

Theology

St. Gregory of Nyssa's Ascetic Treatise "On Virginity" and the Publication of the Georgian Translation

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ABSTRACT. The paper deals with the Georgian translation of the ascetic work "On Virginity" of the great ecclesiastical figure and theologian St. Gregory of Nyssa (331-394). The particular importance of the monument is determined by the profound theological teaching about ascetic activity, namely the life in virginity as a similitude of divine and incorporeal nature. A detailed comparative analysis of the Greek original and its Georgian translation displayed the translator's spiritual affinity to the author of the work. The importance of the Georgian translation is also increased by the fact that it is slightly edited by the great church father St. George the Athonite (1009-1065). © 2013 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

Key words: *ascetic life, virginity, incorporeal, passion, purity, a luminary, Divine contemplation, sin, Deity, soul, grace.*

St. Gregory of Nyssa (331-394) is a great ecclesiastical figure and theologian. His ascetic treatise *On Virginity* includes a systematic doctrine of teaching about life in a state of virginity and asceticism. It gives a philosophical and theological analysis of the essence of virginity and is a work of great importance as a source of insight into ascetic life. The translation of this work into Georgian was made by St. Euthymius the Athonite (955-1028), a luminary of the Georgian Orthodox Church, who lived and worked with great zeal at the Iviron Monastery on Mt. Athos. The particular importance of the monument is determined by the profound theological teaching about ascetic activity, namely the life in virginity as a similitude of divine and incorporeal nature. Like the origi-

nal, the translation is the result of spiritual contemplation and the grace of the vision of God. It is this similitude that accounts for the aim of this work: to study the deeply spiritual vision of the two great ecclesiastical figures – St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Euthymius the Athonite – in a systematic way, through notes and scholia characteristic of philological and theological, particularly, ascetic doctrine; and to demonstrate that despite the difference in form between the original and its translation, they constitute a single teaching in their essence and spirit. It is for the first time that the Georgian translation of the ascetic work *On Virginity* of St. Gregory of Nyssa has been published [1]. The importance of the Georgian translation is also increased by the fact that it was

slightly edited by the great church father St. George the Athonite (1009-1065).

The Georgian translation [1] consists of an introduction and four chapters.

Chapter I [1] is divided into two sub-chapters: 1) the theological essence of St Gregory of Nyssa's *On Virginity* and 2) different publications of this work and the history of its study. The first sub-chapter covers St. Gregory's structure of his treatise. It is noteworthy that St. Gregory of Nyssa wrote an introduction in order to make it clear from the beginning that the goal of this treatise was to create in its readers a passion for life according to excellence. St. Gregory of Nyssa aims to teach his readers to live righteously and to show them that virginity or ascetic activity is a necessary door of entrance to the holier life. *On Virginity* consists of 23 chapters, the title of each chapter indicating the main topic discussed in it; the title of the first chapter – 'Virginity is the highest of all praising' – expresses the essence of the whole work.

In the first sub-chapter of Chapter I, the theological meaning of St. Gregory's 23 chapters is discussed. The analysis suggests that these chapters contain the teaching on the essence of virginity, which is represented as a similitude of divine and incorporeal nature, as, according to St. Gregory, virginity is a characteristic feature of that nature.

According to the ecclesiastical teaching, marriage, which is one of the seven sacraments, is represented as a blessed union between a woman and a man. St. Gregory dwells on the difficulties connected with marriage – it is said that he himself had also been married for some time. The great Cappadocian church father maintains that, for a man absorbed in worldly concerns and affairs, it is very hard to live a life elevated above carnality and passions; he analyses the passionless state of the spirit and purity of body and, in this context, describes the way chosen by Elijah the Prophet and John the Baptist. Here the great Cappadocian gives his explanation of what a pious spirit should seek and what the way of ap-

proaching God, the true goodness, is. According to St. Gregory, the vision of original beauty can only be obtained by deliverance from carnal passions and by leading a life in chastity and virtue, which can be fully achieved only through virginity. He stresses that virginity prevails over death or is not within the power of death. Then he writes on the punishment of those who are even slightly beyond the bounds of virtue, noting that goodness lacking in even one virtue is imperfect. He contends that anyone who wishes to succeed in virginity must learn from those experienced in asceticism.

The second sub-chapter of Chapter I, entitled "The Publications of the Work and the History of Its Study", reviews the most important publications of the treatise. Its first translation into Latin was published in 1562, earlier than the Greek original (1574). Then followed several publications in Greek and other languages; the bilingual Greek-Latin edition was published in Paris in 1615; texts in Greek and in Latin were published again in the middle of the 19th century (PG); the translation into Russian appeared in 1865, followed in 1893 by a translation into English, and in 1949, into Spanish. There were also other translations. The first scholarly edition of the Greek text, accompanied by very important research, was published only in 1952 in the series established by Werner Jaeger: "Works by Gregory of Nyssa" (GN 8, 1, pp. 217-343). As a result of studying the existing Greek manuscripts two publications of the text were distinguished. The Georgian translation is published for the first time with the present work [1].

