

- 13.13.1 Grace...free: *Gratia...gratuita*. Cf. also 13.13.4.
- 13.14.1 His very experienced athlete: Cf. the note at 7.20. Job is also spoken of in terms of an athlete in Origen, *Selecta in Iob* ad 19.1 and 7 (PG 12.1031-1034); Athanasius, *Frag. in Iob* (PG 27.1345); Didymus, *Frag. in Iob* ad 2.6 (PG 39.1129); Ambrose, *De interpel. Iob et David* 1.2.4; Chrysostom, *De laudibus Pauli* 1.10; Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob* 1.3.4.
- 13.14.8 The citation is incorrectly said to be from Joshua.
- 13.14.9 Nurse: *Nutrix*. The word is translated as "nurse" by Gibson and as *mère* by Pichery. There is a remarkably similar illustration of grace, this time compared unmissably with a mother, in Ps.-Macarius, Coll. 3, *Hom.* 27.3 (SC 275.320-322).
- 13.17.2 The citation of Rom 11.33-34 is very frequent in Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings. But whereas Cassian uses it here in the context of reflecting on God's goodness in drawing human beings to salvation "in numberless different manners and in inscrutable ways" (13.17.1), Augustine quotes it in reference to the mystery of the seeming arbitrariness in the fact that some are saved while others are lost. Cf. *De peccat. meritis et remis.* 1.21.29; *De spir. et litt.* 34.60; *C. duas epp. Pelag.* 4.6.16; *De gratia et libero arbitrio* 22.44; *De correptione et gratia* 8.17, 8.19; *De praedest. sanct.* 8.16; *De dono persever.* 12.30.
- 13.18.1f. On experience as a sure guide cf. the note at 3.7.4.
- 13.18.5 That faith (or authority) precedes understanding is a favorite theme of Augustine. Cf. *De mor. eccl. cath.* 2.3; *De util. cred.* 10.23ff.; *De symb. ad cat.* 4. It would be ironic if Cassian concluded this particular conference with an idea that he had taken from Augustine—if indeed it came from that source.

FOURTEENTH CONFERENCE THE FIRST CONFERENCE OF ABBA NESTEROS: ON SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Nesteros, the second of the three abbas of this second part of *The Conferences*, is perhaps identical with Nisteros ("the Great") of the *Apophthegmata patrum*. It is unlikely, in any event, that he is the same as Nistheros the Cenobite, also of the *Apophthegmata patrum*, in view of the fact that the Nesteros of the present conference is referred to as an anchorite in 11.3.2. After an extremely brief introduction, and after we are told that the old man has heard of Cassian's and Germanus's desire to understand certain scriptural passages that they have committed to memory, he at once proceeds to speak on the topic of knowledge.

He begins by dividing religious knowledge into two kinds—practical (πρακτικη) and contemplative or spiritual (θεωρητικη). In its present form this distinction may be traced to Aristotle (*Metaph.* 2.1): "Philosophy is rightly called a knowledge of truth. The end of contemplative [knowledge] is truth, but that of practical [knowledge] is action." Less remotely, though, the idea is Evagrius (cf. SC 170.38-56). This is but the first of numerous distinctions that make the fourteenth conference one of the most analytic of all the conferences. Practical knowledge, which must precede its contemplative counterpart, itself exists in twofold form: It both understands the working of the vices and forms the mind according to the virtues, in such a way that the mind delights in these latter. The words of Jeremiah 1:10 suggest to Nesteros, however, that expelling vice is twice as hard as acquiring virtue.

Practical knowledge is to be found in many different contexts—among solitaires and cenobites, among monks and secular persons. Indeed, Cassian implies that such knowledge is whatever profession a man or woman may take up and pursue in Christian fashion. And whatever profession a person may embrace, he should stick to it and therein discover perfection for himself. The insistence on being faithful to one's profession is reminiscent of the insistence, found elsewhere in *The Conferences* and throughout desert literature (cf. 6.15 and the relevant note), on being faithful to one's cell and to the place where one has established one's monastic career.

It is only when he begins to speak of contemplative or spiritual knowledge that Nesteros finally addresses himself directly to the concern of his two listeners, for it is clear that this knowledge pertains exclusively to the understanding of Scripture. Like practical knowledge, it is twofold, having to do with both the historical interpretation and the spiritual understanding of Scripture. While the former deals simply with historical facts or assertions, the latter is occupied with the possible deeper meaning or meanings of a given text. In an elaboration of 8.3, Cassian here divides the spiritual senses of Scripture into three—namely, allegory, anagogy, and tropology. Roughly speaking, allegory has to do with Christ, the Church, and the sacraments—in other words, with historical or visible things that are, however, charged with spiritual significance. Anagogy has to do with invisible, eternal, heavenly realities. Tropology, finally, bears a certain moral weight. To the four senses of Scripture (including the historical) there correspond the four terms that Paul employs in 1 Corinthians 14:6: The historical is linked with instruction, the allegorical with revelation, the analogical with prophecy, and the tropological with knowledge. Cassian's complex structure here is a masterpiece of hermeneutical literature. Both Ambrose (*Exp. evang. sec. Luc.*, prol. 2) and Augustine (*De util. cred.* 3.5ff.) had proposed four possible levels on which Scripture could be understood, but they differ from Cassian's scheme, which is original to him.

Hereupon Nesteros returns to the practical, for in order for a person to acquire spiritual understanding he must first have acquired virtue. Once worldly cares have been stilled, an assidu-

ous program of reading the Bible must be undertaken. Reading, though, brings with it the danger of pride, and consequently the exercise of humble discretion is urgently recommended as well. Reading in turn suggests memorization, and Nesteros does not hesitate to say that the reader must eventually memorize the Bible in its entirety. Scripture will thus form the subject of continual meditation, which will then both drive out other thoughts and gradually reveal the beauty of what has been memorized. But whatever a person may derive from Scripture is shaped according to his capacity to understand it, and a passage as apparently simple, for example, as Exodus 20:14 ("You shall not commit fornication") can yield a multitude of deeper meanings.

One such deeper meaning is the identification of fornication with wandering thoughts. On hearing Nesteros offer this interpretation, Cassian himself, in one of the few passages where he and not Germanus speaks, laments his boyhood schooling in literature, which has given him the wherewithal for his distractions: He cannot sing a psalm without seeing the heroes of pagan mythology with his mind's eye. Nesteros replies by observing that worldly tales and poems can be expelled from the imagination by reading and meditating on the Bible. Once a person has done this over a certain period of time, spiritual thoughts will begin to well up in him of their own accord. But, again, for such a thing to happen a person must have overcome his vices: The contemplative must be preceded by the practical.

Now it is Germanus who intervenes with the objection that some who have not attained to virtue are nonetheless more knowledgeable about Scripture than many holy persons. Nesteros responds by distinguishing between a rhetorical skill that passes for spiritual knowledge on the one hand and holiness that provides true spiritual insight on the other. This kind of rhetorical skill is merely pseudo-knowledge. It is important to note here that Cassian's view in this matter cannot be characterized as anti-intellectual. In contrast to many Egyptian monks who condemned learning *tout court*, Cassian rejects only the abuse of learning. On Egyptian anti-intellectualism cf. the note at 10.2.2.

