

PSEUDO-MACARIUS: MYSTICISM AND COMMUNITY

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Abstract: *In this paper, I will try to explore the social consequences of mystical theology that we can find in Pseudo-Macarius' works. When we mention Pseudo-Macarius, usually we associate this name with a teaching of prayer that leads to an ascension towards God. However, in my opinion, his understanding of love towards other people and toward God's creation still remains unexplored. Through his Homilies and his Great Letter, I will try to draw an outline that will show practical implications of his mystical theology upon human relations towards creation and fellow man.*

Keywords: mysticism, community, mind, person, individual, love.

We usually perceive that Pseudo-Macarius' works explain and imply spirituality which has nothing to do with the practical life in the world. It is quite often that spirituality has been understood as life in solitude and isolation from the surrounding world, best achieved in monastic communities. In this paper, I'll try to point other side of the spirituality through his *Homilies* and *Great Letter*.

To be more understandable this work is divided into subtitles:

- Historical context of Homilies and Great Letter;
- Anthropology;
- Mystical theology of Pseudo-Macarius;
- Consequences of communion with God in Ps-Macarius' writings;

Historical context of Homilies and Great Letter

Today we still do not know the name of the original writer of the works that are ascribed to Pseudo-Macarius. Andrew Louth in his *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition* suggested that the original writer was probably someone from the Messalian sect. Other scholars suggested either that the writer was someone who was actually using Gregory of Nyssa's treatise¹ for his work or either someone who produced something original that even Gregory of Nyssa was using for his own treatise.²

¹ Werner Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1954.

² Aelred Baker, "Syriac and the Spiritual Quotations of Pseudo-Macarius," in *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 20 (1969), p. 38.

The salient point here is that although we are still unsure of the exact writer these works found good acceptance in the Christian tradition through the centuries. Pseudo-Macarius' works were written in the fourth century, and they were primarily written for monastic communities in those years. From his own experience, he was trying to illuminate what is important for monastic communities, for their everyday life. In those days, many men and women became monks, and eventually they started to take monastic life as salvific *per se*, without consideration that they were called to strive for perfection. "The author of the letter takes issue with the tendency toward increasing laxity in the monastic communities for which he is writing".³

The achievement of a servant who goes about his work without hesitation, even if he cannot fulfill his task completely, will be greater than that of the lazy servant who begins by saying that it is impossible for him to do all this work and wastes much of his time in procrastination.⁴

Through his experience, he wanted to empower monastics with the understanding that a living faith and relationship with God are the strongest powers in their lives.

In his homilies, he was addressing the contemporary problems in the monastic communities of that time. One of the problems was the distinction between 'praying monks' and 'serving brethren',⁵ and especially he addressed this problem in *Homily 3*.⁶ We will see later consequences of this writing for our life 'in the world'.

In the conclusion of this chapter, we could say that Pseudo-Macarius was insisting on prayer as a living relationship with God towards attaining His love. It was a calling for monastics to strive for perfection, and God will provide them with the aid in their journey. These writings were:

essentially for monks and were intended for monks as they pursued their life of solitude and prayer, a life which is, for Macarius, a descent into the depths – the depths of sin, the depths of one's own heart.⁷

³ Werner Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius*, p. 201.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 203.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 206.

⁶ Pseudo-Macarius, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, New York, Paulist Press, 1992, p. 47.

⁷ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981, p. 125.

Anthropology

Before we start to talk about some basic elements of Macarius' mysticism, we need to understand his anthropology. Is it only the mind that is the most important element in the human being, or is the whole human being necessary in the journey of ascension towards God? Each of these two answers will shape the relationship between mystical experience and practical consequences on the community life. If we accept that only one part of man is important, intellect as an example, for our relationship with God, it means that mysticism is nothing else than inner experience that matters only for one individual. In that case, Orthodox Mysticism becomes a good excuse for individualism in modern society.

