

EUCHERIUS OF LYONS, On Contempt for the World

(1654 Vaughan translation)

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DE CONTEMPTU MUNDI, by St. Eucherius of Lyons

--translated by Henry Vaughan the Silurist

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Eucherius of Lyons is one of the great neglected spiritual writers of Western Orthodoxy. His ascetic mysticism is very much in the Eastern tradition; if there were a "Latin Philokalia", Eucherius would doubtless have a place in it. At the same time, his proverbs and apothegms, some of which may be found near the end of the present work, speak directly to people living in the world as much as to monks.

For some reason, Eucherius is hard to find in English. It is remarkable but apparently true that the only unabridged English translation of any of his spiritual writings is the work you are about to read, here reissued with slightly modernized spelling and punctuation but otherwise just as it first appeared in 1654. Happily, by way of compensation, it is a very remarkable English version. The work of the brilliant Cavalier poet and mystical visionary Henry Vaughan the Silurist, "The World Contemned" was the first part of a spiritual anthology called -Flores Solitudinis-, which Vaughan had hoped would trigger a monastic revival in the Church of England. Though that hope went unfulfilled in Vaughan's lifetime, his translation lives on to inspire modern English-speakers to a life of angelic holiness.

The St. Pachomius Library will be issuing original modern translations of Eucherius' other works as they are completed. --N. Redington]

THE WORLD CONTEMNED,

IN A

Parenetical Epistle written by
the Reverend Father

EUCHERIUS,

Bishop of Lyons, to his Kinsman

VALERIANUS.

Translated into English by Henry VAUGHAN, Silurist.

"Love not the World, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him... They are of the world, therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them."

1 John 2:15 and 4:5.

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you... If ye were of the world, the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, the Servant is not greater than the Lord: if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also."

John 18:15, 19, and 20.

Originally printed for Humphrey Moseley at the Princes Armes, St. Paul's
Churchyard, London, anno Domini 1654.

[Translator's Introduction]

Heribert Ros-veyd published this piece at Antwerp, 1621. It is mentioned by Gennadius, cap. 63. -De Scriptoribus Ecclesiasticis-; and Erasmus -- long before Ros-veyd's edition -- writ some Notes upon it. The author Eucherius was a Roman senator, but being converted to the faith he left the Senate, and lived in a poor cell by the river Druentium, where his wife Galla died. His two daughters, Consortia and Tullia, having learnt Christ, continued both in the virgin-life, -et signorum gloria claruerunt-. He sate Bishop in the chair of Lyons -- as I find him placed by Helvicus -- in the year of our Lord 443. Some will have him a century lower, but that difference weakens not the certainty of it. The piece itself -- in the original -- is most elaborate and judicious, and breathes that -togatam elegantiam- which in most of the Roman senators was not more acquired than natural.

What this Valerian was [to whom the epistle was addressed] -- more then our author's kinsman, by whose pen his name lives -- is not certainly known. Some will have him to be Priscus Valerianus, the prefect, or deputy of France, mentioned by Sidonius Apollinaris: others are willing to let him pass for that Valerian whose Homilies now extant were published by Sirmondus. But as it is not determinable, so is it not material. This we may safely conclude: that he was a very eminent noble personage, and one that followed too much after temporal pomp, and the powers of this world; though neither of them could lend him so much light, as would keep him from obscurity. To bring down these top branches, Eucherius lays the axe to the root of the tree, by shewing him the vanity, and the iniquity of riches and honours, the two grand inticements of popular spirits. And this he doth with such powerful and clear reasons, that to virtuous and peaceful minds he hath rendered them not only contemptible, but odious. Much more might have been spoken against them, but -- seeing the age we live in hath made all his arguments demonstrations -- he hath in my judgement spoken enough. -- H.V.S.

EUCHERIUS TO HIS KINSMEN VALERIANUS:

THEY are happily linked in the bond of blood who are held together in the bond of love. And for this gift - which is descended to us from the father of lights, - both you and myself may greatly rejoice: whom love as well as kindred hath united, and those two fair obligations have betrothed in one entire affection. One of them we took from the fathers of the flesh, and the other from our private dispositions. This double tie by which - love bounding us on the one side, and blood on the other, - we are mutually knit together, hath enforced me to enlarge myself in this Epistle with some excess more then usual: that I might commend unto your consideration the cause of your own soul, and assert the work of our profession to be that supreme beatitude which is only true, and capable of those things which are eternal. And indeed your own pious propension is not repugnant of holy living, who already by a forward felicity of manners have in some points prevented, and met with many things which are taught unto us by sacred learning: so that by the means of provident and discrete Nature, you seem unto me to have seized upon many duties of religion; as the concessions and indulgencies of our good God towards you, whose gift it is, that the divine wisdom should partly find in you, and partly confer upon you the riches of His kingdom.

But although -- by the hands of your father and father-in-law -- you have been already advanced and seated upon the highest pinacles of temporal honours, and are still adorned and surrounded with illustrious titles descending from them both; yet I desire, and long to find in you, a thirst of greater and far higher honours, and shall now call you not to earthly, but to heavenly honours, not to the dignity and splendor of one short age, but to the solid and enduring glories of eternity: for the only true and indelible glory is, to be glorified in eternity.

I shall therefore speak unto you, not the wisdom of this world, but that secret and hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory. I shall speak with much care and affection towards you, and with very little respect and animadversion of myself; for I have in this attempt considered more what I wish to see practised in you, than what I am able to do in myself.

The first duty of man ordained and brought forth into this world for that end, -- my most dear Valerian! -- is to know his creator, and being known, to confess Him, and to resign or give up his life -- which is the wonderful and peculiar gift of God, -- to the service and worship of the Giver; for what he received by God's free donation, may be employed in true devotion, and what was conferred upon him in the state of wrath and unworthiness, may by an obedient resignation make him precious and beloved. For of this saving opinion are we; that as it is most certain, that we came forth first from God, so should we believe it, and press on still towards Him: whereupon we shall conclude, that he only rightly and divinely

apprehends the purpose of God in making man who understands it thus, that God Himself made us for Himself.

