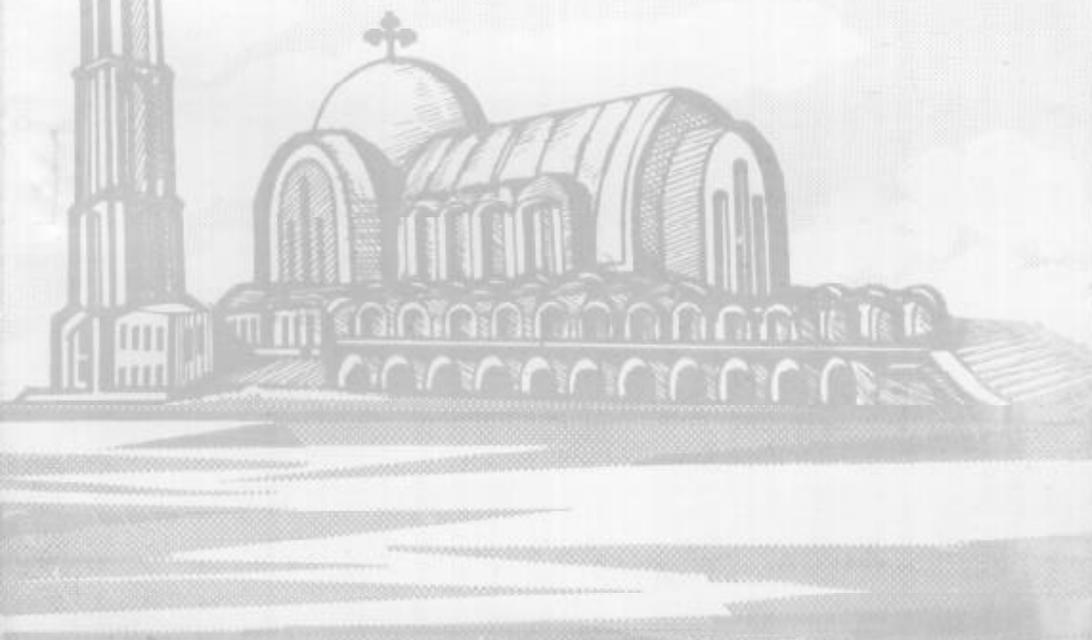
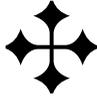


EXPERIENCES IN LIFE

BY
H. H. POPE SHENOUDA III





**COPTIC ORTHODOX
PATRIARCHATE**



See of St. Mark

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H. H. POPE SHENOUDA III

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*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of
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EXPERIENCES IN LIFE

Introduction

This book differs from all my pervious books in that it is composed of separate passages each of which presents you with a particular experience, idea or meaningful short story. Some of them are very brief while others are longer.

Although this book does not present you with a single subject, but rather dozens of subjects, they all revolve around a central theme which is that of practical life.

I cannot determine a particular date for this book: some of the experiences I have written about occurred over forty years ago, before I became a monk, others while I was a monk or bishop or since I have been Patriarch, but they are all practical issues.

However, a person's experiences in life are countless, **so I have just made a selection for you in this book. There are others which I prefer to describe in a book about the pastoral life because they are specifically concerned with that. Its time will come, with the Lord's will .**

I preferred to have this book printed at this size so that it would be small enough for you to put in your pocket and take with you wherever you go, and read at any time, even if it is only a small section, at whatever page you open and without feeling that you have to keep to a particular continuity of thoughts.

There are other experiences in life which are not suitable for a book that is intended for the general public; their time has not yet come.

I will leave you now to these reflections and look forward to meeting you again in a later volume, if the Lord's good grace permits.

Pope Shenouda III



[1] A wise Observation

A person had just taken over office at a senior position, and I saw that he had hung on the wall above his desk a sign which said:

“Others were here before me and others will come after me.”

[2] The Eye and the Eyebrow

Some one said about himself in a humble manner, “The eye is not above the eyebrow”, and so I answered him: **“Nevertheless, the eye is of so much more importance that you cannot compare the two.”** The eye is the source of sight and is of great usefulness, but the eyebrow is only for decoration even though it is **above** the eye. I have given a similar reply when it has been said to me that the crown is above the head.

[3] Tops without Supports

Once there had been high peaks rising for a long period of time above broad popular supports. However, they did not concern themselves with this popular support but in fact raised themselves up above it in pride at what they considered their superior position, past and fame. Then along came someone who was able to win this popular support because he loved the people and served them in humility, and so the supports were withdrawn from under them. Yet they stayed where they were,

as tops without supports: **tops rising up in the air - but without supports.**

[4] Advice to a driver

I said to a driver of my car one day: **"It's not important that we get there quickly but that we arrive safely. "**

[5] The Appropriate Time

If you want your words to have their full effect, choose the appropriate time to say them. Put before you the words of the wise man who said: *"A word fitly spoken [is] [like] apples of gold In settings of silver."*(Prov 25:11)

If there is a matter which you are concerned about, do not speak about it to anyone who is busy or tired, or who needs a rest or is not in the mood to talk. Do not speak to anyone about it either if he is annoyed or sad about something.

Speak when the ear is ready to listen to your words, and more preferable when it is eager to listen to you. An exception to this is a word of reprimand, like that spoken by John the Baptist to Herod. The important thing to keep before you is that you say **your word when it finds an ear ready to listen.**

[6] Silence

Sometimes silence is more effective than words and more beneficial and useful, or at the very least it may be less harmful than to speak... In silence there may be wisdom and strength, there may be nobility and dignity.

Sometimes we keep silent in order that God should speak, for the word of God is more powerful than anything we might want to say... How beautiful are the words of the Bible, *"The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."* (Ex 14:14)

Our Lord Jesus Christ remained silent before Pilate. He did not open His mouth or defend Himself. During His silence Pilate said, "I find no reason to condemn this righteous man".

Silence can be profitable sometimes, but it is not a fixed rule.

The golden rule is this, that the person should speak when it is right to speak and keep silent when it is right to keep silent.

When he is silent then let his heart speak with God and ask Him to speak on his behalf...

[7] Side Issues

✚ **There may be a person who speaks to you on some subject or other, but who cannot concentrate on it and in fact digresses to numerous related issues.** You try to get him to stick to the subject, but you can't because he just keeps on branching out into endless side issues

✚ **You may enter into a discussion on a point of doctrine with someone,** but he departs from it to other points. Whenever you reply to one he digresses to another, and it is as if you are in front of a vast open forum of discussion and out engaged in discussing a definite point !

✚ **A person may sit down with you to tell you off concerning some problem between you, but whilst doing so he touches on side issues which make the original problem look small.** And these additional criticisms leave pain in the soul which in turn needs to be set at rest!

People need to concentrate on what they are saying, and not go rambling freely on minor issues. The same also applies to writing, making reports and preaching...

✚ **Quite often people gather together to talk without having a fixed topic for their conversation, so their talking tends to be just haphazard, on side issues or endless secondary matters which are not connected...!**

[8] Easy and Difficult

Everybody can shout, can be abusive and belittle others and be harsh in his judgements of people. This is something easy which everyone can do. It does not prove any particular strength... But the hard thing is for the person to restrain his tongue and control his feelings and nerves, and be well-mannered choosing his words with care, whatever he feels.

So here the one who is insulted but in command of himself, is actually stronger than the one who is abusing him who has lost control of his nerves.

Talking about ideals is easy, anyone can do it. Likewise, admiring high ideals is something we hear about from everybody.

But living with such ideals is not possible for all, not even for those who are called to it and who encourage others to

it. High ideals require a pure heart, a will and determination in the individual to work hard for their sake and suffer in order to achieve them. when a person is raised on the cross because of his ideals, then he is being a true idealist.

[9] Rejection... !

There are people who reject something many times and thus miss their opportunity. They then yearn for what they have previously rejected but do not find it! It may be that their previous rejection was because of an emotional impulse which lacked depth and the wisdom of calm consideration.

There are a lot of people who really need to think long and hard before they reject something. Rejection, when it is made from a sound conviction, is never followed by regret or yearning for what might have been...

[10] My Eyes and My Ears

They would come to me saying, “Such and such a job has been completely finished and done thoroughly”. As I thanked them I would smile at them and say jokingly,

“I am used to believing my eyes more than my ears”. Then I would go and see how it was for myself...

[11] The dove returns to the Ark

When I left the bishopric and returned to my desert home at the beginning of January 1964, I found the monk Antonius at the door and he said to me, “I knew that you would return”, as he hugged me tightly so that we became one.

At that point I remembered that Saint Arsanius the Recluse, when he returned to the desert of Shehit, had said to his pupils, “They are ready to say about Arsanius what was said in the story of the Flood, “ ***But the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, and she returned into the ark ...***” (Gen. 8:9)

[12] From the Inside

Many preachers speak about personal appearance and decorum and stress the importance of keeping a dignified outer appearance, while the important thing is really the purity of the heart. for if the love of God enters into the heart, all traces of immodesty disappear automatically without the need for preaching. Correcting the inside is the foundation.

Yet we tell young men off for the length of their hair, and we tell the girls off for their clothes and long fingernails, and we forget the heart!

Our young people need to know what strength means, and what beauty is, in a spiritual way... Likewise, they ought to know the meaning of real freedom; is it an internal freedom from sin, or is it an indifference or not caring?!

Perhaps this change of outlook is what the Apostle Paul meant by his words: “*but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,*” (Rom 12:2). We want a generation and people who judge values by spiritual standards which they are convinced are true. Then all their energies can be directed towards the Good.

The outward appearance is a sign of something in the heart, and its goodness or its correction will come about through inner conviction not through censure and force.
So let us begin with the inside then!

[13] A Shattered Mirror

He was a person I had known for some time, and all his life he had been frank and truthful. It was not his nature to praise or flatter anyone when it was not due. He came to meet me and I asked how he was, and he said to me:

“My fault is that I am a mirror which offers to everyone who faces it, a true picture of himself, and people, very sadly, do not like to see their real face.

They wanted me to be not a mirror, but make-up, to make them look better.

Since I am not like that, they have shattered me. Because I spoke truthfully and frankly to them, they ruined my name describing me in the worst possible ways. So here I am now : I have become a shattered mirror.”

Then I said to him: “Did you feel psychologically drained when they went against you, and did you change your manner?” He looked at me deeply, then said: “Today I found something that consoled me. I have a friend who is sick with a high fever, and his family want every day to see his temperature decrease, but it doesn’t. And today, when I visited him, his brother wanted to take his temperature, but when he read the thermometer he found the opposite of what he wanted to see. The thermometer was in fact indicating a rise in temperature. So he flared up in

anger and took the thermometer in his temper, and hit it against the wall and smashed it.

This poor thermometer, so truthful and honest, what had it done wrong?!

“It was just like me - a shattered mirror!”

[14] While...

It was in 1948 that I had read an important volume which discussed theological subjects in a way that demanded great attention of one's thoughts and deep concentration. After reading it I had written this sentence on the book:

“While the theologians are searching these abstruse matters, many simple-souls will have slipped into the Kingdom of God”...

[15] Only One Ear

God has fitted you with two ears, and it is as if each of them is a symbol; each has its orientation. With one you hear one opinion, and with the other you hear another, or the opposite opinion.

Your mind exists between the two ears weighing up each of the two views.

You do not have only one ear, otherwise you might be swayed by some people in the wrong direction. Nor do you believe all the words your ear hears until it has heard the reply to these words.

With only one ear you might stray far from the truth or be deceived by half-truth.

With only one ear you could not be just, you might wrong some people and have a bad relationship with others without good reason. So whenever a person whispers in your ear, say to yourself, “Where is my other ear?”

[16] Sunset

I used to be in the habit of taking a walk in the desert at sunset. Whenever I saw the sun on the horizon going down to set, I would say to myself at the time of the sunset:

“It is not the sun which has hidden its face from the earth, but the earth which has turned its back on the sun”.

[17] Which is Better?

I observed two distinct types among the monks of the monasteries: one was the worshipping type, the other the worldly type.

One would withdraw himself from everything in order to be bound to the One, while...

The other would surround himself with all the people, explaining and interpreting.

Each of these two types had its virtues and each its admirers and followers. A debate among the group began to go round as to which of them was better:

The worshipping one or the worldly one.

[18] Team Work

There is a type of person who can be very successful as long as he is working on his own individually, but who fails completely if he works as a member of a group. It might be that he suddenly splits off from them or loses the ability to cooperate with them. He clings tightly to his views and criticises or attacks theirs, pointing out to them their mistakes, while they point out his mistakes to him, which makes it impossible for them to continue working together!

This is one of the plagues of our society...

