



*Traversing
to
Heaven:*

*"The
Christian
Way"*



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A Study on “The Eschatological Life”,
from the Spiritual and Ancestral viewpoint

Our Hope
in
Life after Death

Volume III :

Traversing to Heaven:
“The Christian Way”

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Introduction

Delving into the depths of our souls will lead us to the discovery that the human soul's true yearning is for the infinite; it can thus never find satisfaction in this world, with whatever capabilities, glorifications and joyful moments it may offer. To the soul, death is but a heavenly gift - a springboard to paradise, where it becomes affiliated with the heavenly hosts on a much clearer and purer plane. There, the soul awaits the Lord's Great Day, when it will finally receive the body worthy to share with it its glories. That was the subject of Volume I, "The Gift of Death", of this series.

The Holy Bible's viewpoint concerning Eschatology was presented, very briefly, in Volume II.

True Christians, who discharge faithfully all responsibilities entrusted to them, will always carry in their thoughts and feelings the heavenly touch which, in turn, will be manifested in their outward behaviour. In this vein, the present Volume discusses, clarifies and dwells upon the Divine promises which we enjoy in our lives on earth, which give us a flavour of the Divine splendours to come, and which will enable us to discover the heavenly hosts with whom we will share eternal life, in the presence of Him who sits on the heavenly Throne.

Life is a Divine school through which we learn, and are trained in, the heavenly life, in all directions of our respective lives.

The Soul's Journey to Heaven

Many of our ancestors, particularly **the learned scholar Origen**, contemplated the meaning of life; they concluded that, to a believer in a general sense, life constitutes the soul's journey to heaven. Every day, indeed every moment of our lives, sees us ascending on the wings of the Holy Spirit, towards the Divinely promised eternal glory.

A Return to God

Life, **Origen** says, is an important, serious trip, during which the soul returns to its original state, through the grace of God; it then becomes an icon of God, having the right of adherence to Him, and of settling in His Divine Bosom. In this laborious trip towards heaven, fraught with struggles against the forces of darkness, the soul savours much sweetness, since it experiences the wounds of the Divine love, and it enjoys a continuous stream of triumphs.

Origen furthermore writes:

- + **"Yearning, and the Divine love, provide the soul with a clear vision of the beauty and perfection of God's Word.** It falls into the depths of its love for Him through His own love for it, and it accepts the Word Himself as an arrow and as wounds of love."

Saint John Chrysostom (the golden mouth) says:

- + Whereas we use all kinds of containers and buckets to carry away water discharged through the natural fountains, we can only use our faculties of comprehension, serenity, and burning

desire, to approach the spiritual fountains, and to measure the water flowing therefrom. Countless blessings will be poured immediately, through the intangible workings of the grace of God, on whoever proceeds in that fashion; this, in turn, will appease that person's conscience, lead to abundant peace, and prepare for **the departure from this earth's shore towards Heaven's pier. This is achievable for us since, although we are still harboured in our earthly bodies, our eyes and goals can be focused unceasingly on all the heavenly splendours.**

- + "...seek those things which are above,...Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." (Colossians 3:1-2). **Our pre-occupation with heavenly matters thus frees us from the world and transports us to heaven.**

The soul's journey in this life is the **ladder of paradise** which Jacob saw, with "the angels of God ascending and descending on it." (Genesis 28:12). In the ascending angels, **Origen** sees the believers' souls reclaiming their fallen nature, and ascending to the lost paradise through the cross; while the descending ones represent to him, those angels who have fallen from grace and who have lost their heavenly stature.

Saint Isaac the Syriac says: "God opens the gate to paradise, at all stages of the road which a human being follows towards Him." He also says: "The ladder to paradise is within you, hidden in your soul;" and again, "Dive into the depths of your soul, away from sin, to find the steps that will enable you to rise."

A believer's thoughts and feelings are emulated in heaven, upon the realization that life is a difficult journey, rendered sweet and pleasurable through its transportation of the soul's depths to heaven, for the ultimate enjoyment of the heavenly after-life. This is furthermore reflected in the believer's faith, understanding, and outlook on everything from the soul within to the surroundings without:

- + Christians believe that the Holy Spirit **establishes the Kingdom of God in their depths.**
- + Christians realize that **they have become a second heaven**, and a heavenly sanctuary.
- + Christians enjoy **the heavenly splendour, it being the Son's glorification within.**
- + Christians meet with the heavenly Christ, whom they consider to be the ever-fulfilling bread of life, the fountain of living water, the feast of inner joy, the soul's musical symphony of love, the garment of heavenly righteousness, and **the Divine provider of all needs.**
- + Christians, in their struggle for enjoyment of virtues, open their mouths to accept the flood of the heavenly Christ's unique spiritual fruit poured through the Holy Spirit's grace. Every virtue, be it selfless love, generous giving, purity of heart, or the like, represents **communion with the Divine Nature.**

- + Christians experience heavenly life in **every form of worship, whether it be individual, family or communal**; this is especially true when participating in the Divine Liturgies. Participation in a Baptismal Ceremony is a portrayal, to the believer, of his lost paradise. Furthermore, when a Christian participates in a Chrismation Rite, he sees God's Holy Spirit establishing for Himself a heavenly dwelling in the believer's life. During the Liturgical Rite, the spirit soars to see the Lord's wondrous heavenly table. Finally, during the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, a Christian sees the eternal wedding.
- + When a believer's life traverses a period of tribulation, he carries the Cross and experiences God's mercies through hardships as well as through good times. He is neither forsaken by heaven, nor does he abandon it, even though he may be re-living, with St. Paul, the trying moments of imprisonment or of being stoned.
- + Last but not least, a true believer will always be living in heaven, whether he leads a married life or a life of abstention, or whether his dwelling is in a city, a monastery, or a desert cave.

To sum up, a believer both becomes a heaven and carries heaven within him; he charges with all his might, and with every breath he takes, towards heaven !

Chapter 1

Eschatology and the Kingdom of God Within Us

The Church as an Icon of Heaven

When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church of the New Testament, during the Day of Pentecost, the apostles immediately started preaching two fundamental truths; these, in fact, represent one reality through which we acquire the spirit of hope and joy.

First:

The prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the coming of the Saviour Messiah were fulfilled through the coming of Christ, His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. Everything that Israel was desirous of in the Old Testament thus came true. He Who came was indeed He Who “has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.” (Colossians 1:13) Believers entered the kingdom of God, or, the kingdom of God was established within them; as the Holy Spirit filled them, fellowship in Christ’s life became theirs, and they “tasted...the powers of the age to come.” (Hebrews 6:5) The fulness of time has come, history has been fulfilled, and the Lord reigns in our hearts.

