

ARCHIMANDRITE AIMILIANOS
OF SIMONOPETRA

ON PRAYER

PROBLEMS & TEMPTATIONS

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THE HOLY CONVENT OF THE
ANNUNCIATION, ORMYLIA



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Elder Aimilianos

The Elder, Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra (1934-2019), was born in Nikaia, Piraeus, in Greece, to pious parents with roots in Asia Minor. He received his primary education from them and his grandparents, who were exemplary teachers of that period, but foremost, he inherited an indelible spiritual wealth.

After graduating from the Theological School of Athens, he ardently desired to serve God's people, thus, he dedicated himself faithfully to a priestly and monastic life. On 9 December 1960, he was tonsured a monk and subsequently ordained to the diaconate by the eminent Metropolitan of Trikkis and Stagon, Dionysios Haralambous. His ordination into the priesthood followed on 15 August 1961, whereupon he was installed as the Abbot of the Great Meteoron, the largest monastery of Meteora.

In 1973, he was invited with his brotherhood to repopulate the Holy Monastery of Simonos Petras on Mount Athos, which had only a few elderly monks, and he was elected Abbot on 25 November 1973. He also had a sisterhood that followed him, which was established in 1974 at the Dependency of Simonopetra at Ormylia, Halkidiki, (an old dependency of the Athonite Monastery of

Vatopaidi.) This became the Holy Convent of the Annunciation of the Theotokos, of which he is the founder.

The Elder, as Abbot of Simonopetra, attended to the restoration of the building and its facilities and the formation and harmonious running of its internal life; but his main goal was to keep inspiring his brotherhood and Dependencies with the ethos of his hope-filled and revelatory words that he generously shared with his spiritual children and the thirsting souls in the world.

The fruit of this toilsome endeavour are the homilies and orations from his spiritual experiences that the Sisters of the Holy Convent of Ormylia have undertaken the task of compiling, editing, translating and publishing unto the benefit and solace of all.

On 9 May 2019, after a long illness, Elder Aimilianos passed away at the Holy Convent, where he was laid to rest. The epitaph on his tomb has the verse “O God, my God, to You I rise early at dawn” (Ps 62:1 LXX), which was the ceaseless expression of his whole life.

Publisher's Note

The edition you hold in your hands under the title *ON PRAYER: Problems & Temptations* puts into print the oral teaching of our revered Elder, Archimandrite Aimilianos, as addressed to the monks of the Holy Monastery of Simonos Petras¹ on 29 November 1978.

In this catechetical work, Elder Aimilianos unlocks the door to the depths of our souls, in the sense that he reveals to us the causes that daily bring to our attention various problems in our prayer in general, and in particular, in the practice of the Jesus Prayer. It often happens that, not knowing what is really in our best interests, we are led to mistaken conclusions, and attribute the responsibility for this to ourselves, with the result that we discontinue our prayer. “No,” says the Elder, “we have only to strengthen our conviction that our prayer is exactly as it should be, that we are on the right road, and that it will draw grace in its wake.”

Knowing that prayer comprises the main task of us all, we express the wish that this edition will help to solve many of the problems that arise in its realisation.

This is the first booklet being published after the Elder's repose on 9 May 2020 with an English

translation of one of his homilies. The task of translating it was undertaken by the erudite professor emeritus of the English language and astute scholar of Ancient Greek, Dr. Richard Matthews. As we express our gratitude to him, it is our wish that he also will reap from the spiritual benefit that will be received by all those who will read this work.

The Holy Convent of Ormylia

Translator's Note

All notes at the end of the booklet have been added by the translator, mostly to provide background facts about Greek (or Orthodox, or Athonite) life that are not general common knowledge; or to outline some of the problems faced by scholars when dealing with ancient texts of doubtful authorship, pedigree, exact wording or intended meaning: in short, problems of 'textual criticism'.

This booklet uses the numbering of the Psalms according to the Septuagint (LXX) text of the Old Testament. For more details about the numbering, please see the note at the end of the booklet.

Richard Matthews

ON PRAYER Problems & Temptations

Prayer is a large theme: the theme of our whole life, we might say. In a previous encounter,² we saw that if somebody is to pray, especially at night, he has to create the right atmosphere within himself, and the most suitable atmosphere will be one of compunction. With compunction and the awareness of what we are about, we notice that in the small space in which we stand, in our cell or in our room, in the place where we actually are, we can circumscribe Him Who is uncircumscribable, and contain the One Who cannot be contained. Our prayer cannot be impersonal. Prayer always concerns two people: myself, and Him Who is truly present and with me: God.

Further, we need to cultivate that compunction, and with it the awareness that I have brought God into my cell (or other private place) with me; further, that God is really there, whether I understand it or not, whether I think it or not, whether I believe it or not. But our feelings are changeable and liable to influence from any one of several sources: the Devil, our various different circumstances, our egoism, our level of self-abasement, so that those feelings are not always permanent, above all for a beginner or one who has not yet set out very far on the route of his spiritual journey.

Today I want to discuss the difficulties that we meet with in prayer, problems that should not be allowed to exhaust us or throw us off course. Now somebody might say that he would not expect that of a monk or of any believer. We can't always take it in that a believer can lose the thread when he meets with problems in prayer, so that he actually comes to feel afraid. If someone doesn't encounter problems in prayer, then where exactly does he expect to meet with them? Basically, in his attempt to pray. It is as if one were to see, on starting out on a sea or air journey, the waves or the clouds and take fright, lose his cool and wonder whether he really wants to make the intended journey at all. But that kind of change in weather conditions is only to be expected.

The trouble is that these problems can have a suspensive and delaying effect upon us, whereby they express and demonstrate the weakness of our faith and, above all, our cowardice. Fear is characteristic of cowards but also of inexperienced individuals. We cannot say that it is for the first time that we are meeting with problems in our prayer, since we have been pegging away at it for most of our lives. All of you have been praying since you were small children, yet in spite of that it cannot be denied that we have simple problems in this area every day. Let's mention some of them.

Sleep is one of those problems. Somebody wakes up at 05.00 at night, Byzantine time.³ He says to himself, "Today I shall pray for five whole hours." But he is soon overtaken by sleep, the bell rings, and it is 10.00. He then realises that he has slept for five whole hours! If this happens twice or thrice or four times over, he will slacken off and say, "What am I doing with my life? I'm just not up to it!" Struggling against sleep, against the weight of his eyelids, against the difficulty of staying awake, he feels that God has abandoned him, that God does not want to have anything to do with him whenever he tries to pray. Very often, when someone sleeps heavily, he also feels the weight of his own soul, and it is as if he were living through an experience of virtual death. He then comes to believe that that is one reason why he has to stop his prayer. He says to himself, "I have tried once, twice, twenty or fifty times, and have gotten nowhere."

Another person may experience pain at prayer: in the stomach, in the belly, in the heart, in the head, in the feet. These pains can have a physical provenance, but most probably also a mental one. As a rule, a man's thought processes can provoke pain or even dizziness. Such pain can be triggered off by anxiety, or impatience, or weakness of faith, or can be the outcome of a false idea about prayer. The pain can even be diabolical. Thousands of

Other titles in English of
ARCHMANDRITE AIMILIANOS'S
PUBLISHED WORKS

1. The Authentic Seal, Ormylia 1999
2. The Way of the Spirit, Indiktos 2009
3. The Church at Prayer: The Mystical
Liturgy of the Heart, Indiktos 2015
4. Psalms and the Life of Faith, Indiktos 2015

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