The material in Chapter II [1], "The Georgian Manuscripts Containing the Work of St. Gregory of Nyssa", shows that the translation of *On Virginity* into Georgian has survived as a full version in two copies: P3 dated 1040, a copy made in the Calypso Georgian monastery, Antiochia, and presently kept in the Manuscripts Department of the St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Studies; and Ath. 39 dated to the 11th century, copied in the Georgian monastery on Mount Athos and presently preserved there, in the

repository of Georgian manuscripts. The first nine pages (Chapters I-III) are extant in one more copy – A108, dated to the 11th-12th centuries. The four copies dated to the 18th-19th centuries (A394, H2350, S3661, S139) only contain the introduction. Chapter II offers a detailed analysis of the first three copies (two of them containing the full text and the third one containing chapters I-III). It also deals with the notes that provide information about the time and place of translation into Georgian of the works of St. Gregory of Nyssa, and about those who translated or copied them.

Chapter III [1] is dedicated to the linguistic analysis of the Georgian translation. The published text is based on the three above-mentioned copies (P3, Ath. 39, A108) and deals with their orthographical, morphological and syntactical features. It describes how the changes which occurred in the literary language during the transitional period of the 11th century influenced writing, including this translation. The text for publication was identified on the basis of the classical standards of Old Georgian. The initial text, which proved to be the text given in P3, was determined as a result of linguistic analysis. Ath. 39 was copied from that text directly or from one of its manuscript copies. It became known that the initial text of Ath. 39 was edited by George the Athonite, the great ecclesiastical figure and translator of the 11th century. That edited text is given in A108.

It is supposed that George the Athonite was the editor of Ath. 39 because, along with St. Gregory of Nyssa's treatise, this manuscript contains a number of other works copied in George the Athonite's handwriting. The supposition may be confirmed as accurate also by comparing this handwriting with the manuscript text by Gregory of Nyssa contained in Ath. 39. Moreover, this conclusion is supported by George the Athonite's competent efforts to bring some sections in the translation by Euthymius the Athonite closer to the Greek original, to avoid misinterpretation by the reader. Such treatment was the main aim of George the Athonite while editing the already ex-

isting translations. Finally it is also noteworthy that only a renowned translator like George the Athonite would dare to correct the translation performed by Euthymius. The above chapter gives examples of how the edited texts of Ath. 39 were classified into several groups.

Chapter IV [1] – On Virginit, translated by Euthymius the Athonite – represents an organic continuation of Chapter III. After getting familiar with this chapter, it will become clear for the readers why Euthymius the Athonite's translation was edited by George the Athonite.

Euthymius the Athonite's method of translation is characterized by a creative approach to the original. A deep knowledge of the Greek language and the grace of God enabled the translator, unlike dogmatic texts, to apply the methods of extension, reduction and free translation. The few examples cited in the text make it obvious that there is a creative co-authorship of the translator with the author of the original text.

St. Gregory of Nyssa's On Virginit is one of the most important ascetic works. The main translation principles of Euthymius the Athonite have been applied in translating the text we have analyzed.

St. Euthymius the Athonite gained an insight into St. Gregory of Nyssa's profound teaching on virginit. He did not avoid extending or shortening the author's teaching about the superiority of virginit to secular life. All the interpolations into the text aimed at helping the readers to fully comprehend that extremely important ascetic work. The Holy Father tried to preserve the harmony of philosophical-theological thinking and of the highest spiritual nature of the original. The great Athonite father in some cases applied the method of extension that was revealed in not merely adding one or two extra words, but inserting whole passages, which aimed at interpreting some essential aspects of the ecclesiastical teaching. Despite the method of free translation, which implies both extension and reduction of a text by different methods, he never changed the main contents and

meaning of the original. The translation also reflected the translator's personal attitude to the teaching thoroughly covered in the original. It can be said that, together with the original author, the translator guides the reader towards understanding how great an advantage ascetic activity is, which necessarily implies virginity in life.

His own ascetic experience made it possible for Euthymius the Athonite to gain a deep insight into the essence of life in virginity and to express the teaching of the Bishop of Nyssa very precisely. Obviously, Euthymius the Athonite was himself richly endowed with the perception of such immortal beauty that can only be achieved through true faith, purity, fulfillment of the commandments of God and, above all, virginity, i.e. monastic life. Naturally, it must have been with the help of the Holy Spirit and by a deep knowledge of theology that he was able to perform the translation that was neither too far from the original nor too literal, since word-by-word translation could have sounded artificial and thus made this extremely important ascetic work difficult to read.

As a result of the research carried out in the present work it has become possible to systematize the material according to the approach of Euthymius the Athonite, as a theologian and translator, to the quotations from the Holy Scripture (Chapter V: "Quotations from the Holy Scripture"). The main conclusions are as follows:

1) Based on the Georgian translation of the Holy Scripture, Euthymius the Athonite completed some quotations cited by St. Gregory of Nyssa in his treatise. (Deut. 6:5; Ps. 119:5; Mat. 22:37; II Pet. 2:18; Tit. 2:13; Jn. 1:18) [2].

2) In accordance with the Greek text of the Holy Scripture cited by St. Gregory of Nyssa, Euthymius the Athonite provided new translations of certain clauses of the Holy Scripture. Sometimes the changes were insignificant, he merely replaced words by their synonyms, (e.g. in Ps. 18:2-3; Eccles. 4:10; II Cor. 12:4 he writes "*esma... usmenelni*" [1] ("heard... unheard") instead of "*esmnes... utkumelni*" ("heard... inexpress-

ible"); I Tim. 4:2 the use of hendiadys "*arian dasjil da damtsuar gonebita*" [1] ("having their own conscience punished and seared"); in some cases the changes were more substantial, which rendered the context more comprehensible for the reader (e.g. in I Cor. 7:35; Eph. 2:12; Heb. 13:16; etc.).