It is then our best course to bestow our greatest care upon the soul; so shall that which is the first and highest in dignity be not the lowest and last in consideration. Amongst us Christians, let that which is the first in order be the first cared for; let salvation, which is the chiefest profit, be our chiefest employment. Let the safeguard and the defense of this take up all our forces; let it be not only our chiefest, but our sole delight. As it surpasseth all other things in excellency, so let it in our care and consideration.

Our supreme duty is that which we owe to God, and the next appertains to the soul. And yet these two are such loving correlates, that though every one of the is a duty of supreme consequence, and such as by no means we may presume to neglect or omit, yet cannot we possibly perform any one of them without the other. So that whosoever will serve God doth at the same time provide for his own soul; and he that is careful for his own soul doth at the same time serve God. So that the state of these two sovereign duties in man, is by a certain compendious dependency and co-intention rendered very easy, while the faithful performance of the one is a perfect consumation of both: for by the unspeakable tenderness and mercy of God, the good we do to our own souls is the most acceptable service and sacrifice that we can offer unto Him.

Much physical curiosity, much care and many strict observations are bestowed upon the body; much pain it undergoes in hope of health; and deserves the soul no medicine? If it be but fit and necessary, that diverse helps and means of healing are sought for the body, for the recovering only of a temporal and transitory health, is it not unjust that the soul should be excluded, and be suffered to languish and putrify with deadly and spiritual diseases? Shall the soul only be a stranger to those proper and precious remedies ordained for it by the Physician? Yea, rather, if so many things are provided for the body, let the provision for the soul be far more abundant: for if it was truly said by some, that this fleshy frame is the servant, and the soul the mistress, then will it be very undecent and injurious, that the better part should require the better attendance? For with constant and intente diligence should we look on that side where the greater dignity and our most precious treasure is laid up.

It is not agreeable to reason, and it takes from the honour of our employment, that we should subject it to the unworthier party. The flesh being always inclined to viciousness draws us back to the Earth, as to its proper center and original: but the soul being descended from the Father of lights, is like the sparks of fire still flying upwards. The soul is the image of God in us, and the precious pledge of his future munificence. Let us employ all our innate forces and all outwards auxiliaries for the preservation of this: if we manage and defend it faithfully, we take care for and protect the entrusted pledge and purchased possession of God.

What convenience can we have to build, unless we do first of all lay the foundation? But to him that designed a superstructure of true blessings, the fundamental must be salvation. And if he hath not laid that foundation, upon what can the consequences he hopes for be builded? How shall he be filled with the increase of those remunerations and after-blessings, that wants the first-fruits, and denies the rewarder? What portion can he have in joys of eternity that will be wanting to his own salvation? How can he live the life of the blessed, that will not rise from death? Or what will it benefit him to heap up temporal provision, and the materials of this world, when he hath stored up nothing for the comfort of his soul? Or as our Lord JESUS CHRIST hath said, "What is a man profited, if he gains the whole world, and lose his own soul?" [Matthew 16:26]

There can therefore be no cause for sparing and laying up, where it is manifest that the soul is already lost; where salvation is forfeited, what gain or profit can he hope for? Or wherein shall the true treasure be laid up, or wherewith shall he receive it, when the soule's precious vessel, and the storehouse of eternal joys, is utterly ruined and broken? Let us therefore while we have time labour for true riches, and make earnest haste to that holy and heavenly commerce, which is worth our looking and longing after.

Eternal life may be obtained in a very few days: which days, though they should be blest with an inoffensive and untainted holiness of life, yet because they are but few are to be lightly esteem'd of: for nothing can be rich in value, which is but short in duration: nor can that procure any long or durable joys, whose time of existence or abode is narrow and transient. The short accomodations of this life have but short effects. It seems therefore but just unto me, that to the joys of this present life, -- if it hath any -- we should prefer the true and indubitable joys of that which is everlasting. For the felicity we enjoy here is at best but temporal, but the other is eternal; and the fruition of a transitory, uncertain happiness is but a frailty and accident; but the possession of inviolable and never ending joys is triumph and security.

It is clear then, that the eternal life is most blessed; for what other thing can be named, or thought upon, that is more happy than everlasting life? As for this present short life, it is so very short, that it is withal most miserable. It is pressed and assaulted on every side with surrounding, inevitable sorrows; it is distressed with many evil defects, and tossed to and fro with secret and penal accidents. For what is there in all the whole world that is so uncertain, so various, and so replenished with troubles, as the course of this life? which is full of labour, full of anguish, fraught with cares, and made ominous with dangers; which is distracted with violent and sudden mutations, made unpleasant with bodily distempers, afflicted with thoughtfulness, and lies naked to all the whirlwinds of time and chance? What benefit then, yea, what reason have you to turn aside and run away with [= from] eternal joys, that you may pursue and follow after temporal miseries!

Do not you see, my dear Valerian, how every one that is provident -- even in this life -- doth with plenty of all necessities furnish that cottage or field, where he knows he shall reside? and where he abides but for a short time, his provision is accordingly; where he intends a longer stay, he provides likewise a greater supply? Unto us also who in this present world -- being straightened on every side -- have but a very short time, are eternal ages reserv'd in the world which is to come; if so be that we competently provide for an eternal state, and seek only what is sufficient for the present, not perversely bestowing the greatest care upon the shortest and smallest portion of time, and the smallest care on the time of greatest and endless extent.

And indeed I know not which should soonest or most effectually incite us to a pious care of life eternal, either the blessings which are promised us in that state of glory, or the miseries which we feel in this present life. Those from above most lovingly invite and call upon us; these below most rudely and importunately would expell hence. Seeing therefore that the continual evils of this life would bring us hence into a better, if we will not be induced by the good, let us then be compelled by the evil. Both the good and the bad agree to incite us to the best, and though at difference amongst themselves, yet both consent to make us happy. For while the one invites us, and the other compells us, both are solicitous for our good.

If some eminent and powerful prince, having adopted you for his son and co-partner, should forthwith send for you by his ambassador; you would -- I believe -- break through all difficulties, and the wearisome extent of sea and land, that you might appear before him, and have your adoption ratified. God Almighty, the Maker and the Lord of Heaven and Earth, and all that is in them, calls you to this adoption, and offers unto you (if you will receive it) that dear style "a son", by which He calls His Only Begotten, and your glorious Redeemer. And will you not be inflamed and ravished with His divine love? will you not make haste, and begin your journey towards Heaven, lest swift destruction come upon you, and the honours offered you be frustrated by a sad and sudden death?