Having encouraged his two listeners to read and memorize Scripture, Nesteros warns them not, out of a desire for human

praise, to teach those who are unworthy to learn. But attempts at spiritual teaching will fail in two instances—namely, when the teacher himself speaks without experience in spiritual matters, and when the hearer obdurately refuses to accept the teaching. Yet sometimes God will even give the grace of teaching to persons who theretofore had resisted all grace.

The conference concludes with Nesteros's promise to discuss the gifts of healing that evening.

XIV. THE FIRST CONFERENCE OF ABBA NESTEROS: ON SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

Chapters

- I. Some words of Abba Nesteros on the knowledge of religious persons.
- II. On grasping a knowledge of spiritual things.
- III. That practical perfection exists in a twofold form.
- IV. That practical life is dispersed among many professions and pursuits.
- V. On perseverance in a profession once it has been undertaken.
- VI. On the fickleness of the weak.
- VII. An example of chastity which teaches that not everything should be emulated by everyone.
- VIII. On spiritual knowledge.
- IX. That there should be a progression from practical to spiritual knowledge.
- X. On grasping the discipline of true knowledge.
- XI. On the various ways of understanding Divine Scripture.
- XII. A question about how one can arrive at forgetting worldly poems.
- XIII. The reply, on the method by which we can cleanse away the stains of our memory.
- XIV. That an impure soul can neither pass on nor receive spiritual knowledge.
- XV. An objection to the effect that many impure persons possess knowledge and many holy persons do not.
- XVI. The reply, that the wicked are unable to possess true knowledge.
- XVII. To whom the method of perfection should be disclosed.
- XVIII. Under what conditions spiritual teaching is fruitless.
- XIX. That frequently even the unworthy receive the grace of a saving word.

I.1. Both our promise and the sequence of our itinerary demand that the instruction of Abba Nesteros, a man of the highest knowledge and outstanding in every regard, should follow. When he heard that we had committed some parts of Holy Scripture to memory and desired to understand them, he addressed us in words like these:

2. "There are indeed as many kinds of knowledge in this world as there are different sorts of arts and disciplines. But, although all are either completely useless or contribute something of value only to the present life, still there is not one that does not have its own order and method of instruction by which it can be grasped by those who are interested in it. 3. If, then, those arts follow their own defined principles when they are taught, how much more does the teaching and profession of our religion, which is directed to contemplating the secrets of invisible mysteries rather than to present gain and which seeks instead the reward of eternal prizes, consist in a defined order and method. Its knowledge is in fact twofold. The first kind is *πρακτικη*, or practical, which reaches its fulfillment in correction of behavior and in cleansing from vice. The other is *θεωρητικη*, which consists in the contemplation of divine things and in the understanding of most sacred meanings.

II. "Whoever, therefore, wishes to attain to the *θεωρητικη* must first pursue practical knowledge with all his strength and power. For the *πρακτικη* can be possessed without the theoretical, but the theoretical can never be seized without the practical. For certain steps have been arranged and distinguished in such a way that human lowliness can mount to the sublime. If these follow one another according to the method that we have mentioned, a person can attain to a height to which he cannot fly if the first step has not been taken. In vain, therefore, does someone who does not reject the contagion of vice strive for the vision of God. For the Spirit of God hates deception, and it does not dwell in a body subject to sin."¹

III.1. "Now this practical perfection exists in a twofold form. Its first mode is that of knowing the nature of all the vices and the method of remedying them. The second is that of discerning the sequence of the virtues and forming our mind by their perfection in such a way that it is obedient to them not as if it were coerced and subjected to an arbitrary rule but as taking pleasure in and enjoying what is so to say a natural good, thus mounting with delight the hard and narrow way. For how will a person who does not understand the nature of his vices and has not striven to uproot them be able to attain either to the method of the virtues, which is the second step in practical discipline, or to the mysteries of spiritual and heavenly realities, which are found on the higher step of theoria?"

2. "It follows that a person who has not conquered the level places cannot progress to the heights, and much less will he grasp things that are outside himself if he has been unable to understand things that are within himself. Yet we should know that we must exert ourselves twice as hard to expel vice as to acquire virtue. We do not come to this by our own guesswork, but we are taught by the words of him who alone knows the ability and intelligence of what he has made: 'Behold,' he says, 'today I have set you over nations and over kingdoms, to root up and to pull down and to disperse and to scatter and to build and to plant.'² 3. He has pointed out that four things are necessary for expelling what is harmful—namely, rooting up, pulling down, dispersing, and scattering. But for perfecting the virtues and for acquiring what pertains to righteousness there are only building and planting. Hence it is quite clear that it is more difficult to pluck out and eradicate the ingrown passions of body and soul than it is to gather and plant spiritual virtues.

IV.1. "This *πρόκτιση*, then, which—as has been said—exists in two modes, is divided among many professions and pursuits. For some people are completely set upon the remoteness of the desert and on purity of heart, as we know Elijah and Elisha were in times past and the blessed Antony and others were in our own day, pursuing the same chosen orientation and attaching themselves very closely to God by the silence of the desert. 2. Some have devoted every painstaking effort of theirs to the instruction

of the brothers and to the constant care of the cenobia, as we recall was the case lately with Abba John, who presided over a large cenobium near the town called Thmuïs; and there were some other men who were equally worthy and who also shone forth with apostolic signs. The kindly duty of welcoming strangers is attractive to some. This was how, also in times past, the patriarch Abraham and Lot pleased the Lord,³ and lately there was the blessed Macarius, a man of extraordinary gentleness and patience. He presided over a hostel in Alexandria in such a way that he should not be considered inferior to any of those who pursue the remoteness of the desert. 3. Some choose the care of the sick, others carry out the intercession that is owed to the downtrodden and the oppressed, some are intent upon teaching, and others give alms to the poor, and among great and noble men they have flourished by reason of their love and their goodness.

V.1. "Therefore it is beneficial and proper for each person, in accordance with the orientation that he has chosen and the grace that he has received, to strive most zealously and diligently to attain to perfection in the work that he has undertaken. He may praise and admire the virtues of others, but he should never depart from the profession that he has once chosen, knowing that, according to the Apostle, the body of the Church is indeed one, although its members are many,⁴ and that it has 'gifts differing according to the grace which has been given us, whether prophecy according to the degree of faith, or ministry in ministering, or the one who teaches in doctrine, or the one who exhorts in exhortation, or the one who gives in simplicity, or the one who presides in carefulness, or the one who shows mercy in cheerfulness.'⁵ Some members cannot claim for themselves the ministries of other members, for the eyes cannot perform the function of the hands nor the nose of the ears. Therefore not all are apostles, not all are prophets, not all are teachers, not all have the grace of healing, not all speak in tongues, not all interpret.⁶

VI. "Those who are not yet established in the profession that they have undertaken are accustomed, when they hear some people commended for their different concerns and virtues, to be so taken up with their praise that they immediately desire to imitate their practices. In such cases human frailty inevitably expends its

efforts in vain. For it is impossible for one and the same person to shine simultaneously in all the virtues that I have listed above. If someone wants to strive after all of them together, in his pursuit of them he will of necessity not possess a single one completely, and he will suffer loss rather than make gain as a result of this diversity and variation. For there are many ways that lead to God, and therefore each person should finish the one that he has taken up, intent upon his course, so that he may be perfect in his profession, whatever it may be.

