



Brief Patristic Messages



The Confession of Thoughts*

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A VERY subtle matter in a Christian's spiritual life is the matter of thoughts and their confession.

Unskilled is the believer in the unseen warfare, when he feeds on religious products of Western provenance and not on solid Patristic food, being brought to despair as soon as he is inundated by thoughts of blasphemy and unbelief, by wicked thoughts and hatred of his brother, and by shameful and sensual thoughts.

As true scientists in the field of the discernment and healing of thoughts, the holy Fathers unwaveringly guide us in this difficult matter.

To be freed from the three general sorts of thoughts—that is, from blasphemous, wicked, and shameful thoughts—, one must heal the three faculties of the soul from which these thoughts emanate: that is, the rational, the incensive, and the appetitive.

The rational faculty is healed by prayer and humility; the incensive by love towards our neighbor; and the appetitive by general temperance and hardship.

Here is what St. Maximos the Confessor advises us:

“The incensive faculty of the soul is bridled by love, the appetitive is withered by temperance, and the rational grows wings by prayer; and the light of the mind is never obscured.”

HOWEVER, because we are spiritually weak, the envious Devil unceasingly battles against us; our heart is filled with sorrow, agitation, and discouragement. What will become of us?

We will find a great consolation in such instances by Confession. Kneeling under the Confessor's holy Epitrachelion (Priestly stole), with contrition and self-reproach, let us reveal to him the contents of our heart.

We do not visit the Confessor solely for our sins, but also in order to be supported in our struggle.

Together with fervent prayer, disdain of evil thoughts, and self-reproach, we must without fail make use of holy Confession.

Whatever Satan sows and plants in our hearts, we uproot and destroy by a clean Confession.

St. John of the Ladder states that nothing gives thoughts—and, by means of them, the unclean spirits—so much power against us, as when they remain hidden and unconfessed within us.

The same Saint very characteristically writes:

“As eggs that are warmed in dung hatch out, so thoughts that are not confessed hatch out and proceed to action.”

Let us not be ashamed, then, when we are besieged by passionate and sinful thoughts, but let us take recourse to our Confessor to find solace and strengthening.

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*Source: Άγιος Κυπριανός, No. 146 (February 1981), p. 5.