**HOW MONASTICISM BEGAN IN CHRISTIANITY**

**By Metropolitan Bishoy**

Monasticism was certainly within God’s divine economy before the creation of the world. Events in the Old Testament point that one day monasticism would be a way of life for many saints.

Monasticism appeared powerfully and in an organized fashion in Christianity. It had a great impact on Christian history, and remains influential to this day.

**John the Baptist:**

In announcing John the Baptist’s birth to his father Zechariah the priest, the angel said: “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of **Elijah**, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

At John the Baptist’s birth, Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied of the salvation and of the Lord Christ, then he directed the speech to his newborn son and said: “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins,through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.’ So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and **was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel**.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

We could not overlook that John the Baptist was raised in the desert, until he appeared to the people of Israel, after reaching the age of thirty.

Even Elijah the prophet, who ascended to heaven alive, with whom John’s name was connected, was not married. He went to Mount Sinai, and there God spoke with him saying: “Elisha… you shall anoint asprophet in your place,”[[3]](#footnote-3) revealing to him that he would be taken away to heaven.

We call John the Baptist, the prophet of the two testaments, because his arrival was announced in the Old Testament, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit at St. Mary’s visit while she bore the child Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, in her womb. He served to prepare the way before Christ, was honored with baptizing the Lord Christ, and saw the descent of the Holy Spirit and the designated sign on the head of the Lord Christ[[4]](#footnote-4); he saw heaven open and heard the voice of the heavenly Father. He testified to Christ many times.

Likewise, Elijah the prophet lived in the Old Testament, but he will come in the New Testament to testify to Christ on the mountains of Jerusalem. He will be martyred in opposing the beast, the antichrist, as John the Baptist also died for the truth.

Elijah the prophet lived in the Old Testament, but he is still alive today, therefore he lives in the New Testament, and will come serve in the New Testament at the end of the world.

This is why Malachi, recording the words of God, said: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

The disciples asked the Lord Christ: “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’ Jesus answered and said to them, Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished’… Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

The angel announced to Zechariah the Father of John the Baptist that he would, “go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah.”

Elijah also visited earth on the Transfiguration Mount. Elijah’s visit in the presence of the Lord Christ was speedy, just as John the Baptist’s service before the Lord was swift. Elijah “spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Elijah came along with Moses; Moses did not come in body but in spirit only (his body had been dead and buried), while Elijah came body and spirit to the Transfiguration Mount. This was simply a quick glimpse.

**John’s Life is an Amazing Glimpse to Monasticism at the Dawn of Christianity:**

The gospel of St. Luke says, “The word of God came to John the son of Zacharias **in the** **wilderness**.And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

The gospel of St. John mentions Johns witness to the Lord Christ: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world... And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

The gospel of St. Matthew states: “In those days John the Baptist came preaching **in the wilderness** of Judea,and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’ … And John himself was **clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey**.Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to himand were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

The phrase “**He is dressed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist**” proves that he lived in the wilderness, and did not meet people who can bring him cloth. Likewise, “His food was locusts and wild honey” because there was no one who can cook or bring food for him. He neither lived in a house, nor did he have any relationship with the community.

The phrase, “**He was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel**,” is supported by his victuals and the appearance of his dress. He lived many years in the desert. In those years, he had absolutely no relationship with the world; if he had had a relationship with the world, people would have brought him food and cloth. Even after he began to baptize, he did not live in a house or eat normal food.

He would have said, along with His Holiness –may our Lord extend his life- in his poem *Stranger*, “I move as a phantom that startles the eyes of the beholder.” If one glimpsed John moving in the desert, one would see an entity, perhaps it is a long haired desert animal. The Old Testament Nazirite did not cut his hair, drink wine, or approach anything unclean.[[11]](#footnote-11) The angel said that John “shall drink neither wine nor strong drink,”[[12]](#footnote-12) and the same commission had been given for Samson; a Nazirite does not cut his hair.

John’s hair was long and he was dressed in camel’s hair, anyone seeing him from afar would have reckon him a desert animal. Most probably, when he appeared, no one had known who he was.

What we would like to highlight here is, **even while John the Baptist was preaching the baptism of repentance, he was still living in the wilderness. This was an amazing glimpse to monasticism at the dawn of Christianity.**

When Christ came to be baptized, “John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?’But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’”[[13]](#footnote-13)

**The Lord Christ’s Celibacy:**

Christ Himself was unmarried. If He was born without marriage, how could He marry?

He incarnated to offer Himself a sacrifice for the sake of the world; His posterity is **spiritual**, as Isaiah said: “He shall see a long-lived seed, and the will of the Lord shall be prosperous in his hand.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

What proves that a spiritual seed does exit? St. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, speaks of the seed of Israel: “But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, In Isaac your seed shall be called.That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are **not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed**.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

Therefore, the phrase, “He shall see a long-lived seed” means the spiritual children of God, as St. John the Evangelist said in his gospel: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

**St. Mary’s Celibacy:**

The Lord Christ was celibate. St. Mary was also celibate.

