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Evagrius Ponticus' *Sententiae ad Virginem*

SUSANNA ELM

"Institutions create shadowed places in which nothing can be seen and no questions asked."¹

INTRODUCTION

The fourth century A.D. witnessed the emergence of an institution, monasticism, that was to become one of the most important formative elements within Christianity for centuries to come. The "shadowed places" created in the wake of this emerging institution proved to be as formidable as monasticism itself. One area still largely, if not entirely, obscure is a set of institutions that developed at the same time and in close connection with it: the institutions of female monasticism.

While monasticism, true to Mary Douglas' words, "show[s] finely discriminated detail, which is closely scrutinized and ordered," and thus has been much studied and discussed, very little research has been done regarding the institutions of female monasticism, despite the light that has in recent years been shed on a number of aspects concerning female ascetics. What is perhaps even more telling is that what little has been done on the topic of the institutionalization of female ascetic life has been based on the premises provided by its male counterpart. Interpreted in this fashion, rather than as a process that occurred on its own terms and with its own merits, albeit in close connection and interdependence with that of male monasticism, the organization of female asceticism is more often than not found wanting.

The fourth century A.D. witnessed the emergence of female ascetic life with its own organizational structures and normative texts. Both the organizational structures and, consequently, the nature of the normative texts regulating them differ profoundly and increasingly from their male counterparts. This difference is most pronounced in the methods prescribed by the Fathers on how to achieve the essential aim of ascetic life. For a

woman, the summit of ascetic life is the mystical wedding of her soul with her bridegroom, Christ, in the kingdom of heaven. A man, on the other hand, must seek his *summum bonum* through mystical knowledge of the divine, γνώσις τοῦ Θεοῦ. The method of achieving the *summum bonum* and the organizational structures created to realize an ascetic life, and in consequence the normative texts regulating the process, differ. However, this difference by no means implies that the Fathers of the Church considered the ascetic life of women to be of a lesser order. For the Fathers, the essence of ascetic life remains the same for men and for women: both strive in a constant progression toward the mystical union of their soul with the divine. In other words, the shadowy existence to which female ascetic life and its institutions have been condemned is less a result of the fourth-century Fathers and their writings than of subsequent historical and historiographical developments.

Evagrius Ponticus' *Sententiae ad Virginem*, a text that has so far received very little scholarly attention,² are a prime example to illustrate the process described above.³ The *Sententiae* not only denote

¹M. Douglas, *How Institutions Think*, the Frank W. Abrams Lectures, 1985 (Syracuse, N.Y., 1986), 69. I would like to thank L. Domaszewicz, R. Einhorn, R. Lyman, and W. North for their help in writing this article.

²I know of only two works concerned with *SV*: a French translation by B. Lavand, *Lettre de Ligugé* 124 (1967), 32–36, and a Spanish version by E. Tamburini, *Quadernos Monasticos* 36 (1976), 108–10; I have been unable to see either of these.

³The *Sententiae ad Virginem* (*SV*) and their parallel text, the *Sententiae ad Monachos* (*SM*), are referred to by Socrates: στιχηρὰ δύο. ἓν πρὸς τοὺς ἐν τοῖς κοινοβίοις ἢ ἐν συνοδίαις μοναχοὺς καὶ ἓν πρὸς τὴν παρθένον, Soc. *HE* IV.23, PG 67, col. 516; and by Gennadius in his *De vir. inl.* 11 (ed. E. C. Richardson, TU 14, Leipzig, 1895), 65: "coenobitis ac synoditis doctrinam aptam vitae communis et ad virginem Deo sacratam libel-

and illustrate the ideal specific to female asceticism and the methods to achieve it, they also form a set of prescriptions regulating the life within an ascetic community of women. Thus the *Sententiae* fulfill a function usually ascribed to a "rule."⁴ In this capacity, the *Sententiae* serve to demonstrate why this and similar texts addressed to women have been neglected, as have the organizational structures they regulated.

In the case of the *Sententiae*, the reasons for their neglect lie partly in the biography of their author and his precarious position between orthodoxy and heresy, which did not allow his work to achieve its full impact on later generations. The more profound reasons for neglect, however, have to be sought in the specific character of fourth-century female asceticism and its relationship to the quite differently organized male monasticism, which created its own traditions and which has, as such, formed the central interest of scholarship.⁵

I

Evagrius Ponticus was born around 345, the son of Evagrius the Elder, *chorepiskopos* of the small town of Ibora in Pontus.⁶ His formative years were spent under the influence of the "great Cappadocian Fathers," Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus, and their particular interpretation of the Nicæan doctrines, often called Neo-Nicæan.⁷ The teachings of Origen had in turn exercised a profound influence on Basil and Gregory. Indeed, during their first ascetic experiments at Annesi, they had compiled a collection of excerpts from

lum competentem religioni et sexui." Jerome mentions in his *Epistula ad Ctesiphontem*, 133, 3 (CSEL 56), 246: "Evagrius Ponticus Hiberita, qui scribit ad virgines, scribit ad monachos."

⁴A. de Vogüé, "Les règles monastiques anciennes (400–700)," in L. Génicot, ed., *Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental* 46 (Turnhout, 1985), 19–22, 37–40, 49–52; S. Elm, "The *Sententiae ad Virginem* by Evagrius Ponticus and the Problem of Early Monastic Rules," *Augustianum* 30 (1990), 393–404.

⁵S. Elm, *The Organization and Institutions of Female Asceticism in Fourth Century Cappadocia and Egypt*, Ph.D. diss. (Oxford, 1986), passim.

⁶Pall. *HL* 38, ed. C. Butler, *The Lausiaca History of Palladius*, I–II, Texts and Studies 5–6 (Cambridge, 1898–1904; repr. Hildesheim, 1967) (= *HL*), here II.116; Soc. *HE* IV.23, PG 67, cols. 516–21; Soz. *HE* VI.30, 6–11 (ed. J. Bidez, *Sozomenus Kirchengeschichte*, GCS 50, Berlin, 1960), 285; G. J. M. Bartelink, ed., *Palladio. La Storia Lausiaca*, Vite dei Santi 2 (Milan, 1974), 192–97.

⁷In its turn directed against the then reigning Homoians or "Arians." The bibliography regarding Basil and Gregory's doctrine is, of course, very substantial; see H.-Ch. Brennecke, *Studien zur Geschichte der Homöer. Der Osten bis zum Ende der homöischen Reichskirche*, Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 73 (Tübingen, 1988), passim and the literature cited there.

Origen's writings, entitled the *Philocalia*.⁸ Their ascetic doctrine, however, had been strongly influenced by Eustathius of Sebasteia.⁹

Both Ibora's proximity to Annesi and his father's position led to Evagrius' early acquaintance with Basil of Caesarea and his monastic circle. Shortly before his death in 379, in fact, Basil himself ordained Evagrius as a lector (*ἀναγνώστης*).¹⁰

⁸Soc. *HE* IV.26, PG 67, col. 529; M. Harl, ed., *Origène. Philocalie 1–20, Sur les écritures*, SC 302 (Paris, 1983); E. Junod, ed., *Origène. Philocalie 21–27, Sur le libre arbitre*, SC 226 (Paris, 1976); M. W. O'Laughlin, *Origenism in the Desert: Anthropology and Integration in Evagrius Ponticus*, Ph.D. diss. (Harvard University, 1987), 11–21.

⁹J. Gribomont, "Eustathe le Philosophe et les voyages du jeune Basile de Césarée," *RHE* 54 (1959), 115–24; idem, "Saint Basile et le monachisme enthousiaste," *Irenikon* 53 (1980), 123–44; both repr. in E. Bianchi, ed., J. Gribomont, *Saint Basile. Évangile et église. Mélanges I–II*, Spiritualité Orientale 36 (Bellefontaine, 1984).

¹⁰Pall. *HL* 38 (II.116); for the identification of the site of Ibora, see G. de Jerphanion, "Ibora–Gazioura?" *MUSJ* 5 (1911), 333–54. Unfortunately, we know little about Evagrius' early years. Our main source, chapter 38 of Palladius' *Historia Lausiaca*, omits the period prior to and following Evagrius' ordination and continues its report only after Basil's death in 379. The Coptic redaction of Palladius' chapter 38, ed. E. Amélineau, *De Historia Lausiaca, quaenam sit hujus ad monachorum Aegyptiorum historiam scribendam utilitas* (Paris, 1887), 104–24, contains a more fully developed biography than the Greek, based on a source equally known to Socrates, originating in all probability from someone acquainted with Evagrius at Cellia. The complex relationship between these two versions is discussed by A. Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalaia Gnostica" d'Evagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'Origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens*, Patristica Sorbonensia 3 (Paris, 1962), 76 note 118. A letter written by Evagrius to the Caesareans, preserved as Ep. 8 of the correspondence of Basil of Caesarea (ed. Y. Courtonne, *Saint Basile. Lettres I–III*, Paris, 1957–66, here I.22 [Basil's letter 8 corresponds to letter 22 in W. Frankenberg, *Evagrius Ponticus*, AbhGött, N.F. 13, 2, Berlin, 1912, 581]), led W. Bousset, *Apophthegmata. Studien zur Geschichte des ältesten Mönchtums* (Tübingen, 1923), 335–41, to conclude that Basil not only ordained Evagrius as a lector, but enrolled him as a member of his monastic community at Annesi. In this letter (in some mss. that attribute it to Nilus [PG 79, cols. 1315–16] it bears the subtitle "to some monks"), Evagrius speaks of his sudden flight to Constantinople, prima facie caused by an unexpected event that left him disturbed, presumably Basil's death, but also by a great yearning to learn the doctrine of God and his philosophy. He asks the addressees to grant him some time, not because he is attracted by life in the city, but because he has found a teacher whose eager pupil he became, "acquiring the doctrine of God." In addition to letter 8, Bousset reaches his conclusion based on a quote by Mar Babai from Evagrius' letter, referring to the ἅγιον σχῆμα, and Mar Babai's reference to τῶν μοναχῶν ἀριθμῶ in his commentary on the *Kephalaia Gnostika* 20–21 (Frankenberg, *Evagrius*, 822). According to Bousset, Evagrius would have left this community for Constantinople shortly after Basil's death in A.D. 379, an embarrassing move Palladius would have preferred to omit in his eulogy on Evagrius. Though plausible, considering Evagrius' close ties to Basil—"the column of truth"—this hypothesis has not been unanimously accepted, and we have to resign ourselves to the fact that our knowledge of this period of Evagrius' life remains incomplete; see also Soc. *HE* IV.23, PG 67, col. 520. Most modern scholars reject Bousset's hypothesis; see G.

In 380, now ordained as a deacon by Gregory of Nazianzus, Evagrius left his native Pontus to accompany Gregory to Constantinople. Gregory had been more to Evagrius than just a superior. Indeed, Evagrius repeatedly refers to "the just Gregory who planted me," affirming the profound influence that the great Cappadocian had on the young Evagrius' intellectual formation.¹¹ The attraction was mutual, for Gregory on his part addressed Evagrius in letter 228 as his "beloved brother, . . . who only recently has embraced the philosophical life," and mentioned him very favorably in his testament of 21 May 381.¹²

Evagrius had developed into a highly sophisticated member of the clergy. Not surprisingly, Gregory specifically recommended him to his successor Nectarius as an assistant in negotiating the highly charged doctrinal disputes of the synod in 381, since Evagrius was "most well trained in fighting (*διαλεκτικώτατος*) all heretical doctrines" and a brilliant rhetorician.¹³ In short, Evagrius' time in Constantinople began auspiciously.

Yet only a year later his rapid rise came to a sudden halt. The young deacon, then about thirty-five years old, had fallen in love with the wife of a high court official, who reciprocated his feelings. Before the scandal broke, causing irreparable damage, Evagrius was induced by a dream to leave the fol-

lowing day for Jerusalem.¹⁴ His sudden departure from Constantinople marked "la première phase d'une conversion à la vie ascétique: rupture avec le monde et renoncement à la brillante carrière."¹⁵ Upon his arrival in Jerusalem in 382 or 383, Evagrius was received with great hospitality by Melania the Elder and Rufinus of Aquileia in their monasteries on the Mount of Olives.¹⁶ After a short period in which he reverted to his former "worldly" life-style, Evagrius succumbed to a grave and elusive fever that lingered for several months. Melania declared the illness to be yet another sign from heaven and persuaded Evagrius to renounce his former life entirely.

Late in 383 Evagrius left Jerusalem for Egypt and the deserts of Nitria. In 385 he moved into the even harsher desert of Cellia, where he remained until his death in 399/400.¹⁷ Thus the former intellectual with a well-known inclination for luxurious living,¹⁸ died at the age of fifty-four like a true Father of the Desert, in search of perfection and after a life of asceticism that was strict even by the standards of his day.¹⁹

Yet Evagrius' retreat into the desert did not result in a complete annihilation of his former self. He soon became the focal point of a group of Desert Fathers known as the "Tall Brothers," *μεγάλοι ἄνδρες*,²⁰ who were drawn together by their com-

Bunge, *Evagrius Pontikos. Briefe aus der Wüste*, Sophia 24 (Trier, 1986), 21–22; A. and C. Guillaumont, eds., *Evagre le Pontique. Traité Pratique ou Le Moine I–II* (= Pr.), SC 170–71 (Paris, 1971), 23, esp. note 3; R. Melcher, *Der 8. Brief des hl. Basilios, ein Werk des Evagrius Pontikos*, Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie 1 (Münster, 1923), passim and 7–9, 72–76.

¹¹Pr. 100 (SC 171), 713, alluding to I Cor 3: 6–7; *Gnostikos* 44, A. and C. Guillaumont, eds., *Evagre le Pontique. Le Gnostique ou celui qui est devenu digne de la science* (= Gn.), SC 356 (Paris, 1989), 172 = PG 40, col. 1285B = Frankenberg, 553; Soc. HE IV.23, PG 67, col. 520; Soz. HE VI.30 (GCS 50), 285; Pall. HL 38 (II.117). Soc. HE IV.23, PG 67, col. 516, records that E. accompanied Gr. Naz. on a journey to Egypt; this is not attested elsewhere. Gr. Naz. Ep. 3 (ed. P. Gallay, *Grégoire de Nazianze. Lettres*, I–II, Paris, 1964), here I, 2, could have been addressed to Evagrius' father; M.-M. Hauser-Meury, *Prosopographie zu den Schriften Gregors von Nazianz*, s.v. Euagrius I–V, Theophaneia 13 (Bonn, 1960), 64 f. Mar Babai further assumes that Ep. 46, 1 (Frankenberg, 597) was addressed to Gregory, in which case their correspondence did not cease even after Evagrius' subsequent move to Egypt. Indeed, O'Laughlin, *Origenism in the Desert*, 11–14, has most recently suggested that the 14- or 15-year-old Evagrius was one of Gregory's pupils upon the latter's return from Athens. This remains hypothetical; see also Lackner, *Zur profanen Bildung* (note 32 below), 18; followed by Bunge, *Briefe*, 22.

¹²Gr. Naz. *Testamentum*, PG 37, col. 393B; idem, Ep. 228 (II.120).

¹³Pall. HL 38 (II.119); Gr. Nyss. Ep. 26 *ad Evagrium monachum de divinitate*, PG 46, cols. 1101–10 (originally Gr. Naz. Or. 45), is not adopted as authentic by Gallay.