3) Sometimes Euthymius avoids the translation of certain quotations cited in the work of St. Gregory of Nyssa. On the one hand, he did so when the content of those quotations had already been mentioned in the context and there was no need to repeat it. On the other hand, Euthymius did not translate the quotations when, in accordance with the context, there was no particular necessity of it (Gen. 1:31; Dan. 7:10; II Cor. 5:16; II Cor. 6:4).

4) There was a single case when Euthymius the Athonite extended the quotation cited by St. Gregory of Nyssa in the form of a commentary. This seems to have been aimed at interpreting the contextual meaning of the quotation (Mt. 13:43).

5) In certain cases St. Euthymius, clarifying the main content of the citation from the Holy Scripture in the treatise of St. Gregory of Nyssa, extended the appropriate text with one word (Jn. 1,18; I Tim. 4:2).

The above analysis makes it clear that St. Euthymius the Athonite, a luminary of the Georgian Orthodox Church, treated the text he translated in a versatile way.

The present publication is supplemented with the text (78 pages), commentary (53 pages) and a terminological dictionary.

The commentary explains a number of key words and whole passages to render the teaching of the great ecclesiastical figure St. Gregory of Nyssa fully comprehensible for the reader. In some cases, along with the Old Georgian words and phrases, Greek, English, Russian, and French translations have been provided. The commentary is aimed at making it easier for the reader to gain insight into this extremely important ascetic work. Words which the reader may find difficult to understand have been explained in accordance with the ecclesiastical and ascetic teach-

ing. When there is a considerable difference between the Greek original and its translation into Old Georgian, a possible explanation of such difference has been provided. Along with St. Gregory of Nyssa's teachings, the commentary contains extracts from the works of other ecclesiastical fathers, to emphasize complete agreement of the great Cappadocian father - St. Gregory of Nyssa's teaching with the holy ecclesiastical teaching – the Unchangeable Law of God.

The terminological dictionary [1] contains 1267 lexical units. Each lexical unit together with its Greek equivalent is given with the relevant context from the text. Greek equivalents are also given in such cases when their meaning does not fully cover the meaning of the Georgian words. This is one more way to fully characterize Euthymius the Athonite's method of translation.

Proceeding from the importance of the treatise, I think it would be expedient to say a few words about the content of the work of Gregory of Nyssa. In the introduction, the author of this ascetic treatise speaks about how without Virginity it is impossible to find quiet for Divine contemplation: "The object of this treatise is to create in its readers a passion for life according to excellence. There are many distractions, to use the word of the Divine Apostle, incident to secular life; and so this treatise would suggest, as a necessary door of entrance to the holier life, the calling of Virginity; seeing that, while it is not easy in the entanglements of this secular life to find quiet for that of Divine contemplation, those on the other hand who have bid farewell to its troubles can with promptitude, and without distraction, pursue assiduously their higher studies". St. Gregory praises virginity and says that attaining it is impossible for those who feel the world's anxieties. He interprets for his readers that the faculty of desire that we have received from our Maker should be directed toward holiness, and that true virginity is free from any stain of sin: "Now, whereas all advice is in itself weak, and mere words of exhortation will not make the task of recommending what is beneficial easier to anyone, unless

he has first given a noble aspect to that which he urges on his hearer, this discourse will accordingly begin with the praises of virginity; the exhortation will come at the end; moreover, since the beauty in anything gains lustre by the contrast with its opposite, it is requisite that mention should be made of the vexations of everyday life. Then it will be entirely in the plan of this work to introduce a sketch of contemplative life, and to prove the impossibility of anyone attaining it who feels the world's anxieties. In the devotee bodily desire has become weak; and so there will follow an inquiry as to the true object, for which (and which only) we have received from our Maker our power of desiring. When this has received all possible illustration, it will seem to follow naturally that we should consider some method to attain it; and the true virginity, which is free from any stain of sin, will be found to fit such a purpose".

St. Gregory of Nyssa in his introduction [2] makes clear that the examples of those Saints who have gained their glory in celibacy have always had a great impact on those who would likewise choose a life of virginity. The author of the treatise mentions a most godly bishop who, according to Gregory of Nyssa "alone could be the master in such instructions" (p. 343). Despite the fact that the name of the holy father is not given, we can presume that the author attributes these words to Basil the Great, prominent Byzantine Church Father and Theologian, the brother of Gregory of Nyssa.

In the first chapter [2] the author of the treatise presents virginity as a great virtue that makes the followers of it "without blemish and holy". These epithets used by him we encounter in the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians (5:27) in connection with God. Taking into consideration all of this, St. Gregory concludes: "Now if the achievement of this saintly virtue consists in making one without blemish and holy, and these epithets are adopted in their first and fullest force to glorify the incorruptible Deity, what greater praise of virginity can there be than thus to be shown in a manner deifying those

who share in her mysteries, so that they become partakers of His glory Who is in actual truth the only Holy and Blameless One; their purity and their incorruptibility being the means of bringing them into relationship with Him?" (p.344).