Even before she bore the Lord Christ she had chosen the life of celibacy. The proof for that is that when the angel announced to her that she “will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son”… although she was engaged she asked, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”[[17]](#footnote-17) If she intended to marry her respond would not have been “How can this be, since I do not know a man”. If she intended to marry she would have understood that she would conceive after marriage since she was already engaged… The issue is that Joseph was simply as her caretaker and not as her husband in the full sense of the word. This was their agreement. He was also an aged man.

**The Establishment of Christian Monasticism:**

When we come to think of how monasticism originated, we find the Lord Christ as the role model for all humanity (men and women). The role model for women (and possibly men), after the Lord Christ, is Virgin Mary. And the greatest among those born of women,[[18]](#footnote-18) (among the prophets) is John the Baptist — of course this excepts the Lord Christ who said, “He who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”[[19]](#footnote-19)

**The whole group which started Christianity lived a life of celibacy**, does this not cause one to think seriously of clinging onto them?

**Essenes:**

The connection between John the Baptist’s life and the wilderness was not strange at that time. Historically, the Essenes were a group of Jews, most of whom lived akin to the monastic life. They continued until after the coming of the Lord Christ, until Titus, the Roman ruler, attacked Judea and the surrounding areas, and so this sect was dispersed. They left the manuscripts of the Holy Bible and other books in earthen vessels in the caves of Qumran, which were discovered in 1947. The manner of these Essenes does not concern us much, because they are not the ones who shaped Christianity, but our concern is with such personalities as we have just mentioned: the Lord Christ, Virgin Mary, and John the Baptist. These three will sit together in the kingdom of heaven: the Lord Christ in center with Virgin Mary at His right, and John the Baptist on His left.

**Christ’s Life and the Wilderness:**

The Lord Christ’s situation was unlike John the Baptist’s. He had to go down to Egypt to fulfill certain prophecies concerning Egypt and its idols. He also had to go to the temple at the age of twelve. His path was different from that of John the Baptist.

**He could not be completely isolated from the community as was John the Baptist**, yet, many times He would **withdraw to the mountains to pray**.[[20]](#footnote-20) After His baptism “Jesus was led up by the Spirit **into the wilderness** to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry… Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee… [Preaching,] repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”[[21]](#footnote-21) The three temptations on the mountain reveal to us the might of the wilderness. (This is besides what it shows on the Transfiguration Mount and its events.)

He spent forty days in the wilderness, and at their terminus the tempter came to Him.

Why did the struggle between our Lord Jesus Christ and the devil occur on the mountain, and not at another location? In all types of temptations He scored victories for the sake of humanity: He fasted and was tempted for us in order to lift up the head of humanity, being the second Adam.

All this gives us an idea of **the** **wilderness, that it is an arena with its own significance**.

Even the Lord Christ’s life, whose mission and service differed from that of John the Baptist, still included the wilderness, and fasting and praying in the wilderness. This does not prevent that the Lord Christ prayed at various times, but the wilderness has a special taste.

He was anointed in the Jordan River by the Holy Spirit. Should He not, after being anointed at the age of thirty, begin His service? In the Old Testament, all the priests, the sons of Aaron, did not practice their priesthood except at coming to the age of thirty. At the age of thirty, the Lord Christ was anointed in the Jordan River by the Holy Spirit: king, priest, and prophet (from the viewpoint of His humanity) and He was to begin His priesthood, but the Holy Bible says, “Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness.And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him.”[[22]](#footnote-22)

When we think of how monasticism began, we need to think of important events recorded in the gospels and in the Holy Bible, like the wilderness in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the lives of John the Baptist and Elijah. Also, the connection between John the Baptist and Elijah the prophet and his ascent to heaven in a fiery chariot.

This concept was not overlooked by His Holiness when he composed his ode to St. Antony: “You were given the spirit of Elijah — And Anne the Prophetess — And of John the son of Zechariah — O our Father St. Antony.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

**Elijah is Still Living the Monastic Life:**

St. Antony might be the father of all monks, but I could not consider him the beginning of monasticism, because monasticism did not originate as late as the third century AD, but has its roots extending to the apostolic era, or the life of Christ.

Elijah and John the Baptist are distinct markers in the origin of monasticism.

As previously mentioned, a monastic is someone who is distant from the world and is unmarried, this is exactly the life condition of Elijah who led this type of life on earth and till now since he is still alive. He did not leave the inhabited world into the wilderness; he left the entire globe into a wilderness of another kind, a heavenly wilderness.

Wonder what he does there this whole time? Is this not monasticism also?

Elijah has lived the life of monasticism for thousands of years.. who can live such a life?

When he comes again, the world will quiver; he will come to confront the beast face to face. As the colloquial expression goes, He will be “a good coin that comes in handy on a dark day.” At that time, the church will be in a sorrowful state, because the Beast will apply violent pressure, and the false prophet will perform miracles in the name of the Beast.

Nowadays, sorrowfully, we find people rushing after miracles without distinction. This is not new, but it is mentioned in the history of the church as for example in the story of St, Agathon whom we commemorate on the 14 of Tut. He used to cast out demons from those who present having prophecies, making miracles and being holy.

When the Beast comes: “**The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish… God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth**.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

I puzzle to find people run after the supernatural guise, regardless of these personalities who perform them if they are of deviant dogma or unspiritual behavior. We had experiences with such cases of deceitful guise and we discovered the truth and proved that they were acts of the devil, inspite of having supernatural appearances.

