

# Gut-Madness: On the Passion of Gluttony

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## Abstract

Gluttony is common and comfortable in contemporary society. Often expressed as an internal desire to consume in excess (particularly of unhealthy food), gluttony provides a significant, yet stubborn challenge due to its prevalent, well-established risks to physical health. Through the lens of ancient Christianity, however, the external harms of gluttony on physical health are expressed through deeper, internal concerns to spiritual health—with gluttony described as a strong and brutal passion that fetters the heart, destroys everything good, and the cause of all human shipwreck. This paper provides an introductory summary of the passion of gluttony, its power to move one beyond health, need, and control, while also highlighting prescribed remedies to move one beyond passion.

## Introduction

During his radio broadcasts in the early 1940s, which would later be compiled as *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis, proposed a farfetched example to capture the runaway indulgence of carnal appetites.

You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act—that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you come to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let everyone see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in the country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food?<sup>1</sup>

I was recently reminded of this peculiar and farfetched example while on the treadmill at the gym. Elevated in front of me were two television screens. On one screen was a man stuffing bite after bite of what appeared to be ten pounds of fully loaded nachos, under a time constraint, with a crowd of people behind him enthusiastically cheering on the debauchery. On the neighboring screen was a cooking show highlighting the eager preparation of a food critic's favorite dish. Each dish was revealed in a tantalizing way, building tension to the climax when we, the audience, could watch and (much to our relief) vicariously enjoy the critic sensuously savor each bite.

Peculiar, indeed, but can we still say farfetched? Has something gone wrong in our contemporary society, which has invented and dedicated a phrase for its seductive food culture of indulgence, excess, and desire—*food porn*—which sees food, like sex, as a performance and voyeuristic exercise

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity* (3.5), (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001), 96.

to be openly shared and readily consumed?<sup>2</sup> While, one might hypothesize that such a country would be that of famine to have such an absurd appetite for food, Lewis points out an ancient Christian understanding that appetite grows by indulgence—“Starving men may think much about food, but so do gluttons; the gorged, as well as the famished, like titillations.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps a bit more strikingly, St John Climacus writes in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*:

Gluttony is hypocrisy of the stomach. Filled, it moans about scarcity; stuffed, and crammed, it wails about its hunger...For the truth is, as one will discover, that the belly is the cause of all human shipwreck.<sup>4</sup>

Modern environments are designed to entice the carnal passions for food. A single fast-food meal could give one half of a day’s worth of calories, with little nutrition. Low-fat foods are packed with sugar, and low-sugar foods are packed with fat. Coloring is added, and foods are engineered to trigger the brain’s instinctual appetites, as if it was that rare, edible gem found in the wild. Such food is even used for emotion-focused coping, as the brain responds with a powerful, biochemical response that manifests as pleasant feelings and comfort. This is why “comfort foods” are chocolate or ice cream, and not broccoli or Brussels sprouts.

Since the years of Lewis’ observations, the allotted amount of added sugar and sweeteners has ballooned to between 125–150 pounds *per person* each year.<sup>5</sup> A single can of soda is nearly two days’ worth of added sugar, for an adult, while certain popular coffee-type drinks can surpass four or five days’ worth of added sugar. For comparison, the native Anbara people of Australia, without modern confections, have been estimated to consume only four to five pounds per year of their primary sweetener, honey.<sup>6</sup> And so the proverb warns, while “the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste” (as wisdom should be to the soul), one is to not be misled into over-indulgence—“If you have found honey, eat only enough for you, lest you have your fill of it and vomit it,” (Prov 24:13–14; 25:16).

## Gluttony

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<sup>2</sup> Jordan, Amanda. "Food Porn." Master's thesis, Minnesota State University, Mankato, 2025; Magee, Richard M. "Food puritanism and food pornography: The gourmet semiotics of Martha and Nigella." *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture* 6, no. 2 (2007): 1–9.

<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (3.5), 97.

<sup>4</sup> John Climacus. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (Step 14), Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell, trans. (Paulist Press, 1982), 165.

<sup>5</sup> “Food Availability Data System: Sugar and Sweeteners (Added),” *United States Department of Agriculture. Food Availability Data System*, <<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-per-capita-data-system>>, September 27, 2024; Putnam, Judy. "Major trends in US food supply, 1909–99." *Food Review/National Food Review* 23, no. 1 (2000): 8–15.

<sup>6</sup> Meehan, Betty. "Hunters by the seashore." *Journal of Human Evolution* 6, no. 4 (1977): 363–370; Allsop, Karen A., and Janette Brand Miller. "Honey revisited: a reappraisal of honey in pre-industrial diets." *British Journal of Nutrition* 75, no. 4 (1996): 513–520.

“Who is a stranger to the brutish pleasure of gluttony?”<sup>7</sup>

This question is as relevant for Christians today, if not more, as for those to whom St Gregory of Nyssa spoke in the fourth century. Gluttony has found a comfortable home in contemporary society, inspired by constant inner thoughts and dialogues about food (now termed, “food noise”<sup>8</sup>), insatiable appetites, accessible and tempting environments, and a norm in the common pleasures of this life—even to the point, according to Dr Jean Claude Larchet, of being “stripped of guilt and perversely set up as a virtue.”<sup>9</sup>

The English word *gluttony* comes from the Latin *gluttire*, roughly meaning to swallow or gulp down in an overindulgent, excessive manner—most commonly of food (overeating) or alcohol (drunkenness). Depictions, warnings, and consequences of gluttony are found throughout the Scriptures, such as Adam’s first trespass being seen as an act of gluttony, to those from whom God saved creation through the flood,<sup>10</sup> to the sins of Sodom (Ez 16:49), to Israel’s desire of forbidden foods and the flesh pots of Egypt (Ex 16; Nu 11), in acts idolatry (Ex 32:6; Phil 3:17–19), of persistent desire for drunkenness and delicacies (Is 5:11–12; Prov 23:1–3, 20–21; Titus 1:12), of the prodigal son, (Lk 15:11–32), and to the accusations of unrepentant prodigality against Jesus (Mt 11:18–19; Lk 7:33–35; Deut 21:19–21).