Second:

As the Church acquired God’s kingdom through the fulfilment of the Old Testament’s prophecies, it was deeply moved to proclaim the perfect eschatological glory. The Church’s period of estrangement is thus spent in anticipation of the Lord’s second coming, and in anticipation of a face-to-face encounter with Him. Christ’s Church preaches Christ her heavenly groom, not only verbally, but also by proclaiming His heavenly nature, through her continuous growth as a heavenly icon. The Church’s aim is to renew mankind’s inner lives, and to transform their hearts from the perishable nature of dust to the lasting heavenly nature, which is worthy of eternal glory. Therefore, when the choir chants: “Hail to the Church, the house of angels,” the reason is not only because the Church gathers believers and angels alike, but also because it offers the believers, to the Father, as angel-like, sanctified by the Holy Spirit and confirmed through the heavenly Word of God. This is as though the Church beatifies those believers who accepted to be likened unto the angels and the heavenly orders.

In this way, the gate of hope was opened before the Church of the New Testament, so that it may experience the present kingdom and traverse, as it were, a heavenly journey filled with tribulation, yet mixed with the sweetness of Christ, for its ultimate enjoyment of the perfect kingdom in the coming age. It would then seem that eschatology is but an extension of our present life and a prelude to life everlasting. Applying this practically, means that we have to lead a life of repentance in this new light, we have to re-examine our internal lives, and we have to understand the history governing us.

The Heavenly Paradise

God's preparation of His believers for their journey to His kingdom, and for their enjoyment of communion with the eternal glories, entails His creation of a paradise out of each believer's soul, or a "Garden of Eden" that He tends personally. He also creates out of the Church, as a whole, a paradise - a testimony to the work of His Hands. Believers look up to themselves as members in the Church of the heavenly Christ; they then realize that they are fruitful trees: planted by the Lord in His heavenly field, a source of delight to God Who planted them, and a source of joy to the heavenly orders. In his prophecies, the Psalmist refers to himself as an "olive tree" planted in the house of the Lord. Isaiah the prophet says that the Church is God's unique heavenly vine, with the heavenly Father being the Vinedresser Who sows His Word in our hearts' earth (Isaiah 5), to transform our inner wilderness into a heavenly field, filled with a variety of trees - delicious to the heavenly beings' taste. **Our Lord Jesus** says: "Eat O friends ! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones !" (Song of Solomon 5:1)

St. Theophylact says: "The Son of God never stops planting the Word of God in our souls; this is not only through His teaching us, but also through His continual sowing of good seeds within us." And, in this regard, **St. Ambrose** also said: "He came to the Mount of Olives to plant small olive trees through His Divine strength. He is the Divine Sower; and each of the plants He planted in the house of God proclaims: "But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever." (Psalm 52:8)

The Kingdom of God Within Us

Throughout the ages, and to this very day, many have been and continue to be preoccupied with the understanding of time; wondering when the great Second Coming will be, when everyone would be given according to their deeds, and when believers would see the perfect glory in store for them. Unfortunately, much emphasis is placed on the exact time, rather than on the coming of the Lord. It is for this reason that when the Pharisees asked Christ "when the kingdom of God would come," (Luke 17:20), the Lord re-directed their hearts and thoughts from preoccupation with time, to the real enjoyment of the kingdom of God.

He raised our eyes to the heaven within us, so that we can see it shining inside. St. Augustine said that when we pray "Our Father" we should, rather than raise our eyes towards heaven, withdraw to our depths to see Him establishing the heavenly kingdom within us. Here are some of our forefathers' writings about the kingdom of heaven:

St. Augustine:

- + Christians who were invited to the eternal inheritance should understand fully that the words "Who art in heaven" mean "Who is in the saints and the righteous"; this is because God is not confined within a particular space. The heavens constitute that material part which is elevated above the rest of the material world; it is therefore limited. If we were to believe that God resides in the upper part of the universe, the birds would be better than we are,

since they would be closer to Him. However, it is not written that “the Lord is closer to tall people and to those who live in mountains.” Rather, alluding to humility, it is written that “The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart,” (Psalm 34:18)

If, therefore, the wicked are described as “earth,” the righteous would be “heaven.” **St. Paul**, referring to the righteous, said: “For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.” (1Corinthians 3:17) Since God resides in His temple, and since He has called the saints “His temple”, it follows that the expression “Who art in heaven” means “Who is in the saints.” It is quite appropriate to consider the righteous and the wicked, in the spiritual sense, as being analogous to heaven and earth, in the material sense.

+ There is nothing that God can offer us, which is better than His own Self; we may however ask if we do conceive of something better.

+ Does God know no recompense ? Indeed nothing but His Self Whom He offered you !

+ My God, let our happiness be derived from our preoccupation with you - so we may maintain our focus on You.

+ May you love God, and may His dwelling be within you, and may you let Him provide the drive and motivation which inspire your love for Him.

+ I say, happy is he who acquires God.

St. Cyril the Great:

+ When the Pharisees asked Christ “when the kingdom of God would come,” (Luke 17:20), He gave a response that would benefit humanity in its entirety: “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, “See here !” or “See there !” For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:20 & 21) Christ is asking us to desire that we be found worthy of the kingdom of heaven, rather than to be absorbed in trying to understand the timing of its coming; **this is because the kingdom of God is inside us, it depends on our own will, and it is within our power to accept or reject it.**

Anyone who accepts righteousness through faith in Christ, and who accepts being adorned with all the virtues, will be considered worthy of the kingdom of heaven.

St. John Saba

+ We have been empowered to enjoy heaven while still on earth; this is through God’s transforming the earth of our hearts into heaven, through His proclamation of His Divine presence within us and, finally, His invitation to all the heavenly hosts to rejoice in His superb work in us.

+ God reveals His beauty to those who love Him. Thus, as the soul looks inwards, it is awed by seeing Christ shining inside it. Here, the soul perceives what is the angels’: they dwell in amazement, glorifying the life-giver, for His awesome beauty. Here, also, the Holy Trinity

mysteriously reveals Himself, and the Persons are visible to the bare mind. Magnificent indeed is that mystery which is manifested solely to the pure mind. The heavenly world is revealed secretly to those who have reposed in Christ; this means that God is transfigured in the soul.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

You may wonder: “Why do I fail to see heaven inside me ?” The answer is simple: because your heart is “choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life,” (Luke 8:14) which corrupt your inner perception, and deprive you of the heavenly vision. If you lift up your heart and cry to God, His Holy Spirit will open your eyes, enabling you to see God’s beauty inside you; He will also open your ears to hear the heavenly voice, and sanctify all your senses and feelings such that their fulfillment can only be found in that which is Divine.