When Elijah comes the atmosphere will be very difficult for the church, like one drowning who clings onto a straw. He will come after thousands of years to say that Jesus of Nazareth is the true Christ, and not this false Christ and his lying wonder-working prophet in the name of the Beast.

**What is the Benefit of Monasticism**

Some people attack monasticism, asking, “What is the benefit to monasticism?”

The history of the Church tells us that when the war grew hot on St. Athanasius at Alexandria, St. Antony was compelled to leave the desert, not to leave the desert and live in the world, but simply to witness to the true faith. People asked him if the true faith was that of Athanasius or that of Arius.

Arius had composed church songs which he had used to teach people his erroneous dogma. When people saw St. Antony with his luminous face, they asked him: What is the true faith? He kept telling them that the faith of Athanasius was the upright faith. Some personalities need support, because they lack the capacity for theological dogmatic debates.

The same parable applies to St. Antony that “a good coin that comes in handy on a dark day.” St. Antony was like the coming of Elijah the prophet at a crucial moment.

St. Antony supported Athnasius in Alexandria, because people believed him so they followed Athnasius.

Historically, Arius is recorded to have had seven hundred consecrated deaconesses follow him, along with seven priests, two bishops, and twelve deacons. The index of the seven hundred deaconesses indicate that they were emotionally affected by his enchanting personality. Philip Schaff, the Catholic historian, one of the greatest in Christian history says that Arius had a magnetic personality, was handsome, enthralling, adroit, and artful.[[25]](#footnote-25) He was also a poet, since he composed many songs and taught them to the people. I believe he was also a musician, because the songs needed music. He was peculiarly gifted.

St. Athanasius was a theologian and well-versed in the Holy Bible, but perhaps he was not so artistically gifted, therefore he needed the support of St. Antony.

**St. Athanasius lived three years pouring water on the hands of St. Antony in the desert; monasticism had its impact on his life, helping him not be vexed when he was exiled from his See**. Note that Pope Athanasius himself spent much of his time of exile. He spent forty-five years on the throne, nineteen of which he spent in Alexandria, and twenty-six years in exile. He was condemned to exile five times. But, God did not allow Arianism to sweep Alexandria at the time of Arius.

Pope Alexander convened a council of one hundred bishops who anathematized Arius, so he left Alexandria. Unfortunately, the issue was not done with him, since he had followers who disseminated his beliefs. The struggle against Arianism continued for a very long time. Arius was also very active in Nicomedia, Caesarea, and the Cappadocian regions. From time to time a council condemnation came out against St. Athanasius, until matters came to an end and Orthodoxy scored a decisive victory, after the death of Pope Athanasius, at the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD, when they confirmed the Nicene Creed and added the section specific to the Holy Spirit.

Note that St. Athanasius spent three years in the desert.

**St. Paul the Apostle and Three years in the Wilderness:**

St. Paul, after believing in Christianity, flee from Damascus since they wanted to kill him, and spent three years in the Arabian Desert. He said, “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

When did he receive anything from the Lord? **He received it in the desert, in the monastic life.** Therefore St. Paul says, “**It isgood for a man not to touch a woman**.”[[27]](#footnote-27) St. Paul began his life, before beginning his apostleship, with three years of monasticism.

He wrote to the Galatians:

“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace,to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but **I went to Arabia**, and returned again to Damascus.Then **after three years** **I went up to Jerusalem** to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother”.[[28]](#footnote-28)

St. Paul explained that the governor of Damascus wanted to kill him, so he “was let down in a basket through a window in the wall”[[29]](#footnote-29) of Damascus and escaped to the desert; he did not go to Jerusalem. He remained in the Arabian desert for three years, and then returned to Damascus (as things had calmed down), and then he thought of going to Jerusalem to meet St. Peter and St. James. (cf 2 Cor11: 32, 33)

Further he continues:

“Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me.And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain… for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me.But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter(for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles),and when James, **Cephas[[30]](#footnote-30)**, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised”.[[31]](#footnote-31)

**St. Paul Receives from the Lord in the Desert:**

When St. Paul said, “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you,”[[32]](#footnote-32) frankly, he boasted of something, but then returned to balance it.

He boasted in saying, “I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,”[[33]](#footnote-33) and at the beginning of the epistle he says, “Paul, an apostle not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead.”[[34]](#footnote-34) He is boasting that his apostleship is from Christ who appeared to him on the road and called him, so, he was not chosen by people, not even ones guided by the Holy Spirit. He wanted to affirm that his apostleship is from the Lord Christ Himself, exactly as when He prayed all night and called the twelve and called them apostles. In this case he would not be viewed as a successor to the apostles, but Christ personally appointed him an apostle.

Simultaneously, in his humility, lest anyone imitate him and end up in a predicament, he says, “Then after fourteen years… I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.”[[35]](#footnote-35)

Here is the balance. Although he was called to the apostleship by Lord Christ, who told Ananias, “He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake,”[[36]](#footnote-36) and, he received in Arabia many things directly from Christ, yet, simultaneously, lest anyone follow his example and claim to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, he said, “I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach.”