A monk of Cellia in the Egyptian desert, Evagrius has been called the first codifier of a monastic doctrine of prayer. In his writings, Evagrius defined prayer as "the ascent of the intellect to God," and in so doing he emphasised the necessity of intellectual prayer, as a means toward achieving union with God. Because Evagrius held to a neo-platonic anthropological dualism reminiscent of Origenist teaching, he elevated the role of the intellect in prayer to the detriment of the role of the body, and as a result, Evagrius taught a mysticism which was purely intellectualistic.⁸

On the other hand, if the mystical journey towards God is a matter of the whole human being it means that consequences of this approach are completely different from the previous one. If the whole being is illuminated and transfigured through God's love, (inwardly and outwardly) then the expression of that love will be exercised through practical deeds of one person with the others. In this case, mystical experience is not closed into an inner experience but touches the whole person and consequently the other people in the community. "The soul is called to 'mirror the eternal good things' – we recall the hierarchies as "mirrors" of God – and to "attain to repose and sure foundation and untroubledness... in the peace of Christ".⁹ When man is enlightened then he is transformed into light. Macarius now stresses that if we are enlightened through the whole our person, then we need to be a light of the world, to testify that encounter with God.¹⁰ Here it is obvious that

⁸ Gregory K. Hillis, *To Be Transformed by a Vision of Uncreated Light: A Survey on the Influence of the Existential Spirituality of Hesychasm on Eastern Orthodox History*, <http://www.euphrosynoscafe.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=6106>, accessed 21.03.2016.

⁹ Hieromonk Alexander Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei*, Thessaloniki, 1994, p. 378.

¹⁰ Homily I, 4; *Pseudo-Macarius, The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, p. 39.

this mysticism is not the mysticism of individuals, but the mysticism of living persons that only exist in communion with other persons.

The writings of Pseudo-Macarius, an unknown fourth century monk, provided a counterbalance to Evagrius' 'prayer of the mind.' In contrast to Evagrius' dualistic anthropology which elevated the intellect, Macarius elevated the heart as being the "source of all intellectual and spiritual activity" in a human. In other words, Macarius viewed the heart as being the centre of a person's will, intellect, and body. Therefore, by focusing on 'prayer of the heart,' rather than 'prayer of the mind,' Macarius advocated an experience of God which penetrated the heart, thus implying that the body participates in union with God. In other words, Macarius' spirituality entailed more of an affective element than did Evagrius' spirituality.¹¹

Pseudo-Macarius considered that the heart is the center of the human being that it is a more holistic approach than what we find in the writings of Evagrius. "Macarius insists on the total encountering in ever-increasing awareness and even "feeling" of the presence of the indwelling Trinity through the power of the Holy Spirit."¹² In order to explain what the heart is, Macarius described the nature of encounter between God and man:

His very grace writes in their hearts the laws of the Spirit. They should not put all their trusting hope solely in the Scriptures written in ink. For divine grace writes on the "tables of the heart" (2 Cor 3:3) the laws of the Spirit and the heavenly mysteries. For the heart directs and governs all the other organs of the body. And when grace pastures the heart, it rules over all the members and the thoughts. For there, in the heart, the mind abides as well as all the thoughts of the soul and all its hopes. This is how grace penetrates throughout all parts of the body.¹³

Such an understanding of the heart as the center of human beings is similar to the biblical understanding of the heart as a moral and spiritual center of man.¹⁴ "Thus, Macarius sought not a disincarnation of the mind, but the transfiguration of the entire person through union with

¹¹ Gregory K. Hillis, *To Be Transformed by a Vision of Uncreated Light: A Survey on the Influence of the Existential Spirituality of Hesychasm on Eastern Orthodox History*, <http://www.euphrosynoscafe.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=6106>, accessed 12. 06. 2016.

¹² Pseudo-Macarius, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, p. 3.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 116.

¹⁴ Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love*, Crestwood, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985, p. 51.

God.”¹⁵ From this foundation, we can understand his mystical theology about the transformation of whole man, the whole person.

Mystical theology of Pseudo-Macarius

Pseudo-Macarius will express the experience of communion with God through the images of flight and intoxication, and the source of the man’s intoxication is divine nature.¹⁶ The central theme of his *Homilies* is man’s longing for God, who provides grace which penetrates man’s soul. In the end, the whole man is transformed when the divine lights enters into him.