We need to train our children for team work, or to work with a group in cooperating and working in harmony to achieve a common goal out of love and self-denial.

Also, within the church, we should train the deacons to sing together as a group or choir, with one voice. Singing a solo is easy, anyone can do that.

[19] There are Two Roads Before Us

I said to some bishops on the day of their consecration: “Before us are two roads, there isn’t a third.

Either we labour and the people find rest,

Or we find rest and the people labour.

I have invited you, through this consecration, to labour. Have faith that through your hard work your hearts will find rest and the

ministry will be refreshed.” I repeated these same words at the consecration of some of our priests.

[20] With Your Father Confessor

Do not present him with your decisions, but with questions...

Do not simply ask him to agree with something you have already made up your mind about and are resolved on. But rather ask him for advice, his opinion and information.

[21] Problems or Solutions

How many are those who bring me their problems, And how few those who bring me solutions?!

If only those who bring problems would bring with them suggestions for their solution, provided that they are practical and feasible solutions!

[22] The Conceited ‘Right’

On one of those occasions when ‘The Right’ was priding itself over ‘The Wrong’ and condemning it harshly and scorning it, while ‘The Wrong’ bowed before him with a contrite heart, I looked at them deeply and said:

“I know, Dear Lord, that the one who is wrong but contrite, is better by far than the one who is in the right but prides himself on it..

For this ‘Wrong’, through his contrition, is on the road to You to become a ‘Right’, and that ‘Right’, through his conceit, is just taking himself far away from You and becoming a

‘Wrong’. And I recalled the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. (Luke 18)

[23] Who are Those who are Suitable?

Sometimes God has sent us servers who were suitable to be consecrated into the various degrees of the priesthood - for which we thank Him.

But there have been many other times when we have been faced with a repeated problem, which is particularly so in relation to our ministers abroad, which was that:

**Those who are suited to become ministers, do not want to,
And those who do are not suitable.**

[24] It has a Will

A huge chunk of wood cannot resist the flood, but is swept along by it wherever it goes.

But a small fish **can** resist the current and is able to go where **it** wants to go.

That is because it has life and has a will.

[25] Nothing!

I have noticed a type of person who talks a lot but who says nothing. By which I mean his words are of no benefit .

The significance of his words does not correspond at all to their volume.

He finds nothing to say so he says anything, then elaborates and spends a long time talking. Yet the result of his speech is nothing, and his listener is forced to waste his time listening to this ‘nothing’...

Even more surprising than this is that he asks for another appointment in order to finish off telling you this ‘nothing’ with even more ‘nothing’ of the same sort !!

If only everybody would weigh his words before speaking and consider whether they are worth the time it takes to say them and whether they will be useful and whether they deserve to be heard?

He should also consider how much his listener can put up with, by watching his expression to see if he really wants to hear...

If he feels that the listener wants to be excused then he should let him go in peace.

[26] Participating

This particular brother would try to share in whatever we were making. His way of participating, though, was with words, not actions.

He would contribute criticism, something not really very constructive, though we tried to turn it to our benefit and would thank him for his participation and for not just standing by passively!

[27] It is Not Enough

If you want to make someone a partner in a piece of work, it is not enough that he is keen, or that he agrees with you on the goal, but it is essential that he agrees also on the means and method of achieving it...

Your partner in work might do you harm if his method is wrong, or if his way of dealing conflicts with yours, or if his measures are cause for objection...

Take serving the Church as an example: everyone agrees on the importance of the ministry and is enthusiastic for it, but they do not all serve in the same way .

But as for you, serve along with anyone with whom your spirit feels in tune, and whose method harmonises with yours. Otherwise his mistakes will be at your expense and you will find yourself, without intending it, sharing with him in being responsible for every mistake.

It is a fact that one of the conditions of comradeship is mutual agreement...

[28] Coping with Being Honoured

Saint Antonius the Great said: **“Many people can endure being insulted, but they cannot bear to be honoured. For to be able to endure being honoured is harder than to put up with insults .”....**

Being honoured might push some people towards pride so that they feel superior to others or ignore them, or mistreat them. It

may make them change their surroundings, friends and way of life. It might induce them to become conceited and talk arrogantly with people...

All this goes to show that they have not been able to cope with being honoured since it has changed their character and behaviour towards others. As the poet said, "When my friend's family becomes a rich family, I can be sure that I have lost my friend."

As for the person who is inwardly strong, or the person who is as humble as the Virgin Mary, then being honoured cannot change him.

Whatever position he gains, whatever wealth or titles, power or knowledge, and however much the people praise him, he remains the same...

It is a wonder how in spite of all this he does not lose his simplicity and humility or his good relationship with people and does not abandon his former friends or seek a new environment which he considers more in keeping with his new dignity... !

[29] What History Records

History does not record everything...

It only sets down the important matters and records the actions of the great...

Thus history passes over thousands of activities and actions, paying no attention to them as if they never happened, simply because they were not worth recording... The world forgets them after a while; they were just minor matters!

As for the important action that endures for generations, history cannot forget it along with all the countless personalities and events which it loses track of...

And what about you? Is your work as important as this?

I do not just mean important enough for history to record, but important enough to be recorded in the Book of Life...

[30] Frankness

You want to be sincere in defending the Truth.

But your frankness often hurts people, they become upset and take a stand against you...

Take a good look at yourself. With how many people have you employed this hurtful ‘frank’ manner and done a lot of damage for no reason?! What is more, you have not won their souls for the Lord either.

You ought to have spoken gently and wisely, with consideration for the feelings of others, as our Lord spoke to the Samaritan woman, so that he won her soul without hurting her feelings (John 4) .

If God were to send an angel to speak to everyone about his actions, the hidden ones and those that are plain to see, could anyone bear it?

We thank God that He does not use this method, this hurtful ‘frankness’, with us, out of His great love and kindness and His sympathy for people’s feelings

[31] Every Goliath has a David

Do not be afraid at the spread or apparent victory of something that is false or untrue...

Such things will inevitably be defeated if made to stand before the Truth, however long it takes.

Every Goliath has a David waiting to conquer him in the name of the Lord of Hosts...

[32] The Exploitation of Tolerance

Anyone who wishes, on whatever level of sin, to wipe it all away and be done with the matter, thus escaping any punishment and avoiding making any reparation, simply by admitting, "I have made a mistake", is quite wrong!

Some of those who work in government offices become extremely strict and rule-bound in their outlook, because there, for every calling to account there must be a penalty.

But in the Church you still have to have order and discipline, otherwise there would be chaos, indifference, lots of mistakes and diversifications just because men of God are supposed to be tolerant.

It does not mean there should be no discipline and order. It shows a wrong understanding of the term 'tolerance', and shows that there is not complete faith in the work, or in serving the Church if it is taken to mean that one does not keep to appointments or work systematically and with thoroughness. If some people are punished for their mistakes, many will become resentful and be misled!! It seems as if punishment in itself is

something wrong or harsh. The Bible nevertheless mentions a good many punishments from the time of Adam and Cain, to the Flood and Sodom and Qorah, Dathan and Abiram.

God punished Eli the priest because he did not correct his sons.

And in the New Testament there was Ananias and Saphira, Bar Jesus and the sinner of Corinth.

[33] Taking Account of Reaction

There are people who behave without taking account of possible reactions to their deeds; whether they are likely to have an effect on others or what would be the other's behaviour in regard to them.

The chess player who does not move a piece without calculating what his opponent's position is likely to be as a result of it, is wiser than these people.

[34] At the Most Critical Stage

There are some people who try to treat their illnesses themselves in whatever way! They only resort to a doctor when the patient has reached the most critical stage!

So it is in the ministry. Problems sometimes occur and those responsible in the ministry say: "It's not right for us to bother Pope Shenouda with our troublesome tales". And if one of them wants to tell me about the problem they prevent him and say he is letting them down on the assumption that he will expose them all.

So the problem continues and does not reach me until it has become very complicated indeed and can no longer be solved easily. Then when I tell them off for that they say: “We just didn’t want to bother you...!!”

[35] When? And When

The wise person knows how to behave and knows when to take a particular decision.

When is kindness the right thing and when is firmness?

When is it right to take one’s time and when must one be quick?

When is it right to keep silent and when is it right to speak?

It is wisdom which activates the appropriate behaviour at the appropriate time, and that is because in most cases it is the particular occasion which determines the suitability of the behaviour.

[36] Simplicity and Wisdom

Simplicity of behaviour is not the same as simple mindedness.

It does not mean embarking on things without thinking or inquiring, and this simplicity does not conflict with wisdom. The Lord Jesus Christ said: “Be simple... and wise “. (Matt. 6..22)

How then do we reconcile the two? What is the definition of simplicity? I tell you in all honesty,

Simplicity means not being complicated and difficult. It does not mean not thinking.

The bible teaches us about wise simplicity and simple wisdom .

[37] A Beginning Without an End

We might fix an appointment to meet some people. We know when it will begin but we do not know when it will end, and perhaps we cannot control when it will end.

The visitors may show no concern that there might be appointments fixed for others after them, and so they might decide to stay a long time and all polite attempts to bring the visit to an end will fail.

Perhaps this reminds me of what one of the men of letters said to his guests who were of this type, when he joked with them:

“Feel free and easy, make yourselves comfortable like one of the family. But not so comfortable that you forget to go!”

[38] In the New Year

Is it just a new year according to the calendar, or is it **really** a new year in your life? How can it be a new year if you enter it with the same habits, same character and same faults without changing anything within yourself, just letting your personality become frozen in its particular ways?!

If only you would move during this new year and make even one practical step towards a better way of living...

In the new year do not just present to God your vows, your promises and pledges, for these are above the level of your will

and strength, but gather up all your desires and present them to God as a prayer, acknowledging your weakness, and do not make your promises as if you are relying on your own ability

Instead of promising to God that you will change yourself for the better, take from Him a promise that He will change you for the better...

[39] People's Respect for You

Do not demand that people respect you,... but leave them to feel respect for you of their own accord because they find in you qualities which compel their respect.

So do not find fault with another person if he has not shown you respect. On the contrary, it would be better to find fault with yourself, and consider that you have acted in a way that has diminished other people's respect for you.

Be sure that you know that respect is one thing but fear is something else.

People may fear you on account of your position or power or strength, but this does not mean that they respect you.

Respect is an inner feeling of reverence in praise of certain exalted qualities or humane or spiritual values.

[40] The Celebration Period from Easter to Whitsun

Not fasting during the fifty days from Easter to Whitsun is one thing.

But eating without restraint is something else...

Since these fifty days are a celebration period, neither fasting nor 'matanias' (prostrations in prayer) are allowed, but that does not mean that a person should lose his self-control, otherwise when he eats, whether it is at an appropriate time to eat or not, it will be in such a way that he harms himself spiritually and physically and loses the spiritual benefits of the Lenten fast and the Holy Week...

The Easter celebrations are first and foremost spiritual celebrations, and it is for the body to join in the joys of the spirit but not take the opportunity to be lax...

[41] Preparing a Priest to go Overseas

Preparing a priest for life abroad, outside Egypt, is not an easy matter. Not every one is suited to it, whether it is because of his type of spirituality, or his gifts, or proficiency in the foreign language or social skills.

If you find a person who is suitable, he may not feel it is the right thing for him.

And if he does find it suits him, then his wife might not agree to go and live abroad.

And even if both he and his wife agree to it then the church where he serves, and his people who love him may not agree.

If the right person is found, and agreement concluded on all sides, even though this may only be after a lot of effort and persuasion, there remains before us another problem which is, how to fill the gap that he will leave in the Church at home.

This requires a repeat of the story: the suitable person must first agree, and his wife must agree, to accept the priesthood, then the Church must approve him and recommend him.

[42] Whether to Cancel or Keep

When I took up my responsibilities, some people suggested that I abolish the unspiritual elements, the entertainments and errors that had entered the 'Mawalid' (Saints' Days). The Saints' festivals at that time were called the 'Mawalid' which was not a correct name.

Yet others gave me a view that was quite the opposite of that, which was that :

“The festivals of the Saints presented the opportunity for popular gatherings, which could be purified and used for spiritual guidance and for leading people to what is right and good.”

I then carried through this second suggestion and was able to correct any distortion in these anniversaries so that they became spiritual occasions with very beneficial programmes drawn up for them with hymn singing and chanting, sermons, recordings, religious films and competitions, besides services and Communion. **Thus they were transformed into a blessing through being kept and not cancelled.**

[43] Recommendations

At the beginning of my pastoral career I used to receive recommendations signed by many asking for the ordination of

various people as priests or the consecration of a monk as bishop.