And to obtain this adoption, you shall not need to pass through the unfrequented and dangerous solitudes of the Earth, or to commit your self to the wide and perillous sea: when you will, this adoption is within your reach, and lodgeth with you. And shall this blessing, because it is as easy in the getting as it is great in the consequence, find you therefore backward or unwilling to attain it? How hard a matter to the lukewarm and the dissembler will the making sure of this adoption prove? for as to the faithful and obedient it is most easy, so to the hypocrite and the rebellious, it is most difficult.

Certainly, it is the love of life that hath enslaved us so much to a delectation and dotage upon temporal things. Therefore do I now advise you, who are a lover of life, to love it more. It is the right way of persuading, when we do it for no other end but to obtain that from you, which of your own accord you desire to grant us. Now for this life which you love am I an ambassador: and intreat that this life which you love in its transient and momentary state, you would also love in the eternal. But how or in what manner you may be said to love this present life, unless you desire to have it made most excellent, perfect, and eternally permanent, I cannot see; for that which hath the power to please you when it is but short and uncertain, wil please you much more when it is made eternal and immutable: and that which you dearly love and value, though you have it but for a time, will be much more dear and precious to you, when you shall enjoy it without end. It is therefore but fit, that the temporal life should look still towards the eternal, that through the one, you may pass into the other. You must not rob your self of the benefits of the life to come, by a crooked and perverse use of the present. This life must not oppose itself to the damage and hurt of the future: for it were very absurd and unnatural, that the love of life should cause the destruction and then death of life.

Therefore whither you judge this temporal life worthy of your love, or your content; my present argument will be every way very reasonable.

[An excellent dilemma! -Vaughan, tr.]

For if you condemn it, your reason to do so is that you may obtain a better: and if you love it, you must so much the more love that life which is eternal.

But I rather desire, that you would esteem of it as you have found it; and judge it to be -- as it is indeed -- full of bitterness and trouble, a race of tedious and various vexations; and that you would utterly forsake and renounce both it, and its occupations. Cut off at last that wearisome and endless chain of secular employments, that one and the same slavery, though in several negotiations. Break in sunder those cords of vain cares, in whose successive knots you are always entangled, and bound up, and in every one of which your travail is renewed and begun again. Let this rope of sands, this coherency of vain causes, be taken away: in which -- as long as men live -- the tumult of affairs (being still lengthen'd by an intervening succession of fresh cares) is never ended, but runs on with a fretting and consuming solicitousness, which makes this present life, that is already of itself short and miserable enough, far more short and more miserable. Which also -- according to the success or crossness of affairs -- lets in divers times vain and sinful rejoicings, bitter sorrows, anxious wishes, and suspicious fears.

Let us last of all cast off all those things which make this life in respect of their employment but very short, but in respect of cares and sorrows very long. Let us reject and resolutely condemn this uncertain world, and the more uncertain manners of it, wherein the peasant as well as the prince is seldom safe, where things that lie low are trodden upon, and the high and lofty totter and decline. Choose for yourself what worldly estate you please: there is no rest either in the mean, or the mighty. Both conditions have their miseries, and their misfortunes. The private and obscure is subject to disdain, the public and splendid unto envy.

Two prime things I suppose there are, which strongly enchain and keep men bound in secular negotiations; and having bewitch'd their understanding, retain them still in that dotage; the pleasure of riches and the dignity of honours. The former of which ought not to be called pleasure, but poverty; and the latter is not dignity, but vanity. These two -- being join'd in one subtle league -- set upon man, and with alternate, ensnaring knots disturb and entangle his goings. These -- besides the vain desires which are peculiar to themselves -- infuse into the mind of man other deadly and pestiferous lustings, which are their consequents; and with a certain pleasing enticement solicit and overcome the hearts of mankind.

As for riches -- that I may speak first of them -- what is there, I pray, or what can there be more pernicious? They are seldom gotten without injustice; by such an administrator are they gathered, and by such a steward they must be kept; for covetousness is the root of all evils. And there is indeed a very great familiarity betwixt these two, riches and vices [-divitiae et vitia-] in their names, as well as in their nature. And are they not also very frequently matter of disgrace, and an evil report? Upon which consideration it was said by one, that riches were tokens of injuries.

[--Every rich man is either a tyrant himself, or the son of a tyrant. -Henry Vaughan, tr.--]

In the possession of corrupt persons they publish to the world their bribery and unrighteousness, and elsewhere, they allure the eyes, and incite the spirits of seditious men to rebellion, and in the custody of such they bear witness of the sufferings, and the murder of innocent persons, and the plundering of their goods.

But grant that these disasters should not happen, can we have any certainty, whither these things that make themselves wings, will fly away after our decease? "He layeth up treasure" -- saith the Psalmist -- "and knoweth not for whom he gathers it."

But suppose that you should have an heir after your own heart, doth he not oftentimes destroy and scatter what the father hath gathered? doth not an ill-bred son, or our ill choice of a son-in-law, prove the frequent ruin of all our labours and substance in this life? What pleasure can there be in such riches, whose collection is sin and sorrow, and our transmission, or bequeathing of them, anxious and uncertain? Whither then at last will this wild and devious affection of men carry them? You know how to love accidental and external goods, but cannot love your own self. That which you so much long for is abroad, and without you; you place your affection upon a foreigner, upon an enemy. Return, or retire rather into yourself, and be you dearer and nearer to your own heart than those things which you call yours. Certainly if some wise man, and skilful in the affairs of this world, should converse and come to be intimate with you, it would better please you, that he should affect your person, than affect your goods; and you would choose, that he should rather love you for your self, than for your riches; you would have him to be faithful unto man, not to his money. What you would have another to perform towards you, that do for yourself, who ought to be the most faithful to your self. Our selves, our selves we should love, not those things which we phantastically call ours. And let this suffice to have been spoken against riches.

