



St. John of Karpathos

**For the Encouragement
of the Monks in India who had Written
to Him: One Hundred Texts**

—and—

**Ascetic Discourse
Sent at the Request of the Same
Monks in India: A Supplement to the
One Hundred Texts**

Text from G.E.H. Palmer, P. Sherrard, and K. Ware,
The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Faber and Faber,
London & Boston: 1979), pp. 297-326

Introductory Note

St Nikodimos says that he has little information about St John of Karpathos: 'It is not known when he was active or where he underwent his ascetic struggles.' Our knowledge today is only a little more extensive. Presumably John came from the island of Karpathos, situated between Crete and Rhodes in the archipelago of the Sporades. It is thought that he lived there as a monk in a *coenobium*, and then became bishop of the island; he may be identical with a bishop John of the island 'Karpathion' who signed the acts of the sixth Ecumenical Council (680-681), but this is hypothetical. The monks in India, to whom his two writings are addressed, were perhaps living in Ethiopia. His primary aim is to offer encouragement to those tempted to abandon the monastic life.

**For the Encouragement
of the Monks in India who had Written to Him:
One Hundred Texts**

When making a request to an earthly king, sometimes men bring with them as an offering nothing more than a bunch of spring flowers; yet often, so far from rejecting their request, the king has even presented them with gifts in return. In the same way I, at your

command , have gathered from various sources a century of spiritual texts: this is my offering to you who are ‘citizens of heaven’ (Phil. 3:20). I hope that you will accept what I offer and grant me in return the gift of your prayers.

1. The King of all reigns for ever, and there is neither beginning nor end to His kingdom. To those, then, who choose to serve Him and who for His sake strive to attain holiness, He grants a reward infinitely greater than that given by any earthly ruler. The honours of this present life, however splendid, come to an end when we die— but the honours bestowed by God on those whom He regards as worthy are incorruptible and so endure for ever.
2. David in one of his Psalms describes the praise offered to God by the whole of creation (cf. Ps. 104). He speaks of the angels and all the invisible powers, but he also descends to the earth and includes wild animals, cattle, birds and reptiles. All of them, he believes, worship the Creator and sing His praise; for it is God’s will that everything He has made should offer Him glory. How, then, can the monk, who may be compared to the gold of Ophir (cf. 1Kgs. 10:11), allow himself to be sluggish or apathetic when singing God’s praise?
3. Just as the bush burned with fire but was not consumed (cf. Exod. 3:2), so those who have received the gift of dispassion are not troubled or harmed, either physically or in their intellect, by the heat of their body, however ponderous or fevered it may be. For the voice of the Lord holds back the flames of nature (cf. Ps. 29:7): God’s will and His word separate what by nature is united.
4. The moon as it waxes and wanes illustrates the condition of man: sometimes he does what is right, sometimes he sins and then through repentance returns to a holy life. The intellect of one who sins is not destroyed (as some of you think), just as the physical size of the moon does not diminish, but only its light. Through repentance a man regains his true splendour, just as the moon after the period of waning clothes itself once more in its full light. If a man believes in Christ, ‘even though he dies, he shall live’ (John 11:25); he shall know that ‘I the Lord have spoken, and will do it’ (Ezek.17:24 LXX).
5. If you give in and are defeated when a swarm of evil thoughts rises up against you in your mind, you should know that for a time you have been cut off from the grace of God, and by His just sentence abandoned to your fate. Make every effort, then, never through your own negligence to be deprived of grace, even for a single moment. If you manage to avoid falling, if you succeed in leaping over the barrier formed by impassioned thoughts, and if you overcome the unclean provocations that the enemy in his ingenuity continually suggests to you, do not ignore the gift conferred on you from above. As the Apostle says, ‘It was not I but the grace of

God which was with me' (1Cor. 15:10) that won this victory, raising me above the impure thoughts that assailed me. It was His grace that 'delivered me from the wicked man' (cf. Ps. 18:48 LXX), that is, from the devil and from the 'old man' within me (cf. Rom.6:6). Lifted by the wings of the Spirit and freed from the weight of my body, I was able to soar above the predatory demons, who catch man's intellect with the bird-lime of sensual indulgence, tempting it in a forcible and violent manner. It was God who brought me out from the land of Egypt, that is, from the soul destructiveness of the world; it was God who fought on my behalf and with His unseen hand put Amalek to flight (cf. Exod. 17:816), thus giving me cause to hope that He will also drive out the other tribes of impure passions before me. He is our God, and will give us both 'wisdom and power' (Dan. 2:23); for some have received wisdom but not the power of the Spirit to defeat their enemies. He will 'lift up your head above your enemies' (cf. Ps. 27:6); He will give you 'the wings of a dove', so that you can 'fly away and be at rest' with God (Ps. 55:6). The Lord will make your arms as a 'bow of bronze' (Ps. 18:34 LXX), giving you strength and endurance against the enemy, subduing under your feet all that rise against you (cf. Ps. 18:39). It is to the Lord, then, that you should ascribe the grace of purity, for He did not surrender you to the desires of your flesh and your blood, and to the impure spirits that trouble and corrupt them; but He guarded you with His own right hand. Build Him, then, an altar as Moses did after defeating Amalek (cf. Exod. 17:15). 'Therefore will I give thanks to Thee, O Lord, and sing praises to Thy name' (Ps. 18:49), glorifying Thy mighty acts; for Thou hast 'redeemed my life from destruction' (Ps. 103:4), and snatched me from the midst of all the specious and deceptive snares and nets of evil.

6. The demons in their malice revive and rekindle the unclean passions within us, causing them to increase and multiply. But the visitation of the divine Logos, especially when accompanied by our tears, dissolves and kills the passions, even those that are inveterate. It gradually reduces to nothing the destructive and sinful impulses of soul and body, provided we do not grow listless but cling to the Lord with prayer and with hope that is unremitting and unashamed.
7. Why does Christ accept praise from the mouths of the faithful who are 'little children in regard to evil' (1Cor. 14:20; cf.. Matt. 21:16)? It is because through such praise He destroys the enemy and avenger' (Ps. 8:2), who tyrannizes us harshly; for the devil is an enemy of holiness and an avenger in the cause of evil. By praising the Lord with simplicity of heart we overthrow and destroy the schemes of this enemy; for 'in the fulness of Thy glory Thou hast crushed the enemy' (Exod. 15:7).

