



St. John of Kronstadt

## Fire & Light

### St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ November 1, 2015 ✠

St. John of Kronstadt (1908)

Holy Wonderworkers & Unmercenary Healers,  
Sts. Cosmas and Damian of Mesopotamia (345)



Today: Sacrament of Holy Matrimony: Sophia Ritchey & David Rutledge – 4:00pm

Tomorrow: New Inquirer's Class – 6:30pm First session – Old Hall

Wednesday, November 4, 6:30pm Akathist Service

Next Sunday, November 8 – 2:00pm: Spence Marriage Blessing, with pig roast reception

Saturday, November 14 – 3:00pm: Holy Baptism – Baby Elizabeth Murphree

➤ Sunday, November 15 – Nativity Fast begins

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## St. Paisios the Athonite – *Good Will Is Everything*

✠ On Greed and Generosity... from the book: *Spiritual Struggle*



**Geronda, what about when someone asks for help and I have nothing to give?**

— When I wish to give charity and I have nothing to give, then I do charity with “blood”. Someone who has wealth and gives material help, experiences some joy, while another who has nothing to give suffers constantly and is humbled, saying, “I have not given any alms.” Good will is everything. A rich man has the ability to give and does not give. A poor man wants to give, but does not give because he doesn't have anything to give. The one case is different from the other. If a rich man gives, he will experience a certain degree of joy. The poor man suffers, he wants to give some alms, but has nothing to give and so suffers inside, whereas if he had something to give, he would give it and not suffer. Good will shows in our actions. If someone asks alms from a poor person, and this poor person, even though deprived, offers something — regardless of whether the other person goes out and drinks ouzo with the money given —, then the poor man who gave will have spiritual joy, and God will guide someone else to provide him with material help.

Do you know what great injustice is done sometimes? One person gives all he has in order to help, and the recipient rationalizes the gesture to his liking.

— Geronda, what do you mean?

— Suppose that someone has just five thousand drachmas in his pocket. On his way, he meets a beggar and places all the drachmas in the beggar's hand and leaves. The beggar then sees that he has just received five thousand drachmas and is very happy. At that same time, another very rich person passes by and seeing that the other one gave five thousand drachmas to the beggar, he reasons to himself, “For him to be giving five thousand drachmas at a time, one can only wonder how much

money he must have! Certainly he must have millions!" So the very rich man gives five hundred drachmas to the beggar and eases his conscience with the thought that he has done his duty. In fact, the first man only had the five thousand drachmas, and, seeing the beggar, his heart was moved by compassion to give him all his money. If the rich man had also worked spiritually, he would have had the good thought to reason accordingly, "Oh my goodness, he gave the beggar everything he had!" Or maybe he would have said, "He had ten thousand and gave the five thousand drachmas to the beggar." But how can he have any good thoughts about this matter when he does not work at all in a spiritual manner? He simply reasons and says, "For him to be throwing his money away like that, he must be raking it in."

Some people again, while giving five hundred or even a thousand drachmas to a poor person, will start bargaining over five or ten drachmas with the poor laborer who works for him. I can't understand this. You give five hundred or even a thousand drachmas to a stranger, and the person you have beside you, who helps you, you allow to go hungry? This is the person you are obligated to love and help first. But it seems the charity offered by such people is only done to earn praise from others. They will even take someone to court over a thousand drachmas simply because they are thinking in a worldly way and do not wish to be taken for a dupe.

A devout woman related an incident to me. She wanted to buy a load of firewood from an old lady who had travelled three hours to bring it from the forest to town. In fact, that particular time it had taken her three and a half hours, because she had to circle around the lookout post to avoid the Forest Patrol. "How much is the wood?" the woman asked. "Fifteen drachmas," the old lady replied. "No, it's too much; I'll give you eleven drachmas for it." She then went on to tell me, "I bargained with her like this so that people will not take us spiritual people for fools." After that I gave her a piece of my mind, a "thorough dressing down". That poor old lady had two animals and had spent two days gathering the wood in order to make twenty-two drachmas. Instead of offering an extra twenty drachmas for the wood, the greedy woman tried to bargain the price down for just a few drachmas.

## **Almsgiving Greatly Helps the Departed**

Wealth can be very destructive for one when it is not distributed to the poor for the benefit of our soul and for the souls of our departed. Giving alms to people who are suffering, widows, orphans and so on, is also very helpful for the repose of the souls of those who have passed away. For when we give alms on behalf of someone who has died, the recipients will say, "May God forgive him; may his relics be sanctified." If someone happens to be sick, unable to work and in debt, and at this difficult time you offer him help and say, "Take this for the sake of the soul of so and so", he, too, will say, "May God forgive him; may his relics be sanctified!" They say a heartfelt prayer, and it is this that helps a lot those who have fallen asleep.

