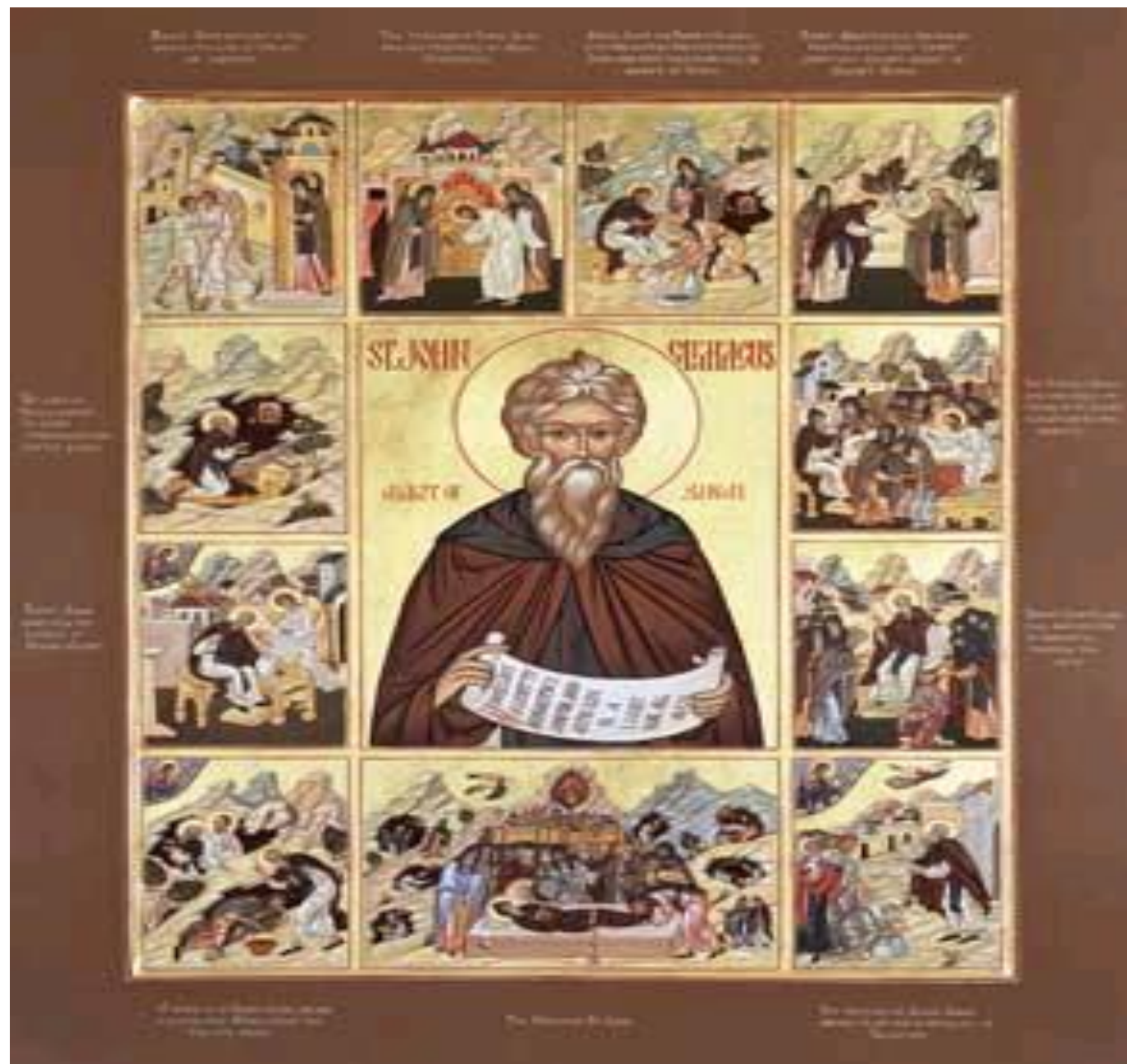


# MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

John of St. Catherine of Sinai (Climacus)

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John of Sinai  
(Climacus)

# John of Sinai (Climacus)

- 579-649 AD. Contemporary of Maximus the Confessor. Read daily during Lent.
- “For someone who believes there is a God, that God has manifested Himself in historical soundings in the person of Christ, and that insight and obligations are thereby held up to everyman, the monk cannot be ignored.”
- There is an “undeniable correlation between hardship and an intense marshaling of inner and frequently unsuspected resources manifest as a commanding faith in God.”

- There is a “deadly antagonism at the center of man’s own being. To be alive is to be in the world, ensuring one’s own survival, entering into relationships with others, gazing on the beauty rising before the eye, encountering at every turn the achievements of art and intellect, feeling the stirrings of delight, and discovering the outward reach of desire, of passion, and of the urge to possess...This is where the body feels most at home...even the hours awake and asleep, the body is in command.”
- Thus, “for the sake of the coming Kingdom, or because of the number of one’s sins, or on account of the love of God,” the monastic life calls.