According to the Church Fathers, gluttony is not simply another carnal passion, but is declared first among the eight principal faults,<sup>11</sup> “the prince of the passions,”<sup>12</sup> a “strong and brutal passion,”<sup>13</sup> that

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<sup>7</sup> Gregory of Nyssa. “The Lord’s Prayer” (4), in *The Lord’s Prayer and the Beatitudes*, H.C. Graef, trans. (Florence, AZ: SAGOM Press, 2021), 62–63.

<sup>8</sup> Diktas, Hanim E., Michelle I. Cardel, Gary D. Foster, et al., “Development and validation of the Food Noise Questionnaire.” *Obesity* 33, no. 2 (2025): 289–297.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Claude Larchet. *The Spiritual Roots of the Ecological Crisis*, Archibald Andrew Torrance, trans. (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Publications, 2022), 73.

<sup>10</sup> John Chrysostom. “Homilies on Matthew” (13.2), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 10 (First Series), Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 80.

<sup>11</sup> John Cassian. “The Institutes” (5.1), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 11 (Second Series), Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 233.

<sup>12</sup> John Climacus. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (Step 14), 169.

<sup>13</sup> John Chrysostom. “Homilies on First Corinthians” (17.1), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 12 (First Series), Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 96.

“feters the heart”<sup>14</sup> and “destroys everything good.”<sup>15</sup> St Gregory adds, commenting on the Lord’s Prayer:

And the pleasure of taste is, one may well say, the mother of each individual evil. For who does not know that indulgence of the palate is pretty nearly the root of the sins committed in the physical life? For on this depend luxury and drunkenness, gluttony and prodigality of table, filling oneself up to satiety and reveling until one sinks into the depths of shameful passions like irrational brutes.<sup>16</sup>

To emphasize its carnal and brutish qualities, gluttony is often expressed through the *belly* (*γαστήρ*), the “seat of the passions,” and in turn, with the desirous power of the soul (*επιθυμία*)—for, “inordinate eating and carnal luxuriousness are the parents of desires.”<sup>17</sup> St Neilos the Ascetic says that the belly is “a very apt symbol for the life of pleasure, since the belly is the cause of virtually all pleasures ...”<sup>18</sup> Surveying the patristic tradition, Fr Dimitru Staniloae points out that, “the stomach, by gluttony, becomes a sea impossible to fill—a good description of any passion.”<sup>19</sup> The infinite thirst of the passions, rather than being filled with the Infinite, relentlessly seek to be filled with the finite objects of this world that can never satisfy them. Thus, gluttony is most often referred to as *gastrimargia* (*γαστριμαργία*), literally *gut-madness*.<sup>20</sup>

With what has already been shared, perhaps this description is still fitting for us, and our bellies, today—as well as an enlightening explanation for the many who are struggling against or who have surrendered to the passion of gluttony. As a helpful guide, what follows is an introduction to gluttony through the lens of ancient Christianity for how it can move one *beyond need*, *beyond health*, and *beyond control*, while also sharing often prescribed remedies for moving *beyond passion*.

## 1 | Beyond Need

First, the passion of gluttony moves one beyond need.

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<sup>14</sup> Jerome. “Against Jovinianus” (2.8), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 6 (Second Series), Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 394.

<sup>15</sup> Neilos the Ascetic. “Ascetic Discourse,” in *The Philokalia* 1, G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, ed. (Faber and Faber, 1979), 239.

<sup>16</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *The Lord’s Prayer* (4), 62–63.

<sup>17</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on First Corinthians (15.4), 85.

<sup>18</sup> Neilos the Ascetic, *Ascetic Discourse*, 238.

<sup>19</sup> Dumitru Staniloae. *Orthodox Spirituality: A Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar* (Part 1.7), Archimandrite Jerome (Newville) and Otilia Kloos, trans. (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2003), 77.

<sup>20</sup> John Cassian. “The Conferences” (5.2), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 11 (Second Series), Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 339.

The ancient Christian view is very consistent—that the quantity and/or quality of food should be chosen and eaten as necessity, sufficient for the body’s need for health and function.<sup>21</sup> For example, since humans cannot subsist without tasting food, “It follows,” says St Jerome, “that reason must be present, that we may take food of such a kind and in such quantities as will not burden the body, or hinder the free movement of the soul ...”<sup>22</sup> And, from St John Cassian, “For it is not only the quality, but also the quantity of food taken which dulls the keenness of the mind, and when the soul as well as the flesh is surfeited, kindles the baneful and fiery incentive to vice.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Quantity**

Take a moment to answer the following question: Have you overeaten at any point in the past week?

If you answered “yes,” then you are not alone. Researchers have found that a majority of self-professed Christians confessed they had *overeaten* in the past week,<sup>24</sup> and Americans overeat beyond health recommendations, on average. In turn, more than 50% of US adults are currently trying to lose weight,<sup>25</sup> mostly by trying to reduce sugar, although less willing to challenge the belly to reduce calories or processed food.<sup>26</sup>

Ancient Christians did not have our modern calculators to help assess daily energy (calorie) needs or serving sizes,<sup>27</sup> but there is ample teaching on paying attention and individual prescriptions to *how* and *how much* one eats. For example, while the “righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite,” teaches a proverb, “the belly of the wicked suffers want,” (Prov 13:25). More specific guidance can be seen in the three types of gluttony shared by St John Cassian:

- (1) that which drives a monk to eat before the proper and stated times;
- (2) that which cares about filling the belly and gorging it with all kinds of food, and
- (3) that which is on the lookout for dainties and delicacies.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Isaac the Syrian. *The Ascetical Homilies* (17), Revised Second Edition (Boston, MA: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 2024), 214.