VII.1. "For, apart from the loss that befalls a monk who, as we have said, in his fickleness of mind wants to pass from one pursuit to another, he also runs the risk of death in this respect—in that occasionally things that are correctly done by some are taken by others as a bad example, and things that had turned out well for some are thought by others to be wicked. For example, suppose someone wished to imitate the virtue of that man whom Abba John is in the habit of mentioning, not as a model to imitate but only as one to admire.

"Now, someone dressed in worldly attire came up to the aforesaid old man and, when he had offered him some of the first-fruits of his harvest, he found someone there who was possessed by a raging demon. 2. Although the latter disdained Abba John's adjurations and commands and swore that he would never obey his injunction and leave the body that he had possessed, he was utterly terrified at the coming of this man and departed, very reverently calling out his name. The old man wondered greatly at such obvious grace and, all the more astonished because he noticed that he was in worldly attire, he began to ask him carefully about his state of life and profession. 3. And when he said that he was in the world and bound by the ties of marriage, the blessed John reflected on the excellence of his virtue and grace and inquired attentively as to his way of life. The man testified that he came from the country, that he earned his living by the daily work of his hands, and that he was not aware of anything good about himself except that he never went out to his work in the fields in the morning or returned home in the evening without having thanked God beforehand in church for having provided him with his daily bread. Nor did he ever take any of his own produce with-

out first having offered God the firstfruits and a tithe, and he never led his cattle through someone else's harvest without first having muzzled them, lest his neighbor suffer even the slightest loss through his carelessness. 4. And when these things still did not seem sufficient to Abba John to obtain the great grace with which he saw that he was endowed, he probed and asked him what it was that he did to deserve such grace. The man felt himself obligated by the respect with which so anxious an inquiry was made, and he confessed that twelve years previously he had been forced by the pressure and command of his parents to take a wife, although he had wanted to profess the monastic life. Although even now no one was aware of it, he kept her a virgin and treated her as a sister. When the old man heard this he was so struck with admiration that he proclaimed publicly, in the man's presence, that not without reason had the demon who had disdained him not been able to endure the presence of a man whose virtue he himself would not dare to seek not only in the heat of youth but even now without endangering his chastity.

5. "Although Abba John would speak of this situation with the highest admiration, nonetheless he did not encourage any of the monks to try it out, knowing that many things which have been rightly practiced by some have led others who imitated them into great danger, and that what the Lord has bestowed by a special favor upon a few cannot be seized upon by all.

VIII.1. "But let us return to discussing the knowledge that was spoken of at the beginning. As we said previously, the *πρακτικη* is dispersed among many professions and pursuits. The *θεωρητικη*, on the other hand, is divided into two parts—that is, into historical interpretation and spiritual understanding. Hence, when Solomon had enumerated the different forms of grace in the Church, he added: 'All who are with her are doubly clothed.'¹⁷ Now, there are three kinds of spiritual knowledge—tropology, allegory, and anagogy—about which it is said in Proverbs: 'But you describe those things for yourself in threefold fashion according to the largeness of your heart.'¹⁸

2. "And so history embraces the knowledge of past and visible things, which is repeated by the Apostle thus: 'It is written that Abraham had two sons, one from a slave and the other from a free

woman. The one from the slave was born according to the flesh, but the one from the free woman by promise.⁹ The things that follow belong to allegory, however, because what really occurred is said to have prefigured the form of another mystery. 'For these,' it says, 'are two covenants, one from Mount Sinai, begetting unto slavery, which is Hagar. For Sinai is a mountain in Arabia, which is compared to the Jerusalem that now is, and which is enslaved with her children.'¹⁰ 3. But anagogy, which mounts from spiritual mysteries to certain more sublime and sacred heavenly secrets, is added by the Apostle: 'But the Jerusalem from above, which is our mother, is free. For it is written: Rejoice, you barren one who do not bear, break out and shout, you who are not in labor, for the children of the desolate one are many more than of her who has a husband.'¹¹ Tropology is moral explanation pertaining to correction of life and to practical instruction, as if we understood these same two covenants as *ἠποκρυκτῆ* and as theoretical discipline, or at least as if we wished to take Jerusalem or Zion as the soul of the human being, according to the words: 'Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion.'¹²

4. "The four figures that have been mentioned converge in such a way that, if we want, one and the same Jerusalem can be understood in a fourfold manner. According to history it is the city of the Jews. According to allegory it is the Church of Christ. According to anagogy it is that heavenly city of God 'which is the mother of us all.'¹³ According to tropology it is the soul of the human being, which under this name is frequently either reproached or praised by the Lord. Of these four kinds of interpretation the blessed Apostle says thus: 'Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what use will it be to you unless I speak to you by revelation or by knowledge or by prophecy or by instruction?'¹⁴

5. "Now, revelation pertains to allegory, by which the things that the historical narrative conceals are laid bare by a spiritual understanding and explanation. Suppose, for example, that we tried to make clear how 'all our fathers were under the cloud, and all were baptized in Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and [how] all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink from the rock that followed them. But the rock was Christ.'¹⁵ This expla-

nation, which refers to the prefiguration of the body and blood of Christ that we daily receive, comprises an allegorical approach.

6. "But knowledge, which is also mentioned by the Apostle, is tropology, by which we discern by a prudent examination everything that pertains to practical discretion, in order to see whether it is useful and good, as when we are ordered to judge for ourselves 'whether it befits a woman to pray to God with unveiled head.'¹⁶ This approach, as has been said, comprises a moral understanding.

"Likewise, prophecy, which the Apostle introduced in the third place, bespeaks anagogy, by which words are directed to the invisible and to what lies in the future, as in this case: 'We do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, about those who are asleep, so that you may not be saddened like others who have no hope. For if we believe that Christ has died and has arisen, so also God will bring those who have fallen asleep in Jesus with him. For we say this to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive at the coming of the Lord shall not anticipate those who have fallen asleep in Christ, for the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a command, with the voice of an angel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead who are in Christ shall arise first.'¹⁷ 7. The figure of anagogy appears in this kind of exhortation.

"But instruction lays open the simple sequence of a historical exposition in which there is no more hidden meaning than what is comprised in the sound of the words, as in this case: 'I delivered to you first what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he rose on the third day, and that he was seen by Cephas.'¹⁸ And: 'God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to save those who were under the law.'¹⁹ And this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord your God is one Lord.'²⁰

IX.1. "Therefore, if you are concerned to attain to the light of spiritual knowledge not by the vice of empty boastfulness but by the grace of correction, you are first inflamed with desire for that blessedness about which it is said: 'Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God,'²¹ so that you may also attain to that about which the angel said to Daniel: 'Those who are learned shall shine like the splendor of the firmament, and those who instruct many in righteousness like the stars forever.'²² And in another

prophet: 'Enlighten yourselves with the light of knowledge while there is time.'²³

2. "Maintaining the diligence in reading that I think you have, then, make every effort to get a complete grasp of practical—that is, ethical—discipline as soon as possible. For without this the theoretical purity that we have spoken of cannot be acquired. The only people who attain to it, possessing it as a reward after the expenditure of much toil and labor, are those who have found perfection not in the words of other teachers but in the virtuousness of their own acts. Obtaining this understanding not from meditating on the law but as a result of their toil, they sing with the psalmist: 'From your commandments I have understood.'²⁴ And after all their passions have been purified they say with confidence: 'I will sing and I will understand in the undefiled way.'²⁵ 3. For the one who is singing the psalm, who is moving forward in the undefiled way with the stride of a pure heart, will understand what is sung.

