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The Spiritual Father of the Monastery of St Macarius

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The Monastery of St Macarius
Scetis

كتاب: "حاجتنا إلى المسيح" (إنجليزي)

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The Spiritual Father of the Monastery of St Macarius

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OUR NEED FOR CHRIST

THE GREATEST EXPERIENCE which strongly drew my attention during my early Christian life is that whenever I felt my want of so many things in my dealings with the people, the Church or the monks, I got so distressed and agonized that my energy, ministry and influence upon others were consequently emasculated. But the moment I approach the person of my Lord Jesus and become aware of Him as though He were coming back after an absence of which I was always the cause, my heart leaps with joy and my mind gathers up so that all sense of want falls away from me and Christ rises over the horizon of my whole life. Then I see Him more than all my needs and feel His fullness overflowing and sweeping my life in the tide of His love which transcends the mind.

In the same measure I had this sense whenever I was so troubled with storming thoughts about the ways of God and His care for individuals and people that my spirit was sorely distressed within me. For I was always eager to see God supreme at all levels, of mercy or of justice and chastening, of tender fatherhood or sovereignty and grace, and remained thus torn asunder with conflicting feelings which gave me no rest or peace. But once I feel Him approaching me my soul calms down immediately, all my questions and worries vanish from me, and Christ appears transcending all our mental criteria concerning mercy or justice, fatherhood or sovereignty. At such moments Christ reveals to us the mystery of His will.

Through these two experiences I have been assured that Christ is the sole need of our life, and that the more distant we are from Him the greater our needs for so many things of this world, and the more

our worrying regarding things particular or general in our life.

Why then is it that the person of Christ appears in this way as though He were the fullness of everything, and the sole answer which copes with a thousand questions, or rather does away with every question?

To answer this we must realize that human nature comprises two contradictory worlds, the physical and the spiritual. This spiritual world which runs through man's being contrasts with a materialistic and degenerate reality in the life of man which leads him to commit acts of utter baseness. A man may kill his brother for a morsel of bread or sell his heavenly heritage for a meal of pottage (*cf* Gen 27). The history of civilization, philosophy and science proves that there is no hope of establishing a natural reconciliation in the tension and disruption inherent in man's being between the ideals of the spirit and the realities of the flesh—whether through the interference of wisdom, the refinement of skills or the mere following of the commandments of God, or even caning. For as soon as human instincts rage, man rebels against all spiritual values, and a temporary spiritual blindness overpowers him and drives him to commit the grossest transgressions even against himself.

Here appears Christ in his full humanity and full divinity as the great miracle which reconciled the human reality—apparent in man's instincts and passions in his dealings with the world, and his needs and infirmities—with spiritual ideals, or rather with God Himself. The conciliation is complete, perpetual and eternal, deeply rooted in the depth of man himself, for all that belongs to Christ has come to belong to mankind.

Here Christ has become at once man's miracle and God's miracle—man's miracle because he has reached the depth of God's nature, and God's miracle because He has penetrated to the depth of man's nature. In order to enter into the light of this miracle we have to realize that this conciliation does not rest on a theory however elaborate, nor on the mere following of commandments. The

conciliation fulfilled by Christ is a personal conciliation achieved in Christ Himself, not through our power but through His power, and the result surpasses the mind of man. Enough to realize that the moment it was fulfilled through the Incarnation and Crucifixion of Christ, it comprised all humanity in the person of Jesus who represents it before God the Father.

Man is reconciled to himself, for God was reconciled in the body of our humanity which belongs to Christ and which He took from us. Hence we say confidently and succinctly that we are reconciled with God in Christ. It is a highly personal reconciliation, a sort of unique mediation undertaken by this sole mediator, Christ, between God and man, giving rise to a new force which entered earth or rather heaven.

The lesser and weaker image of our Christianity is our vain attempts to apply the commandments of Christ to our daily problems without Christ Himself, while the stronger and greater image obtains when "the person of Christ" enters our life. Then all our problems fall at once and we rise to the level of Christ's commandments without the least personal skill.

The bitterness experienced by the Christian within himself as a result of the daily disruption whenever he comes up against Christ's commandments and finds himself incapable of catching up with them although he loves them, is the outcome of his attempt to fulfill the commandments of Christ without Christ, which is impossible. Christ laid down the commandment that we may prove by it His presence: "Prove your own selves, know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2Cor 13:5).

Hence the Lord says: "He who loves me keeps my commandments" (Jn 14:21) in the sense that he who loves me is he who can follow my commandments. First Christ's person, then follows all that is Christ's.

The Christian is required at all times to declare his Christianity before Christians and non-Christians alike. This persistent demand puts him in a perpetual tension, for he is bound to rise to the level of truth that he may see and reveal it, and to the level of faith that he may act in accordance with it before he declares it, or else he would disgrace himself and Christ alike.

