

MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

MACARIUS

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Macarius theGreat

Macarius

- Macarius the Egyptian (300-390 AD) is one of the great monastic saints.
- Also known as Great or the Elder
- Macarius retired at age 30 to live as a hermit.
- He possessed unusual judgment and discernment and was greatly respected.
- At age 40 he received the gift of healing and of forecasting the future.
- He was ordained a priest and became famous for his sermons and instructions.

Macarius

- Fifty homilies and a Great Letter were attributed to the Egyptian elder.
- These are foundational for contemplative prayer.
- The cooperation of human effort with divine grace and participation in the sacraments enable one to partake of the divine nature.

Macarius

- The writings reflect Syrian, not Alexandrian, thought and language. Thus, the author is known as (Pseudo) Macarius.
- The author writes against those who believe that their own effort through ascetic labor and prayer is sufficient to obtain salvation (and thus is unlikely to be Symeon of Mesopotamia, one of the leaders of that faction).
- The author links freely given grace with the action of human preparation for its reception; he emphasizes the value of the sacraments.

Macarius

- Evil is pervasive and stubborn.
- Evil cannot be overcome without divine grace.
- “When the will of man is lacking, God himself does nothing.”
- All life is a spiritual struggle.
- “I have not yet seen a perfect Christian or one perfectly free.” (cf Lk 14:26; Mt 16:24-26) There is no inalienable perfection in this present life.
- The Holy Spirit casts out sin in cooperation with one’s will.

Macarius

- “When your soul has fellowship with the Spirit and the heavenly soul enters into your soul, then you are a perfect man in God and an heir and son.” (cf Col 6:14)
- However, “Satan is never quieted...as long as a person dwells in this world and is living in the flesh, he is subject to warring.” (cf Lk 22:31-32)
- “Be sober in all things.” (Eph 4:31)

Macarius

- The body is the outward expression and reflection of the soul.
- There is no salvation for the soul apart from the body.
- Divinization signifies transformation of the total person.
- It looks to the resurrection of the body and not to immortality of the soul.

Macarius

- “The soul that is counted worthy to participate in the light of the Holy Spirit by becoming His throne and habitation, and is covered with the ineffable glory of the Spirit, becomes all light, all face, all eye. (Ezek 1:4-2:1; 10:20) There is no part of the soul that is not full of the spiritual eyes of light...there is no part of the soul that is covered with darkness” (Mt 5:14).

Macarius

- “Who can see or lay hold of the soul? Or what is its nature? It has no visible appearance. A person does not know himself until the time that the Lord reveals this to him.”
- “What shall we say? Where is the invisible God to be found? Is He beneath the sea? Or under the earth? Who can seize hold of Him or catch sight of Him? Not a single created thing.”
- As the anonymous author of the Cloud of Unknowing wrote centuries later, “He may well be loved, but not by thought. By love He may be reached and held, but not by thought.”

Macarius

- “This is purity of heart, when you see the sinners and the weak, you have compassion on them...there is no other way to be saved except through your neighbor.” (cf. Mt 6:9-13)
- All Christians are called to live the Gospel radically and to follow Christ completely. (cf Ps 103:18)

Macarius

- “If you see a person puffed up by arrogance and pride because he is a participator of grace, and even if he should perform signs and should raise up the dead; if he, nevertheless, does not hold his soul as abject and humble and he does not consider himself poor in spirit and an object of abhorrence, he is being duped by evil and is ignorant...He is not to be trusted.”

Macarius

- “For the sign of Christianity is this, that one be pleasing to God so as to seek to hide oneself from the eyes of men. And even if a person should possess the complete treasures of the King, he should hide them and say continually, ‘The treasure is not mine, but another has given it to me as a charge. For I am a beggar when it pleases Him, He can claim it from me’...and the more they apply themselves to the art of growing in reflection, the more that they (regard) themselves as poor, as those in great need, and possessing nothing...this is the sign of Christianity, namely, this very humility.”
(cf 1 Cor 13:1)

Macarius

- “The summit of all zeal toward the good and peak of all virtuous practices is one’s striving in prayer, thanks to which we can obtain each day the rest of the virtues and demand them of God.”
- Give over entirely to seeking the love of Christ in all things, maintain constant vigilance, receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. (cf Rom 5:5)

Macarius

- “For as one defends himself against the exterior man, so also he must...do battle against his thoughts. For the Lord demands of you that you be angry with yourself and engage in battle with your mind, neither consenting to or taking pleasure in wicked thoughts.” (cf Jas 1:14; 1Tim 2:8)

Macarius

- “Still, to uproot sin and the evil that is so imbedded in evil sinning can be done only by divine power, for it is impossible and outside man’s competence to uproot sin. To struggle, yes, to continue to fight, to inflict blows, and to receive setback is in your power. To uproot, however, belongs to God alone.” (cf 2 Cor 12:9-10)
- “Pray all the time, asking for what you need, praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion.” (Eph 6:18)
- “He gives to him what he has asked for.” (Ps 106:15)

Macarius

- “The fruits of sincere prayer are simplicity, love, humility, fortitude, innocence (Gal 5:22)...Such fruits which precede the heavenly fruit are developed in this life by a man eager for prayer through hard labor...Who lacks such fruit undertakes in vain laborious tasks.”

Macarius

- “The whole visible arrangement of the Church of God came to pass for the sake of the living and intelligent being of the rational soul that was made according to the image of God, and that is the living and true Church of God...For the Church of Christ and temple of God and true altar and living sacrifice is the man of God.”