Whoever approaches God and truly desires to be a partner of Christ must approach with a view to this goal, namely, to be changed and transformed from his former state and attitude and become a good and new person, harboring nothing of “the old man” (2 Cor 5:17). For it says, “If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Cor 5:17). *Homily 44:1*

The longing of the soul for God is often rewarded by “an awakening of the spiritual senses, raptures, miracles, freedom from sin, profound peace, charity toward all, and becoming one spirit with God, deification itself”.¹⁷ For Pseudo-Macarius, intoxication with divine nature is a transient experience, and so it can never be a permanent experience available in the present age. Intoxication is the gift of God; it is the work of His Grace upon man’s heart. As free beings, we can accept and cooperate with God’s divine grace, or we can reject this gift. In his homilies, ‘Macarius’ explained this many times-and what is more important is that he explained this always through a loving relationship between two subjects. In his *Homilies*, he is not speaking about a rational relationship between object and subject, where the subject is called through its rational powers to achieve and explore God. Moreover, he is stressing the free-will of man “to turn away from the pursuit of God, and become intoxicated by bad/evil, a phrase not found in Gregory”.¹⁸

“Although Ps-Macarius refers to being intoxicated with the spirit, or with the Godhead, he also uses the terminology of being intoxicated

¹⁵ Harvey D. Egan, S. J., *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, Collegeville, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1987, p. 81.

¹⁶ Stuart Burns, "Divine Ecstasy in Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Macarius: Flight and Intoxication", in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, VII (1999), No. 1-4, p. 312.

¹⁷ Harvey D. Egan, S.J., *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, p. 83.

¹⁸ Stuart Burns, "Divine Ecstasy in Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Macarius: Flight and Intoxication", p. 313.

with “good”, and “joyfulness”. Goodness in this instance, being the sheer abundance of God. This is to be contrasted with that of “badness” or “evil” intoxication, which he refers to in *Collection I Homily 6.4*.¹⁹ In his *Homily 8*, Ps-Macarius explained that there are “twelve steps a person has to pass to reach perfection.” (*Homily 8.4*). As we said before, union with God is in the present age always transient, but in Paradise this stage will be permanent.

Ps-Macarius expressed communication with God through the image of the soul’s flight towards God. Stressing the role of the prayer within the flight of the soul is a unique contribution of Ps-Macarius:

To fly into the divine air and enjoy the liberty of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18) may be one’s desire, but, if he does not have wings given him, he cannot. Let us pray to God that he gives us “the wings of a dove” (Ps 55:7) of the Holy Spirit so we may fly to him and find rest and that he may separate and take away from our soul and body such an evil wind, namely, sin itself, inhabiting the members of our soul and body. For this he alone is able to do. *Homily 2.3*.

To explain this journey of the soul, Ps-Macarius insisted on the image of “the eagle who is ‘constantly upon the wing’ yet with much stillness and rest, with the flight of the soul who receives the ‘Wings of the Spirit’ and is ‘furnished with wings’”. This use of the eagle as an image is connected to the power and rest that the bird displays in flight”.²⁰ The soul in flight is described as free, free from all the weights of the earthly distractions to prayer, and protected from evil during the journey of prayer. It is interesting that in Ps-Macarius’ understanding even God’s grace is not constant, grace ebbs and flows according to the divine will. For this reason, someone could attain a higher level, but because of God’s grace he “descends to the next lower level, now standing on the eleventh step” (*Homily 2.4*). The most important thing in a monk’s life is his persistence in prayer.

All other virtues can be acquired by it for prayer establishes the communion of the soul with God, the source of all spiritual power, and links it with Him in ineffable love. He who compels himself to persevere in prayer is inflamed to divine *eros* and receives the grace of the sanctifying perfection of the Spirit.²¹

For our work it is necessary to mention *The Healing Motif* in the Homilies of ‘Macarius’.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 312.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 320.

²¹ Werner Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius*, p. 210.

The healing motif found in the Macarian Homilies and in 4Q374 include another important feature. Both texts interpret *healing* to be the *healing of the human heart*...

The Homily II.20.7 also links the motif of healing with the theme of the curing (or cleansing) of the human heart. It tells that “man could be healed only by the help of this medicine and thus could attain life by a cleansing of his heart by the Holy Spirit.