— If a woman's husband dies without having received Holy Communion, without having made his final Confession, or if her child was killed in an accident, what else can she do to help their souls?  
— She should try and improve herself as much as possible. This will naturally help her personally, but it will also help her departed husband, for since they have been inseparably crowned as husband and wife, he, too, has a share in his wife's spiritual improvement. This, of course, is most important of all, that he improve her spiritual life. Otherwise, she may do some charitable work and still maintain her old bad habits. She may say, "I have done my duty; what else do you want me to do?" So, she remains her same old self and may even become worse.

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***"I may be counted amongst the least of those who are enlisted in the Church of God, but still I am not too weak to stand out as her champion against one who has broken with that Church. The very smallest member of a vigorous body would, by virtue of the unity of its life with the Body, be found stronger than one that had been cut away and was dying, however large the latter and small the former."***

~ St. Gregory of Nyssa

## CURING THE POISON OF GOSSIP

By Saint Theophan the Recluse.

*A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul. [Prov 18:7]*

† † †

### The Poison

Evil speech is worse than all poisons. All other wounds may be healed, but the wound of the tongue has no cure. The tongue of the dragon is less evil than that of the whisperer, which in turn comes from a most evil demon: for it provokes quarrelling and bitter strife between brethren, sows evil and discord among the peaceful, scatters many communities. If you permit the whisperer to approach you, he will strip you of every merit you possess. Whosoever becomes involved with him has already become a confederate in his bloodshed, in his murders, and in his slayings! For a whisperer and a murderer spawn the same whelp: if they do not slay you with the sword, they will bring the same disaster on you with the tongue.

Because of these things I charge you severely, that you separate yourself from a whisperer as speedily as you can. Let him be a monk, let him be an anchorite, let him be a champion of virtue or but a novice, whoever he is, as long as he is a whisperer, fly from him. Though he should be your own father, or your brother, if he is a whisperer keep far away from him. For it is better to dwell with a lion or with a lioness than with one who is a whisperer. And do not be ashamed to fly from him; so that he shall not infect you with the poison of his sin.

So then, my sons, have no part in murmuring. Do your work earnestly and in silence; for he who is devoted to silence is close to God and His angels and dwells in heaven. For the Lord tells us that: *He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.* (Prov 13:3).

And then in the day of our visitation He shall say to us: *Blessed art thou, O Israel,* because you kept watch on your tongue; *who is like unto thee.* (Deut 33:29).

May the Lord preserve you in His grace and peace. Amen.

### The Cure

Set, O Lord, a watch before my mouth, and a door of enclosure round about my lips. The greatest necessity of all is to control and curb our tongue. The mover of the tongue is the heart: what fills the heart is poured out through the tongue. And conversely, when feeling is poured out of the heart by the tongue, it becomes strengthened and firmly rooted in the heart. Therefore the tongue is one of the chief factors in building up our inner disposition.

Good feelings are silent. The feelings which seek expression in words are mostly egotistical, since they seek to express what flatters our self-love and can show us, as we imagine, in the best light. Loquacity mostly comes from a certain vainglory,

which makes us think that we know a great deal and imagine our opinion on the subject of conversation to be the most satisfactory of all. So we experience an irresistible urge to speak out and in a stream of words, with many repetitions, to impress the same opinion in the hearts of others, thus foisting ourselves upon them as unbidden teachers and sometimes even dreaming of making pupils of men, who understand the subject much better than the teacher.

When you have to speak, before expressing what has entered your heart and letting it pass to your tongue, examine it carefully; and you will find many things that are better not let past your lips. Know moreover that many things, which it seems to you good to express, are much better left buried in the tomb of silence. Sometimes you will yourself realize this, immediately the conversation is over.

