian thought 1500 years after our Lord altered the very nature of humanity by entering human existence as God and Man. There is much in Luther that is

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interesting, perceptive, and true. However, there is also much that does not speak the same language as early Christianity. And herein lies the great divide in the ecumenical dialogue. For the ecumenical dialogue to bear fruit, the very controversies that separate the churches must not be hushed up. Rather they must be brought into the open and discussed frankly, respectfully, and thoroughly. There is much in Luther with which Eastern Orthodox theologians especially can relate. Monasticism, however, is one area in which there is profound disagreement. Even Luther at first did not reject monasticism. Luther’s Reformation was the result of his understanding of the New Testament, an understanding which Luther himself calls “new.” His theological position had already been formed before the issue of indulgences and his posting of his *Ninety-Five Theses*. Nygren, loyal to Luther’s theological vision, has a theological reason for his position in *Agape* and *Eros*. Nygren identifies his interpretation of *Agape* with the monoenergetic concept of God, a concept of God that would be correct in and of itself, for God is the source of everything. But once we confront the mystery of creation, the mystery of that “other” existence, that created existence which includes mankind, we face a totally different situation. The existential and ontological meaning of man’s created existence is precisely that God did not have to create, that it was a free act of Divine freedom. But— and here is the great difficulty created by an unbalanced Christianity on the doctrine of grace and

freedom— in freely creating man God willed to give man an inner spiritual freedom. In no sense is this a Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian position. The balanced synergistic doctrine of the early and Eastern Church, a doctrine misunderstood and undermined by Latin Christianity in general from St. Augustine on— although there was always opposition to this in the Latin Church— always understood that God initiates, accompanies, and completes everything in the process of salvation. What it always rejected— both spontaneously and intellectually— is the idea of irresistible grace, the idea that man has no participating role in his salvation. Nygren identifies any participation of man in his salvation, any movement of human will and soul toward God, as a pagan distortion of *Agape*, as “*Eros*”— And this attitude, this theological perspective will in essence be the determining point for the rejection of monasticism and other forms of asceticism and spirituality so familiar to the Christian Church from its inception.

If Nygren’s position on *Agape* is correct, then the words of our Lord, quoted above, would have had no basis in the hearts of the listeners for understanding. Moreover, our Lord, in using the verbal form of *Agape*— *agapate*— uses the “old” commandment as

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the basis for the giving of the new, inner dimension of the spiritual extension of that commandment of *agape*, of love. If Nygren is correct, the “old” context of *agape* would have been meaningless, especially as the foundation upon which our Lord builds the new spiritual and ontological character of *agape*. Nygren’s point is that “the Commandment of Love” occurs in the Old Testament and that it is “introduced in the Gospels, not as something new, but as quotations from the Old Testament”— He is both correct and wrong. Correct in that it is a reference taken from the Old Testament. Where else was our Lord to turn in addressing “his people”? He is wrong in claiming that it is nothing but a quotation from the Old Testament, precisely because our Lord uses the Old Testament reference as a basis upon which to build. Hence, the foundation had to be secure else the building would have been flawed and the teaching erroneous. Indeed, Nygren himself claims that “*Agape* can never be ‘self-evident’.” In making such a claim, Nygren has undercut any possibility for the hearers of our Lord to understand any discourse in which our Lord uses the term “*Agape*.” And yet Nygren writes that “it can be shown that the *Agape* motif forms the principal theme of a whole series of Parables.” What is meant by this statement is that Nygren’s specific interpretation of *Agape* forms the principal theme of a whole series of Parables. If this is the case, then those hearing the parables could not have understood them, for they certainly did not comprehend *Agape* in the specificity defined by Nygren, and hence the parables— according to the inner logic of Nygren’s position— were meaningless to the contemporaries of our Lord, to his hearers.

To be filled by the love of and for God is the monastic ideal. In the *Gospel of St. Matthew* (22:34-40) our Lord is asked which is the greatest commandment. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind [understanding]. This the great and first commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. In these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”—

*agapêseis kyrion ton theon sou en holêi têi kardiâi sou kai en holêi têi psychêi sou kai en holêi têi dianoîai sou. hautê estin hê megalê kai prôtê entolê. deuthera de homoia autêi, agapêseis ton plêsion sou hôs seauton. en tautais tais dysin entolais holos ho nomos krematai kai hoi prophêtai.* The monastic and ascetic ideal is to cultivate the love of the heart, the soul, and the mind for God. Anders Nygren's commentary on this text in his *Agape and Eros* is characteristic of his general position. "It has long been recognized that the idea of *Agape* represents a distinctive and original feature of Christianity. But in

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what precisely does its originality and distinctiveness consist? This question has often been answered by reference to the *Commandment of Love*. The double commandment, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart' and Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, has been taken as the natural starting-point for the exposition of the meaning of Christian love. Yet the fact is that if we start with the commandment, with *Agape* as something demanded, we bar our own way to the understanding of the idea of *Agape*... If the Commandment of Love can be said to be specifically Christian, as undoubtedly it can, the reason is to be found, not in the commandment as such, but in the quite new meaning that Christianity has given it... To reach an understanding of the Christian idea of love simply by reference to the Commandment of Love is therefore impossible; to attempt it is to move in a circle. We could never discover the nature of *Agape*, love in the Christian sense, if we had nothing to guide us but the double command... It is not the commandment that explains the idea of *Agape*, but insight into the Christian conception of *Agape* that enables us to grasp the Christian meaning of the commandment, We must therefore seek another starting-point" (pp. 61-63). This is indeed an odd position for one who comes from the tradition of *sola Scriptura*, for the essence of his position is not *sola Scriptura* but precisely that Scripture must be interpreted— and here the interpretation comes not from within the matrix of early Christianity but from afar, from an interpretation that to a great extent depends on an interpretation of Christianity that came into the history of Christian thought approximately 1500 years after the beginning of Christian teaching, and that is with the assumption that Nygren is following the general position of Luther. In his analysis of certain interpretations of what constitutes the uniqueness of Christian love and in his rejection of these interpretations as that which determines the uniqueness of Christian love Nygren is in part correct. "This, in fact, is the root-fault of all the interpretations we have so far considered; they fail to recognize that Christian love rests on a quite definite, positive basis of its own. What, then, is this basis?" Nygren approaches the essence of the issue but neglects the important aspect of human ontology, a human ontology created by God. "The answer to this question may be found in the text... 'Love your enemies'. It is true that love for one's enemies is at variance with our immediate natural feelings, and may therefore seem to display the negative character suggested above; but if we consider the motive underlying it we shall see that it is entirely positive. The Christian is commanded to love his enemies, not because the other side teaches hatred of them, but

because there is a basis and motive for such love in the concrete, positive fact of God's own love for evil men. 'He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good'. That is why we are told: 'Love your enemies... that ye may be children of your Father which is in heaven'." What Nygren writes here is accurate. But it neglects the significance of human ontology; that is, that we are commanded to love our enemies because there is a spiritual value within the very fabric of human nature created by God, even fallen nature, and that that spiritual value is to be found in each and every man, however dimly we may perceive it. If we begin to love our enemy, we will begin to perceive in that enemy characteristics, aspects that were veiled, that were dimmed by the blindness of our hatred. We are commanded to love our enemy not only because God loves mankind, not only because God "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good" but God loves mankind because there is a value in mankind. Nygren writes (p.79) that "the suggestion that man is by nature possessed of such an inalienable value easily gives rise to the thought that it is this matchless value on which God's love is set." It is perhaps inaccurate to assert that Nygren misses the central issue that that which is of value in man is God-created, God-given. It is more accurate to assert that Nygren rejects completely the issue, and he does so because of his theological doctrine of God and man. This again is part of that great divide which separates certain churches within the ecumenical dialogue. There is a basic and fundamental difference of vision on the nature of God and man. One view claims its position is consistent with apostolic Christianity, consistent with the apostolic deposit, and consistent with the teaching and life of the early Church and of the Church in all ages. Another view begins with the Reformation. Both views claim the support of the New Testament. Luther's writings on the Divine nature of love are not only interesting but valuable, not only penetrating but in one emphasis accurate. Indeed, if one considers Luther's doctrine of Divine love by itself, exclusive of his other doctrines, especially those on the nature of man, the nature of salvation, the nature of justification, the doctrine of predestination and grace, one encounters a view not dissimilar from that of ancient Orthodox Christianity. At times Luther can even appear to be somewhat mystically inclined. Luther's well known description of Christian love as "eine quellende Liebe" [a welling or ever-flowing love] is by itself an Orthodox view. For Luther, as for the Fathers of the Church, this love has no need of anything, it is not caused, it does not come into existence because of a desired object, it is not aroused by desirable qualities of an object. It is the nature of God. But, at the same time, it is God who

created mankind and hence the love of God for mankind, though in need of nothing and attracted by nothing, loves mankind not because of a value in man but because there is value in man because man is created by God. Herein lies the difference and it is indeed a great divide when one considers the differing views on the other subjects closely related to the nature of Divine love.

## Perfection, Almsgiving, Prayer, Fasting, And Chastity

In monastic and ascetical literature from the earliest Christian times the word and idea of “perfect” are often confronted. The monk seeks perfection, the monk wants to begin to become established on the path that may lead to perfection. But is this the result of monasticism? Is it the monastic and ascetical tendencies in early Christianity which bring forth the idea of perfection, which bring forth the idea of spiritual struggle and striving? It is our Lord, not the monks, who injects the goal of perfection into the very fabric of early Christian thought. In the *Gospel of St. Matthew* (5:48) our Lord commands: “Be ye therefore perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”— *esesthe oun hymeis teleioi hōs ho patēr hymôn ho ouranios teleios estin*.