¹⁴Pall. HL 38 (II.117–19); Soz. HE VI.30 (GCS 50), 284, even mentions a planned attack by the woman's enraged husband; for an interesting, if perhaps at times too speculative, summary of Evagrius' stay in Constantinople, see O'Laughlin, *Origenism in the Desert*, 26–31.

¹⁵A. and C. Guillaumont, "Evagre le Pontique," in *DSP*, IV (Paris, 1961), 1732.

¹⁶For the site of Melania's foundation, see H. G. Evelyn White, *The Monasteries of the Wadi 'n Natrûn II: The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis* (New York, 1932), 75 f.; F. X. Murphy, *Rufinus of Aquileia (345–411): His Life and Works* (Washington, D.C., 1945), 51 f.

¹⁷Pall. HL 38 (II.119); Evgr. Ep. 22 (Bunge, *Briefe*), 234; Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique* (SC 170), 21–25. Nitria is situated about 35 miles southeast of Alexandria, and the "desert" of Cellia about another 10 miles further south toward the Libyan desert; see A. Guillaumont, "Le site des 'Cellia' (Basse Egypte)," *RA* 2 (1964), 43–50. For a summary of life at Cellia see idem, "Histoire des Moines aux Kellia," *OLP* 8 (1977), 197–203.

¹⁸Pall. HL 38 (II.120).

¹⁹Evagrius practiced the most austere asceticism. He ate one pound of bread daily and a *ξέστης* (= *sextarius* = approx. 1 pint, LSJ, s.v.) of oil every three months and practically died of starvation. Since his stomach could no longer hold bread, he lived the last two years of his life on vegetables alone; Pall. HL 38 (II.121).

²⁰Pall. HL 24 (II.77): οἱ περὶ τὸν ἅγιον Ἀμμώνιον καὶ Εὐάγγελιον συντηχόντες and HL 35 (II.101): οἱ περὶ τὸν μακάριον Εὐάγγελιον. They are also mentioned in the *Historia Monachorum* 20 (ed. A. J. Festugière, *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, SubsHag 53, Brussels, 1971), 123. Evagrius also became acquainted with the two Macarii, Pr. 93–94 (SC 171), 696–99; see

mon intellectual interests, particularly in Origen's writings, an interest they shared with Rufinus and Melania. The intellectual pursuits of these "foreigners," combined with an increasing antagonism against Origen and his teachings in general, led to the exile of the entire group in 399–400. Evagrius was spared this fate only by his death, which occurred in the same year.²¹

Trained in the school of the great Cappadocians, Evagrius certainly differed from the majority of his fellow desert dwellers, most of whom were simple, illiterate peasants from the nearby villages of the Nile valley. As far as we know, moreover, Evagrius was the only one of the "Tall Brothers" group to express his ascetic principles in his own writings.²² The titles of his major works, the trilogy *Praktikos*, *Gnostikos*, *Kephalaia Gnostika*, and the treatises entitled *Antirrhetikos*, *Of the Eight Evil Thoughts*, and *On Prayer*, indicate that the subject of his literary work was the quintessence of his own life: the quest for the spiritual perfection, for knowledge of the divine.²³ According to Gennadius of Marseilles, Evagrius was the first to unite the practical and spiritual approach to ascetic perfection and to incorporate both into an extensive and highly complex philosophical system. It is precisely this system which led Bousset to characterize Evagrius as the "Anfänger der Mönchsmystik."²⁴

esp. G. Bunge, "Evagre le Pontique et les deux Macaire," *Irénikon* 56 (1983), 215–27; E. Amélineau, *Histoire des monastères de la Basse-Egypte*, Annales du Musée Guimet 25 (Paris, 1894), 118–202, esp. 157–58; Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalaia Gnostica,"* 55–59; idem, *Aux origines du monachisme*, Spiritualité Orientale 30 (Bégrolles, 1979), 199–200; O'Laughlin, *Origenism in the Desert*, 3–5.

²¹ Apophth. A. Evagrius, A. Arsenius 5, A. Euprepius 7; for anti-intellectual feelings, see esp. A. Evagrius 7 and A. Euprepius 7; L. J. Guy, ed., *Les Apophthegmes des Pères du désert*, série alphabétique, Textes de Spiritualité Orientale 1 (Bellefontaine, 1966), 93 f, 31, 92, 94; Soz. *HE* VIII.11 (GCS 50), 363; Soc. *HE* VI.7, PG 67, col. 684D. For Melania and Rufinus' Origenistic tendencies, cf. Pall. *HL* 55 (II.149); Rufinus, *Praef. in hom. Bas.*, PG 31, col. 1723. According to Palladius, *HL* 38, long recension (I.144), Theophilus intended to ordain Evagrius bishop of Thmuis, but E. refused; Soc. *HE* IV.23, PG 67, col. 521; Pall. *HL* 38 (II.121–22); N. H. Baynes, "Alexandria and Constantinople: A Study in Ecclesiastical Diplomacy," in *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London, 1960), 97–115; Bunge, *Briefe*, 38–66. For a detailed study of the event of 399, see A. Favale, "Teofilo d'Alessandria (345–c. 412)," *Salesianum* 18 (1956), 215–46, 498–535; 19 (1957), 34–82, 215–72; Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalaia Gnostica,"* 52–65.

²² Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique* (SC 170), 30.

²³ *Pr.* 1 (SC 171), 498; for a more complete overview see Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique* (SC 170), 30–37; P. Hadot, "Exercices spirituels antiques et 'philosophie chrétienne,'" in *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, Études Augustiniennes (Paris, 1981), 59–74, here 62 f.

²⁴ Jer. Ep. 133 *ad Ctesiphontem* (CSEL 56), 246; Genn. *De vir. inl.* 11 (TU 14), 65; Soc. *HE* IV.23, PG 67, cols. 516–21; Soz.

Although Evagrius' ascetic system exercised an immense influence on his contemporaries and followers,²⁵ it has reached us only "dans des conditions particulières."²⁶ In fact, until the beginning of this century, Evagrius' work was virtually unknown. The reasons for this relative obscurity are only too familiar to those interested in the history of the Early Church. Evagrius' doctrine was profoundly influenced by the teachings of Origen. It was precisely during Evagrius' lifetime, the second part of the fourth century, that Origen and his teachings came increasingly under attack as being at the root of the "Arian heresy," to be formally declared as heretical in 553 at the fifth ecumenical council.²⁷ Evagrius and his circle, which included Rufinus of Aquileia and Melania the Elder, were placed progressively on the defensive, until the last word was spoken: the anathema pronounced on them by the council in 553.²⁸

HE VI.30 (GCS 50), 285; Bousset, *Apophthegmata*, 281 f; H. U. v. Balthasar, "Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus," *Zeitschrift für Askese und Mystik* 14 (1939), 31–47; Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique*, 29–37; O. Zöckler, *Das Lehrstück von den sieben Hauptsünden* (Munich, 1893).

²⁵ More so in the East than in the West: Evagrian concepts influenced Byzantine monastic thought primarily through the works of John Climacus, Hesychius, and Maximus Confessor; see esp. I. H. Dalmis, "L'héritage évagrien dans la synthèse de saint Maxime le Confesseur," *Studia Patristica* 8 = TU 93 (Berlin, 1966), 356–62; M. Viller, "Aux sources de la spiritualité de saint Maxime le Confesseur: Les oeuvres d'Evagre le Pontique," *Revue d'ascétique et mystique* 11 (1930), 156–84, 239–68, 331–36. Through Philoxenus of Mabboug and Isaac of Nineveh, it reached Syrian monasticism; see Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalaia Gnostica,"* 15 note 1; I. Hausherr, "Spiritualité syrienne: Philoxène de Mabboug en version française," *OCP* 23 (1957), 171–85. Letters addressed to Melania the Elder and translations by Rufinus attest Evagrius' influence on Palestine and from there via Cassian on the West; Jer. Ep. 133 (CSEL 54), 246: "... huius <Euagrii> libros . . . et interpretante discipulo eius Rufino Latinis . . . plerique in occidente lectitant"; John Mosch. *Prat. spir.* 177, PG 87, col. 3048AB; Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalaia Gnostica,"* 5, 69–74; S. Marsili, Giovanni Cassiano ed Evagrio Pontico, *Studia Anselmiana* 5 (Rome, 1936). The work of his disciple Palladius assured Evagrius an even larger audience; R. Draguet, "L' 'Histoire Lausiaque', une oeuvre écrite dans l'esprit d'Evagre," *RHE* 41 (1946), 321–64, 42 (1947), 5–49; for a general overview, see Balthasar, "Metaphysik und Mystik," 31–47, esp. 31; A. Guillaumont, "Evagrius Ponticus," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, X (Berlin, 1972), 565–70, esp. 569.

²⁶ Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique* (SC 170), 29.

²⁷ Epiphanius, his principal opponent, describes Origen as "the Father of Arius" in his letter to John of Jerusalem, transmitted in Jerome's translation, Ep. 51 (CSEL 54, 395), a charge already made in his *Pan. Haer.* 4, 3 (GCS 31), 417, 16–17. This accusation was perhaps the most damaging for the fate of Origen and his teaching; Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalaia Gnostica,"* 55, 84–89.

²⁸ F. Diekamp, *Die origenistischen Streitigkeiten im sechsten Jahrhundert und das fünfte allgemeine Concil* (Münster, 1899), text of the anathema against Evagrius, 90–96; A. Guillaumont, "Evagre et les anathématismes antiorigenistes de 553," *Studia Patristica* 8 = TU 78 (Berlin, 1961), 219–26.

Evagrius' writings, inevitably, were destroyed or forced into obscurity, preserved only under the names of orthodox authors.²⁹ This obscurity led in turn to a lack of interest among scholars, a situation only recently reversed.³⁰ Understandably, Evagrius' scholarly rehabilitation has so far focused on the reconstruction and edition of his principal works and, at the same time, the reconstruction of his doctrinal system.³¹ Evagrius himself has as yet received very little attention from a historical point of view.³² This is true in particular for the *Sententiae ad Virginem*.

Until recently, the *Sententiae* were known only in Rufinus' Latin translation, preserved in the appendix to Holstenius' *Codex Regularum*.³³ In 1911 Dom A. Wilmart published an independent Latin version, entitled "Epistola Evagri ad virginem (di-

recta),"³⁴ and in the following year the first complete Syriac version was edited by Frankenberg under the title "Epistula ad virginem."³⁵ In 1913 G. Gressmann published the first edition of the sole surviving manuscript in Greek, the original language of the *Sententiae*, under the title Παράνεσις πρὸς παρθένον.³⁶ This short overview of the *Sententiae's* textual tradition has already suggested one of the fundamental questions: exactly what kind of text are they? Are they a letter, as implied by Jerome, who uses the phrase "scripsit ad";³⁷ a collection of sentences, of "stichera" or verses, a description used by Socrates;³⁸ a collec-

²⁹A. Wilmart, "Les versions latines des Sentences d'Evagre pour les vierges", *RBén* 28 (1911), 143–53, based on a 10th-century codex from Silos, now in Paris, Bibl. Nat., N. Acq. lat. 239.

³⁰Frankenberg, *Evagrius*, 562–65, based on a ms. preserved in the British Library (Brit. Mus. Add. 14578), alternations to the title: "de virgine" or "de virginitate." Frankenberg also used an unedited Syriac version of the first 50 sentences, preserved in Cod. Vat. Syr. 126. Muyltermans, *Evagriana Syriaca*, 30 and note 30, mentions another complete, though unedited, Syriac manuscript preserved in the British Library (Add. 17165), several unedited incomplete Syriac versions (Brit. Mus. Add. 14579, Oriental 2312 and Brit. Mus. Add. 14728), and an incomplete Armenian version; idem, "Fragment arménien du 'Ad Virgines' d'Evagre," *Le Muséon* 53 (1940), 77–87. Sarghisian, *Vie et oeuvres*, published another incomplete Armenian manuscript titled "Sententiae ad virginem." SV is no. 22 of *Reliquiae Scriptorum Evagrii epistolae*.

³¹H. Gressmann, "Nonnenspiegel und Mönchsspiegel des Evagrius Pontikos," TU 39 (Berlin, 1913), 143–65. Gressmann's edition, used herein, is based on the sole 13th-century Greek ms. thus far discovered, Barb. gr. 515. For the catalogue description of this ms., see S. de Ricci, "Manuscripts grecs de la Biblioteca Barberina," *Revue des Bibliothèques* 17 (1907), 81–125, here p. 118, no. V, III. The codex is characterized as "anthologia ex Veteri et Novo Testamento S. Basilii Magni homilia V . . . Evagrii monachi capita varia, eiusdem parainesis ad monachos . . ."; the SV are on fols. 65–68. Gressmann used Rufinus' Latin translation and Frankenberg's Syriac versions as a basis for his edition. The Greek text is shorter than the Latin and the Syriac versions, both of which contain a doctrinal passage in SV 54 that is missing in the Greek ms. Gressmann, 144, remarks with respect to this passage: "In pr. 54 ist ein längeres Glaubensbekenntnis eingeschoben, daß die kirchlichen Dogmen gegen Ketzereien schützen soll. Es ist ungefähr gleichlautend im Lateiner und Syrer zu lesen, fehlt aber noch im griechischen MS. Sein fremder Ursprung wird zweitens dadurch bestätigt, daß es den Zusammenhang sprengt, und drittens dadurch, daß ihm die eigentümliche Form des Parallelismus membrorum fehlt. . . ." However, as J. Muyltermans, "Evagriana. Le Vat. Barb. Graec. 515," *Le Muséon* 51 (1938), 208–14, concludes, this dogmatic passage was original and was later deleted by the translators, though the existence of an identical passage handed down in both Latin and Syriac, without a common Greek source, is difficult to explain, especially since the Greek codex is much younger than the Latin or the Syriac ones. Muyltermans argues that the dogmatic aspects conform with Evagrius' system, an argument adopted by G. Bunge, "Origenismus—Gnostizismus. Zum geistesgeschichtlichen Standort des Evagrius Pontikos," *VChr* 40 (1986), 32; see below, note 61.

³²Jer. Ep. 133 (CSEL 56), 246; corroborated by the later Syriac and Armenian tradition.

³³HE IV.23, PG 67 col. 516.

²⁹Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique* (SC 170), 29–37.