But I did not trust these recommendations at all:

Some people sign them as a kind of flattery to the other person, others sign out of ignorance or fear or embarrassment before those who present them or have them presented on their behalf.

Some people sign these petitions without caring whether they sign this one or that one or perhaps something quite the opposite... Some might sign not only for themselves, but on behalf of others too, for their children, friends or relatives, claiming that they were of the same opinion as themselves, when these others might have had quite a different view..!

Perhaps these recommendations represented the view of one person alone, who had written them up and then collected the signatures of all those who passed him by, who signed just to follow him.

That was why I would seek to discover the opinion of the people by meeting them directly.

Either I would go to them or they would come to me. I used to distribute pieces of paper to them on which each could write what he liked without anyone else reading his view. I used to benefit very greatly from the information they gave and I would discuss things quite frankly with them...

[44] In the Name of the People

I often used to receive a telegram about some Church matter or other in which its author would try to give weight and importance to a matter by saying that it was in the name of the people of such and such a church, or making it signed by ‘the people of such and such a church’.

Sometimes its contents expressed only his personal view and the people really had had nothing to do with what it said...

He might believe that as long as he is convinced on something, everyone else must inevitably be convinced on it too! His view is the truth and everyone must be behind this ‘truth’ !

One of them might go to the telegraph office and send a long collection of telegrams in practically the same form, and signed by a great many names. Heaven only knows whether the people named knew of all this. The matter needs to be studied actually...

[45] Even at the Hour of Death!!

There was a very devout woman who was ill with cancer. She turned to God with prayers, and Communion and fasts were held for her. The cancer entered a very critical stage and when her final hour approached she called for me.

At that time I was a bishop, and was able to visit people more than I can now, so I went to her and stood beside her bed listening to her complaints.

She told me, “I am very sad because many doubts are going round in my thoughts about whether prayer, fasting and Communion are of any value, and where is God’s mercy and response?!”

So often I have prayed for these thoughts to leave me but they persist and I get anxious and say, ‘Shall I lose my life now, and lose my chance of eternal life too, because of these doubts?...

So I said to her, “Do not be anxious, for they are not your thoughts.

They are just doubts which the Devil casts into your mind. Your prayers prove that you do not accept them and that these thoughts are not from you. God will not allow a good woman like you to suffer here and in eternity as well. You are like Lazarus who received his full share of misfortunes on earth, but was deemed worthy to go to the arms of Abraham on his way to a happy eternity with God...

If God wants to take you to Him, this is not against His mercy nor against prayer, for eternity is a delight which the Saints eagerly desire.”

Then I read an absolution for her and she relaxed and departed, to the amazement of the devils who fight the Saints even at the hour of death!!

[46] A Rumour!

There are people who when they want to achieve a particular aim start a very provocative rumour against this aim and spread it, by all ways, to arouse the people and cause a lot of disturbance and chaos.

And in the midst of this disturbance, they try to achieve their aim!

But the strange thing is that they find many people actually believe these rumours!

[47] A common Error in Announcements of Bereavement

Many people when they are speaking about a loved one of theirs who has departed this life, refer to him as ‘the lost one’. They would say for example: “We announce the death of our dear ‘lost’ so and so!!”

Yet those who have left our world are not lost, nor are they dead, because they are alive in heaven. They have only moved from one world to another.

It is better to use the expression ‘dear departed’ than the ‘lost’ one.

Some also say, “So and so has moved on to heavenly glories”, but this is a mistake from the theological point of view, because the heavenly glories do not come until after the resurrection and the Reckoning on the Last Day. (Matt. 25:31-46)

A better expression for us to use instead of saying he has gone to ‘heavenly glories’, is that he has gone to the ‘land of the living’ or to the ‘Paradise of the Blessed’ or to the ‘Congregation of Saints’.

Or we could say, “He has passed from our transitory world to the eternal world”, or such expressions as these which are quite removed from ‘the heavenly glories’.

[48] Trips to the Monasteries

Many people when they go on a trip to spend a day or more at one of the distant monasteries such as the Monastery of Saint Antonius or the Monastery of Saint Paul, think only about themselves... There may be more than one bus load of them, it might be a trip for more than one hundred people, and there might be hundreds of visitors arriving in other parties on the same day!

The quiet of the monastery turns into a din, and the problem arises as to how to accommodate these hundreds of men and women in the monastery and how to provide them with what they need to be comfortable.

The monks lose their freedom and feel that they have not left the world as long as ‘the World’ strives after them. At the same time, the members of the trips cannot reap any spiritual benefits in the midst of all this noise and crowding. Those who supervise such trips are unable to keep control during these kind of excursions, and so unfortunately neither the monks nor their visitors derive any benefit from them.

If the monastery refuses to admit these parties, their members get annoyed and complain saying, “Have we come all this long distance for you to turn us away? And out in this deserted region, with the sun about to set, how can we return?” This puts the monastery in an embarrassing situation! This is especially so because these people have not come with prior

permission, nor have they given the monastery the opportunity to arrange for these parties to be admitted.

An excursion to a monastery is an excursion which has a spiritual purpose, and ought to be different from a visit to the Pyramids or a museum.

To obtain spiritual benefit from visiting the monasteries, one should go individually or in a small group (no more than ten for example), and the party should follow a strict order and a programme of activities designed for the benefit of its members. It should also be made with prior agreement from the monastery and with special permission from the monks, so as not to cause them embarrassment by a sudden arrival.

Also the peace and spiritual concerns of the monks should be taken into consideration, for they are the ones for whom the monastery was built. It is they who have left the world and all that is in it in search of the peace which will help them to feel unity, to contemplate and devote themselves to worship.

[49] Freedom

Many young people used to be very sensitive about their personal freedom and would say, when they reached the age of maturity, or even before, that they ought to enjoy their full freedom without restrictions and thus do what they liked...

But we would reply to them that freedom has two basic conditions: that a person exercise his freedom in such a way that:

1. He does not encroach on the freedoms or rights or others, and

2. He does not offend against the public order or the morals or disturb the values and observed customs.

We would say that these two conditions do not pose a restriction to the ‘free’ individual, but rather amount to a protection for his course through life, like the banks of a river protecting its water.

The two banks do not pose a restriction which limits the freedom of the river but in fact protect its water from flooding out over its sides. If it were not for them the river would turn into a quagmire...

[50] Popular Songs

Sometimes people compose a hymn using the same tune as a popular song.

They imagine that as long as the words are healthy, it does not much matter about the music!! However, music in itself has an effect upon the emotions which is no less than the effect of the words composed to it.

So, the words of spiritual songs should only be set to spiritual music and melodies which are suited to them.

[51] Variety and Difference

Many people overdo the use of the word ‘difference’ when it is not so much a difference which exists, but rather a variety!

For example they say, “Different colours”, when the colours are not so much different as varied; and there may be a beauty in their variety.

They might say for example, “Different food, different birds, different tastes” and “different sciences”, and there may not be a difference between all these things so much as a variety.

If we over-use the word ‘difference’ and its derivatives, we may well be planting in our minds a particular discriminatory attitude, when quite probably the word ‘variety’ and its derivatives would be more suitable!

[52] Yesterday and Tomorrow

The days of our lives pass in such an amazingly quick succession that one can hardly distinguish between yesterday, today and tomorrow. This is so much so that I once wrote in my diary these two lines of the poem:

“What is my life but a fleeting yesterday
only a yesterday, however long it has been
My today is yesterday in tomorrow
and my tomorrow becomes a yesterday
with the following day.”

[53] Dealing With Problems

In dealing with problems I have accustomed myself to leaving them outside and not letting them get deep inside me. I do not let them put any pressure on my frame of mind or on my nerves.

I do not think at all of the fatigue or the pain involved in the problem.

I just think of how to solve it or confront it.

If I do not find a solution, I leave it and give it to God to solve over a period of time, during which I do not let it concern me...

[54] Why go on at length?!

A person may speak at length on a subject which does not deserve at all to be spoken about, or require such a large amount of words as this...

It may be that the matter is clearly obvious and does not need explanation, yet this speaker goes on and on explaining at length and the listener has to force himself to listen...

This points to one of three things:

**Either the speaker is a poor judge of subject matter,
Or he is a poor judge of time,
Or he does not care for the feelings of his listener!**

We can also say the same things in relation to writing: does the subject warrant all that is written about it?!

[55] The Chaos of the Organisers

Some organisers of parties and celebrations in church raise their voices so that their instructions and directions to the people ring out, and they themselves become the cause of a noisy din in the church.

You might be surprised when you see the congregation very quiet and calm, while these organizers are the only ones who can be heard .

Ought not order to be achieved calmly and quietly?

[56] Remember and Forget

I visited the man in hospital when he was ill in bed after he had had a thrombosis brought on by stress from his inability to bear failure in a job which was particularly important to him...

I said to him, “You have done very many great things which have seen success at your hands...

Why then do you concentrate so much on this one job which has failed for reasons beyond your control?!

Remember your successes and how God helped you in them, and forget this work which failed through no fault of yours.”

[57] Tomorrow is Better for You

Don't live in your present day if it is too wearisome for you, but live for your tomorrow.

In this tomorrow see the hand of God reaching out to you to calm you.

And on the morrow you will see many solutions to your problems.

If your today is dark, then your tomorrow will open before you windows of light.

The Saints lived for their tomorrows, for their eternity, and hung all their hopes upon it.

David lived for his tomorrow when Saul was pursuing him.
And so did Jonah when he was in the belly of the fish...

Joseph lived for his tomorrow when he was in prison and so did his father Jacob when he was fleeing from Esau, trusting that God would restore him from his exile...

If things become problematic for you, say to yourself that they will be solved tomorrow.

Then smile and live for that tomorrow...

[58] Unconditional Judgements

Many judgements which contain the words ‘all’ or ‘every’ are liable to be wrong, such as someone who says, “I have read every book which deals with this subject and all the Fathers say such and such.”

It would be better to say, “I have read many books”, or “most of the Fathers” or “some” or “many of the Fathers” instead of using the word ‘all’.

[59] Absolution, For Whom?

In 1958, when I was the father confessor for the monks of the monastery, it happened that one of them came to me to confess, but he did not mention a single sin that he had committed, but went on and on all the time telling me about the mistakes made by one of the Fathers towards him.

When he had finished his tales and the time came for the prayer of absolution, I said to him with a smile: “Could you call this Father now so that I can read him an absolution! “

[60] Is the Leader Led?

Some of them said to me, “What is wrong is not what this great man has done but what those around him have done, for they have led him astray by their bad advice”.

[61] The Wisdom of Abigail

When we have to give some people reproof or direction, we need to have that spirit of wisdom in which Abigail spoke to David..

She combined indirect reproach with appreciation, respect and obvious praise , which opened his heart to her.

(1 Sam. 25:18-33).

She said all that she wanted to say but in a very humble manner without hurting David’s feelings. Therefore she really deserved it when David said to her, “May you be blessed for your good judgement.”

[62] All the Sins

It was in June 1959 when a man from the countryside came to me on a Communion day in order to confess, and he said to me, “To put it briefly, I have committed all the sins in the world”.

I realised that he did not want to say anything specific and so I asked him.

“Have you killed anyone?” And he answered, “No”.

“Have you been unkind to a poor defenceless widow?” And he replied, “No”.

“Have you stolen from the National Bank?” And he again replied, “No”.

So at that point I said to him: “why then, my son, do you do yourself an injustice by saying that you have committed all these sins in the world?! Tell me now what exactly have you done?”.

[63] Pain

Pain is stronger and deeper than joy and also more sincere.

A person in pain stands before the reality of life and before the reality of himself and perceives that all the delights of the world are feeble and insignificant...

[64] Forgiveness, but no Sin!!

They said to me: “We have come to you as intermediaries on behalf of so and so, that you should forgive him.

And I said to them, “Has so and so done something wrong that I should forgive him?! He says to everyone that he has done nothing wrong at all.

I wonder if I should say to him, ‘May God forgive you for any sins you have not committed?!’

[65] Practical Information

When I used to stand and speak from the pulpit, the object was that the people should learn.

But when I used to sit with the people to discuss their affairs, then I was the one who learned from them.

They would bring to my mind more and more new information when they described to me the practical realities of their lives, which they knew about better than I, of course, and they would also present me with useful practical suggestions which I could make use of in sorting out their affairs and those of others too. That is how my insight into the reality of people's lives becomes refined.

When the discussion comes to an end, both sides have benefited. I have gained new information from what they have mentioned to me, and they have gained from the decision upon which we have agreed.

[66] Orphanage or Vocational Institution?

A man who was wealthy came to me and told me that he wanted to found a home for the care of orphans, and I said to him: "I have another idea for you, come and let us discuss the matter".