<sup>22</sup> Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* (2.10), 395.

<sup>23</sup> John Cassian, *The Institutes* (5.6), 235.

<sup>24</sup> “Religion in Everyday Life,” Pew Research Center, <<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2016/04/12/religion-in-everyday-life>>, April 12, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> “43% of Americans Say They are Overweight; 55% Want to Slim Down,” Gallup <<https://news.gallup.com/poll/654425/americans-say-overweight-slim-down.aspx#:~:text=Although%2055%25%20of%20U.S.%20adults,%25%20Yes>>, December 26, 2024.

<sup>26</sup> Bailey, Pippa et al., “Actions & Interventions for Weight Loss,” Ipsos <<https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2021-01/actions-and-interventions-for-weight-loss.pdf>>, January 18, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> For example: <<https://www.nal.usda.gov/human-nutrition-and-food-safety/dri-calculator>>

<sup>28</sup> John Cassian, *The Conferences* (5.11), 343.

Because each person has different needs based on their age and physical condition, it is impossible to impose a single, strict rule of food for all. We might self-diagnose eating beyond need as “being full,” having to unbutton our pants after a meal, or saying “my eyes were bigger than my stomach” after loading up too much food on a buffet plate, during a holiday meal, or at a church celebration. The consensus of the Church Fathers is that if we have eaten until we are “full,” we have likely overeaten.

However, our feelings of being full can be deceptive. For example, the stomach has receptors that sense stretch and communicate back to our brains to regulate food intake, telling us when we are getting full.<sup>29</sup> The more we overeat, these receptors can undergo a drastic shift. In adults with obesity, for example, the receptors that normally tell them to *reduce* food intake as the stomach fills, can actually *promote* food intake, telling them to eat more.<sup>30</sup> Also, with diets that are high in fat, such as is common to the Standard American Diet (appropriately, *SAD*, for short), the receptors that sense stomach stretch become dampened and not as sensitive to the stretching, so the brain does not get the normal signal of fullness, and more easily can lead to overeating beyond need.

Thus, according to St Basil the Great, the objective that must be common to all Christians is “satisfying need,” since:

Filling the stomach to satiety, burdening it with food, is an act deserving of malediction ... such excess renders the body unfit for work, prone to sleep, and more susceptible to harm. Nor, to be sure, ought pleasure to be made an end in taking food, but the aim should be the *sustaining of life* for those who have renounced intemperate delights...<sup>31</sup>

Such concerns also point to the *quality* of food.

### **Quality**

From a health perspective (barring specific medical contraindications), the current scientific evidence is consistently clear that humans *need* sensible combinations of whole, nutrient-dense foods like fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, seeds, and other plants naturally packed with nutrition<sup>32</sup>—while more closely imitating the diet of Paradise (Gen 1:29), as St. Basil encourages:

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<sup>29</sup> Brookes, Simon JH, Nick J. Spencer, Marcello Costa, and Vladimir P. Zagorodnyuk. "Extrinsic primary afferent signalling in the gut." *Nature reviews Gastroenterology & Hepatology* 10, no. 5 (2013): 286–296.

<sup>30</sup> Page, Amanda J., and Stephen J. Kentish. "Plasticity of gastrointestinal vagal afferent satiety signals." *Neurogastroenterology & Motility* 29, no. 5 (2017): e12973.

<sup>31</sup> Basil the Great. “The Long Rules” (Q.19), in *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works, The Fathers of the Church* 9, Sister M. Monica Wagner, trans. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1950), 275.

<sup>32</sup> Katz, David L., and Stephanie Meller. "Can we say what diet is best for health?" *Annual review of public health* 35, no. 1 (2014): 83–103.; Frates, B., Faries, M. D., & Katz, D. L. (2021). Lifestyle medicine. In Maxcy–Rosenau–Last *Public Health and Preventive Medicine* (16<sup>th</sup> Ed.). McGraw–Hill.; “Scientific Report of the 2025 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee,” Dietary Guidelines for Americans, <<https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/2025-advisory-committee-report>>.

However, now indeed as we wish to conduct ourselves in imitation of the life of paradise, we avoid this excessively material enjoyment of foods, conducting ourselves as far as is possible according to that life, using fruits and grains and the produce of fruit trees for passing through life, but what surpasses these things we reject as unnecessary.<sup>33</sup>

Yet, prevalent temptations to eat beyond need are not from healthy, high-quality foods that sustain health and the mind, but from unhealthy, low-quality foods that sustain illness and the passions. So, concern is shared, first, not necessarily of the amount of food, but of the pleasurable taste of food. For example, St Basil issues another lesson of warning, remembering how the adversary lured Adam from the life in Paradise, and sought to test Jesus in his hunger:

The vice of gluttony is wont to display its proper force not with regard to a great quantity of food, but in the appetite for a little taste. If, therefore, desire of some bit of food succeed in making you subject to the vice of gluttony, he [the adversary] will give you up to destruction without further ado.<sup>34</sup>

With such an understanding, the Christian can ask often, “Do I *need* this?”—being attentive to distinguish what is harmful from what is healthful,<sup>35</sup> and supplying a reminder of the importance of eating from need (both quantity and quality of food), rather than *want*, which only adds fuel to the passionate fire of the belly.

## 2 | Beyond Health

Next, the passion of gluttony moves one beyond health.

When defining gluttony, Larchet notes that in seeking out different kinds of food, whether quantitatively or qualitative, it is “not with the aim of getting something to eat and maintaining one’s health, but simply on account of the pleasure they are able to give. ... a veritable perversion of the nutritive function ...”<sup>36</sup> Or, as St Mark the Monk notes, “He who enjoys bodily pleasures beyond the proper limit will pay for the excess a hundredfold in sufferings.”<sup>37</sup> Such sufferings span both *physical* and *spiritual* health.