There must be legitimization. The apostles in Antioch: “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’… being sent out by the Holy Spirit.”[[37]](#footnote-37) Therefore the church interfered in appointing his service.. Likewise, the phrase “by revelation” implies that God himself made him communicate his gospel which he preaches lest by any means he might run in vain. However, he himself said: “But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter(for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles),and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.”[[38]](#footnote-38)

The point here is that St. Paul was not placed as a successor to the apostles. The twelve apostles were represented in these three, James, Cephas, and John, took the right hand of fellowship for the circumcised, while St. Paul and Barnabas took the right hand of fellowship for the gentiles. They represented two leaderships in the church; the Lord Christ said, “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold.”[[39]](#footnote-39) The Lord Christ personally appeared to St. Paul and told him, “Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me… Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles,”[[40]](#footnote-40) I want to send you to Rome and elsewhere.

The point is that the three years of Arabia effected powerful divine work in St. Paul the apostle. He said, “I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia,”[[41]](#footnote-41) here is the effect of the desert and the wilderness on Christianity.

**The Role of the Desert and the Wilderness on Christianity:**

The work that our Lord Christ accomplished with St. Paul in the desert is the same He did with His disciples during His years of service on earth, including the night of the Lord’s Supper. Christ was in heaven, and St. Paul on earth and was able, in the desert, to receive what the disciples received during the presence of the Lord Christ on earth, to the point that he became one of the greatest orators of Christianity akin to the twelve, to the extent that at one point he began to correct St. Peter.

St. Peter also attested that St. Paul’s epistles were like the Holy Scriptures — anyone who twists them reaps self-destruction,

St. APul said: “Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed… And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.But **when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews**?”[[42]](#footnote-42)

St. Peter was not upset by this, on the contrary, St. Peter did us a great favor when he said: “Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation **-- as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you,as also in all his epistles**, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand[[43]](#footnote-43), which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.”[[44]](#footnote-44)

St. Peter attested to all of St. Paul’s epistles… and warned of twisting or misunderstanding them.

St. Peter offered us two very awesome points in his advice: he said that all the writings of St. Paul are inspired by God, and also said to be careful not to twist the words therein if they are hard to understand.

He saw that St. Paul explained many things, including some very eloquent things, that people should not interpret to their own whim in order to change the faith. The Protestants, like Calvin and his followers, fell in what St. Peter warned everyone from, and confirmed in the Dordrecht Council. They still hold these claims to this day.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Do not think that St. Peter was criticizing St. Paul when he said this phrase: “As also our beloved brother Paul, **according to the wisdom given to him**, has written to you… which **untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures**.”[[46]](#footnote-46) So, he considers the writings of St Paul as the rest of the Scriptures and whoever twists his words could bring upon himself destruction.

It is wonderful to see how the apostles interacted together. The Apostles and Peter, whose name was mentioned first among the twelve disciples in the gospels, accepts rebuke from St. Paul who came later and had been persecuting the church. He rebuked Peter and documents this in his epistle to the Galatians: “I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed,”[[47]](#footnote-47) and St. Peter still writes, “According to the wisdom given to him.”

This is the church. No one thinks of himself, but thinks of God’s Providence for people’s salvation and the upright dogma.

**Monasticism:**

Monasticism produced for us John the Baptist, St. Paul the apostle, the greatest missionary in Christianity, from the Arabian desert, and Elijah the prophet an amazing personality. As previously mentioned, Elijah will come in very difficult days and play a big role in defending the faith at the end of the world, because, as the Lord Christ said, Satan will try “to deceive, if possible, even **the elect[[48]](#footnote-48)**.”[[49]](#footnote-49)

**Did Monasticism Begin by St. Antony:**

Monasticism was not begun by St. Antony, as some claim; monasticism began with the start of the New Testament church. Furthermore, it has roots, as previously explained, in the Old Testament. These roots will continue active and influential until the Lord’s coming at the end of the world.

**What is the Benefit of Monastics**

Some might say, “We have no problem extolling chastity, as St. Paul extolled it, but what is with this idea of isolation in the desert? And, what is the benefit of the people who sit idly praying in the monasteries. Furthermore, the abovementioned examples were of people who were isolated for a while, but at one point they appeared for a specific message, as John the Baptist, St. Paul, and even St. Antony. What is the benefit of monastics living continually in monasteries?” These are objections expressed against the monastic life.

In response let us take the story of St Demiana as an example: St. Demiana abandoned the world, lived the life of monasticism, and never thought that one day she would go back to the world in order to rebuke her father, so that he becomes a martyr. She left him, and came to live a wonderful life of prayer and praise with the virgins in the wilderness of Zaafaran. She never thought that she would become a martyr or that she would lead her father to martyrdom. If it is God’s will, He is the one who stirs events. She never intended, neither did she ever dream that a day would come when her father would sacrifice to idols. Still, what did she do? It was simply a speedy visit to rebuke her father, and she returned. This was not planned in her agenda. But that would have resulted in a terrible turn in the history of all Northern Egypt. This was the governor of Borrulos and had massive lands in the Delta under his control, and he was given authority over El-Farma (Port Said) after he offered incense to the idols. He sacrificed all this to be a martyr after his daughter’s visit.