³⁰Evagrius' rehabilitation began in 1893 with O. Zöckler's monograph, *Evagrius Ponticus: Seine Stellung in der altchristlichen Literatur- und Dogmengeschichte*, *Biblische und kirchenhistorische Studien* 4 (Munich, 1893). This work has not lost its fundamental value, although most of Zöckler's conclusions were drawn from the small selection of works contained in Migne's PG 40, cols. 1219C–1286A, which contains the following works: *Capita Practica ad Anatolium*, 1219C–1252C; *Rerum Monachalium Rationes*, 1252D–1264C; *Capitula XXXIII, Spirituales Sententiae, De Octo Vitiosis Cogitationibus*, 1240A–1244B; *Sententiae ad Fratres, Sententiae ad Virgines*. Zöckler's initiative was soon followed by a comprehensive Armenian study published in 1907 by H. B. V. Sarghisian, *Vie et oeuvres du saint Père Evagre le Pontique traduites du grec en arménien au V^e siècle* (Venice, 1907) (not seen by me), and in 1912 by Frankenberg's *Evagrius Ponticus*, an edition of a number of Syriac manuscripts, containing parts of all major works, the *Kephalaia Gnostika*, the *Praktikos* and *Gnostikos*, the *Antirrhethikos*, and a collection of Evagrius' correspondence, including a long letter to Melania. As a result of these publications, Evagrius' opus received increasing attention. Attempts to reconstruct his doctrine began in 1923 with Bousset, *Apophthegmata*, and R. Melcher, *Der 8. Brief des hl. Basilus*, and were followed in the 1930s by H. U. v. Balthasar, "Die Hiera des Evagrius," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 63 (1939), 86–106, 181–83; idem, "Metaphysik," passim; I. Hausherr, I. Moysesu, and M. Viller, "Aux sources," passim. Cf. the bibliography below.

³¹The main task of reconstructing a complete edition of Evagrius' work, rendered difficult by the literary disguises in which large parts of his work have been handed down, is as yet incomplete. J. Muyltermans, primarily with his *À travers la tradition manuscrite d'Evagre le Pontique: Essai sur les manuscrits grecs conservés à la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris*, *Bibliothèque du Muséon* 3 (Louvain, 1912) and *Evagriana syriaca: Textes inédits du British Museum et de la Vaticane*, *Bibliothèque du Muséon* 31 (Louvain, 1952), and especially A. and C. Guillaumont have made fundamental contributions. See below for bibliographical references.

³²Except to a degree by W. Lackner, *Zur profanen Bildung des Evagrius Pontikus* (Graz, 1966), 17–29, and Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalaia Gnostica,"* passim.

³³Preserved in a 9th-century codex, Vat. Regin. 140, they were first published by L. Holstenius in 1661 in the *Codicis Regularum Appendix in qua sanctorum patrum exhortationes ad monachos et virgines de observantia vitae religiosae, collectae olim a s. Benedicto Anianensi abbate III* (repr. Graz, 1957), 465–69; and then reprinted in 1759 in Augsburg in a version revised by M. Brockie, now in PG 40, cols. 1283–86.

tion of *παραινέσεις*, defined by Dibelius as “ein Text, der Mahnungen allgemein sittlichen Inhalts aneinanderreicht”;³⁹ or should we consider the *Sententiae* to be a “Speculum Virginum,” as Gressmann’s German translation implies?⁴⁰

II

Addressed to an anonymous virgin (*παρθένος*) of noble birth, the *Sententiae* contain a series of short prescriptions addressing practical matters that affect the ascetic’s day-to-day life within a community, concentrating on issues vital for achieving and preserving the true aim of the virgin’s life: internal purity. The *Sententiae* begin with a quasi-liturgical evocation (SV 1–3):

Love your Lord and he will love you, serve him and he will enlighten your heart. Honor your mother [in the same way] as the mother of Christ and do not irritate the one, now white-haired, who has borne you. Love your sisters as the daughters of your mother, and do not stray from the path of peace.

Taken literally, “do not irritate the one, now white-haired, who has borne you (SV 2)” could imply that the *parthenos*’ community was her natural family.⁴¹ However, addressing the sisters as *παρθένοι*, or virgins, and exhorting them to love one another as if they were related, Evagrius leaves little doubt as to the *Sententiae*’s intended audience: they are addressed to an ascetic community. The mother is a mother in the spiritual sense; her daughters are born in a spiritual rebirth.

This ascetic community lived within a village or town, and the sisters, although they observed the strictest possible seclusion, did occasionally come into contact with the outside world. Virgins visited the local church (SV 33); the virgin addressed is repeatedly exhorted to avoid all contact with men (SV 6, 7, 46); she “must not see the feasts of drunk-

ards nor visit the weddings of strangers” (SV 14), since “the chants of demons and of flutes weaken the soul and diminish its strength” (SV 48); and she must not “mingle with women [*κοσμικαί*] who are still in the world” (SV 24). Three kinds of women are particularly reprehensible: those who mock others and make jests (SV 49);⁴² a virgin “who touches a man” (SV 44),⁴³ perhaps a *syneisakte*; and, finally, *γραῶν κυκλευουσῶν*, old women who wander around (SV 13). Considering the warning (SV 26) against “the desire to walk about and the longing to visit the houses of strangers,” Evagrius seems to recommend strongly what could be described as *stabilitas loci*.⁴⁴

In contrasting the virgin to *κοσμικαί* (SV 24), literally “those in the world,” Evagrius leaves little doubt that the virgin, by virtue of her status as *παρθένος*, falls into an entirely different social category. “This” world with all its commitments such as marriage and the rearing of children—the world *κοσμικός* is frequently used in the narrower sense of “married”—is no longer hers. She already inhabits a world of another kind, ruled by different norms of behavior.⁴⁵

The virgin’s community was guided by the “mother,” who had to be honored as the “mother of Christ.” “Mother,” or Coptic *amma*, was at that time a title frequently used in reference to the leader of a community of *παρθένοι*.⁴⁶ Here, however, Evagrius adds another nuance. The “mother” should be honored like the “mother of

³⁹J. Dibelius, *Der Brief des Jakobus*, Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament 15 (Tübingen, 1964), 16–18; idem, *Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur*, II (Tübingen, 1929), 65–79; K. Berger, *Formgeschichte des Neuen Testaments* (Heidelberg, 1984), 121; R. Vetschera, *Zur griechischen Paränese* (Smichow, 1912). For the Hellenistic history of the genre, see P. Wendland, *Anaximenes von Lampsakos* (Leipzig, 1905), 81 f; most mss characterize SV as *sententiae* or *paraineseis*.

⁴⁰Above, note 36. M. Bernards, *Speculum Virginum. Geistigkeit und Seelenleben der Frau im Hochmittelalter*, Forschungen zur Volkskunde 36–38 (Cologne, 1955), 1 note 5, 2–13, 20 f, 30–39, 70–73, 210–13.

⁴¹Instances of ascetic communities that developed from natural families, and of ascetic mother-daughter relations, are quite frequent. See e.g., Pall. HL 37 and 60 (II.86 and 154); or, for non-literary sources, P. Mich. inv. 431 (ed. Youtie, *ZPapEpiG* 37 [1980], 216); P. Lond. VI 1926.

⁴²Rufinus translates “vituperantibus”; Wilmart has “detrahentibus.” *ἐπισκωπτούσας* could refer to actresses or mimes; cf. LSJ and Lampe s.v. See also John Chrys. *Hom. V in Ep. I ad Thess.* IV, PG 62, col. 428; G. Theocharidou, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Profantheaters im IV. und V. Jhd.*, Laographia 3, diss. (Munich, 1940), 87–99 note 1; *ibid.*, 104–13, has interesting references to “religious fools,” ascetics who degrade themselves to mimes; see, e.g., Pall. HL 34 (II.98).

⁴³Rufinus translates “adjuncta,” a virgin connected, linked to, a man; Wilmart has “contingens.” For the institution of *syneisaktes*, see H. Achelis, *Virgines Subintroductae. Ein Beitrag zum VII. Kapitel des I. Korintherbriefes* (Leipzig, 1902), *passim*.

⁴⁴Evagrius warns against this practice in his *Sententiae ad Monachos* (= SM 81), using the same expression, *κυκλεύειν*, for wandering monks. He likewise opposes a virgin’s proposed travel to Egypt in Ep. 7 and 8 (Frankenberg, *Evagrius*, 573 = Bunge, *Briefe*, 220–21); H. v. Campenhausen, “Die asketische Heimatlosigkeit im altkirchlichen und frühmittelalterlichen Mönchtum,” in *Tradition und Leben*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen, 1960), 290–317, here 294 note 13.

⁴⁵Evagrius frequently contrasts *κοσμικοί* and *μοναχοί*, Pr. 19, 24 (*τὰς κοσμικὰς ἐπιθυμίας*; cf. Tit. 2:12), 41, 48 (SC 171), 546, 556, 594, 608; idem. SM 34, 78, 113 (Gressmann), 156, 160, 162; Gregory of Nyssa, for example, uses *κοσμικός* to refer explicitly to those who are married, *De Virg.* Prol. 1, 21 and III 1, 14 (M. Aubineau, *Grégoire de Nyssa. Traité de la virginité*, SC 119, Paris, 1966), 248 and 274.

⁴⁶Pall. HL 34 and 59 (II.99 and 153).

Christ," like Mary. Unfortunately, this indirect allusion to Mary is Evagrius' only one; it is thus not feasible to draw further conclusions, beyond perhaps that Mary is evoked as a symbol of perpetual virginity.⁴⁷

In any case, all members had to obey the "mother" at all times without murmuring (SV 20, 21, 45). Equality, not only with regard to obedience, was essential for the life in community. All property was owned in common—"do not say: this is mine and that is yours, because in Jesus Christ everything is in common" (SV 30). Furthermore, to slander or despise a weaker sister, to occupy oneself overly with another's life, or to "exalt yourself on account of your noble birth" was strictly to be avoided (SV 29, 31, 32). Theoretically, the past, the "world" with its social distinctions, had to be, if not forgotten, at least consciously obliterated. To enter the community meant to adopt a new identity and presumed a definite, lifelong decision to abide by the obligations connected with this new identity. Though no vow is mentioned, the whole tenor of the *Sententiae* indicates that to "become" a παρθένος, a member of this community, implied a lifelong commitment.⁴⁸

In spite of the community's striving after equality, the full spectrum of social classes was represented. The best efforts could not erase a lingering consciousness of former social distinctions. The sisters had hand- or waiting-maids:⁴⁹ "Do not say: the maidservant annoyed me and I am going to punish her, because there is no slavery among the daughters of God" (SV 12). Clearly, the community included servants, and it appears that these maids were not considered to be "fully" equal members of the community, a situation Evagrius may have intended to rectify.

Consisting of a mother, daughters or sisters, and serving maids, the community was structured according to a precise hierarchy modeled after the

οἶκος or the *familia*.⁵⁰ Just as in a household, members of the community obeyed the mother, lived with their servants, and fulfilled their specific function, all benefiting from the household's common property. Although individual poverty was a fundamental requirement for the status of παρθένος, the community as a whole owned property. The virgins, as a community, financed their housing as well as generous acts of charity by their own work, at least partially (SV 4, 17, 32, 36, 43).

Once she became a member of this "family," the virgin had to adhere to certain basic requirements regarding food, work, prayer, and external appearance. Abstinence, work, and prayer were the practical foundations of a life directed toward peace, mutual charity, equality, and obedience. Peace or equanimity was perhaps the most fundamental prerequisite for life in common: "The Lord loves the gentle virgin, the quarrelsome will be hateful to him" (SV 19). And further: "She who secretly slanders a sister will remain outside the bridal chamber and no one will hear her crying at the door" (SV 42). Indeed: "A gentle wife is better than an angry and enraged virgin" (SV 45).

Anger and rage, ὀργή and θυμός, together with avarice, envy, jealousy, and gloating (SV 11, 28, 31, 36), are the most difficult obstacles a virgin must overcome to achieve the much-desired tranquil soul: "Anger and rage ought to be far from you, and rancor (μνησικακία) must not rest in your heart" (SV 8). "Envy (φθόνος) lays waste to the soul, and jealousy (ζήλος) devours it" (SV 28). Evagrius, however, also provides the virgin with positive advice to overcome all of these vices: "Love banishes anger and rage, gifts avert rancor" (SV 41); and only "the foolish virgin loves money, whereas the wise one gives even her own bread away" (SV 36, and 17, 43).

Because "hunger and thirst diminish evil desires" (SV 40), ἐγκράτεια, abstinence, together with love and generosity, becomes an essential ally in overcoming all adverse emotions, especially those that might endanger chastity. There are many warnings to avoid all conceivable situations that might lead to contacts with the opposite sex (SV 6, 7, 44, 46). Beyond doubt: "Abstinence (ἐγκράτεια)

⁴⁷ See Athanasius, *Lettre aux Vierges*, in L.-Th. Lefort, *S. Athanasie. Lettres festales et pastorales en copte*, CSCO 150–51, Scriptorum Coptici 19–20 (Louvain, 1955), 73–99 and 55–80, esp. 59; Y.-M. Duval, "La problématique de la Lettre aux Vierges d'Athanasie," *Le Muséon* 88 (1975), 413–16. For Origen see H. Crouzel, "La théologie mariale d'Origène," in H. Crouzel, F. Fournier, and P. Périchon, eds., *Origène: Homélies sur S. Luc*, SC 87 (Paris, 1962), 11–64.

⁴⁸ Regarding a promise or vow of virginity, see Elvira chap. 13 (Mansi II), 8; Ancyra chap. 19 (Mansi II), 519–20, 526; Bas. Ep. 199, can. 18 (II.155); H. Koch, *Virgines Christi. Das Gelübde der gottgeweihten Jungfrauen in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, TU 31 (Leipzig, 1907), 59–112, esp. 86–90 and 95–112.

⁴⁹ Phil. 10:12, 15, 16; *therapainis*: LSJ s.v., a hand- or waiting-maid, but only two occurrences are recorded in this form, Plato *Legg.* 808 A and Menander 142, Parth. 192.

⁵⁰ M. Forlin Patrucco, "Aspetti di vita familiare nel IV secolo negli scritti dei Padri Cappadoci," in R. Cantalamessa, ed., *Etica sessuale e matrimonio nel cristianesimo delle origini* (Milan, 1976), 158–79. For a more theoretical evaluation of the hierarchical structure of ascetic organizations, see F. J. Felten, "Herrschaft des Abtes," in F. Prinz, ed., *Herrschaft und Kirche*, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 33 (Stuttgart, 1988), 147–296, esp. 147–205.

is hard to bear, and chastity (ἀγνεῖα) difficult to sustain, but nothing is sweeter than the heavenly bridegroom" (SV 52).

Food was restricted. Evagrius did not specify the exact diet to be followed except that normally it was vegetarian: "to eat meat is not good (καλόν) and to drink wine not the best (ἀγαθόν); you must give all of these to the weak amongst your sisters" (SV 10).⁵¹ While the times of the meals are not stated, nor do we know whether meals were held in common, Evagrius recommends regular meals: "Do not say: today I shall eat, tomorrow I shall not eat, because you will not do so in wisdom. It will harm your body and hurt your stomach" (SV 9).