...In the Macarian Homilies the motif of “healing” is understood as the restoration of the former Adamic glory, the glorious garments with which the first humans were clothed in Eden before their transgression.²²

Consequences of communion with God in Ps-Macarius

1. Spirituality:

After these preliminary descriptions, we are ready to speak about the consequences of Ps-Macarius’ teachings on our life. Even though Ps-Macarius was writing his works for monastic communities, his work can be brought into the Church’s everyday life with some observances.

One of the problems in his time was the distinction between ‘praying monks’ and ‘serving brethren’,²³ and this problem he addressed especially in *Homily 3*.²⁴

The brethren should conduct themselves toward one another with the greatest love, whether in praying or reading Scripture or doing any kind of work so that they may have the foundation of charity toward others. *Homily 3.1*.

The brethren, therefore, regardless of what work they are doing, ought to conduct themselves toward each other in love and cheerfulness. And the one who works should say of him who is praying: “I also possess the treasure which my brother possesses since it is common.” And let him who prays say of him who reads: “What he gains from reading redounds also to my advantage.” And he who works let him thus say: “The work which I am doing is for the common good.” For as the members of the body, being many, are one body (1 Cor 12:12) and help each other while each still performs its own function – as the eye sees for

²² Andrei A. Orlov, *Vested with Adam’s Glory: Moses as the Luminous Counterpart of Adam in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Macarian Homilies*, p. 15-16, in www.marquette.edu/maqom/moses3.pdf, accessed 27. 03. 2012.

²³ Werner Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius*, p. 206.

²⁴ *Pseudo-Macarius, The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, p. 47.

the whole body and the hand labors for all the members and the foot walks sustaining all the members, and another members suffers with all the others-so also the brethren should be among themselves. *Homily 3.2.*

This passage we can use as a pattern for our understanding of spirituality. Ps-Macarius through these words signifies that there are different ways to express Christian spirituality. If our work is conducted for the sake of the common good and for the whole community, primarily out of love, then it also equally expresses a road towards God. This understanding, if we expand it to the whole community where we are spending our everyday life, teaches us that the expressions of spirituality that we find in all at our work have potential for us to participate in a passionate love towards God (*eros*) and towards others.

‘Macarius’ writings are also important for understanding other varieties of mysticism, because in comparison with others, he insisted on the diversity of the Holy Spirit’s manifestations.

It is, therefore, possible that anyone, who thus really strives and perseveringly attends to himself either in prayer or in obedience or in *doing any work according to God*, should be able to escape from the darkness of the evil demons. *Homily 9.11.*²⁵

In addition, Ps-Macarius will speak about spirituality and how it has different expressions in different people. If man is in communion with God, then although the gifts are the same, their expressions can be different.

Those various manifestations of grace that we spoke of, even though they are expressed differently, still they act on such persons in a progression, one operation following another. Finally, when a person reaches the perfection of the Spirit, completely purified of all passions and united to and interpenetrated by the Paraclete Spirit in an ineffable communion, and is deemed worthy to become spirit in mutual penetration with the Spirit, then it becomes all light, all eye, all spirit, all joy, all repose, all happiness, all love, all compassion, all goodness and kindness. As in the bottom of the sea, a stone is everywhere surrounded by water, so such persons as these are totally penetrated by the Holy Spirit. They become like to Christ, putting on the virtues of the power of the Spirit with a constancy. They interiorly become faultless and spotless and pure. *Homily 18.10.*²⁶

This understanding of spirituality deliberates us from every ‘conventional’ way of thinkig where we radically limit the varieties of

²⁵ *Pseudo-Macarius, The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, p. 87.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 145.

spirituality's expressions, discerning what is acceptable and what is not to be called 'spiritual'. Usually in our life, we connect spirituality with one of the monastic communities. And many times, that kind of spirituality could be "cheap pseudo-spirituality".²⁷ But people "enjoy cheapness, as long as it is covered with beards, crosses, and comfortable words."²⁸

It is dangerous if we forget that spirituality can be expressed in everyday life, if it is immersed in any work according to God and out of love for Him and others.