But who can declare Christ, who is unattainable in His stature? For He is the zenith of all that is in heaven and earth, and He recapitulates everything in His own person. Above all He is the visible image of God the invisible. Therefore who can declare or interpret Him? The mind of man, his eloquence, his logic—all fall short of this.

Christ alone is capable of revealing Christ; whenever I feel Him approaching me I lay down all my weapons, or rather they fall off of their own accord. He alone is the mouthpiece of my truth and faith who speaks within me. He can reveal Himself in countless ways and with inexpressible ease, for the person of Christ is an infinite force that reveals itself in man without any effort on the part of man. Rather the effort of man is the major impediment to the revelation of Christ. Our greatest need is to feel His coming to us and to receive Him with all our being, then leave him to speak and act within us.

The critical attitude of others toward our Christianity is not focused on the person of Christ but on the absence of Christ from our Christianity. If Christ in His “divinity” were present in our lives no body would find fault with the divinity of Christ.

People stumbled at Christ because we put Christ in our lives on the same level as other needs, the level of seeking our bread, and the level of pleasure, diversion, knowledge and politics. And so the Christ within us appears a thousand times less than His real stature. If Christ is a God, He should be higher and greater than everything in our life, even greater than our life itself. Our dire need is that our Christianity be Christ Himself and not our principles, ambitions,

pride, malice or lust for the vain worldly glory which we conceal behind the name of Christ.

People do not hate Christ at all. Christ is beloved and indeed He is the “Son of Love”—love itself with all its depth which every man craves. But people do hate our character, our behavior and our false traits which we falsely attribute to the name of Christ.

The discrepancy between Christianity and Christ has more than ever become manifest in us and even outcrying against us. Our deeds and words merely proceed as Christian, but they never proceed from Christ. They are devoid of the fragrant spirit of Christ; no wonder then that our Christianity is not liked by people.

Our greatest need is to appeal once more to the person of Christ that he may show up in our life. Then will emerge an awakening where our false deeds are swept away to give place to the deeds of truth which witness to Him without any interference by our mortal skill. People want to come to Christ not to our earthly persons. Do we accept this? The major problem that obstructs our way to Christ is that although we get hold of Christ yet in time of danger or fatigue it is not Christ that is manifest but ourselves.

Most dangerous in this delusion is that ourselves seem good in our eyes, and so we find it needless to let go ourselves and get hold of Christ, and the real Christ remains hidden from the eyes and ears of people. Even if ourselves sometimes appear to us mean, false and delusive as they preach Christ while Christ is totally absent from them, they are capable of transformation and lack the conviction to take the risk and die so that Christ may revive them for Himself. For life in terms of this world is so delectable to the soul that seeks its own glory, particularly when it seeks backing from Scriptural sayings and thus takes the form of false resplendent glory. This self-seeking soul cannot be detected except by those who possess the true light of Christ. When are we going to believe the verse which says: “For we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants of Jesus’ sake” (2Cor 4:5).

How many preachers presented their own selves disguised under the teaching of Christ, so that men stumbled at Christ, and the blame and disgrace were laid not on them but on the weakened person of Christ, while he who witnesses for Christ is bound to receive from Christ and give to the others. This is the essence and significance of testimony which is effected through the mediation of the Holy Spirit who knows all that belongs to Christ and is eager to witness for Him in us properly. How many times we have grieved the Holy Spirit and obstructed His testimony by utilizing the testimony of Jesus for our own glory and interest! We badly need to be delivered from ourselves. Do we accept this?

Who will read the life of Jesus Christ and does not feel in his heart of hearts that Christ is the most beautiful and most clear image of God? If God is like Christ, then God is actually a loving and compassionate Father, while an infinitely omnipotent God. "He that hath seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:8).

Humanity will remain miserable until it finds God, and it will not find God except in Christ. Christ should have found in our lives an opportunity to prove His eternal power and divinity, that men may believe that He is truly the Son of God, and attain salvation and eternal life through Him, and that they may truly see the Father in Him. But we are to blame for impeding belief in Christ by presenting ourselves instead of the real Christ, so that our humanity is glorified at the expense of His divinity.

The redemptive work of Christ, in the last analysis, sums up in our becoming like Him, bearing His qualities once He has filled our life and reigned on us, not through teaching and instruction, but as St Paul says, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph 3:7).

If Christ dwelt in men and they consequently adopted His qualities this would mean that humanity transcended itself and bypassed all its impotence, illness and death, and entered upon its glorified phase which is by no means related to its dead earthly

heritage. This is man's new creation, and the divine power of Christ to uplift man over his own self so that he may surpass it and through Christ's power and effective life enter the field of action and divine liberty. Man would then freely, consciously and joyfully respond to God and all His intimations. This is the future of the new man in Christ, and this is his new birth. Hence Christ was truly named Adam the Second.