When the governor is non-Christian, especially if he is originally Christian, this causes great retrogression to the Christian culture. People who are not very strong in the faith could be affected. A parable says that peoples’ religion is the religion of their kings.

Returning to her monastery, she was surprised to find an army coming to command her to worship idols. She refused, and gave the virgins the option to flee. They refused and remained with her; they were all martyred.

It was not in her plan to go down to the world, or to offer any service. But, if God wills, He could use her on a certain day, for a certain event, or for a speedy purpose, as occurred with St. Antony, who went down to Alexandria and returned. He was as a speedy ray that illuminated the minds of the people.

Here we put the following question: Had St. Demiana not think of monasticism, and live in a monastery, would she have had the same influence on her father? I do not think so. Before she went to him, she prayed fervently, along with the forty virgins. Prayers and fasts move mountains.

**Examples for the Importance and Necessity of Prayer:**

**St. Paul the Apostle:**

St. Paul says: “You also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift grantedto us through many.”[[50]](#footnote-50) Why does St. Paul need prayer by many in spite of being the greatest missionary in Christianity?

He also said, “No, we also need people to pray for us.” He also asked them to pray “for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.”[[51]](#footnote-51) St. Paul was continually alerting to the importance that someone is praying for those who are serving; this is very important.

Even St. Paul the Apostle in his service, did not only ask them to pray for him, but also told them I am “making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”[[52]](#footnote-52)

Furthermore he says: “Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. For this reason **I** **bow my knees** to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height -- to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God [all that God fills you with]”.[[53]](#footnote-53)

He says ‘I bow my knees and pray for you’; in many of his letters He says I pray for you. Was not your missionary work sufficient: the revelations, the preaching, and the miracles?

He tells the people of Philippi: “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,**always in every prayer** of mine making request for you all with joy.”[[54]](#footnote-54)

There is ample evidence that St. Paul was very interested in the scope of prayer, both in his prayers for those whom he served, and in their prayers for him.

**Moses the Prophet:**

In the war with Amalek Moses sent Joshua to fight, while he stood on the mountain to pray. “And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.”[[55]](#footnote-55) Finally, Aaron and Hur held up his two hands each from a side, so that his hands are held up in prayer position till the end of the day and the victory of the people of Israel.

This is one example which illustrates that one group could fight while another prays. It is not necessary for all to descend to the battlefield.

**King David:**

Also, after one of the wars King David said, “As his part is who goes down to the battle, so shall his part be who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike.”[[56]](#footnote-56) Specialties are distributed; not every individual can do everything.

**St. Mary:**

In the church, priesthood and teaching are the work of men. This is very clearly stated in the Bible.

Virgin Mary did not partake in any priestly rank, nor did she stand to preach on Pentecost, but her presence in the church was a blessing. The Apostles resorted to her, to pray for them. Her story with Matthias the Apostle is well known and we commemorate it as the feast of “The Virgin who melted the iron”.

Could anyone underestimate Virgin Mary’s mission after Pentecost? The Virgin had the great merit of accepting the pregnancy, going down to Egypt, caring for baby Jesus from every angle until He began His salvific missionary service, and standing by Him on the Cross.

Even while standing beside the cross, she did nothing but prayer. She could neither petition Pontius Pilate, nor stand up to the soldiers because she is a humble person, not one to enter into fights, so she said, “The world rejoices at the acceptance of salvation, but my heart burns when I look at Your crucifixion which You are enduring for the sake of all; O my Son and my God.”[[57]](#footnote-57)

**Monasticism is not Passive:**

Some claim that monastic life is passive, that monastics do nothing. They claim that monastics have no role in the church; they simply flee from the world to escape diabolic wars and worldly offenses. Unfortunately, today this is being said, printed in books, and broadcast on satellite channels.

As we discussed the roots, motives, and spiritual basis of monasticism in Christianity, we must also add the words of St. Paul on celibacy, “The unmarried woman cares about the **things of the Lord**, that she may be **holy both in body and in spirit**. But she who is married cares about the things of the world -- how she may please herhusband.”[[58]](#footnote-58) The issue at hand is the claim by some, that monasticism, since it includes an angle of escaping from the world, is passive. The monastics living in the monastery or a cave in the mountain are supposedly no longer useful to the church, had they remained in the community they would have served God more.

St. Anthony took to the world and then returned again to the desert, but other monastics did not go down like him. They remained in their monasteries or caves, and most nuns remain in their monasteries. This is the category that is attacked of being passive.

We are discussing the monasticism that we read about in *The* *Paradise of the Holy Fathers*, the monastic life of prayer, worship, and seeking the way of Christian perfection, having no premeditation of getting back into the world like St. Demiana who went to instruct her father — that was a special case. We already explained that she herself did not know that she would do this; she was moved by necessity. When she came to Zaafaran wilderness she never thought that one day she will go to her father saying that it would have been much better if she heard news of his death that to know that he raised incense to idols. God used her; when God wills, His will is done…

**Is Monasticism Passive:**

Fulfilling the commandment in a person’s life delights God’s heart.

The following story is mentioned in *The Paradise of the Fathers* and shows how God delights at fulfilling His commandments.