8. If someone is figuratively speaking an abortion, misshapen'- by sin, it is said that half his flesh is devoured in this life and half in the life to come (cf. Num. 12:12). For each of us will certainly experience the consequences of his own actions.
9. A monk should practise the virtue of fasting, avoid ensnarement by the passions, and at all times cultivate intense stillness.
10. In their hatred of our souls, the demons sometimes prompt others to pay us empty compliments, and thus cause us to grow slack because we are praised. If as a result we give way to conceit and self-esteem, our enemies have no difficulty in taking us prisoner.
11. Accept scornful criticism rather than words of praise; for a flatterer 'is no different from one who curses' (Prov. 27:14 LXX).
12. If you try to keep the rules of fasting and cannot do so because of ill health, then with contrition of heart you should give thanks to Him who cares for all and judges all. If you always behave with humility before the Lord, you will never show arrogance towards anyone.
13. The enemy knows that prayer is our invincible weapon against him, and so he tries to keep us from praying. He fills us with a desire for secular learning, and encourages us to spend our time on studies that we have already renounced. Let us resist his suggestions; otherwise, if we neglect our own fields and go wandering elsewhere, we shall harvest thorns and thistles instead of figs and grapes. 'For the wisdom of this world is folly in God's sight' (1Cor. 3:19).
14. It is written: 'I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall come to all people' (Luke 2:10)— not just to some people. Again, it is written: 'Let all the earth worship Thee and sing to Thee' (Ps. 66:4 LXX)— not just part of the earth. This singing is an expression not of grief but of rejoicing. Since this is so, let us not despair, but pass through this present life cheerfully, conscious of its joys. Yet we should temper our gladness with the fear of God, keeping in mind the words: 'Rejoice in the Lord with trembling' (Ps. 2:11). Mary Magdalene and the women with her ran from Christ's tomb with both fear and great joy (cf. Matt. 28:8); and perhaps we, too, shall one day come out from our spiritual tomb with fear and joy. I should be surprised if we were to do so without fear, for there is no one without sin, not even Moses or the Apostle Peter. But, at the time of the departure of such men from this life, God's love proves victorious and casts out fear (cf. 1John 4:18).
15. The Scriptures testify that if a man still under the sway of the passions believes humbly yet with all his heart, he will receive the gift of dispassion. For it is said: 'Today you shall be with Me in paradise' (Luke 23:43), and: 'Your faith has saved

you; go in peace' (Luke 7:50)— the peace, that is, of blessed dispassion. Other texts express the same idea— for example: 'The grapes shall ripen at seedtime' (Amos 9:13 LXX), and: 'According to your faith so be it done to you' (Matt. 9:29).

16. When we fiercely oppose the passions, the demons trouble us all the more severely with shameful thoughts. At such a time, we should reaffirm our faith in the Lord and set our hope steadfastly in the eternal blessings that He has promised us. In their jealousy our enemies wish to estrange us from these promised blessings and to deprive us of them; indeed, the very fact that the demons burn with such envy against us shows how great these blessings are. Continually bombarding us with unclean thoughts, the demons seek in this way to appease the frenzy within themselves, hoping to drive us to despair through these constant and unbearable attacks.
17. Some hold that the practice of the virtues constitutes the truest form of spiritual knowledge. In that case, we should make every effort to manifest our faith and knowledge through our actions. Whoever trusts blindly to knowledge alone should call to mind the words: 'They claim to know God, but in their actions they deny Him' (Titus 1:16).
18. For the most part it is at the time of Great Feasts and during the Divine Liturgy— especially when we are intending to receive Holy Communion— that the demons try to defile the ascetic with impure fantasies and the flow of semen. Yet they cannot break down the resistance of one accustomed to withstand all things firmly and courageously. Hunchbacks should not exult over us as if they stood upright.
19. The demons try to undermine your inward resolution by buffeting your souls with an untold variety of temptations. Yet out of these many tribulations a garland is woven for you; Christ's power 'comes to its fulness in us in our weakness' (2 Cor.12:9). It is usually when our situation is most gloomy that the grace of the Spirit flowers within us. 'Light has shone in darkness for the righteous' (Ps. 112:4 LXX)— if, that is, 'we hold fast to our confidence and the rejoicing of our hope firmly to the end' (Heb.3:6).
20. Nothing so readily obliterates virtue as frivolous talk and making fun of things. On the other hand, nothing so readily renews the decrepit soul, and enables it to approach the Lord, as fear of God, attentiveness, constant meditation on the words of Scripture, the arming of oneself with prayer, and spiritual progress through the keeping of vigils.
21. It is most necessary and helpful for the soul to endure with fortitude every tribulation, whether inflicted by men or by demons. We should recognize that our

sufferings are no more than we deserve, and we should never blame anyone but ourselves. For whoever blames others for his own tribulations has lost the power of judging correctly what is to his own advantage.

22. There are times when trials and temptations multiply and cause a man, despite his diligence, to deviate from the true path; for all his wisdom and skill are swallowed up. This happens so as to prevent us from trusting in ourselves: ‘lest Israel boast, saying, My own hand has saved me’ (Judg. 7:2). But once the evil one has withdrawn from us, driven away at God’s command, we may hope to be restored to the good state that we possessed previously. Urging us to sin, the evil one encourages us to look at everything and listen to it with senses and thoughts imbued with passion. He coarsens our intellect, enveloping it in thick fog, and he makes our body seem an unspeakable weight and burden. Our innate intelligence, which at the outset is simple and undeveloped like a newborn child, he turns into something complex and highly experienced in every kind of sin, poisoning and distorting it through indecision and doubt.
23. When a man grows inwardly and increases in holiness, he is something great and marvellous. But just as the elephant fears the mouse, so the holy man is still afraid of sin, lest after preaching to others he himself ‘should be cast away’ (cf. 1Cor. 9:27).
24. It is not only in the period close to the end of the world that the devil will ‘speak words against the Most High’ (Dan. 7:25). Even now, acting through our thoughts, he sometimes sends up to heaven monstrous blasphemies against the Most High, against all He has created and against the Holy Mysteries of Christ. But, climbing the rock of spiritual knowledge, we should not be terrified by this or astonished at the insolence of the avenger. Growing ever more fervent in our faith and prayer, we shall receive help from above and so resist the enemy.
25. When the soul leaves the body, the enemy advances to attack it, fiercely reviling it and accusing it of its sins in a harsh and terrifying manner. But if a soul enjoys the love of God and has faith in Him, even though in the past it has often been wounded by sin, it is not frightened by the enemy’s attacks and threats. Strengthened by the Lord, winged by joy, filled with courage by the holy angels that guide it, encircled and protected by the light of faith, it answers the malicious devil with great boldness: ‘Enemy of God, fugitive from heaven, wicked slave, what have I to do with you? You have no authority over me; Christ the Son of God has authority over me and over all things. Against Him have I sinned, before Him shall I stand on trial, having His Precious Cross as a sure pledge of His saving love towards me. Flee far from me, destroyer! You have nothing to do with the servants

of Christ.' When the soul says all this fearlessly, the devil turns his back, howling aloud and unable to withstand the name of Christ. Then the soul swoops down on the devil from above, attacking him like a hawk attacking a crow. After this it is brought rejoicing by the holy angels to the place appointed for it in accordance with its inward state.