How then can we be born to God without Christ? This is impossible.

Let us not forget that Christ founded His work in mankind upon the cross. Although the cross entered the life of Christ as primarily a redemptive act, He handed it to us as a model of life and behavior. He who does not live or think in terms of the cross shall never realize the glory of Christ which He attained through the cross, nor shall he understand and value the real significance of redemption. But if we experience the cross in our life and taste it with consciousness and joy, this will be the mystical initiation to the knowledge and the glory of His power. Through communion in the sufferings of the cross we enter with Christ in an eternal covenant as inheritors to all the glories and consolations of the Father in heaven.

How wonderful the mystery of Christ, nay the mystery of Christ in man!

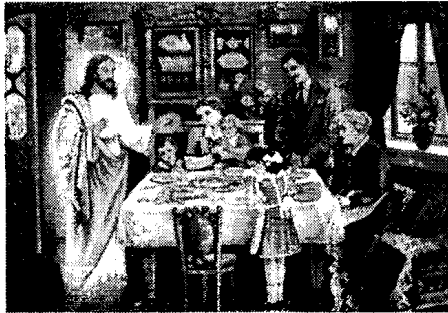


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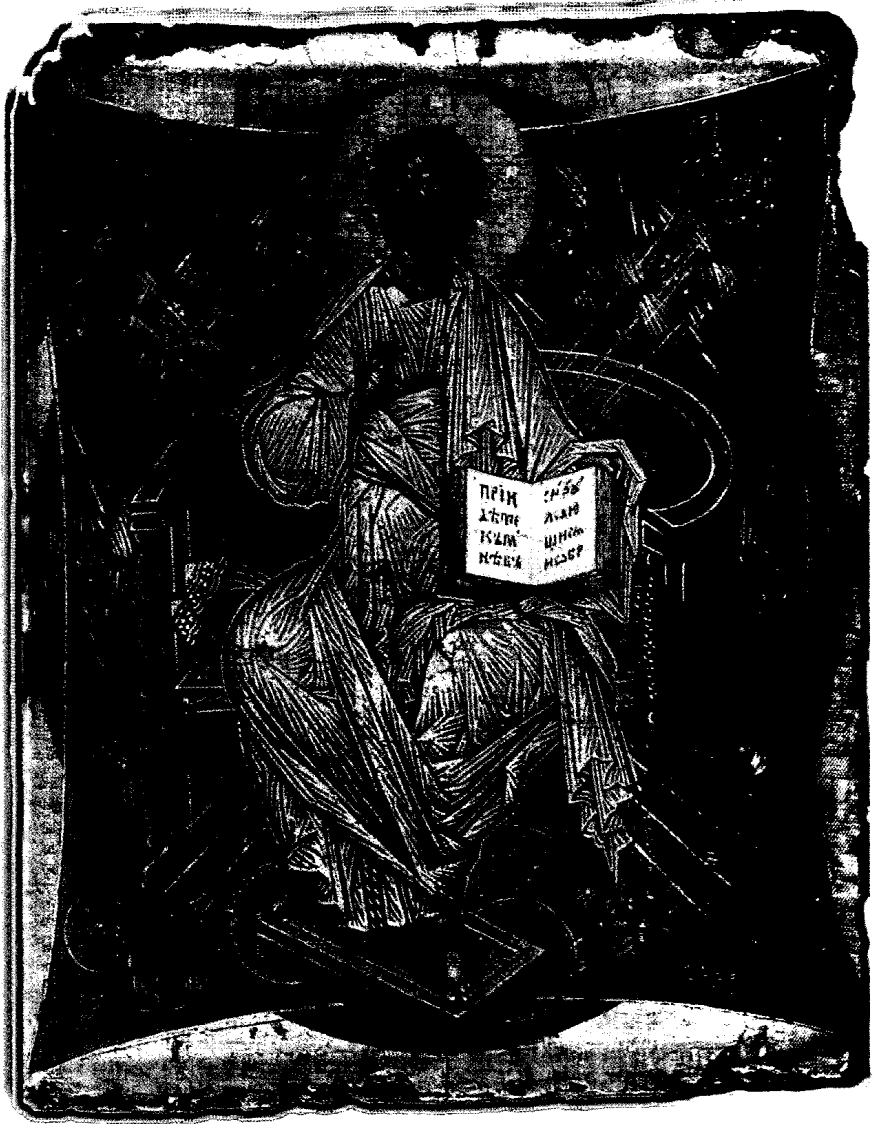
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