### **Physical Health**

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<sup>33</sup> Basil the Great. “On the Origin of Humanity” (Discourse 2.7), in in *On the Human Condition, Popular Patristics Series 30*, N.V. Harrison, trans. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 54.

<sup>34</sup> Basil the Great. “On Renunciation of the World,” in *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works, The Fathers of the Church 9*, Sister M. Monica Wagner, trans. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1950), 24.

<sup>35</sup> Basil the Great. “Homily on the Words ‘Be Attentive to Yourself’” (6), in *On the Human Condition, Popular Patristics Series 30*, N.V. Harrison, trans. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 95.

<sup>36</sup> Jean–Claude Larchet, *Theology of the Body* (4.7), (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2016), 61.

<sup>37</sup> Mark the Monk. “Those Who Imagine That They are Justified by Works” (119), in *Counsels on the Spiritual Life 1, Popular Patristics Series 37*, Tim Vivian, trans. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009), 126.

There is much attention to the role of overeating of unhealthy diets in modern medicine. An unhealthy diet has surpassed tobacco smoking as the *leading* risk factor for premature death in the U.S.—accounting for one out of five deaths, globally.<sup>38</sup> Yet, nearly 80% of chronic disease, our most deadly and costly of all diseases, is preventable, and in some cases reversible, through a lifestyle lead by a moderate, healthful diet that mirrors that of Paradise.<sup>39</sup>

The link of gluttony to poor health was nothing new from the ancient perspective—which would think it madness to eat in a manner, not to maintain or improve health, but to knowingly undermine it, all to satisfy carnal pleasures. For example, Plato, in his book *Timaeus*, argues that the coiled bowels of the digestive system with all its extended twists and turns was created to help prevent gluttony and the lack of self-control over food, and ensure that the human species was not rapidly killed off by diseases.<sup>40</sup> Such concern is also shared from the wisdom of the book of Sirach:

Do not be gluttonous for every dainty food, and do not give yourself over to food. For overeating will bring sickness, and gluttony will lead to nausea. Many have died because of gluttony, but the careful man will prolong his life. (Sir 37:29–31)

So, those in the early centuries of the Church were taught what we know far too well in the twenty first century (yet often ignored)—that “gorging gives rise to disease,”<sup>41</sup> that diseases of the body “are the natural offspring, not of abstinence and moderate diet, but of gluttony and repletion,” and in turn, how gluttony will “sweep away all the bulwarks of our health; and if you enter a physician’s house and ask him, you will find that almost all the causes of diseases arise from this.”<sup>42</sup>

### ***Spiritual Health***

Yet, St John Chrysostom also notes that while Christians are not avoid bread, wine, or dainties as unclean in themselves, their excess is forbidden, “as they corrupt the soul by excess.”<sup>43</sup> The passions,

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<sup>38</sup> Ali H. Mokdad et al. “The state of US health, 1990–2016: burden of diseases, injuries, and risk factors among US states.” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 319, no. 14 (2018): 1444–1472.; Christopher J. Murray. “Health effects of dietary risks in 195 countries: A systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study.” *Lancet* 393, no. 10184 (2019): 1958–72.

<sup>39</sup> Ornish, Dean, Larry W. Scherwitz, James H. Billings, et al. “Intensive lifestyle changes for reversal of coronary heart disease.” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 280, no. 23 (1998): 2001–2007.; Esselstyn Jr, Caldwell B., Gina Gendy, Jonathan Doyle, Mladen Golubic, and Michael F. Roizen. “A way to reverse CAD?” *Journal of Family Practice* 63, no. 7 (2014).

<sup>40</sup> Plato. *Timaeus* (33.73C), R.D. Archer–Hind, ed. (NY: Macmillan and Co., 1888), 271.

<sup>41</sup> Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* (2.10), 396.

<sup>42</sup> John Chrysostom. “Homilies on the Gospel of John” (22), in *Nicene and Post–Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 14 (First Series), Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 79.

<sup>43</sup> John Chrysostom. “Homilies on First Timothy” (12), in *Nicene and Post–Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 13 (First Series), Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 445.

especially gluttony, are a result of a “sick soul,” rendering the soul diseased, and its first victim being the *nous*<sup>44</sup>—the purest, eye of the soul, “which perceives the perfection of godly life.”<sup>45</sup> To summarize the patristic teaching: gluttony drives out self-control, moderation, and all the other virtues,<sup>46</sup> “kindles the baneful and fiery incentive to vice,”<sup>47</sup> “coarsening the intellect [*nous*],” making it “spiritless and sluggish,”<sup>48</sup> or “cloddish and brutelike and never lets it raise itself toward God and the practice of the virtues,”<sup>49</sup> and thus, says St Maximus, it “kills all the divine offspring of the virtues.”<sup>50</sup>

From gluttony, comes no spiritual vision—a dire warning within the Christian ascetical tradition. For example, St Symeon the New Theologian concludes, “It is impossible to stuff your body to the limit with food and enjoy spiritually the intelligible consolation of God. You move away from it the more you look after you belly.”<sup>51</sup> “For when the belly is inflamed by luxurious foods,” warns St Neilos, “the mind loses all power to conceive what is good and is paralyzed in its spiritual efforts. ... But one who is beginning to pursue the spiritual way gets rid of the fat round his belly by giving up rich food.”<sup>52</sup> Similarly, St Seraphim of Sarov reiterates, “One should not think about the doings of God when one’s stomach is full; on a full stomach there can be no vision of the Divine mysteries.”<sup>53</sup> And perhaps most strikingly, St Isaac the Syrian share a vivid comparison—“It is just as shameful for lovers of the flesh and the belly to search out spiritual things as it is for a harlot to discourse on chastity.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Gregory Palamas, “To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia, Isaiah the Solitary,” in *The Philokalia* (vol. 4), ed. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (Faber and Faber, 1995), 309.

<sup>45</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* (8.6), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 5* (Second Series), Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), 394.

