

Second Century

1. Christ mentioned the cup before the baptism (cf. Matt. 20 : 22) because virtue exists for the sake of truth but truth does not exist for the sake of virtue. Thus he who practises virtue for the sake of truth is not wounded by the arrows of self-esteem; but he who pursues truth for the sake of virtue does harbour the conceit which self-esteem generates.

2. Truth is divine knowledge, and virtue the struggles for truth on the part of those who desire it. A man who endures the labours of virtue for the sake of such knowledge is not vainglorious, because he knows that truth cannot be grasped naturally through human effort. For it is not in the nature of things for what is primary to be circumscribed by what is secondary. But a man who expects to attain knowledge by means of the struggles he makes for the sake of virtue invariably suffers from self-esteem, because he imagines he has gained the victor's crown before he has sweated for it. He does not know that labours exist for the sake of crowns, but crowns do not exist for the sake of labours. For by nature every spiritual method ceases to be practised once the purpose for which it was intended has been achieved or is thought to have been achieved.

3. He who seeks only the outward form of knowledge, that is, knowledge which is merely theoretical, and pursues the semblance of virtue, that is, a merely theoretical morality, is puffed up, Judaic-wise, with the images of truth.

4. He who does not view the ritual of the Law with his senses alone, but noetically penetrates every visible symbol and thoroughly assimilates the divine principle which is hidden in each, finds God in the Law. For rightly he uses his intellect to grope among the material forms of the Law, as among litter, in the hope of finding

hidden somewhere in its body that pearl or principle which utterly escapes the senses (cf. Matt. 13 : 45-46).

5. Again, he who does not limit his perception of the nature of visible things to what his senses alone can observe, but wisely with his intellect searches after the essence which lies within every creature, also finds God; for from the manifest magnificence of created beings he learns who is the Cause of their being.

6. Discrimination is the distinctive characteristic of one who probes. He then who examines the symbols of the Law in a spiritual manner, and who contemplates the visible nature of created beings with intelligence, will discriminate in Scripture between letter and spirit, in creation between inner essence and outward appearance, and in himself between intellect and the senses; and in Scripture he will choose the spirit, in creation the inner essence or *logos*, and in himself the intellect. If he then unites these three indissolubly to one another, he will have found God: he will have come to recognize, as he should and as is possible, the God who is Intellect, Logos and Spirit. In this way he will be delivered from all the things which deceive man and seduce him into innumerable errors – delivered, that is to say, from the letter, the outward appearance of things, and the senses, all of which possess quantitative distinctions and are the negation of unity. But if a man compounds the letter of the Law, the outward appearance of visible things, and his own senses with each other, he is 'so short-sighted as to be blind' (2 Pet. 1 : 9), sick through his ignorance of the Cause of created beings.

7. The apostle gives us the following definition of faith: 'Faith makes real for us things hoped for, gives assurance of things not seen' (Heb. 11 : 1). One may also justly define it as an engrained blessing or as true knowledge disclosing unutterable blessings.

8. Faith is a relational power or a relationship which brings about the immediate, perfect and supranatural union of the believer with the God in whom he believes.

9. Since man is composed of body and soul, he is moved by two laws, that of the flesh and that of the Spirit (cf. Rom. 7 : 23). The law of the flesh operates by virtue of the senses; the law of the Spirit operates by virtue of the intellect. The first law, operating by virtue of the senses, automatically binds one closely to matter; the second law, operating by virtue of the intellect, brings about direct union with God. Suppose there is someone who does not doubt in

his heart (cf. Mark 11 : 23) – that is to say, who does not dispute in his intellect – and through such doubt sever that immediate union with God which has been brought about by faith, but who is dispassionate or, rather, has already become god through union with God by faith: then it is quite natural that if such a person says to a mountain, ‘Go to another place’, it will go (cf. Matt. 17 : 20). The mountain here indicates the will and the law of the flesh, which is ponderous and hard to shift, and in fact, so far as our natural powers are concerned, is totally immovable and unshakeable.

10. The capacity for unintelligence is rooted so deeply in human nature through the senses that the majority think that man is nothing more than flesh, which possesses sense faculties so that he can enjoy this present life.

11. ‘All things are possible’, says Scripture, ‘for the person who believes’ (Mark 9 : 23) and does not doubt – that is to say, for the person who is not dominated by his soul’s attachment to the body through the senses, and so does not separate himself from the union with God which faith has brought about in him through the intellect. Whatever alienates the intellect from the world and the flesh brings it, perfected by its spiritual achievements, close to God. That is what should be understood as implied in the saying, ‘All things are possible for the person who believes.’

12. Faith is knowledge that cannot be rationally demonstrated. If such knowledge cannot be rationally demonstrated, then faith is a supernatural relationship through which, in an unknowable and so undemonstrable manner, we are united with God in a union which is beyond intellection.

13. When the intellect is in direct union with God, that quality in it by virtue of which it apprehends and is apprehended is completely in abeyance. As soon as it activates this quality by apprehending something sequent to God, it experiences doubt and severs the union which is beyond intellection. So long as the intellect is joined to God in this union, and has passed beyond nature and become god by participation, it will have transposed the law of its nature as though shifting an immovable mountain.