Traditional monastic and ascetical life has included among its activities almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Were these practices imposed upon an authentic Christianity by monasticism or were they incorporated into monastic and ascetical life from original Christianity? In the *Gospel of St. Matthew* it is once again our Lord and Redeemer who has initiated almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Our Lord could very easily have abolished such practices. But rather than abolish them, our Lord purifies them, gives them their correct status within the spiritual life which is to do them but to attach no show, no hypocrisy, no glory to the doing of them. It is proper spiritual perspective that our Lord commands. “Take heed that you do not your righteousness before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward with your Father in heaven”— *prosechete de tēn dikaiosynēn hymôn mē poiein emprosthen tōn anthrōpōn pros to theathēnai autois. ei de mēge, misthon ouk echete para tōi patri hymôn tōi en tois ouranois* (6:1). Therefore, when you do alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be glorified by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you are doing alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms

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may be in secret; and your Father who is seeing in secret will reward you”— *hotan oun poiēis eleēmosynēn, mē salpisēis emprosthen sou, hōsper hoi hypokritai poiōusin en tais synagōgais kai en tais hrymais, hopōs doxasthōsin hypo tōn anthrōpōn. amēn legō hymin, apechousin ton misthon autōn. sou de poiountos eleēmosynēn mē gnōtō hē aristera sou ti poiei hē dexiāi sou, hopōs ēi sou hē eleēmosynē en tōi kryptōi kai ho patēr sou ho blepōn en tōi kryptōi autos apodōsei soi* (6:2-4). And prayer is commanded to be done in a similar manner to ensure its spiritual nature. At this juncture our Lord instructs his followers to use the “Lord’s Prayer,” a prayer that is so simple yet so profound, a prayer that contains within it the glorification of the name of God, a prayer that contains within it the invoking of the coming of the kingdom of God, a prayer that acknowledges that the will of God initiates everything and that without the will of God man is lost— *genēthētō to thelēma sou* [“thy will be done]. It is a prayer of humility in that it asks for nothing beyond daily sustenance. It is a prayer of human solidarity in forgiveness, for it asks God to forgive us only as we forgive others, and in this a profound reality of spiritual life is portrayed, a life



that unites man with God only as man is also united with other persons, with mankind, in forgiveness. And then there is the prayer to be protected from temptation and, if one falls into temptation, the prayer to be delivered from it. So short, so simple, yet so profound both personally and cosmically. Is monasticism a distortion of authentic Christianity because the monks recite the Lord's Prayer at the instruction of and command of our Lord? If monasticism used free, spontaneous prayer, then it could be faulted for not having "followed" our Lord's command. But that is not the case. Is monasticism a deviation because of the frequent use of the Lord's Prayer? Our Lord was specific: when praying, pray this. It does not preclude other prayers but prominence and priority is to be given to the Lord's Prayer. Indeed, it is certainly foreign to our Lord to restrict the frequency of prayer. The "vain repetitions," or more accurately in the Greek, the prohibition of "do not utter empty words as the gentiles, for they think that in their much speaking they will be heard"— *mê battalogêsête hôsper hoi ethnikai, kodousin gar hoti en têi polylogiâi autôn eisakousthêsontai*. This is in essence different than our Lord's intention. And our Lord says more on this subject, a subject considered of importance to him. In the *Gospel of St. Matthew* (9:15) our Lord makes the point that when he is taken away, then his disciples will fast— *kai tote nêsteuousin*. In the *Gospel of St. Matthew* (17:21) our Lord ex-

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plains to his disciples that they were unable to cast out the devil because "this kind goes out only by prayer and fasting"— *touto de to genos ouk ekporeuetai ei mê en proseuchêi kai nêsteiâi*. This verse, it is true, is not in all the ancient manuscripts. It is, however, in sufficient ancient manuscripts and, moreover, it is contained in the *Gospel of St. Mark* (9:29). It is obvious that our Lord assigns a special spiritual efficacy to prayer and fasting.

Chastity is a monastic and ascetic goal. Not only an external celibacy but an inner chastity of thought. Is this too something imposed upon authentic, original Christianity by a Hellenistic type of thinking or is it contained within the original deposit of apostolic and Biblical Christianity? Again it is our Lord who lays down the path of celibacy and chastity. In the *Gospel of St. Matthew* (19:10-12) the disciples ask our Lord whether it is expedient to marry. "Not all men can receive this saying but those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to grasp it, let him grasp it"— *ou pantes chôrousin ton logon touton, all' hois dedotai. eisin gar eunouchoi hoitines ek kiolias mêtros egennêthêsan houtôs, kai eisin eunouchoi hoitines eunouchisthêsan hypo tôn anthrôpôn, kai eisin eunouchoi hoitines eunouchisan heautous dia tèn basileian tôn ouranôn. ho dynamenos chôrein chôreitô*. The monastic and ascetical goal merely "follows" the teaching of our Lord. Original Christianity never imposed celibacy. It was, precisely as our Lord has stated, only for those to whom it was given, only to those who might be able to accept such a path. But the path was an authentically Christian path of spirituality laid down by our Lord. In early Christianity not even priests and bishops were required to be celibate. It was a matter of choice. Later the Church thought it wise to

require celibacy of the bishops. But in Eastern Christianity celibacy has never been required of one becoming a priest. The choice to marry or to remain celibate had to be made before ordination. If one married before ordination, then one was required to remain married, albeit the ancient Church witnessed exceptions to this. If one was not married when one was ordained, then one was required to remain celibate. The Roman Church, not the Eastern Orthodox Church, extended the requirement of celibacy to priests and had a very difficult time attempting to enforce it throughout the ages. One can never force forms of spirituality upon a person and expect a spiritually fruitful result. The words of our Lord resound with wisdom— to those to whom it is given, to those who can live in this form of spirituality.

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## Poverty and Humility

Poverty is not the goal but the beginning point of monastic and ascetical life in early Christianity. Was this a precedent established by St. Antony, a new notion and movement never before contained within Christian thought? Again it is our Lord who establishes the spiritual value of poverty. In the *Gospel of St. Matthew* (19:21) our Lord commands the rich man who has claimed he has kept all the commandments: “If you will to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor... and come follow me”— *ei theleis teleios einai, hypage pôlêson sou ta hyparchonta kai dos tois ptôchois, kai hexeis thêsauron en ouranois, kai deuro akolouthei moi*. It was not St. Antony who established the precedent. Rather it was St. Antony who heard the word of our Lord and put it into action, who “did the word of the Lord”— It is Christ, the God-Man who has put forth the ideal of perfection, who has commanded us to be perfect (see also 5:48), who has put forth the ideal of poverty as a starting-point for a certain form of spiritual life. Elsewhere in the *Gospel of St. Matthew* (13:44) Christ makes a similar point, asserting that one sells everything in exchange for the kingdom of heaven. “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field”— *homoia estin hê basileia tôn ouranôn thêsaurôi kekrymmenôi en tôi agrôi, hon heurôn anthrôpos ekrypsen, kai apo tês charas autou hypagei kai pôlei panta hosa echei kai agorazei ton agron ekeion*.

All Christianity exalts humility. It should therefore not be a surprise if monastic and ascetical spirituality focus on humility. In the *Gospel of St. Matthew* (18:4) our Lord proclaims that “he who therefore will humble himself as this little child, he is greatest in the kingdom of heaven”— *hostis oun tapeinôsei heauton hês to paidion touto, houtos estin ho meizôn en têi basileiâi tôn ouranôn*. Elsewhere (23:12) our Lord says that “whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted”— *hostis de hypôsei heauton tapeinôthêsetai, kai hostis tapeinôsei heauton hypsôthêsetai*. the emphasis on humility may appear self-evident. Behind it, however, lies a reality of the nature of God to which few pay much attention. In the Incarnation two very core elements

of any spirituality are clearly evidenced— the love and humility of God. The idea that humility is rooted in God may appear astonishing. The humility of God

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cannot, of course, be considered in the same light as ascetical humility, or any human form of humility. However, the human forms of humility are derived from the very nature of God, just as the commandment to love is rooted in God's love for mankind God's humility is precisely that being God he desires, he wills to be in communion with everything and everything is inferior to God. This has great theological significance, for it reveals the value of all created things, a value willed by God. There is even a parallel here with the saints who loved animals and flowers. And from this idea, an idea intrinsically derived from the Incarnation and *kenosis* of God the Son, one can clearly see the real Divine origin in action of Christ's teaching about "others." In the very notion of a vertical spirituality a concern for others is presupposed. And while one is ascending to God— an abomination for Nygren— his fellow man must be included in the dimensions of spirituality. Through the Incarnation all forms of human existence are sanctified. Through the Incarnation both the love and the humility of God are made known. And man is to love God and fellow mankind because love contains absolute, positive value, a value derived because love is the very nature of God. And man is to experience humility, to become inflamed by humility precisely because humility belongs also to God and hence its value is derived from God. But to become filled innerly with love and humility is not easy. It demands not a mere acknowledgement of the fact that God is love and humility is Divine. Rather, it demands the complete purification of our inner nature by God. And this is the struggle, the spiritual warfare that must be waged to enter and maintain the reality of love and humility. The path of monasticism and asceticism is an authentic path, a path also ordained by our Lord.

## **The Writings by St. Paul and the Interpretation of the Reformation**

The writings by or attributed to St. Paul form a critical point in the entire great divide between the churches of the Reformation and the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church. The *Epistle to the Romans* is one of the most important references of this controversy. This epistle and the *Epistle to the Galatians* formed the base from which Luther developed his doctrine faith and justification, a doctrine that he himself characterized in his preface to his Latin writings as a totally new understanding of Scripture. These two works continue to be the main reference points for contemporary theologians from the tradition of the Reformation. It was this *new understanding* of the Scriptures that the rejection

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of monasticism obtained in the Reformation In general it is not an exaggeration to claim that this thought considers St. Paul as the only one who understood the Christian message. Moreover, it is not St. Paul by himself nor St. Paul from the entire corpus of his

works, but rather Luther's understanding of St. Paul. From this perspective the authentic interpreters of our Lord's teaching and redemptive work are St. Paul, as understood by Luther, then Marcion, then St. Augustine, and then Luther. Marcion was condemned by the entire early Church. St. Augustine indeed does anticipate Luther in certain views but not at all on the doctrine of justification and Luther's specific understanding of faith. It is more St. Augustine's doctrine of predestination, irresistible grace, and his doctrine of the total depravity of man contained in his "novel" to quote St. Vincent of Lerins— doctrine of original sin that influenced Luther, who himself was an Augustinian monk.

The rejection of monasticism ultimately followed from the emphasis placed upon salvation as a free gift of God. Such a position is completely accurate but its specific understanding was entirely contrary to that of the early Church. That salvation was the free gift of God and that man was justified by faith was never a problem for early Christianity. But from Luther's perspective and emphasis any type of "works," especially that of the monks in their ascetical struggle, was considered to contradict the free nature of grace and the free gift of salvation. If one was indeed justified by faith, then— so went the line of Luther's thought— man is not justified by "works"— For Luther "justification by faith" meant an extrinsic justification, a justification totally independent from any inner change within the depths of the spiritual life of a person. For Luther "to justify"— *dikaion*— meant to declare one righteous or just, not "to make" righteous or just— it is an appeal to an extrinsic justice which in reality is a spiritual fiction. Luther has created a legalism far more serious than the legalism he detected in the Roman Catholic thought and practice of his time. Moreover, Luther's legalistic doctrine of extrinsic justification is spiritually serious, for it is a legal transaction which in reality does not and can not exist. Nowhere was the emphasis on "works" so strong, thought Luther, as in monasticism. Hence, monasticism had to be rejected and rejected it was. But Luther read too much into St. Paul's emphasis on faith, on justification by faith, and on the free gift of the grace of salvation. St. Paul is directly in controversy with Judaism, especially in his *Epistle to the Romans*. It is the "works of the law," the law as defined by and interpreted by and practiced by Judaism in the time of St. Paul. Our Lord has the same reaction to the externalization and mechanical understanding

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of the "law"— Indeed, the very text of the *Epistle to the Romans* revels in every passage that St. Paul is comparing the external law of Judaism with the newness of the spiritual understanding of law, with the newness of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ through the Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection of our Lord. God has become Man. God has entered human history and indeed the newness is radical. But to misunderstand St. Paul's critique of "works," to think that St. Paul is speaking of the "works" commanded by our Lord rather than the Judaic understanding of the works of the "law" is a misreading of a fundamental nature. It is true, however, that Luther had a point in considering the specific direction in which the Roman Catholic merit-system had gone as a reference point similar to the Judaic legal system. As a result of Luther's background, as a result of his theological milieu, whenever he read anything in St. Paul about "works," he immediately

thought of his own experience as a monk and the system of merit and indulgences in which he had been raised.