St. Gregory of Nyssa wants his readers to understand that the virtue of virginity is extremely important and that the human tongue is unable to praise it sufficiently. That is why he puts forward an example through which everyone can realize that all attempts to praise this virtue are useless, for it is above praise: "So the one sufficient way of praising virginity will be to show that virtue is above praise, and to evince our admiration of it by our lives rather than by our words. A man who takes this theme for ambitious praise has the appearance of supposing that one drop of his own perspiration will make an appreciable increase of the boundless ocean, if indeed he believes, as he does, that any human words can give more dignity to so rare a grace; he must be ignorant either of his own powers or of that which he attempts to praise" (p.344).

In the second chapter [2] St. Gregory of Nyssa speaks again about the surpassing excellence of virginity. He says that this virtue is comprehended in the idea of the Father incorrupt. According to him, virginity is found in the Persons of the Holy Trinity: "Virginity is found in Him (the Father), Who has a Son and without passion has begotten Him. It is included too in the nature of this Only-begotten God, who struck the first note of all this moral innocence; it shines forth equally in His pure and passionless generation. Again a paradox; that the Son should be known to us by virginity. It is seen, too, in the inherent incorruptible purity of the Holy Spirit; for when you have named the pure and incorruptible you have named virginity" (p.344).

In the same chapter Gregory of Nyssa explains that: "Virginity though it is the property of spiritual existence and of such singular excellence, by the love of God it has been bestowed on those who have received their life from the will of the flesh and from

blood; that, when human nature has been baser by passionate inclination, it (virginity) stretches out its offer of purity like a hand to raise it up again and make it look above". After this teaching the author of the treatise speaks about the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and sheds light on why He did not come into the world by wedlock: "It was, to divulge by the manner of His Incarnation this great secret; that purity is the only complete indication of the presence of God and of His coming, and that no one can in reality secure this for himself, unless he has altogether estranged himself from the passions of the flesh. What happened in the stainless Mary when the fulness of the Godhead which was in Christ shone out through her" (p.344).

In chapter three [2] Gregory of Nyssa speaks about the vanity of this life. Every happiness in this world is ephemeral and even in the condition of wellbeing there is always pain and the expectation of death that overshadows all sorts of enjoyments. According to him even those people who live with an amount of good fortune cannot be without sorrow and pains proceeding from the fact that as the author puts it: "They are human all the time, things weak and perishing; they have to look upon the tombs of their progenitors; and so pain is inseparably bound up with their existence, if they have the least power of reflection. This continued expectancy of death, realized by no sure tokens, but hanging over them the terrible uncertainty of the future, disturbs their present joy, clouding it over with the fear of what is coming...smiles melting into tears, pain mingled with pleasure, death always hanging by expectation over the children that are born, and putting a finger upon each of the sweetest joys. Whenever the husband looks at the beloved face, that moment the fear of separation accompanies the look. If he listens to the sweet voice, the thought comes into his mind that some day he will not hear it. Whenever he is glad with gazing on her beauty, then he shudders most with the presentiment of mourning her loss" (p.346).

In chapter four [2] the author of the treatise continues speaking about the things that vanish with time. St. Gregory says: "How can a man keep for ever anything here, be his love for it never so passionate? Which of life's most cherished objects endures always? What flower of prime? What gift of strength and beauty? What wealth, or fame, or power? They all have their transient bloom, and then melt away into their opposites. Who can continue in life's prime? Whose strength lasts forever? Has not Nature made the bloom of beauty even more short-lived than the shows of spring? For they blossom in their season, and after withering for a while again revive; after another shedding they are again in leaf, and retain their beauty of today to a late prime. But Nature exhibits the human bloom only in the spring of early life; then she kills it; it is vanished in the frosts of age. All other delights also deceive the bodily eye for time, and then pass behind the veil of oblivion" (p. 350). St. Gregory considers that there is only one way to escape such earthly things: "it is, to be attached to none of these things, and to get as far away as possible from the society of this emotional and sensual world; or rather, for a man to go outside the feelings which his own body gives rise to. Then, as he does not live for the flesh, he will not be subject to the troubles of the flesh. But this amounts to living for the spirit only, and imitating all we can the employment of the world of spirits. There they neither marry, nor are given in marriage. Their work and their excellence is to contemplate the Father of all purity, and to beautify the lines of their own character from the Source of all beauty, so far as imitation of It is possible" (p.350-351).

In chapter five [2] Gregory of Nyssa speaks about the liberty of the soul from all earthly loves and purity of the body. According to the Holy Father, passionlessness of the soul should be prior to purity of the body: "virginity is the practical method in the science of the Divine life, furnishing men with the power of assimilating themselves with spiritual natures. The constant endeavour in such a course is to

prevent the nobility of the soul from being lowered by those sensual outbreaks, in which the mind no longer maintains its heavenly thoughts and upward gaze, but sinks down to the emotions belonging to the flesh and blood. How can the soul which is riveted to the pleasures of the flesh and busied with merely human longings turn a disengaged eye upon its kindred intellectual light? This evil, ignorant, and prejudiced bias towards material things will prevent it... To look with a free devoted gaze upon heavenly delights, the soul will turn itself from earth; it will not even partake of the recognized indulgences of the secular life; it will transfer all its powers of affection from material objects to the intellectual contemplation of immaterial beauty" (p. 351).