2. To Approach God:

Through the Homilies, Ps-Macarius insists on showing us the abundance of God's love. He uses various examples to draw a living picture of that love, many of these pictures he was using from the Bible or through the usage of his own parables. His intention is to call us that we can conduct ourselves to approach to this abundant love. To approach it means to strive for perfection, both inner and outward man.²⁹

Let us, therefore, strive to approach him with a truly converted heart, not despairing that we will ever attain salvation (for such a thought itself is evil and depraved). The remembrance of our past sins can easily lead us to despair, to sloth, negligence, and resignation that we may not be converted to the Lord and ever attain salvation, even though the great goodness of the Lord covers the whole human race. *Homily 4. 24.*³⁰

Even before someone wants to approach to God, he needs to force himself to love, and to wait for His mercy.

It is, however, necessary at first for one coming to the Lord to force himself thus to do good and, even if he should not in his heart be so inclined, he must constantly await his mercy with unshakened faith and push himself to love, even if he has none, to mercy and to have a merciful heart. He must force himself to be disregarded, and when he is looked down upon by others, let him rejoice. When he is made light of or dishonored, let him not become angry according to the saying: "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves" (Rom 12:19). Let him push himself to prayer even when he does not possess the prayer of the Spirit. And so, God, seeing him striving so and pushing himself by determination, even if the heart is unwilling, gives him the authentic prayer of the Spirit, gives

²⁷ *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemmann 1973-1983*, New York, Sv. Vladimir' Press, 2002, p. 2.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ *Pseudo-Macarius, The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, (1992), Paulist Press, New York, p. 48.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

him true charity, true meekness, “the bowels of mercies” (Col 3:12), true kindness, and, simply put, fills him with the fruits of the Spirit. *Homily 19.3*.³¹

3. Reject the Whole World as a Center of our Lives:

Many times Ps-Macarius was speaking about a rejection of this world if we want to attain communion with God. If someone refused “to deny himself, but rather loved something of this world, all those worldly desires and evil passions of the flesh resulted.” (*Homily 5.6.*)³² He was saying the following:

After I received the experience of the sign of the cross, grace now acts in this manner. It quiets all my parts and my heart so that the soul with the greatest joy seems to be guileless child. No longer am I a man that condemns Greek or Jew or sinner or worldling. Truly, the interior man looks on all human beings with pure eyes and finds joy in the whole world. He really wishes to reverence and love all Greeks and Jews. *Homily 8.6.*³³

So then, how is one to understand something like this, a ‘rejection of the world’ and then a ‘love for the world’? Ps-Macarius is not speaking about a rejection of the world in a way that we should view this world as sinful, trying to do nothing to save it. If we are investing all our hopes and dreams into this world, if we are relying our beings only on this world, then all the evil passions of the flesh will become visible. Moreover, if we begin to look into this world through the eyes that are enlightened by God’s love and communion with Him then we are reflecting God’s love toward every creature. Creation becomes our road towards God, and joy. “All visible things God created, and gave them to men for recreation and enjoyment, and he gave them also a law of justice”³⁴

In the same time, this world is becoming a place in which we strive for our salvation. This mutual relationship between man and the world is further emphasized through Ps-Macarius’ teaching that the experience of God is transient, which is the reason why we need to strive in this world. ‘Macarius’ mentioned that Satan wants to lead us into despair promising to us that we cannot be saved because of multitude of our sins. That is the reason why this world is the theater where we are coping to reflect God’s love to the world, so that he allowed us that we can approach Him.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 147.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 65.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 104-105.

For how lovely it is when a spiritual person consecrates himself totally to the Lord and clings to him alone. He walks in his commandments, never forgetting. Reverently honoring the overshadowing presence of the Spirit of Christ, he becomes one spirit with him and one being, just as the Apostle says: “He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit” (1 Cor 6:17)... Let us, therefore, prepare ourselves so that we may approach the Lord with perfect promptitude and full intent. And let us become passionately in love with Christ to do his will. And let us “think upon his commandments so as to do them” (Ps 103:18). *Homily 9.12-13*.³⁵

4. The Fruits:

a) Love

Ps-Macarius continues, stressing that prayer without love and deeds of love is nothing. Moreover, we could say that his message is that “it is not enough to *say* prayers; one must become, *be* prayer, prayer incarnate”.³⁶