"Therefore, if you wish to prepare a sacred tabernacle of spiritual knowledge in your heart, cleanse yourselves from the contagion of every vice and strip yourselves of the cares of the present world. For it is impossible for the soul which is even slightly taken up with worldly distractions to deserve the gift of knowledge or to beget spiritual understanding or to remember the sacred readings.

4. "Take care first of all, then (especially you, John, who should be more heedful of observing what I am going to speak of, since you are somewhat younger), that your lips maintain strict silence, lest your pursuit of reading and the intensity of your desire come to naught because of empty pride. This is the first beginning of practical discipline—that with attentive heart and as it were silent tongue you receive the institutes and words of all the elders, preserve them carefully in your breast, and strive to fulfill them rather than to teach them. For from the latter the dangerous presumption of vainglory will spring, but from the former the fruit of spiritual knowledge. 5. Consequently, do not dare to put anything forward during a conference of the elders unless either a harmful ignorance or the need to know something compels you to ask a question, since some people who are puffed up with the

love of vainglory make up questions about things that they know very well in order to show off their learning. For it is impossible for a person who pursues reading persistently with the intention of winning human praise to deserve the gift of true knowledge. Whoever has been overcome by this passion is invariably entangled in other vices too, and especially in pride. Thus, having come to ruin with the practical and ethical, he will not acquire the spiritual knowledge that springs from it. Be in every respect, therefore, 'quick to hear, but slow to speak,'²⁶ lest there befall you what Solomon mentions: 'If you see a man who is quick with words, know that a fool has more hope than he.'²⁷

"Nor should anyone presume to teach in words what he has not previously done in deed. 6. Our Lord taught us by his own example that we should follow this order, as it is said: 'Which Jesus began to do and teach.'²⁸ Be careful, therefore, that you not jump to teaching before you have acted and be counted among those of whom the Lord speaks to his disciples in the Gospel: 'Observe and do what they say, but do not do according to their works. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to carry, and place them on people's shoulders, but they themselves do not move them with their finger.'²⁹ For if the person 'who breaks the least commandment and teaches people so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven,'³⁰ it follows that whoever neglects many great things and dares to teach is certainly not merely least in the kingdom of heaven but should be considered greatest in the punishment of Gehenna.

7. "Therefore you should be careful lest you be stirred to teach by the example of those who have acquired skill in speaking and a fluent tongue and who are believed by those who are unable to discern its power and character to possess spiritual knowledge because they can say whatever they want elaborately and at length. For it is one thing to speak with ease and beauty and another to enter deeply into heavenly sayings and to contemplate profound and hidden mysteries with the most pure eye of the heart, because certainly neither human teaching nor worldly learning but only purity of mind will possess this, through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.

X.1. "If you wish to attain to a true knowledge of Scripture, then, you must first hasten to acquire a steadfast humility of heart

which will, by the perfection of love, bring you not to the knowledge which puffs up³¹ but to that which enlightens. For it is impossible for the impure mind to receive the gift of spiritual knowledge. Therefore, avoid this very carefully, lest by zealous reading there arise in you, out of arrogant vanity, not the light of knowledge or the everlasting glory that is promised by the enlightenment of teaching but rather the means of your own destruction.

2. "Then, once all worldly cares and preoccupations have been cast out, you must strive in every respect to give yourself assiduously and even constantly to sacred reading. Do this until continual meditation fills your mind and as it were forms it in its likeness, making of it a kind of ark of the covenant,³² containing in itself two stone tablets—that is, constant steadfastness under the aspect of a twofold Testament; a golden jar too—that is, a pure and sincere memory, which preserves safely and lastingly the manna that is contained in it—namely, the enduring and heavenly sweetness of spiritual understandings and of the angelic bread; and also the rod of Aaron—that is, the banner of salvation of our true high priest Jesus Christ, ever green with undying remembrance, 3. for this is the rod which had been cut from the root of Jesse³³ and which, having died, flourishes again with still greater life. All of these are guarded by two cherubim—that is, by the fullness of historical and spiritual knowledge, for the cherubim are interpreted as the breadth of knowledge. They constantly guard the propitiatory of God—that is, your interior calm—and protect it from every assault of the evil spirits. Thus your mind, having advanced not only as far as the ark of the divine covenant but even as far as the priestly kingdom, and by its unshakable love of purity being as it were absorbed in spiritual discipline, will fulfill the priestly command that is laid down in this way by the Lawgiver: 'He shall not go forth from the holy places, lest he pollute the sanctuary of God'³⁴—that is, his own heart, in which the Lord promises that he will always dwell when he says: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them.'³⁵

4. "Hence the successive books of Holy Scripture must be diligently committed to memory and ceaselessly reviewed. This continual meditation will bestow on us double fruit. First, inasmuch as the mind's attention is occupied with reading and with preparing to

read, it cannot be taken captive in the entrapments of harmful thoughts. Then, the things that we have not been able to understand because our mind was busy at the time, things that we have gone through repeatedly and are laboring to memorize, we shall see more clearly afterward when we are free from every seductive deed and sight, and especially when we are silently meditating at night. Thus, while we are at rest and as it were immersed in the stupor of sleep, there will be revealed an understanding of hidden meanings that we did not grasp even slightly when we were awake.

XI.1. "But as our mind is increasingly renewed by this study, the face of Scripture will also begin to be renewed, and the beauty of a more sacred understanding will somehow grow with the person who is making progress. For its form is also adapted to the capacity of the human intelligence, and it will appear as earthly to carnal persons and as divine to spiritual persons, such that those to whom it previously seemed wrapped in thick clouds will be unable to grasp its subtlety or endure its splendor. But in order that what we are trying to say may be made clearer by an example, it is enough to mention one passage from the law by which we can demonstrate that all the heavenly commands are shaped for the whole human race according to the measure of our condition.

2. "It is written in the law: 'You shall not commit fornication.'³⁶ This is kept in a beneficial way according to the simple sound of the letter by the person who is still entangled in the passions of fleshly impurity. It is necessarily observed in spiritual fashion, however, by one who has already left behind this filthy behavior and impure disposition, so that he also rejects not only all idolatrous ceremonies but also every superstition of the Gentiles and the observance of auguries and omens and of all signs and days and times, and is certainly not engaged in the divination of particular words or names, which befouls the wholesomeness of our faith. 3. Jerusalem herself is said to have been debauched by this fornication, having fornicated 'on every high hill and under every green tree.'³⁷ And the Lord, rebuking her, says by the prophet: 'Let the astrologers stand and save you, who gazed on the stars and counted the months, so that from them they might announce the things that are to happen to you.'³⁸ Concerning this fornication the Lord reproaches them elsewhere

when he says: 'The spirit of fornication has deceived them, and they went fornicating away from their God.'³⁹

"But whoever has left behind these two fornications will have a third kind to avoid, which is contained in the superstitions of the law and of Judaism. 4. The Apostle says of these: 'You observe days and months and seasons and years.'⁴⁰ And again: 'Do not touch or taste or handle.'⁴¹ There is no doubt that these things were said about the superstitions of the law. If anyone falls into them he has doubtless committed adultery with respect to Christ and does not deserve to hear from the Apostle: 'I have espoused you to one husband, to show you as a chaste virgin to Christ.'⁴² Instead there will be addressed to him what follows, in the words of the same Apostle: 'I fear lest, as the serpent seduced Eve by his cunning, so your minds may be corrupted away from the simplicity that is Christ Jesus.'⁴³

5. "But if a person has escaped from the uncleanness of this fornication too, there is still a fourth, which is perpetrated by the adultery of heretical teaching. About this the same blessed Apostle says: 'I know that after my departure fierce wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock, and from you yourselves there will arise men who speak wicked things, in order to lead astray the disciples.'⁴⁴

"Whoever has been able to avoid this should beware lest by a more subtle sin he fall into the vice of fornication which consists in wandering thoughts, for every thought that is not only wicked but even idle and that to some degree departs from God is considered the most impure fornication by the perfect man."