It must be strongly emphasized that Luther does indeed protect one aspect of salvation, the very cause and source of redemption and grace. But he neglects the other side, the aspect of man's participation in this free gift of Divine initiative and grace. Luther fears any resurgence of the Roman Catholic system of merit and indulgences, he fears any tendency which will constitute a truly Pelagian attitude, any tendency that will allow man to believe that man is the cause, the source, or the main spring of salvation. And here Luther is correct. Nygren's *Agape*-Eros distinction is correct in this context, for any spirituality that omits *Agape* and concentrates only on Eros, on man's striving to win God's influence, is fundamentally non-Christian. *But the issue is not that simple.* Both extremes are false. God has freely willed a synergistic path-of-redemption in which man must spiritually participate. God is the actor, the cause, the initiator, the one who completes all redemptive activity. But man is the one who must spiritually respond to the free gift of grace. And in this response there is an authentic place for the spirituality of monasticism and asceticism, one which has absolutely nothing to do with the "works of the law," or with the system of merit and indulgences.

## Romans

In his *Epistle to the Romans* St. Paul writes in the very introduction (1:4-5) that through Jesus Christ "we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name"— *di' hou elabomen charin kai apostolên eis*

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*hypakoên pisteôs... hyper tou onomatou autou.* The notion of "obedience of faith" has a meaning for St. Paul. It is much more than a simple acknowledgement or recognition of a faith placed within one by God. Rather, it is a richly spiritual notion, one that contains within it a full spirituality of activity on the part of man— not that the activity will win the grace of God but precisely that the spiritual activity is the response to the grace of God, performed with the grace of God, in order to be filled by the grace of God. And it will be an on-going spiritual "work," one which can never be slackened, and one totally foreign from the works" of the Judaic law.

St. Paul writes (2:6) that God "will render to each according to his works"— *hos apodôsei hekastôi kata ta erga autou.* If St. Paul was so concerned about the word "works," if he feared that the Christian readers of his letter might interpret "works" in some totally different way from what he intended, he certainly could have been more cautious. But St. Paul clearly distinguishes between the "works" of the Judaic law and the "works" of the Holy Spirit required of all Christians. Hence, it is difficult to confuse these two perspectives and it is significant that the early Church never confused them, for they understood what St. Paul wrote. If anything— despite the lucidity of St. Paul's thought— there were

tendencies at times to fall not into Luther's one-sided interpretation but rather to fall somewhat spontaneously into an Eros-type of striving.

It is the "doers of the law" who will be justified"— *hoi poiêtai nomou dikaiôthêsontai* (2:13). The notion of "doers" implies action, activity. Elsewhere in the same epistle (5:2) St. Paul writes that through our Lord Jesus Christ "we have had access [by faith] into this grace in which we stand"— *tên prosagôgên eschêkamen (têi pistei) eis tên charin tauten en hêi estêkamen*. The very idea of "access into grace" is dynamic and implies spiritual activity on the part of mankind.

After the lengthy proclamation of the grace of God, the impotence of the "works of the law" in comparison with the "works" of the new reality of the Spirit, St. Paul resorts to the traditional spiritual exhortation (6:12f). "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body in order to obey its lusts. Nor yield your members to sin as weapons of unrighteousness"— *mê oun basileuetô en tôi thnêtôi hymôn sômati eis to hypakouein tais epithymiais autou. mêde paristanete ta melê hymôn hoopla adikias têi hamartiâi* The exhortation presupposes that man has some type of spiritual activity and

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control over his inner existence. The very use of the word "weapon" invokes the idea of battle, of spiritual warfare, the very nature of the monastic "ordeal."

In the same chapter (6:17) St. Paul writes: "But grace to God that you who were slaves of sin obeyed out of the heart a form of teaching which was delivered to you"— *charis de tôi theôi hoti ête douloi tês hamartias hypêkousate de ek kardias eis hon paredothête typon didachês*. In the second chapter of the *Epistle to the Romans* (2:15) St. Paul writes about the universal aspect of the "law" that is "written in the hearts" of mankind, a thought with profound theological implications— *hoitines endeiknyntai to ergon tou nomou grapton en tais kardiais autôn* ["who show the work of the law written in their hearts"]. In using the image of the heart St. Paul is emphasizing the deepest aspect of the interior life of mankind, for such was the use of the image of the "heart" among Hebrews. When he writes that they obeyed "out of the heart," St. Paul is attributing some type of spiritual activity to the "obedience" which springs from the "heart"— And to what have they become obedient? To a form or standard of teaching or doctrine delivered to them— this is precisely the apostolic deposit, the body of early Christian teaching to which they have responded and have become obedient. And in so doing, they have become "enslaved to righteousness," the righteousness of the new law, of the life of the Spirit— *eleutherôthentes de apo tês hamartias edoulôthête têi dikaiosynêi* (6:18). And the "fruit" of becoming enslaved to God" is precisely sanctification which leads to life eternal— *doulôthentes de tôi theôi, echete ton karpon hymôn eis hagasmon, to de telos zôên aiônion* (6:22). Throughout is a process, throughout is a dynamic spiritual activity on the part of man. St. Paul becomes more explicit about the distinction between the old and the new law (7:6). "But now we are discharged from the law, having died in that which held us captive, so as to serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter"— *nyni de*

*katêrgêthêmen apo toui nomou, apothanontes en hôi kateichometha, hôste douleuein en kainotêti pneumatos kai ou palaiotêti grammatos.*

St. Paul writes that we “are children of God, and if children, also heirs, heirs on the one hand of God, co-heirs on the other hand, of Christ” — *esmen tekna theou. ei de tekna, kai klêronomoi. klêronomoi men theou, sygklêronomoi de Christou, eiper sympaschomen hina kai dyndoxasthōmen* (8:17). But all this has a condition, has a proviso, for there is the all important “if indeed”— *eiper*. “If we co-suffer in order that we may be glorified”— Our glorification, according to St. Paul, is contingent upon a mighty

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“if” and that “if” leads us to the spiritual reality, the spiritual reality ‘of “co- suffering”— The very use of the word “co-suffer”— *sympaschomen*— presupposes the reality of the idea of “cosuffering” and both presuppose an active, dynamic spiritual action or activity on the part of the one who co-suffers, else there is no meaning to the “co”.

In the *Epistle to the Romans* (12:1) St. Paul uses language that would be meaningless if man were merely a passive object in the redemptive process, if justification by faith was an action that took place only on the Divine level. “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, through the compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service”— *parakalō oun hymas, adelphoi, dia tôn oiktirmôn tou theou, parastêsai ta sômata hymôn thysian zōsan hagian euareston tôi theôi, tēn logikēn latreian hymôn*. St. Paul is asking the Christian to present, a reality which presupposes and requires human activity. But not only “to present” but “to present” the body as a living sacrifice, as holy, and as acceptable or well-pleasing to God. And this St. Paul considers our “reasonable service” or our “spiritual worship.” The language and the idea speak for themselves. Using the imperative, St. Paul commands us: “Be not conformed to this age but be transformed by the renewing of the mind in order to prove [that you may prove] what [is] that good and well-pleasing and perfect will of God”— *kai mê syschēmatizesthe tôi aiōni touôi, alla metamorphousthe têi anakainōsei tou noos, eis to dokimazein hymas ti to thelêma tou theou, to agathon kai euareston kai teleion*. Taken by itself and out of context this language could be misinterpreted as Pelagian, for here it is man who is transforming the mind, man who is commanded to activate the spiritual life. Such an interpretation is, of course, incorrect but it reveals what one can do to the totality of the theological thought of St. Paul if one does not understand the balance, if one does not understand that his view is profoundly synergistic. Synergism does not mean that two energies are equal. Rather it means that there are two wills— one, the will of God which precedes, accompanies, and completes all that is good, positive, spiritual and redemptive, one that has willed that man have a spiritual will, a spiritual participation in the redemptive process; the other is the will of man which must respond, cooperate, “co-suffer”— In 12:9 St. Paul exhorts us to “cleave to the good”— *kollōmenoi tôi agathôi*— and in 12:12 he exhorts us “to be steadfastly continuing in prayer”— *têi proseuchêi proskarterountes*. Such a position certainly does not

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exclude monastic and ascetical spirituality but rather presupposes it.

## I and II Corinthians

Celibacy is a part of the monastic life and it too has its source in the teachings of the New Testament. In *I Corinthians* 7:1-11 St. Paul encourages both marriage and celibacy— both are forms of Christian spirituality, and St. Paul has much to say about marriage in his other epistles. But his point is that celibacy is a form of spirituality for some, and it therefore cannot be excluded from the forms of spirituality within the Church. In verse 7 St. Paul writes that he would like all to be like him— *thelô de pantas anthrôpous einai hês kai emauton*. But he realizes that each person has his own gift from God— *alla hekastos idion echei charisma ek theou, ho men houtôs, ho de houtôs*. “I say therefore to the unmarried men and to the widows, it is good for them if they remain as I. But if they do not exercise self-control, let them marry”— *legô de tois agamois gai tais chêrais, kalon autois ean meinôsin hês kagô: ei de ouk egkrateuontai, gamêsatôsan*. In verses 37-38, St. Paul summarizes: “the one who has decided in his own heart to keep himself virgin, he will do well. So, therefore, both the one marrying his betrothed [virgin], does well, and the one not marrying will do better”— *kai touto kekriken en têi kardiâi, têrein tèn heautou Parthenon, kalôs poiêsei. hôste kai ho gamizôn tèn heautou Parthenon kalôs poiei, kai ho mê gamizôn kreisson poiêsei*. The monastic practice of celibacy is precisely not excluded by the New Testament. Rather, it is even encouraged both by our Lord and by St Paul— and without jeopardy to the married state. The decision cannot be forced. Rather, it must come from the heart. And, indeed, it is not for everyone.