+ We can surely learn this lesson from the Gospel, since our Lord addresses those who have the ear for the teachings of wisdom: “...the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:21)

It is clear that this passage refers to God’s gift which is inseparable from our nature; it is indeed close to anyone seeking it. **It lives inside each one of us, but we either ignore or forget it, because of our occupation with the anxieties and pleasures of life** (Luke 8:14). We may, however, re-discover it, if we re-direct our minds towards it.

An Eschatological Understanding of Repentance

How can God establish His kingdom in the human soul, transform it into a heavenly bride, a paradise, a city of God and a holy temple for Him?

Through repentance (Matthew 3:2).

What does repentance mean?

The Divine’s coming to earth, becoming man, adopting our nature and living among us as one of us, has changed believers’ outlook on everything. **Eschatology thus became the centre of faith and worship, and the living guide to human behaviour** (Psalm 139:20) **Even repentance now bears a new eschatological meaning.** John the Baptist, Christ’s forerunner, preached saying, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”** (Matthew 3:2) Matthew the Evangelist also narrates: “Jesus began to preach and to say, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**” (Matthew 4:17)

Repentance is no longer limited to confessing our sins and weaknesses, while promising to refrain from evil and to lead pious lives; **repentance has developed into a genuine yearning to establish the kingdom of heaven in the depths of our souls.** After man, through his rebellion, had turned his back on that which is heavenly and Divine (Jeremiah 27:24), the Holy Spirit turned our inner selves, through repentance, towards God and His heavenly kingdom. This is why **Christ** told us **“the kingdom of God is within you.”** (Luke 17:21) We would therefore respond to Him Who said, “but

the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head,” (Matthew 8:20) by saying, “May You come, O Divine Wonder, and may You establish Your kingdom within us, and may You rest Your head inside us! For we will assuredly not turn our backs on You!”

When Christ proclaimed to His disciple Peter **His acceptance of his repentance**, He asked him three times, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?” (John 21:15, 16 & 17); He did this to emphasize to us a new understanding of repentance, namely, our perception that the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom of love, has in-dwelt us, as a prelude to eternal life.

The evangelist Luke gives us a detailed account of Peter’s repentance; he says: “**And the Lord turned and looked at Peter**.....So Peter went out and wept bitterly.” (Luke 22:61 & 62) It is as though St. Peter’s repentance was the fruit borne of the eye-to-eye contact he made with the Divine Christ - there he discovered the sin which deprived him from establishing the heavenly kingdom within him. **It therefore seems that in our repentance, we need to experience our Divine Christ’s look towards us, before being preoccupied with our sins.**

+ Christ looked at him, so he wept bitterly. O Lord Jesus, may You look at us, and make us weep for our sins. (St. Ambrose)

Repentance is the return of man to paradise, his heavenly abode, where he resides with Jesus Christ and all His heavenly ministers. For this reason, after healing the paralytic man from the paralysis of sin, Christ ordered him: “go to your house.” (Matthew 9:6)

+ He not only ordered him to take up his bed (Matthew 9:6) but also to go to his house. In other words, **He told him to return to paradise**, man’s real home which received him first and which he lost, not through the scripture, rather, through going astray. Truly, he was returned to his house, since He Who proceeds from the truth came and crushed prodigality, and restored truth. (St. Ambrose)

Repentance is the heart’s opening to let Jesus Christ in, to transform it into a heavenly feast.

+ When Mathew abandoned his tax-collecting spot, he followed Christ with an inflamed heart; he then prepared for Him a great feast. Whoever accepts Christ in his heart is showered with countless blessings and inundated with profound joy; the Lord Himself then desires to enter the believer’s heart and to rest! Whoever accepts the beauty of virtue, and accepts Christ in his house, enjoys a great heavenly feast of righteous works, to which access is denied to the rich, and from which the poor are fed to fulfilment!

St. Ambrose

Some might ask: “Why did Christ say, “the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force”?” (Matthew 11:12) To this question, **St. Jerome** answers: “Consider the following: is it not indeed “taking by force” when the body desires to become a god, ascends to the place from whence the angels fell, and judges the angels?” This is the real meaning of repentance.

- + Christ preaches repentance to His own; analogously, since repentance is a source of great agony for Satan, he is its archenemy, and he will distance his followers from it. On the other hand, repentance liberates those who were led through Satan's cunning into bondage; it obliterates in a moment, all the work which would have taken him years to accomplish.
- + Repentance will enter the house of adulterers, and the lewd will be re-born in Christ under its wings. **It clothes the repentant with the glory of Jesus Christ, the True Light.**
- + Repentance leads from the gutter to paradise, and from wantonness to the wedding. It crafts luminous beings from blackened ones, and gives sight to the blind. It uproots the tree which bears poisonous fruit, and plants the tree of life in our paradise; it seats at the wedding's table of honour all those who bow down before it. **The keys of the kingdom were placed in its hands, and it will render priceless all those who cherish it and come to it.**
- + **All those who were born of repentance develop fiery wings and soar to the heights with the spiritual.** Furthermore, all those whose wings were plucked by hunters, and who hid in their wake for a short time, will acquire through them wings that are even more fiery and lighter than the first.
- + **Repentance accompanies all angels;** for those who love it, it wrenches tribulation away from them. Repentance resides in God's gate; it directs all bounties emanating from Him to members of its household.
- + No one ever had recourse to you (O Repentance), and descended into hades. **And no one ever ascended into heaven without being one of yours.**

Has anyone ever been able to see God without you?
 Who has ever clung to you, yet fell in Satan's hands?
 Has anyone ever been purified, without being washed by you?
 Has anyone ever approached your cleansing, yet remained defiled?
 Who has ever reaped a sheaf of joy, without your rain having watered his field?
 Who has ever approached your cure, and failed to be distanced from ailments?
 Who has ever been sprayed with your droplets, yet failed to see God in his heart?
 Who has ever acquired you through his petitions, yet failed to have the gate to God's treasures opened?

St. John Saba

Christ Guides Us to Heaven!