It is said about an elder, that there was a great famine, but he did not stop being charitable until he lost everything that used to belong to him. He only had three loafs of bread remaining, and one day when he got up to eat, God wanted to examine him and so a petitioner knocked on the door of a monk’s cell. He said to himself it is good that I remain hungry but not to leave someone else hungering in need. He gave him two loaves of bread and left one for himself. With the last loaf he sat down to pray before eating, but as he sat down to eat another knocked. His thoughts pressed on him because of being himself hungry, but he got up bravely and gave the last loaf of bread saying: I believe that Christ my Lord will make me eat of His goods if I give food to the needy during this famine… Therefore he heard a voice from heaven saying, “Because you fulfilled the commandment and loved others, there will be no famine on the earth all the days of your life.” The rain fell and the famine ended, simply because he fulfilled the commandment.[[59]](#footnote-59)

The famine ended because one monk fulfilled the commandment, he did that while sitting in his cave in the mountain. He did not go down to the world, or work at a hospital or shelter. He prayed, a need occurred for him to give, and so he gave.

Fulfilling the commandments could be in many things, not only in charity.

You could fulfill the commandment with a life of purity, a life of prayer, a life of spiritual perfection.

Christ said, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word… I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”[[60]](#footnote-60)

Monasticism is pursuing the way to perfectly fulfill the commandment, pursuing deep fellowship with God. If anyone wanted to enjoy God to the maximum degree possible, would this ever be because he did not want to pursue love? Absolutely not! When an opportunity come to test his love, he would be able to love more than people who live in the world.

Does God look at the external appearance of the situation, or the internal substance of the heart?

One might serve the poor all day long, yet be unable to give of himself in serving them. Yet, look at the woman who gave the two mites, Christ was very impressed by her position, “So He called His disciples to Himselfand said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury;for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.’”[[61]](#footnote-61)

Some people might offer very many services but are unwilling to carry out the commandment fully, while one who lives the monastic life pursues the life of perfectly fulfilling the commandment.

People who attack monasticism say, “This one has reached a good spiritual level, why should he not go down to the world to carry out these commandments which he has prepared himself to fulfill.”

In response we say that charity to the poor is not the only commandment? Scripture says, “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up **his heart** from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”[[62]](#footnote-62) Suppose a monk or nun goes down on an errand, having money, and coincidentally finds a person in dire distress. He or she could give the money to them. What is important is the readiness of the heart internally.

**Is fulfilling the commandments only in handing charity to the poor?**

The nuns perform manual labor, and we give the proceeds to the poor. As an example in the monastery of St. Demiana the nuns work without interacting with people. A nun could toil in her handwork and rejoicing in this exhaustion knowing that the income will go to a needy young lady about to marry, or a needy sick person.

When Christ performed the miracle of the five loaves and two fish, he blessed the bread and fish, and gave to the apostles who gave to the crowds. He did not distribute with His own hands, He did not go down to the people.

Work is one of the three basics of monasticism stands (prayer, reading, and labor) as established by our forefathers.

**Is fulfilling the commandment only by serving in Sunday school?**

What about fulfilling the commandment of humility…

Some famous servants who are very well known personalities, have no humility. Regarding this type Christ would answer, “Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward,”[[63]](#footnote-63) because they accepted their praise from people.

**A monk or nun might pursue virtues *secretly* and rejoice with disdain, live the life of obedience** (one of the corners of the monastic life), imitating the Lord Christ, lives the life of obedience, and struggles against demons.

Sometimes, in the service, we exhaust ourselves out for one person with no results. So, we pray before God saying that we exerted every effort and did our best uselessly and that we will leave this case to Him to intervene, He is the only solution. Our work does not bring fruit.. this case needs prayers with simple follow-up…

Believe me, once I handed one case of that sort to God after doing my best uselessly. Suddenly, the next day I received a letter from her saying that she will do everything is asked her to do. The same things she refused to do before, but once the issue was handed over to God you find rapid results. A servant might be overexerting oneself for years for one case with no result or development.

Service is not only by preaching, visiting, or one-to-one contact with the person you want to serve. Working for God could be done covertly, it could only be prayers offered for those you serve.

**Monasticism is the Secret Strength Behind the Coptic Church:**

The monastic life is the secret strength behind the Coptic Church, despite all the pressures that befell her over the centuries. As long as there are people praying, God find a resting place.

The Psalmist says, “I will not give sleep to my eyes orslumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.”[[64]](#footnote-64) God wants a heart to rest in.

Monasticism is not passive; on the contrary. One sometimes grieves over the time lost in the service which brings no result, or over servants who are overactive in social services, community activities, parties, concerts, or picnics ... Where are the true fruits of the kingdom?

You find people lost, and because of their failure they attack monasticism.

In the story of Martha and Mary:“Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her, [while Martha was] worried and troubled about many things.”[[65]](#footnote-65) I do not agree with those who say that Martha represents service, while Mary represents monasticism, since Martha’s service was not a preaching or teaching service, it was kitchen service. We cannot call missionaries and church fathers Martha. Jesus told Martha, “You are worried and troubled about many things.But one thing is needed,”[[66]](#footnote-66) you should prepare one type, or a small variety and come quickly to listen. Do not let your concern be for the physical service, and neglect spiritual food. “Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her,”[[67]](#footnote-67) listening to our Lord’s words.