XII. Upon hearing these things I was at first very moved by a hidden compunction, and then I groaned deeply and said: "All these things that you have discussed at great length have brought upon me a greater despair than I had previously endured. For, besides those general captivities of the soul by which I have no doubt that the weak are afflicted from without, there is a particular stumbling block to salvation that comes from the knowledge of literature which I seem to have acquired to a slight degree. In this respect the insistence of my teacher and the constant attention paid to reading have so weakened me that now my mind, infected as it were with those poems, meditates even during the time for

prayer on the silly fables and narratives of wars with which it was filled when I was a boy and had begun my studies. The shameless recollection of poetry crops up while I am singing the psalms or asking pardon for my sins, or a vision of warring heroes passes before my eyes. Daydreaming about such images constantly mocks me, and to such an extent does it prevent my mind from attaining to higher insights that it cannot be gotten rid of even with daily weeping."

XIII.1. NESTEROS: "From this very fact, which has given rise to your immense despair of being cleansed, there can come quite a speedy and effective remedy if you wish to transfer the same diligence and urgency, which you said that you had in those worldly studies, to the reading of and meditation upon spiritual writings. For your mind will inevitably be taken up with those poems until it harvests for itself other things within itself, pursues them with similar zeal and interest, and bears spiritual and divine realities in place of those fruitless and earthly ones. 2. When it has grasped their depth and their height and has been nourished by them, the former thoughts will be able to be gradually cast out and completely abolished. For the human mind cannot be open to every thought, and therefore as long as it is not occupied with spiritual pursuits it will inevitably be wrapped up in those that it had learned some time before. As long as it has nothing to return to and to exercise itself tirelessly on it will inevitably fall back on what it had been imbued with in childhood, and it will constantly reflect on what it has conceived after long habituation and meditation.

3. "This spiritual knowledge must be strengthened in you firmly and lastingly. It is not for you to enjoy it only temporarily, like those who lay hold of it not by their own efforts but by way of another person and who snatch at it as if it were a kind of ethereal scent; rather, it should be stored deep in your mind and be made as it were visible and palpable. In order to accomplish this it behooves you to see to it with great care that, even should you hear mentioned in a conference what you know very well, you should not on that account treat disdainfully and haughtily what is already known to you. Instead, you should accept it in your heart with the same eagerness with which the long-desired words of salvation should be ceaselessly poured into our ears and ever spoken

by our lips. 4. For even if there is a frequent repetition of holy things, still satiety will never beget disgust in the soul of one who has a thirst for true knowledge. Rather, it takes those things in every day as if they were new and sought-after, and the more often it imbues them the more eagerly it will hear and speak of them, and from their repetition it will be strengthened by the knowledge that has been gained instead of being bored by frequent conferences. For it is a clear indication of a lukewarm and proud mind if it receives the medicine of saving words haughtily and heedlessly, even when it has been offered with an overzealous frequency. For 'the soul that is full jeers at a honeycomb, but to the needy soul even bitter things seem sweet.'⁴⁵

5. "If, then, these things have been diligently listened to, stored in the recesses of the mind, and sealed by deep silence, afterward, like certain sweetsmelling wines that 'rejoice the heart of man,'⁴⁶ when they have been warmed by reverent thoughts and by a long-standing patience and have been brought forth from the vessel of your breast with a strong aroma, they will bubble up like an unceasing fountain out of the springs of experience and the watercourses of virtue, and they will pour forth continual streams as it were from the abyss of your heart. 6. There will take place in you what is said in Proverbs to one who has accomplished these things in his work: 'Drink water from your own vessels and from the fountain of your own wells. Let water from your own fountain flow abundantly for you, but let your water pass through into your streets.'⁴⁷ And according to the prophet Isaiah: 'You shall be like a watered garden and like a fountain of water whose water will not fail. And places desolate for ages shall be rebuilt in you. You shall raise up foundations of generation upon generation, and you shall be called the repairer of fences, turning paths into rest.'⁴⁸ 7. For the blessedness that the same prophet promises shall come to you: 'The Lord will not make your teacher flee from you any more, and your eyes shall see your teacher. And your ears shall hear the words of one admonishing you behind your back: This is the way; walk in it and go neither to the right nor to the left.'⁴⁹ And thus it will come about that not only every aim and meditation of your heart but also every wandering and digressive thought of yours will be for you a holy and continuous reflection on the divine law.

XIV.1. "But it is impossible, as we have already said, for someone who is inexperienced to know or teach this. For if someone is really incapable of receiving something, how will he be fit to pass it on? Yet even if he presumes to teach something about these matters, his words will only get as far as his hearers' ears, and they will be ineffective and useless. Produced out of inactivity and barren vanity, they will be unable to penetrate their hearts because they come not from the treasury of a good conscience but from vain and arrogant boastfulness. 2. For it is impossible for the impure soul, with whatever effort it may have toiled in reading, to acquire spiritual knowledge. No one pours a choice ointment or the finest honey or any kind of precious liquid into a foul-smelling and filthy vessel. A pot that has once been filled with horrid foul-smelling odors spoils the most aromatic myrrh more easily than it receives any sweetness or pleasantness from it, for clean things are more quickly filthied than filthy things are made clean. 3. Likewise, therefore, unless the vessel of our heart has first been cleansed of every foul-smelling vice it will not deserve to receive the oil of blessing that is spoken about by the prophet: 'Like oil on the head, which ran down to Aaron's beard, which ran down to the edge of his garment.'⁵⁰ Nor will it preserve unspoiled that spiritual knowledge and the words of Scripture that are 'sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.'⁵¹ 'For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? Or what agreement is there between Christ and Belial?''⁵²

XV. GERMANUS: "This understanding does not at all seem to us to be based on truth or to be supported by credible reasoning. For although it is clear that all who either never receive the faith of Christ or corrupt it by blasphemous and wicked teaching are unclean of heart, how is it that many Jews and heretics and also Catholics who are entangled in different vices have acquired a perfect knowledge of Scripture and boast of their extensive spiritual learning, whereas an innumerable multitude of holy men, whose hearts are cleansed of every stain of sin, is content with a devout and simple faith and is ignorant of the secrets of a deeper knowledge? How, then, will this opinion stand, which attributes spiritual knowledge solely to purity of heart?"

XVI.1. NESTEROS: "One who does not carefully weigh all the words of an opinion that has been expressed does not rightly perceive the thrust of the statement. For we said before that people of this kind only have skill in disputation and an ornate style, but that they are unable to penetrate the depths of Scripture and the secrets of spiritual meanings. True knowledge is possessed only by true worshippers of God, and the people to whom this is said certainly do not have it: 'Hear, O foolish people, who have no heart, who have eyes and do not see, and ears and do not hear.'³³ And again: 'Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from acting as my priest.'³⁴ 2. For when it is said that 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden' in Christ,³⁵ how can a person who has scorned to find Christ or who blasphemes him with sacrilegious tongue when he is found or who has at least stained the Catholic faith with unclean works be believed to have acquired true knowledge? 'For the Spirit of God will flee from deception, and it does not dwell in a body subject to sin.'