If a person pushes himself to attain prayer alone, when he has none, in order to attain its grace, without striving earnestly for meekness and humility and charity and all the other commandments of the Lord, neither taking pains nor struggling and battling to succeed in these as far as his choice and free will go, he may at times be given a grace of prayer with some degree of repose and pleasure from the Spirit according as he asks. But he has the same traits he had before. He has no meekness, because he did not seek it with effort and he did not prepare himself beforehand to become weak. He has no humility, since he did not ask for it and did not push himself to have it. He has no charity toward all men, because he was not concerned with it and did not strive for it in his asking for the gift of prayer. And in doing his work, he has no faith or trust in God, since he did not know that he was without it. *Homily 194*.³⁷

Later he emphasizes that from a communion with God, our love is growing more and more. “The Spirit himself graces him with all of these virtues and teaches him authentic prayer, authentic charity, authentic meekness, for which he pushed himself and sought to possess them. And he had a concern and thought about them and they were given to him”.³⁸

b) Love toward Fellow Man

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

³⁶ Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love*, Crestwood, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985, p. 62.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 147.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 149.

The love towards God and our offering of ourselves to him is the beginning of a process when a communion with God starts in loving relationship with the world and fellow men. This mutual communion is inseparable, and that's why our relationship towards God is not our private affair without the fruits of the Spirit that empower us and spread themselves through us.

...We must first beg of God with struggle in the heart through faith that he grants us to discover his riches, the true treasure of Christ in our hearts, in the power and energy of the Spirit. In such a way, first, by finding the Lord to be our help within us and our salvation and eternal life, we may be of help and profit to others also, insofar as it is possible and attainable, by drawing upon Christ, the treasure within, for all goodness of spiritual discourses and in teaching the heavenly mysteries. Thus the goodness of the Father was pleased to wish to dwell in every believer who asks this of him. *Homily 18.6.*³⁹

The Father's goodness that dwells in us, while we are in communion with Him, empowered us not only in practical help to the others, but also in spiritual help to others. Those who are rich in the Holy Spirit,

they truly possess the fellowship of the Spirit within themselves. And when they speak words of truth or deliver any spiritual conference and wish to edify persons who listen to their spiritual discourses. And they do not fear lest they run short since they possess within themselves the heavenly treasure of goodness from which they draw to feed those who hunger for spiritual food. *Homily 18.5.*⁴⁰

On the subject of love, Ps-Macarius further explain that there is no salvation except through one's neighbors.

For the Lord, in commanding many things regarding love, enjoined us to seek the "righteousness of God" (Mt 6:33). For he knows that it is the mother of love. There is no other way to be saved except through the neighbor as he has commanded: "Forgive and it will be forgiven you" (Lk 6:37). This is the spiritual law which has been written in faithful hearts, "the fulfillment of the first law" (Rom 13:10). For he says, "I did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it" (Mt 5:17). *Homily 37.3.*⁴¹

c) Inseparable Connection Between Virtues

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 149.

Ps-Macarius quoted the apostle Paul in a way that stressed the idea that charity is the “bond of perfection” (*Homily 26.16.*).

Do you not hear what Paul says? “If I have all gifts, if I hand my body over to be burnt, if I should speak with the tongues of angels and, yet, I have no charity, I am nothing” (1 Cor 13:1ss). These gifts really are to encourage us. And those who settle for these, even though they are in light, they still are infants. For many of the brothers have reached this degree and enjoyed the gifts of healings and revelation and prophecy. But because they did not reach perfect charity which is the “bond of perfection” (Col 3:18), war came upon them and, because they were negligent, they fell. *Homily 26.16.*⁴²

On the subject of charity, Ps-Macarius is speaking in a more profound way that it is a practical experience of a communion with God.

Charity... is perfect... other things are of little importance, and he who possesses charity cannot fall. I tell you this, that I have seen men who received all the gifts and were participators of the Spirit, but, not reaching perfect charity, they fell. *Homily 27.14.*⁴³

Reading carefully works of Ps-Macarius, we can see that from the core of his theology prayer is inseparably connected with other virtues.

Concerning external asceticism and what practice is better and primary, know this, Beloved Ones, that all the virtues are mutually bound to each other. Like a spiritual chain, one is dependent upon the other: prayer to love, love to joy, joy to meekness, meekness to humility, humility to service, service to hope, hope to faith, faith to obedience, obedience to simplicity. *Homily 40.1.*⁴⁴

Even prayer as a virtue is nothing if it is not followed with love and charity that is inseparably bounded with a life in community with other human beings.