There is one hint: the one sitting under Christ’s feet to learn was praised; and found real entertainment.

Service which would be considered Martha is service void of a spiritual dimension, such as those who concentrate on church parties and church trips, the summer club, without a prayer meeting or a Bible study. That service atmosphere serves the cultural life without considering the educational spiritual dimension.

The church has varieties of members, as St. Paul says, “Would the eye say to the hand, you are not of the body, because you are not an eye,”[[68]](#footnote-68) or vice versa? Each one is given a talent from God, if in “ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching;he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”[[69]](#footnote-69)

Simultaneously, one who wants to live a spiritual life with God, and enter into strong fellowship with God, needs to lead a life of true praise like monks and nuns who daily pray midnight praises. These praises are not simply fulfilling a duty, as a way of life, but it is supposed to be a prelude to the life of praise in heaven.

**The Twenty Four Presbyter and the Four Living Creatures:**

God sends certain angels to aid human beings, but the twenty-four presbyter sitting around the throne could never part with this scene. The maximum one of them did is that when John found an open door in heaven he merely spoke with him. Have you ever heard that one of the twenty-four priests came here on Earth?

**These raise the incense, the prayers of the saints; this is monasticism. Is this passivity!**

There are many angelic ranks that serve human beings, “Ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation…”[[70]](#footnote-70) Ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, are prepared to come help us. Also, “The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them,”[[71]](#footnote-71) and “In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them.”[[72]](#footnote-72)

Would anyone dare say that the twenty-four priest should leave their service around the throne, raising the incense, the prayers of the saints, to come down speak to a person in Galilee or Tiberius? Who could say such things?

Likewise, should the four incorporeal creatures leave the divine throne?

The four incorporeal creatures, carrying the divine throne, have four symbolisms regarding the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension. They symbolize the presence of God in the soul and His reign over it had to be in: the image of the man (representing incarnation), the ox (representing crucifixion), the lion (representing resurrection), and the eagle (representing ascension). By this Christ purchased us and reigned over our lives.

Will I make the four incorporeal creatures leave the throne and come serve in Sunday school? This is their duty. Is this passivity? No, it is not passivity! These are carrying the divine throne.

Some Protestants say that the twenty-four priests are the twelve Old Testament prophets and the twelve disciples. This is not true since no one has gone inside the veil as a forerunner for us except the Lord Christ. This is supported by plainly clear verses in the Holy Scriptures.. No human has entered the Holy of Holies: “In the midst of the throne…stood a Lamb as though it had been slain,”[[73]](#footnote-73) and no one else.

Would anyone else entered would he be able to atone for the sins of humanity except Christ? No! no one can be a mediator between God and men except Jesus Christ. Protestants who say this contradict themselves.

Even St. Paul says in Hebrews: “That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil,where **the forerunner** has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”[[74]](#footnote-74)

He also says, “He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”[[75]](#footnote-75) He entered as a forerunner for us.

Even Jesus Christ told His disciples, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, thereyou may be also.”[[76]](#footnote-76)

How then could they have now entered the Kingdom? Where then is that great Day of Judgment? What then is the Second Coming? Why only the twelve may enter? What about St. Paul, should he not enter?

As for the twelve prophets, which twelve prophets, do they mean the major prophets? What about the minor prophets will they not enter? Or is it the twelve tribes of Israel? So, should Abraham not enter, meanwhile Reuben, Simeon, and Levi enter!?

The twenty four presbyter are an angelic order, specialized in raising incense which is prayers of the saints. This is why I truly favor how they address St. Antony in this modern-day song:

You were sublime A human who became Akin to the heavenly angels

Or were you an angel Who left your heaven And became human like us

St. Antony you are mysterious Whenever I think of you I get delirious

**Conclusion:**

**Monk and nuns are heavenly humans or earthly angels**; this is the synopsis.

They ride Jacob’s ladder, and live the life of prayer and praise.

1. (The New King James Version 1982), Lk 1:15-17. The New King James Version is used unless otherwise specified. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lk 1:76-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 1 Kin 19:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Jn 1:33. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Mal 4:5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Mt 17:10-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Lk 9:31. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Lk 3:2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Jn 1:29, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Mt 3:1-2, 4-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Cf. Num 6:2-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Lk 1:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Mt 3:14-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. , Is 53:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Rom 9:6-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Jn 1:12-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Lk 1:31, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Mt 11:11; Lk 7:28. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Lk 7:28. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Cf. Mk 6:26; Lk 6:12; Lk 9:28. At least twenty incidents in Christ’s life mention Him withdrawing. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Mt 4:1-2; Lk 4:14; Mt 4:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Mk 1:12-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. From an ode chanted during the Kiahk Praises written by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III about St. Antony. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. 2 Thess 2:9-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Cf , 477. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. 1 Cor 11:23. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. 1 Cor 7:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Gal 1:13-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. 2 Cor 11:33. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Peter is the Greek interpretation of Cephas. In Syriac, Cephas means stone, and Shuo means rock. Peter is not the rock, but a stone. Christ did not speak Greek, but spoke Aramaic. When He told him, “Thou art Cephas: and upon this rock, I will build my church,” He did not say, “You are Petros and on this Petra I will build my church,” but, “You are Cephas and on this Shuo I will build my church.” You are the stone, and on this rock, which is the rock of his faith in confessing Christ, I will build my church. The problem arises in translating the words Cephas and Shuo from Aramaic Syrian to Greek, both words take the same term: Petra. This led some to believe that Petros is the same as Petra. Certainly not. St. Paul even says: “Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, **Jesus Christ** Himself being the **chief cornerstone**,”(Eph 2: 20) “**You** also, as living **stones**, are being built up.” (1Pet 2: 5)