14. He who has just begun to follow a holy way of life, and has received instruction about how to act righteously, devotes himself wholly to the practice of the virtues in all obedience and faith, nourishing himself, as if on meat, on their manifest aspects, that is

to say, on moral training. The inner principles of the commandments, which constitute the knowledge of the perfect, in his faith he leaves to God, for he cannot as yet embrace the full magnitude of faith.

15. The perfect man, who has passed beyond the category not only of beginners but also of those who are advancing, is not ignorant of the inner principles of the actions he performs in carrying out the commandments. On the contrary, he first spiritually imbibes those principles and then by means of his actions feeds upon the whole body of the virtues. In this way he transposes to the plane of spiritual knowledge actions which take place in the sensible realm.

16. The Lord said, 'First seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness' (Matt. 6 : 33), that is, seek the knowledge of truth before all things, and therefore seek training in appropriate methods of attaining it. In saying this, He showed clearly that believers must seek only divine knowledge and the virtue which adorns it with corresponding actions.

17. Many are the things of which the believer has need in order to attain knowledge of God and virtue: deliverance from passions, patient acceptance of trials, the inner principles of virtues, the practice of methods of spiritual warfare, the uprooting of the soul's predilection for the flesh, the breaking of the senses' attachment to sensible objects, the utter withdrawal of the intellect from all created things; and, in short, there are countless other things which help us to reject sin and ignorance and to attain knowledge and virtue. It was surely because of this that the Lord said, 'Whatever you ask for in prayer, believing, you will receive' (Matt. 21 : 22), stating simply that the devout must seek and ask with understanding and faith for all those things, and for those alone, which lead to virtue and knowledge of God. For all these things are profitable, and unquestionably the Lord gives them to those who ask.

18. Thus he who for the sake of faith alone – that is to say, for the sake of direct union with God – seeks all the things that contribute towards this union will unquestionably receive them. He who seeks either the things which we have mentioned or other things without this motive will not receive them. For he has no faith, but like an unbeliever uses divine things to boost his own glory.

19. He who purges his will from the corruption of sin destroys the corrupting activity of what causes corruption. For when one's

free will is itself free from corruption, it prevents nature from being corrupted by hostile forces and keeps it incorrupt through the providential grace of the Spirit within it.

20. Since the principles of nature and of grace are not one and the same, we should not be surprised if certain of the saints sometimes resisted the passions and sometimes succumbed to them; for we know that the miracle of resistance is due to grace, while the passion belongs to nature.

21. He who keeps in mind the way of the saints by imitating them not only shakes off the deadly paralysis of the passions but also takes up the life of the virtues.

22. God, who before all ages set the bounds of each man's life, in the manner which He wills, leads every man, whether righteous or unrighteous, towards the final end he deserves.

23. As I take it, the dark storm which befell St Paul (cf. Acts 28 : 1-4) is the weight of involuntary trials and temptations. The island is the firm unshakeable state of divine hope. The fire is the state of spiritual knowledge. The sticks are the nature of visible things. Paul gathered these with his hand, which I take to mean with the exploratory capacity of the intellect during contemplation. He fed the state of spiritual knowledge with conceptual images derived from the nature of visible things, for the state of spiritual knowledge heals the mental dejection produced by the storm of trials and temptations. The viper is the cunning and destructive power hidden secretly in the nature of sensible things. It bites the hand, that is, the exploratory noetic activity of contemplation, but without harming the visionary intellect; and this, with the light of spiritual knowledge, as if with fire, at once destroys the destructive power that arises from the contemplation of sensible things and that attaches itself to the practical activity of the intellect.

24. St Paul was a 'scent of life, leading to life' (2 Cor. 2 : 16) because he inspired the faithful by his own example to experience the fragrance of the virtues by putting them into practice, or because like a preacher he led those who had been converted by the word of grace away from life in the senses to life in the spirit. 'The scent of death, leading to death' (*ibid.*) gives a taste of their future condemnation to those who go from the death of ignorance to the death of unbelief. Or, alternatively, the 'scent of life, leading to life' refers to those who have advanced from the life of ascetic prac-

tice to that of contemplation, and the 'scent of death, leading to death' refers to those who have passed from the mortification of whatever is earthly in their nature (cf. Col. 3 : 5) to the blessed mortification of impassioned conceptual images and fantasies.

25. The soul has three powers: the intelligence, the incensive power and desire. With our intelligence we direct our search; with our desire we long for that supernal goodness which is the object of our search; and with our incensive power we fight to attain our object. With these powers those who love God cleave to the divine principle of virtue and spiritual knowledge. Searching with the first power, desiring with the second, and fighting by means of the third, they receive incorruptible nourishment, enriching the intellect with the spiritual knowledge of created beings.

26. When the Logos of God became man, He filled human nature once more with the spiritual knowledge that it had lost; and steeling it against changefulness, He deified it, not in its essential nature but in its quality. He stamped it completely with His own Spirit, as if adding wine to water so as to give the water the quality of wine. For He becomes truly man so that by grace He may make us gods.