Silence is a great power in our unseen warfare and a sure hope of gaining victory. Silence is much beloved of him, who does not rely on himself but trusts in God alone. It is the guardian of holy prayer and a miraculous helper in the practice of virtues; it is also a sign of spiritual wisdom. St. Isaac says: *Guarding your tongue not only makes your mind rise to God, but also gives great hidden power to perform visible actions, done by the body. If silence is practiced with knowledge, it also brings enlightenment in hidden doing.* In another place he praises it thus: *If you pile up on one side of the scales all the works demanded by ascetic life, and on the other side—silence, you will find that the latter outweighs the former. Many good counsels have been given us, but if a man embraces silence, to follow them will become superfluous.* In yet another place he calls silence *the mystery of the life to come; whereas words are the instruments of this world.* It can be said in general that: *One that keepeth silence is found wise: and another by much babbling becometh hateful.* (Sir 20:5).

I shall indicate to you the most direct and simple method to acquire the habit of silence: undertake this practice, and the practice itself will teach you how to do it, and help you. To keep up your zeal in this work, reflect as often as you can on the pernicious results of indiscriminate babbling and on the salutary results of wise silence. When you come to taste the good fruit of silence, you will no longer need lessons about it.



Many abstain from meat, milk and other food which God has not forbidden and which was even given as a blessing of people who have learned the truth and know how to *partake of these things with thanksgiving* (I Tim 4:4). But the same abstemious, devout-living people, give scandal by their action, and spread scandal with their tongue like an incendiary fire.

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

## ON THE SPIRIT OF PARISH LIFE

*From a parish bulletin of the Holy Virgin Cathedral, San Francisco, October 1990.*

In parish life, everything has deep meaning, if only one understands this meaning. And for this reason a proper attitude should be established towards all this meaning.

Everything in church life should foster a genuinely Christian, angelic and truly Orthodox attitude towards it. We must take great care that everything lead us to the Kingdom of Heaven, that everything contributes to the growth of this Kingdom within us, and not draw it away from our souls. Church life should open to us the laws of this Kingdom. This is its very purpose. The Church of Christ is not only a ladder to the Kingdom of God; it is also a school, instructing the thoughts, feelings, and will of a person in the ways of the Heavenly Kingdom.

Today church life appears unsettled. The evil laws of this world have penetrated church life, and have even begun at times to direct it. The results are evident.

Everything living on earth must submit in some degree to life's natural laws, and by virtue of its existence on earth, even Christ's Church—that which is most holy on earth—is not exempt from the weight of material considerations. Even though the Lord could turn water into wine and make bread to multiply, His Apostles carried with them a money box where they collected donations which people freely gave for their daily needs and the needs of their divine Teacher. This was not a sin; it was simply following the law governing the material life of fallen man. At the same time, it evoked noble feelings of love, of charity and of sacrifice in those people who were instructed about these feelings by the Apostles' preaching. But that man who carried the money box became inflamed by a spirit of materialism, avarice, and self-interest. He regretted the fragrant myrrh used for the Saviour of the world, and he died as a traitor. Found unfaithful in this small matter, he turned out to be unfaithful in that which was great.

For us this serves as an important lesson: anyone who is attached to money will betray Jesus Christ. A Christian's attitude towards money must be sober, free, unrestrained, without any emotional attachment. If one ought not to be foolishly tied to earthly life, then all the more must one remain free of attachment to its wealth, material wealth in particular. Only a soul free from materialism can be truly believing and enter the other world, when its time comes, without distress.

In the church foyer, i.e., as though in a courtyard (the church foyer connotes the court of the Old Testament "skinia") the sale of various church-related goods is permissible as a service to the faithful, since for them to buy bread or candles elsewhere to bring to church would be more troublesome.

But one must clearly understand that all material effects in the church, just as what is experienced spiritually, possesses a free

and voluntary character. Unity in the parish, just as unity in the Kingdom of God, has a wholly voluntary character, foreign to any compulsion. Each believer determines how much he donates to the church and does so without compulsion. Articles which cost money—candles, *prospora*, etc.—are purchased voluntarily. The collection plate is passed around the church for voluntary contributions. And everything which has to do with prayer must likewise rest upon the same clear and strictly voluntary terms.

It is customary to pay for a service of "need" (*moleben, panikhida*, house blessing, etc.). But not everyone realizes that this is a donation on the occasion of this service, and not a fee paid for the service. To "pay for" the service is not right, since every service is effective only by virtue of the Holy Spirit, which is present in it, and it is not possible to receive or to give the Spirit of God for any price; only through selfless prayer, through faith and love does it descend upon men. A genuine "service of need" is worth infinitely more than any material payment, more than all worldly treasure. Conversely, an insincere, hypocritical service of need not only is worth nothing, but it is a sin before God, both for the layman and, even more so, for the priest.