An orphan grows up and becomes an adult, but feels very sensitive about the words 'orphanage' and 'orphan', he does not want anyone to know that he was brought up in a children's home.

So why don't we just establish vocational boarding institutions instead of orphanages, where orphans can have their lessons along with children who have families? The only difference between the two types of children would be that the orphan would stay the night in the institute. And the child who had a home could also spend the night there if for example his family had to travel away from home.

Then we could get rid of the words 'orphanage' and 'orphans'.

[67] What God Wills or Permits

I have heard many people say about everything that comes about: "It was God's will", whether the outcome was good or bad.

Yet God wants only the best. As for the ills that happen on the earth, they happen against God's beneficent will.

God permits these things to happen because He has generously granted man free will, but God will judge him for it... So that is why the tyrant is free to oppress, the murderer to kill and the thief to steal. All these matters are opposed to God's good will and He will judge the wrong-doers for them.

There is, therefore, a big difference between what God wills and what God permits.

[68] The Devil Said to God

The Devil said to God: "Leave me the strong, I can cope with them" (Prov. 7:26)

But as for the weak, since they are conscious of their weakness, they will ask for your strength and will fight me with it and I shall be defeated before them.

[69] Winning People

Real success is not that you triumph over people. This is neither bravery nor strength..

But real success is to gain people, to win them, for “... *he who wins souls [is] wise.* ”. (Prov. 11:30)

Perhaps you triumph over people to their disadvantage! But it does not mean that because of their loss you have been successful.

Our Lord Christ was at His strongest on the cross for then He had ‘won’ everybody.

[70] Following Through

Experience in life has shown me that it is not enough simply to issue sound practical decisions, especially for the congregation.

But one should constantly follow through these decisions and find out how far they can be implemented and whether any obstacles be in their way and what means can be offered to avoid these obstacles?...

For without following through, resolutions become just a nice memory and how easy it is for us to forget them with the passing of time!

[71] People are the Stands they Take

Sometimes history praises a person for a particular stand he has taken, for manliness, heroism or nobility... Or history might remember him for a brilliant word he has spoken which cannot be forgotten because of its depth and influence.

Another person, on the contrary, may have his name recorded by history in connection with some shameful or disgraceful situation which has broken his character!! His whole life is forgotten and this incident is all that remains.

So people are really the stands that they take, and such stands reveal the hidden qualities of people especially when it comes to those situations which cannot be forgotten.

There are a lot of people who were not known for anything at all... but just one incident brought them fame!

[72] The Complaining Sinner

A person in the Church makes some awful mistakes which have a serious effect on other people and all efforts to advise him and be patient with him fail. In the end he has to be punished so that his errors will not spread further and hurt more people. But that can be done quietly without its adverse aspects being made known.

Yet he does not calm down, though we have passed over the matter, and he keeps on crying before the people and complaining to each one, and he talks to everyone he meets about the injustice that has been inflicted upon him without his committing any fault!

The people come to me then imploring or wondering about him, or finding faults and I find myself in a dilemma.

Either I remain silent and stand before them like one who is unjust, which might cause them to stumble!

Or I reveal to them the mistakes of that person and thus his reputation is harmed, while I would prefer, out of concern for him, that his sins remain unknown.

[73] The Spirit of the Law

Justice in giving a sentence decrees that the judge should rule in accordance with the **spirit** of the law and not just the bare texts of the law.

That is why very often the judges resort to the explanatory textbook to the law, or to the records of the Parliamentary session.

We often read in the law books the phrase, “what the legislator considers..” because what is important is the **spirit** of the law:

“For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. “ (2 Cor.3: 6)

[74] Fair Shares!

I have a friend and we were going to share some work together, and he said to me: “Come on let’s divide up the particular areas of the work between us”.

I’ll have the authority and the administration,

You can have the problems and be in charge of solving them!! “

So I smiled, remembering the story of that Beduin poet who wanted to share with his companion the task of making the bread which they would eat together, and he said to him as he divided up the relative expenses involved in making it:

“You provide the flour and I’ll do the fire:

I’ll bring the water and you provide the butter and honey”!

[75] God and the Problem

Do not look at a problem but look at God to solve it.

Your feelings that God is standing with you in your difficulties will give you hope and strength.

[76] Blessing and an Orderly Approach

One of the common mistakes people make is to say, “Let it be according to God’s blessing”, by which they mean that you should leave the matter to turn out however it will, without bothering about any system or arrangement or preparation towards it. As though God’s blessing were in some way opposed to an orderly approach! Or as if such a methodical way of dealing with a situation were a kind of human wisdom which would conflict with His blessings.

Yet a chapter of the Gospel concerned with blessings, in which the Lord blessed the five loaves and two fish and satisfied the crowds, is actually a chapter which shows the working of order, since the Lord said: “*Make them sit down in groups of fifty.*”. (Luke 9 : 14, Mark 6 : 40)

Likewise the distribution was made in an orderly manner: the Lord gave to the disciples and the disciples gave to the crowds (Mt. 14:19) and what was left over was not thrown on the ground but, *“He said to His disciples ‘Gather up the fragments that remain so that nothing is lost’ (John 6 : 12)* So they gathered it and filled twelve baskets.

Blessing and an orderly approach go together. An orderly approach facilitates blessing.

[77] Forgetting the Good (1)

Do good and forget about it. Don't seek any reward or praise for it.

Don't expect that the one to whom you have done a good turn will repay you in the same way or give you the same treatment.

One thing is sure which is that you have not done good with some expectation of a reward! When you do good just because you love to do good and because you cannot help doing good, then you can be sure that you have done good.

Let goodness be a character trait in you. Let it be something spontaneous, which requires no effort just like breathing.

If you forget it, God will remind you, here and in eternity.

But if you recall it, even if it is only inside you, then you might well lose it...

[78] Forgetting the Good (2)

Do good and forget it..

It is inside yourself. Do not think about it, otherwise you will fall into self-righteousness, conceit and thinking too highly of yourself...

Forget it before other people. Don't speak about it, in case you fall into pride and get your reward for it from people, while you lose that blessing of having done good in secret...

Forget this goodness too before God, lest you do what the Pharisee in the temple did, for he did not go home justified before God. (Luke 18)

Forget any good deed that you have done, so that it can be stored up for you as treasure in heaven, because by recalling it you lose it. This was the problem of the righteous Job, and the cause of his trial. (Job 29)

Forget this good that you do and God will remember it for you. But do not forget the good which others do to you, rather make it a reason for them to be closer to your heart. Be grateful to them and thankful for what they have done...

[79] Getting into Difficulties

Many people let themselves get involved in relationships that keep on expanding until they get into difficulties and become exhausted by them...These sorts of relationships involve them in complex policies and expose them to information which causes them to lose their simplicity and purity of heart, whether it is

true or false information. How nice it would be if a person could set limits to all his relationship so that he would not go beyond them to eat from the “tree of knowledge of good and evil”.

[80] Does Thinking Have a Price?

The price of a book is the price of its paper, ink and printing costs, not the price of its thoughts..

Thoughts are too precious to be given a price, they cannot be bought or sold, only given.

They are a light which spreads out from one mind to another and from one heart to another and casts its rays on those who love them and also on those who criticise them.

So when you read the price of a book, don't imagine at all that it represents the price of its thoughts, for perhaps it contains a single idea which is too valuable to be bought at any price...

Even when it comes to a book which seems to be profitable for its price, what is this profit except the cost of the author's expenses against his requirements or those of others? It is not the value of the ideas.

And the usefulness of a good book is not confined only to its thoughts, but the other ideas which it generates in the mind of its reader and in his heart. Do you think that these thoughts and feelings so generated can be evaluated? They are invaluable!

[81] The Policy of Transferring Responsibility

Many of those who do not like to take responsibility for their actions or mistakes try to transfer the responsibility on to others in order to exonerate themselves. **But this is an old mistake, going back to the time of Adam and Eve.**

Our forefather Adam wanted to justify himself by putting the blame on Eve and she in turn wanted to put it on the serpent.

When a person makes a mistake he might try to put the blame for his mistakes on society or the Church or his parents or friends. The main thing is that he wants to exempt himself from blame.

As for you, it is better to take responsibility for your own actions and not try to transfer it to another, however much he has had a share in it, and then look for your weak points in order to correct them.

Understand that the mistakes of others are not an excuse for you and will not intercede for you on the day of Judgement.

[82] Being a Pupil

It is a mistake to imagine that one's period of learning ends at a particular age or stage.

One should be a pupil for the whole of one's life, without giving up, even after one has become a teacher. For the teacher who is strong in his subject is one who has continued to learn,

or at least to read continuously in order to activate his knowledge, make it grow and extend it so as to be able always to present something new to his pupils.

[83] A School for Marriage

I have often called for the setting up of this kind of school. How often we see in the clerical assembly cases of marital discord, and how often are divorce and annulment brought before the judge, all of which makes us feel an urgent need for the Church to set up classes for learning about married life...

Among its set subjects would be: what is marriage, its aims and conditions, suitability for marriage and compatibility, studying the engagement period and what it involves and how to behave during it, and how to behave and cooperate in the marital home. Also one could learn about the character of men and women, and the reasons for marital disputes and how to solve them, how to bring up children, how to arrange one's home and financial affairs, and how to behave towards the relatives of both partners...

All this would be so that our young people do not enter suddenly upon a way of life that is totally unfamiliar and thus find themselves floundering.

And if they do find themselves in difficulties, they would know whether to keep quiet about them or speak, and with whom to speak about their problems.

[84] In Spite of...

To do good in spite of obstacles in one's way, shows a deep fund of goodness in the heart and the triumph of the will to do good, and that has a great reward.

As examples of this we have:

- The one who gives in spite of having needs of his own, like the widow who gave her two small coins; (Mark 12:42) and the widow who gave the prophet Elijah food during the famine, and the poor man who paid his tithes in spite of being in need himself.
- To enter by the wide gate and the broad road is easy, but the one who enters by the narrow gate in spite of its difficult path, he is the one who will receive a blessing from the Lord.
- Likewise the one who is forgiving in spite of being deeply offended, and the one who forgives, though it is seventy times seven. (Matt.18 : 22)
- And the one who succeeds in spite of the difficulty of the test, as our father Abraham did in his test to sacrifice his only son, the son promised by God.
- And the one who sticks firmly to his faith or attains a firm faith despite doubts or struggles, like the thief who believed in the Lord when he was crucified beside Him and taunts and provocation's were all around them.
- Likewise the one who retains his sincerity and devotion in the midst of difficulties, at a time when many stumble and fall, like the beloved John who followed his Master even to

the cross, and like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who were not afraid to be joined in crucifixion, and Saint Julius El-Akfehas who took care of the bodies of the martyrs...

Anyone can do something good if it is easy to do, but to do good when one is surrounded by difficulties and dangers is real proof of righteousness and saintliness.

[85] Judas

Judas betrayed his Lord and Master.

But there is a Judas alive in every generation.

He was a particular person whom we read about in the Gospel.

But he is also a symbol...

[86] Who is Blown by the Storm?

Storms blow but they do not shake everything.

The rickety hut may be demolished, but the firmly-based mountain will not be shaken. The little tree is blown, but the strong oak is unaffected.

The waters of the Nile with all their force, sweep along in their course any soil which they meet, and dig a channel through it. But they cannot sweep away the six great Cataracts 'Ganadil' stones which remain fixed in the current. Neither its waters or waves can affect them.

And you, ask yourself what are you made of?

Be a fixed slab of stone which the water cannot sweep away.

Be a towering mountain which the storms cannot shake.

And remember what was said about Zerubbabel: “*Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain*” (Zech. 4:7)

Do not let new reports shake you nor events alarm you. Be bigger than them. Let them pass by or over you while you stay unchanged.

The Apostle said: “Stand firm. Let nothing shake you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord.” (1 Cor. 15:58)
Yes. Stand firm!

The safety of your life is not dependent on external factors, but on faith and on the substance of your heart inside you.

The heart that is strong in the Lord is an invincible fortress.

[87] Repentance or Just an Attempt

Someone who says that he has repented then goes back to sinning, then repents and goes back again... has not yet repented. This is not repentance but attempts at repentance.

A person who is truly sorry for his sin is a person whose life has changed, who has left his sin with no going back, like Saint Augustine and St. Moses the Black.

One of the Saints said: “I don’t recall that the devils have ever made me fall into the same sin twice”.

[88] Four Kinds of Doing Good and Doing Harm

When it comes to doing good or doing harm, there tend to be four types of people:

1) A person who benefits others who at the same time benefits himself, and that springs from his wisdom, love and eager concern for others and his good relationship with them.