As for the honours of this world -- to speak generally, and without exception, for I shall not descend to particulars -- what dignity can you justly attribute to those things which the base man, and the bad, as well as the noble and good, promiscuously obtain, and all of them by corruption and ambition? The same honour is not conferred upon men of the same merits, and dignity makes not a difference betwixt the worthy and the unworthy, but confounds them. So that which should be a character of deserts, by advancing the good above the bad, doth unjustly make them equal; and after a most strange manner there is in no state of life less difference made betwixt the worst men and the best, than in that state which you term honourable. Is it not then a greater honour to be without that honour, and to be esteemed of according to our genuine worth, and sincere carriage, than according to the false gloss of promiscuous, deceiving honours?

And these very things --- how big soever they look --- what fleeting and frail appearances are they? We have seen of late men eminently honourable, seated upon the very spires and top of dignity, whose incredible treasures purchased them a great part of the world; their success exceeded their own desires, and their prodigious fortunes amazed their very wishes: but these I speak of were private prosperities. Kings themselves with all their height and imperiousnesse, with all their triumphs and glory, shined but for a time. Their clothings were of wrought gold, their diadems sparkled with the various flames and differing relucencies of precious stones; their palaces were thronged with princely attendants, their roofs adorned with gilded beams, their will was a law, and their words were the rules and coercive bounds of mankind. But who is he, that by a temporal felicity can lift his head above the stage of human chances? Behold now, how the vast sway and circumference of these mighty is no where to be found! Their riches and precious things too are all gone, and [so too] they themselves: the possessors and masters of these royal treasures! Most late [i.e. recent] and most famous kingdoms -- even amongst us -- are now become a certain fable. All those things which sometimes were reputed here to be very great are now become none at all.

Nothing I think, nay I am sure, of all these riches, honours, powers went along with them from hence: all they took with them was the precious substance of their faith and piety. These only -- when they were deprived of all other attendants -- waited on them, and like faithful, inseperable companions, travelled with them out of this world. With this provision are they now fed; with these riches, and with these honours are they adorned. In these they rest, and this goodness is now their greatness.

Wherefore, if we be taken at all with honours and riches, let us be taken with true and durable ones. Every good man exchangeth these earthly dignities for those which are celestial, and earthen treasures for the heavenly. He lays up treasure there, where a most exact and unconfused difference is made betwixt the good and the bad; where that which is once gotten shall be for ever enjoyed; where all things may be obtained, and where nothing can be lost.

But seeing we are fallen into a discourse of the frailty of temporal things, let us not forget the frail condition of this short life. What is it, I beseech you, what is it? Men see nothing more frequently then death, and mind nothing more seldom. Mankind is by a swift mortality quickly driven into the West, or setting point of life, and all posterity by the unalterable law of succeeding ages and generations follow after. Our fathers went hence before us; we shall go next, and our children must after. As streams of water falling from on high, the one still following the other, do in successive circles break and terminate at the banks; so the appointed times and successions of men are cut off at the boundary of death. This consideration should take up our thoughts both night and day; this memorial of our frail condition should keep us still awake. Let us always think the time of our departure to be at hand; for the day of death, the further we put it off, comes the faster, and is by so much the nearer to us. Let us suspect it to be near, because we know not how far! Let us, as the Scripture saith, "Make plain our ways before us". [Isaiah 28:25]

If we make this the business of our thoughts, and meditate still upon it, we shall not be frightened with the fear of death. Blessed and happy are all you who have already reconciled yourselves unto Christ! No great fear of death can disturb them, who desire to be dissolved that they may be with Christ; who in the silence of their own bosoms, quietly, and long since prepared for it, expect the last day of their pilgrimage here. They care not much how soon they end this temporal life, that pass from it into life eternal.

Let not the populacy and throng of loose livers or hypocritical time-pleasers persuade us to a neglect of life, neither be you induced by the errors of the many to cast away your particular salvation. What will the multitude in that day of God's judgement avail us, when every private person shall be sentenced, where the examinations of works, and every man's particular actions, not the example of the common people, shall absolve him? Stop your ears, and shut your eyes against such damnable precedents that invite you

destruction. It is better to sow in tears, and to plant eternal life with the few, then to lose it with the multitude. Let not therefore the number of sinful men weaken your diligence of not sinning; for the madness of those that sin against their own souls can be no authority unto us. I beseech you look always upon the vices of others as their shame, not your example.

If it be your pleasure to look for examples, seek them rather from that party, which though the least, yet if considered as it is a distinct body, is numerous enough. Seek them -- I say -- from that party, wherein you shall find those ranged, who wisely understood wherefore they were born, and accordingly, while they lived, did the business of life; who eminent for good works, and excelling in virtue, pruned and dressed the present life, and planted the future. Nor are our examples -- though of this rare kind -- only copious, but great withal, and most illustrious.

For what worldly nobility, what honours, what dignity, what wisdom, what eloquence, or learning have not betaken themselves to this heavenly warfare? What sovereignty now hath not with all humility submitted to this easy yoke of Christ? And certainly it is a madness beyond error and ignorance for any to dissemble in the cause of their salvation. I could -- but that I will not be tedious to you -- out of an innumerable company produce many by name, and shew you what eminent and famous men in their times have forsaken this world, and embraced the most strict rule of Christian religion. And some of these -- because I may not omit all, -- I shall cursorily introduce.

Clement the Roman, of the stock of the Caesars, and the ancient lineage of the senators; a person fraught with science, and most skilful in the liberal arts, betook himself to this path of the just; and so uprightly did he walk therein, that he was elected to the episcopal dignity of Rome.

Gregory of Pontus, a minister of holy things, famous at first for his humane learning and eloquence, became afterwards most eminent by those divine graces conferr'd upon him. For -- as the faith of ecclesiastical History testifies, -- amongst other miraculous signs of his effectual devotion, he removed a mountain by prayer, and dried up a deep lake.

Gregory Nazianzen, another holy father, given also at first to philosophy and humane literature, declined at last those worldly rudiments, and embraced the true and heavenly philosophy: to whose industry also we owe no meaner a person than Basil the Great; for being his intimate acquaintance and fellow-student in secular sciences, he entered one day into his auditory, where Basilus was then a reader of rhetorick, and leading him by the hand out of the School, dissuaded him from that employment with this gentle reproof: "Leave this vanity, and study thy salvation." And shortly after both of them came to be faithful stewards in the house of God, and have left us in the Church most useful and pregnant monuments of their Christian learning.