27. When God created human nature, at the same time as He gave it being and free will He joined to it the capacity for carrying out the duties laid upon it. By this capacity I mean the impulse implanted in human nature on the level of both being and free will: on the level of being, so that man has the power to achieve the virtues; on the level of free will, so that he may use this power in the right way.

28. We have as a natural criterion the law of nature. This teaches us that, before we can acquire the wisdom that lies in all things, we must through mystical initiation seek their Maker.

29. Jacob's well (cf. John 4 : 5-15) is Scripture. The water is the spiritual knowledge found in Scripture. The depth of the well is the meaning, only to be attained with great difficulty, of the obscure sayings in Scripture. The bucket is learning gained from the written text of the word of God, which the Lord did not possess because He is the Logos Himself; and so He does not give believers the knowledge that comes from learning and study, but grants to those found worthy the ever-flowing waters of wisdom that spill from the fountain of spiritual grace and never run dry. For the bucket - that is to

say, learning – can only grasp a very small amount of knowledge and leaves behind all that it cannot lay hold of, however it tries. But the knowledge which is received through grace, without study, contains all the wisdom that man can attain, springing forth in different ways according to his needs.

30. There is a great and unutterable difference between the tree of life and the one which is not the tree of life. This is clear simply from the fact that the one is called the tree of life while the other is merely called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (cf. Gen. 2 : 9). Unquestionably, the tree of life is productive of life; the tree that is not called the tree of life, and so is not productive of life, is obviously productive of death. For only death is the opposite of life.

31. The tree of life, when understood as symbolizing wisdom, likewise differs greatly from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in that the latter neither symbolizes wisdom nor is said to do so. Wisdom is characterized by intellect and intelligence, the state which is opposite to wisdom by lack of intelligence and by sensation.

32. Since man came into being composed of noetic soul and sentient body, one interpretation could be that the tree of life is the soul's intellect, which is the seat of wisdom. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil would then be the body's power of sensation, which is clearly the seat of mindless impulses. Man received the divine commandment not to involve himself actively and experientially with these impulses; but he did not keep the commandment.

33. Both trees in Scripture symbolize the intellect and the senses. Thus the intellect has the power to discriminate between the spiritual and the sensible, between the eternal and the transitory. Or rather, as the soul's discriminatory power, the intellect persuades the soul to cleave to the first and to transcend the second. The senses have the power to discriminate between pleasure and pain in the body. Or rather, as a power existing in a body endowed with soul and sense-perception, they persuade the body to embrace pleasure and reject pain.

34. If a man exercises only sensory discrimination between pain and pleasure in the body, thus transgressing the divine commandment, he eats from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that is to say, he succumbs to the mindless impulses that pertain to the senses; for he possesses only the body's power of discrimination,

which makes him embrace pleasure as something good and avoid pain as something evil. But if he exercises only that noetic discrimination which distinguishes between the eternal and the transitory, and so keeps the divine commandment, he eats from the tree of life, that is to say, from the wisdom that appertains to his intellect; for he exercises only the power of discrimination associated with the soul, which makes him cleave to the glory of what is eternal as something good, and avoid the corruption of what is transitory as something evil.

35. Goodness so far as the intellect is concerned is a dispassionate predilection for the spirit; evil is an impassioned attachment to the senses. Goodness so far as the senses are concerned is the impassioned activity of the body under the stimulus of pleasure; evil is the state destitute of such activity.

36. He who persuades his conscience to regard the evil he is doing as good by nature reaches out with his moral faculty as with a hand and grasps the tree of life in a reprehensible manner; for he thinks that what is thoroughly evil is by nature immortal. Therefore God, who has implanted in man's conscience a natural hatred of evil, cuts him off from life, for he has now become evil in his will and intention. God acts in this way so that when a man does wrong he cannot persuade his own conscience that what is thoroughly evil is good by nature.

37. The vine produces wine, the wine drunkenness and drunkenness an evil form of ecstasy. Similarly the intelligence – which is the vine – when well-nurtured and cultivated by the virtues, generates spiritual knowledge; and such knowledge produces a good form of ecstasy which enables the intellect to transcend its attachment to the senses.

38. It is the devil's practice maliciously to confound the forms and shapes of sensible things with our conceptual images of them. Through these forms and shapes are generated passions for the outward aspects of visible things; and our intellectual energy, being halted at the level of what pertains to sense-perception, cannot raise itself to the realm of intelligible realities. In this way the devil despoils the soul and drags it down into the turmoil of the passions.

39. The Logos of God is at the same time both a lamp and a light (cf. Ps. 119 : 105; Prov. 6 : 23). For He illumines those thoughts of the faithful which are in accordance with nature, but burns those

which are contrary to nature; He dispels the darkness of sensory life for those who press forward by means of the commandments towards the life that they hope for, but punishes with the fire of judgment those who wilfully cleave to the dark night of this present life because of their love for the flesh.