Transforming the earthly heart to a heaven, along with enjoying repentance as a form of royal love through which the soul is more desirous of the Divine God than this world's glamour and anxieties, may seem to many like an impossible proposition. Their problem is the absence of their encountering Christ, Who came especially for each and every soul, in order to lead it by the hand, both to in-dwell its heart and to have it abide in His heart. The soul is thus trained in the heavenly school, embarks on a magnificent royal journey, acquires heavenly talents and Christ's Divine Holy Spirit, and becomes Christ's disciple. It is for this reason that it appealed to the Church's forefathers, especially those from Alexandria, to call Christ "the Teacher" or "the Enlightener."

- + In this regard, **St. Clement of Alexandria** said, "We should be there in the Father's bosom in heaven, since we learned our lesson while on earth, and we went to heaven to be in the love of God the Father, the love that we have experienced during our presence on earth. Also, God the Holy Word wrought everything, and taught us and is teaching us all things; He grooms us in all that is righteous."

Our Life Is a Journey of Initiation to Things Divine

When a person starts proceedings for emigrating to another country, such as Australia or Brazil, not only does he make ready all the necessary documentation, but he also needs to prepare himself for that new country. He would thus familiarize himself with details pertaining to that country's prevailing economic, social and political systems, traditions, languages, various regions, etc. Analogously, we are not simply being invited to emigrate to heaven, we are in fact being called to return to our place of origin, which is heaven. It is therefore only befitting that we embark on an internal journey in our souls to acquaint ourselves with all that pertains to heaven and the heavenly beings. This way, when the time comes for our departure, we will not find ourselves strangers to heaven; we will have met our heavenly Father, the heavenly Orders, and the hosts of prophets, apostles and believers who preceded us, and with whom we would have met during our earthly journey. We would thus embark on a journey towards them, to live with them eternally.

- + **St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa**, tells us that Abraham left his town and family in response to a Divine command. His emigration suited him as a prophet, since its purpose was the quest to know God. Most likely, that was not a physical emigration, rather, it served to prepare us to develop our knowledge concerning spiritual matters. By leaving his homeland, in other words by shedding his self, Abraham stepped out of the circle of low, earthly thoughts, and elevated his mind as far as possible above the limits of human nature. He cut all ties that bound the soul to the senses. Thus, having been freed of any obstacle posed by the senses, his mind became pure and able to perceive the imperceptible. His reasoning ceased to succumb to erroneous judgments dictated by appearances influencing his faculties of hearing and sight.
- + The spiritual sage, **St. John the Dalmatian**, says that entry to that land (the land of Light of lights, and the world of eternal life) shall not be awarded to those who have not experienced

it in this life. We cannot access that land if we have not already accessed it here. This is because we have to rid ourselves of the veil obscuring our vision and, when this world's sun sets from before our eyes, we hurry to encounter the Great Sun, the Light of the upper worlds.

Preparation for Eternal Life

During their journey through the wilderness, God granted His people Manna for their daily food. He also decreed that whoever gathered for himself any excess for the following day, would not only be collecting worms and corruption, but would also become the object of God's displeasure and Moses' wrath. However, on the sixth day, the day of preparation for the Sabbath, everyone had to gather two portions (Exodus 16:5) This referred to collecting and storing up for use during the great day of rest. **St. Gregory Bishop of Nyssa** says, "This preceding day is none other but our present life, during which we prepare ourselves for everlasting things."

What do we prepare for everlasting life? **The apostle** tells us, "For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." (Galatians 6:8) **Origen** says in this regard, "It behoves us, on the sixth day, to gather and store sufficiently for the following day. Whatever you store up for yourself here, from good deeds, to treasures of mercy, righteousness and piety, are counted for you as sustenance in the coming age. Have you not read in the Gospel about the servant who, in return for earning ten minas, was given authority over ten cities, and the one who earned five was given authority over five cities? (Luke 19:16-19) **St. Paul** puts it differently: "whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." (Galatians 6:7)" **Origen** goes on to say, "Whatever you store up for the Sabbath will remain whole, and will neither rot nor decay; but worms will develop within you if you store out of love for the present life and for this world."

+ The spiritual sage, **St. John the Dalmatian**, says, "Pray for me, in the name of our Lord, in order for me to be drawn to His land which resides within you; then I will enter it at the time when we ask Him fervently to come forth, so I can see Him. He kindles His flame in our souls and manifests His work through us, if He finds our souls pure and undampened by worldly lusts."

The Divine Heavenly Visits

When **St. John the Dalmatian** felt indebted to someone for whatever reason, and when he was at a loss as to how he should recompense that person, he could find nothing greater than prayer and supplication, so that God might grant that person Divine visits. Through those visits the person experiences the Divine outreach and transfiguration within him; his depths thus transport the ever-multiplying and developing heavenly glories. **St. John** therefore said: "Since I have nothing with which to repay you for your gracious deeds for my abject self, may the Righteous grant you the favour of visiting you and bestowing upon whatever your heart continually desires. Amen. May our Lord reward you for your love through His transfiguration within you, since He is the True Love."

- + Your descent to me has transformed my life into a pleasurable journey.
My life has become a royal heavenly journey.
You carry me on your shoulders, and you set forth with me towards your heavens.
You abide within me and I live in you.
Your outreach to me is never-ending and you are transfigured inside me.

- + Your fiery Holy Spirit leads me throughout my journey.
He grants me sincere repentance, not merely by remembering my iniquities, but by kindling a desire for You in my heart.
He transforms my worldly perception to see You observing me.
He renews continually my depths making me an icon of Yours.
I yearn for the mysteries of Your glory through His unceasing revelation.
He redeems me unto my heavenly home; I will thus rest with You and find a share with Your heavenly servants.
He transforms my insides into a heavenly feast, which nourishes my Saviour.

- + What a sweet, pleasurable journey amidst all the hardships!

Chapter 2

The Believer is a Second Heaven

The Church urges daily repentance. This does not constitute a mere calling for us to cite our sins. Rather, we should always be conscious of our human weakness, while professing God's infinite love. This love opens for us the gates to His heaven, through which believers proceed every day towards new heavenly experiences. In this way believers acquaint themselves with their eternal dwelling, in the company of their Saviour. Therefore, upon departure from this world, a believer is propelled rapidly towards the gates through which he had already passed by faith. He will then enjoy the glory with which he is already familiar. He will see the Lord Jesus, with Whom he is acquainted, and with Whom he had lived and tasted life all the days of his estrangement. This is the positive understanding of repentance. **Such an understanding transforms the life of a Christian to a joyful life, filled with hope, and with internal peace and happiness surpassing all comprehension. He is thus considered to be a second heaven.**

The Virgin as an Example for Us

The first New Testament believer, and the example which all believers should follow, is **the holy virgin, St. Mary**. She enjoyed the heavenly annunciation and, not only did she carry the Divine Word of God in her womb, but she was also called "**the Second Heaven.**" We, as true believers, must follow her example: thus, we must carry Him in our hearts such that heaven, rather than being remote, becomes closer to us than any of our surroundings.