<sup>46</sup> Neilos the Ascetic, *Ascetic Discourse*, 239.

<sup>47</sup> John Cassian, *The Institutes* (5.5), 235.

<sup>48</sup> Diadochos of Photiki. “On Spiritual Knowledge” (45), in *The Philokalia 1*, G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, ed. (Faber and Faber, 1979), 266.

<sup>49</sup> John of Damascus. “On the Virtues and the Vices,” in *The Philokalia 2*, G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, ed. (Faber and Faber, 1981), 335.

<sup>50</sup> Maximus the Confessor. Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice” (Fifth Century, 49), *The Philokalia 2*, G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, ed. (Faber and Faber, 1981), 274.

<sup>51</sup> Symeon the New Theologian. “The Practical and Theological Chapters” (1.42), in *The Practical and Theological Chapters and the Three Theological Discourses*, Paul McGuckin, trans. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1982), 44.

<sup>52</sup> Neilos the Ascetic, *Ascetic Discourse*, 239.

<sup>53</sup> Seraphim of Sarov. “The Spiritual Instructions” (1), in *Little Russian Philokalia 1*, Seraphim Rose, trans. (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2008), 23.

<sup>54</sup> Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies* (17), 214.

With no spiritual vision, comes darkness. From Proverbs, “Feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’” (Prov. 30:8–9). In turn, it is those who choose gluttony over God that St Paul calls “lazy gluttons” (slow or idle bellies; Titus 1:12–16), who professes to know God, but deny him by their works, being detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work—in an idolatrous state where “their god is their belly,” (Phil 3:18–19). Thus, a general principle from the ascetic tradition is one of moderation—that, “food should sustain the body as a spiritual working tool, so that it doesn’t become an impediment by causing debility or too much vigor in him.”<sup>55</sup>

### 3 | Beyond Control

Finally, the passion of gluttony moves one beyond control.

In the medical literature, there are two, relevant concerns: *binge eating* and *food addiction*. In the second century, Clement of Alexandria contrasts *gastrimargia*, an “excess with respect to food, insanity in reference to the belly,” with *laimargia* (λαιμαργία), an “insanity with respect to the gullet [neck, throat].”<sup>56</sup> It has been suggested that *gastrimargia* most closely conveys our modern concept of binge eating behavior or disorder—overeating, even when satiated, and accompanied by a feeling of a lack of control. The term *laimargia*<sup>57</sup> more closely conveys food addiction—an excessive craving for food.<sup>58</sup> A recent review found that food addiction was diagnosed in almost one out of four people, but increasing to one out two in those with a binge eating disorder.<sup>59</sup> The concern of interest here is that, “a person who is addicted to food exhibits loss of control, tolerance, withdrawal, and continued use despite dangerous consequences.”<sup>60</sup>

#### *Slavery*

Thus, a deeper concern of gluttony is the heart being moved beyond control to a state of dependence and service to the belly, whether eating little or much, as St John Chrysostom reminded the Christians of his time:

You have received a belly, that you may feed, not distend it, that you may have the mastery over it, not have it as mistress over you: that it may minister to you for the

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<sup>55</sup> Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, (1.17), 151.

<sup>56</sup> Clement of Alexandria. “On Eating” (Book 2.1), in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library 4*, Ed. Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, trans. William Wilson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1867). 194.

<sup>57</sup> *λαιμαργία*: λαιμός (neck, throat) + μάργος (madness), *γαστριμαργία*: γαστήρ (belly) + μάργος (madness)

<sup>58</sup> Mazokopakis, Elias E. “Food addiction in the Christian Patristic Tradition.” *Eating and Weight Disorders—Studies on Anorexia, Bulimia and Obesity* 26, no. 1 (2021): 405–406.

<sup>59</sup> Praxedes, Dafiny RS, André E. Silva-Júnior, et al. “Prevalence of food addiction determined by the Yale Food Addiction Scale and associated factors: A systematic review with meta-analysis.” *European Eating Disorders Review* 30, no. 2 (2022): 85–95.

<sup>60</sup> Wieland, Diane M. “Food addiction: A new mental health disorder?” *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services* 57, no. 12 (2019): 3–5.

nourishment of the other parts, not that you may minister to it, not that you may exceed limits.<sup>61</sup>

More so, the Scriptures and many Church Fathers strongly warn of the passions having the power to enslave as a *bondservant* or *slave* (δούλος). To be “enslaved” is to hand authority and power over to something (or someone) else—to be *mastered*, which is the opposite and antithesis of self-control. As St John Climacus notes of gluttony that we are to master the belly before it masters us,<sup>62</sup> and St Jerome highlights that, “the smells of the kitchen may induce us to eat, but when hunger is satisfied, they make us their slaves.”<sup>63</sup>

The first work of the flesh—that puff, sip, or bite—might be by a choice. Gradually, the following puffs, sips, or bites are not by choice, but by necessity. So, what begins as a gain of choice ends with a loss of control, as Jesus helps those believing in him recognize, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin,” (Jn 8:34).

A carnal passion, then, is not simply strong interest or enthusiasm for something, but is *passivity*,<sup>64</sup> as is summarized by the following:

The passions represent the lowest level to which human nature can fall. ... that man is brought by them to a state of passivity, of slavery. In fact, they overcome the will, so that the man of the passions is no longer a man of will; we say that he is a man ruled, enslaved, carried along by the passions.<sup>65</sup>

### ***Freedom***

St Paul clarifies to the Corinthians that freedom in Christ does not mean they can do whatever they want (1 Cor 6:1–22; 10:23), which would carry tremendous risk of re-enslavement back to that which they have been freed, including gluttony, as St John Chrysostom comments:

Here he [Paul] glances at the gluttons. ... This is his meaning, ‘You are at liberty to eat,’ says he; ‘well then, remain in liberty, and take heed that you do not become a slave to this appetite ... For it is a strong and brutal passion, and makes us slaves, and puts us upon ministering to the belly.’<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> John Chrysostom. “Homilies on Philippians” (13), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 13 (First Series)*, Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 243.