26. There is a tiny fish called the remora, which is supposed to have the power to stop a large ship simply by attaching itself to the keel. In a similar manner, by God's permission a person advancing on the spiritual way is sometimes hindered by a small temptation. Remember how even the great Apostle said: 'We wanted to come to you -1, Paul— more than once, but Satan prevented us' (1Thess. 2:18). Such a hindrance, however, should not upset you: resist firmly, with patient endurance, and you will receive God's grace.
27. When someone far advanced on the spiritual way deviates from it because of indolence, then he is attacked by all the evil children of the east', by 'the Amalekites and the Midianites', whose camels are without number' (Judg. 7:12). The Midianites signify the forces of unchastity, and their numberless camels are impassioned thoughts. These hostile armies 'destroy all the produce of the earth' (Judg. 6:4), that is, every good action and state. So Israel— that is, the man of whom we are speaking— is brought to destitution and utter discouragement, and is compelled to call upon the Lord. Then, because of his deep faith and humility, the man receives help from heaven, just as Gideon did. 'My clan is the humblest in Manasseh,' said Gideon (cf. Judg.6:15)— too weak to face such a huge army; yet, against all expectation, with a weak force of three hundred men he defeated the enemy, because God's grace was fighting on his side.
28. You will not be able to 'tread upon the asp and cobra' (Ps. 91:13 LXX), unless in answer to your constant prayers God sends His angels to protect you. They will support you with their hands and raise you above the mire of impurity.
29. When someone is defeated after offering stiff resistance, he should not give up in despair; let him take heart, encouraged by the words of Isaiah: 'In spite of all your strength, you will be defeated, wicked demons;_ and if you should again gather your strength together, again you will be defeated. Whatever Plans you devise, the Lord will bring them to nothing: for God is with us' (cf. Isa. 8:9- 10). God 'raises up all who are bowed down' (Ps. 145:14) and produces grief and consternation among our enemies, as soon as we repent.
30. When you are being tested by trials and temptations, you cannot avoid feeling dejected. But those who till the earth of hardship and tribulation in their hearts are afterwards filled with 9Yreat joy, tears of consolation and holy thoughts.

31. Isaac wanted to bless Esau, and Esau was eager to receive his father's blessing; but they failed in their purpose (cf. Gen. 27). For God in His mercy blesses and anoints with the Spirit, not necessarily those whom we prefer, but those whom He marked out for His service before creating them. Thus we should not be upset or jealous if we see certain of our brethren, whom we regard as wretched and insignificant, making progress in holiness. You know what the Lord said: 'Make room for this man, so that he can sit in a higher place' (cf. Luke 14:9). I am full of admiration for the judge, who gives His verdict with secret wisdom: He takes one of the humblest of our brethren and sets him above us; and though we claim priority on the basis of our asceticism and our age, God puts us last of all. For 'each must order his life according to what the Lord has granted him' (1Cor. 7:17). 'If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit' (Gal. 5:25).
32. Never acquiesce when someone under obedience to you pleads: 'Give me time to resolve on such and such a virtuous action; then I will be able to achieve it.' Whoever speaks like this is clearly yielding to his own self-will and repudiating his promise of obedience.
33. However great they may have grown, the passions of body and soul are destroyed, as you will see, by the passing of time and at God's command. But the mercy of Christ never fails: 'the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him' (Ps. 103:17), continuing with them from this present age into the age to come.
34. A royal treasury is full of gold; and the intellect of a true monk is filled with spiritual knowledge.
35. There are times when a teacher falls into disgrace and undergoes trials and temptations for the spiritual benefit of others. 'For we are despised and weak,' says the Apostle, 'brought to disgrace by the thorn in our flesh; but you are honoured and made strong in Christ, (cf. 1Cor. 4:10;2 Cor. 12:7).
36. Impassioned thoughts are the source and foundation of the corruption which comes to us through the flesh. But if, after sinning, we return to watchfulness through repentance, we expel such thoughts from our soul. It is a good thing that you have been 'filled with grief', so that the wicked and unholy thought that encouraged you to sin may be 'taken from your midst' (1Cor. 5:2). Grief repulses the spirit of corruption.
37. To anyone among you who is oppressed by a sense of his worthlessness and inability to attain holiness, this is our message: if he attains dispassion he can see Jesus, not only in the future, but coming to him here and now 'with power and

great glory' (Matt. 24:30). Though his soul, like Sarah, has grown old in barrenness, it can still bear a holy child, contrary to all expectation; like her he can still say: 'God has made me laugh' (Gen.21:6)— that is, God has granted me great joy after the many years that I have spent in sorrow, dominated by the passions; God has shown His tender love to me, so that my youth 'is renewed like an eagle's' (Ps. 103:5). Previously I had grown old in sins and shameful passions, but now I am reborn in the fresh vigour of youth; material desires and actions had made me rough and hard, but now I am softened. God in His compassion has healed my intellect, and regaining my natural simplicity I can now see the things of this world clearly. My flesh, like that of Naaman the Syrian, has become as the flesh of a little child, because I have washed in the Jordan of spiritual knowledge (cf. 2Kgs. 5:14). Now I am at one with myself, set free by God's grace from the guile of the serpent and from the great variety of evil thoughts that I had acquired in a manner contrary to nature.

38. Imagine that the Lord is saying to you: 'For a time I have taken away from you this or that gift of grace, in which you expected your intellect to find fulfilment, and so to be at peace. To make up for this, I have given you instead some other gift. Yet you think only about what has been taken away, not noticing what has been given you in its place; and so you feel dejected, pained and full of gloom. Nevertheless, I am glad because of this gloom which I have brought on you. I make you dejected for your own good. My purpose is not to destroy but to save you, since I regard you as My son.'
39. Suppose you have ordered yourself not to eat fish: you will find that the enemy continually makes you long to eat it. You are filled with an uncontrollable desire for the thing that is forbidden. In this way you can see how Adam's fall typifies what happens to all of us. Because he was told not to eat from a particular tree, he felt irresistibly attracted to the one thing that was forbidden him.
40. God saves one man through spiritual knowledge and another through guilelessness and simplicity. You should bear in mind that 'God will not reject the simple' (Job 8:20 LXX).
41. Anyone who devotes himself with special intensity to prayer is assailed by fearsome and savage temptations.
42. If you have resolved to clothe yourself in dispassion, do not be negligent, but strive to attain it with all your strength. 'For we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our house that is from heaven . . . so that what is mortal in us may be swallowed up by life' (2Cor. 5:2-4)— not only in the case of the body after the consummation of this age, but also by anticipation here and now, spiritually. For

'death is swallowed up in victory' (1Cor. 15:54); all the pursuing Egyptians that harass us will be swallowed up in the waves, when power is sent down upon us from heaven.

43. Do not forget what St Paul says: 'I fear lest, after preaching to others, I myself should be cast away' (1Cor. 9:27); 'Let anyone who thinks he stands firm take care lest he fall' (1Cor. 10:12); 'You, who are spiritual . . . look to yourself, in case you also are tempted' (Gal.:1). Remember how Solomon, after receiving so much grace, turned aside to wickedness (cf. 1Kgs. 11:1-8); remember how St Peter unexpectedly denied his Lord. If you allow yourself to forget all this, you will grow over-confident because of your spiritual knowledge; you will become boastful about your way of life and complacent because of your many years of strict asceticism, and so will give way to pride. Do not become puffed up, my brother, but continue in fear until your last breath, even though you should live as long as Moses. Pray in these words: 'Lord, cast me not off in the time of my old age; forsake me not when my strength fails; O God my Saviour, my praise shall be continually of Thee' (cf. Ps. 71:6,9).
44. The Lord says to you what He said to Matthew: 'Follow Me' (Matt. 9:9). But when you follow the Lord with burning love, it may happen that on the road of life you strike your foot against the stone of some passion and fall unexpectedly into sin; or else, finding yourself in a muddy place, you may slip involuntarily and fall headlong. Each time you fall and in this way injure your body, you should get up again with the same eagerness as before, and continue to follow after your Lord until you reach Him. 'Thus have I appeared before Thee in the sanctuary— the sanctuary of my thoughts— 'that I might behold Thy power and glory', for they are my salvation. 'In Thy name will I lift up my hands', and I shall be heard; I shall think myself 'filled with marrow and fatness', and my lips will rejoice as they sing Thy praise (Ps. 63:2,4,5 LXX). It is a great thing for me to be called a Christian, as the Lord tells me through Isaiah: 'It is no light thing for you to be called My servant' (Isa. 49:6 LXX).
45. In one place it is said that the Father 'will give good things to those that ask Him.' (Matt. 7:11); elsewhere, that He will 'give the Holy Spirit to those that ask Him' (Luke 11:13). From this we learn that those who pray to God with steadfast faith in these promises receive not only remission of sins but also heavenly gifts of grace. The Lord promised these 'good things' not to the righteous but to sinners, saying: 'If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those that ask Him? (Luke 11:13) Ask, then, unremittingly and without doubting, however poor your efforts to

gain holiness, however weak your strength; and you will receive great gifts, far beyond anything that you deserve.