- “Let no one who grieves for his sins expect reassurance at the hour of death. There can be no reassurance about the unknown.”
- But, “to despair is...to inflict death on oneself.”
- God is real and there is an afterlife. “Reverence as far as possible the alliance of soul and body, the concerns of here and now, and live to the extent one can the life of the spirit.” Love, then, is clarified and God is made present.
- The seeker “runs a minefield of worldly allures and the unending assault of the devil and his minion who are ever on watch to turn a believer away from the path of right conduct.”

- “Surrender even the capacity to hold a private and unspoken attitude of critical reserve or judgment regarding the commands meted out (by the spiritual father who stands as God).”
- “Humble recognition of one’s own insignificance and actualization of that insignificance will then open to one the grace of becoming someone pleasing in the sight of God.”
- “He who strives for dispassion and for God considers lost any day on which he was not criticized.”
- “The monastic life is a light for all men.”

- To the married Christian, “Do whatever good you may. Speak evil of no one. Tell no lie. Despise no one...Show compassion to the needy...Be satisfied with what your own spouses can provide you. If you do all this, you will not be far from the Kingdom of Heaven.”
- Christianity is more than the exterior acceptance of doctrines and rules. No one can be a true Christian at second hand. There must be a personal encounter, in which each knows, sees, tastes, and touches for himself.”

- The true teacher is illuminated by God. He evokes a response; invites to pilgrimage. Each acts in accord with his station in life.
- “A man who has heard himself sentenced to death will not worry about the way theaters are run.”
- “When we die, we will not be criticized for having failed to work miracles. We will not be accused of having failed to be theologians or contemplatives. But we will certainly have to have some explanation to offer God for not having mourned unceasingly (for our sins).”



- Penitence is the beginning (and the end) of seeking God.
- Love is gnosis (higher knowledge).
- “A Christian is an imitator of Christ in thought, word, and deed, as far as this is humanly possible, and he believes rightly and blamelessly in the Holy Trinity.”
- “Prayer and remembrance of death are equally necessary.”
- Man becomes virtuous by participating in the energies of God. (cf Jo 15:5)

- 1. Break with the world: renunciation, detachment, exile.
- 2. Practice the virtues (“active life”): obedience, penitence, remembrance of death, sorrow for one’s sins.
- 3. Struggle against the passions: anger, malice, slander, talkativeness, falsehood, despondency, gluttony, lust, avarice, insensitivity, fear, vainglory, pride.

Practice the higher virtues: simplicity, humility, discernment.

- 4. Contemplative life: stillness, prayer, dispassion, love.

- “Repentance is the daughter of hope and the refusal to despair. (The penitent stands guilty, but not disgraced). Repentance is reconciliation with the Lord.”
- “The sins committed after Baptism are washed away by tears.”
- “To have dispassion is to have the fullness of love...the complete indwelling of God.”
- “It is said of angels that they do not...or cannot fall. But men fall, yet they can quickly rise again, as often as this may happen to them. Devils and devils only never rise once they have fallen.”

- One must confess thoughts to a spiritual father.  
“Nothing gives demons and evil thoughts such power over us as to nourish them and hide them in our hearts unconfined.”
- “But, “to recall sins (of the flesh) in detail inflicts injury on the man who hopes in God...They pollute him again with old defilement.
- “Prayer is by nature a dialogue and a union of man with God.”
- “What higher good is there than to cling to the Lord and to persevere in unceasing union with Him.”
- “Its effect is to hold the world together.”

- How to pray: First, praise God; Then, confess one's sins; Then, ask.
- “Pray in all simplicity...talkative prayer frequently distracts the mind and dilutes it.”
- “Cry out to God, who has the strength to save you. Do not bother with elegant and clever words. Just speak humbly, beginning with, ‘Have mercy on me, for I am weak.’” (Ps 6:3)
- “Let the remembrance of death and the concise Jesus Prayer go to sleep with you and get up with you, for nothing helps you as these do when you are asleep.” (cf 1 Thes 5:17)

- “Flog your enemies with the Name of Jesus, since there is no stronger weapon in Heaven or Earth.” (cf Acts 19:11)
- “Stillness is worshipping God unceasingly and waiting on Him. Let the remembrance of Jesus be united with your every breath. Then, indeed, will you appreciate the value of stillness.”

- “You will know that you have this holy gift...when you experience an abundance of unspeakable light.” (cf Ex 34:29-35)
- Love has no boundary (cf Ps 119:96). Love progresses throughout eternity.
- “The fathers have declared the singing of psalms to be a weapon, prayer to be a wall, and honest tears to be a bath. To them, blessed obedience is a confession of faith, without which no one subject to passions will see the Lord.” (cf Ps 31:5)
- “Obedience is self-mistrust up to one’s dying day, in every matter, even the good.” On the contrary, “self-direction is to follow one’s own regimen and satisfy one’s own will.”
- No idle talk.