The comparison of the spiritual life to that of running a race and to that of warfare is throughout the New Testament. Without diminishing his basis of theological vision— that it is God who initiates everything— St. Paul writes in *I Corinthians* 9:24-27 in a manner, which, if taken by itself, would indeed appear Pelagian, would indeed appear as though all the essence of salvation depends upon man. But in the total context of his theology there is no contradiction, for there are always two wills in redemption— the Divine, which initiates; and the human, which responds and is, in the very response has received. “Do you not know that the ones running in a race all

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run indeed. But one receives the prize? So run in order that you may obtain. And everyone struggling exercises self-control in all things. Indeed, those do so therefore in order that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible one. I, therefore, so run as not unclearly. Thus I box not as one beating the air. But I treat severely my body and lead it as a slave, lest having proclaimed to others, I myself may become disqualified”— *ouk oidate hoti hoi en stadiôi trechontes pantes men trechousin, heis de lambanei to brabeion; houtôs trechete hina katalabête. pas de ho agônizomenos panta egkrateuetai, ekeinoi men oun hina phtharton stephanon labôsin, hêmeis de aphtharton. egô toinyn houtôs trechô hês ouk adêlôs, houtôs pykteuô hês ouk aera derôn: alla hypôpiazô mou to sôma kai doulabôgô, mê pôs allois kêryxas autos adokimos genômai*.



In this text we encounter the race— the spiritual race— and the prize; we encounter the grammatical and the thought structure of “in order that you may obtain,” a structure which implies contingency and not certainty. We encounter the race as a spiritual struggle in which “self-control in everything” must be exercised. And then St. Paul describes his own spiritual battle— he treats his body severely, leads it as though it were a slave, and to what end? So that he will not become disapproved. The entire passage is very monastic and ascetic in its content. Despite St. Paul’s certainty of the objective reality of redemption which has come through Christ as a Divine gift, he does not consider his own spiritual destiny to be included in that objective redemption which is now here unless he participates in it— and until the end of the race. In 10:12 he warns us: “Let the one who thinks he stands, let him look lest he falls”— *hōste ho dokôn hestanaï blepetô mê pesêi*. In 11:28 he writes: “Let a man prove or examine himself”— *dokimazetô de anthrôpos heauton*. In the latter context the proving” or “examining” is in the most serious of contexts, for it is spoken in connection with the Holy Eucharist, which is spoken of so objectively that if one “eats this bread” or “drinks this cup of the Lord” “unworthily,” that person “shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” and shall “bring damnation to himself”— for that reason, continues St. Paul, some are weak, sickly, and some have died. But our focus here is on self-examination, on those who think they stand. This again is an integral aspect of the monastic and ascetical life; that is, a constant examination of one’s spiritual life. In *II Corinthians* 13:5 St. Paul again stresses self-examination: “Examine yourselves, if you are in the faith. Prove yourselves”—

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*heautous peirazete ei este en têi pistei, heautous dokimazete.*

In 15:1-2 St. Paul introduces a significant “if” and “also”— “I make known to you, brothers, the Gospel which I preached to you, which you also received, in which you also stand, through which you also are saved, if you hold fast to that which I preached to you”— *gnôrizô de hymin, adelphoi, to euangelion ho euêggelisamên hymin, ho kai parelabete, en hô kai hestêkate, di’ hou kai sôizesthe, tini logôi euêggelisamên hymin ei katechete.*

In *I Corinthians* 14:15 St. Paul speaks of praying with both spirit and mind, a thought that weaves its way through monastic and ascetical literature. The use of the mind in prayer finds its fullest expression in the controversial use of the “mind” in the thought of Evagrius Ponticus. The text, even within its general context in the chapter, is clear. “I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray also with the mind; I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the mind”— *proseuxomai tôi pneumatic, proseuxomai de kai tîo noi: psalô tôi pneumatic, psalô de kai tîo noi.*

St. Paul’s hymn to love, to *Agape*, fills the entirety of *I Corinthians* 13. Despite later interpretations of the use of the word “faith” in this chapter, specifically the interpretations that entered Christian thought with the Reformation, there was no misunderstanding of this “hymn to love” in the early Church indeed, in the history of Christian thought until the Reformation it was understood quite directly. It is only through a convoluted exegetical method imposed by a specific— and new— theological understanding that this great

“hymn to love” had to be understood by distinguishing different meanings attached to the word “faith.” Though one speaks with the tongues of men and of angels, though one has the gift of prophecy, though one understands all mysteries, though one understands all knowledge, though one has all faith “to remove mountains,” though one bestows all one’s goods to feed the poor, though one gives one’s body to be burned— though one has all this, but not love, one is “nothing,” one “becomes as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal,” one “profits” not at all— *ean tais glôssais tôn anthrôpôn lalô kai tôn aggelôn, agapên de mê echo, gegona chalkos echôn ê kymbalon alalazon. kai ean echo prophêteian kai eidô ta mystêria panta kai pasan tèn gnôsin, kan echo pasan tèn pistin hôste orê methistanai, agapên de mê echo, outhen eimi. kan psômisô panta ta hyparchonta mou, kai ean paradô to sôma*

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*mou hina kauchêsomai, agapên de mê echo, ouden ôpheiloumai.* St. Paul is quite explicit on what love is. “Love suffers long, love is kind, love is not jealous, does not vaunt itself, is not puffed up, does not act unseemly, does not seek its own things, is not provoked, does not reckon evil, does not rejoice over wrong, but rejoices with the truth. Love covers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never falls. But prophecies— they will be abolished; tongues— they will cease; knowledge— it will be abolished... And now remains faith, hope, love, these three. But the greatest of these is love”— *hê agape makrothymei, chrêsteuetai hê agape, ou zêloi, hê agape ou perpereuetai, ou physioutai, ouk aschêmoni, ou zêtei ta heautês, ou paroxynetai, ou logizetai to kakon, ou chairei epi têi adikiêai, sugchairei de têi alêtheiâi: panta stegei, panta pisteuei, panta elpizei, panta hypomenei. hê agape oudepote piptei: eite de propheteiai, katargêthêsontai: eite glôssai, pausontai: eite gnôsis, katargêthêsetai... nuni de menei pistis, elpis, agape, ta tria tauta: meizôn de toutôn hê agapê.* The goal of monastic and ascetical struggle, of the “ordeal,” is love— to love God, to love mankind, to love all created things, to be penetrated by God’s love, to participate in love, which is God and flows from God, and to enter a union with God, with love. Often monastic literature will speak of “achieving” this love, as though it is the work of man. But that it not the total context of love in monastic literature, not even in those texts which appear as though everything were nothing but a striving on the part of man in the “ordeal.” This language is spoken because it is spontaneous with spiritual nature. This language is spoken because it runs parallel with that assumed knowledge— that God is the source of everything. And yet St. Paul himself often uses language which could come directly from monastic statements. True, both would be taken out of their total context, but it is true that the two languages are spoken— the language referring to God as the source, as the initiator, to the grace of God, to the gift of all spirituality; and the language which concentrates on man’s activity, on man’s response to the love and redemptive work of God in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. When one line of thought is being used, it in no way denies the other line of thought. Rather, it is precisely the opposite, for monastic and ascetical literature can only speak about man’s activity if it is presupposed that God has accomplished the redemptive activity in and through our Lord, that God is working in man

through the Holy Spirit. Else, all that is written is without meaning, temporarily and ultimately. St. Paul's command in *I Corinthians* 14:1 to "pursue love and eagerly desire

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the spiritual things" is responded to directly by monastic and ascetical spirituality—*diôkete tèn agapên, zêloute de ta pneumatika*.

In *II Corinthians* 2:9 St. Paul writes in the very same spirit that an abbot might employ with his novices: "For to this end indeed I wrote— in order that I might know your proof, if you are obedient in all things"— *eis touto gar kai egrapsa, hina gnô tèn dokimên hymôn, ei eis panta hypêkooi este*. Obedience is an important theme and reality in the monastic and ascetic "ordeal" and that very theme of obedience is mentioned often throughout the New Testament.

Monastic and ascetical literature will often use the terms "fragrance" and "aroma" and again the source is the New Testament. In *II Corinthians* 2:14-15 St. Paul writes: "manifesting among us the fragrance of his knowledge in every place. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those perishing, to the latter an aroma from death unto death, to the former an aroma from life unto life"— *kai tèn osmên tês gnôseôs autou phanerounti di' hêmôn en panti topôi: hoti Christou euôdia semen tôi theôi en tois sôizomenois kai en tois apollymenois, hois men osmê ek thanatou eis thanaton, hois de osmê ek zôês eis zôên*.

In *II Corinthians* 3:18 St. Paul uses an expression which is often found in ascetical literature— "from glory to glory"— "But we all, with face having been unveiled, beholding in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being changed into the same icon from glory to glory, even as from the Spirit of the Lord"— *hêmeis de pantes anakekalymmenôï prosôpôi tèn doxan kyrious katoptrizomenoi tèn autên eikona metamorphoumetha apo doxês eis doxan, kathaper apo kyriou pneumatos*. The Greek verbal structure throughout the New Testament cannot be stressed enough, for it conveys a dynamic activity that is seldom found in other languages and in translations. In this text the emphasis is on the process of "we are being changed." Elsewhere emphasis is often on "we are being saved." rather than "we are changed" and "we are saved." When the objective nature of redemption is the focus, then the Greek verbal structure uses "we are saved." But mainly, when the process is the focus, the dynamism is expressed by the verbal structure of "we are being saved." In this text it is significant that the objective nature is expressed by "having been unveiled," while the on-going process of our participation in the spiritual process of salvation is expressed by "we are being changed." Here is expressed the dynamism of synergy.

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In *II Corinthians* 4:16 St. Paul again emphasizes the dynamism and process of the spiritual reality in man. "Our inner [life] is being renewed day by day"— *ho esô hêmôn anakainoutai hêmerâi kai hêmerâi*. The monastic life attempts to respond to such a text by the daily regulation of prayer, meditation, self-examination, and worship— precisely to

attempt to “renew” daily “our inner” spiritual life. In 10:15 the dynamic aspect of growth is stressed and precisely in reference to “faith” and “rule.” “But having hope as your faith is growing to be magnified unto abundance among you according to our rule”— *elpida de echontes auxanomenês tês pisteôs hymôn en hymin megalunthênai kata ton kanona hêmôn eis perisseian*. In 4:12 St. Paul again places the inner depth of man’s spiritual life in the “heart,” something which Eastern monasticism will develop even in its life of prayer.