46. How can someone with little or no faith be made to realize that an ant grows wings, a caterpillar turns into a butterfly, and many other strange and unexpected things happen in nature, so that in this way he shakes off the sickness of unbelief and despair, himself acquires wings, and buds in spiritual knowledge like a tree? ‘I am He’, says God, ‘who makes the dry tree flourish; I give life to the dry bones’ (cf. Ezek. 17:24;37:1-14.).
47. We should on no account wear ourselves out with anxiety over our bodily needs. With our whole soul let us trust in God: as one of the Fathers said, ‘Entrust yourself to the Lord, and all will be entrusted to you.’ ‘Show restraint and moderation,’ writes the Apostle Peter, ‘and be watchful in prayer . . . casting all your care upon God, since He cares for you’ (1Pet. 4:7; 5:7). But if you still feel uncertainty, doubting whether He really cares about providing for you, think of the spider and compare it with a human being. Nothing is more weak and powerless than a spider. It has no possessions, makes no journeys overseas, does not engage in litigation, does not grow angry, and amasses no savings. Its life is marked by complete gentleness, self-restraint and extreme stillness. It does not meddle in the affairs of others, but minds its own’ business; calmly and quietly it gets on with its own work. To those who love idleness it says, in effect: ‘If an one refuses to work, he should have nothing to eat’ (2Thess. 3:10). The spider is far more silent than Pythagoras, whom the ancient Greeks admired more than any other philosopher because of the control that he exercised over his tongue. Although Pythagoras did not talk with everyone, yet he did speak occasionally in secret with his closest friends; and often he lavished nonsensical remarks on oxen and eagles. He abstained altogether from wine and drank only water. The spider, however, achieves more than Pythagoras: it never utters a single word, and abstains from water as well as from wine. Living in this quiet fashion, humble and weak, never going outside or wandering about according to its fancy, always hard at work— nothing could be more lowly than the spider. Nevertheless the Lord, ‘who dwells on high but sees what is lowly’ (Ps. 13:5-6 LXX), extends His providence even to the spider, sending it food every day, and causing tiny insects to fall into its web.
48. One who is enslaved to greed may perhaps object: ‘I eat a great deal, and since this involves me in heavy expenses, I am inevitably tied up with all kinds of worldly business.’ Such a person should think of the huge whales that feed in the Atlantic Ocean: God gives them plenty to eat and they never starve, although each of them

swallows daily more fish than a highly populated city would consume. ‘All things wait upon Thee, to give them their food at the proper time’ (Ps. 104:27). It is God who provides food both for those who eat much and for those who eat little. Bearing this in mind, anyone among you who has a capacious appetite should in future set his faith entirely in God, freeing his intellect from all worldly distractions and anxieties. ‘Be no longer faithless, but have faith’ (John 20:27).

49. If we truly wish to please God and to enjoy the grace of His friendship, we should present to Him an intellect that is stripped bare not weighed down with anything that belongs to this present life, with any skill or notion or argument or excuse, however highly educated we may be in the wisdom of this world. God turns away from those who approach Him presumptuously, puffed up with self-esteem. People who suffer from futile conceit we rightly describe as bloated and puffed up.
50. How can we overcome the sinfulness that is already firmly established within us? We must use force. A man labours and struggles, and so by the use of force he escapes from destruction, always striving to raise his thoughts to holiness. We are not forbidden to resist force with force. If in any ascetic task we exert force, however slight, then, ‘remaining in Jerusalem’, we can wait for the ‘power from on high’ which will come down upon us (cf. Luke 24:49). In other words, if we persevere in unceasing prayer and the other virtues, there will come upon us a mighty force, infinitely stronger than any we can exert. This force cannot be described in human language; in its great strength it overcomes our worst faults of character and the malice of the demons, conquering both the sinful inclinations of our soul and the disordered impulses of our body. ‘There came a sound from heaven as of a rushing violent wind’ (Acts 2:2); and this force from heaven drives out the evil that is always forcing us into sin.
51. The enemy lurks like a lion in his den; he lays in our path hidden traps and snares, in the form of impure and blasphemous thoughts. But if we continue wakeful, we can lay for him traps and snares and ambuscades that are far more effective and terrible. Prayer, the recitation of psalms and the keeping of vigils, humility, service to others and acts of compassion, thankfulness, attentive listening to the words of Scripture—all these are a trap for the enemy, an ambuscade, a pitfall, a noose, a lash and a snare.
52. When already well advanced in years, David offered thanks to God for choosing him, and he said this about the final fruits of God’s blessing: ‘Now has Thy servant found his own heart, so as to offer this prayer’ (2Sam 7:27 LXX). This he said to teach us that a great effort and much time are needed in prayer, before through struggle we can reach a state in which our mind is no longer troubled, and so

attain the inward heaven of the heart where Jesus dwells. As the Apostle says, 'Do you not know that Jesus Christ dwells within you? (cf. 2Cor. 13:5).

53. If Christ is our 'wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption' (1Cor. 1:30), it is clear that He is also our rest. As He Himself says, 'Come to Me, all that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matt. 11:28). He says also that the sabbath— and 'sabbath' means 'rest'— was made for man (cf. Mark 2:27) for only in Christ will the human race find rest.
54. Just as there is 'a cup of calamity and a goblet of wrath' (Isa. 51:17 LXX), so there is a cup of weakness which, at the proper time, the Lord takes from our hands and puts into the hands of our enemies. Then it is no longer we but the demons who grow weak and fall.
55. Outwardly men follow different occupations: there are money-changers, weavers, fowlers, soldiers, builders. Similarly, we have within us different types of thoughts: there are gamblers, poisoners, pirates, hunters, defilers, murderers, and so on. Rebutting such thoughts in prayer, the man of God should immediately shut the door against them— and most of all against the defilers, lest they defile his inward sanctuary and so pollute him.
56. The Lord can be robbed and made to grant salvation, not only by speech— as in the case of the thief who cried out from the cross (cf. Luke 23:42)— but also by thought. The woman who suffered from a haemorrhage merely thought within herself: 'If I can but touch the hem of His garment, I shall be healed' (Matt. 9:21). Another example is Abraham's servant, who spoke inwardly to God about Rebekah (cf. Gen. 24:12-28).
57. Sin itself drives us towards God, once we repent and have become aware of its burden, foul stink and lunacy. But if we refuse to repent, sin does not drive us towards God. In itself it holds us fast with bonds that we cannot break, making the desires which drive us to our own destruction all the more vehement and fierce.
58. Guard yourself from the witchcraft of Jezebel (cf. 2Kgs.9:22). Her most powerful spells are thoughts of delusion and vainglory. By God's grace you can overcome such thoughts, if you regard yourself as worthless and despicable, casting yourself down before the Lord, calling upon Him to help you, and acknowledging that every gift of grace comes from heaven. For it is written: 'A man can receive nothing, unless it is given him from heaven' (John 3:27).
- 5q. The Law says about a bull which is given to goring other bulls: 'If men have protested to the owner and he has not destroyed the animal, he shall pay' (Exod. 21:36 LXX). You should apply this to your thoughts and impulses. Sometimes