Continuous exhortations to fast, emphasized by many laudable *exempla*, abound in the ascetic literature. At the same time, it is worth noting that virtually all writings addressed to virgins stress the need to do so in moderation or, to use Basil of Caesarea's words, to preserve τὸ ἐν ἐγκρατεῖα εὐτονον. Excesses are never condoned, because they distort the God-given harmony and divert the focus of the virginal life toward merely bodily concerns.⁵²

Thus abstinence from food, despite its merits, must never be overdone: "Do not despise your sister when she eats and do not boast with your own abstinence, because you do not know the Lord's wishes and who will behold the Lord" (SV 50). On the whole, the sisters' day was characterized by a certain routine: "Let the rising sun see the Scripture in your hands, and, come the second hour, your work" (SV 4). While again the precise nature of the work is not mentioned, it clearly holds an important position within the ascetic routine. Its fruits, as has already been noted, were owned by the community.⁵³

The most important aspect of the daily routine, however, was prayer: "Pray incessantly and constantly remember (μύμνησο) Christ who created you" (SV 5). The essence of prayer is in its constant nature. It is an uninterrupted remembrance, vir-

tually a "meditation" on Christ, day and night, transcending yet underlying all other activities (SV 15, 35).⁵⁴ However, despite the continuous nature of prayer, a specific "time of prayer" and a time for vigils were set aside (SV 6, 25, 40).⁵⁵ During these times, the sisters sang psalms and visited the church of the Lord (SV 33, 35). The most effective form of prayer, however, took place at night, in solitude and with tears (SV 25), performed in all sincerity with a "pure heart," from which all evil thoughts and "false images" had been removed (SV 6, 38, 40).⁵⁶ Merely moving the lips was not sufficient (SV 35).

Abstinence, work, and uninterrupted, pure prayer—this harsh life could easily lead to sadness (λύπη) or, even worse, ἀκηδία. Ἀκηδία, "indifference," an affliction peculiar to the life of an ascetic, is difficult to translate.⁵⁷ The most vivid and psychologically astute description of this particular state of mind and its symptoms is given by Evagrius himself in chapter 12 of his *Praktikos*.⁵⁸

The demon of ἀκηδία, also called the noonday demon, is the most oppressive of them all. . . . First it makes the sun seem to slow down or stop moving en-

⁵⁴In the terminology of Greek philosophy, μνήμη is in essence the exercise of memorization, closely connected with that of μελέτη, meditation or preparatory exercises, both forming the fundamental aspect of internalizing a rule of life; see Hadot, "Exercices spirituels," (above, note 23), 20–25. This was often practiced in the form of a dialogue, *ibid.*, 29, and most importantly, carried out regularly and constantly, *ibid.*, 67. For the importance of prayer and its scriptural foundations in Evagrian thought, see Evagrius, *De Oratone*, PG 79, cols. 1165–1200, trans. J. E. Bamberger, *Evagrius Ponticus. The Praktikos. Chapters on Prayer*, Cistercian Studies Series 4 (Spencer, Mass., 1970), 45–80; I. Hausherr, *Les leçons d'un contemplatif: Le Traité de l'Oraison d'Evagre le Pontique* (Paris, 1960); A. de Vogüé, "La lecture du Matin dans les Sentences d'Evagre et la De Virginitate attribué à saint Athanase," *Studia Monastica* 26 (1984), 7–11. See also P. Maraval, ed., *Grégoire de Nyse. Vie de Saint Macrine*, 3:15–26; 11:28–39, SC 178 (Paris, 1971), 150 and 178; M. J. Marx, "Incessant Prayer in the Vita Antonii," *Studia Anselmiana* 38 (1956), 108–35.

⁵⁵For the "time or hour of prayer," see Evagr. *De Orat.* 117 and 120; trans. Bamberger, *The Praktikos*, 74–75.

⁵⁶H. Bacht, "Agrypnia. Die Motive des Schlafentzuges im frühen Mönchtum," in G. Pflug, B. Eckhart, and H. Friesenhahn, eds., *Bibliothek-Buch-Geschichte. K. Klöster zum 65. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt, 1977), 353–69, 353–69.

⁵⁷Indifference, listlessness, or depression in the modern clinical sense are the terms that come closest.

⁵⁸Evagrius is the first to identify *akedia* with the "noonday demon" mentioned in Ps. 90:6; Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique* (SC 170), 84–100, text *ibid.* (SC 171), 520–28. In his more popular treatise on the subject, *Akedia. Die geistliche Lehre des Evagrius Pontikos vom Überdruß* (Cologne, 1983), G. Bunge translates ἀκηδία as "Überdruß," i.e., indifference or listlessness; Bamberger, *The Praktikos*, 18 f, leaves ἀκηδία untranslated and translates λύπη as "sadness." S. Tugwell, in an unpublished translation of

⁵¹This is not in Wilmart, 149 and 151.

⁵²Bas. Ep. 173 (II.109); Pall. *HL* 20 (II.62); Gr. Nyss. *De Virg.* XIX.12; XXI.2; XXII.1 (SC 119), 488, 506, 510; Ps.-Athan. *De Virg.* 7, 8, 12 (E. v. d. Goltz, *De Virginitate. Eine echte Schrift des Athanasius*, TU 29, N.F. 14, Leipzig, 1905), 41–45. The warnings addressed to women and young girls could be related to "anorexia nervosa"; see C. Walker Bynum, *Holy Fast and Holy Feast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, 1987), 31–69, esp. 194–207.

⁵³SV 21 in Wilmart's Latin version, 149 (30–32), contains an additional passage concerning diligence while working: "quae curat iunctum sibi opus cum diligentia inveniet mercedem magnam; quae autem negligit negligetur."

tirely, so that the day seems fifty hours long . . . it makes [the monk] hate the place and his way of life and his manual work. . . . It makes him desire other places . . . it joins to this the remembrance of the monk's family and his previous way of life, and suggests to him that he still has a long time to live. . . . In short, it uses . . . every device it has to make the monk abandon his cell and give up the race.

"Sadness is oppressive and indifference unbearable," but, again, Evagrius prescribes the appropriate remedy: "to cry before God is better than both" (SV 39). Tears had a special significance, if shed not out of sadness, but while praying "before God" (SV 39 and 25).⁵⁹ Laughter was not permitted (SV 22, 46, 49). It was shameful, foolish, and an entirely superfluous expression of sentiment. Moreover, it created a noise quite unbecoming to constant prayer as, for that matter, did talking.⁶⁰ A virgin ought to remain silent, except for uttering a "word of God" (SV 15, 33).

In short, the virgin had to maintain a thoroughly controlled countenance and avoid every possible source of distraction. Her eyes should not wander, especially when she left the house, (SV 33), which she was supposed to do as rarely as possible, and ideally only to visit the church of the Lord. Apart from facilitating the complete immersion into prayer, seclusion also helped to avoid vanity. "She who adorns her dress is bereft of prudence" (SV 23). Any vestige of vanity might cause the virgin to regret the ideal virginal beauty for which she had to strive: silent without a smile, eyes cast down, dressed poorly, and subjected to constant work, with a face marked by frequent tears, careworn and thin because of lack of sleep and fasting.⁶¹ Only those who were truly determined could find the lifelong motivation to sustain this kind of beauty: "She who is sad about her bloodshot eyes and the wasting of her flesh will not delight in her pure, passionless soul" (SV 51).

"A pure, passionless soul" is the true aim of a virgin's life. The practical prescriptions regarding the control of a virgin's body were solely means to the end of the perfection of her soul. Without that, all other attempts at salvation remained futile, be-

cause they were undertaken for entirely the wrong reasons—glory among men: "Do everything for the sake of the Lord, and do not strive for glory among men, for the glory of men is like a withered flower, the glory of the Lord is everlasting" (SV 18). Everything had to be done for the glory of God, since only the Lord truly "knows a virgin's heart and observes all her thoughts" (SV 33). A virgin's soul, therefore, had to be pure, devoid of all evil thoughts and desires, resounding with uninterrupted prayer without any infringement or hindrance: "As the fire's blast is hard to control, so is the wounded soul of the virgin hard to heal" (SV 37). Free from hunger and thirst, no longer troubled by avarice, fornication, sadness, anger and rage, indifference or *akēdia*, jealousy and envy, never boasting or gloating,⁶² a virgin will always be continent, charitable, free from any attachments to this world, merciful and gentle, loving, obedient, and humble. She will achieve the aim and quintessence of virginal perfection: total liberation from passion, ἀπάθεια (SV 31), the precondition of purity: "The kingdom of heaven is ἀπάθεια of the soul" (Pr. 2).

Without a doubt, purity of the soul, more essential to ultimate perfection than bodily purity, is harder to achieve and much easier to lose. Even at the very last stages of perfection, dangers lurk and vigilance should not be slackened: "I have seen men who corrupt virgins with their teachings, thus rendering their entire virginity worthless. You, daughter, listen to the teachings of the Church of the Lord and allow no stranger to divert you" (SV 54).⁶³ Only "the just will inherit the light, the impious will inhabit the darkness" (SV 54). In at-

⁶²Six sentences deal with anger: SV 2, 8, 12, 19, 41, 45; four with desires: SV 26, 34, 38, 40; three with boasting: SV 16, 32, 50; three with laughter: SV 22, 46, 49; three with lasciviousness: SV 11, 22, 13.

⁶³Here follows the exhortation to orthodoxy in both the Syriac and Latin versions of the SV (see above, note 34), a concise outline of the correct doctrine concentrating on four essential subjects. First, the creation: God created everything and delights in the fruits of his labor; second, the nature of evil: nothing, not even the demon, is evil by nature, but God created evil out of his own free will. The third subject, christology, is thus summarized: Christ was born as a human being, but without sin, and he was not just an apparition in the eyes of men; and finally, eschatology: there will be a resurrection of the dead, the world will come to an end, and we will be clad in a spiritual body. The warning against "strange" (ἀλλότριου) teachers corrupting the virgins (see also *Sch. Prov.* 30, 9, ed. A. C. v. Tischendorf, *In Proverbia*, in *Notitia editionis Codicis Bibliorum Sinaitici* [Leipzig, 1860], 111, 5; *SM* 43, 123–25, 127; M. Franzmann, "Strangers from Above: an Investigation of the Motives of Strangeness in the Odes of Solomon and Some Gnostic Texts,"

the *Praktikos* (Oxford, 1987), translates λυπή as "depression" and ἀκηδία as "listlessness." I do not always follow their suggestions for translating the specifically Evagrian terms.

⁵⁹B. Steidle, "Die Tränen, ein mystisches Problem im alten Mönchtum," *Benediktinische Monatsschrift* 20 (1938), 181–87.

⁶⁰Idem, "Das Lachen im alten Mönchtum," *ibid.*, 271–80.

⁶¹Additions in the Syriac version A, Gressmann coll., Franzenberg, *Evagrius*, 562.

tempting to inherit the light, the virgin should emulate two models in particular, the “mother of Christ” and the wise virgins mentioned in Matt. 25:1–13.⁶⁴ The foolish virgins personify the vices to be avoided (SV 17, 22, 36, 42, 43, 53) and the wise virgins symbolize the reward awaiting the virgin who fulfilled her earthly tasks: to be the bride of Christ, awaiting her everlasting union with the bridegroom.

In fact, the virgin’s decision to join the community equals the betrothal of the “daughter of God” to her heavenly bridegroom, whom she awaits, clad in virtue like a pearl in a golden setting (SV 47). Her entire life is but a preparation for the heavenly wedding (2 Cor. 11:2). This summit of virginal life will, however, be reached only after the virgin’s death. Only then will she find fulfillment in the union of her bridegroom, Christ, an occasion for which Evagrius composed a vivid epithalamium, modeled after the *Song of Songs*:⁶⁵

The virgin’s eyes shall behold the Lord, her virginal ears shall hear his words. The virgin’s mouth shall kiss the bridegroom, her senses shall be drawn to the sweet smell of his perfume. Virginal hands shall touch the Lord, and he shall delight in the chastity of their flesh. The virgin’s soul shall receive the crown, and she will live with her bridegroom for ever after. She shall be clad in a spiritual garment, and she will feast

Le Muséon 103 [1990], 27–41), combined with the tenor of the doctrinal passage, led Muyltermans and Bunge to accept the passages as Evagrian. Bunge, “Origenismus–Gnosticismus,” 31–35, further attempts to identify a distinctly gnostic opponent because of the emphasis on the divinity of all creation; this is in line with Bunge’s attempts to characterize Evagrius not so much as an Origenist but an anti-Gnostic, otherwise soundly based on Nicaean teachings.

⁶⁴For the “mother of Christ,” see note 45; for the wise and the foolish virgins in Origen, see A. Feuillet, *Le Cantique des Cantiques*, *Lectio Divina* 10 (Paris, 1953), 64.

⁶⁵Ever since Meth. *Symp.* 7, 4, 158–59 (ed. H. Musurillo, *Méthode d’Olympe. Banquet*, SC 95, 18) the motif of the virgin’s espousal with Christ, based on Isa. 62:5, has become a commonplace in the literature “on virginity”; Orig. *Comm. In Canticum* Prol. and 2, 15 (W. A. Baehrens, *Origenes Werke*, GCS 33 (Berlin, 1925), 61–88 (= PG 13, col. 193); O. Rousseau, *Origène. Homélie sur le Cantique des Cantiques* (SC 37), 7–55. Athanasius, *Lettre aux Vierges*, 77–80, also uses the Cant. as the model for his description of the ideal virgin; see esp. H. Crouzel, *Mariage et virginité selon Origène* (Paris, 1962), 25–39, 66–73; L. Abramowski, “Sprache und Abfassungszeit der Oden Salomos,” *OC* 68 (1984), 80–90, esp. 86 f; E. A. Clarke, “The Use of the Song of Songs: Origen and the Later Latin Fathers,” in E. A. Clarke, *Ascetic Piety and Women’s Faith*, *Studies in Women and Religion* 20 (Lewiston, N.Y., 1986), 386–427; H. J. W. Drijvers, “The Odes of Solomon and Psalms of Mani,” in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religion Presented to G. Quispel* (Leiden, 1981), 117–30; J. Flemming and A. Harnack, *Ein jüdisch-christliches Psalmenbuch aus dem ersten Jahrhundert*, TU 35.4 (Leipzig, 1910); M. Lattke, *Die Oden Salomos in ihrer Bedeutung für Neues Testament und Gnosis*, Ia (Freiburg-Göttingen, 1980).

among the angels of heaven. Her lamp shall be shining forever, the oil in her vessel will never be exhausted. She will be showered with everlasting riches, and she will inherit the kingdom of heaven. (SV 55) My words to you, daughter, are said; your heart may keep my utterances. Remember Christ who guards you, and do not forget the worship of the Trinity. (SV 56)

To summarize, the *Sententiae* regulate the community’s internal life and its contacts with the outside world. They allow us to discern the principal model according to which the community organized itself: the family, reflected both in the terminology used to address the community’s members—mother, daughter, sister—and in its hierarchical structure. None of the *Sententiae*’s precepts differ from those contained in other writings aimed at regulating the life of a virgin. Rather, Evagrius simply brings many of the same issues concerning the life of a virgin in community into sharper focus.

The community addressed by the *Sententiae* included at least one woman of “noble birth,” εὐγενής, the addressee, as well as members from other social strata, including servants. Indeed, members of the community remained quite conscious of their “worldly” social differences, a fact Evagrius does not explicitly criticize either. He simply exhorts the “noble” members not to use the privileges of their rank.