We carry Jesus Christ with **Simeon the elder** on our internal arms, and circle around the altar which God has erected within us - the new heaven. Then **our heart will be enflamed with yearning for things eternal**, and we will chant saying: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation." (Luke 2:29 & 30)

We will rise with **Peter, James and John** in the company of the heavenly Christ on the Mount of the Transfiguration; we will then see the glory of our heavenly Lord, and cry out saying, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." (Matthew 17:4)

We will thus spend our entire life walking with our heavenly Christ, Who rose from the dead, and repeating with **the two disciples of Emmaus**: "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road." (Luke 24:32)

Finally, our life is transformed into a pleasant dialogue with the Divine, and we are graced with what the Samaritan woman acquired: she left all her possessions, her waterpot which refers to all that is temporal, to rush to her brethren, calling them to meet the Heavenly, Who told her everything that she had done (John 4:29)

Briefly, eschatology is no longer a philosophical concept discussed by philosophers, nor is it an academic subject researched by theologians; rather, it is the believer's practical way of daily life. **Eschatology is now centred in the coming of the heavenly Christ, Who rose from the dead, to our world, granting us His Holy Spirit, Who forms us to become the heavenly's icon, and Who transforms our earthly heart into a new heaven. We can thus savour the prelude to eternal life,**

and experience it in our practical daily life. St. Clement of Alexandria thus says that, for a gnostic, the earth becomes a heaven!

From a true believer's viewpoint, this is how eschatology acquired its presence in this world. Or, at least, this is how our world carries an eschatological touch, which increases with each living encounter with God, until such a time as our Church meets face-to-face with her heavenly Groom, on the Great Day of the Lord. In this regard, **St. Paul** says, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory,...." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

+ You must yearn for heaven, and heavenly matters, even before heaven. We have been commanded to turn earth into heaven, and to behave and speak under all circumstances as though we were in heaven, while still on this earth. This should also be the purpose of the prayers offered to the Lord. Our living on earth should not constitute an obstacle to our reaching the perfection of the upper powers; rather, it is possible, even while living here, to accomplish everything as though we were living on high.

+ Truly, the Lord came to abolish the old regime and to call us to a greater homeland. **St. John Chrysostom** says, "He does everything to free us from all unnecessary preoccupations, and from our emotions towards the earth. For this reason, Christ said, referring to the heathen, "For after all these things the Gentiles seek." (Matthew 6:32) In other words, the Gentiles place all their toil and effort to satisfy the present life, with neither provision for things to come, nor consideration of heavenly matters."

+ **Origen** says, "When God's will is realized through us, who live on earth, as it is realized in those who dwell in heaven, **we become likened unto the heavenly hosts, since we, like them, carry the image of the Heavenly Man** (1 Corinthians 15:49), and we inherit the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 25:34). Those who follow us on earth, will pray to be likened unto us, since we will then be in heaven (paradise).

+ The **Great Father Gregory** tells us, "The Creator himself is man's dwelling place, but not as a material location. Rather, He formed man in order that he may abide in Him. When we lend ear to the Tempter, we abandon our abode, and we abandon our Maker's love. In order for the Omniscient to save us, He appeared to us in the flesh and, I might add, followed man's tracks, who had fled from Him, and redeemed him unto Himself, the ultimate resting place for the prodigal man."

God's Heavenly Image Within Us

+ **St. Augustine** says, "As Caesar requires the currency to portray his image, so does God require His image within us."

- + Man carries two images: the first was handed to him by God at creation, as the Book of Genesis says: “So God created man in His own image.” (Genesis 1:27) The second is the image of the man of dust (1 Corinthians 15:49), which he acquired because of his rebellion and sin, when he was expelled from paradise at the temptation of “the ruler of this world.” (John 12:31).

Origen elaborates that the image which a coin carries represents the authority of this world; analogously, whoever effects the work of “the rulers of the darkness of this age” (Ephesians 6:12) carries the image of the Wicked One. For this very reason, Christ orders that this image be revoked and effaced from us, so that we may re-display our original: the image of God in which we were created. We can thus render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s. Paul emphasizes this point to the Corinthians: “And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.” (1 Corinthians 15:49) Thus, the clause “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,” means “leave the image of the man of dust.” Cast away that image, so you would enjoy the image of the heavenly man; then you will render to God the things that are God’s.

- + O man, you are the image of God! Do you want the image to mirror its Maker? Suppress, therefore, any contrary act, always carry the yoke of your Lord in your heart, and let your mind marvel at His greatness. You will thus shine in His glory, you will be converted into a true replica, and you will become a god within God. You will acquire the likeness of your Maker, through your union with Him unto Whom you are likening yourself.

- + You are in union with him and intermingled with his members.
You are ever-present in his mind, You enthral him so that he marvels at Your revelation.
The intensity of Your love dampens his soul’s movements.
You replace the lusts of his body by the greatness of Your sweetness.
He inhales Your holy scent as a child would his father’s scent.
The scent of Your grace exudes from his body, as a child’s body exudes his nurse’s.

- + Just as the prophets liken themselves to Him Who oversees them, so are the children, who are of Your Spirit, converted into images of You; this is not according to nature, rather, according to glory. **St. John the Dalmatian** says, “You make joint heirs with Your Son, out of those who suffered to keep Your heritage (Romans 7:17). Glory be to You, O Omnipotent One, Father of all; You turned our ignorance into wisdom, through the wisdom of Your mysteries, unto eternity, Amen.”

The Heavenly Christ Within Us

- + “He prays for us and in us, as we pray to Him. He prays for us, being our Priest; and He prays in us, being our Head. We pray to Him, being our God.” **St. Augustine.**

- + “Christ’s perfect servant has nothing besides Christ. Because if he did have anything besides Christ, he would not be perfect.” **St. Jerome.**

An Inner Paradisical Life

- + “We possess internally all those talents to which we aspire and which we are forever contemplating: purity, happiness, self-sufficiency, freedom of decision, life without pain or grief, preoccupation with things Divine, and seeing the Righteous One (God). This represents a simple outline of creation: since man was formed in the image of God in paradise, and he enjoyed all the blessings that grew therein. The fruit of the trees from which man ate were life, knowledge, and the like.” **St. Gregory Bishop of Nyssa.**

Spiritual Man and Worldly Man

- + “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The Church’s spiritual man is heaven. The earth, on the other hand, is represented by the fleshly man. Therefore, when we pray that God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven, we are saying that as the spiritual man serves You, may the fleshly man also serve You through his reform.