In chapter six [2] Gregory of Nyssa speaks about two prophets. The first one is Elias the prophet and the second one, John the Baptist, who baptized our Lord, Jesus Christ. According to Gregory of Nyssa, the greatness of those two prophets is preconditioned by the fact that they chose life in virginity, a special mode of life. As the author puts it: "Both, from their youth upwards, exiled themselves from human society, and in a way from human nature, in their neglect of the usual kinds of meat and drink, and their sojourn in the desert. The wants of each were satisfied by the nourishment that came in their way, so that their taste might remain simple and unspoiled, as their ears were free from any distracting noise, and their eyes from any wandering look. Thus they attained a cloudless calm of soul, and were raised to that height of Divine favour which Scripture records of each. Elias, for instance, became the dispenser of God's earthly gifts; he had the authority to close at will the uses of the sky against the sinners and to open them to the penitent. John is not said indeed to have done any miracle; but the gift in him was pronounced by Him Who sees the secrets of a man greater than any prophet's. This was so, we may presume, because both, from beginning to end, so dedicated their hearts to the Lord that they were unsullied by any earthly passion; because the love of wife or

child, or any other human call, did not intrude upon them, and they did not even think their daily sustenance worthy of anxious thought; because they showed themselves to be above any magnificence of dress, and made shift with that which chance offered them, one clothing himself in goat-skins, the other with camel's hair. It is my belief that they would not have reached to this loftiness of spirit, if marriage had softened them" (p.351).

In chapter seven [2] we can observe the author's clear teaching about the ways through which a man directs his life toward God. According to him, any person who longs for union with God must detach his mind from all worldly business. In order to make his teaching on this subject clearer the author refers to an illustration and instructs us: "the human mind, as long as its current spreads itself in all directions over the pleasures of the sense, has no power that is worth the naming of making its way toward Real Good; but once call it back and collect it upon itself, so that it may begin to move without scattering and wandering towards the activity which is congenial and natural to it, it will find no obstacle in mounting to higher things, and in grasping realities" (p.352).

In the eighth chapter [2] St. Gregory of Nyssa explains the reason why he praises virginity and not marriage which is holy, blessed, and everlasting in sight of God and His Church: "Let no one think however that herein we depreciate marriage as an institution. We are well aware that it is not a stranger to God's blessing. But since the common instincts of mankind can plead sufficiently on its behalf, instincts which prompt by a spontaneous bias to take the high road of marriage for the procreation of children, whereas Virginity in a way thwarts this natural impulse, it is a superfluous task to compose formally an Exhortation to marriage. We put forward the pleasure of it instead, as a most doughty champion on its behalf" (p.352). The author's teaching is completely in agreement with Orthodox Doctrine. In the same chapter St. Gregory of Nyssa repudates those heretics who did not obey the Law of the Church and ignore

marriage as they associate it with the sin of adultery: "Such persons "have their conscience seared with a hot iron", as the Apostle expresses it; and very truly too, considering that, deserting the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the "Doctrines of devils", they have some ulcers and blisters stamped upon their hearts, abominating God's creatures, and calling them "foul", "seducing", "mischievous", and so on. "But what have I to do to judge them that are without?" asks the Apostle. Truly those persons are outside the Court in which the words of our mysteries are spoken; they are not installed under God's roof, but in the monastery of the Evil One. They "are taken captive by him at his will". They therefore do not understand that all virtue is found in moderation, and that any declension to either side of it becomes a vice" (p.352).

In chapter nine [2] Gregory of Nyssa speaks about the impossibility for a man to be steeped in earthly pleasure and at the same time serve God in chastity. His argument is a very considerable and solid one as it is based on the Holy Scriptures: "It is impossible that one who has turned to the world and feels its anxieties, and engages his heart in the wish to please men, can fulfil that first and great commandment of the Master, "Thou shalt love God with all thy heart and with all thy strength." How can he fulfil that, when he divides his heart between God and the world, and exhausts the love which he owes to Him alone in human affections? "He that is unmarried careth for the things of the Lord; but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world" (p.354).

In chapter ten [2] the author of the treatise speaks about the beauty of the true and intellectual light. He says that: "he who by a gift of Divine inspiration can see it retains his ecstasy unexpressed in the depth of his consciousness". According to the Holy Father, comparison between the beauty of the true and intellectual light and the goods of this world would be very difficult due to the fact that spiritual and immaterial goods hugely surpass all earthly things. As he puts it: "Who compares the Sun to a little spark? Or

the vast Deep to a drop? And that tiny drop and that diminutive spark bear the same relation to the Deep and to the Sun, as any beautiful object of man's admiration does to that real beauty on the features of the First Good, of which we catch the glimpse beyond any other good. What words could be invented to show the greatness of this loss to him who suffers it? Well does the great David seem to me to express the impossibility of doing this. He has been lifted by the power of the Spirit out of himself, and sees in a blessed state of ecstasy the boundless and incomprehensible Beauty; he sees it as fully as a mortal can see who has quitted his fleshly envelopments and entered, by the mere power of thought, upon the contemplation of the spiritual and intellectual world, and in his longing to speak a word worthy of the spectacle he bursts forth with that cry, which all re-echo, "Every man a liar!" I take that to mean that any man who entrusts to language the task of presenting the ineffable Light is really and truly a liar; not because of any hatred on his part of the truth, but because of the feebleness of his instrument for expressing the thing thought of" (p.354-355).