40. It is said that he who does not first reintegrate himself with his own being by rejecting those passions which are contrary to nature will not be reintegrated with the Cause of his being – that is, with God – by acquiring supranatural blessings through grace. For he who would truly unite himself with God must first separate himself mentally from created things.

41. The function of the written Law is to deliver men from passions; that of the natural law is to grant equal rights to all men in accordance with natural justice. The fulfilment of the spiritual law is to attain similitude to God, in so far as this is possible for man.

42. The intellect has by nature the capacity to receive a spiritual knowledge of corporeal and incorporeal things; but by grace alone does it receive revelations of the Holy Trinity. While believing that the Trinity exists, the human intellect can never presume to grasp what the Trinity is in Its essence, in the way that this is known to the divine Intellect. The person without spiritual knowledge is completely ignorant of the way in which sin is purged by virtue.

43. He who loves falsehood is handed over to be harrowed by it, so that by suffering he may come to know what it is he willingly pursued, and may learn by experience that he mistakenly embraced death instead of life.

44. God has knowledge only of what is good, because He is in essence the nature and the knowledge of what is good. He is ignorant of evil because He has no capacity for evil. Only of those things for which by nature He possesses the capacity does He also possess the essential knowledge.

45. The breast mentioned in Leviticus (cf. Lev. 7 : 30, 34) indicates the higher form of contemplation. The shoulder (cf. Lev. 7 : 32, 34) stands for the mental state and activity concordant with the life of ascetic practice. Thus the breast and the shoulder denote respectively spiritual knowledge and virtue. For spiritual knowledge leads the intellect directly to God Himself, while virtue in the life of ascetic practice separates it from all involvement in generation. In the text in question, breast and shoulder were set aside for the

priests, who alone possessed the Lord as their inheritance for ever and had no share at all in earthly things.

46. Those fully endowed by the Spirit with spiritual knowledge and virtue are able, through preaching and instruction, to make the hearts of others receptive of true devotion and faith, withdrawing their disposition and capacity from its preoccupation with corruptible nature and directing it towards the actualization of supernatural and incorruptible blessings. It is therefore fitting that in this same text the breast of the victims offered in sacrifice to God – that is, the hearts of those who offer themselves to God – and the shoulder – that is, their life of ascetic practice – should be set aside for the priests.

47. Compared with the righteousness of the age to be, all earthly righteousness fulfils the role of a mirror: it contains the image of archetypal realities, not the realities themselves as they subsist in their true and universal nature. And compared with knowledge there, all spiritual knowledge in this world is an indistinct image: it contains a reflection of the truth but not the truth itself as it is destined to be revealed (cf. 1 Cor. 13 : 12).

48. Since what is divine consists in virtue and spiritual knowledge, the mirror displays the archetypes of virtue and the indistinct image reveals the archetypes of spiritual knowledge.

49. He who has conformed his life to God's will through practice of the virtues transposes his intellect to the realm of intelligible realities by means of contemplation. By so doing he places himself utterly beyond the reach of everything that seeks to entrap him, and so is not attracted through some sensory image towards the death that lies in the passions.

50. The person who with the clear eye of faith beholds the beauty of the blessings of the age to be readily obeys the command to leave his country and his kindred and his father's house (cf. Gen. 12 : 1), and he abandons the flesh, the senses and sensory things, together with passionate attachments and inclinations. In times of temptation and conflict he rises above nature because he has put the Cause of nature first, just as Abraham put God before Isaac (cf. Gen. 22 : 1–14).

51. So long as you do not pursue virtue or study Holy Scripture for the sake of glory, or as a cloak for greed (cf. 1 Thess. 2 : 5), or from love of flattery and popularity, or for self-display, but do and

say and think all things for the sake of God, then you are walking with spiritual knowledge in the way of truth. If, however, you have in some respects 'prepared the way for the Lord', yet have not 'made His paths straight', He will not come to dwell within you (cf. Isa. 40 : 3. LXX; Mark 1 : 3).

52. If you fast and avoid a mode of life which excites the passions, and in general do whatever contributes to your deliverance from evil, then you have 'prepared the way for the Lord'. But if you do these things out of self-esteem, or greed, or love of flattery, or for some similar motive, and not with a desire to perform God's will, then you have not 'made His paths straight'. You have endured the labour of preparing the way but do not have God walking in your paths.

53. 'Every valley shall be filled' – yet not 'every' without qualification, or 'everyone's valley', for the text does not refer to the valley of those who have not prepared the way of the Lord and made His paths straight. By a valley is meant the flesh or soul of those who have prepared the way of the Lord and made His paths straight in the manner I have explained. When such a valley has been filled with spiritual knowledge and virtue by the divine Logos who, present in His commandments, walks in its paths, then all the spirits of false knowledge and evil are 'abased'; for the Logos treads them down and brings them into subjection. He overthrows that cunning power which has raised itself up against human nature; He levels it as if it were high and massive mountains and hills which He uses to fill in the valleys. For the rejection of passions which are contrary to nature, and the reception of virtues which are in accordance with nature, fills up the valley-like soul and abases the exalted lordship of the evil spirits (Isa. 40 : 4. LXX).