during a meal the impulse of self-esteem springs up inside you, urging you to speak at the wrong moment. Then angelic thoughts protest within you and tell you to destroy this impulse to speak. If you do not resist the impulse by keeping silent as you should, but allow it to come out into the open because you are puffed up by delusion, then you will have to pay the penalty. As a punishment you will perhaps be tempted to commit some grave sin; alternatively, you may experience severe bodily pain, or be involved in violent conflict with your brethren, or else suffer torment in the age to come. We shall have to give account for every idle and conceited word spoken by our ill-disciplined tongue. Let us guard our tongue, then, with watchfulness.

60. The Psalm says of those who are tempted by thoughts of pleasure, anger, love of praise and the like, that the sun burns them by day and the moon by night (cf. Ps. 121:6). Pray, then, to be sheltered by the cool and refreshing cloud of God's grace, so that you may escape the scorching heat of the enemy.
61. Never form a close friendship with someone who enjoys noisy and drunken feasts, or who likes telling dirty stories, even though he may have been a monk for many years. Do not let his filth defile you; do not fall under the influence of people who are unclean and uncircumcised in heart.
62. Peter was first given the keys, but then he was allowed to fall into the sin of denying Christ; and so his pride was humbled by his fall. Do not be surprised, then, if after receiving the keys of spiritual knowledge you fall into various evil thoughts. Glorify our Lord, for He alone is wise: through setbacks of this kind He restrains the presumption that we tend to feel because of our advance in the knowledge of God. Trials and temptations are the reins whereby God in His providence restrains our human arrogance.
63. Often God takes away His blessings from us, just as He deprived Job of his wealth: 'The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away' (Job 1:21). But it is equally true that God will also remove from us the adversities He has brought upon us. 'Both blessings and adversities come from God' (Eccl. 11:14); He has caused us to suffer adversities, but He will also give us eternal joy and glory. 'As I watched over you,' says the Lord, 'to destroy and afflict you, so will I build you up again and will not pull you down; I will plant you and will not uproot you' (cf. Jer. 31:28; 24:6). Do not say: 'It's just my bad luck'; for the Lord, who changed our situation for the worse, can unexpectedly alter it again for the better.
64. If someone launches a fierce and determined attack on the demons through his self-control, prayer or any other form of holiness, they retaliate by inflicting deeper wounds upon him. Eventually he is reduced to despair, and feels in his soul that

he has received a spiritual death-sentence. He is even brought to say: ‘Who will deliver me from the body of this death? For I am compelled against my will to submit to the laws of my adversary’ (cf. Rom. 7:23-24).

65. The demons say to themselves: ‘Let us rise up, and fall upon a people that lives in hope and stillness; come, let us go and speak to them with words of spiritual deceit, seducing them from the truth over to our side’ (cf. Judg. 18:27; Isa. 7:6 LXX). So they sharpen the sword of temptation against us who have chosen the life of stillness, and continue their attacks up to the last moment of our life. The more fervent our devotion and love for God, the more savage are their assaults; they urge us on to acts of sin, making war upon us in ways that we cannot endure, trying in this manner to deprive us of our faith in Christ, of prayer and every hope. But for our part we shall not cease to trust in God ‘until He has mercy upon US’ (Ps. 123:2), and those that devour us are driven far away. We shall not cease to trust in God, until He commands our tempters to depart, and we are given new life through patience and steadfast dispassion. For ‘the life of man is a time of testing’ (Job 7:1 LXX). God, who watches over the contest, often allows us for some definite period of time to be trampled underfoot by our enemies; but it is the mark of a courageous and noble soul not to despair in adversity.
66. If a demon has such strength as to force a man, even against his will, to change from his natural state of goodness into a state of sin, how great must be the strength of the angel who at the appointed time is commanded by God to restore that man’s whole condition. If the icy blast of the north wind is strong enough to give to water the hardness of rock, what cannot the warmth of the south wind achieve? If extreme cold forces everything to submit to it—for (who can withstand His cold?)’ (Ps. 147:17)—cannot heat in the same way alter everything? ‘Who can abide the burning heat?’ (Eccl. 43:3). So let us confidently believe that the cold, dark coals of our mind will sooner or later blaze with heat and light under the influence of the divine fire.
67. We should mention in this connection an inward state that shows the degree of dispassion attained by the Joseph hidden within each of us. Our intellect, departing from Egypt, leaves behind it the burden of the passions and the builder’s basket of shameful slavery, and it hears a language that it does not understand (cf. Ps. 81:5-6 LXX). It hears no longer the demons’ language, impure and destructive of all true understanding, but the holy language of the light-giving angels, who convert the intellect from the non-spiritual to the spiritual—a language which illuminates the soul that hears and accepts it.

68. Once certain brethren, who were always ill and could not practise fasting, said to me: 'How is it possible for us without fasting to rid ourselves of the devil and the passions? To such people we should say: you can destroy and banish what is evil, and the demons that suggest this evil to you, not only by abstaining from food, but by calling with all your heart on God. For it is written: 'They cried to the Lord in their trouble and He delivered them' (Ps. 107:6); and again: 'Out of the belly of hell I cried and Thou heardest my voice ... Thou hast brought up my life from corruption' (Jonah 2:2,6). Therefore 'until iniquity shall pass away'— that is, as long as sin still troubles me— 'I will cry to God most high' (Ps. 57:1-2 LXX), asking Him to bestow on me this great blessing: by His power to destroy within me the provocation to sin, blotting out the fantasies of my impassioned mind and rendering it image-free. So, if you have not yet received the gift of self-control, know that the Lord is ready to hear you if you entreat Him with prayer and hope. Understanding the Lord's will, then, do not be discouraged because of your inability to practise asceticism, but strive all the more to be delivered from the enemy through prayer and patient thanksgiving. If thoughts of weakness and distress force you to leave the city of fasting, take refuge in another city (cf. Matt. 10:23) that is, in prayer and thanksgiving.
69. Pharaoh entreated, saying: 'May God take away from me this death' (Exod. 10:17), and he was heard. Similarly, when the demons asked the Lord not to cast them into the abyss, their request was granted (cf. Luke 8:31). How much more, then, will a Christian be heard when he prays to be delivered from spiritual death?
70. It may happen that for a certain time a man is illumined and refreshed by God's grace, and then this grace is withdrawn. This makes him inwardly confused and he starts to grumble; instead of seeking through steadfast prayer to recover his assurance of salvation, he loses patience and gives up. He is like a beggar who receives alms from the palace, and feels put out because he was not asked inside to dine with the king.
71. 'Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed (John 20:29). Blessed also are those who, when grace is withdrawn, find no consolation in themselves, but only continuing tribulation and thick darkness, and yet do not despair; but, strengthened by faith, they endure courageously, convinced that they do indeed see Him who is invisible.
72. The humility which in due time and by God's grace, after many struggles and tears, is given from heaven to those who seek it is something incomparably stronger and higher than the sense of abasement felt by those who have lapsed

from holiness. This higher humility is granted only to those who have attained true perfection and are no longer under the sway of sin.