"Therefore, there is no other way of attaining to spiritual knowledge except by following this order, which one of the prophets has neatly expressed: 'Sow for yourselves unto righteousness; reap the hope of life; enlighten yourselves with the light of knowledge.'³⁶ 3. First, then, we must sow for ourselves unto righteousness—that is, we must increase practical perfection by works of righteousness. Then we must reap the hope of life—that is, we must gather the fruit of spiritual virtues by expelling our carnal vices. Thus we shall be able to enlighten ourselves with the light of knowledge. The psalmist also concludes that this is the order that must be followed when he says: 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are those who search his testimonies.'³⁷ He did not say first: 'Blessed are those who search his testimonies,' and add afterward: 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way.' Rather, he says first: 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way.' By this he clearly shows that no one can properly arrive at searching into the testimonies of God unless he first enters undefiled upon the way of Christ by his practical way of life.

4. "Those unclean persons whom you spoke of, therefore, cannot have this. Instead, they possess a knowledge that is *ψευδ-ωσυνον*—that is, which is in name only and about which the

blessed Apostle says: 'O Timothy, guard what has been placed in your care, avoiding profane novelties of words and the antagonism of knowledge in name only.'³⁸ This appears in Greek as: *τοῖς ἀντιθέσεις τῆς ψευδωνυμίου γνώσεως*. Of those who seem to acquire a certain veneer of knowledge and who, although they diligently pursue the reading of the sacred books and the memorization of Scripture, nonetheless do not abandon carnal vice, it is well put in Proverbs: 'Like a golden ring in the snout of a swine, so is the beauty of an evil-tempered woman.'³⁹ 5. For what does it profit someone to have acquired the ornamentation of heavenly words and the most precious beauty of Scripture if, by clinging to filthy deeds and thoughts, he ruins it, so to say, by rooting around in the foulest soil, or stains it in the dirty mire of his wanton desires? For what happens is that what was supposed to be an ornament for those who used it properly will not only not be able to adorn them but in fact gets stained from contact with more filth. For 'from the mouth of a sinner praise is unseemly.'⁴⁰ To such a person it is said by the prophet: 'Why do you recount my righteous deeds, and why do you take my covenant in your mouth?'⁴¹ 6. Of souls of this kind, who do not at all possess an unwavering fear of the Lord (about which it is said: 'The fear of the Lord is instruction and wisdom'⁴²) and who strive to attain to an understanding of Scripture by constantly meditating on it, it is well noted in Proverbs: 'Of what use are riches to the fool? For a senseless person cannot possess wisdom.'⁴³

"But to such an extent is this true and spiritual knowledge removed from that worldly learning, which is stained by the filth of fleshly vice, that we know that it occasionally flourishes in wondrous fashion in some rustic and nearly illiterate persons; 7. This is very clearly demonstrated in the case of the apostles and of many holy men, who did not spread themselves out with an empty abundance of leaves but who were weighed down with the true fruit of spiritual knowledge. It is written about them in the Acts of the Apostles: 'When they saw the boldness of Peter and John and had found out that they were illiterate and unlearned men, they were astonished.'⁴⁴

"Therefore, if you are anxious to acquire the un fading fragrance of that knowledge, make every effort first of all to obtain a

chaste purity from the Lord. 8. For no one in whom there still dominates a love of fleshly passions and especially of fornication will be able to possess spiritual knowledge. For 'wisdom will repose in a good heart.'⁶⁵ And: 'Whoever fears the Lord will find knowledge with righteousness.'⁶⁶ The blessed Apostle also teaches that by following this order, which we have spoken of, spiritual knowledge can be acquired. For when he wished not only to draw up a list of all his virtues but also to set out their sequence, in order to express which followed which and which sprang from which, he mentioned after some other things: 'In watching, in fasting, in chastity, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in gentleness, in the Holy Spirit, in unfeigned love.'⁶⁷ 9. With this concatenation of virtues he very obviously wished to teach us that one proceeds from watching and fasting to chastity, from chastity to knowledge, from knowledge to long-suffering, from long-suffering to gentleness, from gentleness to the Holy Spirit, and from the Holy Spirit to the reward of unfeigned love. When, therefore, by this discipline and in this sequence you yourself attain to spiritual knowledge, you will certainly have, as we have said, a learning that is not barren and worthless but one that is alive and fruitful. Thereupon an abundant downpour of the Holy Spirit will germinate the seed of the saving word that has been commended by you to the hearts of your hearers and, according to what the prophet promised, 'rain will be given to your seed, wherever you sow on the land, and the bread of the fruit of your land shall be most abundant and rich for you.'⁶⁸

XVII.1. "Beware also lest, seduced by love of vainglory, you tell impure persons at random about these things, which you have learned not so much from reading as from toilsome experience, once a more mature age has drawn you to teach. Thus you will bring upon yourself what the most wise Solomon forbade: 'Do not attach a wicked person to the pastures of the righteous, and do not let yourself be seduced by a full stomach.'⁶⁹ For 'pleasures are not fitting for a fool, nor is wisdom necessary where sense is lacking. 2. For foolishness is the more led on because a stubborn servant will not be corrected by words; even if he understands, he will not obey.'⁷⁰ And: 'Do not say anything in the hearing of an imprudent person, lest perchance he laugh at your wise words.'⁷¹

And: 'Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not cast your pearls before swine, lest perchance they trample them underfoot and turn and rend you.'⁷²

"It is fitting, then, that you hide the mysteries of spiritual meanings from such persons, so that you may sing effectively: 'I have hidden your words in my heart, so that I might not sin against you.'⁷³ 3. But perhaps you will say: To whom are the mysteries of Divine Scripture to be dispensed? The most wise Solomon teaches you: 'Give,' he says, 'intoxicating drink to those who are in sorrow, and wine to drink to those who are in pain, that they may forget their poverty and remember their pains no longer.'⁷⁴ That is to say, pour out abundantly the joy of spiritual knowledge, like wine that 'rejoices the heart of man,' for those who are cast down with bitterness and sorrow on account of being punished for their former deeds, and restore them with the inebriation of a saving word, lest perchance, overcome by constant bitterness and deathly hopelessness, people of this sort 'be swallowed up by too much sorrow.'⁷⁵ 4. But concerning those who are lukewarm and negligent and afflicted with no sorrow of heart it is said: 'One who is carefree and without sorrow shall be in need.'⁷⁶

"Be as careful as you can, therefore, not to be puffed up with the love of vainglory, lest you be unable to have any part with the one whom the prophet praises, 'who has not loaned his money at interest.'⁷⁷ 5. For everyone who dispenses the words of God (of which it is said: 'The words of the Lord are pure words, silver tried in the fire, refined from the earth, seven times refined'⁷⁸) out of love of human praise lends his money out at interest, and for this he will deserve not praise but punishment. For he has chosen to waste the Lord's money for the sake of making temporary gain out of it, not so that, as it is written, when the Lord comes 'he will receive what is his with interest.'⁷⁹

XVIII. "But it is clear that the teaching of spiritual matters is ineffective under two conditions. Namely, either the person who is teaching recommends things that he has not experienced and attempts to instruct his hearer with empty phrases, or the hearer, full of wickedness and vice and hard of heart, does not accept the saving and holy teaching of the spiritual man. Of the latter it is said by the prophet: 'The heart of this people is blinded, and their ears

are dull of hearing, and they have shut their eyes, lest at some time they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and be converted and I heal them.⁸⁰

XIX. "Yet sometimes it is granted by the bountiful generosity of our God, who so ordains it and 'who desires all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth,'⁸¹ that a person who has not shown himself worthy of the preaching of the Gospel by reason of his blameless way of life acquires the grace of spiritual teaching for the salvation of many.