“All our forefathers the prophets, the saints, the apostles and the ascetics are none other than heaven.....To them, we represent the earth. Thus, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.””
St. Augustine.

- + “With God’s will being done on earth as it is in heaven, **we become a heaven**, because “the flesh profits nothing.” (John 6:63) Furthermore St. Paul tells us that, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 15:50) However, we say that they do inherit it, when they are transformed from flesh, earth, dust and blood, into heavenly matter.” **Origen.**

- + “The soul of a small child is void of any lust. A simple mind is therefore the ultimate limit of wisdom. This is the angelic life.” **St. John Chrysostom.**

- + The fleshly Adam begets through Eve offspring in his own image, for his fleshly world. Similarly Christ, the Father of the spiritual world, begets for Himself children in His own image for the spiritual world, through repentance and baptism.

“As the newborn, upon emerging from the darkness of Eve’s womb sees immediately the light of Adam’s world, so do God’s children, upon leaving the sad embrace of repentance, see the shining glorious light of the new world awaiting them. The Head of their life will then hail them saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”” (Matthew 3:2 & 4:17) **St. John the Dalmatian.**

- + “The Holy Spirit created the new man in God’s image, this being far superior to our outward, external man. The apostle identifies the former as heavenly, and the latter earthly, thus: “As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.”” (1 Corinthians 15:48) **St. Ambrose.**

Believers and Non-Believers

Since believers have become a heaven, non-believers represent the earth; we should thus entreat God, Who has accepted us unto Him as a heaven submitting to His will, to manifest His work in non-believers - regardless of their wickedness, enmity or even blasphemies - so that His Self may be proclaimed through them, transforming them into a heaven through fulfillment of His will in them.

- + “The Church is heaven, and her enemies are the earth. What does “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” mean? It is a petition that enemies believe in God as we do. They are against us because they are the earth; once they become a heaven, they will be for us!” **St. Augustine.**

The Book of Leviticus (Leviticus 16:17) says, “There shall be no man in the tabernacle of meeting when he goes in to make atonement in the Holy Place, until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself, his household, and for all the assembly of Israel.” **Origen** comments on this verse saying, “They who follow Christ, I believe, penetrate with Him into the interior of the tabernacle, and rise with Him to the highest heavens. They are thus no longer human beings, “but are like angels of God in heaven.” (Matthew 22:30) The words of the Lord are then fulfilled in them: “I said, “You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High.””(Psalm 82:6) Let us, therefore, be of one spirit with the Lord, and let us abolish man by traversing in the glory of His resurrection to the rite of angels.” In other words, by virtue of Christ’s proceeding to the Holy Place in atonement for us, no man can accompany Him without being a fully united member of His holy body; we would thus be counted among the heavenly hosts, carrying His heavenly life within us!

- + It is incumbent upon us to entreat the Lord on behalf of those who are still earthly, and who have not yet started on their way to being a heaven, in order that God’s will may be fulfilled even in them.

“As God’s will is fulfilled in heaven, in other words in us, **since through our faith we have become a heaven**, so shall it be fulfilled on earth, in other words in those who have not yet believed. We thus pray so that those who are still earthly due to their first earthly birth, may be reborn of the water and the Spirit, and may start becoming a heaven.” **St. Caprasius.**

The Believer’s Motherhood Towards the Heavenly Man

The Holy Virgin delighted in being the Mother of the heavenly Christ, in carrying the incarnate Christ in her womb, and in carrying Him, through faith, in her heart. Similarly, the soul who enjoys communion with God, also relishes a kind of motherhood. **Father Methodosius** thus says: “The Church is in a state of apprehensive expectation until such a time as Christ is formed and born within us. Every saint thus enjoys fellowship with Christ, as though Christ were born anew within him!”

- + Wondrous indeed is your exceeding love.
You have granted me communion with Your Only Begotten Son, thus making me Your son!
My dust has been transformed into a heaven.

My perspective towards the earth has changed, such that I see heaven through it!

- + May Your work be manifest in my brethren,
so that I may see them all as heavenly,
renouncing the earth, to acquire heaven.
Doing penance of their own free will, to carry Your Divine will.
- + May I carry You within me O Heavenly One!
May You be formed in my depths, O You Whom neither heaven nor earth can contain!
May my soul carry the motherhood of overwhelming love and, if at all possible, the entire
human race, for Your sake, O Heavenly Head!

Chapter 3

Internal Splendour is a Prelude to Heaven

The Old Testament's prophecies concerning Jesus Christ conclude with Malachi's proclamation that He is the "Sun of Righteousness" (Malachi 4:2) Who shines on those who dwell in darkness. He pours His splendour over them through His shining light. This is also echoed by Ezekiel the prophet, when he spoke of the "time of love." (Ezekiel 16:8) In Ezekiel's passage, man is portrayed as a maiden, spattered with her blood and lying bare in all the shame of her nakedness by the wayside, whom Christ encounters, and for whom nobody cares. He Himself carries her and tends to her every need; **He pours His splendour over her, and she becomes exceedingly beautiful and fit to be a queen seated at the right of the Heavenly King.**

The Lord reassures the human soul: **"And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood,.....When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love."** (Ezekiel 16: 6 & 8) The Lord passed by her and found her shamefully exposed, with no one to cover her bareness. He came forward and betrothed her unto Himself to fill her with glory: "so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness, Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine, says the Lord GOD." (Ezekiel 16:8) The Holy One did not find it beneath Him to descend to us in the land of travail, and to extend His hand to our weakness, granting us union with Him and offering Himself as our Groom, so that we may become **His glorified bride.** In this regard, **St. John Chrysostom** said: "I have said previously that He Who is great and mighty, desired an adulteress. I speak here of "adulteress" in terms of human nature: a man desiring an adulteress is judged. How, then, can God desire an adulteress to be His bride?! What does He do?! He did not send her one of His servants, angels, cherubim or seraphim; rather, He Who loved her descended in Person seeking her closeness.....as long as she remained incapable of ascending to the Most High, He descended to earth. He approached the adulteress and, with no diffidence, held her in her drunkenness.....and how did He come? He did not come openly proclaiming the essence of His nature, rather, He became similar in nature to the adulteress, except for sin. This, He did not accomplish simply in will, but in fact; He became likened unto her, so that she may not be alarmed at His presence and flee! He came to the adulteress and became Man!....."