The entire fifth chapter of *II Corinthians* is an exceptionally important text. Here, as elsewhere, St. Paul uses language which, when used by others, distresses sorely many scholars working from the Reformation perspective— he uses the notion of “pleasing God,” something which some scholars find indicative of man’s solicitation to “win” God’s favor. But when St. Paul uses such language it passes in silence, it passes without objection— precisely because St. Paul has established his position that God is the source of everything. But monastic and ascetical literature also presuppose that God initiates and is the source of everything. But it is in the very nature of daily spiritual life in monasticism and in ascetical spirituality to focus on man’s activity. It is precisely focus, not a theological position. “We therefore are ambitious [to make it our goal], whether being at home or being away from home, to be well-pleasing to him. For it is necessary for all of us to be manifested before the tribunal of Christ in order that each one may receive something good or something worthless, according to what one has practiced through the body. Knowing, therefore, the fear of the Lord, we persuade men”— *dio kai philotimoumetha, eite endêmountes eite ekdêmountes, euarestoi autôi einai. tous gar pantas hêmas phanerôthênai dei emprosthen tou bêmatos tou Christou, hina komisêtai hekastos ta dia tou siomatos pros ha epraxen, eite agathon eite phaulon*. In *II Corinthians* 11:15 St. Paul writes that one’s “end will be according to [one’s] works”— *hôn to telos estai kata ta erga autôn*. Also this is not the only time that the New Testament uses the word “practice,” a word which becomes systematized in monasticism. After a profound exposition on the initiative of God in the redemptive work of Christ (5:14-20), in which St. Paul writes that “all things are of

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God, who, having reconciled us to himself through Christ”— *ta de panta ek tou theou tou katallaxantos hêmas heautôi dia Christou*, St. Paul writes in verse 21: “Be reconciled to God”— *katallagête tôi theôi*. Moreover, he not only uses the imperative form but also precedes this with “we beg on behalf of Christ”— *deometha hyper Christou*. His language here becomes meaningless unless there is spiritual activity on the part of man. And what is more, St. Paul uses a very interesting structure in relationship to the “righteousness of God,” for he writes that the redemptive work of Christ was accomplished “in order that we might become the righteousness of God in him”— *hina hêmeis genometha dikaiosynê theou en autôi*. Here the significance is on “we might become” rather than “we are” or “we have become”— Implicit is a synergistic dynamism. This is further stressed in 6:1: “And working together [with him] we entreat you not to receive the grace of God to no purpose”— *synergountes de kai parakaloumen mê eis kenon tèn charin tou theou*

*dexasthai hymas*. And St. Paul then quotes from Isaiah 49:8 in which it is said that God “hears” and “helps”— *epékousa sou kai... eboêthêsa soi*.

In *II Corinthians* 6:4-10 St. Paul writes what could be a guide to monastic spiritual life. “In everything commending ourselves as ministers of God— in much endurance, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in prisons, in tumults, in labors, in vigils, in fasting, in purity, in knowledge, in longsuffering, in kindness, in a holy spirit, in unfeigned love, in a word of truth, in power of God— through the weapons of righteousness on the right and left hand, through glory and dishonor, through evil report and good report... as dying, and behold, we live... as being grieved but always rejoicing, as poor but enriching [sic] many, as having nothing yet possessing all things”— *en panti synistanontes heautous hōs theou diakonoi, en hypomonēi pollēi, en thlipsesin, en anagkais, en stenochōriais, en plēgais, en phylakais, en akatastasiais, en kopois, en agrypniis, en nēsteiais, en hagnotēti, en gnōsei, en makrothymiāi, en chrēstotēti, en pneumatic hagiōi, en agapēi anypokritōi, en logōi alētheias, en dynamei theou: dia tōn hoplōn tēs dikaiosynēs tōn dixiōn kai aristerōn, dia doxēs kai atimias, dia dysphēmias kai euphēmias... hōs apothnēskontes kai idou zōmen... hōs lypoumenoi aei de chairontes, hōs ptōchoi pollous de ploutizontes*. The vigils, the fasting, the purity, the gnosis or knowledge— these are to be reflected in monastic and ascetical life. Moreover, St. Paul again uses the image of warfare and refers to the “weapons of

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righteousness.” The language used by St. Paul in this passage can only have significance if man participates synergistically in the redemptive process. If the doctrine of “righteousness” in the thought of St. Paul has only a one-sided meaning— that is, the “righteousness of God,” which is, of course, the source of all righteousness— then why the talk of “weapons of righteousness” placed in the very hands, both right and left, of man? If man is solely “reckoned righteous” by the “vicarious sacrifice” of our Lord Jesus Christ, why the need to speak of “weapons of righteousness,” unless there is a second aspect of the redemptive process which ontologically includes man’s spiritual participation? In *II Corinthians* 10:3-6 St. Paul continues with the reference to it warfare” and again stresses “obedience.” “For though walking in the flesh, we wage war not according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly but [have] the power of God to overthrow strongholds, overthrowing reasonings and every high thing rising up against the knowledge of God and taking captive every design unto the obedience of Christ”— *en sarki gar peripatountes ou kata sarka strateuometha, ta gar hopla tēs strateias hēmōn ou sarkika alla dynata tōi theōi pros kathairesin ochyrōmatōn, logismous kathairoountes kai pan hupsōma epairomenon kata tēs gnōseōs tou theou, kai aichmalōtizontes pan noēma eis tēn hypakoēn tou Christou*.

St. Paul writes in *II Corinthians* 7:1 about cleansing, about it perfecting holiness,” and about the “fear of God.” After referring to our having “these promises,” he exhorts: “Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and of spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”— *katharisōmen heautous apo pantos molysmou sarkos kai pneumatou,*

*epitelountes hagiôsynên en phobôi theou.* This exhortation is precisely what monastic and ascetical life attempts to implement. In 13:9 St. Paul writes: “We pray also for you restoration”— *touto kai euchometha, tèn hymôn katartisin.* In order for one to be “restored,” one would have to have been at a certain level previously. The text bears witness to the dynamic nature of faith, of spiritual life in Christ, of the rising and falling away, and then the restoration.

In *II Corinthians 7:10* St. Paul speaks in terms quite similar to those found in monastic and ascetical literature, for he speaks of “grief” which works “repentance” which leads to “salvation.” “For grief, in accordance with God, works repentance unto unregrettable salvation”— *hê gar kata theon lypê metanoian eis sôtêrian ametamelêton ergazetai.* St. Paul contrasts this “Godly grief” with the “grief of the world which works out death”

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— *hê de tou kosmou lypê thanaton katergazetai.* The theme “sorrow” and “grief” over one’s sin— precisely “grief in accordance with God” or “Godly grief”— is a constant in monastic spiritual life.

St. Paul ends the text proper of *II Corinthians* with a final exhortation. “Restore yourselves, admonish yourselves, think the same, become at peace, and the God of love and of peace will be with you”— *katartizesthe, parakaleisthe, to auto phroneite, eirêneute, kai ho theos tês agapes kai eirênês estai meth hymôn.* Here the emphasis is again on “restoration”— St. Paul’s sequence of language— if taken by itself and out of context— could be easily misinterpreted as man causing God’s action, for he writes “become at peace *and*.” It is precisely that “and” that introduces the activity of God. God “will be with you,” if you achieve peace— this is how this text could well be interpreted if we did not possess the body of St. Paul’s works. What could have happened to the thought of St. Paul is what usually happens to the thought expressed in monastic and ascetical literature.

## **Galatians**

Along with the *Epistle to the Romans*, St. Paul’s *Epistle to the Galatians* is the other work from the corpus of St. Paul most often quoted by the theologians of the Lutheran and Calvinistic Reformation and those theologians who have followed in those theological traditions. They were also the two works most quoted by St. Augustine to support his doctrine of irresistible grace and predestination. But one encounters the same problem in *Galatians* that is, that there is a second line of thought which, by itself, could be interpreted in a Pelagian sense. The point here is, of course, that both views are one-sided, that the thought of St. Paul is far richer than any one-sided interpretation allows for, far more realistic both with the glory of God and with the tragedy of man’s experience in evil, corruption, and death. But St. Paul not only extols the glory of God, the power and initiative of grace but also the joyfulness of an objective redemption in which each person must participate in order for the redemption of man to be completed.

In the first chapter of *Galatians* St. Paul in verse 10 uses language which implies the seeking of favor with God. “For now do I persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men?”— *arti gar anthrôpous peithô ê ton theon; ê zêtô anthrôpois areskein?* At one point, in *Galatians* 4:9, St. Paul catches himself falling into the very understandable usage of human language: “But

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now knowing God, or rather, being known by God”— *nyn de gnontes theon, mallon de gnôsthentes hypo theou*. Imprecision of language occurs even with St. Paul.

The second chapter of *Galatians* provides an illumination of the central controversial issue in the theology of St. Paul. In context St. Paul is addressing the hypocrisy of St. Peter in Antioch, for St. Peter ate with the Gentiles until those from the “circumcision” party arrived from Jerusalem. At that time St. Peter withdrew from the Gentiles, “fearing those of the circumcision”— *phoboumenos tous ek peritomês*. St. Paul challenges St. Peter face to face. Again the whole controversy is between the “works of the law” and the “works of the Spirit,” between the laws of Judaism and the spiritual laws of Christ as a direct result of his Divine redemptive work. It is, therefore, in this context that St. Paul brings the doctrine of justification into discussion. In verse 16 St. Paul writes: “And knowing that a man is not justified out of works of the law but through faith of Christ Jesus, even we believed in Christ Jesus in order that we might be justified out of faith of Christ and not out of the works of the law because out of works of the law all flesh will not be justified”— *eidotes de hoti ou dikaioutai anthrôpos ex ergôn nomou ean mê dia pisteôs Christou lêsou, kai hêmeis eis Christon lêsoun episteusamen, hina dikaiôthômen ek pisteôs Christou kai ouk ex ergôn nomou, hoti ex ergôn nomou ou dikaiôthêsetai pasa sarx*. In the Greek construction used by St. Paul a dynamism still exists, for we believed “in order that we might be justified” and “out of faith.” This latter expression contains breadth, expansion of spiritual life generating from faith. It is a rich expression and its fulness and dynamism must not be diminished by a reductionist interpretation. And the very use of “in order” has implications theologically, as does the construction “that we might be justified.” St. Paul could very well have written that we have believed and are hence justified. But that is not what he has written. The objective reality of redemption, the objective reality of mankind being justified by Christ is one thing. The subjective reality of each person participating in this already accomplished redemptive work of justification, of being really “right” with God is another dimension, a dimension which requires and addresses the entire spiritual composition of man. In the very next text St. Paul writes “if seeking to be justified in Christ”— *ei de zêtountes dikaiôthênai en Christôi*. In 5:5 he can write “for we in the Spirit eagerly expect the hope of righteousness”— *hêmeis gar pneumatic ek pisteôs elpida dikaiosynês apekdechometha*. What is the ontological meaning of “the hope of righteousness” if

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“righteousness” is “imputed” to us as though a legal transaction, and if it is the “passive righteousness” of God which “justifies” us? No, St. Paul’s vision is far deeper. The “hope

of righteousness” is precisely our hope to share in that objective “righteousness of God” which is now freely given by God in and through Christ. But we “hope” because there is “work” for us to do in order to take hold of and participate in that righteousness eternally. God creates in his freedom. God created man with this image of freedom. Christ accepts the Cross in freedom. Freedom is the foundation of creation and redemption. And man’s freedom, however weakened, can still be inspired by the free gift of Grace. And in this freedom man must, as St. Paul writes in his *Epistle to the Philippians* 2:12, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”— *meta phobou kai tromou tēn heautōn sōtērian katergazesthe*. It cannot be denied that monastic and ascetical spirituality took this seriously. In *Galatians* 5:1 St. Paul writes that “Christ freed us for freedom. Therefore stand firm”— *tēi eleutheriāi hēmas Christos ēleutherōsen: stēkete oun*.