Paulinus Bishop of Nola, the great ornament and light of France, a person of princely revenues, powerful eloquence, and most accomplished learning, so highly approved of this our profession that choosing for himself "the better part", he divided all his princely inheritance amongst the poor, and afterward filled most part of the world with his elegant and pious writings.

Hilarius of late, and Petronius now in Italy, both of them out of the fulness of honours and power, betook themselves to this course; the one entering into the religion, the other into the priesthood.

[Hilarius about this time -- which was 435 years after Christ -- did lead a monastical life; but upon the death of Honoratius, he was elected his successor in the Bishoprick of Orleans, in which dignity he continued not long, for being addicted to solitariness, he resigned it, and returned into the wilderness. -- Vaughan, tr.]

And when shall I have done with this great "cloud of witnesses", if I should bring into the field all those eloquent contenders for the faith, Firmianus, Minutius, Cyprian, Hilary, Chrysostom and Ambrose? These I believe spoke to themselves in the same words which another of our profession -- St. Augustine -- used as a spur to drive himself out of the secular life to this blessed and heavenly vocation. They said, I believe, "What is this? The unlearned get up, and lay hold upon the kingdom of heaven, and we with our learning, behold where we wallow in flesh and blood." This surely they said, and upon this consideration they also rose up, and tooke the kingdom of Heaven by force.

Having now in part produced these reverend witnesses, whose zeal for the Christian faith hath exceeded most of their successors, though they also were bred up in secular rudiments, persuasive eloquence, and the pomp and fulnesses of honours, I shall descend unto kings themselves, and to that head of the world, the Roman Empire. And here I think it not necessary that those royal religious ancients of the old world should be mentioned at all. Some of their posterity, and the most renowned in our sacred Chronicles I shall make use of; as David for piety, Josiah for faith, and Ezechias for humility. The later times also have been fruitfull in this kind, nor is this our age altogether barren of pious princes, who draw near to the

knowledge of the only true and immortal King, and with most contrite and submissive hearts acknowledge and adore the Lord of Lords. The Court, as well as the cloister, hath yielded saints, of both sexes. And these in my opinion are more worthy your imitation than the mad and giddy commonality; for the examples of these, carry with them in the world to come salvation, and in the present world, authority. You see also how the days and the years, and all the bright ornaments and luminaries of Heaven, do with an unwearied duty execute the commands and decrees of their Creatour; and in a constant, irremissive tenor continue obedient to his ordinances. And shall we -- for whose use these lights were created, and set in the firmament,-- seeing we know our Master's will, and are not ignorant of His commandments, stop our ears against them? And to these vast members of the universe it was but once told what they should observe unto the end of the world; but unto us line upon line, precept upon precept, and whole volumes of God's commandments are every day repeated. Add to this, that man -- for this also is in his power -- should learn to submit himself to the will of his Creator, and to be obedient to His ordinances; for by paying his whole duty unto God, he gives withal a good example unto men. But if there be any that will not return unto their Maker and be healed, can they therefore escape the arm of their Lord, in whose hand are the spirits of all flesh? Whither will they fly, that would avoid the presence of God? What covert can hide them from that eye which is everywhere, and sees all things? Let them hear thee, holy David, let them hear thee:

PSALM 139

Whither shall I go from Thy presence, Or whither shall I flee from Thy Spirit? If I ascend into Heaven, Thou art there: If I make my bed in Hell, behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the Sea; Even there shall Thy hand lead me, And Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me," Even the night shall be light about Thee. Yea the darkness hideth not from Thee, But the night shineth as the day: The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee.

Therefore -- willing or unwilling -- though they should absent themselves from the Lord of all the world by their wills, yet shall they never be able to get their persons out of His jurisdiction and supreme right. They are absent from Him indeed in their love and affections: but He is present with them in His prerogative and anger. So then being runagates they are shut up, and -- which is a most impious madness - - they live without any consideration or regard of God, but within His power. And if these being earthly masters, when their servants run away from them, with a furious and hasty search pursue after them; or if they renounce their service, prosecute them for it, and become the asserters of their own right over them; why will they not themselves render unto their Master which is in Heaven His most just right? Why will they not stay in his Family, and freely offer themselves unto His service, and be as impartial judges in the cause of God as in their own?

Why with so much dotage do we fix our eyes upon the deceitful looks of temporal things? Why do we rest ourselves upon those thorns only which we see beneath us? Is it the eye alone that we live by? Is there nothing useful about us but that wanderer? We live also by the ear, and at that inlet we receive the glad tidings of salvation, which fills us with earnest groans for our glorious liberty and the consummation of the promises. Whatsoever is promised, whatsoever is preached unto us, let us wait for it with intente wishes and most eager desires. That faithful one, the blessed Author of those promises, assures us frequently of his fidelity and performance; let us covet earnestly his best promises.

But notwithstanding this which hath been spoken, if a sober and virtuous use were made of the eye, we might by that very faculty be drawn to a certain sacred longing after immortality, and the powers of the world to come, if that admiration which by contemplating the rare frame of the world we are usually filled with were returned upon the glorious Creator of it, by our praises and benediction of Him. Or if we would meditate what a copious active and boundless light shall fill our eyes in the state of immortality, seeing so fair a luminary is allowed us in the state of corruption: or what transcendant beauty shall be given to all things in that eternal world, seeing this transitory one is so full of majesty and freshness. There can be no excuse for us, if we solicit the faculties of these members to abuse and perverseness. Let them rather be commodiously applied to both lifes, and so minister to the use of the temporal as not to cast off their duty to the eternal.

But if pleasure and love delight us, and provoke our senses, there is in Christian religion, a love of infinite comfort, and such delights as are not nauseous and offensive after fruition. There is in it, that which not only admits of a most vehement and overflowing love, but ought also to be so beloved; namely, God, blessed for evermore, the only beautiful, delightful, immortal and supreme good, Whom you may boldly and intimately love as well as piously; if in the room of your former earthly affections you entertain

heavenly and holy desires. If you were ever taken with the magnificence and dignity of another person, there is nothing more magnificent than God. If with anything that might conduce to your honour and glory, there is nothing more glorious than Him. If with the splendour and excellency of pompous shows, there is nothing more bright, nothing more excellent. If with fairness and pleasing objects, there is nothing more beautiful. If with verity and righteousness, there is nothing more just, nothing more true. If with liberality, there is nothing more bountiful. If with incorruption and simplicity, there is nothing more sincere, nothing more pure than that supreme goodness.