<sup>62</sup> John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (Step 14), 167.

<sup>63</sup> Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* (2.10), 396.

<sup>64</sup> For more on the role of passions in health behavior referenced here, see: Faries, Mark. “A passionate view of health behavior.” *Synergeia 3* (in Press).

<sup>65</sup> Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality* (1.7), 77.

<sup>66</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians* (17.1), 96.

So, while there are those who have surrendered to gluttony, there are others waging an intense war to remain in freedom from gluttony, toward a transformation *beyond passion*. Of his own fight, Chrysostom shares:

Stubborn as appetite is and the tyranny of the belly, nevertheless I bridle it and give not myself up to the passion, but endure all labor not to be drawn aside by it.<sup>67</sup>

#### 4 | Beyond Passion

The goal of the Christian is to become *dispassionate* (*apatheia*, ἀπάθεια), no longer accepting and being subject to the carnal passions, and thus, unmoved by the passion of gluttony beyond control, beyond health, or beyond need. To help in this transformation, Christians are prescribed a number of mystical medicines, such as being prudent to focus on the quality and simplicity of one's diet, eating to satisfy need for sustaining life, not making pleasure the end in taking food, avoiding greediness and dainty preparation of food, and cultivating temperance to eat in moderation so as to not "make war upon the body."<sup>68</sup>

Yet, there is one remedy, in particular, which stands in formidable, direct opposition to gluttony.

##### **Continence**

This virtue, *egkrateia* (εγκράτεια), often translated as *continence* or *self-control*, is perhaps best understood as *self-mastery* or *dominion within*<sup>69</sup>—maintaining control, rather than being moved beyond control. Continence restrains and is intolerant of any thought, word, or movement that is "not essential to the life of the body or to the soul's salvation," and "that is not in harmony with Gods' will."<sup>70</sup> As a result, says St Gregory of Nyssa, "continence will extinguish the uncontrolled impulses of a mind dominated by passion."<sup>71</sup>

The Church Fathers are often cited as having passed down a single, basic rule of continency. St Basil describes this one rule as, "complete abstinence from all that tends to harmful pleasure."<sup>72</sup> St John Cassian says this simple rule is to "'not be deceived by the filling of the belly' [Prov 24:15, LXX], or be led astray by the pleasure of the palate."<sup>73</sup> He also shares a primary aim and object of continence for all, "that no one may be overburdened beyond the measure of his appetite, by gluttony."<sup>74</sup> Others

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<sup>67</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies First Corinthians* (23.2), 132.

<sup>68</sup> Basil the Great, *The Long Rules* (Q.19), 276.

<sup>69</sup> εγκράτεια: ἐν (in) + κράτος (power)

<sup>70</sup> Peter of Damascus, *Twenty-Four Discourses* (4), in *The Philokalia* 3, G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, ed. (Faber and Faber, 1984), 219.

<sup>71</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *The Lord's Prayer* (3), 43.

<sup>72</sup> Basil the Great, *The Long Rules* (Q.19), 275.

<sup>73</sup> John Cassian, "On the Eight Vices: On Control of the Stomach," in *The Philokalia* 1, G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, ed. (Faber and Faber, 1979), 74.

<sup>74</sup> John Cassian, *The Institutes* (5.5), 235.

add that not only does “the person who practices continence avoids gluttony,”<sup>75</sup> but gluttony is “destroyed” by continence.<sup>76</sup> As expected, experiences of such continence are found and celebrated throughout Christian history, as is hymned of the third century saint Chariton the Confessor (Sept 27), “Thou didst wither up the passions of the body by continence [ἐγκρατείας].”

So, where and how might one obtain this virtue? St Basil the Great points in the right direction:

Concupiscence [strong, fleshly desire] is a disease of the soul, whereas its health is continence. ... Not to be drunken is continency. Not to overeat one’s self is continency. ... continency makes one free, being at once a medicine and a power, for it does not teach temperance; it gives it. Continency is a grace of God.<sup>77</sup>

Continency comes in the co-participation and synergy with God through virtue in the likeness Christ—to walk according to the Spirit.<sup>78</sup> St Paul confirms, “walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh,” (Gal 5:16) knowing that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, *continence* [ἐγκράτεια] ... and those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires,” (Gal 5:22–24).

St John Chrysostom concludes:

Therefore, he says, ‘Walk by the Spirit and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh’: having spoken of the cause of the disease, he likewise mentions the remedy which confers health.<sup>79</sup>

Yet, as noted, the appetite is stubborn, the belly is a tyrant, and gluttony tries to destroy self-control by seducing one back to walking according to the flesh (Rom 8:1–8). And so, the Christian strives like the athlete, who “controls himself” (ἐγκρατεύεται) in all things—not aimlessly, but with discipline of body to keep it under control; not to simply compete, but to win; not to receive a perishable prize, but imperishable (1 Cor 9:24–27). In fact, St John Cassian argues that before the Christian ascetic can lawfully enter this spiritual contest (2 Tim 2:5), he must prove that he is not a slave (as was also a requirement in the Olympic and Pythian contests)—firstly, a slave to the belly:

For it is impossible for a full belly to make trial of the combat of the inner man: nor is he worthy to be tried in harder battles, who can be overcome in a slight skirmish.

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<sup>75</sup> Mark the Monk, *Concerning Those Who Imagine That They Are Justified by Works* (24), 116.

<sup>76</sup> John of Damascus, *On the Virtues and the Vices*, 338.

<sup>77</sup> Basil the Great. “Letters” (366), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 8 (Second Series), Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 327.

<sup>78</sup> See also: Faries, Mark. “A passionate view of health behavior.” *Synergeia* 3 (in Press).