2) A person who helps others even if it involves himself being harmed in some way. This type is characterised by his self-sacrifice, his sparing no efforts, and his energy. In reality he has not actually harmed himself but has benefited spiritually. As the Lord said, “Whoever would lose his life... will find it”. (Matt 10:39)

3) A third type of person benefits himself at the expense of others. This is the selfish type who loves himself. He is not fitted for social life nor for the spiritual life.

4) A fourth type harms himself and others. He is a person who is badly behaved or ignorant. It would be better if he did not exist at all.

Which of these types do you yourself resemble?

A good useful person, which the circle of their goodness would spread out to embrace others?

[89] Unexpected Events

Unexpected events reveal people’s true make-up.

They are a light that is cast on a person which shows his character in its true colour.

We thank God for such events because they give us a deeper knowledge into our brothers and friends and deeper experience.

They are a balance for weighing.. a proof.. a means of sifting.

That is why those elders who have seen many such occurrences have sounder opinions because they can judge according to the reality that they have experienced and the deeper knowledge that they have gained of people.

[90] A Famous Preacher

The famous preacher said to me: “Do you know how many sermons I have preached this year?”

And I replied, “I would rather know how many people have repented this year as a result of being influenced by your sermons, and have turned back to God”.

[91] Fleeing from Sin and Being Freed From Sin

What a difference there is between fleeing from and being freed from sin.

A person may try to flee from sin, but this does not mean that he will have been liberated from this sin, even if he has not actually committed it.

Running away from sin is something external.

Liberation from sin is an inner condition of the heart.

Nevertheless, to run away from sin is the first step, perhaps it is for beginners, but to seek freedom from sin is for those who are well on the way to maturity.

Sometimes to escape from sin is proof of a fear of falling into error which shows that one has not yet been liberated on the inside!

Fleeing from sin may also be a sign of one's rejection of it, as was the case with the righteous Joseph when he fled from the wife of his master...

Some of the Saints flee from sin out of a kind of humility, lest they fall prey to the devil of false glory.

Sometimes they flee from sin in order to devote themselves to constructive spiritual work, but inside them they have been already liberated from such errors.

[92] Is Silence a Virtue?

Silence is not always a virtue....

Sometimes we are judged guilty for keeping quiet...

The issue requires wisdom, so that we know when to speak and when to keep silent, and if we speak, then what words to use.

The wise man is one who does not remain silent when he should speak and does not speak when he should remain silent.

[93] Within the Church

I am not surprised at those whom the world sweeps away and who perish... This is something natural and there are many examples of it...

But I am surprised at someone who perishes who is within the Church, who might even be one of its servers!

He might come to grief because of pride or his love of dominating, or anger or his love of praise, or because of a distorted faith, or because of his stubbornness, fanaticism or hostility to everyone else!

When someone like this joins the Church bringing his sins with him, he perishes because of them and so do others.

[94] When do You know Him?

You won't know a person just from hearing about him or even by having business dealings with him.

But you find out what each person is really like when you have a difference with him, whether this is a difference in opinion or a conflict of interests.

[95] Stages

In life we pass through stages. The heart, thoughts, feelings and spirit all pass through them. Each stage has its impact and effect. It has a duration of time beyond which it does not go.

Golgotha is a stage, so is the Resurrection. The ascent to heaven is a stage that extends to the sitting on the right hand of the Father, where there is final rest.

A Gologtha, as a stage in life, does not last for ever.

It passes as we rejoice in the resurrection and our situation improves and the cross turns to a crown and glory...

Happy is the one who looks continually with hope for the next stage.

Happy is the one whom difficulties do not send to the other extreme. For a difficulty is only a stage in life and the solution of that difficulty is yet another stage.

Live with faith that there will be a solution and rejoice as you look forward to what cannot be seen.

The world itself is only a stage in life that will arrive at another stage, that of eternity.

[96] When the Tape Recorder is Not There

Some people are cautious of their speech and pay particular care over it when a tape recorder is placed before them, because it registers whatever they say...

But if there is no recorder before them a person tends to speak without reserve or restraint.

He does not care if he has made a mistake so long as there is not a recorder or someone observing him, since he cannot be blamed or questioned for what he has said.

Yet every word he speaks is charged to his account here and in heaven whether one's words are on a tape or not. The Lord Jesus Christ said, “ ... *for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*”(Matt. 12:36-37)

The same applies to the person who is just careful of his behaviour before a camera, because his expression, actions, movements and appearance are all recorded, though he may not care at all about such things when the camera is not there ... !

[97] Tiring Conversations

Someone who was really fed up said to me:

“What can I do about a person who wastes my time by making me listen to something which I know all about and have heard many times before? Or someone who tries to convince me about something which I have already made up my mind about? The more I tell him that my mind is made up, the more he insists on trying to explain and convince me further!

What should I do with someone who talks to me a lot yet says nothing of any purpose, and who then asks for another appointment on which he can add more nothing to the nothing he has already told me?!”

I said to him; “Perhaps these people want to teach you the virtue of being a good listener”.

And he replied, “Forgive me. But what about my nerves, they're tired out and exhausted?”

So I said to him, “It would be better with these people if you lead the discussion, or try to change the subject that they have brought up and direct it from then on.

[98] The Skilled Speaker

The skilled speaker is one who tells you what you want to hear and not what he wants to say...

And if he wants to say something to you he puts it to you in an interesting way so that you want to listen and if he falls silent and does not finish what he was saying you urge him to tell you the rest of the story.

He fills your ears with what they like and does not force you to listen to what does not please you.

If he notices from your expression that you are not listening any more, he does not go on and on, but tactfully brings the subject to a close in order to change the conversation to something which he knows you will find more pleasing...

Through his speech he arouses your concern and your interest in what he says.

You always feel that his words are soothing to your ears, your mind and heart.

This is why we find that the skilful speaker attracts the attention of his listeners, as opposed to someone who speaks on subjects which do not interest his listeners and at such length that they grow bored, yet have no power to silence him or avoid listening to him!

[99]Noisy Behaviour

Something we have even met during our ministry.

There is a kind of person who imagines that he will achieve his desires in the Church by noisy and disturbing methods, with pamphlets and leaflets and stirring up the people and talking a lot here and there, imagining that the Church will do for him what he wants in order to put a stop to his clamouring!

However, such unspiritual methods as these are not compatible with the spiritual atmosphere of the Church. They are an attempt to introduce the atmosphere of the World into the sphere of the Church. It is not for the Church to bow down to these methods otherwise its people will get accustomed to them.

[100]One Way of Life

We must reconcile our way of life within the Church and our way of life outside it, so that they proceed along the same line without any contradictions.

It is not good for a person to have two personalities: one for the House of God and another for the world.

The righteous person is always the same, he does not wear a different face for each different occasion.

[101] I had Done Wrong

I could not go to see him before he died. That was because I loved him very much... **and my heart could not bear to see him as he was dying.**

I came to know after he had passed away that he had wanted to see me very much before he departed this world..

My heart was in very great pain because I had done wrong by not going to visit him, **preferring my own comfort to his...**

[102]Teaching the Poor Man a Skill

Many churches and charitable associations give monthly assistance to the poor. This is good for those who are unable to work.

But for those who can, then it is better to find them some work, teach them a skill, or start a simple project for them. Then they will not be in need of constant assistance.

If that is not possible, then at least some work should be found for their sons and daughters...

The charitable committees need to be trained to recognise those jobs suitable for the poor according to each one's capabilities and understanding.

[103] Wrong Estimations

Do you, my Brother, imagine that Herod was stronger than John the Baptist because he was able to present the head of John the Baptist on a plate?

There is no doubt that he was not! His victim was the stronger.

Herod continued to fear John the Baptist even after he had had him killed, and when Christ appeared, Herod imagined that John had risen from the dead. (Matt. 14:2).

How amazing people's estimations are! They imagine there to be strength where there is only weakness and imagine there to be victory when there is defeat!

[104] Mediators

Sometimes a person makes a mistake and does not apologise for his error, in fact he does not even admit to having done wrong...

Even though his mistake has put him in trouble, he remains defiant. Mediators intervene to make excuses for him but he insists proudly that he has done nothing wrong!

Whenever he does wrong, there is always someone to intercede on his behalf to defend him and he becomes more brazen because of these defenders of his who continue to plead for him as he continues to sin, even after the situation has been restored, though not amended!

The situation may reach the point that it is neglected as a result of the mistake being longstanding and going unpunished and being continually defended and excused...

In the meantime, values and discipline are lost. Those who love goodness become upset and protest, and it appears that there must be intervention of a decisive nature and the imposition of a penalty as a deterrent.

The strange thing is that the mediators who defend justify their position saying that they are acting out of love and a desire for peace. Yet in all this they do not realise the real meaning of love. For to defend one who does wrong is to do him harm spiritually and harm the interests of the world and harm the model of goodness.

It is your love for one who does wrong which can save him from his sin, not punishment.

Your love for him should push him to repent, not you to defend him. It should make you persuade him that he has done wrong and that he must change his course. If he does not, and is punished then those who love him will be convinced that he deserved the punishment and will not protest at it. Nor is it possible that their defence of him in this way will ever make him stubborn and insist on doing wrong and thus go from bad to worse.

So let those mediators put before themselves the words of the Bible: *“He who justifies the wincked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abonimation to the lord“ (Prov. 17:15)*

We notice here in regard to what is abhorrent to the Lord, firstly the case of the guilty being acquitted, that whoever acquits a guilty man is not putting before him the Truth, and the ‘Truth’ is one of the names of God. (Jn. 14:6) It is not right for anyone to defend a sinner more than he would defend the Truth.

And so I said to them in surprise, “Is the leader led?!”

It is the job of one who is in a position of authority to lead others not to be led by others! There is nothing wrong with his

listening to all opinions or taking into consideration the views of those with experience, who give good advice. Then he can examine them carefully and find out what is best and true out of what he hears, without having to be led by all that he hears!

He must follow Goodness and Truth and not merely follow all that people say.

If the leader is led by Goodness and Truth, then this is proof that he is fitted to be a leader.

Whoever declares the guilty man innocent is sharing in his crime.

As for saying that mediation is for the sake of peace in the Church, it is impossible to build peace on the continuation of an error. Real peace is not in the defending of the false, but in the prevailing of righteousness, because, "*There is no peace, says my Lord, for the wicked*". (Is. 57 : 21)

Some people ask me: "Is it wrong then for me to act as a mediator?"

And I answer, "Being a mediator isn't wrong as long as it isn't at the expense of the Truth".

So be a mediator then, but without flattering what is untrue and without shutting your eyes to the Truth.

[105] A Reverse Situation

I was amazed at the priest who instead of sharing in solving the people's problems, set them at work on his own problems to share in solving them!

Instead of providing a big heart which could give love and compassion to everyone, he was striving to be the object of the people's love and compassion!

[106] The Relative Truth

Truth, in its absolute meaning, is total goodness and total sincerity.

It is also one of the names of God.

But most people live in a relative 'Truth', which is in accordance with what they know and what they feel.

Two or more opponents might dispute about the Truth, each one claiming that it is on his side, while the Truth is in fact quite remote from both positions, or in between.

A person may become over-enthusiastic and rebellious on the pretext of defending the Truth. Probably this 'Truth' of his consists of mistaken facts in his mind which he has heard but not examined thoroughly and that is not the Truth!

[107] Ways of Reprimanding

To reprimand within reasonable limits is acceptable.

But there are certain methods of censuring someone's behaviour which produce the opposite effect to what is desired, and worsen relations... These are:

1) A reprimand that is too harsh or severe, so that the other side does not feel that it is done with love.

- 2) A reprimand that condemns without having evidence, and appears to be acting unjustly without good reason.
- 3) A reprimand which does not accept any mutual point of agreement, which insists on the causes of its own anger without accepting any explanation, clarification or denial.
- 4) A reprimand that does not even accept apologies and efforts of conciliation and which does not aim at peace! Instead it aims at pouring out all that is in the heart and mind even if it hurts the other person with hurtful words.

Ask yourself : what is my aim in reprimanding this particular person? And what method am I using?
Remember what the poet said:

“Desist from reprimanding, for many an evil was born of a reprimand.”

[108] Writing and the Conscience

Whoever writes should put in his mind before writing what consequences, effects and reactions are likely to result from it.

A piece of writing is something for which one is responsible before, one’s conscience, before God and before its readers.

Blessed is the person who writes with his conscience before his pen.

And blessed is he whose writing can call forth nobility and not sharp arrows of animosity.

No one ought to write and publish without considering the possible reactions to his work, or just to achieve some personal gain.