The virgins enjoyed a large degree of financial autonomy, and lived within a village or an urban center. This last fact, despite the virgins’ almost complete seclusion, led to contacts with the outside world, with all the accompanying dangers of chattering old women, weddings, and even regular visits to church.⁶⁶ The external circumstances re-

⁶⁶There are only allusions to the economic life of the community. Evagrius’ SV corroborate an observation gained from virtually all sources referring to ascetics who lived a settled life in a community: the most fundamental ascetic requirement, namely, to renounce the world, was not carried to its extreme except by the most radical ascetic movements. To renounce one’s property did not necessarily lead to absolute poverty, and while the individual member had to forgo personal luxuries, the community as such could at times own substantial properties, often received as donations, as implied by the existence of a virgin of “noble birth.” Most of the leaders of female communities known to us belonged to an elevated social class, for example, Macrina and Emmelia, Vetiana, Olympias, or Ammoun’s wife. On the opposite end of the social spectrum, most ascetics mentioned had maids, servants or indeed slaves, in clear defiance of Gal. 3:28 or SV 12 itself. Basil of Ancyra referred to maids in chap. 29 of his *De Virg.*; Macrina, Emmelia, and Ammoun’s wife lived with servants; the “foolish virgin” in Pachomius’ female community performed slave work; and even Alexandra, enclosed in her tomb, had her servant, although

ferred to in the *Sententiae* thus also strongly resemble those of other female communities as described by Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea, in Athanasius' letters to virgins, in Palladius' *Historia Lausiaca*, and in the canonical literature.⁶⁷ Finally, the fact that Evagrius addressed his *Sententiae* to that community attests its close ties to a figure of authority, Evagrius himself.

III

The *Sententiae ad Virginem* are not a continuous treatise or a cohesive discourse. Their only discernible structural elements appear to be the introduction, which has an exhortation to love and honor the Lord, the mother, and the sisters, and the conclusion, which has three parts: the reminder to adhere to the correct doctrine, the epithalamium, and a final sentence exhorting the worship of the Trinity. Other than that, Evagrius assembled a series of sentences or *paraineseis* without any apparent sequence, order, or connection between them. The sentences are characterized by *parallelismus membrorum*, with the customary conjunction *καί*, at times accentuated by an explanation introduced with *γάρ*. Their advisory nature is enhanced by the frequent use of the imperative: "do this," "do not do or say that."⁶⁸ Thus, from a stylistic point of view, the *Sententiae* are most reminiscent of a literary genre known as *κεφάλαιον* or "chapter."⁶⁹

Evagrius was probably the first Christian author to employ this literary genre.⁷⁰ Yet the use of sentences or *κεφάλαια* in gnomic literature is no Evagrius innovation. Developed by the Stoics, the form of the *κεφάλαιον*, or collection of short, autonomous sentences, was considered the most ap-

propriate way to facilitate meditation, because its concise, almost terse style prohibits fluid, discursive reading. Instead, it offers "chaque jour, au hasard du rouleau ouvert, une pensée se suffisant à elle-même et de nature à nourrir leur méditation . . . Vous devez renoncer, dès le premier numéro, à y trouver un ordre logique."⁷¹

Is the same true for the *Sententiae ad Virginem*, or is it possible to discern some structure, some underlying principle of composition? This question is difficult to answer.⁷² Interestingly, despite the apparent absence of any immediately recognizable order, the individual sentences and their subdivision into 56 sections of two lines each have retained the same sequence in all surviving manuscripts.⁷³ Indeed, it is Evagrius' doctrine which reveals a much clearer picture of the *Sententiae*'s composition.

Evagrius' thought reflects a long philosophical tradition, comprising Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic elements,⁷⁴ particularly as they had been ex-

⁷¹M. Th. Disdier, "Le témoignage spirituel de Thalassius le Libyen," *EtByz* 2 (1944), 79–118, quote on p. 81 as cited by Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique* (SC 170), 115 f. Other works employing the same technique are, e.g., Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*; Epictetus, *Manual*; Porphyry, *Letter to Marcella*; Hadot, "Exercices spirituels," 67 f.

⁷²Numbers, which according to Evagrius' own testimony in the prologue to his *De Orat.*, PG 79, col. 1165; trans. Bamberger, *Praktikos*, 53–55, played an important part in his doctrine, do not seem to provide an insight into a potential structure of the *SV*. If the last three sentences were to be considered as some form of an appendix, the core part of the *SV* would form the number 53, "and fifty-three is a combination of triangular and spherical, because twenty-eight is triangular and twenty-five is spherical . . . [So you have] the wise knowledge of this world, which resembles the number twenty-five, because of the spherical nature of time, which rolls on from year to year. . . . The triangular number you can take as signifying the knowledge of the Holy Trinity"; see Nicomachus, introduction to *Arithmetic* II.8, 11, 17:7, PL 63, cols. 1079–1168. For the Pythagorean appreciation of numbers and a general discussion of this aspect, see C. Wagenaar, ed., "Evagrius Pontikus. Opgang von de Geest naar God," *Tijdschrift voor Geestlijk Leven* (1969), 444–46; Hausherr, *Les leçons d'un contemplatif*, 10 f; however, to consider mystical numbers as an ordering element of the *SV*'s composition seems somewhat forced. The case is different with the *SM*, where J. Driscoll, in his as yet unfinished dissertation in theology (Gregoriana, Rome), has discovered the numerical principle of their composition; equally unsatisfying, however, are assessments such as Lackner's, *Profane Bildung*, 23 note 39: "Die literarische Form der Sentenzen des Mönchs- und Nonnenspiegels braucht hier, weil nicht von der Rhetorik bestimmt, nicht behandelt zu werden." See also A. Otto, *Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer*, 2nd ed. (Hildesheim, 1960), VII–XLI.

⁷³Six sentences consist of three and six of four lines; the two sections concerning the doctrine and the final culmination are much longer.

⁷⁴The following draws upon Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique* (SC 170), 38–112; H. Crouzel, *Origène et la "connaissance mystique"* (Paris, 1961); P. Hadot, "Les divisions des parties de la philoso-

slavery continued to be a controversial issue, as *SV* 12 and discrepancies in the opinions of Basil and the two Gregorians indicate; *HL* 5 and 34 (II.21 and 98); *HM* 22 (Festugière), 128; *VSM* 7:6–8 (164); see Elm, *Organization and Institutions*, passim.

⁶⁷For details see Elm, *Organization and Institutions*, passim.

⁶⁸K. Berger, "Hellenistische Gattungen im Neuen Testament," in W. Haase, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, 25, 2 (Berlin, 1984), 1031–1432, esp. 1049–78, deals with gnomic literature, *sententiae*, *parainesis*, etc.; of fundamental importance are Berger's methodological reflections, *ibid.*, 1035–44.

⁶⁹Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique* (SC 170), 114–16; I. Hausherr, "Centuries," in *DSp*, II (Paris 1953), 416–18; E. v. Ivánka, "ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΑ. Eine byzantinische Literaturform und ihre antiken Wurzeln," *BZ* 47 (1954), 285–91.

⁷⁰A *γνώμη* has been defined by P. W. v. d. Horst, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides*, SVTP 4 (Louvain, 1979), 78, as "a short sentence giving a rule for conduct in daily life"; A. Méhat, *Études sur les "Stromates" de Clément d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 1966), 179–279, argues that the *Stromateis* follow the same genre.

pounded earlier by Clement of Alexandria and, above all, Origen. According to Evagrius, Christian doctrine consisted of three essential parts, each constituting a successively greater advancement toward spiritual perfection: “Christianity is the teaching (δόγμα) of Christ our Savior, consisting of practical science (πρακτική), natural science (φυσική), and theological science (θεολογική)” (*Pr.* 1). The last two components, “natural science” (φυσική) and “theological science” (θεολογική), are the essentials of a single concept, the “science of the divine,” which Evagrius also defies as γνωστική. In essence, therefore, Evagrius’ tripartite division of Christian doctrine consists of two parts only, πρακτική and γνωστική.

These two notions, πρακτική and γνωστική, or in their more detailed form, πρακτική, φυσική, and θεολογική, are the foundation of Evagrius’ entire system and, as such, possess a specific, technical meaning. To identify the specifically Evagrian understanding of these terms, it is most useful to begin with a familiar aspect: their tripartite nature.

According to Seneca, “philosophiae tres partes esse dixerunt et maximi et plurimi auctores: moralem, naturalem, rationalem”—in Greek, φυσικόν, ἠθικόν, λογικόν.⁷⁵ From the first century A.D. onward, these “classical” disciplines acquired a new meaning. Rather than denoting a simple division, physics, ethics, and logic began to signify progressive levels of knowledge that are equivalent to a spiritual progress leading to the ultimate contemplation.⁷⁶ It is this sense of spiritual progress that leads to reevaluation of the divisions φυσικόν, ἠθικόν, and, instead of logic, ἐποπτεία—the technical term used to describe initiation into the highest *mysterion* in Eleusis.⁷⁷ Thus the highest possible

degree of knowledge now assumes distinctly mystical characteristics.⁷⁸

It was Origen who explicitly equated these three stages—φυσική, ἠθική, and ἐποπτεία—with the three levels of a Christian’s spiritual progress: “L’éthique, selon lui, assure la purification préalable de l’âme, la physique, en révélant la vanité du monde sensible, nous invite à nous en détacher, l’épopéique enfin ouvre à l’âme purifiée la contemplation des réalités divines.”⁷⁹ Origen further established a direct link between these three parts of philosophical knowledge and the three Books of Solomon. According to him, Proverbs aided in achieving ethical purification, Ecclesiastes revealed the vanities of the physical world, and the Song of Songs introduced the soul to the contemplation of the divine through spiritual love.⁸⁰

Evagrius’ intellectual debt to Origen is evident in his adoption of the tripartite nature of spiritual progress. Evagrius developed the concept further by substituting *praktikē* for ethics, and thus attributing the mystical propensities of *epopteia* to θεολογική or γνώσις τοῦ θεοῦ, the science of the divine.

To begin with the first step, what precisely did Evagrius understand by πρακτική? “Practical science (πρακτική) is a spiritual method (μέθοδος πνευματική) which purifies the passionate part (παθητικόν μέρος) of the soul” (*Pr.* 78). By the fourth century, the term πρακτική, or πρακτικός βίος, had assumed a specific, Christian meaning.⁸¹

⁷⁵Orig. *Contra Cels.* 3, 37 (GCS 1), 233; the term ἐποπτεία is quite rare in Origen but more frequent in Clement; Crouzel, *Origène et la “connaissance mystique,”* esp. 450–59.

⁷⁶Quoted in Hadot, “Les divisions,” 219; Orig. *Comm. in Cant. Prol.* (GCS 33), 75; J. Daniélou, “Platonisme et théologie mystique,” *Théologie patristique* 22 (1954), 61–66, 92–97; Crouzel, *op. cit.*, 50–64, 249–53, 460–74; W. Völker, *Das Vollkommenheitsideal des Origenes* (Tübingen, 1931); W. Windelband, *Geschichte der abendländischen Philosophie im Altertum* (Munich, 1923), 128 f.

⁷⁷Orig. *Comm. in Cant. Prol.* (GCS 33), 75–79; J. Daniélou, *Origène* (Paris, 1948), 297 f; Hadot, “Les divisions,” 218–21. In Neoplatonism the summit of the *physikē* is equated with *apatheia*, which then becomes the stepping stone for the detachment of the soul from the sensible world toward the contemplation of the divine *nous*, intelligence; Porphyry, *Sent.* 32; H. v. Lieshout, *La théorie plotinienne de la vertu. Essai sur la genèse d’un article de la Somme théologique de saint Thomas* (Freiburg, 1926).

⁸¹The term has a long history; in Greek philosophical usage, the adjective πρακτικός defines a profane activity, whether a manual activity such as in Plato, activity in general as in Aristotle, or in the stoic sense, social activity; H. Bacht, “Euagrios Pontikos,” in *Große Mystiker. Leben und Wirken*, ed. H. Ruhbach and J. Sudbrack, (Munich, 1984), 36–50; Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique* (SC 170), 38–41; Hadot, “Les divisions,” 218–21; A. M. Malingrey, *Philosophia. Etude sur un groupe de mots dans la littérature grecque des présocratiques au IV^e siècle après J.-C.* (Paris, 1961), 174 f. Philo of Alexandria was the first to attribute a more spe-

phie dans l’Antiquité,” *Museum Helveticum* 36 (1979), 201–23; I. Hausherr, “Les grands courants de la spiritualité orientale,” *OCP* 1 (1935), 114–38, esp. 121.

⁷⁵Seneca, *Ep. mor.* 89, 9 (ed. T. E. Page, *Seneca. Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, II, London, 1930, 382); Greek according to Porphyry by Aetius in H. Diehls, *Doxographi graeci* (Berlin, 1929), 273; Hadot, “Les divisions,” 208–14; idem, “Exercices spirituels,” 25–70.

⁷⁶The first testimony of this changing understanding is Plutarch in his *De Iside* 382d; I. Hadot, *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung* (Berlin, 1969), esp. 115; H. J. Horn, “Anakolouthie der Tugenden und Einheit Gottes,” *JbAC* 13 (1970), 3–28.

⁷⁷Developed in the works of Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* I, 28, 176, 1–3 (ed. O. Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus. Stromata*, GCS 15, 4th ed. (Berlin, 1985), 108–9; Hadot, “Les divisions,” 214–19; idem, “Exercices spirituels,” 59–73; Méhat, *Etudes sur les “Stromates,”* 77 f.

Gregory of Nazianzus, for instance, used *πρακτικός* to define a nonmonastic form of religious life, "a life useful to others, but less useful to oneself," as opposed to the life of a monk, a philosophical life devoted to meditation or *ήσυχία*.⁸²

Evagrius, again, adds another nuance. He now considers *πρακτική* to be an essential part of monastic life: *πρακτική* signifies the ascetic's exercise of five precise virtues, listed, for example, in the *Sententiae ad Monachos* 3–5 and in the Prologue to the *Praktikos*:

The fear of God (*φόβος*) strengthens faith (*πίστις*), children, and is in turn strengthened by abstinence (*ἐγκράτεια*). Abstinence is made unshakable by perseverance (*ὑπομονή*) and hope (*ἐλπίς*), and from these is born passionlessness (*ἀπάθεια*), whose offspring is charity (*ἀγάπη*); and charity is the doorway to natural knowledge (*γνώσεως φυσικῆς*), which is followed by theology and supreme beatitude (*μακαριότης*). (Prol. 8)

The practice of these virtues—faith, fear of God, abstinence, perseverance, hope—is nothing but the ascetic's fight against unwanted thoughts, *λογισμοί*, because ". . . demons prefer to fight men of the world (*κοσμικοί*) by means of things, but monks they attack for the most part by means of thoughts (*λογισμοί*)" (*Pr.* 48).

The essence of *πρακτική*, therefore, is the discovery of these thoughts, an analysis of their characteristics, and the employment of appropriate remedies to ensure their final conquest. These evil thoughts, *λογισμοί* and *διαλογισμοί*, as well as their propensities, are engendered by demons. In fact, the link between the thought and the demon who causes it is such that they are virtually synonymous: the thought is the demon personified.⁸³

cifically religious meaning to *πρακτική*, when he described the ascetic life led by Jacob as a *πρακτικός βίος*; Philo, *De praemiis et poenis* 51, ed. Beckaert (Paris, 1961), 66–67. In *De Vita contemplativa* 1 (ed. F. Daumas and D. Miguel, Paris, 1963, 78 f) he contrasts the Essenes, who lead a *πρακτικός βίος*, to the *θεραπευταί*, leading a contemplative life; R. Joly, *Le thème philosophique des genres de vie dans l'antiquité classique* (Brussels, 1956), 143–47.