In chapter eleven [2] the author of the treatise speaks about the essential Beauty which is the Archetype of all beauty. He instructs his readers that the necessary requirement for attaining that Beauty is purity of the soul and body: "I venture to affirm that, to one who has cleansed all the powers of his being from every form of vice, the Beauty which is essential, the source of every beauty and every good, will become visible. The visual eye, purged from its blinding humour, can clearly discern objects even on the distant sky" (p. 356); the Holy Father says that: "the God of the Universe is the only absolute, and primal, and unrivalled Beauty and Goodness. All, maybe, know that; but there are those who, as might have been expected, wish besides this to discover, if possible, a process by which we may be actually guided to it" (p.356-357). In the same chapter St. Gregory of Nyssa explains that all instructions for our guidance toward primal and unrivalled Beauty

are in the Divine books and besides that, as the author says: "many of the Saints cast the refulgence of their own lives, like lamps, upon the path for those who are "walking with God" (p. 357).

In the twelfth chapter [2] St. Gregory of Nyssa speaks about the prelapsarian state of a man: "this creature, I say, did not in the course of his first production have united to the very essence of his nature the liability to passion and to death ... Being the image and the likeness... of the Power which rules all things, man kept also in the matter of a Free-Will this likeness to Him whose Will is over all. He was enslaved to no outward necessity whatever; his feeling towards that which pleased him depended only on his own private judgment; he was free to choose whatever he liked; and so he was a free agent, though circumvented with cunning, when he drew upon himself that disaster which now overwhelms humanity. He became himself the discoverer of evil, but he did not therein discover what God had made; for God did not make death. Man became, in fact, himself the fabricator, to a certain extent, and the craftsman of evil" (p. 357).

In the same chapter the author of the treatise once again explains to his readers that the first man could have chosen good and not evil. Disobedience towards God's commandment made him a slave of sin which was not in his nature. St. Gregory says: "So the first man on the earth, or rather he who generated evil in man, had for choice the Good and the Beautiful lying all around him in the very nature of things; yet he wilfully cut out a new way for himself against this nature, and in the act of turning away from virtue, which was his own free act, he created the usage of evil" (p. 357). The Holy Father puts special emphasis on the results of the sin: "Then that godly beauty of the soul which was an imitation of the Archetypal Beauty, like fine steel blackened with the vicious rust, preserved no longer the glory of its familiar essence, but was disfigured with the ugliness of sin. This thing so great and precious, as the Scripture calls him, this being man, has fallen from his proud birthright. ... so

this creature has fallen into the mire of sin and lost the blessing of being an image of the imperishable Deity; he has clothed himself instead with a perishable and foul resemblance to something else; and this Reason counsels him to put away again by washing it off in the cleansing water of this calling” (p. 357-358).

Alongside all of this impressive teaching about man, St. Gregory says that: “this likeness to the divine is not our work at all; it is not the achievement of any faculty of man; it is the great gift of God bestowed upon our nature at the very moment of our birth; human efforts can only go so far as to clear away the filth of sin, and so cause the buried beauty of the soul to shine forth again” (p. 358).

The holy father points out that: “the Divine good is not something apart from our nature, and is not removed far away from those who have the will to seek it; it is in fact within each of us, ignored indeed, and unnoticed while it is stifled beneath the cares and pleasures of life, but found again whenever we can turn our power of conscious thinking towards it” (p. 358).

In chapter thirteen [2] St. Gregory of Nyssa again and again praises the virtue of virginity and says that virginity is above death and mortality. The holy father makes a comment on the following words of St. David the Prophet: “He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children” (Ps. 113:9). He further says: “Truly a joyful mother is the virgin mother who by the operation of the Spirit conceives the deathless children, and who is called by the prophet barren because of her modesty only. This life, then, which is stronger than the power of death, is, to those who think, the preferable one. The physical bringing of children into the world - I speak without wishing to offend - is as much a starting-point of death as of life; because from the moment of birth the process of dying commences. But those who by virginity have desisted from this process have drawn within themselves the boundary line of death, and by their own deed have checked his ad-

vance; they have made themselves, in fact, a frontier between life and death, and a barrier too, which thwarts him. If, then, death cannot pass beyond virginity, but finds his power checked and shattered there, it is demonstrated that virginity is a stronger thing than death; and that body is rightly named undying which does not lend its service to a dying world, nor brook to become the instrument of a succession of dying creatures. In such a body the long unbroken career of decay and death, which has intervened between the first man and the lives of virginity which have been led, is interrupted” (p. 359).

According to St. Gregory, death reigned from Adam to the Holy Virgin, Mother of Jesus Christ, but it (death, G. Z.) found in virginity a barrier, to pass which was an impossible feat, because as he says: “when he (death) came to Her (the Holy Virgin, G. Z.) and dashed his forces against the fruit of Her virginity as against a rock, that he was shattered to pieces upon her, so in every soul which passes through this life in the flesh under the protection of virginity, the strength of death is in a manner broken and annulled, for he does not find the places upon which he may fix his sting” (p. 359-360).

In the fourteenth chapter [2] St. Gregory of Nyssa speaks about the perfection of the grace of virginity and the results that necessarily follow from it. He explains that the subjugation of the body is not a single achievement of virginity, but a right condition of the soul. The holy father says: “that soul which cleaves to her Master so as to become with Him one spirit, and by the compact of a wedded life has staked the love of all her heart and all her strength on Him alone - that soul will no more commit any other of the offenses contrary to salvation, than imperil her union with Him by cleaving to fornication” (p. 361); In the same chapter the author of the treatise points out: “the virtues are not disunited from each other, and that to grasp the principle of any one virtue will be impossible to one who has not seized that which underlines the rest, and that the man who shows one virtue in his character will necessarily show them all.