[109] The Contagion of Psychological Illnesses

Psychological illnesses can be passed from one person to another just like contagious physical illnesses...

Having too much to do with sceptics may make one start to doubt. And listening to the words of the fearful may bring on fear. The same goes for worry, anxiety and suspicions, jealousy and lust, which can all be passed on through being in close contact and association with others and exchanging facts and communicating with them.

Therefore it is necessary for a person to choose his friends.

And it is not only psychological illnesses which can be spread by contagion, but spiritual illnesses too!

[110] The Limits of Leniency

You can be tolerant and lenient as far as your own rights are concerned, but should not be so indulgent when it comes to the rights of others, or the Church, or the general public, or God.

Your personal right belongs to you .

But the right of the general public does not.

You ought not to neglect it; it is something deposited in trust or committed to one's charge and you should protect it.

I say this especially to all those in a position of responsibility or who are entrusted with a charge. (1 Cor.9:17)

[111] The Importance of Endurance

The value of a piece of work is in its endurance. You may do something which makes an impact for days or weeks, but which comes to an end, and it is as if it never happened... Or you may do something which has an effect on your life, which ends with the ending of your life.... But this is not an activity of any real depth or strength...

A strong action is one that lasts even after your life...

It continues into eternity where God will remember it for you...

And it continues on earth where the people remember you for it...

Let us give some examples of such work which endures:

Strong love is something which endures... As for that which is shaken by events or ends with any difference of view, that is not real love.

Strong spiritual training is also something that lasts, but if you are strict with yourself just for a few days or weeks and then revert to how you were, that is not strength, and brings you no benefit...

Likewise, repentance which is only temporary is not real repentance, and a temporary improvement is not a permanent one. It is important that repentance and improvement should both be lasting.

Fixed principles are similarly enduring, but as for those that are practised and then hidden away, their roots are not firmly established in the soul.

It is easy for a person to do good just for a limited period! But if a person is really good, then his doing good is a permanent feature.

To begin a piece of work is easy, what is important is that we carry it through to completion.

[112] Welding by oxygen

It was about forty years ago, before I went to become a monk, that I was walking in the street and saw a workman carrying out an operation of welding a piece of metal by oxygen and this piece of metal was submitting to his blazing fire until its welding was complete...

So I said to myself, why do we complain and protest and object when God uses with us His process of welding by oxygen?

[113] A Car and a Cart

On another occasion when I was walking in the street I saw a donkey cart and a luxurious Mercedes. The people were wondering how this one could drive alongside that one!

But I said to myself, both of them are necessary: the cart can carry sacks and furniture, but the Mercedes cannot. Society needs both of them. Both are useful and successful within the limits of their capabilities and special areas, just like the different members of a person's body.

[114] The Gift of Thinking

The biggest project begins with an idea, which is why it is important that there should be people who have the gift of thinking, and who have enough time to think and a calm atmosphere in which to think.

If you do not have the gift of thinking, then rely on those who are intelligent and experienced who do...

[115] Their Religiosity Wears Them Out!

Being religious does not cause fatigue, unless of course it is a mistaken type of religiousness.

The thing which wears them out, however, is an adherence to a single type of virtue, and a lack of wisdom in how to practise it.

If a person behaves, for example, in a humble and meek manner, but without wisdom, he finds himself worn out by people's attacks on him and their ridicule and lack of respect for him, so he comes and complains.

Or if a person behave unwisely in how he gives, so that he finds himself surrounded by a group of swindlers who try to put constant pressure on his conscience without letting up, he gets tired!

Or if a person is too lenient, so that he loses control over his subordinates in the work place, and is then overcome by an atmosphere of neglect and indifference. He then gets worn out

by all that and complains.

In reality, Christianity calls for a fully-formed personality in which the virtues are brought to perfection, even those virtues which seem to be contradictory.

There is pardon and punishment; and God himself punishes.

There is kindness and strictness, meekness and boldness.

There is the gentle word and also the rebuke when it is called for.

As the Bible says: *“To everything [there] [is] a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: ”. (Eccl. 3:1-8)*

In general every virtue must be linked to wisdom and discrimination. Those types who say that they are worn out by being religious are not practising or understanding religion correctly, because they do so without wisdom.

[116] On One Day

I have noticed while travelling along Life’s road, that a person might take forty years to build his name, fame and reputation, and that all of this could then be lost on one day, perhaps even in just one hour or by one act! It is a real tragedy.

[117] Learning and Submitting

To be a pupil does not just mean listening to the words of a teacher, **but means that one is a seeker after knowledge, who absorbs a particular spirit and lifestyle which is passed from one person to another. Thus it is “spirit, and [they] are life.”. (John 6 : 63)**

Being a pupil involves not only instruction but in the main submitting oneself.

A true teacher is someone who can present the divine picture to the people, presenting them with the spiritual life in an entirely practical way. They learn more from life than from words.

The true teacher is a beautiful icon in the Church, he is the image of God before the people.

How do the children in the Church learn? How do the ordinary people and those of limited knowledge learn and those who do not grasp the depth of what books, readings and sermons contain?

They learn from a living image, they absorb the spiritual life and receive its ideals in the example set before them...

Even those who understand the books and the sermons only grasp their depths by way of a practical example.

And you, I wonder, what do you present to the people? Words or a living example?!

[118] Joining on Paper

Quite often a young man from another Christian denomination wants to marry an Orthodox Coptic girl, one of our daughters in the Church. And since the Church insists that an engagement only be performed between two Orthodox members, it offers this fiance the chance of joining the Church.

He joins purely as a formality, not out of faith or belief.

The Church does not provide him with any instruction or test his faith. Nor does it hold any ceremony for him or tell him

any of the secrets of the Church. So his being joined to the Orthodox girl is just a superficial one - on paper!!

Some Church Fathers are happy with these formalities, but then after marriage, problems occur, with the husband perhaps continuing to hold fast to the beliefs and social occasions of his former denomination.

One of the results of this type of marriage is that it brings forth young people with a shaky faith, or who have departed from their belief.

[119] Relatives and Tithes

Many people ask me: “Are we allowed to pay our tithes to our close relatives?” And I answer:

“You are permitted to pay tithes to your relatives if they are in need, but do not pay them all of it.

You must pay something to them because the Bible says, *“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”* (1 Tim. 5:8) So I say *“only if they are in need”*, which does not mean spending on luxuries or inessentials.

Do not pay them all your tithes for two reasons:

1) **In case it is just the family tie which motivates you and not a love for the poor.** One presumes that you help other needy people too, apart from your relatives, and also share in providing for the Church’s needs.

2) And in case you avoid giving tithes on the pretext that you are fulfilling other social duties.

It is as well to remember that in Christianity it is not only tithes which are demanded of you!

[120] A Worshipper Goes Wrong!

A person who worships another person and follows him and supports him in right or wrong, loses his objectivity and can only see before him a person who is free from all error! This course of behaviour is marked by two errors:

- 1) He defends subjects which he has not studied but which he has to defend only because they apply to his Lord master.
- 2) He attacks without having any basis of knowledge, but merely to defend his master.

[121] He Doesn't Benefit!

There are people who benefit from being punished since it leads them to repentance and regret and to correct their ways... And there are those who do not benefit.

We have also come across examples of those who are punished who not only do they not benefit, but in fact the opposite happens, and they sin more and more deeply ... !

Some resort to grumbling and complaining and provoking people, and others, as a way of justifying themselves, resort to lies and claim that they have been treated unjustly.

Others in defending themselves resort to a counterattack by spreading blame and false accusations, and in others,

punishment rouses a feeling of hatred and obstinacy. Oddly enough some resort to threats!

None of these types benefits from punishment because they lack humility and the desire to save their souls.

Thus they are deflected from one abyss to another... A few of them return after a time, seeking forgiveness, not because they have repented, but because they have found that none of these methods will achieve the desired result.

[122] Should I Tell Him Off?

One of his brother monks offended him very deeply so that he came and said to me: “Should I go and tell him off ! “

So I said to him, “If his conscience is alive he will come of his own accord to apologise to you. Otherwise there is no use in telling him off. It will probably make this end up worse.

However, if he is really ignorant of the seriousness of what he has done, it would be better for a third party to intercede between you in this matter, to explain to him the extent of his offence.

Whatever the case, it is better for you to wait, and who knows, you might be lucky enough to forget him and forget his offence!”

[123] The Hand of God

In all the events which we go through and all the details of our lives - as individuals and groups - we cannot forget the hand of God in all these things and in the life of each individual...

After He created the world, God did not leave it to progress as it chanced, or let people direct it according to their wishes, without the intervention of divine providence!!

God is almighty, and the freedom which he has given to people is not absolute freedom, but a freedom controlled by divine arrangement.

The eye of God does not slumber or sleep, but watches over everything, recording it and calling it to account... It is the hand of God intervening in events which makes us have confidence that He is intervening and arranging everything.

Even if God seems to be silent at times and mistakes occur, He intervenes later to correct and turn the bad into good...

What is prayer but a call for God's hand to intervene?

And what is faith, but the confidence of God's hand intervening?

Blessed is the hand of God. It is full of love...

[124] Saturday and Sunday

Whoever prepares on Saturday, finds he has a Sunday.

And whoever does not prepare for his tomorrow finds nothing at all and no one to return a favour.

[125] Surrounded Only by Followers

He only ever surrounded himself by followers and adherents who agreed to everything and defended whatever he did, however wrong. And he was happy with their defence.

He had absolutely no desire to surround himself with those who were on his own level, or above him, because his followers' excessive praise had made him imagine that there was no one on his level and that it was impossible for anyone to be higher than he !

Thus he lost friendship and sincere advice, and lost humility of heart and thoughts, and his mistakes, which those outside his circle could see, multiplied. As his followers continued to defend them they increased further!

[126] True Love

Some people imagine that their love for a person means that they will protect and defend him whatever he has done wrong! But true love is to save that person from his sins even if it means rebuking him until he abandons them.

[127] Right Timing

The element of right timing is a very important element in every activity, and in every successful project, in every word spoken and in every request made.

Therefore in everything you undertake do not simply ask, "Is this action good and beneficial?", but ask as well, "Is this the right time for it?"

That is because if it not the right time for it, it will not succeed, just like plants which if not planted at the right time, cannot flourish, however good the seeds and however expert their planter.

Timing needs patience, and the wise person is patient until he can do the right action at the best time.

[128] He Wants to Grumble

Sometimes a person complains about hearing something, yet he is the one who is straining to hear it, or at least is encouraging himself to listen to it!

[129] Two Meanings of the Cross

Some people love the cross for its blessings and its strength, and for its doctrine of faith... but they do not love the cross in their lives. By which I mean that they do not like to carry their cross ... !

The cross is outside them, not inside them!

They love Golgotha for its spirit of self-sacrifice, but want to avoid its pains!

[130] Force

Some people resort to the use of force to solve their problems or carry out their wishes or ideas...

But there are other ways which are more effective than force. These call for calm nerves, however, and a mind that thinks more quickly than the soul reacts emotionally.

It also needs a vigilant heart which puts the commandments of God before it in every problem and sees that force is an extreme measure, or is unsuitable to be used at all.

Some people consider that the word ‘force’ is distasteful and replace it with another such as ‘power’ or ‘boldness’ or the ‘defence of the Truth’ etc...

But the word ‘force’ is the most reliable description of force.

[131] The Meaning of Simplicity

Many people use the word ‘simplicity’ for ‘naivety’ and ‘shallowness of thought’, and they consider simple-souled people to be naive people with no understanding of anything, or who have no depth of thought or ability to manage.

But this way of thinking is not sound. Simplicity in Christianity is a wise simplicity. There is no difference between this simplicity and wisdom. The Lord said, “ *...be wise ... and harmless*”. (*Matt. 10 : 16*)

This simplicity of innocence is not the opposite of wisdom but the opposite of sophistication.

Christian simplicity is a wise simplicity and Christian wisdom is innocent wisdom which means that there is no attempt to make things complicated and involved. A person may be extremely intelligent, but even so, may be innocent, by which we mean that he does not make matters complicated or tricky.

[132] A Child!

The boy was in my presence with his mother and some of the members of his family. And his mother presented him to me, saying to him: “Let Sayyidna* hear the ‘Our Father’. Say *the ‘Holy, Holy, Holy’* for him. Sing him the hymn that you have learned by heart...”

But the child looked at me and said, “Do you see my beautiful new shirt?” He said it so innocently and joyfully, as though he had not heard what his mother had said to him.

I learned from this child a lesson in dealing with children.