⁸²Gr. Naz. *De vita sua* v. 263–337, PG 37, col. 1029, esp. 1047–52; idem, *Or. 43 in Bas. Laud.* 23 (ed. F. Boulanger, Paris, 1908, 108–9). See, however, again the Origenistic usage described by Bousset, *Apophthegmata*, 306, and Viller, "Aux sources," 38 note 10.

⁸³In *Pr.* 80 (SC 171), 668, Evagrius distinguishes between thoughts inspired by angels and those inspired by demons; again, this concept of a personification of evil thoughts as demons is not new; Orig., *Comm. in Cant.* 3 (GCS 33), 211; Ath., *V. Ant.* 23, PG 26, col. 877; Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique* (SC 170), 57–63 and (SC 171), 509–35; T. Spidlik, *La spiritualité de l'Orient chrétien*, OCA 206 (Rome, 1978), 244–60.

While, again, not the originator of these concepts, Evagrius first distilled the theory of evil thoughts into a fixed system of eight generic thoughts, thoughts that in turn comprised all other evil sentiments:

There are eight generic [evil] thoughts, in which every thought is contained. First, that of gluttony (*γαστριμαργία*), then, fornication (*πορνεία*), third, avarice (*φιλαργυρία*), fourth, sadness (*λύπη*), fifth, anger (*ὄργη*), sixth, indifference (*ἀκηδία*), seventh, vainglory (*κενοδοξία*), eighth, pride (*ὑπερηφάνια*). (*Pr.* 6)

These eight generic thoughts have to be counteracted with the appropriate remedies. Fasting and abstinence (*ἐγκράτεια*)⁸⁴ counter gluttony and fornication, love overcomes avarice and depression. Angry thoughts, however, whether those within the monk's soul or thoughts directed against others, require three remedies: gentleness, compassion, and charity (*Pr.* 20–26). Likewise, the monk has to employ three remedies against that most difficult vice, *ἀκηδία* or indifference: tears (*Pr.* 27), perseverance, that is, *stabilitas loci* (*Pr.* 28), and a constant vigilance over his soul, "as if he were to die tomorrow" (*Pr.* 29). The last in the hierarchy of demons are those of vainglory and pride, which attack the monk after all the others have been overcome, but humility and the remembrance of past failures guard against these two (*Pr.* 33).

This system of eight vices and their remedies reappears in the same sequence in virtually all of Evagrius' writings dealing with monastic life, the *Sententiae ad Monachos*, the *Antirrhetikos*, *Against the Eight Evil Spirits*, and others.⁸⁵ In short, the system occupies a central position in Evagrius' ascetic doctrine and had a tremendous impact on following generations in the form of the "seven deadly sins."⁸⁶

The monk may achieve the "flower of practical life," the absence of passions or *ἀπάθεια* (*Pr.* 81), solely through constant watchfulness over the three parts of the soul in which evil thoughts act, namely, the part of instinctive desires or *ἐπιθυμητι-*

⁸⁴For the concept of humidity and its stimulating effects on sexual desires, see P. Littré, ed., *Hippocrates, De la Génération I, VII* (Paris, 1851), 470; Ev. *De Oct. Spir. Mal.*, PG 79, cols. 1148C, 1229.

⁸⁵The only exception is *Cogitationibus*, PG 79, cols. 1145–64, where anger precedes sadness.

⁸⁶M. W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (East Lansing, Mich., 1952); I. Hausherr, "L'origine de la théorie orientale des huit péchés capitaux," *OrChr* 30.3 (1933), 164–75; A. Vögtle, "Woher stammt das Schema der Hauptsünden?" *ThQ* 122 (1941), 217–37.

κόν, the irascible part or θυμικόν, and the rational part, λογιστικόν, which Evagrius at times equates with νοῦς.⁸⁷

Apatheia signifies the liberation of the soul from all attacks of the demons, and thus the conquest of all evil thoughts. As such, “ἀπάθεια is what we shall call the soul’s health” (*Pr.* 56), a state in which the soul has achieved “harmony and mutual adaptation” (*Pr.* 89).⁸⁸ Once the soul has achieved this state of perfect harmony, it is able to love with truly pure love, ἀγάπη, which in turn opens the “doorway to γνῶσις,” or the science of the divine (*Pr.*, Prol. 8).

Passionlessness, ἀπάθεια, is the precondition for love, ἀγάπη, which in turn leads on to the ultimate goal of monastic life, γνωστική, or a spiritual science.⁸⁹ It, therefore, did not mean “to become like God or like a stone,” as insinuated by Jerome, nor was it an end in itself.⁹⁰

The true aim of practical life was not solely the absence of all passion, but pure love, ἀγάπη, without which γνῶσις τοῦ θεοῦ remains impossible.⁹¹ Love alone guarantees ἀπάθεια and hence the achievement of the *summum bonum*, the mystical connection with the divine through γνῶσις.⁹²

This brief summary has sought to emphasize the three essential steps comprising Evagrius’ ascetic

teachings: (1) πρακτική, the conquest of the eight evil thoughts through their remedies, culminating in freedom from passion and true love; followed by (2) knowledge of the physical world; leading ultimately to (3) knowledge of the divine. How are these essential steps, with their equally essential components of the five virtues and the eight evil thoughts, represented in the writings discussed here, the *Sententiae ad Virginem* and the *Sententiae ad Monachos*?

Evagrius composed the *Sententiae ad Monachos* as the male equivalent to the *Sententiae ad Virginem*. Their parallel nature, which is attested to by similarities in style and content as well as by verbatim quotations, was well known to Evagrius’ contemporaries, who always mention the two *Sententiae* as forming a unit. Jerome, for instance, wrote to Ctesiphon: “Euagrius Ponticus Hiberita, qui scribit ad virgines, scribit ad monachos,” and Rufinus translated both writings into Latin.⁹³

Evagrius opens his *Sententiae ad Monachos* with a brief address to the heirs of God, the monks, exhorting them to listen to his words, so that they may pass on his wisdom to their “sons,” or disciples, an opening similar to that of the *Sententiae ad Virginem*. This exhortation is immediately followed by the description of the five virtues, listed in the same order as in the Prologue to the *Praktikos*: “faith,” “fear of God,” “abstinence,” “perseverance,” and “hope” (*SM* 3–5). After this brief theoretical definition of the most important virtues, Evagrius sketches a rough outline of his concept of πρακτική: a description of the eight vices—gluttony and fornication, avarice and anger, sadness and indifference, and finally vainglory and pride—together with their remedies, arranged according to the tripartite division of the soul.⁹⁴ He then proceeds to describe more concretely the monk’s daily life, furnishing a doctrinal outline that includes a warning against heretics, and concluding with an exposé on the “science of nature” as the precondition for the final steps in the ascent toward the “science of the divine,” γνωστική.

⁸⁷For a detailed study of Evagrius’ anthropology, see O’Laughlin, *Origenism in the Desert*, 127–37; for the complex delineation of soul (νοῦς-λογιστικόν), see esp. 153–86.

⁸⁸Aristotle, *Phys.* IX 5, 256 b 24 (ed. Ross, 6th ed., Oxford, 1977); Seneca, *De Vita Beata* 4, 2–3 (ed. Basore, London, 1905), 108; see the notes by Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique* (SC 171), 631–33; 681–89, for stoic antecedents of the notion of *apatheia*.

⁸⁹Evagrius’ concept of the “gnostic” as the summit of ascetic perfection derives from Clement of Alexandria rather than directly from Origen: Guillaumont, *Le Gnostique*, 24–26; A. Guillaumont, “Le Gnostique chez Clément d’Alexandrie et chez Evagre le Pontique,” in *Alexandria. Mélanges offerts à C. Mondésert* (Paris, 1987), 1195–1201; M. Smith, “The History of the Term Gnostikos,” in B. Layton, ed., *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, II (Louvain, 1981), 796–817; W. Völker, *Der wahre Gnostiker nach Clemens Alexandrinus*, TU 57 (Berlin, 1952).

⁹⁰Jer. Ep. 133 (CSEL 56), 246: “edidit librum et sententias peri apatheias, quam nos ‘impassibilitatem’ vel ‘imperturbationem’ possumus dicere, quando numquam animus ulla cogitatione et vitio commovetur et—ut simpliciter dicam—vel saxum vel deus est.” For Christian precedents of the notion see, among others, Bardy, “Apatheia,” in *DSP*, I (Paris, 1937), 727–46; A. Dirking, “Die Bedeutung des Wortes Apathie beim heiligen Basilius dem Großen,” *ThQ* 134 (1954), 202–12; Völker, *Der wahre Gnostiker*, 524–40; J. K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God* (Cambridge, 1926).

⁹¹Since ἀγάπη, as understood by Evagrius, is love of God and the corresponding love of one’s neighbor, then just as “the passions of the body are cut off by abstinence (ἐγκράτεια), those of the soul are cut off by spiritual charity (ἀγάπη)” (*Pr.* 35). Thus ἀγάπη, love, is ἐγκράτεια of the soul.

⁹²Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique* (SC 170), 38–112; Hadot, “Exercices spirituels,” 59–74.

⁹³Jer. Ep. 133 (CSEL 56), 246; Genn. *De vir. ill.* 11 (TU 14) 65; Soc. *HE* IV.23, PG 67, cols. 516–21; Bunge, “Origenismus—Gnostizismus,” 36–37; Gressmann, “Nonnenspiegel,” 8, 152. For quotations see *SM* 15 – *SV* 6; *SM* 23 – *SV* 53; *SM* 25 – *SV* 43; *SM* 34 – *SV* 45; *SM* 58 – *SV* 38; *SM* 62 – *SV* 49; *SM* 72 – *SV* 42; *SM* 79 – *SV* 36; *SM* 81 – *SV* 13; *SM* 82 – *SV* 23; *SM* 85 – *SV* 19; *SM* 86 – *SV* 21; *SM* 90 – *SV* 3; *SM* 91 – *SV* 20; *SM* 94 – *SV* 15; *SM* 96 – *SV* 16; *SM* 104 – *SV* 31 + 33.

⁹⁴*SM* 11, 22, 23, e.g.; *SM* 25, 30; *SM* 55; *SM* 61; see also Orig. *In Mt. com.* 91 (ed. Klosterman, GCS 12), 207; Gr. Nyss. *V. Moys.* II, 7, 1 (ed. Musurillo, SC 1a, Paris, 1955), 104; Völker, *Das Vollkommenheitsideal des Origenes*, 101.

In contrast to the *Sententiae ad Virginem*, the structure of the *Sententiae ad Monachos* is much clearer. As in the *Praktikos*, Evagrius incorporates the eight generic vices or evil thoughts in their set sequence, combined with their appropriate remedies essential for attaining ἀπάθεια.⁹⁵

Here the congruence between the *Praktikos* and the *Sententiae ad Monachos* ceases. While the *Praktikos* is concerned with the first preparatory steps, leading toward ἀπάθεια, the *Sententiae ad Monachos* intend to guide the monk along the entire, long path to spiritual perfection: Evagrius proceeds by advising the monk on the two subsequent steps, γνώσις φυσική and γνώσις τοῦ θεοῦ. Thus the most substantial portion of the *Sententiae ad Monachos* is devoted to γνώσις τοῦ θεοῦ.⁹⁶ Indeed, as a detailed analysis of its structure reveals, the entire *Sententiae ad Monachos* is composed around a center of six sentences discussing γνώσις and ἀγάπη, the fundamentals of Evagrius' entire system.⁹⁷

In short, the *Sententiae ad Monachos* contain Evagrius' entire ascetic system in a concise form: from the first step of πρακτική, via the recognition of God's wisdom in nature, to the final aim, the climax of ascetic perfection found in the mystical union of the monk with God.⁹⁸ However, the pro-

⁹⁵To repeat the remedies once more, ἐγκράτεια against fornication, ἀγάπη, love and charity, as remedy against μῖσος or anger. *SM* 12–15 deal with rage and its appropriate remedies; 16–18 with avarice; 19–20 discuss humility as a remedy against arrogance; 24–29 stress the incompatibility of wealth and the above-mentioned virtues; 30–37 expound the aspects of θυμός and suggest gentleness and compassion as remedies; 38–45 contain a description of negative consequences of γαστριμαργία. *SM* 55–60 give a brief description of ἀκηδία, its nature, relation to depression, and the delight of the monk who succeeded in overcoming it; 61–62 warn again against vainglory and pride by giving a brief description of them; and 63–73 contain a series of advice on how to avoid them.

⁹⁶The following figures give a merely numerical impression of the importance given to γνώσις in *SM*: the word occurs 30 times altogether, 4 times as γνώσις τοῦ θεοῦ, 3 as γνώσις ἀληθείας. Σοφία and φρόνησις each occur 8 times, but ἀπάθεια, which was so important in *Pr.*, only 4 times.

⁹⁷*SM* 63–68; *Ev. Pr.* 1 (SC 171), 499; *idem, In Ps. 24*, 16 PG 12, col. 1272; J. Driscoll, unpub. diss., Gregoriana.

⁹⁸The *Praktikos* forms one part of a trilogy completed by the *Gnostikos* and the *Kephalaia Gnostika*, as pointed out by Evagrius in his Letter to Anatolios, which forms the prologue to the *Praktikos*: “we shall now expose, concerning the *bios praktikos* and the *bios gnostikos*, not all that we have seen and heard, but only that which we have been instructed by them [the masters] to divulge to others; we have condensed and rephrased *ta praktika* into 100 chapters, and *ta gnostika* into 50 and then further into 600.” Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique*, Prol. 9 (SC 171), 492–93. The second part, the *Gnostikos* (Guillaumont, *Le Gnostique* [SC 356], 17–23), is a form of transition between the *Praktikos* and the *Kephalaia Gnostika* (ed. A. Guillaumont, *Les six Centuries des Képhalaia gnostica d'Evagre le Pontique*, PO 28 [Paris, 1958]), which incidentally have only 540 chapters (6 × 90); Guillaumont, *Les “Kephalaia Gnostica,”* 18–22.

cess was a slow one; the mystic depths of true γνώσις were revealed only to the very advanced monk after many trials and much striving.⁹⁹ Indeed, the most profound depths of mystical knowledge could only be achieved after a monk's death.

In contrast to the *Praktikos*, the *Sententiae ad Monachos*, and indeed all other relevant writings, the *Sententiae ad Virginem* do not include the system of eight evil thoughts and their appropriate remedies. This is not to say that the generic vices with their corresponding virtues are completely absent. As demonstrated above, Evagrius in effect alludes to all of the vices and their remedies. *SV* 39–41 refer to sadness and indifference and their appropriate remedy, tears, and warn against fornication and anger which could be overcome by love, generosity, and compassion. *SV* 36 condemns avarice, and once, in *SV* 38, Evagrius exhorts the virgin to prevent διαλογισμοὶ πονηροὶ from entering her soul. Further, the highest aims of the *praktikē*, *apatheia* and pure love, form a definite part of the *Sententiae ad Virginem*.

However, on closer analysis, the only vices mentioned explicitly are those affecting the ἐπιθυμητικόν and the θυμικόν, the two lower parts of the soul: gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, rage, sadness, and indifference. Vainglory and pride, the last vices preventing perfection, are missing. Further, in sharp contrast to the *Sententiae ad Monachos*, where the word occurs over thirty times, the term γνώσις does not appear once, nor do any of the notions connected with γνώσις play any role whatsoever in the *Sententiae ad Virginem*.