Therefore, by contraries, the depravation of anything in our moral nature will extend to the whole virtuous life" (p. 361).

In chapter fifteen [2] St. Gregory of Nyssa speaks about spiritual marriage. In order to make his teaching clear regarding the object of such union, he refers to the analogy of ordinary marriage. The Holy Father says that if a lady who is in wedlock with her lawful husband remains chaste and devoted to her husband, even if she is besieged by profligate lovers they can find no vantage ground for their attack upon her. But if she defiles the marriage bed for even a single one of them, she would rightly be subjected to condemnation. St. Gregory instructs those who have assumed for themselves a life of virginity: "So the soul whose life is in God will find her pleasure in no single one of those things which make a beautiful show to deceive her. If she were, in some fit of weakness, to admit the defilement to her heart, she would herself have broken the covenant of her spiritual marriage" (p. 361); In the same chapter St. Gregory defines the main obligation of monastics: "The chaste and thoughtful virgin must sever herself from any affection which can in any way impart contagion to her soul; she must keep herself pure for her Husband who has married her, "not having spot or blemish or any such thing" (p. 361).

In chapter sixteen [2] the author of the treatise speaks about the right path of an ascetic life and that virtuous reason and not emotion should control the course of life. The Holy Father gives us the following teaching: "the commandment of the Lord is exceedingly far-shining, so as to "enlighten the eyes" even of "the simple", declaring that good cleaveth only unto God. But God is not pain any more than He is pleasure; He is not cowardice any more than boldness; He is not fear, nor anger, nor any other emotion which sways the untutored soul, but, as the Apostle says, He is Very Wisdom and Sanctification, Truth and Joy and Peace, and everything like that" (p. 362). In the same chapter St. Gregory says that God Himself is the Sum of virtue and that: "He therefore who

watches over the life and the sanity of the soul will confine himself to the moderation of truth; he will continue without touching either of those opposite states which run along-side virtue" (p. 362).

In chapter seventeen [2] St. Gregory's teaching directs his readers towards a life of virtue, that is to say, a life of virginity: "let the virtuous life have for its substructure the love of virginity; but upon this let every result of virtue be reared. If virginity is believed to be a vastly precious thing and to have a divine look (as indeed is the case, as well as men believe of it), yet, if the whole life does not harmonize with this perfect note, and it be marred by the succeeding discord of the soul, this thing becomes but "the jewel of gold in the swine's snout", or "the pearl that is trodden under the swine's feet" (p. 363).

In chapter eighteen [2] the author of the treatise instructs one on the proper uses of the faculties of a man's soul: "we must therefore provide this balance in all feeling; the true sobriety of mind is naturally able to supply it; and if one had to find an exact definition of this sobriety, one might declare absolutely, that it amounts to our ordered control, by dint of wisdom and prudence, over every emotion of the soul. Moreover, such a condition in the soul will be no longer in need of any laborious method to attain to the high and heavenly realities; it will accomplish with the greatest ease that which erewhile seemed so unattainable; it will grasp the object of its search as a natural consequence of rejecting the opposite attractions" (p. 364). In the same chapter St. Gregory says: "Let no one suppose that the prize of virginity is so insignificant and so easily won as that; as if one little observance of the flesh could settle so vital a matter. But we have seen that every man who doeth a sin is the servant of sin; so that a declension towards vice in any act, or in any practice whatever, makes a slave, and still more, a branded slave, of the man, covering him through sin's lashes with bruises and seared spots" (p. 364). The holy father in his teaching frequently refers to the prophets and quotes their words in order to

make clear the importance of purity of the soul and the body in a life of virginity.

In chapter nineteen [2] St. Gregory of Nyssa represents Miriam the prophetess (Exod.15:20), the sister of Moses, as the prefigure of virginity, as after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, as it is written: “she (Miriam, G.Z.) took in her hand a dry and sounding timbrel and conducted the women’s dance. By this timbrel the story may mean to imply virginity, as first perfected by Miriam” (p. 365); The holy father supposes that the sister of Moses was a virgin.

In the same chapter St. Gregory mentions Paul the Apostle and says that despite the fact that from his youth he had chosen a life of virginity and was never married, he brought: “to the birth whole cities and nations; not the Corinthians and Galatians only whom by his travailings he moulded for the Lord, but all in the wide circuit from Jerusalem to Illyricum; his children filled the world, “begotten” by him in Christ through the Gospel” (p. 365).

The holy father ends the chapter by his teaching in regard to the Mother of God: “In the same strain the womb of the Holy Virgin, which ministered to an Immaculate Birth, is pronounced blessed in the Gospel; for that birth did not annul the Virginity, nor did the Virginity impede so great a birth. When the “spirit of salvation” (Is.26:18), as Isaiah names it, is being born, the willings of the flesh are useless” (p. 365). In this context the author of the treatise refers to the Apostle Paul (2 Cor.4:16) and says: “each man of us is a double man; one the outwardly visible, whose natural fate it is to decay; the other perceptible only in the secret of the heart, yet capable of renovation ... there is no absurdity in supposing a double marriage also which answers in every detail to either man; and, maybe, if one was to assert boldly that the body’s virginity was the co-operator and the agent of the inward marriage, this assertion would not be much beside the probable fact” (p. 365).