73. 'Then the devil left Him, and angels came and ministered to Him' (Matt. 4:10. It does not say that the angels were with our Lord during the actual time when He was being tempted. In the same way, when we are being tempted, God's angels for a time withdraw a little. Then, after the departure of those tempting us, they come and minister to us with divine intellections, giving us support, illumination, compunction, encouragement, patient endurance, joyfulness, and everything that saves and strengthens and renews our exhausted soul. As Nathanael was told, 'You will see the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of man' (John 1:51); in other words, the ministry and assistance of the angels will be given generously to mankind.
74. Keep in mind that high priest at whose right hand the devil stood, opposing all his good thoughts and words and actions (cf. Zech. 3:1). Then you will not be astonished at what happens to yourself.
75. A monk should understand what it means to be weak, and he should remember the words: 'Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak' (Ps. 6:2). He should understand what it means to be in rebellion against God; for this is the sickness with which the devil and his angels are afflicted.
76. Fire makes iron impossible to touch, and likewise frequent prayer renders the intellect more forceful in its warfare against the enemy. That is why the demons strive with all their strength to make us slothful in attentiveness to prayer, for they know that prayer is the intellect's invincible weapon against them.
77. When David went out from the city of Ziklag to fight the Amalekites, some of the men with him were so exhausted that they stayed behind at the brook Besor and took no part in the battle (cf. 1Sam. 30:10). Returning after his victory, he heard the rest of his troops saying that no share in the spoils should be given to the men who had stayed behind; and he saw that these themselves were ashamed and kept silent. But David recognized that they had wanted to fight, and so in his kindness he spoke in their defence, saying that they had remained behind to guard the baggage; and on this ground he gave them as large a share in the spoils as he gave to the others who had fought bravely in the battle. You should behave in the same way towards a brother who shows fervour at first, but then grows slack. In the case of this brother and his salvation, the baggage consists of faith and repentance, humility and tears, patience, hope, long-suffering and the like. If in spite of his slackness he yet guards this baggage, waiting expectantly for Christ's coming, he is rightly given an eternal reward.

78. We give the name of Levites and priests to those who dedicate themselves totally to God, alike through the practice of the virtues and through contemplation. Those who do not have the strength to hunt down the passions may be called ‘the cattle of the Levites’ (Num. 3:4.1). They have a genuine and continuing thirst for holiness, and try to attain it so far as they can; but they frequently fail, hamstrung by sin. Yet we may expect that at the right moment God will grant the gift of dispassion to them as well, solely by virtue of His love; for ‘the Lord has heard the desire of the poor’ (Ps. 10:17 LXX).
79. We are aware of the torment that the enemy frequently inflicts upon us visibly or invisibly. But we do not perceive the torment and anguish that we inflict upon him, when we sometimes succeed in practising the virtues, when we repent over our transgressions or show long-suffering and perseverance in our difficulties, pierce him to the heart, or when we pray and do other things which I torture him and cause him bitter grief. God in His providence conceals all this from us, so as to prevent us from growing sluggish. Be sure, however, that ‘God thinks it right to repay with affliction those who afflict you’ (2Thess. 1:6).
80. If the base of a felled tree that has grown old in earth and rock ‘will bud at the scent of water . . . like a young plant’ (Job 14:9), it is also possible for us to be awakened by the power of the Holy Spirit and to flower with the incorruptibility that is ours by nature, bearing fruit like a young plant, even though we have fallen into sin.
81. Sometimes our soul grows despondent at the huge swarm of its sins and temptations, and says, ‘Our hope is gone and we are, lost’ (Ezek. 37:11 LXX). Yet God, who does not despair of our salvation, says to us: ‘You shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord’ (Ezek. 37:6). To the soul that doubts how it can ever give birth to Christ through great acts of holiness, these words are said: ‘The Holy Spirit shall come upon you’ (Luke 1:35)— Where the Holy Spirit is present, do not expect any more the sequence and laws of nature and habit. The Holy Spirit whom we worship is all-powerful, and in an astonishing way He brings into existence what does not as yet exist within us. The intellect that was previously defeated He now makes victorious; for the Paraclete who in compassion comes upon us from above ‘is higher than all’ (John 3:31), and He raises us above all natural impulses and demonic passions.
82. Struggle to preserve unimpaired the light that shines within your intellect. If passion begins to dominate you when you look at things, this means that the Lord has left you in darkness; He has dropped the reins with which He was guiding you, and the light of your eyes is gone from you (cf. Ps. 38:10). Yet even if this

happens, do not despair or give up, but pray to God with the words of David: ‘O send out Thy light and Thy truth to me in my gloom, for Thou art the salvation of my countenance and my God’ (cf. Ps. 43:3,5); ‘Thou shalt send forth Thy Spirit and they shall be created; and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth’ (Ps. 104:30 LXX).

83. Blessed is he who, with a hunger that is never satisfied, day and night throughout this present life makes prayer and the psalms his food and drink, and strengthens himself by reading of God’s glory in Scripture. Such communion will lead the soul to ever-increasing joy in the age to come.
84. Do all in your power not to fall, for the strong athlete should not fall. But if you do fall, get up again at once and continue the contest. Even if you fall a thousand times because of the withdrawal of God’s grace, rise up again each time, and keep on doing so until the day of your death. For it is written, ‘If a righteous man falls seven times’— that is, repeatedly throughout his life— seven times shall he rise again’ (Prov. 24:16 LXX). So long as you hold fast, with tears and prayer, to the weapon of the monastic habit, you will be counted among those that stand upright, even though you fall again and again. So long as you remain a monk, you will be like a brave soldier who faces the blows of the enemy; and God will command you, because even when struck you refused to surrender or run away. But if you give up the monastic life, running away like a coward and a deserter, the enemy will strike you in the back; and you will lose your freedom of communion with God.
85. It is more serious to lose hope than to sin. The traitor Judas was a defeatist, inexperienced in spiritual warfare; as a result he was reduced to despair by the enemy’s onslaught, and he went and hanged himself. Peter, on the other hand, was a firm rock: although brought down by a terrible fall, yet because of his experience in spiritual warfare he was not broken by despair, but leaping up he shed bitter tears from a contrite and humiliated heart. And as soon as our enemy saw them, he recoiled as if his eyes had been burnt by searing flames, and he took to flight howling and lamenting.
86. The monk should wage a truceless war above all on these three things: gluttony, futile self-esteem, and avarice— which is a form of idolatry (cf. Col. 3:5).
87. There was once a king of Israel who subdued cave-dwellers and other barbarian tribes by using the psalms and music of David. You, too, have barbarian cave-dwellers living within you: the demons who have gained admittance to your senses and limbs, who torment and inflame your flesh. Because of them lust is in your eyes when you look at things; as you listen or use your sense of smell, passion dominates you; you indulge in dirty talk; you are full of turmoil inwardly and

outwardly, like the city of Babylon. With great faith, then, and with ‘Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs’ (Eph. 5:19), you too must destroy the cave-dwellers who work evil within you.