- “He who is not submissive in his talk will certainly not be so in what he does.”
- “A man should know that the devil’s slickness is on him if he is seized by the urge in conversation to assert his opinion, however correct it may be.”
- “A sign of true repentance is the admission that all our troubles, and more besides, whether visible or not, were richly deserved.”
- There is no universal salvation.
- “Fear of death is a property of nature due to disobedience; but terror of death is a sign of unrepented sins.” (cf Eccl 7:36)
- “The Devil proposes impossible virtues...”



- “Despondency or tedium...is a paralysis of the soul, a slackness of the mind...it is an approval of worldly things...tedium loves to be in hospitality...recalling even the words of Him who said ‘and you visited me’...(and) searches out any plausible excuse to (draw) us from prayer.”
- “Begrudge the stomach and your heart will be humbled.”
- “To fast is to do violence to nature. It is to do away with whatever pleases the palate.”

- “When you are recollected, do not show off. Withdraw into your heart, and remember that devils fear recollection as thieves fear dogs.”
- “Never stop imagining and examining the dark abyss of fire...think of your lying in bed as an image of the lying in your grave.”
- “A man who is truly in mourning will never go back to high living, glory, anger, or irritability.”
- “The man who has put a stop to anger has also wiped out remembrance of wrongs...A loving man banishes revenge...”

- “Do not make judgments...do not condemn, not even if your eyes are seeing something, for they may be deceived.”
- “Talkativeness is the throne of vainglory...” (cf Ps 5:7)
- “To be chaste is to put on the nature of an incorporeal being.”
- “The rule and limit of absolute chastity is to have the same feelings regarding animate and inanimate beings, rational and irrational.”
- “Heresy comes from presumption; fornication comes from bodily comfort,” writes Timothy of Alexandria

- “Never brood by day over the fantasies that have occurred to you during sleep, for the aim of the demons is to defile us while we are still awake by causing us to harp on our dreams.”
- Struggle against thought.
- “The man of charity spreads his money about him, but the man who claims to possess both charity and money is a self-deceived fool.”
- “The man who gives up possessions for religious motives is great, but the man who renounces his will is holy indeed.”
- “Insensitivity...lack of awareness is negligence that has become a habit.”
- “Alertness keeps the mind clean. Somnolence binds the soul.”

- “The servant of the Lord will be afraid only of his master, while the man who does not yet fear Him is often scared by his own shadow.”
- “To be a showoff is to be vainglorious...” (cf Isa 3:12)
- “A man who takes pride in natural abilities...the man who seeks a quid pro quo from God builds on uncertainty...” (Mt 16:16)
- “Pride is a denial of God...pride begins where vainglory leaves off...pride makes us forget our sins, for the remembrance of them leads to humility.”
- Pride may lead to unspeakable blasphemous thoughts.

- “A meek soul is the throne of simplicity.”
- “Humility is constant forgetfulness of one’s achievements...It is the admission that in all the world one is the least important and the greatest sinner...It is the mind’s awareness that one is weak and helpless...the acknowledgement of divine grace and mercy...the abdication of one’s own will.” (cf Ps 131)
- “Discernment is an understanding of the will of God in all times, in all places, and in all things.”

- “Those who wish to discover the will of God must begin by mortifying their own will. Then having prayed in faith and simplicity, all malice spent, they should turn humbly and in confidence to the fathers or even the brothers and they should accept their counsel, as though from God Himself, even when that counsel goes against the grain, even when that advice comes from those who do not seem very spiritual. God, after all, is not unjust. He will not lead astray the souls who, trusting and guileless, yield in lowliness to the advice and decision of their neighbor, even if those consulted are stupid. God immediately and invisibly speaks through them and anyone who faithfully submits to this norm will be filled with humility...”

- In everything that we do, in what has to be done now or later, the objective must be sought from God Himself; and every act that is not the product of personal inclination or impurity will be imputed to us
- for God, especially if done for the sake of God and not for someone else. This is so, even if the actions themselves are not completely good.”
- “God judges our repentance not by our actions, but by our humility.”
- “The first task of stillness is disengagement from every affair, good and bad...second is urgent prayer. Third is inviolable activity of the heart.”
- “Stillness is worshipping God unceasingly and waiting on Him.”



- “The demons of vainglory and concupiscence usually attack us in the morning. In the middle of the day, the attack comes from the demons of despondency, gloom, and anger; and it comes in the evening from the dung loving demons of the miserable stomach.”
- “The beginning of prayer is the expulsion of distractions from the very start by a single thought (repeated short prayer). The middle space is the concentration on what is being said or thought; its conclusion is rapture in the Lord.”
- “Always be brave and God will teach you your prayers.”
- God is love.

# Bibliography

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