Whenever a child comes to me, I don’t begin by listening to what he has memorised... I just praise, first of all, whatever in his appearance or clothes can be praised, perhaps for their design, colours or patterns. After I have made him happy by noticing all these things which delight him, then we can enter the subject of religion in a very friendly manner.

* (Literally ‘Our Lord’, a title of respect given to a bishop)

[133] Two Servers

There were two servers each of whom followed a course which he was convinced was right for him, but which was the opposite course to that of his fellow.

One of them said, “I must serve within the Church, in order to obtain its blessing and to legitimise my service”.

But the second one said, “I shall serve outside the Church in order to give myself freedom of movement and not be under anyone’s authority”.

The first was widely successful and the Church provided him with all its powers and possibilities, while the second stayed as he was, a private sector, far away from the Church. His freedom of movement had brought him no benefit since he had found no freedom outside the Church...

[134] Collecting Experiences

If we were able to collect the experiences of all the Father Priests, especially the elders and those who have been successful in their ministerial work, we would have a treasure stored for use in pastoral work...

The same goes for our Father Bishops...

If only there could be a group that specialised in the task of gathering this information, and if only the Fathers would write to let us know about their pastoral experiences and the ideas which have proved successful in their lives and about the obstacles which they have encountered and how they have surmounted them, and give examples of God’s intervention in the ministry and His direction...

We say this because many Fathers have departed this world of ours and their many experiences have been buried with them, to our great loss. How valuable they would be if only they had remained. The first step of the project is to set down the names of the Fathers and then contact them and record their experiences.

[135] Everybody... and the Loner

This happened about twenty years ago. We were living together in love as a large group, but one broke away from us and began to be hostile to everyone and provoke them and attack them. All his confidence was based on his having formed a friendship with the director. So why should he care about the members of the group as long as there was someone to support him, even if he fell out with everybody?

Then after that, he committed a very great error and the director gave him up, the only one with whom he had any connection...

And he found himself lost and alone and that no one trusted him...

To rely on one person is to run the risk of losing all if that one person's support is lost.

[136] The Law: When?

People resort to the law whenever the love between them and the mutual consent fails.

Many things which the law cannot solve, love, personal relationships and loving understanding can solve. As the saying goes:

“If the two sides come to a mutual agreement, the judge can take a rest.”

That is why you should think well before resorting to the law.

Ask yourself: how far can this issue be solved by love, instead of resorting to the law?

[137] An Ant

This happened in 1960, when I was sitting at the doorway of my desert cell, in Al-Bahr Al-Farigh. I saw an ant climbing a mound of sand, when suddenly the sand gave way beneath it and it fell...

And as soon as it fell, it did not hesitate for a single moment before beginning to climb once again. And again the sand collapsed beneath it and it climbed up quickly without letting failure push it into despair. It repeated this in front of me a great many times until it finally climbed to the top.

I was very astonished at this little ant, and learned a lesson from it. I said to myself, “ **I haven’t yet reached the level of this persevering little ant, nor reached its determination which will not admit to any failure.**”

[138] Two By Two

I am surprised at a person who has two scales of judgement: one in which he weighs the actions of others, and another in which he weighs his own acts and perhaps those of his friends too.

The two scales are quite different, so much so that one act might be considered a wrong, according to one of the scales, while according to the other, it is a right!!

I am also amazed at someone who has two different faiths:

One which he declares publicly and another which he keeps secret, or which he mentions only to his own personal friends or to those to whom he reveals his secrets, or where it is of no consequence!

[139] Translating Faithfully

If you are translating from a particular writer, author or Saint, then convey his views just as they are in their entirety, and faithfully.

Do not try to hide those words of his which don't please you, just picking from his words only what you imagine to be in your own interests and presenting it as if it were his whole view!!

This is not consistent with a faithful translation...

Likewise, if you translate from the Bible itself, take all the verses which are connected with the subject, and do not insert or hide any other verse or verses, otherwise you will be presenting your own personal understanding and not the Bible's instruction and you will not have translated faithfully.

[140] The Priest and the People

I always used to say concerning pastoral affairs:

“The priest is for the people and not the people for the priest”. Just as we say that the shepherd is made for the sheep and not the sheep for the shepherd. That is why it is said about the priest that he is a servant: a servant for the people and servant for the Sacraments for the sake of the people.

If it were not for the people we would not appoint a priest

[141] Problems and Crying

He came to me crying because of a problem that had befallen him and I said to him:

“Calm down and let’s think and pray. Problems aren’t solved by crying, but by practical solutions which can be put into effect.”

Crying just paralyses the mind and does not give it a chance to think.

[142] Apology

Sometimes a person apologises for mistakes he had made and imagines that the matter is then done with, but his apology is not acceptable.

This is because when he apologises his apology is too meagre in relation to the offence he has committed.

This glib superficial apology does not satisfy the heart of the one who has been hurt, and cannot cover up the previous mistakes.

Also, just apologising is insufficient.

He ought to help deal with the consequences of the errors he has made by making amends to the one whom he has wronged.

[143] When?! and When?!

I have noticed while travelling along Life's road, that people tend not to talk very often about values and standards except on occasions when they are directly concerned themselves..!

For example, when do people talk about justice?

They talk about justice when they are wronged.

A person hardly ever speaks of the importance of justice when he is acting unjustly, because at that time he would find it distressing to talk of it.

When do people talk about mercy? They tend to talk about it when they are crushed by others.

It is rare for someone to talk about mercy when he is in the position of power!

But the noble-minded man is the one who remembers justice and mercy, not just when he is in need of them, but when others need them, even if it is from him.

Time is a constant whirl. Things do not stay the same. A situation may be reversed and the strong becomes the weak and the harsh oppressor becomes the one crushed. It is then that he recalls this past.

Noble-minded and wise is the person who invests in his future out of the reality of his today, by doing good today, so that that 'good' will be waiting for him tomorrow.

[144] The Pulpit of the Church

The Church pulpit has a mission which is to minister the Word:

The word of faith, the word of the Spirit, the word of love, the word of comfort and the word of reconciliation between God and the people, and to preach the word of God to the people...

It is not permitted to use the Church pulpit for any other purpose.

It is not an arena for any personal goal or for any private teaching or propaganda. It is not the place for defending oneself or for announcing the names of others, either to give them fame or criticism. Nor is it the place for talking about oneself.

People attend church in order to hear spiritual words which build up their souls. If they see a departure from this spiritual line they will stumble in regard to their life in the Church and in regard to those who serve there.

Therefore it is necessary for all preachers and all who are appointed to the priesthood to adhere to the mission of the Church's pulpit, and not depart from its spiritual goal and its spiritual course.

[145] Used Once

There are things which a person only needs to use once before being able to dispense with them. So what prevents him from giving whatever it is to others, so that they can benefit from it? He has nothing to lose by it!

An example of this is some study books which a student uses for one year...

These could be handed in after the person has passed the exam, to the social services library at the Church, to be distributed to needy students.

Another example is a wedding dress, which the bride uses only once, on her wedding day, to have her commemorative pictures taken in. She never ever wears it again after that. So why not hand it in to the social services office so that it could be worn by many other brides who are perhaps unable to afford a new dress?

And there is the example of clothes which children, who have no younger brothers and sisters, have grown out of.

What a lot of things we possess which we don't use, and which others are in urgent need of! If we hang on to them, aren't we hanging on to something which is not rightly ours and being mean with our possessions?!

[146] Emotional Decisions

How easy it is to go back on emotional decisions made in one's spiritual life. Likewise, promises and vows which are made on the spur of the moment, without the speaker thinking about whether they can be carried out.

[147] Today and Tomorrow

There are matters which cannot be judged today, but can only be judged tomorrow. For today such matters may be bound up with various feelings, emotions and considerations, which tomorrow they will be quite free of, and better able to remember the Truth as it was...

That is why history is not usually written in its own lifetime.

Historians usually write it after a time, when scholars attempt to strip it of all influence of time and place, and investigate its facts from different sources according to their different standpoints. All that is the work of tomorrow...

Happy is the person whom Tomorrow bears witness for him and not against him, and whom Tomorrow holds in good regard upon which all who are uninfluenced by place, time and circumstances agree.

Happy is he who works for his tomorrow from now onwards, not just for the sake of having a good reputation in the eyes of the people, but principally for the sake of the judgement of his conscience and the judgement of God.

[148] Tribalism

Just as the members of a tribe are proud of their tribe and do not recognise any general membership to a national homeland which embraces all the tribes, so some people in the Church fall into the same mistake. Whether it is 'our Church', 'our association', 'the branch of the Church teaching which we

serve', 'our country'... it is just membership seen in a very narrow sphere.

The rites of the Church, however, teach us in the Holy Communion to pray for "*this world from its farthest shores to its remotest lands*"

[149] A Pyramid Shape

I always offer consolation to those who suffer from wearisome problems by saying to them:

“Problems always have a pyramid shape.

They rise up till they reach their peak, then go down in the other direction.

There isn't a problem which continues to rise up and up for ever. Even the trial of the righteous Job himself reached its peak and then ended, and it was the same for the upright Joseph.

All of their problems were limited to a time, after which they came to an end.

[150] After the Loss

Many people do not feel the value of something until after they have lost it!

A wife clashes with her husband and disagrees with him and does not feel his value until after she has lost him, whether she loses him emotionally or by separation.

The school pupil does not feel the value of time and its importance to his future until the end of the school year, after he has lost it.

The friend who is not faithful to his friend loses him, and only feels his worth after he has lost him.

The son who neglects to honour his parents mistreats them and only feels their value after he has lost them, whether it is through their death or by losing their approval or blessing...

In general, a person is not aware of the value of life and the importance of eternity until after he has lost that life and eternity both together...

Judas did not feel the value of Christ until after he had lost him, when he lost all hope and went and hanged himself.

How nice it is if a person wakes up to himself and perceives the value of his situation before he loses it, especially something which cannot be retrieved once it has been lost!!

[151] The Seed and the Fruit

Throw the seed on the ground, but don't stand and watch it till it brings forth fruit! To stand and watch is not good either for your thinking or your nerves.

It will bring forth fruit in its own time, even for those who have forgotten that they sowed some seeds once upon a time, or who dropped the seed inadvertently.

Therefore, also, do good and forget it and don't be sad if you see that it has not brought forth fruit!

The fruit of goodness will inevitably be gathered, either here or in the next world. It is never lost.

[152] Right and Wrong

In the ministry we have frequently met a problem, which is that:

Right is quiet and Wrong is noisy.

The majority are quiet while a minority are rebellious and provoke the others. We have to reflect much and search to find out the truth of various matters and the way to behave wisely in each one...

[153] A Substitute Punishment

Sometimes we are punished for sins which we have not committed.

That is because other mistakes which we have made, we have not been punished for!

So no one should say, in the case of punishment, that an injustice has befallen him, for perhaps it might have been a substitute punishment.

[154] The Limits of Obedience

Obedience must be understood wisely, for first and foremost it is obedience to God, and after that:

We obey the people within the sphere of our obedience to God.

If, however, the two obediences clash, then one must, “*obey God rather than men.*” (Acts 5:29)

Thus the Apostle says: “*Children, obey your parents in the Lord.*” (Eph. 6 : 1)

How beautiful is obedience and submission as long as it is ‘in the Lord’.

Be obedient and submit in all things to the one who has the right of submission.

Deny yourself and deny your will and deny your honour.

But do not deny your heart...

[155] Too Much Explaining

If a matter requires a lot of explanation, it is likely to be abstruse or unconvincing, for if it were clear and persuasive, it would not need such explanation...

A lengthy explanation might also point to a lack of confidence in your listener’s intelligence or quickness in comprehension, or may reveal your lack of confidence in what you are saying!

The thing which convinces is not a great amount of explanation, but the power of the idea.

Too much explanation may induce boredom, especially if your listener has already understood your meaning. Too much explanation wastes his time and puts pressure on his nerves...

Therefore it is best that your words be brief and persuasive and clearly expressed in balanced phrases; nothing more and nothing less.

[156] He Lives Outside Himself

Why do you live outside yourself? Are you concerned with what others are doing and with your judgements of them and your emotional reactions to them and the effect of all this on your spirituality?!

As for your soul, that is lost in the midst of your judgements of others: You find no time for your soul! And if you were to find time for it, you would make yourself a resolution to keep away from people just because you resent their behaviour and are annoyed by their ways. But it is not long before you return after a while to live in the same prison!

On the Day of Judgement, God will call you on the subject of your own soul first of all, before asking you about the souls of others. And even those with whom you have been so preoccupied, what have you done for them with your judgements and comments?

[157] The Importance of the Individual

It sometimes happens when the pastor is busily absorbed in various affairs of the ministry, that he forgets to minister to some individuals.