How can one put a price on a priest's blessing, a blessing which gives grace to the world, health, and repels evil spirits? Quite clearly, it is a gift of God, and it can only be regarded as a gift, just as all prayer is a gift, *for the Spirit Itself maketh intercession for us with utterances...*, testifies the Apostle. All attempts to buy the Spirit, or to pay for it, are doomed not only to failure, but are rejected outright by God. It is enough to remember Simon Magus, who wanted to pay the Apostles for grace—and what did he hear from the Apostle?

For this reason, in every case one must clearly distinguish between 1) prayer, mystery, blessing, i.e., "need" (need of the spirit), and 2) monetary donation, connected to this need.

May no one fall into despondency and end this earthly life on account of poverty, of material failure; may no one attach profit motives of any kind to voluntary contributions and acts of love for one's neighbor. Let people give whatever they are able to the Church, but let them keep in mind that the Church gives everything free of charge, for it gives what cannot be bought—eternal life in a new, imperishable world. If we understand this, our struggle will indeed be a struggle against militant materialism. And we shall strike the ancient serpent squarely on the head. Otherwise, if we should merely sprinkle this serpent with verbal husks, without Christian deeds and feelings, he will swallow even that remnant of the faithful that still remain on earth.

In the Church and near the Church—this is the field of spiritual battle, a battle of God against the worldly antagonist, who reigns over valuables and over people of this dying age. At the foundation of our Orthodox parish life, may there lie not only a common spirit of sacrifice, but also our common service to God: in our actions and in our hearts.

# **What Happens When You Don't Go to Confession?**

Fr. Anthony Salzman, St. Philothea, Athens, GA

The soul is like a little plant. At Baptism it is germinated and brought to life. With Holy Communion and the Divine services it begins to send out roots and push through the hard ground of our "fleshly self". Through much work and effort a little sprout begins to develop and sees the light of day. Now here is where it gets tricky. If we do nothing and don't attend to this little sprout it will certainly wither and die. It takes attention and care to give it the right amount of sunlight and water to nurture it and help it grow. There are all kinds of pestilence and diseases that could easily destroy this vulnerable seedling. Weeds can choke it off and steal its nutrients. Worms can devour its leaves and render it unable to collect light and grow. This tiny little plant needs protection and care in order to grow and flourish and one day bear fruit. It doesn't just break through the ground and pop out an orange or an apple. That takes a lot of time and effort; so too with the soul.

The soul is a very sensitive organ. It reacts to the negative stimuli in our environment and responds in a positive way to those things that feed it and nurture it. Our society is full of examples of what happens to a soul that has not been cared for and nurtured. We find all kinds of distortions and dysfunctional relationships that emanate from an unhealthy soul. Rarer still are the souls that will support and sustain others in their spiritual life in order to bear fruit. We call the possessors of these souls "Saints".

A key element in the nurturing of the soul is the holy Sacrament of "Confession", sometimes called the Sacrament of Penance. In any case it is the Sacrament that God has given to us to help us maintain a healthy soul. Through the Sacrament of Confession we are able to remove the layers of dust that settles on the greenhouse roof and blocks the sunlight and cuts off the source of our growth. Without sunlight, that is the light of Christ, our growth is stunted and we wither and die. It does not need to be major sins that cut off the light of Christ. The accumulated dust over the years that builds up on the greenhouse roof of our soul slowly and imperceptibly diminishes the amount of sunlight reaching our soul. Confession removes the layers of dirt and provides the right conditions for growth, accelerated growth.

Some people are afraid or embarrassed to go to confession. Here are a few thoughts that will help us overcome this reluctance and put us back in the proper environment for spiritual growth:

- First of all, it is to God that we are confessing. That is why we call it a 'Sacrament' or 'mystery', because God is present with us, hearing our confession as we come humbly before Him to take responsibility for our lives and open ourselves totally to Him in truth and humility. We still speak to the priest as a fellow human being, but God is listening and receiving our confession. Only in this way can we truly remove the elements that inhibit growth in our lives and have a truly healthy soul.
- The second thing that will help is finding the spiritual father "where our soul rests". It is an intimate thing to share the deepest secrets of our soul with another person, and we must have full confidence in their integrity, their love for us, and their discernment. The role of spiritual father is not one we should take lightly. It requires of the spiritual father great care and wisdom to help someone along their spiritual journey to becoming like God.
- Thirdly we must prepare properly. If we look at ourselves by our standards we probably come off as pretty good people, but this kind of self examination begins and ends with us and is hardly objective. To truly have self examination we must hold ourselves to the standard God has for us,

and this is found in the 10 Commandments and in the Commandments of Christ concerning prayer, fasting, not judging, etc. This standard examines thoughts, motives, and movements of the hearts and from it we comprehend a more objective picture of ourselves. It is hard to treat a disease that has been mis-diagnosed.