The total theological significance of all that took place in the coming of Christ, in the Incarnation of the God-Man, in his life, his teachings, his death, his resurrection, his establishment of the Church and the mystical sacramental life in the Church, his Ascension, his sending of the Holy Spirit, and his Second Coming and Judgment— all this has radically altered the old law of works, and the meaning was clear to the early Church. It is true that what St. Paul says about the “works of the law” can be applied to any form of Christianity that deviates from the precision of the balance, that deviates from the authentic “works of the Spirit,” replacing them by a mechanical and mechanistic attitude. And in *Galatians* 3:27 St. Paul immediately connects “justification by faith” with the mystical sacrament of baptism. “For you are all sons of God through the faith in Christ Jesus, for as many of you as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ”— *pantes gar huioi theou este dia tēs pisteōs en Christōi Iēsou: hosoi gar eis Christon ebaptisthēte, Christon enedysasthe*. Within this context what is the distinction between the “justification by faith” and “by faith” being “baptized into Christ,” and, hence, having “put on Christ”?

St. Paul is addressing Christians, those who have been baptized, those who have accepted the faith. Despite all his language about “justification by faith,” about “putting on Christ” through baptism, about the objective aspect of redemption having been accomplished, St. Paul still can write in *Galatians* 4:19 that he

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“travails in birth until Christ is formed” in them— *ōdinō mechris hou morphōthēi Christos en hymin*. What can this mean except that the redemptive process for man is one of struggle, one of rising and falling, one of continual spiritual dynamism? In 5:7 he writes that they “were running well” and asks “who hindered you?”— *etrechete kalōs: tis hymas enekopsen*, invoking again the image of a race.

In *Galatians* 5:14 St. Paul repeats Christ’s commandment of love, a thought not foreign to St. Paul, especially when one considers his “Hymn to Love” [*Agape*] in *I Corinthians* 13. “For the whole law has been summed up in one expression: you shall love your neighbor as yourself”— *ho gar pas nomos en heni logōi peplērōtai, en tō agapēseis ton plēsion sou hōs seauton*. He then distinguishes the “works of the Spirit” from the “works of the flesh,” explicitly linking the latter with the old law. And then he again exhorts and commands from



the realism of spiritual life (5:25). “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit”— *ei zômen pneumatî, pneumatî kai stoichômen*. What is the meaning of such an exhortation? It has a meaning based on realism only if the “living in the Spirit” refers to the entirety of the objective work of the redemptive work of Christ now accomplished and available to mankind, a redemption which surrounds them by the life of the Church in which they live but a redemption in which they must actively participate, in which they must “walk” if they are to obtain and receive the final work of redemption, the union of man and God in love, in goodness, in truth. The “walk” is an obvious expression of activity, of movement toward a goal. In *Galatians* 6:2 St. Paul links the commandment of love and the “walking in the Spirit” with “the law of Christ.” “And thus you will fulfill the law of Christ”— *kai houtôs anaplêrôsete ton nomon tou Christou*. The very language of “the law of Christ” and the “fulfilling” of that law” is theologically significant, for “the law of Christ” refers to everything communicated to the Church through Christ. The monastic and ascetical life is precisely such an attempt to fulfill this “law of Christ”— His concluding thought in *Galatians* is: “Peace and mercy upon those many who will walk by this rule”— *kai hosoi tô kanoni toutôi stiochêsousin, eirênê ep’ autous kai eleos*. The “new creation” about which St. Paul speaks is both an already accomplished redemptive reality and, for us as individuals with spiritual freedom, the “new creation”— *kainê ktisis*— is a reality which must be “formed,” a reality which can come about only through process, when the subjective reality of each person is

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“formed” into the objective reality of the “new creation” wrought by our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Ephesians**

In *Ephesians* 1:14 St. Paul uses extremely interesting language in relationship to our “salvation” in Christ “in whom we believed and thereafter were sealed with the Holy Spirit “who is an earnest of our inheritance unto redemption of the possession”— *hos estin arrabôn tês klêronomias hêmôn, eis apolytrôsin tês peripoîêseôs*. The meaning here is clear: the seal of the Holy Spirit is the “deposit” toward an inheritance of which we take possession when we acquire it. It is a dynamic text. That possession of such an inheritance requires that we walk in “good works” in clear in *Ephesians* 2:10: “For we are a product of him, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God previously prepared in order that we might walk in them”— *autou gar semen poiêma, ktisthentes en Christôi Iêsou epi ergois agathois, hois proêtoimasen ho theos hina en autois peripatêsômen*. In *Ephesians* 6:11 St. Paul again uses the image of warfare and of putting on the “whole armor of God”— *endysasthe tên panoplian tou theou*. The “walk” is evoked again in 5:8 and 5:15. “Walk as children of the light”— *hôs tekna photos peripateite*. “See, therefore, that you walk carefully”— *blepete oun akribôs pôs peripateite*. In 5:9 he writes that “the fruit of the light [is] in all goodness and righteousness and truth”— *ho gar karpos tou photos en pasêi agathôsynêi kai dikaiosynêi kai alêtheiâi*. It is the “walking in the light” that produces “the fruit which is [in] all goodness, righteousness and truth” and this is

described as “proving what is well-pleasing to the Lord”— *dokimazontes ti estin euareston tōi kyriōi*.

In *Ephesians* 5:14 St. Paul quotes from what was probably a hymn of the early Church, a text which has the ring of a monastic motif to it. “Rise, sleeping one”— *egeire, ho katheudōn*. And to what purpose ought one to rise? In 5:1 he commands to “be therefore imitators of God”— *ginesthe oun mimētai tou theou*. In 4:23 St. Paul writes that we are “to be renewed in the spirit of your mind”— *ananeousthai de tōi pneumatic tou noos*— and “to put on the new man”— *kai endysasthai ton kainon anthrōpon*. He begs us in 4:1 “to walk worthily of the calling with which you were called”— *axiōs peripatēsai tēs klēseōs hēs eklēthēte*. In 4:15 he exhorts that “we may grow into him [Christ] in all

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respects”— *auxēsōmen eis auton ta panta*. In 6:18 St. Paul stresses the importance of prayer. “By means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time”— *dia pasēs proseuchēs kai deēseōs, proseuchomenoi en panti kairōi*. All these are aspects of the monastic and ascetical life.

## Philippians

The *Epistle to the Philippians* contains many expressions that directly relate to an active spiritual life. In 1:25 he speaks of “advance and joy of the faith”— *prokopēn kai charan tēs pisteōs*. In 1:27 he speaks of “conducting” oneself “worthily of the Gospel”— *monon axiōs tou euaggeliou tou Christou politeuesthe*. “Stand in one spirit, with one soul striving together in the faith of the Gospel”— *stēkete en heni pneumati, miāi psychēi synathlountes tēi pistei tou euaggeliou*. Here is the “striving” so disliked by Nygren.

For St. Paul we are required not only to believe but also to suffer. In *Philippians* 1:29 he writes: [“not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him”]— *ou monon to eis auton pisteuein alla kai to hyper autou paschein*. And he refers to this as a “struggle,” an “ordeal”— *agona*. In 2:16 he speaks of the possibility of “running and laboring in vain”— *hoti ouk eis kenon edramon oude eis kenon ekopiasa*. In 3:8 St. Paul speaks of “gaining Christ”— *hina Christon kerdēsō*— and this within the context of the “righteousness of the law” as opposed to the “righteousness based on faith”— *dikaïosynēn epi tēi pistei*. *Philippians* 3:11-16 is one of the more interesting texts. “If somehow I may attain to the resurrection out of the dead. Not that I received already or already have been perfected, but I follow if indeed I may lay hold, in as much as I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brothers, not yet do I reckon myself to have laid hold. But one thing [I do], forgetting on one hand the things behind, and stretching forward on the other hand to the things which are ahead, I follow the mark for the prize of the heavenly calling of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, as many as [are] perfect, let us think this. Nevertheless, to what we arrived, let us walk by the same”— *ei pōs katantēsō eis tēn exanastasin tēn ek nekrōn. ouch hoti êdê elabon ê êdê teteleiōmai, kiōkō de ei kai katalabō, eph’ hōi kai katelēmphthēn hypo Christou Iēsou. adelphoi, egō emauton oupō logizomai kateilēphenai: hen de, ta men*

*opisô epilanthanomenos, tois de emprosthen epekteinomenos, kata skopon diôkô eis to brabeion tês*

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*anô klêseôs tou theou en Christôi lêsou. hosoi oun teleioi, touto phronômen... plên eis ho ephthasamen, tôi autôi stoichein.* Here St. Paul speaks both of laying hold of Christ and being “laid hold of by Christ”— The synergistic activity is obvious and realistic. All the language in the passage indicates and underscores the activity of God and the activity of man, of the objective reality of an achieved redemption and man’s process of “laying hold,” of “stretching forward” to the ultimate goal, a goal unachievable if man does not become spiritually active. The Greek verbal structures of “I may attain” and “I may lay hold of” are not without meaning.

In *Philippians* 4:8-9 St. Paul speaks universally as he does in *Romans* 1. “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovable, whatsoever things are well-spoken of, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, consider these things”— *hosa estin alêthê, hosa semna, hosa dikaia, hosa hagna, hosa prosphilê, hosa euphêma, ei tis arête kai ei tis epainos, tauta logizesthe.* These qualities— the true, the just, the pure, the lovable— are not qualities which have been revolutionized by the new creation wrought by the Incarnation of the God-Man, they have not come into existence nor been revolutionized by Christian thought. Rather, they are within the very texture of human nature and existence, things that every conscience knows spontaneously. What Christianity has done, however, is to break forth a new path for mankind to participate in the true, the just, the pure in a new way and with a new power through Christ. They now no longer exist as ideals, as the absolute, but are existentially and ontologically accessible to human nature through redemption. St. Paul speaks almost a Platonic language here, and yet it is thoroughly Christian.

## Colossians

In St. Paul’s *Epistle to the Colossians* 1:22-23 and 29 the realism of synergy is depicted. “But now he reconciled in the body of his flesh through his death to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, if indeed you continue in the faith having been founded and steadfast and not being moved away from the hope of the Gospel which you heard”— *nyni de apokatêllaxen en tôi sômati tês sarkos autou dia tou thanatou, parastêsai hymas hagious kai amômous kai anegklêtous katenôpion autou, ei ge epimenete têi pistei tethemeliomenoi kai hedraioi kai mê metakinoumenoi apo tês*

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*elpidos tou euaggeliou hou êkousate.* The objective reconciliation now exists but in order to participate in it one must be found holy, blameless, and irreproachable, and this is all contingent upon the significant “if”— “if indeed you continue in the faith”— In verse 29 we encounter the ideas of “maturity,” “labor,” and “struggle” or “ordeal.” “In order that we may

present every man mature in Christ, for which also I labor struggling according to his energy energizing in me in power”— *hina parastêsômen panta anthrôpon teleion en Christôi: eis ho kai kopiôi agônizomenos kata tèn energeian autou tèn energoumenên en emoi en dynamei*. *Colossians* 1:10 expresses the same idea of “worth,” of “pleasing” God, of “bearing fruit in every good work,” and of “increasing in the knowledge of God”— *peripatêsai axiôs tou kyriou eis pasan areskeian, en panti ergôi agathôi karpophorountes kai auxanomanoi têi epignôsei tou theou*. But the very power comes from the might of the glory of God. “With all power dynamized according to the might of his glory”— *en pasêi dynamei dynamoumenoi kata to kratos tês doxês autou*. *Colossians* 2:6-7 expresses also the two spiritual wills and activities in the process of redemption. “As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, and being confirmed in the faith as you were taught”— *hôs oun parelabete ton Christon lêsoun ton kyrion, en autôi peripateite, errizômenoi kai epoikodomoumenoi en autôi kai bebaioumenoi têi pistei kathôs edidachthête*.