54. The 'rough places' – that is to say, the attacks of trials and temptations suffered against our will – shall be made 'smooth', above all when the intellect, rejoicing and delighting in weakness, affliction and calamity, through its unsought sufferings deprives of all their lordship the passions in which we deliberately indulge. For by 'rough places' Scripture means those experiences of unsought trials and temptations which change to smooth ways when endured with patience and thankfulness (cf. Isa. 40 : 4. LXX).

55. He who longs for the true life knows that all suffering, whether sought or unsought, brings death to sensual pleasure, the

mother of death; and so he gladly accepts the harsh attacks of trials and temptations suffered against his will. By patiently enduring them he turns afflictions into smooth untroubled paths, unerringly leading whoever devoutly runs the divine race along them towards 'the prize of the high calling' (Phil. 3 : 14). For sensual pleasure is the mother of death and the death of such pleasure is suffering, whether freely chosen or not.

56. Everyone, then, who through self-restraint does away with sensual pleasure, which is intricate, convoluted and intertwined in many ways with every sensible object, makes the crooked straight. And he who with patience withstands and defeats the harsh implacable bouts of suffering turns the rough places into smooth ways. Thus, when a person has well and truly struggled, has defeated sensual pleasure with desire for virtue, has overcome pain with love for spiritual knowledge, and through both virtue and knowledge has bravely persevered to the end of the divine contest, he will see, according to Scripture, 'the salvation of God'; and this will be his reward for virtue and for the efforts he has made to attain it (Isa. 40 : 4-5. LXX).

57. The lover of virtue willingly puts out the fire of sensual pleasure. And if a man has dedicated his intellect to the knowledge of truth, he will not allow unsought sufferings to thwart the ceaseless aspiration that leads him towards God.

58. When through self-control you have straightened the crooked paths of the passions in which you deliberately indulged – that is to say, the impulses of sensual pleasure – and when, by enduring patiently the harsh and painful afflictions produced by trials and temptations suffered against your will, you have made the rough ways smooth and even, then you may expect to see God's salvation, for you will have become pure in heart. In this state of purity, through the virtues and through holy contemplation, you will at the end of your contest behold God, in accordance with Christ's words: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Matt. 5 : 8). And because of the sufferings you have endured for the sake of virtue you will receive the gift of dispassion. To those who possess this gift there is nothing which reveals God more fully.

59. In Scripture hearts capable of receiving the heavenly gifts of holy knowledge are called cisterns (cf. 2 Chr. 26 : 10). They have been hewn out by the firm principle of the commandments; they

have been cleared, as if of earth, of self-indulgence in the passions and of natural attachment to sensible things; and they have been filled with that spiritual knowledge which purges the passions and gives life and sustenance to the virtues.

60. The Lord hews out cisterns in the desert, that is to say, in the world and in human nature. He excavates the hearts of those who are worthy, clears them of their material sordidness and arrogance, and makes them deep and wide in order to receive the divine rains of wisdom and knowledge. He does this so that they may water Christ's flocks, those who need moral instruction because of the immaturity of their souls.

61. Scripture refers to the higher form of the spiritual contemplation of nature as 'hill-country' (Deut. 11 : 11). Its cultivators are those who have rejected the images derived from sensible objects, and have advanced to a perception of the noetic essences of these objects through the acquisition of the virtues.

62. So long as the intellect continuously remembers God, it seeks the Lord through contemplation, not superficially but in the fear of the Lord, that is, by practising the commandments. For he who seeks Him through contemplation without practising the commandments does not find Him: he has not sought Him in the fear of the Lord and so the Lord does not guide him to success. The Lord guides to success all who combine the practice of the virtues with spiritual knowledge: He teaches them the qualities of the commandments and reveals to them the true inner essences of created beings.

63. Sublime knowledge about God stands in the soul like a tower, fortified with the practice of the commandments. That is the meaning of the text, 'Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem' (2 Chr. 26 : 9). A man builds towers in Jerusalem when he is blessed with success in his search for the Lord through contemplation accompanied by the requisite fear, that is, by observing the commandments; for he then establishes the principles of divine knowledge in the undivided and tranquil state of his soul.

64. When the inner principles of particulars combine with those of universals, they bring about the union of what is divided. This is because the more universal a principle is, the greater the degree to which it embraces and unifies the more particular principles. Particulars have a natural affinity with universals. But there is also a

certain spiritual principle which relates the intellect to the senses, heaven to earth, sensibles to intelligibles, and nature to the principle of nature, uniting them one with another.

65. If you have been able to free your senses from the passions and have separated your soul from its attachment to the senses, you will have succeeded in barring the devil from entering the intellect by means of the senses. It is to this end that you should build safe towers in the desert (cf. 2 Chr. 26 : 10). By 'desert' is meant natural contemplation; by 'safe towers' a true understanding of the nature of created beings. If you take refuge in these towers, you will not fear the demons who raid this desert – that is, who insinuate themselves into the nature of visible things, deceiving the intellect through the senses and dragging it off into the darkness of ignorance. If you acquire a true understanding of each thing, you will not be afraid of the demons who deceive men by means of the external appearance of sensible objects.