- Also, we must not be afraid to expose our entire being to God's healing light. If we leave a stone unturned, it only gives Satan a place to hide from the piercing light of Truth, i.e. Christ. If we confess everything before God, He is able to forgive us. This is deliverance from slavery, bondage, mediocrity and complacency.
- Lastly, when we confess, we gather spiritual strength and insight into the working of our heart, and are better prepared to face the temptations of the world and live a more dynamic Christian life. We also have an advocate who is thinking and praying on our behalf, the father confessor.

If we do not confess before Christ, then we cut ourselves off from the Source of Life.

If we continue to approach the Communion cup in this state then what is meant for life becomes a source of judgment for our not discerning the holiness of God, and properly preparing. If we abstain from Holy Communion out of reluctance to confess or out of negligence or laziness then we open ourselves to demons because the house is empty and Christ is not on the throne of our heart.

As St. Cyril of Jerusalem tells us, "The devil then is the first author of sin, and the father of the wicked: and this is the Lord's saying, not mine, that the devil sinneth from the beginning: none sinned before him...but having been created good, he has of his own free will become a devil, and received that name from his action. For being an Archangel he was afterwards called a devil from his slandering: from being a good servant of God he has become rightly named Satan; for "Satan" is interpreted "the adversary."

St. Anthony and the Desert Fathers and Mothers make clear strongly and emphatically the nature of our adversary and his attacks on us. The devil hates goodness and pushes us away from God. The further away we get from God the more disturbed and distorted our lives become. To the point that we let shame, the result of our knowledge of good and evil in our hearts, keep us away from the healing medicine of the Sacrament of Confession and the relief of a clean heart.

## REFLECTION

**A Christian is similar to betrothed maiden. As a betrothed maiden continually thinks about her betrothed, so does the Christian continually think about Christ. Even if the betrothed is far away beyond ten hills, it is all the same, the maiden behaves as though he is constantly there; by her and with her. She thinks about him, sings to him, talks about him, dreams about him and prepares gifts for him. In the same way a Christian behaves toward Christ. As the betrothed maiden knows that she first must leave and distance herself from the home where she was born in order to meet and totally unite with her betrothed, so the Christian knows that even he cannot totally unite with Christ until death separates him from the body, i.e., from the material home in which his soul, resided and grew from birth.**

# In Defense of Christendom

**Having ignored its inheritance, Europe wonders why its house is falling apart.**

WSJ, By BRET STEPHENS, Oct. 19, 2015

The death of Europe is in sight. Still hazy and not yet inevitable, but nevertheless visible and drawing nearer—like a distant planet in the lens of an approaching satellite. Europe is reaching its end not because of its sclerotic economy, or stagnant demography, or the dysfunctions of the superstate. Nor is the real cause the massive influx of Middle Eastern and African migrants. Those desperate people are just the latest stiff breeze against the timber of a desiccated civilization.

Europe is dying because it has become morally incompetent. It isn't that Europe stands for nothing. It's that it stands for shallow things, shallowly. Europeans believe in human rights, tolerance, openness, peace, progress, the environment, pleasure. These beliefs are all very nice, but they are also secondary.

What Europeans no longer believe in are the things from which their beliefs spring: Judaism and Christianity; liberalism and the Enlightenment; martial pride and capability; capitalism and wealth. Still less do they believe in fighting or sacrificing or paying or even arguing for these things. Having ignored and undermined their own foundations, they wonder why their house is coming apart.

What is Europe? It is Greece not Persia; Rome not Carthage; Christendom not the caliphate. These distinctions are fundamental. To say that Europe is a civilization apart is not to say it is better or worse. It is merely to say: This is us and that is you. Nor is it to say that Europe ought to be a closed civilization. It merely needs to be one that doesn't dissolve on contact with the strangers it takes into its midst.

That's what makes the diplomacy of Angela Merkel, undisputed regent of European foreign policy, so odd and disconcerting. The German chancellor leads a party called the Christian Democratic Union, one of the chief purposes of which is to rally the German right to a reasonable conservatism.