The depth of the idea of synergy is found not only in co-dying and co-suffering with Christ but also in co-resurrection with him. In *Colossians* 3:1 St. Paul writes: “If therefore you were co-raised with Christ, seek the things above”— *ei oun synêgerthête tôi Christôi, ta anô zêteite*. St. Paul continues the use of many imperative exhortations in chapter 3. “Put to death therefore your members on earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry”— *nekrôsate oun ta melê ta epi tês gês, porneian, akatharsian, pathos, epithymian kakên, kai tèn pleonexian hêtis estin eidôlatria* (5). “Put away now all things”— *nyni de apothesthe kai hymeis ta panta* (8). And then the command (4:2) to continue in prayer and vigil— *têi proseuchêi proskartereite, grêgorountes*.

## I and II Thessalonians

In *I Thessalonians* St. Paul continues this second aspect of the redemptive process by referring to the “work of faith” (1:3), by

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expressing concern that “labor may be in vain” (3:5), by exhorting “if you stand in the Lord” (3:8), by exhorting that the “breastplate of faith and love” be put on (5:8), and by commanding to test everything, to hold fast to what is good, to abstain from every form of evil (5:21-22). In 3:10 St. Paul writes: “Praying exceedingly night and day... to adjust the shortcomings of your faith”— *nyktos kai hêmeras hyperekperissou deomenoi... kai katartisai ta hysterêmata tês pisteôs hymôn*. Why the need to adjust the shortcomings of faith, if faith “alone” is the sole criterion of salvation, as is held by certain schools of theology rooted in the tradition of the Reformation? In 4:4-5 St. Paul writes interestingly. “For this is the will of God: your sanctification... that each one of you know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor”— *touto gar estin thelêma tou theou, ho hagasmos hymôn... eidenai hekaston hymôn to heautou skeuos ktasthai en hagasmoî kai timêi*. The goal here of the spiritual life in Christ is sanctification and the significant text is to “know

how to possess” this “vessel.” Such language expresses the dynamism of a synergistic process of redemption. In 5:9 St. Paul uses the expression “unto the obtaining of salvation”— *eis peripoiêsin sôtêrias*. In *II Thessalonians* 2:14 St. Paul uses the expression “unto obtaining of the glory of our Lord”— *eis peripoiêsin doxês tou kyriou hêmôn*. In *II Thessalonians* 1:11 St Paul prays that they may be deemed worthy of the calling and that they may fulfill every “good pleasure of goodness and work of faith in power”— *hina hymas axiôsêi tês klêseôs ho theos hêmôn kai plêrôsêi pasan eudokian agathôsynês kai ergon pisteôs en dynamei*.

## I and II Timothy

In *I Timothy* 1:5-6 we read: “Now the end of the charge is love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and unpretended faith, from which things some, missing aim, turned aside”— *to de telos tês paraggeleias estin agape ek katharas kardias kai syneidêseôs agathês kai pisteôs anypokritou, hôn tines astochêsantes exetrapêsan*. In 1:18-19 the image of warfare is again used. “This charge I commit to you, child Timothy... in order that you might war by them the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some, thrusting away, have made shipwreck concerning the faith”— *tauten tèn paraggelian paratithemai soi, teknon Timothee... hina strateuêi en autais tèn kalên strateian, echôn pistin kai agathên*

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*syneidêsin, hên tines apôsamenoi peri tèn pistin enauagêsan*. *I Timothy* 2:1-3 has the same intensity of spiritual activity found in monastic and ascetical literature: “I exhort, therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and eucharists be made on behalf of all men, on behalf of kings and all those in high positions, in order that we may lead a peaceable and quiet life in all piety and seriousness. This is good and acceptable before God our Savior, who wishes all men to be saved and to come to a full knowledge of truth”— *parakalô oun proton pantôn poieisthai deêseis, proseuchas, enteuxeis, eucharistias, hyper pantôn anthrôpôn, hyper basileôn kai pantôn tôn en hyperochêi ontôn, hina êremon kai hêsychion bion diagômen en pasêi eusebeiâi kai semnotêti. touto kalon kai apodekton enôpion tou sôtêros hêmôn theou, hos pantas anthrôpous thelei sôthênai kai eis epignôsin alêtheias elthein*. The same emphasis continues in 4:7-10, especially the expressions “exercise yourself”— *gymnaze de seauton*— and “for unto this we labor and struggle”— *eis touto gar kopiômen kai agônizometha*. *I Timothy* 6:11-12 again stresses the “struggle,” that “laying hold” of that which has been objectively accomplished in redemption. “Struggle the good struggle of the faith, lay hold on eternal life”— *agônizou ton kalon agôna tês pisteôs, epilabou tês aiôniou zôês*. And in the verse preceding this one is commanded “to pursue righteousness, piety, faith, love, endurance, meekness”— *dioke de dikaiosynên, eusebeian, pistin, agapên, hypomonên, praüpathian*. What spiritual meaning can the “pursuit of righteousness” have unless it in fact indicates that, although the “righteousness of God” is established in Christ Jesus, we still must actively struggle in spiritual warfare in order to “lay hold on” this “righteousness”? Already in *I Timothy* 5:9 it is

clear that “widows” of a certain age had a special place within the spiritual life of the Church. “Let a widow be enrolled”— *chêra katalegesthô*. Enrolled into what? It is obviously a special activity within the spiritual life of the Church to which widows were enrolled, already a special form of spiritual activity in the earliest life of the Church.

In *II Timothy* 1:6 both the objective reality of the gift of redemption and the subjective, individual work necessary to “lay hold on” this redemptive work are clearly apparent. “I remind you to fan the flame of the gift of God, which is in you”— *anamimnêiskô se anazôpyrein to charisma tou theou, ho estin en soi*. The synergy of redemption is spoken of in 2:11-12 with the all significant “if”— “For if we co-died with him, we shall also co-live

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with him; if we endure, we shall also co-reign with him”— *ei gar synapethanomen, kai syzêsomen: ei hypomenomen, kai symbasileusomen*. In 2:21 sanctification is contingent upon self-purification. “If, therefore, anyone purifies himself... he will be a vessel unto honor, having been sanctified”— *ean oun tis ekkatharêi heauton... estai skeuos eis timên, hêgiasmenon*. In 2:22 again we are exhorted to “flee youthful lusts” and “to pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace” and the “calling on the Lord” must be done “out of a pure heart”— *tas de neôterikas epithymias pheuge, diôke de dikaiosynên, pistin, agapên, eirênên meta tôn epikaloumenôn ton kyrion ek katharas kardias*. In 4:7 the path of salvation is presented again as a struggle. “I have struggled the good struggle, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith”— *ton kalon agôn êgônismai, ton dromon teteleka, tèn pistin tetêrêka*.

## Hebrews

The *Epistle to the Hebrews* is rich in its thought on both aspects of redemption— on the work of God, and on the spiritual struggle on the part of man. In 3:14 the language is striking. “For we have become sharers of Christ, if indeed we hold fast the beginning of the foundation until the end”— *metochoi gar tou Christou gegonamen, eanper tèn archên tês hypostaseôs mechri telous bebaian kataschômen*. In 4:1 the idea is similar. “Let us fear, therefore, lest a promise being left to enter into his rest, any of you seems to have come short”— *phobêthômen oun mêpote kataleipomenês epaggelias eiselthein eis tèn katapausin autou dokêi tis ex hymôn hysterêkenai*. The idea of “entering this rest” is continued in 4:11. “Let us be eager, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest anyone falls in the same example of disobedience”— *spoudasômen oun eiselthein eis ekeinên tèn katapausin, hina mê en tôi autôi tis hypodeigmati pesêi tês apeitheias*. In 6:1 “the beginning” of the process is spoken of, accompanied by the exhortation: “let us be borne on to in maturity”— *epi tèn teleiotêta pherômetha*. In 6:11 one must show eagerness to the “full assurance of the hope unto the end”— *endeiknysasthat spoudên pros tèn plêrophorian tês elpidos achri telous*. The same exhortations of “let us” are found throughout *Hebrews*. In 10:22-23 it is: “Let us approach with a true heart” and “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope unyieldingly”— *proserchômetha meta alêthinês kardias...*

*katechomen tēn homologian tēs elpidos aklinē.* In 11:1 a definition of faith is proffered. “Now faith is the foundation of things being hoped, the proof of things not being seen”— *estin de pistis elpizomenōn hypostasis, pragmatōn elegchos ou blepomenōn.* This definition of faith is often dismissed too readily. It is a deep idea, especially when considered in its original Greek structure. Faith is the “foundation,” The “reality” upon which the “hope” of the Christian faith is built. And in its reality it contains the very proof, the evidence of the heavenly kingdom. The entire eleventh chapter reveals that “faith” was active under the “old law,” although the faith of and in Christ is of deeper ontological significance precisely because it is the foundation into a new reality not available under the “old law.” After a lengthy exposition of examples of “faith” under the “old law,” The *Epistle to the Hebrews* in 12:1 engages in an exhortation that concerns the very spiritual activity of the new faith. “Putting away every hindrance and the most besetting sin, let us run through endurance the struggle set before us”— *ogkon apothemenoi panta kai tēn euperistaton hamartian, di’ hypomonēs trechōmen ton prokeimenon hēmin agōna.* The reality of “discipline” is stressed in *Hebrews*, especially in 12:7: “Endure unto discipline”— *eis paideian hypomenete.* And that one can “fail from the grace of God” is clear from 12:15— *hysteron apo tēs charitos tou theou.*

## I and II Peter

In *I Peter* 1:9 it is not the beginning of faith or faith in general which results in salvation but it is precisely the “end of faith” which “obtains” salvation— *komizomenoi to telos tēs pisteōs sôtērian psychōn.* Purification and obedience are dominant themes in *I Peter*. “Having purified your souls in the obedience of truth unto an unpretended brotherly love, love one another earnestly from the heart— *tas psychas hymōn hēgnikotes en tēi hypakoēi tēs alētheias eis Philadelphian anypokriton, ek kardias allēlous agapēsate ektenōs* (1:22). The process of growth in the spiritual life is stressed in 2:2: “in order that... you may grow into salvation”— *hina... uuxēthēte eis sôtērian.* The “war” between lust and the soul is spoken of in 2:11: “I exhort you as sojourners and aliens to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul”— *parakalō hōs paroikous kai parepidēmous apechesthai tōn sarkikōn epithymiōn, haitines strateuontai kata tēs psyches.*