<sup>79</sup> John Chrysostom. “Homilies on Galatians,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 13 (First Series), Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 40.

First then, we must trample under foot gluttonous desires ... to extinguish the desires of the palate and the belly by the longing for perfection.<sup>80</sup>

To help, continence is often paired and supplemented with other virtues, as it is not an isolated fruit, but one of many fruit that come from God—“linked one to the other, and follow as it were a sacred sequence, one depending on the other,”<sup>81</sup> which “needs to be cultivated and guarded ceaselessly, so as to prevent any of the passions that are outside the garden from stealthily creeping in.”<sup>82</sup> More specifically, St Peter highlights that continence must first be supplemented with steadfastness and piety (2 Pet 1:3–10).

### ***Steadfastness***

Continence is first supported and nurtured with *steadfastness* (*hypomone, ὑπομονή*)—the power to endure and sustain blows, as a “strong tower” of unwavering faithfulness.<sup>83</sup> The full work or effect of steadfastness is perfection, completeness, lacking in nothing, and if maintained until the end, salvation (Ja 1:4; Mt 10:22). However, steadfastness can only be achieved by the testing of one’s faith (Jas 1:2–3). By analogy, it is the stress that strengthens the muscle, the pressure that forms the diamond, and the heat that refines the gold, so too, it is steadfastness in the fertile soil of the heart that produces fruit (Rom 5:3; Lk 8:15). “The experience and acquisition of the virtues,” teaches St Peter of Damascus, “require God’s help; and they are achieved only through much effort and over a long period of time.”<sup>84</sup>

A common problem, however, is one of environment—of rocky terrain and pleasurable thorns (Cf. Lk 8:13–14). Environments that should be safe havens from unhealthy temptations, are set up to entice. Social norms beguile into handing control over to gluttonous desires, as routine, tradition, or the way things have always been done. The soul tries its best to deepen its roots and defend against the onslaught, but is infected, and her health weakened—an inviting opportunity for the devil to strike. “This is why the weakest outpost has to be the most fortified.”<sup>85</sup>

So, as a master gardener of virtue, St Paul provides crucial advice: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, *and make no provision* for the flesh, to gratify its desires,” (Rom 13:14). Here, St Paul is not forbidding to provide for the needs of life, according to St John Cassian, but “warning us against self-indulgence,”<sup>86</sup> in that “he cuts way the luxurious fondness for the flesh,” so that we should not become entangled in

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<sup>80</sup> John Cassian, *The Institutes* (5.13–14), 238.

<sup>81</sup> Symeon Metaphrastis. “Paraphrase of the Homilies of St Makarios of Egypt” (1.16), in *The Philokalia* 3, G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, ed. (Faber and Faber, 1984), 291.

<sup>82</sup> Peter of Damascus, *Twenty-Four Discourses* (4), 219.

<sup>83</sup> Mark the Monk, *On the Spiritual Law* (2), 92.

<sup>84</sup> Peter of Damascus, *Twenty-Four Discourses* (4), 220.

<sup>85</sup> Paisios the Athonite. *Spiritual Counsels 5: Passions and Virtues* (1), Peter Chamberas, trans. (Thessaloniki, Greece: Holy Hesychasterion “Evangelist John the Theologian,” 2002), 31.

<sup>86</sup> John Cassian, *On the Eight Vices: On Control of the Stomach*, 74.

carnal desire, or “lest the body should be injured by our fault and unable to fulfil its spiritual and necessary duties.”<sup>87</sup>

The word *provision* suggests thinking about gratifying the flesh, now or in the future. With food, the word *craving* is used to describe the motivational state where one feels compelled to seek and eat something. The culprits are often unhealthy foods readily available in modern environments, especially those high in sugar, fat, or sodium that awaken the belly of carnal passions.

Thus, steadfast continence stands as a vigilant, persistent protection against gluttony moving one beyond health, first of the soul and then of the body—since, “the foundation is health of the soul; health of body follows.”<sup>88</sup> In other words, to properly rule and regulate the health of body, the soul must be healthy. For, the health of the soul is steadfast accomplishment of the divine will, just as disease of the soul is falling away from the divine will.<sup>89</sup> St Augustine summarizes:

Now the health of the soul is to cling *steadfastly* to the better part, that is, to the unchangeable God.<sup>90</sup>

### **Piety**

According to St Peter, steadfastness is supplemented with *piety* or *godliness* (*eusebeia, ευσέβεια*)—proper reverence and conduct in relationship toward God,<sup>91</sup> and the “summit of the virtues,”<sup>92</sup> yet not of a single virtue alone, “but in the keeping of all commandments. ... meaning to ‘serve well.’”<sup>93</sup> Piety, which St Paul considers *spiritual exercise* (1 Tim 4:7–9), puts continency of one’s eating into its proper Christian perspective. St Basil clarifies:

By continency, however, we do not mean complete abstinence from food (for this is to take one’s life by violence), but that abstinence from pleasures, which aims at the thwarting of the will of the flesh for the purpose of attaining to *the goal of piety*.<sup>94</sup>

There is temptation, however, to become satisfied in abundance, but accessibility does not mandate acceptability. Thus, piety is a key defense against the passions moving one beyond need, for “there is

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<sup>87</sup> John Cassian, *The Institutes* (5.8), 236.

<sup>88</sup> Porphyrios. *Wounded by Love*, John Raffan, trans. (Crete, Greece: Denise Harvey Publisher, 2018), 177.

<sup>89</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *The Lord’s Prayer* (3), 42.

<sup>90</sup> Augustine of Hippo. “On Christian Doctrine” (1.23), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 2* (First Series), Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 528.

<sup>91</sup> See 1 Tim 3:14–16; 6:3; Titus 1:1; setting one’s heart on God (Sir 49:3; 1 Esdras 1:23); the beginning of spiritual sense–perception and discernment (Prov 1:7, LXX).