The individual loses his way in the midst of the crowds of people and finds himself lost!

But the Lord showed us His concern for the lone individual when he left the ninety-nine and went in search of the lost sheep. (Luke 15 : 4)

Our Lord Jesus Christ performed many acts of ministry to individuals in the midst of His service to the thousands all crowding around Him. There was for example His concern for Zacchareus, Nicodemus, Peter and Mary Magdalena and the Samaritan woman...

[158] Serving the Village

The village is more in need of ministry than the city, and if we don't concern ourselves with it, the people there are liable to be lost.

Serving the village does not mean that the Mass is held there by a priest who is appointed to conduct the service, who prays and then leaves straightaway afterwards!

The village needs pastoral care and visiting, solutions for its problems, listening to confessions, regular and frequent meetings and constant ministry, and the binding of the people to the Church and to all the means of grace. Because of this, some Father Bishops have undertaken to ordain priests for service in the villages.

What has been said about the villages can also be said about the poor inhabitants of the ports and big cities, like Cairo and Alexandria.

[159] Baptism and Holy Chrism in the "Mawalid"

The term 'Mawalid' (Saints' celebrations) is the wrong term to give to the Saints' days. The festivals of the Saints usually see great crowds, with some people, in the midst of this crush, vowing to have their children baptised on the Saint's day!

Then they come to us worn out with doubts about whether the baptism or the anointing with holy chrism was performed properly!

They say that the baptism was too quick, the ceremony not complete! Or they say, 'Our Father baptised the child but didn't anoint him with the holy chrism', or 'He anointed him but didn't make the sign of the cross thirty-six times.'

But a baptism that is performed in the midst of thousands of children, and which raises doubts about the ceremony being performed in full, is not an easy matter, and one for concern...

So why put yourself in a position of doubt?!

The advice that we give to the Church Fathers and those supervising the festivals of the Saints, is to keep a close eye on the rituals. The presence of crowds is not an excuse for mistakes to be made. The Father Bishop can assign a larger number of priests for the occasion, some of whom can be specially in charge of the baptism, while others can administer the holy chrism...

[160] God in Work

If God enters into a piece of work, power enters it, along with blessing and success...

Therefore do your utmost to let God into the work you do so that He can share it with you and work with you...

Be careful not to do anything in which God is not participating; or that you feel that you are working alone, without the hand of God.

Is not He the one who says: “*Without Me you can do nothing*”? (John. 15 : 5)

[161] **Insistence!**

Insisting is often annoying to the listener, just like repeated talking about a particular idea which he has already heard before and grasped. This makes him not want to listen further. Repeating the same words insistently wears out his nerves, annoys him and makes him fed up.

Thus by his insistence the speaker loses his case and loses harmony with his listeners. He gives the subject a greater quantity of words than it deserves...

Therefore, if your listener has understood what you want to say and you find that he has begun to get irritated by your insistence, then there is no need to say more.

[162] **A Piece of Advice**

A certain man used to hand me his notebook on numerous occasions for me to write a word of guidance or advice for him. Yet although he would be very happy at what I had written for him, he would never put it into practice!

At the beginning of the year he presented me the same notebook for me to write some advice for him on the occasion of the New Year, so I wrote him this phrase:

“The one piece of advice which I write for you at the beginning of this new year is to re-read what I have written for you before in this notebook”.

[163] Give Time a Chance

Patience solves many problems, problems which thinking might be incapable of solving, yet with time they can be solved and by patiently giving God an opportunity to intervene to solve them.

You might speak with someone on a particular subject and he does not agree. Do not be too persistent, though, because pressing him will probably annoy him. But leave him a little while and he may think again on the subject and be convinced, or certain events might happen which make him favour your view. He might also ask the advice of others whom he trusts and they might be of the same opinion as you...

Many matters require a period of time or a period of incubation inside the mind so that they grow and mature.

Those who love speed, however, may lose many situations because of their hasty manner.

Even matters which only need their agreement, also require a period of time in which they can be studied, considered, examined and advice can be sought.

Time is also needed to put these matters before God in prayer, so that His will in them can be revealed...

[164] Special Treatment

This person always insisted on being treated in a special way. If, for example, the visit was forbidden for the whole group,

then he would have to have special permission, because he was not like the others. If the monastery was closed for a period of seclusion, then it could not be closed to him.

Although marriages were not permitted during the great fast, then he would want permission for his own marriage, believing that he had special extenuating circumstances.

[165] Encouraging and Not Forcing

The people all loved the Truth and were enthusiastic for it, striving to spread it. This is unquestionably right and imperative.

A person's work is to bear witness to the Truth and not at all to force people to do good.

Even God Himself does not force people to do good. He created human beings with free will to do good according to their will. God does not compel.

Because of this, there are unbelievers in the world whom God has not forced to believe, but He will judge them on the Last Day...

There are also in the world those who sin and are disobedient and God has not forced them to do acts of righteousness, but He will call them to account on the Day of Judgement...

And you, with your enthusiasm for Goodness and Truth, your work is only to call and preach and warn. You do not have any authority to force anyone else. You must bear witness to the Truth, but do not use force to compel other people to be devoted to God.

Force does not produce saints and righteous people, though it can be a suitable means for teaching discipline and correct manners...

The way to correct things, though, is by making the people want to do good, and persuading them, encouraging and helping them to do so. It means strengthening their will and knowing the obstacles which they are likely to encounter on the way to goodness, and advising them on how to surmount them.

The goodness which comes as a result of conviction and acceptance is much more enduring.

[166] Wisdom in Time

On some occasions Time can be to your advantage.

And on others it can be against you.

It might be in your interests sometimes to slow down so that you can understand a situation well and study it and see which are the best ways of tackling it.

And at other times, taking things slowly may be disastrous for you, and might make you lose opportunities which you will not be likely to meet again.

Taking things slowly, when solving a problem, may make it more complicated, so that it becomes more difficult to solve than it was at the beginning.

Somebody once sang, in the words of the poet:

“The one who bides his time may see more clearly his need, while the one who hurries, slips.”

And one of his listeners replied with the saying:

“How often people’s tardiness has harmed them, it would have been better for them if they had hurried. “

Being slow and patient is not in itself a virtue, neither is speed. But a person must study every situation individually and proceed wisely in order to see in which matters it is more suitable to act quickly or take one’s time.

To take things deliberately slowly may be because one is being painstaking in matters of detail, but if this comes after the deadline, after the opportunity has passed, it is of no use. Sometimes speed, if it is seen as a kind of determination to act, is preferable because it at least means that the error is not spread around so that others are guided by it. Like an illness, it is better if it is treated quickly.

There is a big difference between uprooting a new plant from the ground, which can be done easily, and waiting till it has turned from a small plant into a huge tree whose roots drive deep into the earth and which can no longer be uprooted easily.

Nevertheless, there are other times when speed is harmful, since it exposes the person to the risk of rashness, lack of preparation, thought and study in the matter.

It also makes him liable to make mistakes.

Some people might favour quickness because they see it as a way of attaining priority or obtaining a result, any result! They are not concerned with painstaking detail and accuracy! Others favour quickness because such is their nature. They lack patience, ability to reflect and calmness. Some people behave in a hostile manner out of their confidence in themselves and

their personal ability, and their feeling that they do not need time for further study.

Generally speaking, though, we must differentiate between acting quickly and acting hastily.

[167] Passivity

Some people imagine that passivity is spirituality, because they are not doing any act which would expose them to error, nor are they clashing with those who do wrong. In fact they imagine that they retain other people's love, though the opposite is true.

But passivity in itself is a fault.

The Bible says: " to him who knows to do good and does not do [it], to him it is sin. " (James. 4 : 17)

Perhaps the things which invite passivity are self-love and lack of concern for others and the general good... It is surprising how some people might behave in a passive manner, but then at the same time, get angry and annoyed when their friends adopt a similar passive attitude towards them!

In positive action there is a dignity, maturity of behaviour and love for the good, which has its own reward...

[168] Covering Things Up or Solving Them

Facing up to issues, mistakes and events honestly is the safe way to resolve them. Just covering things up is not a solution. It may provide a temporary respite, but it does not deal with them and the sickness remains as destructive as ever.

Covering up involves deception, and most of these cover-ups are brought to light eventually. They do not stand up to reality. Facing the facts is better, more honest and productive...

To face up to things demands sincerity with oneself and others requires courage, because covering up is a kind of escape.

Covering things up does not lead to purity, nor to solutions. Before God all is revealed.

[169] Books and Notebooks

At the beginning of every school year, our children need notebooks and scientific textbooks, which might be expensive for some people.

One of the parents put forward this practical idea, however:

The older students who have successfully passed through a particular class at school, and who have no further need of the books and textbooks required for that stage, could donate whatever they no longer need to the Church library. Or they could take in return for them, the books for the following stage, which their colleagues, who have gone before them, have left behind, or the Church could pay them a token price.

The Church could open a study library for reference, or give the books to the students to study in their own homes on a temporary or permanent loan.

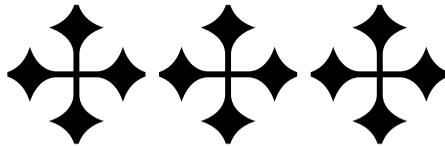
[170] Forgiveness and Trust

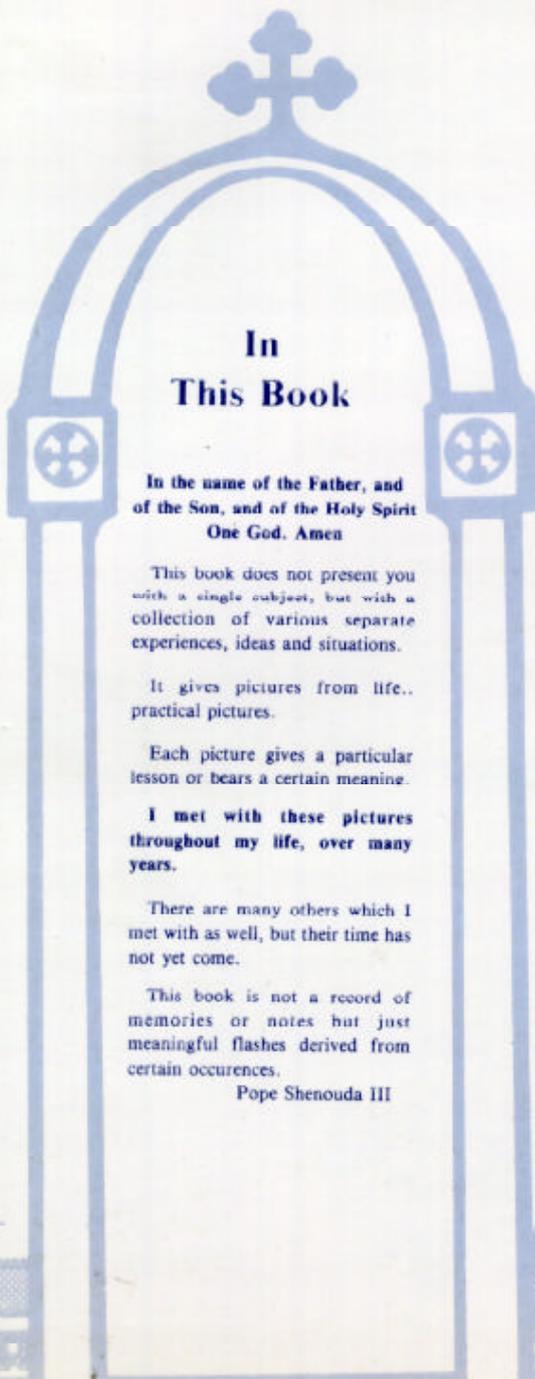
He said to me: “I have forgiven him for his disloyalty to me after I had left all my secrets in his hands. I forgave him because of the Lord’s commandment and because we had been together as servers in the Church for a long time, but...”

Then when I asked him, “But what ... ?” , he answered, with a profound gaze,

“Forgiveness is one thing and trust something else...”

I have forgiven him but I no longer trust him, because of his disloyalty. I no longer tell him my secrets. I don’t leave my office open for him any more. I simply don’t have confidence in him any longer.





In This Book

**In the name of the Father, and
of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit
One God. Amen**

This book does not present you
with a single subject, but with a
collection of various separate
experiences, ideas and situations.

It gives pictures from life,
practical pictures.

Each picture gives a particular
lesson or bears a certain meaning.

**I met with these pictures
throughout my life, over many
years.**

There are many others which I
met with as well, but their time has
not yet come.

This book is not a record of
memories or notes but just
meaningful flashes derived from
certain occurrences.

Pope Shenouda III