88. The Lord desires one man to be saved through another, and in the same way Satan strives to destroy one man through another. So do not spend your time with somebody who is sloppy, a mischief-maker, not guarding his tongue) lest you be sent with him into punishment. It is hard enough for one who associates with a good man to attain salvation. If you do not watch yourself, but consort with people of evil character, you will be infected with their leprosy and destroyed. How can anyone expect pity if he recklessly approaches a poisonous snake? You should avoid those who cannot control their tongue, who are quarrelsome and full of agitation inwardly or outwardly.
89. If you wish to be called wise, intelligent and the friend of God, strive to present your soul to the Lord in the same state as you received it from Him: pure, innocent, completely undefiled. Then you will be crowned in heaven and the angels will call you blessed.
90. A single good word made the thief pure and holy, despite all his previous crimes, and brought him into paradise (cf. Luke 23:42-43). A single ill-advised word prevented Moses from entering the promised land (cf. Num. 20:12). We should not suppose, then, that garrulity is only a minor disease. Lovers of slander and gossip shut themselves out from the kingdom of heaven. A chatterbox may meet with success in this world, but he will not do so in the next. There he will trip and fall; ‘evil will hunt him down and destroy him’ (Ps. 140:11 LXX). It has been well said: ‘Better to slip on the ground than to slip with your tongue’ (Ecclus. 20:18). We should believe James the Apostle when he writes: ‘Let every man be swift to hear and slow to speak’ (Jas. 1:19).
91. So as not to be deceived and carried away by the vain and empty things that the senses bring before us, we should listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah: ‘Come, my people, enter into your inner room)— the shrine of your heart, which is closed to every conception derived from the sensible world, that image-free dwelling-place illumined by dispassion and the overshadowing of God’s grace; ‘shut your door’— to all things visible; ‘hide yourself for a brief moment’— the whole of man’s life is but a moment; ‘until the Lord’s anger has passed by’ (Isa.26:20 LXX); or, as the Psalms put it, ‘until iniquity has passed’ (Ps. 57:1). This anger of the Lord and this iniquity may be caused by demons, passions and sins; as Isaiah says to God, ‘Behold, Thou art angry, for we have sinned’ (Isa.64:5). A man escapes this anger by keeping his attention fixed continually within his heart

during prayer, and by striving to remain within his inner sanctuary. As it is written, ‘Draw wisdom into your innermost self’ (Job 28:18 LXX) ; ‘all the glory of the king’s daughter is within’ (Ps. 45:13 LXX). Let us, then, continue to struggle until we enter the holy place of God, ‘the mountain of Thine inheritance, the dwelling, O Lord, which Thou hast made ready, the sanctuary which Thy hands have prepared’ (Exod. 15:17).

92. If you really wish to renounce the world, you should imitate the prophet Elisha, who in his intense and burning love for God kept nothing back for himself (cf. 1Kgs. 19:21). You should distribute all your possessions to those in need and so take up the Cross of Christ, hastening eagerly and willingly to die to this world; and you will receive in exchange the eternal kingdom.
93. Once you have realized that the Amorite within you is ‘as strong as an oak’, you should pray fervently to the Lord to dry up ‘his fruit from above’— that is, your sinful actions, and ‘his roots from beneath’— that is, your impure thoughts. Ask the Lord in this way to ‘destroy the Amorite from before your face’ (Amos 2:9 LXX).
94. You should not be surprised when those who are themselves incapable of attaining stillness ridicule the stillness that we have achieved. Apply the words of the Psalter to them— but without any feeling of rancour. Resist them by intensifying your obedience to God, and repeat the words: ‘My soul, be obedient to God’ (Ps. 62:5 LXX); ‘In return for my love, they made false accusations against me; but I continued to pray’— for their healing as well as my own (Ps. 109:4 LXX).
95. When there is no wind blowing at sea, there are no waves; and when no demon dwells within us, our soul and body are not troubled by the passions.
96. If you always feel the warmth of prayer and divine grace you may apply to yourself the words of Scripture: you have ‘put on the armour of light’ (Rom. 13:12) and ‘your garments are warm’ (Job 37:17). But your enemies are ‘clothed with shame’ (Ps. 109:29) and with the darkness of hell.
97. When recalling your sins, do not hesitate to beat your breast. With these blows you will dig into your hardened heart and discover within it the gold-mine of the publican (cf. Luke 18:13); and this hidden wealth will bring you great joy.
98. Let the fire of your prayer, ascending upwards as you meditate on the oracles of the Spirit, burn always on the altar of your soul.
99. If at every moment you strive to have ‘your feet shod with the gospel of peace’ (Eph.6:15), you will always be building up your neighbour’s house as well as your own. But if you are indolent, the demons will spit invisibly in your face and, as the

Law states, you will be known as ‘the man who had his sandal pulled off’ (cf. Deut. 25:9-10).

100. If, as St John says, ‘God is love’, then ‘he who dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him’ (1John 4:16). But he who hates his neighbour, through this hatred, is separated from love. He, then, who hates his brother is separated from God, since ‘God is love, and he who dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.’ To Him be, ‘glory and power through all the ages. Amen.

Ascetic Discourse Sent at the Request of the Same Monks in India

A SUPPLEMENT TO THE ONE HUNDRED TEXTS

Never think that a person in the outside world— someone living contentedly with a wife and children— is more blessed than a monk because he is able to do good to others and to give generous alms, and seems never to be tempted by demons at all. Do not suppose that you are less pleasing in God’s sight than he is; do not torture yourself, imagining that you are doomed. I do not say that your life is beyond reproach simply because you persevere in the monastic state; but even if you happen to be a very great sinner, the anguish of soul and hardship that you endure are more precious in God’s sight than surpassingly great virtue on the part of someone living in the world. Your deep dejection and despondency, your tears and sighs of distress, the torments of your conscience and your doubts, your feelings of self-condemnation, the sorrow and lamentation of your intellect and heart, your contrition and wretchedness, your gloom and self-abasement— such experiences as these, which frequently overwhelm those cast into the iron furnace of trials and temptations, are far more precious and acceptable to God than any good actions by a person living in the world.

Take care, then, not to fall under God’s rebuke like those who said: ‘What have we gained by going as suppliants before the Lord, passing our time continually in his house?’ (cf. Mal. 3:14 LXX). Obviously any slave who is near the master of the house receives from time to time a thrashing or a savage reprimand. But a slave who works outside avoids punishment for the time being, because he is not part of the household and so escapes his master’s notice. What have we gained, they ask, we who suffer affliction in soul and body, always praying and singing psalms? Do not those who neither pray nor keep vigil enjoy happiness and success throughout their lives? Again they complain: ‘Behold, the houses of others are built up, and we call others blessed’; and the Prophet adds: ‘And servants of God who were not ignorant said these things’ (cf. Mal.