Are you troubled that your treasure and store is not proportionable to your mind? The Earth and the fulness thereof are under His lock. Do you love anything that is trusty and firm? There is nothing more friendly, nothing more faithful than Him. Do you love any thing that is beneficial? There is no greater benefactor. Are you delighted with the gravity or gentleness of any object? There is nothing more terrible than his Almightyness, nothing more mild than His goodness. Do you love refreshments in a low estate, and a merry heart in a plentiful? Joy in prosperity and comforts in adversity are both the dispensations of His hand. Wherefore it stands with all reason, that you should love the giver more than His gifts, and Him from whom you have all these things, more than the things themselves. Riches, honours, and all things else, whose present lustre attracts and possesseth your heart, are not only with Him, but are now also had from Him.

Recollect your dispersed and hitherto ill-placed affections, employ them wholly in the divine service. Let this dissolute love and compliance with worldly desires become chaste piety, and wait upon sacred affairs. Call home your tedious and runagate thoughts, which opinion and custom have sadly distracted; and having suppressed old errors, direct your love to his proper object, bestow it wholly upon your Maker. For all that you can love now is His, His alone, and none else. For of such infiniteness is He, that those who do not love Him deal most injuriously: because they cannot love anything, but what is His. But I would have an impartial judgement to consider, whether it be just for him to love the work, and hate the workman; and having cast by, and deserted the Creator of all things, to run and seize upon His creatures every where, and without any difference, according to his perverse and insatiable lust. Whereas it behooved him rather to invite God to be gracious and loving to him, by his very affections to His works, if piously laid out. And now man gives himself over to the lusts and service of his own detestable figments, and most unnaturally becomes a lover of the art, and neglects the artificer, adores the creature, and despiseth the Creator.

And what have we spoken all this while of those innumerable delights which are with Him? or of the infinite and ravishing sweetness of His ineffable goodness? the sacred and inexhaustible treasure of His love? or when will it be that they shall be able to express or conceive the dignity and fullness of any one attribute that is in Him? To love Him then is not only delightful, but needful: for not to love Him, Whom even then when we love, we cannot possibly requite, is impious; and not to return Him such acknowledgements as we are able, Whom if we would, we can never recompence, is most unjust: "for what shall we render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards us?" What shall we render unto Him for this one benefit, that He hath given salvation to man by faith, and ordained that to be most easy in the fact, by which He restored hope to the subjected world, and eternal life unto lost man?

And that I may now descend unto those things which were sometimes out of His covenant, I mean the nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles, do you think that these were made subject to the Roman power, and that the dispersed multitude of mankind were incorporated -- as it were -- into one body under one head, for any other end, but that -- as medicines taken in at the mouth are diffused into all parts of the body -- so the faith by this means might with more ease be planted and penetrated into the most remote parts of the world. Otherwise by reason of different powers, customs, and languages, it had met with fresh and numerous oppositions, and the passage of the Gospel had been much more difficult. Blessed Paul himself describing his course in planting the faith amongst this very people, writes in his Epistle to the Romans, "That from Hierusalem and round about to Illyricum he had fully preached the Gospel of Christ". And how long -- without this preparation for the fulness of time -- might this have been in doing, amongst nations either innumerable for multitude, or barbarous for immanity [inhumanity]?

Hence it is that the whole earth now from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof, from the farthest North, and the frozen sea, breaks forth into singing, and rings with the glorious name of Jesus Christ. Hence it is, that all parts of the world flock and run together to the Word of Life. The Thracian is for the faith, the African for the faith; the Syrian for the faith, and the Spaniard hath received the faith. A great argument of the divine clemency may be gathered out of this, that under Augustus Caesar, when the Roman power was in the height and acme, then the almighty God came down upon the earth and assumed

flesh. Therefore that I may now make use of those things, which you are also versed in, it may be clearly proved -- if any skilled in your Histories would assert the truth -- that from the first foundation of the Roman Empire -- which is now one thousand one hundred and eighty five years ago [This letter was written in the year of our Lord 435. -- Vaughan, tr.] -- whatever additions and growth it gathered either in the reign of their first kings, or afterwards under the administrations of consuls, all was permitted by the only wise, and almighty God, to prepare the world against the coming of Christ, and to make way for the propagation of the faith.

But I return thither, from whence I have digressed. "Love not the world" -- saith St. John -- "neither the things that are in the world"; for all those things with delusive and ensnaring shews captivate our sight, and will not suffer us to look upwards. Let not that faculty of the eye which was ordained for light be applied to darkness; being created for the use of life, let it not admit the causes of death. "Fleshly lusts" -- as it is divinely spoken by the Apostle -- "war against the soul," and all their accoutrements are for the ruin and destruction of it. A vigilant guard do they keep, when they are once permitted to make head[way], and after the manner of foreign and expert enemies, with those forces they take from us, they politckly strengthen and increase their own.

Thus hitherto have I discoursed of those splendid allurements, which are the chiefest and most taking baits of this subtile world, I mean riches and honours. And with such earnestness have I argued against them, as if those blandishments had still some force. But what beauty soever they had, when cast over heretofore with some pleasing adumbrations, it is now quite worn away, and all that paint and couzenage [fraud] is fallen off. The world hath now scarce the art to deceive. Those powerful and bewitching looks of things, beautiful sometimes even to deception, are now withered and almost loathsome. In former times it laboured to seduce us with its most solid and magnificent glories, and it could not. Now it turns cheat, and would entice us with toys, and slight wares, but it cannot. Real riches it never had, and now it is so poor that it wants counterfeits. It neither hath delectable things for the present, nor durable for the future; unless wee agree to deceive ourselves the world in a manner cannot deceive us.

But why delay I my stronger arguments? I affirm then that the forces of this world are dispersed and overthrown, seeing the world itself is now drawing towards its dissolution, and pants with its last gasps, and dying inhalations. How much more grievous and bitter will you think this assertion, that for certain it cannot last very long? What should I trouble my self to tell you that all the utensils and moveables of it are decayed and wasted? And no marvel that it is driven into these defects, and a consumption of its ancient strength, when now grown old and weary it stoops with weakness, and is ready to fall under the burthen of so many ages.