Yet there she was in Istanbul on Sunday, offering a deal in which Europe would agree to visa-free travel for Turks in Europe starting next year, along with quicker movement on Turkish membership in the European Union, if only Ankara will do more to resettle Syrian and other refugees in their own country. Europe would also foot the bill.

This is *machtspolitik* in reverse, in which the chancellor is begging small favors from weaker powers on temporary matters in exchange for broad concessions with far-reaching ramifications. There are 75 million Turks, whose per capita income doesn't match that of Panamanians. The country is led by an elected Islamist with an autocratic streak, prone to anti-Semitic outbursts, who openly supports Hamas, denies the Armenian genocide, jails journalists in record numbers, and orchestrates Soviet-style show trials against his political opponents. Turkey also has borders with Syria, Iraq and Iran. These would become Europe's borders in the event of Turkish membership.

This is the country Ms. Merkel proposes to bring into the bosom of Europe. Her apologists will say she's being disingenuous, but that only compounds the disgrace of her overture.

It also compounds the danger. Could Europe's liberal political traditions, its religious and cultural heritage, long survive a massive influx of Muslim immigrants, in the order of tens of millions of people? No. Not given Europe's frequently unhappy experience with much of its Muslim population.



Not when you have immigrant groups that resist assimilation and host countries that make only tentative civic demands.

And not when a heedless immigration policy, conducted in fits of moral self-congratulation, leads to the inevitable reaction. In Switzerland on Sunday, a plurality of voters cast ballots for the Swiss People's Party, known mainly for its anti-immigrant stance. Its sister parties throughout Europe are also the political beneficiaries of the migrant influx, trafficking on legitimate grievances against the postmodern state to peddle illiberal cures. Few things are as dangerous to democracy as a populist with half a case.

It says something about the politics of our day that this column will be condemned as beyond the moral pale. Such is the tenor of the times that it is no longer possible to assert without angry contradiction that Europe cannot be Europe if it is not true to its core inheritance. This is the marriage of reason and revelation that produced a civilization of technological mastery tempered by human decency.

"It is commendable that the West is trying to be more open, to be more understanding of the values of outsiders, but it has lost the capacity for self-love," a prominent German theologian noted about a decade ago. "All that it sees in its own history is the despicable and the destructive; it is no longer able to perceive what is great and pure. What Europe needs is a new self-acceptance, a self-acceptance that is critical and humble, if it truly wishes to survive."

That's Joseph Ratzinger, better known as Benedict XVI. He's out of fashion, which makes him that much more worth hearing.

## **On the Passion of Envy – St. Basil the Great**

**"If someone were to possess thousands of acres upon the earth, and magnificent homes, and herds of every kind of animal, and to exercise absolute authority among men, not even then would he enjoy them forever. Instead, although renowned for these things for a brief span of time, he will - in his turn - leave behind his abundance to others, when he has been placed under a little bit of dirt. And what is more - in many cases even before he comes to the tomb, even before he departs from here - he will see his goods passing over to others — even perhaps to his enemies."**

**"Since these pleasures are excessive and all together alien to us, and cannot become the personal possession of anyone, it is best to run past them with our eyes closed. Yet it is fitting to expend great care on those things which are truly ours. But what is truly ours? The soul: by which we live, which is light and intelligent, and needs none of those things that weigh us down; and the body also, which the Creator gives to the soul as a vehicle for living this life. And so, this is a human being: a nous [the eye, or energy, of the soul] united to a suitable and fitting body. This is what the All-Wise Artisan of the universe forms in the wombs of mothers. This is what the time of travail brings to light from those dark inner chambers. This is what has been appointed to rule over the earth. It was for this [human being] that creation was spread out as a place to practice virtue [for example, faith, hope, love, kindness, gentleness, long-suffering, courage, bravery, self control, almsgiving]. It was for this [human being] that a law was laid down, to imitate the Artificer in His power and to bring about - upon the earth - a reflection of the good order in Heaven."**

**"In addition, anyone can discover that the virtues become our possession when, through the diligent practice [of them], they are woven into our nature. Nor is it their custom to abandon us while we toil upon the earth, unless we drive them away, willingly and forcibly, by giving entrance to vices. As we hasten to the next life, they speed us forward. They rank the one who possesses them with the angels. They shine forever under the eyes of the Creator. But as for riches, political power, worldly distinction, self-indulgence, and the whole throng of such things that increase daily through our lack of understanding, they neither enter into this life with us nor accompany anyone departing from this world. Rather, that saying, uttered by the just man of old, remains true and valid for every human being: *'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return'* [Job 1:21]."**