3:15-16 LXX). Yet we should not think it strange that monks endure affliction and various forms of sorrow, patiently awaiting through many trials and temptations whatever their Master gives. For they have heard Him say in the Gospels: ‘Truly I tell you, that you who are near Me shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice. Yet after a little while I will visit you through the Paraclete and drive away your despondency; I will renew you with thoughts of heavenly life and peace and with sweet tears, of all of which you were deprived for a short time when you were being tested. I will give you the breast of My grace, as a mother feeds her baby when it cries. When your strength fails in battle I will fortify you with power from on high, and I will sweeten you in your bitterness, as Jeremiah says in his Lamentations, speaking of the Jerusalem hidden within you. I will look upon you, and your hearts will rejoice at My secret visitation; your affliction will be turned to joy, and no one shall take that joy from you’ (cf. John 16:20-22).

So let us not be blind or short-sighted, regarding those in the world as more blessed than ourselves; but, knowing the difference between true sons and bastards, let us rather embrace the apparent misery and afflictions of the monastic calling, since they lead to eternal life and to the Lord’s unfading crown of glory. Let us, then, welcome the tribulations we endure as sinful ascetics (for we should not claim to be righteous). Let us choose to be ‘an outcast in the house of God’— that is, to be a monk serving Christ continually— rather than to ‘dwell in the tents of sinners’ (Ps. 84:10 LXX) and associate ourselves with those in the world, even though they perform acts of great righteousness.

Listen, monk, to the words of your heavenly Father, who in His infinite love afflicts and oppresses you with various trials. ‘Know this well, you pitiful monk,’ He warns you, ‘that as I said by My Prophet, I will be your chastiser (cf. Hos. 5:2 LXX). I will meet you on the road in Egypt, testing you with afflictions. I will block your evil ways with the thorns of My providence, pricking and obstructing you with unexpected misfortunes, so that you cannot fulfil the desires of your foolish heart. I will shut up the sea of your passions with the gates of My mercy (cf. Job 38:8); like a wild beast I will devour you with thoughts of guilt, condemnation and remorse, as you perceive things of which you were ignorant. All these tribulations are a great gift of grace from God. And I will be to you not only a beast of prey but a goad, pricking you with thoughts of compunction and with sorrow of heart. Anguish shall not depart from your house— that is, from your soul and body— but they will both undergo the salutary harrowing of the bitter- sweet torments of God.’

But all the grim things that befall us on the ascetic way— torments, pain, confusion, shame, fear and despair— lead finally to endless joy, inexpressible delight and unutterable glory. ‘For this reason have I afflicted you,’ God says, ‘that I may feed you with the manna of spiritual knowledge; I have made you go hungry, so that at the end I may grant blessings to you and bring you into the kingdom on high.’ When that time

comes, lowly monks, you will skip like young calves loosed from their bonds (cf. Mal. 4:2 LXX), for you will be set free from carnal passion and the temptations of the enemy; you will trample on the wicked demons who now trample on you: ‘they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet’ (Mal. 4:3). For if you fear God and are humble—not puffed up with vanity, not headstrong, but in compunction and contrition regarding yourself as a ‘useless servant’ (cf. Luke 17:10)—then your sinfulness, monk, is better than the righteousness of those who live in the world, and your filthiness is more compelling than their purity.

What is it that so distresses you? No stain is intrinsic. If a man has tar on his hands, he removes it with a little cleansing oil; how much more, then, can you be made clean with the oil of God’s mercy. You find no difficulty in washing your clothes; how much easier is it for the Lord to cleanse you from every stain, although you are bound to be tempted every day. When you say to the Lord ‘I have sinned’, He answers: ‘Your sins are forgiven you; I am He who wipes them out and I will remember them no more’ (Matt. 9:2 ; Isa. 43:25) ; ‘as far as the east is from the west, so far have I removed your sins from you; and as a father shows compassion to his sons, so will I show compassion to you’ (cf. Ps. 103:12-13). Only do not rebel against Him who has called you to pray and recite psalms, but cleave to Him throughout your life in pure and intimate communion, reverent yet unashamed in His presence, and always full of thanksgiving.

It is God who, by a simple act of His will, cleanses you. For what God chooses to make clean not even the great Apostle Peter can condemn or call unclean. For he is told: ‘What God has cleansed, do not call unclean’ (Acts 10:15). For has not God in His love acquitted us? ‘Who then will condemn us?’ (cf. Rom. 8:33-34). When we call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is not hard for our conscience to be made pure, and then we are no different from the prophets and the rest of the saints. For God’s purpose is not that we should suffer from His anger, but that we should gain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us. So then, whether we are watchful in virtue or sometimes fall asleep, as is likely to happen because of our failings, yet shall we live with Christ. As we look up to Him with cries of distress and continual lamentation, it is He Himself that we breathe. Let us therefore put on the breastplate of faith, and take as our helmet the hope of salvation; then the arrows of dejection and despair will find no chink through which to wound us (cf. 1Thess. 5:8-10).

You say: ‘I feel infuriated when I see that those in the world are not tempted at all.’ But realize this: Satan has no need to tempt those who tempt themselves, and are continually dragged down by worldly affairs. And know this too: the prizes and crowns are given to those who are tested by temptation—not to those who care nothing about God, to the worldly who lie on their backs and snore. ‘But’, you say, ‘I am severely

tempted by many things and my loins Clare filled with mockings' (Ps. 38:7 LXX); I am bowed down in my distress and there is no healing for my flesh, no 'remedy for my bones' (Prov. 3:8 LXX). Yet in fact the great Physician of the sick is here beside us, He that bore our infirmities, that healed and still heals us by His wounds (cf. Isa. 53:5); He is here beside us and even now administers the medicine of salvation. 'For', He says, 'I have afflicted you by My absence, but I will also heal you. So do not fear: for when My fierce anger has passed, I will heal you again. As a woman will not forget to care for the offspring of her womb, even so will I not forget you', says the Lord (cf. Deut. 32:39 ; Isa. 7:4 and 49:15 LXX). 'For if a bird devotes itself with tender love to its nestlings, visiting them every hour, calling to them and feeding them, how much greater is My compassion towards My creatures!

How much more do I in tender love devote Myself to you, visiting you when you are forgetful, speaking with you in your intellect, feeding your reason when it opens wide its mouth like a young swallow. For as food I give you the fear of Him who is mightier than you; I give you longing for heaven and sighs that console you; I give you compunction and song, deep knowledge and divine mysteries. If I your Lord and Father am lying when I say these things to you, then convict Me of guilt and I will accept it.' It is in this way that the Lord always speaks to us inwardly.

I know that this letter is excessively long, but it is your request that has made it so. I have written at length in order to strengthen those in danger of falling away through apathy. For, as you wrote to me, there are certain brethren among you in India who find themselves more heavily oppressed by temptations than they expected; they have even renounced the monastic life, saying that it completely stifles a man and involves innumerable dangers. You told me that they openly regarded those in the outside world as more blessed than themselves, and cursed the day on which they took the habit. For this reason I have been compelled to write at length, using plain words, so that even a simple and unlettered person can understand what is said. And my aim in writing all this is to show that monks should not consider anything worldly as superior to their own monastic vocation; for, without any contradiction, monks are higher and more glorious than crowned monarchs, since they are called to be in constant attendance upon God. And, having written these things, I beseech you out of love to remember me continually in your prayers, that in my wretchedness I may be given grace from the Lord, so as to close my present life in holiness. May the Father of mercies and the God of all blessings grant you a hope well founded and everlasting blessings in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and dominion through all the ages. Amen.