What Did God Offer Her?

“Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you,” says the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 16:9-14)

He entered with her to the holy waters of baptism to wash her clean of the blood of iniquity. He anointed her with the holy chrism, sealing her and making her His own through His Holy Spirit. He clothed her with the garments of righteousness, preparing her to walk in God’s way. She wore fine linen and silk as a sign of purity, chastity and piety. The ornaments He offered her are not of this world, rather, they are the Spirit’s deposit which endows the soul with beauty. The bracelets on her wrists, chain on her neck, jewel in her nose, earrings in her ears, and beautiful crown on her head, are but the works of the Holy Spirit in our inner life. The Spirit sanctifies our senses and energies to ready us for the kingdom. Our hands will thus be stretched for work without laxness, our necks will bend to carry the burden of others with gladness, our nostrils will inhale the scent of heaven, and our ears will be adorned with the sounds of the Divine commandments. **As for the beautiful crown, it is none other than Christ Himself, Who fills our thoughts and disposes our every move.** This is God’s work in us! He offers us gold and silver: gold refers to the “heavenly life,” and the word of God is referred to by the seven-times-purified silver. He fills our souls with the Holy Body, and never leaves us wanting! **The soul is thus greatly beautified, and is fit to enter her Groom’s kingdom as a queen, fully adorned with His splendour, which He had poured over her, and her name becomes the name of her Holy Christ.**

This is the Divine beauty poured over the believing soul and eventually extends to the body; the soul then reflects the splendour of the Divine glory.

- + Blessed is he whose soul, intermingled with his flesh and bones, relishes this indescribable ecstasy.....**this blessed soul mixes with the soul and body of her Friend.**
- + You, O Lord, are the Sun of the sane; they derive their enlightenment continually from You.....**They yearn to be likened unto Your majesty, through their conversion to Your glory.**
- + God is the real life of a monk. O monk, let your quest be your life within you. You will thus taste the joyful ecstasy through His manifestation in your soul. This is the chaste abode, and the holy dwelling. May God grant, O brother, that you perceive this mystery inside you. Amen.
- + **Blessed are those who love You, Who shine unceasingly through Your beauty, and to**

whom You offer Yourself as a Gift. This is the first resurrection in Christ (Ephesians 2:6), and of which the blessed Paul spoke to the Colossians (Colossians 2:12)

- + Taste, O brother, the sweetness of our righteous Father (Psalm 34:8), and savour His goodness!.....He Himself is beauty unto Him, and through His transfiguration within His followers, He transforms them to a likeness of His glory. He Himself is the Feast of their wedding, and the Groom of their celebrations. They look at Him within themselves and rejoice. He shines inside them and overwhelms them with His beauty. Blessed is the soul who recognizes that she is a mirror of herself; she turns to herself and sees the hidden splendour. For He Who said on the mount, “no man shall see Me, and live,” (Exodus 33:20) is seen in that land. Those who see Him shall live forever.
- + O Beauty, You shine on all the heavenly hosts, whose countenances are continually inflamed by the light of Your praise and by the power of Your luminous love. Those hosts unite with You with a love more sublime than any earthly one!

Yes Lord, I ask and entreat You for Your mercy.

Let the light of Your Holy Trinity shine in my soul.

This is the light through which, and because of whose strength, the enemy phalanxes are crushed, and their vision is blurred; this light forces the enemy hosts to retreat in awe and trembling back to their dark, remote abode, void of the ray of eternal life. **St. John the Dalmatian.**

- + You will be called: “the Recently Enlightened,” because your light is continually renewed, if you so desire - never to be extinguished.

Whether we acquire this or not, night, however, follows the light of this world. But the darkness does not recognize the shining of this new light. “And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” (John 1:5)

It is a certainty, that the world’s splendour at sunrise, is not equal to that of the soul, who was enlightened by the grace embraced through the Spirit.

- + After our present nature has become tarnished with sin’s rust, and with layers of grime, and after the originally God-granted beauty has been disfigured, God takes that nature and melts it anew. He dips it in water as though it were a fiery furnace, and He allows the grace of the Spirit to descend on it as a flaming fire. **Then He will bring us forth from the furnace, renewing us as newly forged vessels, competing with the sun’s rays in their splendour.**

He breaks up the old man into pieces, but **He creates a new man whose splendour outshines the old man.**

- + When fire imparts its nature to the mineral-rich earth, gold is immediately produced. It is even more so with baptism, when it transforms the clay of those washing in it into gold; at that time, the Spirit descends like fire into our souls. **This fire of the Spirit consumes the image of clay, and produces a new image fit to shine in heaven.** This is analogous to the

red-hot image that the melting furnace yields.

- + Your present splendid garment surprises all who see you. The radiance emanating therefrom is proof that your souls are free from all blemish.....

It is meet that we yearn to maintain the splendour of this spiritual garment, since with the passage of time, its shiny splendour increases, and it glitters with ever-increasing brightness. This is not the case with our ordinary material clothes: since if we doubled our efforts, several-folds, at caring for them, they will wear out with the passage of time. Even if we were to keep them away from everyday wear and tear, they will be consumed by moths or will decay by other means.

Active and effective participation requires that we retain our garment of virtue spotless, and untainted by the factor of time. **Rather, it should increase in beauty, with its splendid light shining all the more, as time goes by.**

Do you see the power of that garment? Have you seen its glitter - the glitter that time has neither dulled nor frayed? Do you see its irresistible beauty?

I therefore ask you to spare no zeal in maintaining that state in its full bloom.

Let us learn how this splendour is maintained: through fervent prayer, filled with thanks for all that God has granted us, entreating Him to help us keep these gifts intact. **St. John Chrysostom.**

It was said of St. Pambo of Nitria, one of the great fourth century wilderness ascetics, that he spent three years entreating God, **“Do not glorify me on earth.”** But God glorified him so that **no one could gaze steadfastly at him because of the glory of his countenance.** It was also said of St. Pambo that, like Moses who received the image of the glory of Adam when his face shone, his face shone like lightning and he was like a king sitting on his throne.

The Shining of Moses’ Face

When Moses stood before God “the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him.” (Exodus 34:29) This had never happened on previous occasions, such as Moses’ encounter with God through the burning bush. It was as though God desired to reward him that time, because of his great love for His people. It was out of love for God’s people that Moses entreated with Him praying, “blot me out of Your book which You have written.” (Exodus 32:32) Similarly, it was out of love that his face shone while he was still on earth! This is indeed the splendour and glory of a genuine life of love!