...If through the activity of the Spirit we do not perceive within ourselves the fruits of love, peace, and the other qualities mentioned by St. Paul (Gal 5:22), then our labor for the sake of virginity, prayer, psalmody, fasting, and vigil is useless. *The Great Letter.*⁴⁵

d) How to Conduct Life in the Community

Addressing the monastic community, we can see how a community needs to live in love.

To deny the soul is to deny one’s will, even to suppress it. It is always to embrace the Word of God and also to lead the congregation of

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 149.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 180.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 214.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 268.

brothers, like a good steersman in a boat, in harmony to the port of God's will. However, you must possess nothing, not claiming anything as your own beyond what is common to all, except what garment covers your body. For if one has none of these things, but gives up even the care of his own life, the community will take care of all necessities as he performs with pleasure and hope whatever he is commanded to do as the honest and simple servant of Christ, redeemed to serve the common need of the brethren. *The Great Letter*.⁴⁶

In his *Great Letter*, Ps-Macarius devotes an entire part to explain the importance of love towards God and towards one's neighbor. A strong bond with God empowers us so that we can fulfill all the good deeds in our local community, and the community of the whole world.

Discovering the knowledge of God and understanding the fear of him, you will properly succeed at what follows, namely, to love your neighbor... If the love of God dwells within you, it is necessary that such love bring forth other fruit, such as fraternal love, meekness, sincerity, perseverance in prayer, and zeal and all virtues. But since the treasure is precious, so also great are the labors necessary to obtain it... Much struggle is needed, therefore, and much inward and unseen travail, much scrutiny of our thoughts and training of our soul's enfeebled organs of perception, before we can discriminate between good and evil. The mind that follows God knows how to exercise the soul, binding it to itself out of love for God and by hidden virtuous thoughts and good works healing what is weak and joining it to what is strong... The fulfillment of the commandments becomes easy and delightful to those who love God, since his love makes the struggle for us easy and lovable. *The Great Letter*.⁴⁷

Even though this *Great Letter* is addressed to the monastic communities, 'Macarius' will extend his understanding of love to the extent that God's empowered love is a love for all mankind!

...No one who seriously seeks salvation will lack power to do good. The Lord says: "Whoever will give even a cup of cold water to someone simply in the name of a disciple, amen, I say to you, that he will not go unrewarded" (Mt 10:42).

What can be more powerful than this commandment? Heavenly reward follows upon a cup of cold water. And look at the immense love for mankind! *The Great Letter*.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 260-261.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 264.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 271.

When we carefully read Ps-Macarius, we can see that communion with God is not a matter of an individual, but of a *person*. “Ps-Macarius stands with Gregory as one who began to illuminate the process by which the reception of heavenly wisdom occurs and who grounded his theology into community life”.⁴⁹

We see that to move towards God means to move towards the whole Creation. This enables us to conclude that man, for Ps-Macarius, is “catholic” man. It is this “catholic” man that gathered the whole creation and offered it to God, and he needs to approach not as an individual, but as the one who unites the whole world in himself.

Many times, society repeats that religion is a matter of one’s individual being. Every social involvement of the Christians is often reduced by these accusations. Society actually has only recognized something that is a reality in our Christian life. We as Christians have understood that our spirituality is an individual communion with God. In order to achieve enlightenment, we are ready to break every bond with society, and creation. We need to stress openly that every kind of Christian spirituality that is separated from the God’s creation is a false spirituality. It is not possible for someone who is empowered and fulfilled with divine love to remain silent and passive upon the troubles of the world around him.

Becoming closer to God, our healed heart will be empowered for perfect love towards every being. Through God, our being becomes immersed in the depths of his love. From this perspective, spirituality is not some kind of independent intellectual or emotional relationship ‘God-man’ where the whole creation is despised and abandoned. Moreover, creation is put in its proper place as a space where we are striving for communion with God and a place where we are called to reflect divine love. This understanding of communion with God teaches us to act and to commit deeds of love. In addition, communion with God is a calling to strive unceasingly in this time and this in this world for every fruit of the Spirit, for the healing of the heart, and for the reflection of divine love.

⁴⁹ Stuart Burns, "Divine Ecstasy in Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Macarius: Flight and Intoxication", p. 323.