"It makes sense that we should explain by a similar discussion how the gifts of healing are granted by the Lord for the purpose of casting out demons. But, since we are getting up to eat, we shall reserve this for the evening, because whatever is assimilated gradually and without too much bodily labor is always more effectively grasped by the heart."

1. Wis 1:5, 4.
2. Jer 1:10.
3. Cf. Gn 18:1-8, 19:1-3.
4. Cf. Rom 12:4-5.
5. Rom 12:6-8.
6. Cf. 1 Cor 12:28.
7. Prv 31:21 LXX.
8. Prv 22:20 LXX.
9. Gal 4:22-23.
10. Gal 4:24-25.
11. Gal 4:26-27.
12. Ps 147:12.
13. Gal 4:26.
14. 1 Cor 14:6.
15. 1 Cor 10:1-4.
16. 1 Cor 11:13.
17. 1 Thes 4:13-16.
18. 1 Cor 15:3-5.
19. Gal 4:4-5.
20. Dt 6:4.
21. Mt 5:8.
22. Dn 12:3.
23. Hos 10:12b LXX.
24. Ps 119:104.
25. Ps 101:1-2.
26. Jas 1:19.
27. Prv 29:20 LXX.
28. Acts 1:1.
29. Mt 23:3-4.
30. Mt 5:19.
31. Cf. 1 Cor 8:1.
32. Cf. Heb 9:4-5.
33. Cf. Is 11:1.
34. Lv 21:12.
35. 2 Cor 6:16.
36. Ex 20:14.
37. Jer 3:6.
38. Is 47:13.

- 39. Hos 4:12.
- 40. Gal 4:10.
- 41. Col 2:21.
- 42. 2 Cor 11:2.
- 43. 2 Cor 11:3.
- 44. Acts 20:29-30.
- 45. Prv 27:7 LXX.
- 46. Ps 104:15.
- 47. Prv 5:15-16 LXX.
- 48. Is 58:11-12.
- 49. Is 30:20-21.
- 50. Ps 133:2.
- 51. Ps 19:10.
- 52. 2 Cor 6:14-15.
- 53. Jer 5:21.
- 54. Hos 4:6.
- 55. Col 2:3.
- 56. Hos 10:12 LXX.
- 57. Ps 119:1-2.
- 58. 1 Tm 6:20.
- 59. Prv 11:22 LXX.
- 60. Sir 15:9.
- 61. Ps 50:16.
- 62. Prv 15:33 LXX.
- 63. Prv 17:16 LXX.
- 64. Acts 4:13.
- 65. Prv 14:33.
- 66. Sir 32:16.
- 67. 2 Cor 6:5-6.
- 68. Is 30:23.
- 69. Prv 24:15 LXX.
- 70. Prv 19:10 LXX; 18:2 LXX; 29:19 LXX.
- 71. Prv 23:9 LXX.
- 72. Mt 7:6.
- 73. Ps 119:11.
- 74. Prv 31:6-7 LXX.
- 75. 2 Cor 2:7.
- 76. Prv 14:23 LXX.

- 77. Ps 15:5.
- 78. Ps 12:6.
- 79. Mt 25:27.
- 80. Is 6:10 LXX.
- 81. 1 Tm 2:4.

- 14.1.2f. The reference to the different arts and disciplines recalls 1.2.
- 14.4.1 Elijah and also Elisha (the latter to a lesser degree) were canonized models of the ascetical life. Cf. 18.6.2, 21.4.2 (with the relevant note); *Inst.* 1.1.2; Eucherius, *De laude heremi* 18f. On Elijah's paradigmatic role in particular cf. DS 4.567-571. Comparisons of holy individuals with one or more of these two Old Testament figures were a commonplace in antiquity. Cf. 15.3.6; Jerome, *V. S. Pauli* 13; *V. prima gr. Pachomii* 2; *Hist. monach. in Aegypto* 2.9, 7.1, 8.46; Palladius, *Hist. laus.* 14.4; Theodoret of Cyrus, *Hist. relig.* 3.1, 13.17, 17.6, 26.7; Besa, *The Life of Shenoute* 10, 19 (trans. by Bell, CS 73 [1983]: 44, 45, 48); Gregory the Great, *Dial.* 2.8.
- The Antony mentioned here is the subject of Athanasius's *V. S. Antonii*.
- 14.4.2 The John who appears here and in 14.7 may be any one of several of this name.
- Thmuis was a town of Augustamnica Secunda in the ancient diocese of Egypt, on the banks of the Mendesian branch of the Nile. Serapion, the bishop and writer, who died after 362, was its most renowned inhabitant.
- Abraham's and Lot's hospitality were exemplary in Christian antiquity. Cf. Heb 13:2; *I Clem.* 10.7f.
- The Macarius spoken of here also appears in Palladius, *Hist. laus.* 6.5ff.
- 14.6 On the impossibility of acquiring perfection in all the virtues cf. *Inst.* 5.4.
- 14.7 This story of a holy layman is reminiscent of that told in *Apophthegmata patrum*, de Eucharisto homine saeculari. Cf. Weber 35-38. The account of the initially unimpressive layperson who is in fact often as holy as or even holier than the professional ascetic is a common one in desert literature. Cf. *Hist. monach. in Aegypto* 14.2ff. (which contains three such accounts); *Verba seniorum* 20.13, 20.17; Regnault 37-38, N67;

ibid. 79-80, N490; ibid. 148-149, N628; ibid. 219-220, Bu I 104; John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale* 154. Accounts like these, however, are not necessarily to be taken as promoting holiness "in the world," since so many of the laypeople whom they are about are really monks (or nuns) in everything but name. The purpose of such stories, rather, is to show grace at work in unexpected places and to humble the professional ascetics; in this respect they recall, mutatis mutandis, the narrative of the centurion of Capernaum in Mt 8:5-13 par.

14.7.1 The offering of firstfruits, as well as tithing (mentioned in 14.7.3), is also spoken of in 21.1.3. On this practice in early Christianity cf. DACL 4.995-1003. There is no indication in *The Conferences* that these offerings were obligatory, although this is implied ibid. 997.

14.7.4 Marriages in which sexual union is either never practiced or its practice ceases occur with some regularity in desert literature. Cf. 21.8.2ff. (where a cessation of sexual relations is proposed, but to no avail), 24.26.3 (where this is suggested as an ideal), 24.26.6; Palladius, *Hist. laus.* 8.1ff., 61.2f.; *Apophthegmata patrum*, de Eucharisto homine saeculari.

14.8 On the historical and spiritual understanding of Scripture cf. also 8.3 and the relevant note. Examples of the tropological understanding of Scripture are to be found in 7.5.1 and *Inst.* 8.10.

