

The VINE

St. George & St. Shenouda Coptic Orthodox Church Bulletin

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St. Gregory Nazienzen

On the Nature of God

God always was and is and will be, or rather always "is," for "was" and "will be" belong to our divided time and transitory nature: but he is always "he who is," and he gave himself this name when he consulted with Moses on the mountain. For holding everything together in himself, he possesses being, neither beginning nor ending. He is like a kind of boundless and limitless sea of being, surpassing all thought and time and nature. He is only sketched by the mind, and this is in a very indistinct and mediocre way, not from things pertaining to himself but from things around him. Impressions are gathered from here and there into one particular representation of the truth, which flees before it is grasped and escapes before it is understood. It illumines the directive faculty in us, when indeed we have been purified, and its appearance is like a swift bolt of lightning that does not remain. It seems to me that insofar as it is graspable, the divine draws us toward itself, for what is completely ungraspable is un hoped for and unsought. Yet one wonders at the ungraspable, and one desires more intensely the object of wonder, and being desired it purifies, and purifying it makes deiform, and with those who have become such he converses as with those close to him, —I speak with vehement



On the Nature of God, cont.

boldness—God is united with gods, and he is thus known, perhaps as much as he already knows those who are known to him.

For the divine is without limits and difficult to contemplate, and this alone is entirely graspable in it, namely that it is without limit, whether one supposes that to be a simple nature is to be wholly ungraspable or perfectly graspable. For what is a being whose nature is simple? Let us inquire further, for simplicity is clearly not the nature of this being, just as composition alone is clearly not the nature of composite entities.

....For me this is enough reflection about God for now. For it is not the time to go beyond these things, since our concern here is not "theology" but "economy." When I say "God," I mean Father and Son and Holy Spirit. The divinity is not diffused beyond these, lest we introduce a crowd of gods, but nor is it limited to fewer than these, lest we be condemned to a poverty of divinity, either Judaizing because of the monarchy or Hellenizing because of the abundance. For the evil is alike in both cases, though it is found in opposites. This then is the Holy of Holies, which is veiled by the seraphim and glorified with a threefold "Holy," converging in one lordship and divinity, which another who preceded us has explained in a most beautiful and exalted way.

^a St. Gregory the Theologian (Nazianzen). *Oration 39: On the Nativity of Christ*. Translated by Nonna Verna Harrison. SVS Press. 2008

Book Review

**Have You Seen the One I
Love?**

ISBN: 1-4196-9705-6

This book is based on a lecture series that H.H. Pope Shenouda III delivered in the 1970s. In these pages, he shares with us his contemplations on various verses found within the Song of Songs. When one reads this book, they feel that Pope Shenouda is speaking directly to them. And his words are effective on multiple levels. They both nourish one's intellect and understanding of God and they provide advice on a more practical level. Many times, His Holiness will contemplate on but a few verses over multiple chapters. However, he does so in a way that is neither boring nor drawn out. Rather, with fresh ideas and new depth each time, he demonstrates that, "the word of God is living and powerful."

Though each chapter is a different sermon, the topics flow quite seamlessly. The book totals slightly over 300 pages and, despite its great depth, is considered by this writer as a lighter read. The sermons were delivered in His Holiness' native tongue, Arabic. However, this book collectively represents one of the best English translations of His Holiness's work.

For the reflections of a monk, the advice of an elder, the words of a teacher, the love of a father, and the guidance of a true shepherd, this book is most highly recommended.

The Important Things in Life

A philosophy professor stood before his class with some items on the table in front of him. When the class began, wordlessly he picked up a very large and empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with rocks, about 2 inches in diameter.

He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was. So the professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles, of course, rolled into the open areas between the rocks.

He then asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was. The professor picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else.

He then asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous "Yes."

"Now," said the professor, "I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life. The rocks are the important things - your family, your partner, your health, your children - things that if everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full.

The pebbles are the other things that matter - like your job, your house, your car.

The sand is everything else. The small stuff."

"If you put the sand into the jar first," he continued "there is no room for the pebbles or the rocks. The same goes for your life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you. Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Take your partner out dancing. There will always be time to go to work, clean the house, give a dinner party and fix the disposal.

Take care of the rocks first - the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand."

Learn Coptic

1.

ⲑⲉⲗⲏⲗ = to rejoice ("theleel")

2.

ⲁⲃⲉⲣⲓ = renewed ("emveri")

3.

ⲙⲉⲛⲣⲓⲧ = beloved ("men-reet")

Contemplation Verse

Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.

--1 Corinthians 9:26



Questions? Concerns? Comments?
Please email us at TheVineJC@gmail.com