66. Every intellect that has the power to contemplate is a true cultivator: so long as it has the remembrance of God to sustain it, it keeps the seeds of divine goodness clear of tares through its own diligence and solicitude. For it is said, 'And with fear of the Lord he sought God in the days of Zechariah' (2 Chr. 26 : 5. LXX). 'Zechariah' means 'remembrance of God'. So let us always pray to God to keep this saving remembrance alive in us, lest what our intellect has achieved corrupts our soul, filling it with pride and encouraging it to aspire presumptuously, like Uzziah, to what is above nature (cf. 2 Chr. 26 : 16).

67. Only a soul which has been delivered from the passions can without error contemplate created beings. Because its virtue is perfect, and because its knowledge is spiritual and free from materiality, such a soul is called 'Jerusalem'. This state is attained through exclusion not only of the passions but also of sensible images.

68. Without faith, hope and love (cf. 1 Cor. 13 : 13) nothing sinful is totally abolished, nor is anything good fully attained. Faith urges the beleaguered intellect to press on towards God and encourages it by equipping it with a full range of spiritual weapons. Hope is the intellect's surest pledge of divine help and promises the destruction of hostile powers. Love makes it difficult or, rather, makes it utterly impossible for the intellect to estrange itself from

the tender care of God; and when the intellect is under attack, love impels it to concentrate its whole natural power into longing for the divine.

69. Faith encourages the beleaguered intellect and strengthens it with the hope of assistance. Hope brings before its eyes this help promised by faith and drives off the enemy's attack. Love kills the enemy's provocations within the devout intellect, utterly obliterating them with deep longing for the divine.

70. The first and unique effect of the divine gift of genuine spiritual knowledge is to produce within us by faith the resurrection of God. Faith needs to be accompanied by the right ordering of our will and purpose – that is to say, by discrimination – which makes it possible for us bravely to withstand the spate of trials and temptations, sought or unsought. Thus faith, rightfully expressing itself through the fulfilment of the commandments, is the first resurrection within us of the God whom we have slain through our ignorance.

71. The return to God clearly implies the fullest affirmation of hope in Him, for without this nobody can accept God in any way at all. For it is characteristic of hope that it brings future things before us as if they were present, and so it assures those who are attacked by hostile powers that God, in whose name and for whose sake the saints go into battle, protects them and is in no way absent. For without some expectation, pleasant or unpleasant, no one can ever undertake a return to the divine.

72. Nothing so much as love brings together those who have been sundered and produces in them an effective union of will and purpose. Love is distinguished by the beauty of recognizing the equal value of all men. Love is born in a man when his soul's powers – that is, his intelligence, incensive power and desire – are concentrated and unified around the divine. Those who by grace have come to recognize the equal value of all men in God's sight and who engrave His beauty on their memory, possess an ineradicable longing for divine love, for such love is always imprinting this beauty on their intellect.

73. Every intellect girded with divine authority possesses three powers as its counsellors and ministers. First, there is the intelligence. It is intelligence which gives birth to that faith, founded upon spiritual knowledge, whereby the intellect learns that God is always

present in an unutterable way, and through which it grasps, with the aid of hope, things of the future as though they were present. Second, there is desire. It is desire which generates that divine love through which the intellect, when of its own free will it aspires to pure divinity, is wedded in an indissoluble manner to this aspiration. Third, there is the incensive power. It is with this power that the intellect cleaves to divine peace and concentrates its desire on divine love. Every intellect possesses these three powers, and they cooperate with it in order to purge evil and to establish and sustain holiness.

74. Without the power of intelligence there is no capacity for spiritual knowledge; and without spiritual knowledge we cannot have the faith from which springs that hope whereby we grasp things of the future as though they were present. Without the power of desire there is no longing, and so no love, which is the issue of longing; for the property of desire is to love something. And without the incensive power, intensifying the desire for union with what is loved, there can be no peace, for peace is truly the complete and undisturbed possession of what is desired.

75. Until you have been completely purified from the passions you should not engage in natural contemplation through the images of sensible things; for until then such images are able to mould your intellect so that it conforms to passion. An intellect which, fed by the senses, dwells in imagination on the visible aspects of sensible things becomes the creator of impure passions, for it is not able to advance through contemplation to those intelligible realities cognate with it.

76. When faced with the eruption of the passions, you should courageously close your senses and totally reject the images and memories of sensible things, and in every way restrict the intellect's natural tendency to investigate things in the external world. Then, with God's help, you will abase and overcome the cunning tyrannical power which rises up against you.

77. When intelligence is stupefied, the incensive power precipitate and desire mindless, and when ignorance, a domineering spirit and licentiousness govern the soul, then sin becomes a habit, actively entangling one in the various pleasures of the senses.

78. The mature intellect must with spiritual knowledge escape from invisible entanglements. While it is being provoked by evil

powers it must not engage in natural contemplation or do anything but pray, tame the body with hardship, diligently bring the earthly will into subjection, and guard the walls of the city, that is, the virtues which protect the soul or the qualities which guard the virtues, namely, self-control and patience. Otherwise he who proffers the soul a foul potion may deceive the intellect with what seems to be good and secretly turn its desire away from God, drawing its understanding, which seeks what is good, towards what is bad, because it has mistaken the bad for the good.