What consequences result from this conspicuous absence of γνώσις and all its related notions in the *Sententiae ad Virginem*? Did Evagrius abandon the concept of spiritual progress so fundamental to ascetic life when addressing himself to women?

Origen provides important clues in answering these crucial questions. It will be recollected that he was the first to equate the pure soul and its progress toward the mystical contemplation of the divine with the three Books of Solomon. Proverbs

⁹⁹*Pr.* c. 1, 3, 4; Frankenberg, *Evagrius*, 612–19; Genn. *In vir. ill.* 11 (TU 14), 65: “. . . edidit et paucas sententias valde obscuras <sc. Kephalaia Gnostika>, ut ipse in his ait, solis monachorum cordibus agnoscibilis . . .”; Plato *Rep.* II.379 a 5 (ed. Chambry, Paris, 1970), 83; Orig. *Exh. ad Mart.* 13 (GCS 1), 13; Gr. Nyss. *Hom. XI in Cant.*, PG 44, col. 996. Melania seems to have been an exception; Evagrius spoke to her freely and openly about the mysteries of gnosis; see Guillaumont, *Les “Kephalaia Gnostica,”* 51.

ensure ethical perfection, Ecclesiastes, practically opening with the words “vanitas vanitatum,” reveals the vanity or futility of the physical world, and the Song of Songs depicts the mystical contemplation of the divine.¹⁰⁰ Now, the *Sententiae* as such are a virtual commentary or pastiche on Proverbs.¹⁰¹ A substantial part of the *Sententiae* denounces the vanities of this world, exhorting the virgin to disregard worldly glory and to free herself entirely from vain, empty notions.¹⁰² And, in using the language of the Song of Songs, Evagrius extols the ultimate aim of virginal life: the mystical union with Christ, the bridegroom.¹⁰³ In short, the notion of progression is still present.

In the *Sententiae ad Virginem*, Evagrius preserves the concept of the mystical ascent. What is more, the substance of ascetic life, its ultimate aim, also remains the same: mystical union with the divine. However, in the case of women, the nature of this summit is entirely different, presented with entirely different *topoi*, and achieved by an entirely different method: mystical union with the divine is achieved not through *gnōsis*, but through a heavenly wedding with Christ. For women, the summit of ascetic life is conceived in sexual terms, as the everlasting wedding of the virgin’s soul with her heavenly bridegroom in the bridal chamber of the kingdom of heaven.

Thus, even though the aim of ascetic life, namely, mystical union with the divine, is ultimately the same for men and women, there can be no doubt that the nature of this union and the means of achieving it are understood and represented as different. A monk strives for an intellectual abstraction, namely, mystical knowledge. On

the other hand, the fulfillment of a virgin’s ascetic life is far more personal and concrete: it is union with the heavenly bridegroom, Christ. Consequently, in the *Sententiae ad Virginem*, the λογιστικόν, or rational part of a virgin’s soul, is not an issue.

For women, the highest aim of ascetic life results directly from their status: as a virgin and only by virtue of her being a virgin, in the spiritual sense of the word, will she become bride of Christ. For a virgin, the sole “effort” necessary to achieve her aim is to preserve her condition.

By definition, her ascetic efforts culminate in her attainment of absolute purity. According to Evagrius’ system, purity is the freedom from passion in both body and soul. In other words, a virgin’s ascetic progress, at least while she is alive, ends with ἀπάθεια and ἀγάπη: the aims of *praktikē*. Γνωστική and its notions are of no concern to her. As a result of her capacity to achieve the highest aim of ascetic life, through a mystical wedding, she does not have to pursue the difficult path toward knowledge.

Γνώσις τοῦ θεοῦ, the highest goal of a man’s ascetic life, is, according to Evagrius, virtually unattainable in its strictest sense during an ascetic’s lifetime. However, knowledge of the divine offers at least the theoretical possibility of achievement through an ascetic’s own efforts, though these are always aided by divine grace. Therefore, a male ascetic can, theoretically, aim to strive for perfection while he is still alive. But a woman’s *unio mystica*, her supreme realm of perfection, can, by definition, be achieved only after her death.

This differing conception of the aim of male and female asceticism runs through both *Sententiae* like a leitmotif. Whenever Evagrius portrays the rewards of the monk’s ascetic life (or its punishments in case of a lapse), he phrases those events in terms of the gain or loss of knowledge. The same circumstances, in the case of the virgin, are portrayed as the gain or loss of intimacy with the bridegroom.¹⁰⁴ The difference is most striking in the eulogion passage in both *Sententiae*, which in the case of the *Sententiae ad Virginem* is composed as an epithalamium, a bridal chant, glorifying the final union with Christ, while in the *Sententiae ad Monachos*, it is a glorification of the merits of *gnōsis*.¹⁰⁵

What is the significance of this remarkable difference in the nature of ascetic perfection? The

¹⁰⁰ See above, Orig. *Comm. In Cant.* Prol. (GCS 33), 75, 6; cf. Pr. 1 (SC 171), 498; Hadot, “Les divisions,” 219; Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique* (SC 170), 38, note 1.

¹⁰¹ P. Géhin, ed., *Evagre le Pontique, Scholies aux Proverbes*, SC 340 (Paris, 1987), 16 f; A. C. v. Tischendorf, *In Proverbia*, in *Notitia editionis Codicis Bibliorum Sinaitici* (Leipzig, 1860), 77–122; Balthasar, “Die Hiera des Evagrius,” 86–106, 181–206; M.-J. Rondeau, “Le commentaire sur les Psaumes d’Evagre le Pontique,” *OCP* 26 (1960), 307–48; eadem, *Les commentaires patristiques du Psautier (III–V^e siècles)*, I, OCA 219 (Rome, 1982), here 203–71.

¹⁰² The resemblances to the three steps of progress along the Books of Solomon need not to be stressed too excessively; it is not my intention to superimpose an artificial structure at all costs. E. Marotta, “La base biblica della ‘Vita S. Macrinae’ di Gregorio di Nissa,” *Vetera Christianorum* 5 (1968), 73–88, here 84–86, attempted to prove that the *VSM* followed the same tripartite subdivision, but Maraval, *Vie de Sainte Macrine*, 93 f, denied such a close affinity.

¹⁰³ Significantly, elsewhere Evagrius used the *Song of Songs* only rarely, and did not write a commentary on it; Géhin, *Les Scholies*, 20.

¹⁰⁴ See, for instance, SV 36, SM 18, SV 14, SM 43.

¹⁰⁵ See also Bernardus, *Speculum Virginum*, 185–95.

Sententiae ad Virginem could have been written prior to Evagrius' full development of his system of progressive perfection via *praktikē* to *gnōsis*, and thus prior to his molding of the eight evil thoughts into a fixed form.¹⁰⁶ Yet this is unlikely, for the two *Sententiae* are evidently parallel, and both concur with the relevant aspects of the *Praktikos* and the *Treatise on Prayer*.¹⁰⁷ Further, Evagrius' approach to ascetic life was the same, whether one lived in an anachoretic way or in community. This is demonstrated by the *Sententiae ad Monachos*.¹⁰⁸ The *Sententiae ad Virginem* thus represent the only ascetic work where Evagrius alters the nature of the ascetic's summit, though its substance, mystical union with the divine, remains the same. The reason for the *Sententiae's* different concept of the fulfillment of ascetic life is the obvious one: they were addressed to women.

In substituting the mystical union with Christ, the bridegroom, for γνῶσις τοῦ θεοῦ, Evagrius aligns himself with an already existing tradition, though he adds his own specific "ingredients." The concept of the virgin as bride of Christ, and the corresponding notion of her life as a betrothal or even anticipated marriage, had by the end of the fourth century become the most widespread definition of a woman's ascetic life.¹⁰⁹ In contrast, most of the earlier fourth-century writings that stress the notion of the virginal soul as Christ's future bride are addressed to παρθένοι: male as well as female ascetics. The bridal notion was evoked regardless of gender in a substantial number of texts, whether canons, letters, or treatises. Indeed, one of the most common similes compares the Church to Christ's virginal bride.¹¹⁰

During the fourth century, however, ascetic life as an engagement to Christ progressively became

attached to females exclusively.¹¹¹ The reasons for this change are complex, as are its implications.¹¹² There appears to have existed a direct link to an increase in the institutionalization of female ascetic practices as a whole.

To become a bride reflects the normal course of a woman's life, and the transfer of this concept to a spiritual level serves a dual purpose. Christ as the prospective bridegroom is a powerful incentive for the choice of ascetic life. In contrast to other, more radical interpretations of asceticism, this view does not conflict in the least with traditional norms of a woman's position in society. Thus, as the bride of Christ, a woman may find ascetic fulfillment while remaining an integral part of society: though she already inhabits a different world, she remains part of "this world."

Second, the fulfillment of a woman's ascetic life was perceived as an event a posteriori, occurring only after her death. By this definition, she could never attain perfection in this life, an achievement that might have substantiated her claims to an unduly important position within the congregation and thus within society. To give an example: while, as attested for Macrina, it was acceptable for an outstanding female ascetic to teach her fellow virgins, women's attempts to teach matters of doctrine to men or, even worse, to the congregation, had always been one of the most feared aspects of female ascetic excellence, since it could lead directly to the "usurpation" of clerical functions.¹¹³ Now, according to Evagrius, one of the essential aspects or tasks of the Gnostikos was being a teacher. Accordingly, γνῶσις, or to become a γνωστικός, was not a woman's goal.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ See, to cite one example, Macrina: shortly before her death she was dressed in her wedding gown; *VSM* 32: 2–4 (SC 178), 246 and also 83; E. Giannarelli, *La tipologia femminile nella biografia e nell'autobiografia cristiana del IV° secolo*, *Studi Storici* 127 (Rome, 1980), 29–47, esp. 40 note 34.

¹¹² A detailed discussion would clearly go beyond the scope of this paper. I have investigated these issues further in my forthcoming book, *Virgins of God: The Organization of Female Asceticism in the Fourth Century* (Oxford University Press). Here I will point out only a few implications.

¹¹³ Macrina is described as διδάσκαλος, παιδαγωγός, σύμβολον, *VSM* 26: 29–31 (SC 178), 232; the opposition toward female teaching is based on 1 Cor. 11:10; 14:34–35 and esp. 1 Tim. 2:11–14; 3:11; see also, e.g., the *Const. Apost.* 3, 6, 1–2 (ed. F. X. Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum*, I–II, Paderborn, 1905; repr. Turin, 1964), 191, 8–18; Elm, *Organization and Institutions*, 203–4; A. Faivre, *Naissance d'une hiérarchie. Les premières étapes du cursus cléricale*, *Théologie historique* 40 (Paris, 1977), 75–77, 93–96, 131–38; R. Gryson, *Le ministère des femmes dans l'église ancienne* (Gembloux, 1972), 27–31, 97–101.

¹¹⁴ Guillaumont, *Le Gnostique* (SC 356), 26–40; G. Bunge, *Geistliche Vaterschaft. Christliche Gnosis bei Evagrius Pontikus*, *Studia Patristica et Liturgica*, Beiheft 23 (Regensburg, 1988).

¹⁰⁶ This could be supported by Evagrius' use of the more elaborate διαλογισμοὶ πονηροί, rather than simply λογισμοί, when referring to a thought to be avoided; see note 83 above.

¹⁰⁷ Evagrius is known to quote himself frequently, a fact that complicates the precise dating of many of his works. Very often the quotes are almost, but not entirely, verbatim; Géhin, *Les Scholies*, (SC 340), 20 f. For cross-references between SV and the *Praktikos*, see Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique* (SC 171), 555 n. 23, 561 n. 26, 562 n. 27, 609 n. 48, 612 n. 49, 659 n. 47; Balthasar, "Die Hiera des Evagrius," I, 88 f.

¹⁰⁸ *SM* 73–103; different from Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique* (SC 170), 48.

¹⁰⁹ See Elm, *Organization and Institutions*, passim, for specific references.

¹¹⁰ Meth. Olymp. *Symp.* III 9, 75–14, 93 (SC 95), 110–26; for the canons of Ancyra, Basil of Ancyra's treatise, et al. see Elm, *Organization and Institutions*, passim; P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Ascetic Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988), 69–102, 161–89; Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage*, 15–49, 82–83.

In any case, the conspicuous discrepancy between the two monastic ideals, γνώσις for men and bodily union with Christ for women, is of paramount importance. The absence of any notion of intellect in the prescriptions for virgins as compared to its respective abundance in those for monks implies that, according to Evagrius, intellectual pursuits were not considered appropriate for women. Women were to strive for a more personal aim, that of a bridal union with Christ, rather than an abstract *gnōsis*. The latter was reserved for men, although, to underline the notion of essential equality, exceptions were possible for exceptional women. Thus the only occasion where Evagrius presents his doctrine of *gnōsis* without obscuring it “mystically” is in his *Letter to Melania*.¹¹⁵

The *Sententiae* are an interesting example of a larger development: as the topos of the virginal soul as bride became increasingly inappropriate for male ascetics, it acquired an increasingly exclusive female connotation. At the same time, new aims of a man’s ascetic life were developed, introducing different (and in this case additional) steps toward the ascetic ideal of perfection and union with the divine.

IV

Evagrius addressed one virgin throughout. Who was she? Why did Evagrius address one virgin only, but imply a community? The *Sententiae ad Virginem* are a letter, yet they consist of a collection of sentences prescribing how a future bride of Christ ought to perfect her soul and body in community with other virgins. What was the function of these prescriptions, and what value did both author and recipient(s) attribute to them?¹¹⁶ Were they observed, and was the text repeatedly consulted? Ultimately, the question arises whether the *Sententiae* are: “[un] écrit . . . destiné à un groupe de moines ou de moniales et présentant un certain caractère législatif.”¹¹⁷ The latter requires that the *Sententiae* should have had a certain impact beyond their immediate addressee, that they were consulted by later generations, and that they were general enough to apply to several communities.¹¹⁸

According to our sparse knowledge of Evagrius’

¹¹⁵Guillaumont, *Les “Kephalaia Gnostica,”* 51; see above, note 97.

¹¹⁶Berger, “Hellenistische Gattungen,” 1035–48; for the classic mixed genre category of the “letter,” see *ibid.*, 1326–63.

¹¹⁷De Vogüé, “Les règles monastiques anciennes,” 11, limits himself further to Latin writings.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 7–23, 37–52.

life, one virgin in particular had a decisive influence on his ultimate destiny, a virgin with whom he maintained an extensive correspondence and remained in regular contact throughout the remainder of his life: Melania the Elder.¹¹⁹ A large number of his extant letters are addressed to Melania—among them the famous *Letter to Melania*—and his close relationship with her was common knowledge.¹²⁰

Known to us mainly through the writings of Palladius, Paulinus of Nola, and Rufinus, Melania the Elder certainly occupies an important position in the history of early monasticism.¹²¹ Born around the middle of the fourth century into one of the richest and noblest Roman families of Spanish origin, Melania married young and was already widowed at the age of twenty-two. Only one of her three children, her son Publicola, reached adulthood.¹²² These personal tragedies might have induced Melania to renounce the kind of life to which she was accustomed and to lead the life of an ascetic, despite strong opposition from her family.¹²³ Probably in November 372, Melania left Rome with a small party of companions en route to Alexandria. By 373 she had visited the famous desert ascetics in Nitria and Cellia together with Rufinus, her “spiritali in via comitem.”¹²⁴ In Egypt they both became involved with a group of Fathers who were shortly thereafter forced into exile to

¹¹⁹Pall. *HL* 38 (II.119); Guillaumont, *Les “Kephalaia Gnostica,”* 51.