<sup>92</sup> John of Damascus. *On the Orthodox Faith* (26), *Popular Patristics Series* 62, Norman Russell, trans. (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2022), 132.

<sup>93</sup> Peter of Damascus, *Twenty-Four Discourses* (4), 218–221.

<sup>94</sup> Basil the Great, *The Long Rules* (Q.16), 270.

great gain in godliness with contentment,” writes St Paul (1 Tim. 6:6–8). To help, as an ongoing aid in attaining the goal of piety, and often prescribed as targeted remedies for gluttony, are *prayer* and *fasting*.

### *Prayer*

Prayer is an invincible, spiritual weapon against the passions (Eph 6:18),<sup>95</sup> mortification of the will’s motion to a life of the flesh,<sup>96</sup> and able to subdue and make desire disappear.<sup>97</sup> The fatal wound to gluttony is found in the Lord’s own prayer, “give us this day our *daily bread*,” (Mt 6:11).

Daily bread is bread of necessity. “So, we say to God,” says St Gregory of Nyssa, “Give us bread. Not delicacies or riches,” being content with what is necessary,<sup>98</sup> so that, according to St Maximus, “we eat for the sake of living, and not be guilty of living for the sake of eating. ... to keep it [the body] as far as possible in its natural state of good health, our aim being not just to live, but to live for God.”<sup>99</sup>

Daily bread is bread of God’s provision. When a hungry Jesus was tested in the wilderness by the adversary to turn stones into bread (Mt 4:1–4), the Lord’s response was to quote the words of Moses reminding Israel (also in the wilderness) of God’s provision of manna to make them know that, “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God,” (Deut 8:3). Yet, unlike Jesus, the Israelites turned their attention from daily bread back to the flesh pots of Egypt, and sought to satiate their gluttonous desire with forbidden foods—to their own destruction.<sup>100</sup>

Thus, daily bread is also bread of freedom. Christian tradition maintains that while the seven nations that were given over to dark spiritual powers (giants; Deut 7:1–2) are a figure of seven of the eight principal faults or vices,<sup>101</sup> it is Egypt that is the figure of the eighth and primary fault—gluttony.<sup>102</sup> So too, the prayer for “daily bread” is a salient reminder to all Christians on the journey through the wilderness of this life to not turn their attention and desire back to gluttony from which they have been saved.

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<sup>95</sup> Theodorus the Great. *A Century of Spiritual Texts* (8, 31), in *The Philokalia 2*, G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, ed. (Faber and Faber, 1981), 15, 20.

<sup>96</sup> Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies* (66), 468.

<sup>97</sup> Maximus the Confessor, “Four Hundred Texts on Love” (Second Century, 47), in *The Philokalia 2*, ed. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (Faber and Faber, 1981), 73.

<sup>98</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *The Lord’s Prayer* (3), 47–48.

<sup>99</sup> Maximus the Confessor. “On the Lord’s Prayer,” in *The Philokalia 2*, ed. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (Faber and Faber, 1981), 300.

<sup>100</sup> Ex 16; Nu 11; Deut 8:12–14; Ps 77/78:9–31

<sup>101</sup> Peter of Damascus, *Twenty-Four Discourses* (2.3), 216; Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos* (6), John Eudes Bamberger, trans. (Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 1972), 16–17; John Cassian, *The Institutes* (5.1), 233–234.

<sup>102</sup> John Cassian, *The Conferences* (5.17–19), 348–349.

## *Fasting*

In St Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus transitions from his teaching of the Lord's Prayer to the discipline of fasting—not as something optional, but as faithfulness seen and rewarded by God the Father (Mt 6:16–18). The importance of fasting is declared, first and foremost, through the model of Jesus Christ who, “began his spiritual warfare by fasting and won the battle by this means though, being God, and God of gods.”<sup>103</sup>

Fasting is a much-needed, formidable protection for those who are being tempted by the fiery darts of desire (Eph 6:16). St John Chrysostom highlights why it was not in his fast that the devil approached Jesus in the desert, but in his hunger:

... to instruct you how great a good fasting is, and how it is a most powerful shield against the devil, and that after the font [baptism], men should give themselves up, not to luxury and drunkenness, and a full table, but to fasting. ... On this account then, even he too fasts forty days, pointing out to us the medicines of our salvation.<sup>104</sup>

Fasting helps keep the passions in check, as a “tool for those who desire self-restraint,”<sup>105</sup> attacking the belly to “cool and dry up all the moisture of carnal desire,”<sup>106</sup> stopping the movement of the passions and not allowing desire to grow.<sup>107</sup> Fasting directly challenges and prevents the dullness of soul and spiritual stupor that comes with satiety in service to the flesh, either from too much food or a variety of foods.

Fasting is also a “most useful and trustworthy discipline” for keeping both body and soul in good health, and in turn, maintaining continence as a powerful remedy against gluttony. “After all,” confirms St Basil, “while self-indulgence gratifies the stomach, fasting brings gain to the soul. Be cheerful since the Physician has given you sin destroying medicine.”<sup>108</sup>

## **Acknowledgments**

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<sup>103</sup> Hesychios the Priest. *On Watchfulness and Holiness* (12), in *The Philokalia* 1, G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, ed. (Faber and Faber, 1979), 164.

<sup>104</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* (13.2), 80–81.

<sup>105</sup> Diadochos of Photiki, “On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination” (47), in *The Philokalia* 1, G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, ed. (Faber and Faber, 1979), 267.

<sup>106</sup> Mark the Monk, *A Letter to Nicholas* (7.2), in *Counsels on the Spiritual Life, Popular Patristics Series 37*, Tim Vivian, trans. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009), 67.

<sup>107</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Four Hundred Texts on Love* (Second Century, 47), 73.

<sup>108</sup> Basil the Great. “First Homily on Fasting” (1), in *On Fasting and Feasts*, Susan R. Holman and Mark DelCogliano, trans. (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2013), 55.

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