

Three Epistles on Monasticism and Virginity

Epistle 1.129: “To Pachomios the Monk”

The Kingdom of God is the monastic way of life, which does not succumb to any passion, but thinks lofty thoughts and attains to heavenly realities. In adhering to this way of life, beware lest any fall lead you into slavery and lure you away from the royal palace. For it is difficult for those who have fallen away from such a life to be restored thereto. May God, Who opened the effectual door and Who calls Himself the Door (St. John 10:9) through which one may enter into salvation, bestow upon you a mind free from distraction and irreproachable speech, seasoned with Grace. Through these you will find ease in the present life, and goodwill and salvation in the world to come.



Epistle 1.286: “To Evtonios the Deacon”

The Parable of the Ten Virgins reveals differences between behaviors and lives. The Virgins all cultivated virginity, but did not all have equal concern for the other virtues; the foolish ones thought that virginity alone sufficed for them to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The impartial Judgment showed that virginity is of no benefit in the absence of compassion. “All the glory of the daughter of the King is adorned in divers colors,” says the Psalmist (cf. Psalm 44:14). It must be adorned, he says, with the “gold-fringed garments” of all the virtues. For, if one practices virginity and boasts about it, he fails to attain to the greater virtue of humility. It is not he who lives in virginity that will be exalted, but he who humbles himself (St. Matthew 23:12).

Epistle 1v.192: “To Theodosios the Advocate, concerning ‘Marriage is honourable’ (Hebrews 13:4)”

Let honorable marriage have its own laudations, for it was given by God and is held in honor by men; yet, let it not vie with virginity, but, rather, remain within its proper limits. For although, in wishing to adorn and dignify marriage beyond what is appropriate, you said

that the sky has intercourse with the earth through rain, that the sun illumines the moon, that rivers mingle with the sea, and that animals of all kinds, of land, air, and sea, are governed by the conjugal instinct and thus preserve and perpetuate themselves by succession, yet you also said that it loses out when compared to the way of life led by the Angels, for whom the marital state is superfluous and undesirable. Moreover, it is possible to point out many species on earth which are born without sexual congress. However, I will not do this, for I maintain that the same is both useful and necessary, if its purpose is procreation, and not licentiousness. I would say, rather, that it is not right to compare it to the dignity of Heaven. Let marriage pride itself on illustrations drawn from the physical world; but let it not have recourse to the preëminence of the heavenly realm. Those who embrace marriage, then, are, and are called, worldly. But the true lovers of virginity are enrolled in the ranks of the Angels. Indeed, the mystical Song of Songs says that they inspire awe like armies set in array (6:9). For among them there is nothing disorderly or irregular, but everything is adorned with order, rhythm, and harmony. Therefore, just as Heaven is superior to earth and the soul to the body, so is virginity superior to marriage. In terms of chastity, man resembles the Angels; but in terms of marriage, he differs in no way from wild beasts, for whom copulation is a necessity that evidently procures the perpetuation of the race.



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