These latter years and decrepitness of Time are fraught with evils and calamities, as old age is with diseases. Our forefathers saw, and we still see in these last days the plagues of famine, pestilence, war, destruction, and terrors. All these are so many acute fits and convulsions of the dying world. Hence it is that such frequent signs are seen in the firmament, excessive eclipses, and faintings of the brightest luminaries, which is a shaking of the powers of heaven: sudden and astonishing earthquakes under our feet, alterations of times and governments, with the monstrous fruitfulness of living creatures; all which are the prodigies, or fatal symptoms of time going indeed still on, but fainting, and ready to expire. Nor is this confirmed by weak assertions only, but by sacred authority and the apostolical oracles: for there it is written, that "upon us the ends of the world are come" [1 Cor. 10.11], which divine truth, seeing it hath been spoken so long ago, what is it that we linger for, or what can we expect?

That day, not only ours, but the last that the present world shall ever see, calls earnestly for our preparation. Every hour tells us of the coming on of that inevitable hour of our death, seeing a double danger of two final dissolutions threatens every one in particular and all the world in general. Wretched man that I am! the mortality of this whole frame lies heavily upon my thoughts, as if my own were not burdensome enough. Wherefore is it that we flatter ourselves against these sure fears? There is no place left for deviation. A most certain decree is past against us: on the one side is written every man's private dissolution, and on the other the public and universal.

How much more miserable then is the condition of those men -- I will not say, in these outgoings, or last walks of time, but in these decays of the world's goodly things -- who neither can enjoy ought that is pleasant at the present, nor lay up for themselves any hope of true joys hereafter. They miss the fruition of this short life, and can have no hope of the everlasting: they abuse these temporal blessings, and shall never be admitted to use the eternal. Their substance here is very little, but their hope there is none at all. A most wretched and deplorable condition! unless they make a virtue of this desperate necessity, and hold on the only sovereign remedy of bettering their estate, by submitting in time to the wholesome rules of

heavenly and saving reason. Especially because the goodliest things of this present time are such rags and fragments, that he that loseth the whole fraught [freight], and true treasure of that one precious life which is to come, may be justly said to lose both.

It remains then, that we direct and fix all the powers of our minds upon the hope of the life to come. Which hope -- that you may more fully and clearly apprehend it -- I shall manifest unto you, under a type or example taken from temporal things. If so man should offer unto another five pieces of silver this day, but promise him five hundred pieces of gold if he would stay till the next morning, and put him to his choice, whether he would have the silver at present, or the gold upon the day following, is there any doubt to be made, but he would choose the greater sum, though with a little delay? Go you and do the like: compare the crumbs and perishing pittance in this short life with the glorious and enduring rewards of the eternal: and when you have done, choose not the least and the worst, when you may have the greatest and the best.

The short fruition of a little is not so beneficial, as the expectation of plenty. But seeing that all the frail goods of this world are not onely seen of us, but also possessed by us, it is most manifest that hope cannot belong unto this world, in which we both see and enjoy those things we delight in: for hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for [it]? [Rom 8:24] Therefore, however hope may be abased, and misapplied to temporal things, it is most certain that it was given to man and ordained for things that are eternal; otherwise it cannot be called hope, unless something be hoped for, which as yet-- or for the present life -- is not had. Therefore the substance of our hope in the world to come is more evident and manifest, then our hope of substance in the present.

Consider those objects which are the clearest and most visible; when we would best discern them, we put them not into our eyes, because they are better seen and judged of at a distance. It is just so in the case of present things and the future: for the present -- as if put into our eyes -- are not rightly and undeceivably seen of us; but the future, because conveniently distant, are most clearly discerned.

Nor is this trust and confidence wee have of our future happinesse built upon weak or uncertain authors, but upon our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, that almighty and faithful witness, Who hath promised unto the just, a kingdom without end, and the ample rewards of a blessed eternity; Who also by the ineffable sacrament of His humanity, being both God and Man, reconciled Man unto God, and by the mighty and hidden mystery of His passion, absolved the world from sin. For which cause He was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed upon in the world, and received into glory. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of JESUS every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in Earth, and things under the Earth. And that every tongue should confess that the Lord JESUS is in glory, both God and King before all ages. [Phil. 2:9-10]

Casting off then the vain and absurd precepts of philosophy, wherein you busy yourself to no purpose, embrace at last the true and saving knowledge of Christ. You shall find even in that employment enough for your eloquence and wit, and will quickly discern how far these precepts of piety and truth surpass the conceits and delirations of philosophers. For in those rules which they give, what is there but adulterate virtue and false wisdom? and what in ours but perfect righteousness and sincere truth? Whereupon I shall justly conclude, that they indeed usurp the name of philosophy, but the substance and life of it is with us. For what manner of rules to live by could they give, who were ignorant of the first cause, and the fountain of life? For not knowing God, and deviating in their first principles from the author and the wellspring of justice, they necessarily erred in the rest. Hence it happened, that the end of all their studies was vanity and dissension. And if any amongst them chanced to hit some more honest tenets, these presently ministered matter of pride and superstitiousness, so that their very virtue was not free from vice. It is evident then that these are they, whose knowledge is earthy, "the disputers of this world", "the blind guides," who never saw true justice, nor true wisdom. Can any one of that School of Aristippus be a teacher of the truth, who in their doctrine and conversation differ not from swine and unclean beasts, seeing they place true happiness in fleshly lusts? "whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame." Can he be a master of sobriety and virtue, in whose School the riotous, the obscene, and the adulterer are philosophers? But leaving these blind leaders, I shall come again to speak of those things which were the first motives of my writing to you.

I advise you then, and I beseech you, to cast off all their axioms or general maxims collected out of their wild and irregular disputations, wherein I have known you much delighted; and to employ those excellent abilities bestowed upon you, in the study of Holy Scripture, and the wholesome instructions of Christian philosophers. There shall you be fed with infallible wisdom. There -- to incite you to the faith -- you shall

hear the church speaking to you, though not in these very words, yet to this purpose: "He that believes not the word of God, understands it not." There you shall hear this frequent admonition: "Fear God, because He is your Master, honour Him because He is your Father."