In the twentieth chapter [2] St. Gregory touches on the subject of family distinction in the context of spirituality. Prior to this issue he once again under-

lines the importance of a person’s labour for heavenly treasures. He instructs his readers that one should not be priding himself on worldly wealth, but luxuriating only in the heavenly treasures (p. 366). As for the mentioned subject regarding nobility, he says: “as for family distinction, he will not vaunt that which comes by the mere routine of devolution even to numbers of the worthless, but that which is gained by the successful efforts of his own zeal and labours; a distinction which only those can boast of who are “sons of the light” and children of God, and are styled “nobles from the sunrise” because of their splendid deeds. Strength and health he will not try to gain by bodily training and feeding, but by all that is contrary of this, perfecting the spirit’s strength in the body’s weakness” (p. 366). In the same chapter the author of the treatise talks about the nature of the spiritual union, and the Object of the pure and heavenly love. The holy father in connection with the words of St. Paul “Christ is all, and in all” (Col.3:11), mentions: “it is equally reasonable that he who is enamoured of wisdom should hold the Object of his passionate desire, Who is the True Wisdom; and that the soul which cleaves to the undying Bridegroom should have the fruition of her love for the true Wisdom, which is God” (p. 366).

In chapter twenty-one [2] St. Gregory speaks about the necessity of complete estrangement from everything wherein passion operates. The Holy Father warns those who have godly desire for the life according to excellence that they must place between themselves and the pleasures of the senses a high strong wall of separation. He says: “It is perfectly clear that no one can come near the purity of the Divine Being who has not first become such; he must therefore place between himself and the pleasures of the senses a high strong wall of separation, so that in his approach to the Deity the purity of his own heart may not become soiled again. Such an impregnable wall will be found in a complete estrangement from everything wherein passion operates” (p. 366).

In chapter twenty-two [2] we have a clear caution by the author of the treatise on fasting. The Holy Father says that extremes in fasting do not yield positive results. He condemns those who deviate themselves from the Golden Road regarding fasting: "many, however, slide into the very opposite kind of excess, and unconsciously to themselves, in their over-preciseness, laboriously thwart their own design; they let their soul fall down the other side from the heights of Divine elevation to the level of dull thoughts and occupations, where their minds are so bent upon regulations which merely affect the body, that they can no longer walk in their heavenly freedom and gaze above; their only inclination is to this tormenting and afflicting of the flesh. It would be well, then, to give this also careful thought, so as to be equally on our guard against either over-amount, neither stifling the mind beneath the wound of the flesh, nor, on the other hand, by gratuitously inflicted weakenings sapping and lowering the powers, so that it can have no thought but of the body's pain" (p. 367); In the same chapter St. Gregory in connection with fasting speaks about the four elements of which our body consists and concludes: "the inefficiency of the body from either cause will be that which it guards against; it will train the flesh, neither making it wild and ungovernable by excessive pampering, nor sickly and unstrung and nerveless for the required work by immoderate mortification. That is temperance's highest aim; it looks not to the afflicting of the body, but to the peaceful action of the soul's functions" (p. 368).

In chapter twenty-three [2] St. Gregory makes mention of a very important subject concerning monastic life. The Holy Father says that a novice who has the desire to join himself to a life in virginity, should be entrusted to a person who has lived in a monastery for a long time and is very experienced with the ascetic life. His admonition is as follows: "So, for this high life, which does not advance in nature's groove, but is estranged from her by the novelty of its course, a man cannot be instructed thoroughly unless he puts himself into the hands of

one who has himself led it in perfection" (p. 368).

In the twenty-fourth and final chapter [2] of the treatise St. Gregory refutes those who make sin the practice of a whole life, and remain thereby absolutely ignorant of the purer course! The Holy Father's refutation is directed at the edification of those who live in sin rather than punishment. He says: "How can you in your full life obey the Crucified? How can you, hale in sin, obey Him Who died to sin? How can you, who are not crucified to the world, and will not accept the mortification of the flesh, obey Him Who bids you follow after Him, and Who bore the Cross in His own body, as a trophy from the foe? How can you obey Paul when he exhorts you "to present your body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God" when you are "conformed to this world", and not transformed by the renewing of your mind, when you are not "walking" in this "newness of life", but still pursuing the routine of "the old man"? How can you be a priest unto God, anointed though you are for this very office, to offer a gift to God; a gift in no way another's, no counterfeited gift from sources outside yourself, but a gift that is really your own, namely, "the gift from sources outside yourself, but a gift that is really your own, namely, "the inner man" who must be perfect and blameless, as it is required of a lamb to be without spot or blemish? ... If this all seems little in your eyes, to be crucified with Christ, to present yourself a sacrifice to God, to become a priest unto the most high God, to make yourself worthy of the vision of the Almighty, what higher blessings than these can we imagine for you, if indeed you make light of the consequences of these as well? And the consequence of being crucified with Christ is that we shall live with Him, and be glorified with Him, and reign with Him; and the consequence of presenting ourselves to God is that we shall be changed from the rank of human nature and human dignity to that of Angels" (p. 370).

Thus, in the face of St. Gregory of Nyssa before us is a great church father who through the contemplation of the Orthodox teaching sets forth the im-

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Received November, 2012