    As for the term rock, it says, “For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.” (1Cor 10: 4) Our Lord personally says in Isaiah, “Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.”(Isa 44: 8) Are those who say that Peter is the rock oblivious? Our Lord is personally asking if there is any other rock besides Him, any other God. One whose house is built on the rock, the foundation of his life is the Lord Christ. St. Peter was martyred and died, yet the rock remains, because the rock is Christ.

    When St. Paul said “Cephas”, he means Peter since this is the Greek translation of his name. Maybe Peter himself did not know that his name is Peter. Maybe by the time the apostles started to preach among Greek speaking people they started to call him Peter, but until the Pentecost his name was Cephas. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Gal 2:1-2, 6-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. 1 Cor 11:23. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Gal 1:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Gal 1:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Gal 2:1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Act 9:15-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Act 13:2, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Gal 2:7-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Jn 10:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Act 22:18, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Gal 1:16-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Gal 2:11-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. An example of things hard to understand in the writings of St. Paul is what he wrote in his epistle tot eh Romans wanting to free people of Jewish bigotry, St. Paul wrote: “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” but at the end of the epistle he writes: “Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith;but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law.”(Rom 9: 30-32) He wanted to say, it is not of him who wills or runs according to the works of law, but of God who shows mercy to those who accept the faith. It is not lawful works that will bring a person to salvation, but faith in Christ: “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.”(Rom 3: 21, 22) [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. 2 Pt 3:14-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. In the decision of this Council of Dordrecht they say that by His free will God created people and angels designated for salvation, and of His free will God created other people and angels designated for damnation; He is the one who judges these to salvation and those to condemnation: “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.” Their decision says: “By His decree God decides freely, and not based on His foreknowledge, or by believers’ faith, who will be saved and who will be damned.”

    This is a grave misinterpretation of what St. Paul intended to explain. It leads to complete destruction of the Christian dogma, unfortunately. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. 2 Pt 3:14-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Gal 2:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. **The elect:** Satan will perform miracles and wonders in order to deceive the elect “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined… Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called.” (Rom 8: 29,30). But, it is impossible for any of the elect to perish, because, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined… having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will… which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times.” (Eph 1: 5, 9). This is why our Lord would never leave the elect to be deceived or lost. Even before they believe He sends them someone to deliver the message to them, as St. Paul said to Timothy, “Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel,for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained.Therefore I endure all things **for the sake of the elect**, **that they also may obtain the salvation** which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2: 7-10). Meaning that he must deliver the message to the elect so that they may obtain salvation. It is impossible for them not to obtain salvation, because God, by His foreknowledge says, “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,” (Eph 1: 4) and, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined… Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called.” (Rom 8: 29,30).

    The call must reach the elect. If humans were unable to reach them, God could send them angels, just as He sent to Cornelius, or He would do as He instructed Philip, “Go near and overtake this chariot.” (Act 8: 29-30). It is impossible for the message not to reach one of the elect. “The Spirit of the Lord [the angel, not the Holy Spirit] caught Philip away… was found at Azotus.” Meaning that the angel of the Lord brought him out of the water and flew him to a city in Gaza. He had been returning to Jerusalem. How easy is it for an angel to fly with any of the apostles to any place. The point is: but, who will listen!

    One time the apostles the preachers headed East for Asia Minor, but St. Luke says in the Acts they “were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.” (Act 16: 6) They were headed in the direction of Afghanistan, but He said, “No, go West,” and “A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us,” (Act 16: 9) so he preached in the direction of Greece.

    God is the one planning the ministry; it is not the will of man and of the apostles to where they should go. If there is only one person in the area of which He told them not to preach, He will bring him. He has many means by which to bring him, he might see a vision, he might see a dream, or he might see an angel, like the angel who came to Cornelius while he prayed at the ninth hour. Cornelius had been a gentile who became a Jew, but the angel told him to send and bring Peter who will show you the way of salvation. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Mt 24:24. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. 2 Cor 1:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Eph 6:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Eph 1:16-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Eph 3: 13-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Phil 1:3-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ex 17:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. 1 Sam 30:24. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. , 75. This is taken from the Ninth hour litanies. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. 1 Cor 7:34. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. , 488; Cf. , 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Jn 14: 23, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Mk 12:43-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. 1 Jn 3:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Mt 6:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Ps 132: 4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Lk 10:42, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Lk 10:41-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Lk 10:42. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Cf. 1 Cor 12: 15-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Rom 12: 7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Heb 1:14; Rev 5:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Ps 34:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Is 63:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Rev 5:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Heb 6:18-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Heb 9:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Jn 14:2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)