There it shall be told you, that the most acceptable sacrifice to God are justice and mercy. There you shall be taught that, if you love your neighbor as yourself, you must necessarily love your neighbor; for you can never do yourself a greater courtesy, than by doing good to another. There you shall be taught that there can be no worldly cause so great, as to make the death of a man legal or needful. There you shall hear this precept against unlawfull desires: "Resist lust as a most bitter enemy, that useth to glory in the disgrace of those bodies he overcommeth." There it will be told you of covetousness that "it is better not to wish for things you want, than to have all that you wish." There you shall hear that he that is angry when he is provoked is never -not- angry but when -not- provoked. There it will be told you of your enemies, "Love them that hate you, for all men love those that love them." There you shall hear, that he lays up his treasure safest who gives it to the poor, for that cannot be lost who gives it to the poor, for that cannot be lost which is lent to the Lord.

There it will be told you, that the fruit of holy marriage is chastity. There you shall hear, that the troubles of this world happen as well to the just as the unjust. There it will be told you that it is a more dangerous sickness to have the mind infected with the vices then the body with diseases. There to shew you the way of peace and gentleness you shall hear that amongst impatient men, their likeness of manners is the cause of their discord. There to keep you from following the bad example of others, it will be told you that "the wise man gains by the fool, as well as by the prudent; the one shewes him what to imitate, the other what to eschew."

There also you shall hear all these following precepts: That the ignorance of many things is better than their knowledge, and that therefore the goodness or mercy of God is as great in His hidden will, as in His revealed. That you should thank God as well for adversity as for prosperity; and confess in prosperity that you have not deserved it. That there is no such thing as Fate, and for this let the heathens examine their own laws, which punish none but willfull and premeditating offenders.

There to keep you stable in faith it will be told you that "he that will be faithful, must not be suspicious; for we never suspect, but what wee slowly believe." There also you shall hear that Christians when they give any attention to the noise and enticements of their passions fall headlong from Heaven unto Earth. It will be also told you there that seeing the wicked do sometimes receive good things in this world, and the just are afflicted by the unrighteous, those that believe not the final judgement of God after this life, do -- as far as it lies in them -- make God unjust, and far be this from your thoughts. There it will be told you about your private affairs, that what you would have hidden from men, you should never do, what from God, ye should never think. There you shall hear this rebuke of deceivers: "It is lesser damage to be deceived, than to deceive." Lastly you should hear this reproof of self-conceit, or a fond opinion of our own worth: "Fly vanity, and so much the more viciousness, but vanity is oftentimes a bubble that swims up the face of Virtue." These few rules, as a tast and invitation, I have -- out of many more -- inserted here for your own use.

But if you will turn you eyes towards the sacred Oracles, and come yourself to be a searcher of those heavenly treasures, I know not that which will most ravish you, the casket, or the jewel, the language or the matter. For the Book of God, while it shines and glitters with glorious irradiations within, doth after the manner of most precious gems, drive the beholder's eyes into a strong and restless admiration of its most rich and inscrutable brightness. But let not the weaknesse of your eyes make you shun this divine light, but warm your soul at the beams of it, and learn to feed your inward man with this mystical and healthful food.

I doubt not but -- by the powerful working of our merciful God upon your heart -- I shall shortly find you an unfeigned lover of this true philosophy, and a resolute opposer of the false; renouncing also all worldly oblectations [delights], and earnestly coveting the true and eternal. For it is a point of great impiety and imprudence, seeing God wrought so many marvelous things for the salvation of man, that he should do nothing for himself: and seeing that in all His wonderful works He had a most special regard for our good, we ourselves should especially neglect it. Now the right way to care for our souls, is to yield ourselves to the love and the service of God: for true happiness is obtained by contemning the false felicities of this world, and by a wise abdication of all earthly delights, that we may become the chaste and faithful lovers of the heavenly. Wherefore henceforth let all your words and actions be done either to the glory of God, or for God's sake. Get Innocence for your companion, and she is so faithful, that she will be also your defendress. It is a worthy enterprise to follow after Virtue, and to perform something while we live, for

the example and the good of others: nor is it to be doubted but the mind, by a virtuous course of life, will quickly free itself from those intanglements and deviations it hath been formerly accustomed to. That great Physician to whose cure and care we offer ourselves, will daily strengthen and perfect our recovery. And what estimation or value -- when in this state -- can you lay upon those glorious remunerations that will be laid up for you against the day of recompence? You see that God, even in this life, hath mercifully distributed unto all -- without any difference -- His most pleasant and useful light. The pious and the impious are both allowed the same sun; all the creatures obediently submit themselves to their service: and the whole Earth with the fullness thereof is the indifferent possession of the just and unjust. Seeing then that he hath given such excellent things unto the impious, how much more glorious are those things which He reserves for the pious? He that is so great in His free gifts, how excellent will He be in His rewards? He that is so royal in His daily bounty, and ordinary magnificence; how transcendent will He be in His remunerations and requitals? Ineffable and beyond all conception are those things which God hath prepared for those that love Him; and that they are so is most certain: for it is altogether incomprehensible, and passeth the understanding of His most chosen vessels to tell how great His reward shall be unto the just, who hath given so much to the unthankful and the unbelieving. Take up your eyes from the Earth and look about you, my most dear Valerian; spread forth your sails, and hasten from this stormy sea of secular negotiations, into the calm and secure harbour of Christian religion. This is the only haven into which which we all drive from the raging surges of this malicious world. This is our shelter from the loud and persecuting whirlwinds of Time. Here is our sure station and certain rest; here a large and silent recess, secluded from the world, opens and offers itself unto us. Here a pleasant, serene tranquility shines upon us. Hither, when you are come, your weather-beaten vessel -- after all your fruitless toils -- shall at last find rest, and securely ride at anchor of the Cross. But it is time now that I should make an end. Let then -- I beseech you -- the truth and the force of heavenly doctrine epitomised here by me be approved of and used by you to the glory of God and your own good. These are all my precepts at present: pardon the length, and acknowledge my love.

The St. Pachomius Orthodox Library, Leavetaking of Pascha 1995.

O Lord, remember Thy servants Henry the translator and Thomas his brother, and the scribes Richard, Paul, Michael, Deborah, Mark, Tony, Mary, and Noel.

THE END, AND TO GOD BE THE GLORY!