14.8.4 The fourfold interpretation of Jerusalem, as Cassian understands it, can be traced back to Origen and was a commonplace by the time of our author. Cf. Henri DeLubac, *Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sens de l'Écriture* 1/2 (Paris, 1959), 645-646.

14.8.5 On the daily reception of Holy Communion cf. the note at 7.30.2.

14.9.2 The frequent mentions of reading, which begin here, must probably be taken as referring primarily to the reading of Scripture. But books other than the Bible

were also read in the desert. Cf. Palladius, *Hist. laus.* 55.3; *Apophthegmata patrum*, de Epiphanio episcopo Cypri 8; John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale* 46, 55, 172. On "spiritual reading" in early monasticism in general cf. Louis Leloir, "La lecture de l'Écriture selon les anciens Pères," in RAM 47 (1971): 183-199; DS 9.475-478; and on Cassian in particular cf. Franz Bauer, "Die Heilige Schrift bei den Mönchen des christlichen Altertums nach den Schriften des Johannes Cassianus," in *Theologie und Glaube* 17 (1925): 512-532.

14.9.4

The remark about John's relative youth is one of the few references to Cassian himself in *The Conferences*. Only here and in *Inst.* 5.35 is he called simply John.

The connection between reading—even (or especially) the reading of Scripture—and pride helped to contribute to the anti-intellectualism of the desert. One of the ways of dealing with the temptation to pride of this sort was to pretend that one knew nothing about Scripture when one was asked. Cf. *Apophthegmata patrum*, de abbate Poemene 8, de abbate Pambo 9. The most considered warning against an excessive familiarity with secular literature is found in Augustine, *De doct. christ.* 2.39.58ff.

14.9.5

Knowledge is briefly spoken of here as threefold—namely, not only as practical and as spiritual but also as ethical. The distinction between the ethical and the other two is not explained. Origen, citing unnamed sources in Greek philosophy, also divides knowledge into three parts—*moralis*, *naturalis*, and *inspectiva* (with a fourth, *rationalis*, mentioned in passing). The *moralis* corresponds to the ethical and the practical, the *inspectiva* to the spiritual, but the *naturalis* is equivalent to natural philosophy. Cf. Origen, *Comm. in Cant. Cant.*, prol. (GCS 33.75-79). On this division of knowledge cf. also Evagrius, *Schol. in Prov.* 247 (SC 340-342), with the commentary in SC 340.28-30 and the note *ibid.* 343. Cf. also 5.21.3 and the note at 3.6.4.

14.9.5ff. On the necessity of teaching by example as well as by word cf. the note at 11.2.2.

14.9.7

On the pure heart needed to understand Scripture cf. *Inst.* 5.34; Athanasius, *De incarn.* 57; Chrysostom, *Serm. in Act. Apost.* 55.2 ad fin.

14.10.2f.

Similar ark of the covenant imagery as applied to the inner person may be found in Origen, *Hom. in Exod.* 9.4.

14.10.2

A twofold Testament: *Duplicis instrumenti*. On the use of *instrumentum* in this context cf. Tertullian, *Adv. Marcionem* 4.1: "Dividing the gods into two beings that are in fact different, one for each instrument—or, as is more usually said, Testament." On "instrument" as referring to the whole of Scripture cf. 10.10.3; and to the Old Testament alone cf. 17.19.2; *Inst.*, praef. 1.

14.10.4

Nestoros's recommendation that Cassian and Germanus memorize the whole Bible is not as outrageous as it may seem, given the alleged prodigious memories of many of the desert monks. Cf. Pachomius, *Praecepta* 140; Athanasius, *V. S. Antonii* 3; Jerome, *V. S. Hilarionis* 10; *Verba seniorum* 4.57, 10.91, 10.94, 10.96; Palladius, *Hist. laus.* 11.4 (where Ammonius is said to have memorized not only the entire Bible but also six million verses from different theological writings!), 18.25, 26.3, 32.12, 37.1, 58.1; *Hist. monach. in Aegypto* 2.5, 8.50, 10.7; Regnault 88-89, N518; *ibid.* 281-282, Ch250; Besa, *The Life of Shenoute* 96 (trans. by Bell, CS 73 [1983]: 70-71). There is a passing reference to memorizing the Gospels in 8.23.4.

That things constantly meditated upon while one is awake will form the subject matter of one's dreams when asleep is an idea that appears in Aristotle, *Eth. nicomach.* 1.13; Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Panegyricus* 16.196 (SC 148.178); Augustine, *Conf.* 10.30.41.

14.11

That Scripture adapts itself to the understanding of the reader is similar to the notion that Christ appears

to different persons according to their ability to receive him. Cf. 10.6.1ff. and the relevant note. Parallel to this is the concept of the inexhaustibility of Scripture. Cf. Ephrem, *Comm. in Diatessaron* 1.19 (SC 121.53).

14.11.5ff. On wandering thoughts cf. the note at 1.5.4. On such thoughts characterized as fornication cf. 1.13.1 and the relevant note.

14.13.3ff. The conference mentioned here seems to be a gathering of monks for instruction, undoubtedly by an elder.

14.14.1 On the inability of the impure soul either to receive spiritual knowledge or to pass it on cf. 21.36.3ff.; Evagrius, *Schol. in Prov.* 178 (SC 340.272). On the impropriety of instructing the unworthy cf. 1.1 (and the relevant note) and 14.17.

14.14.2f. The image of the unclean vessel that must first be cleaned before being filled with some precious fluid is paralleled in Augustine, *Tract. in Ep. Joann.* 4.6.

14.14.3 On vice as foul smelling cf. the note at 2.11.5.

14.16.7 The ignorance and simplicity of the apostles is a common theme in early Christian literature. Cf. Origen, *C. Celsum* 1.62; Athanasius, *De incarn.* 47; Chrysostom, *Serm. in I Cor.* 4.3.6; Augustine, *De civ. Dei* 22.5.

On spiritual knowledge as fragrant cf. the note at 1.1.

14.17.1 On the necessity of experience for learning spiritual truths (and for teaching them, as in 14.18) cf. the note at 3.7.4.

FIFTEENTH CONFERENCE THE SECOND CONFERENCE OF ABBA NESTEROS: ON DIVINE GIFTS

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Abba Nesteros's second conference, which deals with the charism of healing, is the shortest of all twenty-four conferences. Nesteros begins by distinguishing among three kinds of healing that differ by reason not of their object or their effect but by reason of the character and disposition of the healer. Thus there are healings performed by holy persons; by sinners and by other unworthy persons to whom, nonetheless, power has been given by God; and by demons who work through public sinners and who are thereby seeking to undermine the respect in which religion is held. Therefore it is not miracles themselves that are admirable, since the wicked can sometimes perform them, but rather a virtuous life. Above all, it is love that counts, and this is equivalent to that practical knowledge that had been discussed in 14.1.3ff.

The great men of the desert were in fact hesitant to work miracles, and they only did so when it seemed that they were compelled to it. As an illustration of this reluctance, Nesteros recounts the stories of three abbots who enacted miracles either to defend the faith in some way or as a merciful response to an urgent request. These men gave no credit to themselves for their gift but humbly acknowledged God as its source.

It is humility that particularly marks the Christian and that is capable of being learned by all, whereas miracle-working is for the few and is, in any event, conducive to vainglory. Indeed, it is a