79. The person who courageously closes his senses by means of the deliberate and all-embracing practice of self-control and patience, and prevents sensory forms from entering the intellect through the soul's faculties, easily frustrates the wicked schemes of the devil and turns him back, abased, along the way by which he came. The way by which the devil comes consists of material things which seem to be needed for sustaining the body.

80. The intellect reaps true knowledge from natural contemplation when, in a way that conforms to nature, it unites the senses to itself by means of the intelligence.

81. When Scripture speaks of the springs blocked up by Hezekiah outside the city (cf. 2 Chr. 32:3-4. LXX), the city signifies the soul and the springs the totality of sensible things. The waters of these springs are conceptual images of sensible things. The river that flows through the middle of the city is knowledge gathered in natural contemplation from these conceptual images of sensible things. This knowledge passes through the middle of the soul because it links the intellect and the senses. For the knowledge of sensible things is not entirely unconnected with the noetic faculty, nor does it depend altogether on the activity of the senses. On the contrary, it is as it were the intermediary between the intellect and the senses and between the senses and the intellect, and itself brings about the union of the two with each other. So far as the senses are concerned, it impresses on them the forms of sensible things, each according to its own kind; so far as the intellect is concerned, it transmutes these impressions into the inner essences of the forms. It is therefore fitting that the knowledge of visible things should be described as a river flowing through the middle of the city, for it occupies the middle ground between the intellect and the senses.

82. If during periods of temptation and trial you refrain from natural contemplation and hold fast to prayer, withdrawing your intellect from all things and focusing it on itself and on God, you will put to death the inward disposition which produces evil and you will send the devil packing with his tail between his legs. For it was the devil who insinuated this habit into you and, relying on it, he boastfully approached your soul, vilifying truth with proud thoughts. David, who had vast experience in the front line of every kind of spiritual battle, was most likely not simply familiar with these tactics but actually put them into practice; for he says: 'While the wicked one stood before me I was dumb and humbled myself and refrained from uttering even good words' (Ps. 39 : 1-2. LXX). Jeremiah, in the same spirit, warned the people not to go out of the city because the sword of the enemy lay about it (cf. Jer. 6 : 25).

83. We may apply this also to Cain and Abel (cf. Gen. 4 : 8). Cain is the law of the flesh, and the field into which Cain and Abel went is the realm of natural contemplation. Had Abel kept guard over himself and had he not gone out with Cain into the field before attaining dispassion, then the law of the flesh would not have risen up and killed him, cleverly deceiving him when he was engaged in the contemplation of created beings before being fully prepared.

84. Similarly, if Dinah the child of Jacob had not gone out to the daughters of the land - that is, into the world of sensible images - Shechem the son of Hamor would not have risen up and humiliated her (cf. Gen. 34 : 1-2).

85. We should abstain from natural contemplation until we are fully prepared, lest in trying to perceive the spiritual essences of visible creatures we reap passions by mistake. For the outward forms of visible things have greater power over the senses of those who are immature than the essences hidden in the forms of things have over their souls. Of course, those who confine their minds Judaic-wise to the letter alone expect the promises of divine blessings to be fulfilled in this present age, for they are ignorant of the qualities naturally inherent in the soul.

86. He who 'wears the image of Him who is from heaven' (1 Cor. 15 : 49) tries to follow the spirit of Holy Scripture in all things, for it is the spirit which, by promoting virtue and spiritual knowledge, sustains the soul. He who 'wears the image of him who is from earth' pays heed only to the letter, for the cultivation of the body by

means of the senses is promoted by the letter. Such cultivation in its turn generates the passions.

87. By the power of God is meant the virtue that destroys the passions and safeguards holy thoughts. Such virtue is generated by the practice of the commandments: in this way, with God's cooperation or, rather, by His strength alone, we destroy the forces of evil that are opposed to sanctity. By God's sublimity is meant the spiritual knowledge of the truth, realized through our efforts to attain the contemplation of created beings and the practice of the virtues. Through spiritual knowledge we utterly annihilate the truth-opposing power of falsehood, abasing and demolishing the vaunting self-assertion of the evil spirits that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God (cf. 2 Cor. 10 : 5). For just as ascetic practice gives birth to virtue, so contemplation engenders spiritual knowledge.

88. Ineffaceable knowledge, whose spiritual gyration around God's infinitude is unconditioned and beyond intellection, images in its unconditionality the more than infinite glory of the truth. The voluntary imitation of divine wisdom and goodness brings as its reward the intellect's longing for and glorious attainment of likeness to God, in so far as this is possible for man.

89. The tongue is a symbol of the soul's spiritual energy and the larynx a symbol of natural self-love for the body. Thus he who ignobly welds the one to the other cannot give his attention to the tranquil state of virtue and spiritual knowledge, for he sedulously indulges in the confusion of bodily passions.