In *II Peter* 1:4 a profound theological thought is expressed. The promises which God has given are great and precious; corruption is in the world because of lust; and man can not only escape this corruption but also become partakers or participators in the Divine nature, an idea which is developed in early Christian and in Eastern Orthodox theological thought, an idea which lays the foundation for the doctrine of *theosis*, of divinization. “He has given to us precious and very great promises in order that through these you become partakers of the Divine nature, escaping from the corruption that is in the world by lust”— *ta timia kai megista hēmin epaggelmata dedōrētai, hina dia toutōn genēssthe theias koinōnoi physeōs, apophygontes tēs en tōi kosmōi en epithymiāi phthoras.* Precisely

because of this we are instructed in the following verses to *supplement our faith*, and then the dynamic spiritual process of growth is presented. “And for this very reason bringing in all diligence, supply in your faith virtue, and in virtue [supply] knowledge, and in knowledge [supply] self-control, and in self-control [supply] endurance, and in endurance [supply] piety, and in piety [supply] brotherly love, and in brotherly love [supply] love”— *kai auto touto de spoudên pasan pareisenegkantes epichorêgêsate en têi pistei hymôn ttên aretên, en de tê aretêi tèn gnôsin, en de têi gnôsei tèn egkrateian, en de têi egkrateiâi tèn hypomonên, en de têi hypomonêi tèn eusebeian, en de têi eusebeiâi tèn Philadelphian, en de têi philadelphiai tèn agapên.*

In *II Peter* 1:10 there is mention of one’s “calling” and election”— And yet in the very same text one is exhorted to be “diligence” precisely to make this “calling and election” firm. “Be diligent to make your calling and election firm”— *spousdasate bebaian hymôn tèn klêsin kai eklogên poieisthai.* And in 2:20-22 the falling away from the “way of righteousness” is not only possible, but it actually takes place, and it is worse than had one not known the “way of righteousness” at all. And the texts speaks about those who had a “full knowledge of the Lord”— “For if, having escaped the defilements of the world by a full knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, these persons again have been defeated, having been entangled, the last things have become to them worse than the first. For it was better for them not to have fully known the way of righteousness than, fully knowing, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. It has happened to them”— *ei gar apophygontes ta miasmata tou kosmou en epignôsei tou kyriou kai sôtêros Iêsou Christou, toutois de palin emplakentes hêttôntai, gegonen autois ta eschata*

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*cheirona tôn proton. kreitton gar ên autois mê epegnôkenai tèn hodon tês dikaiosynês, hê epignousin hypostrepsai ek tês paradotheisês autois hâgias entolês. symbebêken autois....*

## **The Epistles of St. John**

In the three *Epistles of St. John* we encounter the same language, the same reality of the two aspects of redemption. The same “ifs” are there, the same emphasis of purification (see *I John* 3:3), the same language about “pleasing God,” and the same emphasis on “keeping the commandment” and “not sinning.” There is an organic link between loving God and keeping his commandments— the full range of the commandments of Christ.

## **The Epistle of St. James and Luther’s Evaluation**

Luther’s attitude toward the *Epistle of St. James* is well known. In fact, Luther positioned not only James at the end of the German Bible but also *Hebrews, Jude, and Revelation.* And his criterion was that they lacked evangelical “purity”— He was not the first to do so. His colleague at Wittenberg, upon whom Luther later turned, Carlstadt, had distinguished among the books of the New Testament— and the Old Testament— before Luther took



his own action. As early as 1520 Carlstadt divided the entirety of Scripture into three categories: *libri summae dignitatis*, in which Carstadt included the Pentateuch as well as the Gospels; *libri secundae dignitatis*, in which he included the Prophets and fifteen epistles; and *libri tertiae dignitatis*.

Luther rejected the *Epistle of St. James* theologically but of necessity retained it in the German Bible, even if as a kind of appendix. The ending of Luther's Preface to his edition of the German Bible, which was omitted in later editions, reads in the German of his time: "*Summa, Sanct Johannis Evangel. und seine erste Epistel, Sanct Paulus Epistel, sonderlich die zu de Römern, Galatern, Ephesern, und Sanct Peters erste Epistel. Das sind die Bücher, die dir Christum zeigen, und alles lehren, das dir zu wissen noth und selig ist ob du schon kein ander Buch noch Lehre nummer sehest und horist. Darum ist Sanct Jakobs Epistel ein recht strohern Epistel, gegen sie, denn sie doch kein evangelisch Art an ihr hat*"— "for that reason St. James' Epistle is a thoroughly straw epistle, for it has indeed no evangelical merit to it"— Luther rejected it theologically "because it gives righteousness to works in

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outright contradiction to Paul and all other Scriptures... because, while undertaking to teach Christian people, it does not once mention the passion, the resurrection, the Spirit of Christ; it names Christ twice, but teaches nothing about him; it calls the law a law of liberty, while Paul calls it a law of bondage, of wrath, of death and of sin."

Luther even added the word "alone"— *allein*— in *Romans* 3:28 before "through faith"— *durch den Glauben*— precisely to counter the words in *James* 2:24: "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith only"— *horate hoti ex ergôn dikaioutai anthrôpos kai ouk ek pisteôs monon*. What is more is that Luther became very aggressive and arrogant in his response to the criticism that he had added "alone" to the Biblical text. "If your papist makes much useless fuss about the word *sola*, *allein*, tell him at once: Doctor Martin Luther will have it so and says: Papist and donkey are one thing; *sic volo, sic jubeo, sit pro ratione voluntas* ['Thus I will, thus I order, let it be my will for a reason']. For we do not want to be pupils and followers of the Papists, but their masters and judges"— Luther continues in a bantering manner in an attempt to imitate St. Paul in the latter's response to his opponents. "Are they doctors? So am I. Are they learned? So am I. Are they preachers? So am I. Are they theologians? So am I. Are they philosophers? So am I. Are they writers of books? So am I. And I shall further boast: I can expound Psalms and Prophets; which they cannot. I can translate; which they cannot... Therefore the word *allein* shall remain in my New Testament, and though all pope-donkeys should get furious and foolish, they shall not get the word out." In some German editions the word "*allein*" was printed in larger type! Some critics of Luther's translation have accused him of deliberately translating inaccurately to support his theological view. As early as 1523 Dr. Emser, an opponent of Luther, claimed that Luther's translation contained "a thousand grammatical and fourteen hundred heretical errors." This is exaggerated but the fact does remain that there are numerous errors in Luther's translation.

Indeed, the entire Reformation in its attitude towards the New Testament is directly in opposition to the thought on this subject of St. Augustine, who was highly esteemed in many respects by the Reformation theologians and from whom they took the basis for some of the theological visions, especially predestination, original sin, and irresistible grace for Luther and Calvin. On this subject, as on some many others, there is no common ground between Luther and Calvin on the one hand and St. Augustine on the other. St. Augustine wrote: "I should not believe the Gospel except as moved by the authority of the Church"— *ego evangelio non crederem, nisi*

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*me moveret ecclesiae auctoritas.* It should be pointed out that Calvin did not take objection to the *Epistle of St. James*.

Luther was so caught up in the abstraction of a passive righteousness, so infuriated by his experience as a monk in practicing what he would refer to as "righteousness of works," so caught up in attempting to create a specific meaning to one line of the thought of St. Paul that he misses the very foundation from which the theological thought of St. James comes forth— and that is the initiative and will of God. Luther's criticism that St. James does not mention the passion, the resurrection, and the Spirit of Christ is inane, for his readers knew the apostolic deposit— there was no need to mention the very basis and essence of the living faith which was known to those reading the epistle. Such a criticism by Luther reveals the enormous lack of a sense for the historical life of the early Church, for the Church was in existence and it is from the Church and to the Church that the epistles are written. Historically, the Church existed before any texts of the "new covenant" were written. The Church existed on the oral tradition received from the apostles, as is clearly revealed from the pages of the New Testament itself.

The very foundation of the theological vision of St. James is *the will of God*. In 1:17-18 St. James writes: "Every good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom change has no place, no turning, no shadow. Having willed, he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures"— *pasa dosis agathê kai pan dôrêma teleion anôthen estin katabainon apo tou patros tôn photon, par' hôi ouk eni parallagê ê tropes aposkiasma. bouilêtheis apekyêsen hêmas lohôi alêtheias, eis to einai hêmas aparchên tina tôn autou ktismatôn.* In 4:15 St. James writes: "You are instead to say: if the Lord wills, we will both live and will do this or that"— *anti tou legein hymas: ean ho kyrios thelêsêi kai zêsomen kai poiêsomen touto ê ekeino.*

One theologically weak text in the *Epistle of St. James* is in 4:8: "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you." *Taken by itself* it has a Pelagian ring to it. And in monastic and ascetical literature one often encounters such expressions. But the meaning in both this epistle and in monastic and ascetical literature *must be understood within their total context*. Once the synergism of the redemptive process takes place in the human heart, then the existential reciprocity of grace and response is so dynamic that one can, as it

were, use such expressions, precisely because it is assumed that God has initiated and that grace is always at work in

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the human heart, in all the depths of the interior of man as well as in external life. The text in the *Epistle of St. James* must be understood within the context of 1:18 and 4:15. Moreover, it is to be noted that this text is preceded by “Be subject, therefore, to God”—*hypotagête oun tōi theōi*. In being “subject to God,” a relationship is already in place, a relationship which presupposes the initiative of God and the response of man.

The *Epistle of St. James* contains many expressions that will be used in monastic and ascetical life. Temptation (1:14), the passions (4:1), purifying, cleansing, humbling oneself (4), and “be distressed and mourn and weep” (4:9). The excoriating words against the rich (5:1-6) undergird the monastic vow of poverty.

## **The Life of the Early Church**

The life of the early Church as described in the *Acts of the Apostles* is so clear that no analysis or presentation of texts is necessary to demonstrate that the essentials exist for a form of spirituality similar to that of monastic and ascetical Christianity. Mention should also be made of the life of St. John the Baptist: “It is on solid grounds that a student of monastic origins like Dom Germain Morin upheld his apparent paradox: it is not so much the monastic life which was a novelty at the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth, but rather the life of adaptation to the world led by the mass of Christians at the time when the persecutions ceased. The monks actually did nothing but preserve intact, in the midst of altered circumstances, the ideal of the Christian life of early days... And there is another continuous chain from the apostles to the solitaries and then to the cenobites, whose ideal, less novel than it seems, spread so quickly from the Egyptian deserts at the end of the third century. This chain is constituted by the men and women who lived in continence, ascetics and virgins, who never ceased to be held in honor in the ancient Church.”