According to **St. Clement of Alexandria**, the shining of Moses’ face symbolizes the gnostic man, or the person who has the true practical knowledge. Like Moses, such a person is glorified here on earth, and his body bears the characteristics of a righteous soul. **The scholar Tertullian** perceives in this incitement a proclamation of God’s work in the resurrection: just as Moses himself was glorified to the extent that the people were unable to look upon his radiant countenance, so will we be in the resurrection.

Heaven and the Inner Permanent Glory

- + When we gaze at the beauty of the heavens we say, “Glory be to You, O Lord!” Analogously, when we contemplate the work of a virtuous person, we see that God is glorified more in that virtue than in the heavens.
- + This is like saying, “Enable us, O Lord, to follow the heavenly life, such that what we will is what You will.”
- + The Good Book says: “For when he dies he shall carry nothing away.” (Psalm 49:17) The glory of many people does not last till the end of their days. The heavenly glory though is, beyond any doubt, enduring and will have no end. This is because Divine gifts are lasting and uninterrupted, and transcend any change or death.

Therefore, glory cannot be acquired through externalities; rather, its flow originates within us. Glory does not stem from expensive attire, impressive surroundings, or late-model vehicles; rather, the glory which clothes us is of a completely different nature.

Those who clothe themselves with fake, perishing worldly appearances, are immediately stripped of this glory as soon as the appearance is removed from them. They are like those found in baths: whether they are illustrious and rich, or base and poor, all are naked, equal and similar. A virtuous person, however, is inseparable from his glory, regardless of his whereabouts. **As the angels carry their glory within themselves wherever they appear, so shall it be with the saints.**

The Sun needs neither clothing nor another sun; rather, as soon as he appears, his glory dazzles. Thus will the virtuous person be in heaven. **St. John Chrysostom.**

- + The wedding’s garments are the grace of the Holy Spirit. The shining splendour is the heavenly state that we accept through the good confession which is of the faith. The believer then proceeds, undefiled and without blemish, to the meeting in the kingdom of heaven. **St. Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers.**
- + The heart rejoices in God’s proclamations, within whoever is sanctified in himself each hour.

He who focuses within himself all his mind’s perceptions, sees in it the illuminations of the Father. He who forgoes all merriment, sees his Lord within his heart.

- + The land of the pure in soul is within him. **The sun which shines inside him is the light of the Holy Trinity.** The blowing breeze is the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. The dwellers with him are the chaste spiritual virtues. Their life, land, joy, and gladness is Christ, the Light of the Father. **St. John the Dalmatian.**

The Heavenly Christ: Our Crown, Our Adornment, and the Fragrance of Our Life

When Christ's radiance shines on the soul, it illuminates it, bestows upon it the image of His exquisite glory, and transforms it into a light for the world. This is the soul's inner, true glory, which encompasses all its senses. The soul will then not be preoccupied with external glories, such as honours, adornment, fine clothing,.....rather, it simply uses all of those at will without its mind being fully absorbed in them. **Thus, the heavenly glories and reverence remain the soul's first and last quest.**

In talking about the excessive use of elaborate head covers and perfumes, **St. Clement of Alexandria** points out that Christ, and Christ alone, crowns our heads with glory, and His sweet aroma is the only heavenly fragrance that permeates our lives. In this regard, **St. Paul** also says, "Now thanks be to God Who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life." (2 Corinthians 2:14-16)

- + Whereas the Jewish kings used gold, precious stones and decorated crowns, the anointed (kings) wear Christ on their heads; they are thus, and unknowingly, **being adorned by the Head - the Lord Himself**. The precious gems and pearls refer to God the Word Himself.
- + Let the fragrance emanating from women be the genuine royal aroma, that which is derived from Christ, and not that which results from artificially scented powders. Let their purity and meekness be the continual source of their scent. Let them always derive their pleasure from the holy spiritual ointments, and from the fragrant oil that Christ prepares for His disciples, whose constituents bear the sweet heavenly aroma. **St. Clement of Alexandria**.
- + Let us therefore pursue this glory with the utmost degree of sublimation, and let us renounce the other vain glory. The Divine inspiration says, "Boast not of thy clothing and raiment." (Sirach (Apocrypha) 11:4) This is the supreme wisdom's counsel to fools: how can you boast of something that can be subject to moth decay?

Do you not see what an unstable thing it is, this glory of the present life? You take pride in that which insects make and destroy. For Indian insects, it is said, spin those fine threads of which your robes are made. **But rather seek a clothing woven from things above, an admirable and radiant vesture, raiment of real gold;** of gold not dug by malefactors' hands out of the mine, but the produce of virtue. Let us clothe ourselves with a robe not the manufacture of poor men or slaves, but wrought by our Lord Himself. **St. John Chrysostom**.

- + Your Groom is Christ, why, then, do you seek lovers among men? Christ will judge you as an adulteress.

Why do you not adorn yourself with the ornaments that befit Him, and of which He approves? These are piety, self-control, conservatism and simple attire. The way you are dressed is only suitable for a careless, unthinking woman. Nowadays there is no differentiation between wantonness and chastity. A virgin should be inelegant, attired simply and plainly; but here we have those who devise a thousand and one ways to decorate their outer appearances!

O lady, abandon this folly! Concentrate on beautifying your inner being, since those external ornaments are at variance with the internal adornment. They who take care of outward appearances neglect the inside. Consequently, those who neglect the outside, are not wholly preoccupied with decorating themselves.

Fear the blame that Isaiah the prophet levelled at the women of Israel: “Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with outstretched necks.” (Isaiah 3:16) You are in a great battle that requires constant training and exercising, as opposed to preoccupation with decorations. This battle requires the strength of a boxer, rather than a dainty feminine life. Observe boxers: they care neither about the way they look nor walk; to them the ultimate dream, and the primary focus, is to strike and to win.

Satan lies in wait, gnashing his teeth, searching for the opportune moment and the means whereby he can catch you unawares and entice you. This is because you are too busy with those satanic decorations - to the extent that the world mocks you.

The deference for virginity has been lost. Virgins are no longer awarded the respect they deserve; they have exposed themselves to contempt. **Ought not they to be looked up to in the Church of God, as women coming from heaven? St. John Chrysostom.**

+ In order for us to approach the true Light, that is Christ, we praise Him in the Psalms saying, “Enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.” (Psalm 13:3)