90. Appetites and pleasures which are in accordance with nature are not reprehensible, since they are a necessary consequence of natural appetency. For our ordinary food, whether we wish it or not, naturally produces pleasure, since it satisfies the hunger which precedes a meal. Drink also produces pleasure, since it relieves the discomfort of thirst; so does sleep, since it renews the strength expended in our waking hours; and so, too, do all our other natural functions necessary for maintaining life and conducive to the acquisition of virtue. But every intellect that is trying to escape from the confusion of sin transcends such passions, lest through them it remains a slave to passions which are subject to our control, contrary to nature and reprehensible; for these have no ground in us other than the activity of the passions which are in accordance with nature,

although not on that account destined to accompany us into immortal and everlasting life.

91. If the words of God are uttered merely as verbal expressions and their message is not rooted in the virtuous way of life of those who utter them, they will not be heard. But if they are uttered through the practice of the commandments, their sound has such power that they dissolve the demons and dispose men eagerly to build their hearts into temples of God through making progress in works of righteousness.

92. Just as God in His essence cannot be the object of man's spiritual knowledge, so not even His teaching can be fully embraced by our understanding. For though Holy Scripture, being restricted chronologically to the times of the events which it records, is limited where the letter is concerned, yet in spirit it always remains unlimited as regards the contemplation of intelligible realities.

93. If you want to absorb the precise spiritual sense of Holy Scripture in a way that accords with Christ's wishes, you must train yourself diligently in the interpretation of names, for in this way you can elucidate the meaning of all that is written. But you must not Judaic-wise drag the sublimity of the Spirit down to the level of the body and the earth, and limit the divine inviolate promise of spiritual blessings to things corrupt and transitory.

94. Since a vow is a promise of some good thing offered by man to God, it may clearly be inferred that prayer is petition for the blessings bestowed by God on man with a view to his salvation and as a reward for the good inner state of those who make the prayer. Succour is the gift and growth, in the face of demonic attack, of virtuous qualities pursued through the practice of the ascetic life and of spiritual vision pursued through the life of contemplation. In the cry for such succour God naturally pays heed above all not to the loudness with which it is uttered but to the inner state of virtue and spiritual knowledge possessed by those who utter it.

95. The evil and destructive kingdom of the devil - typified by the kingdom of the Assyrians (cf. 2 Kgs. 18 : 11) - has organized a war against virtue and spiritual knowledge, plotting to pervert the soul through the soul's innate powers. First it stimulates the soul's desire to develop an appetite for what is contrary to nature, and persuades it to prefer sensible to intelligible things. Then it rouses the soul's incensive power to struggle with all its might in order to

attain the sensible object which it desires. Finally it teaches the soul's intelligence how to contrive opportunities for sensual pleasure.

96. In His supreme goodness God has not only made the divine and incorporeal essences of noetic realities images of His unutterable glory, each in its own way reflecting, in so far as this is granted, the supra-noetic splendour of His unapproachable beauty; He also permeates with echoes of His majesty things that are sensory and far inferior to noetic essences. These enable the human intellect, mounted upon them and carried above all visible things, to journey towards God and to attain the summit of blessedness.

97. Every intellect crowned with virtue and spiritual knowledge is appointed like the great Hezekiah to rule over Jerusalem (cf. 2 Kgs. 18 : 1-2) – that is to say, over the state in which one beholds only peace and which is free from all passions. For Jerusalem means 'vision of peace' Through the forms which fill creation, such an intellect has the whole of creation under its sovereignty. Through the intellect creation offers as gifts to God the spiritual principles of knowledge that lie within it; and as gifts to the intellect it presents the qualities conducive to virtue which exist within it in accordance with the law of nature. Both through the principles of spiritual knowledge and through the qualities of virtue creation honours the intellect so admirably fitted to make right use of both – the philosophic intellect perfected in both intelligence and action through contemplation and the practice of the ascetic life.

98. He who has attained the summit of virtue and spiritual knowledge through the practice of the ascetic life and contemplation naturally transcends every carnal and reprehensible passion; he also surmounts the condition of so-called natural bodies, that is, of beings subject to generation and corruption. In short, through contemplation he gains spiritual knowledge of the inner essences of all sensible forms and passes beyond them, raising his intellect to the divine realities that are akin to it.

99. When, thanks to the hardships you have undergone in the practice of the virtues, you are appointed to dwell in the state of dispassion as though in Jerusalem and, freed from all the disturbance of sin, you practise, speak, hear and think nothing but peace; and when, after that, you have received through natural contemplation an understanding of the nature of visible things – a nature which

offers through you as gifts to the Lord the divine essences dwelling within it, and presents to you, as if presenting gifts to a king, the laws that lie within it – then you are 'magnified in sight of all nations' (2 Chr. 32 : 23). For you are now above all things: through the practice of the virtues you have risen above natural bodies and the passions of the flesh, and through contemplation you have passed beyond the indwelling spiritual essences and qualities of all sensible forms.

100. Practical philosophy sets above the passions the man who practises the virtues. Contemplation establishes above visible things the man who attains spiritual knowledge, raising his intellect to the noetic realities akin to it.