Macarius

- The Holy Spirit is fully as present in the visible assembly and in all the liturgy of the Church as in Heaven. Heart and altar carry the same presence.
- “Because visible things are the type and shadow of things hidden, and the visible temple (a type) of the temple of the heart, and the priest (a type) of the grace of Christ, and all the rest of the sequence of the visible arrangement (a type) of the rational and hidden matters according to the inner man, we receive the manifest arrangement and administration of the church as a pattern for what is at work in the soul by grace.”
- Transformation is already open to experience now.

Macarius

- “People in the world are complex beings, troubled by ceaseless and unquiet thoughts, by dread, by fear, by unease and by their own cravings. On the contrary, after many a struggle and after a long time, Christians do achieve stability, freedom from agitation. They are at peace. The dew of the Spirit has found its way in, their heart has been smitten by love for Christ, the King of Heaven. Straining towards Him, they free themselves from all love of the world, break every earthly tie.

Macarius

- But they are few who break every tie with the world in this way. To do it, they have to renounce their own will, renounce themselves. For our love is what weighs us down. If we love what is earthly and fleshly, our love keeps us chained, preventing us from taking flight towards God.

Macarius

- On the contrary, the person who directs all his love towards God and renounces himself, comes through all difficulties and trials. For our love is what weighs us down. It is a burden, or it is light according to what we love: the things of Heaven or the things of Earth.”

Macarius

- Renunciation, self-stripping contribute to our salvation.
- Love God alone, strip oneself of all earthly love.
- This is why asceticism is necessary, whereas we would prefer the rewards without having to make the effort.
- Within trials, within sufferings borne with patience and in faith, are hidden our glory and the restoration of our heavenly inheritance.

Macarius

- “By means of the spiritual combat, the practice of the virtues and of faith, we build ourselves a heavenly house to replace that of our body. It is the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us which brings this about...
- Let us struggle on then so as not to be found naked when we shall have put off our body but, through our sharing in the Holy Spirit, be re-clothed with the treasures we are garnering now. The trees which are covered once more with leaves and flowers in the spring are an image of Christians at the resurrection.”

Macarius

- “This is why April is the most important month for the true Christian. It is the time of resurrection when our bodies will be glorified by the power of the Holy Spirit who already dwells in them.
- Moses prefigured the glory with which the Holy Spirit will clothe the bodies of the saints.
- In the resurrection we shall have the wings of the Holy Spirit to bear us whithersoever the Spirit wills.”

Macarius

- “Whence the benefit of asceticism which brings about our sharing in the glory and holiness of the Spirit.”

Homily 5

- “Christ and the Spirit are a treasure within, enabling us to practice all the virtues and thus increase our spiritual riches.
- Let us beg God to give us the treasure that is His Spirit, without whom we are needy and naked.”

Macarius

- “The possession of the Lord, this true treasure, enables us to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, to accomplish all justice, to observe all the commandments.
- Contrast a rich person who has all the resources to give a banquet, and of a poor person who has to borrow everything, pay it back afterwards and, when he has done so, finds himself as poor as ever.

Macarius

- Also, those who are richly endowed with the Holy Spirit, draw upon their own wealth to do good to others. But the person less well endowed borrows from the spiritually wealthy person and, after he has communicated these goods, remains poor and naked. He is neither happy nor filled with the joy of the Spirit.”

Macarius

- “We ought, then, to pray God to let us find His own riches in our heart: the true treasure which is Christ together with the vigor of the Spirit. After having found it, we shall try to be of help to others by explaining the heavenly mysteries.
- Those who bear Christ within, giving them light and repose, are guided by the Holy Spirit, by grace working within them.

Macarius

- The action of the Holy Spirit in the soul is described under the following images:
- A banquet, repose of the bride within the arms of the bridegroom, angelic lightness, divine intoxication, the gift of tears, intense joy, ardor in the combat, repose, possession of wisdom.
- The person who is united with the Spirit becomes all light, all eye, all spirit, all joy, all gentleness, all happiness, all charity, all compassion, all goodness and all sweetness.”

Homily 18

Macarius

- “Christian hope does not look to this Earth. Its object is greater than the Earth, greater than Heaven. It gives itself to the pursuit of the Good and the Beautiful.
- The Good, the Beautiful, is the Lord, the inheritance and the life of the Christian. Before Him, man is free. God asks of him faith and love.”

Macarius

- “God alone can free us from sin. He frees from sin those who believe in Him and love Him. To believe in the Lord, to love Him, depends on you...So also, even though the soul can do little, it can always call on God.
- The one who has been judged worthy of the heavenly fire of the Spirit of life and who is possessed by the power of the divine fire, is hindered from giving himself to the works of sin, drawn as he is by love and affection for the divine Spouse.”

Macarius

- “Greatness of the soul: at once in the body and outside the body, it is destined to be the dwelling of God, and is made in His image.

The soul is in a prison. As a prisoner can only cry out for someone to open up for him, the soul can only cry to the Lord and wait for the advent of His grace. When the soul clings to the Lord, the Lord takes pity on it, loves it and clings to it...The soul becomes one spirit with the Lord, one only alloy, one only thought. The soul has entered into possession of the Lord in Heaven, the Lord has taken possession of the soul on Earth.”

Macarius

- “The greatness of the soul, created by God to be a bride who can be united with Him and become one spirit with Him.
- Nevertheless, what a difference between the Creator and the creature! And yet, in His love and infinite mercy, God has willed that we be united with Him, partners with Him, that we be His bride, noble and pure, and destined endlessly to rejoice in His presence.

Homily 26

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