¹²⁰The first part of the *Epistula ad Melaniam* has been edited by Frankenberg, *Evagrius*, 618 f; the second by G. Vitestam, “Seconde partie du traité, qui passe sous le nom de ‘La grande Lettre d’Evagre le Pontique à Mélanie l’Ancienne,’” *Scripta Minora* 3 (Lund, 1963–64); Muyltermans, “Evagriana Syriaca,” 76–78. For Evagrius’ and Melania’s common views on doctrinal matters, see Pall. *HL* 55 (II.149); Ruf. *Praef. in Hom. Bas.*, PG 31, col. 1723.

¹²¹Pall. *HL* 46, 54, 55 (II.134, 146, 148); Paul. Nola Ep. 28, 29, 31, 45 (CSEL 29), 240, 247, 380; Ruf. *Apol.* 2, 26, PL 21, col. 605.

¹²²Melania belonged to the *gens* Antonia; her grandfather Marcellinus had been consul in A.D. 341; Pall. *HL* 46 (II.134); Paul. Nola Ep. 29, 8 (CSEL 29), 254; Jer. Ep. 39, 5 (CSEL 54), 305; A. H. M. Jones and J. R. Martindale, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, I (Cambridge, 1971), s.v. Publicola, 753; E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire, A.D. 312–460* (Oxford, 1982), 168–73. N. Moine, “Melaniana,” *Recherches augustiniennes* 15 (1980), 3–79, here 65, questions Melania’s age at widowhood; F. X. Murphy, “Melania the Elder: A Biographical Note,” *Traditio* 5 (1947), 59–78, here 61–63.

¹²³Soon after her husband’s death, she began to dispose of her fortune, which was of a magnitude to make this virtually a lifelong process; Paul. Nola Ep. 29 (CSEL 29), 253; Pall. *HL* 46 (II.134).

¹²⁴Paul. Nola Ep. 28, 5 (CSEL 29), 246; C. P. Hammond, “The Last Ten Years of Rufinus’ Life and the Date of His Move South from Aquileia,” *JTS*, n.s. 28 (1977), 372–429, esp. 378–81.

Diocaesarea in Palestine by Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria, who accused them of being "Arians." Melania followed them and offered her financial support. These monks, disciples of Abba Pambo, were the so-called "hoi Makroi," the "Tall Brothers," precisely the group of Origenistic monks that was to become "those around Evagrius."¹²⁵ Probably in 377–378, "after they [the exiled monks] were recalled, [Melania] founded a monastery in Jerusalem and spent twenty-seven years there in charge of a convent of fifty virgins."¹²⁶ Rufinus remained in Egypt until around 380, when he joined Melania in Jerusalem and became himself the guide of a male monastery.¹²⁷

Little is known of the organization of the monasteries of Melania and Rufinus.¹²⁸ Most likely both monasteries were situated on the Mount of Olives, probably between the sanctuary of St. Helena and that of the Ascension.¹²⁹ Melania and Rufinus received numerous pilgrims as guests, treating the sick among them, and Melania gave financial sup-

¹²⁵ Epiph. *Pan. Haer.* 64, 4 (ed. K. Holl, GCS 31, Leipzig, 1922), 409, 19–410, 1; idem, *Ancoratus* 82 (ed. K. Holl, GCS 25, Leipzig, 1915), 102, 30–103, 4; Pall. *HL* 10 and 46 (II.29–32 and 134–35); Ruf. *HE* II.4 and 8, PL 21, cols. 511 and 517; Soc. *HE* VI.7, PG 67, 684; Soz. *HE* VIII.12 (GCS 50), 284–85; Baynes, "Alexandria and Constantinople," 105 f; Favale, "Teofilo d'Alessandria," passim; Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalaia Gnostica,"* 55–59; E. D. Hunt, "Palladius of Helenopolis: A Party and Its Supporters in the Church of the Late Fourth Century," *JTS*, n.s. 24 (1973), 456–80; G. Lazzati, *Teofilo d'Alessandria* (Rome, 1935); N. Moine, "Mélanie l'Ancienne," in *DSP*, X (Paris, 1980), 955–60, differs in dating from Murphy, *Rufinus of Aquileia*, 37, 345–411; idem, "Melania the Elder," 67–69.

¹²⁶ Pall. *HL* 46 (II.135)

¹²⁷ Paul. Nola Ep. 28, 5 (CSEL 29), 246; Pall. *HL* 46 (II.134); Murphy, *Rufinus of Aquileia*, 47–52; idem, "Melania the Elder," 69 f; F. Thelamon, "Modèles de monachisme oriental selon Rufin d'Aquilée," in *Aquileia e l'Oriente mediterraneo*, I, Antichità Altopadriatiche 12 (Udine, 1977), 323–52.

¹²⁸ Moine, "Mélanie l'Ancienne," 958: "ni les austérités de Mélanie . . . ne permettent de saisir le genre de vie et l'idéal monastique des compagnes de Mélanie." Various suggestions as to how her monastery functioned have, however, been brought forward. G. D. Gordini, "Il monachesimo romano in Palestina," *Studia Anselmiana* 46 (1961), 89, assumes "che il sistema di vita in vigore in questi monasteri fosse molto simile a quello che la pellegrina Egeria (Silvia) ammirò a Gerusalemme in quegli stessi anni," referring to *Per. Aeth.* 28, 38, 41 (ed. H. Petré, *Ethérie. Journal de voyage*, SC 21, Paris, 1948), 214, 238, 244. Murphy, "Melania the Elder," 70, states that "quite evidently, Rufinus and Melania had a double monastery under their mutual guidance—a procedure with which they were familiar through their knowledge of the practice in the Egyptian desert . . . As to the type of monastic observance . . . we have very little information." O'Laughlin, *Origenism in the Desert*, 35, presumes that these monasteries were "co-educational."

¹²⁹ Pall. *HL* 46 (II.134); Moine, "Mélanie l'Ancienne," 958, dates its foundation between A.D. 374 and 378; L. Pirot, "Ascension, église de l'," in *DB*, Suppl. I (Paris, 1928), 628–44; H. Vincent and F. M. Abel, *Jérusalem: Recherches de topographie, d'archéologie et d'histoire, I–II* (Paris, 1914), here II, 337–92.

port to both foundations.¹³⁰ It is well documented that Rufinus and Melania frequently exchanged manuscripts, and it was Rufinus who translated most of Evagrius' works into Latin, the *Sententiae ad Virgines* among them.¹³¹ Since Rufinus also translated Basil's rules into Latin, it has frequently been presumed "that this was at least the basis of the regular life followed by the monastic settlements of Rufinus and Melania."¹³²

As G. Bunge has pointed out, at least four of Evagrius' letters, namely, 7, 8, 19, and 20, deal explicitly with concerns of Melania's community.¹³³ In Letter 7, probably addressed to Rufinus, Evagrius states: "As regards the chaste deaconess Severa, I praise her intentions, but I do not approve of her undertaking. For I cannot imagine what she will gain from such a long journey, along such a laborious route." The "chaste deaconess Severa" was a member of Melania's community who wanted to undertake the strenuous pilgrimage into the Egyptian desert, apparently to visit Evagrius. Consequently, being opposed to such an undertaking, Evagrius exhorts Melania in Letter 8 to teach her "sisters and daughters" to refrain from such long journeys, because these are "alien to every soul that has retired from this world."

In Letter 19, again addressed to Rufinus, Evagrius writes:

I would have wished to give something to the chaste virgin, which is useful for her life, but the impatience of the messenger did not allow me to do so. However, those things, which we have already composed earlier on through our Lord, we willingly handed to her, so that she may pray in her mind without interruption, may control her desires through abstinence, and mitigate her anger through gentleness.

In Letter 20 Evagrius addressed Severa herself:

I was greatly pleased by your intentions, and I have admired your zeal for learning and delight in your progress. . . . For you are fighting the "just battle, to

¹³⁰ This later on led Jerome to allege that the communities lived like "Decius, Croesus, Crassus, and Sardanapalus," i.e., in luxury and decadence; Jer. *Apol. c. libr. Ruf.* I.17 and III.4, PL 23, cols. 411 and 459; F. Cavallera, *Saint Jérôme*, I (Louvain, 1922), 200; idem, "Jérôme," in *DSP*, VIII (Paris, 1974), 904.

¹³¹ Jer. Ep. 133 (CSEL 56), 246; Hammond, "The Last Ten Years of Rufinus of Aquileia," 394 f; Muijldermans, *Evagriana Syriaca*, 30. SV could have been written for an Egyptian community, but the lack of a Coptic version is worth noting.

¹³² So, for instance, Murphy, "Melania the Elder," 70.

¹³³ Frankenberger, *Evagrius*, 571–73, 579 = Bunge, *Briefe*, 220–21, 232–33; none of the 62 letters in the surviving corpus bears a title or a prescript, so that the addressee can only be identified with absolute certainty in four cases (Ep. 21, 48, 58, 59); in all other cases, identification has to be based on internal reference, so that in effect no absolute certainty can be reached.

be crowned in justice" (2 Tim. 4:7) and you are striving to see the bridegroom Christ. . . . See, the writing that we sent you will teach you the nature (τύπος) of these things, and it will let you recognize the "straight and narrow path" (Matt. 7:14). For it [the path] will lead whoever obeys through his deeds to the heavenly kingdom.

The "writing" in question is undoubtedly the *Sententiae*.¹³⁴

By the time Evagrius wrote Letters 19 and 20, and probably even Letters 7 and 8, he had already composed the *Sententiae*. Someone other than, but closely connected to, the original recipient specifically requested Evagrius' practical and spiritual advice—Severa. Originally, Severa had intended to seek out this advice from the "master" in person, but Evagrius objected. Instead, he sent a copy of the *Sententiae*. Severa was a deaconess, which implies a fairly prominent position within Melania's community in Jerusalem.¹³⁵ The reasons for her request are unknown, but there can be little doubt that she regarded the *Sententiae* as a full substitute for the master's words.¹³⁶

The *Sententiae ad Virginem* were thus intended for Melania's community, and as Bunge has pointed out, the *Sententiae ad Monachos* for those around Rufinus.¹³⁷ These texts thus form the basis of ascetic life in both communities. That the lady "of noble birth," the original addressee, was Melania herself seems most likely, but this has ultimately to remain a matter of speculation.

The *Sententiae* were consulted by more than one party, their precepts were considered binding, and they were intended for more than one person. Their precepts were of sufficient precision to allow a community to regulate its dealings with the out-

side world and to organize its life within; they could provide guidance and thus ensure the continuity of ascetic practice and spiritual development, independent of the presence of the original founder and guide of the community.¹³⁸

In fact, even in its details the content of the *Sententiae* concurs with many of the prescriptions laid down in the slightly earlier or contemporary writings that are usually characterized as rules.¹³⁹ These writings are, primarily, Basil of Caesarea's Letter 22, his *Regula Moralia*, and the *Regula Monastica*, translated into Latin by Rufinus in 397; Pachomius' rules, translated shortly thereafter into Latin by the latter's then opponent Jerome;¹⁴⁰ and Augustine's precepts for male and female ascetics, composed around 395/7.¹⁴¹ Basil's Letter 22, the *Regulae Brevius Tractatae* or shorter recension of his rules, and Augustine's Letter 211, 5–16, the *Regularis Informatio* or his rule addressed to

¹³⁸ The SV's advice does not contradict the little that we know of the practices in Melania's community. The Scriptures stood in high regard, with prayer and strict, but not overly severe, abstinence being of paramount importance. Work was prescribed, and the lack of information concerning the economic situation of the convent in the *Sententiae ad Virginem* may well be explained by Melania's financial position. Seclusion was not absolute; according to Egeria, in Jerusalem visits to the local church were customary, Pall. *HL* 54 (II.146, 158); *Per. Aeth.* 28, 38, 41 (SC 21), 214, 238, 244; Gordini, "Il monachesimo," 89. Both Melania's community and that depicted in the SV emphasized generosity, hospitality, and caring for the sick (cf. *SV* 9, 10). The description of Melania's outer appearance agrees with that recommended to the addressee of the SV. Melania's spiritual beliefs are not known to us, apart from her intellectual pursuits, which she based firmly on the writings of Origen and the Cappadocian Fathers, and her belief in the primacy of poverty and service.

¹³⁹ De Vogüé, "Les règles monastiques anciennes," 12–17, and bibliography, pp. 8–10.

¹⁴⁰ Translated in 404; Bas. Ep. 22 (I.52–57) and see also Ep. 173 (II.108–9); L. Lèbe, ed., *Saint Basile. Les Règles morales et Portrait du Chrétien* (Maredsous, 1969); idem, ed., *Saint Basile. Les Règles Monastiques* (Maredsous, 1969); A. Veilleux, ed., and A. de Vogüé, *Pachomian Koinonia*, II, Cistercian Studies 46 (Kalamazoo, 1981), 141–223; D. Amand de Mendieta, *L'ascèse monastique de saint Basile. Essai historique* (Maredsous, 1948), esp. 86–144, 180–262; idem, "Le système cénobitique basilien comparé au système cénobitique pachômien," *RHR* 152 (1957), 31–80; J. Gribomont, "Les Règles Morales de saint Basile et le Nouveau Testament," *Studia Patristica* 2 = TU 64 (Berlin, 1957), 416–26; idem, "Les Règles épistolaires de saint Basile: Lettres 173 et 22," *Antonianum* 54 (1979), 255–87; both articles repr. in Bianchi, *Gribomont, Saint Basile. Evangile et église. Mélanges*, I–II. Of course, the bibliography for questions regarding the rules of Basil, Pachomius, and Augustine is virtually endless.

¹⁴¹ Aug. Ep. 211 (CSEL 57), 359–61; De Vogüé, "Les règles monastiques anciennes," 13; G. Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule* (Oxford, 1987), 248–52. For Augustine's rule in general, see L. Verheijen, *La Règle de saint Augustin*, I–II, *Etudes Augustiniennes* (Paris, 1967), 11–14, 439–41; for the dates of the rule, see *ibid.*, II, 96–116 and 198; cf. also II, 125–74, 209–12; on the question of male-female adaptation, see II, 186–98.

¹³⁴ A fact already noted by I. Hausherr, "Le Traité de l'Oraison d'Evagre le Pontique (Pseudo-Nil)," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 15 (1934), 34–93, 113–70, here 44. In fact, the compiler of the epistles' Syriac ms., Mingana 68 (fols. 61a–88a, A.D. 1902, a modern copy of an old ms. of unknown age from the monastery Deir Za'faran, Bunge, *Briefe*, 168), inserted the SV immediately after Ep. 19; Bunge, "Origenismus–Gnostizismus," 36.

¹³⁵ A. G. Martimort, *Les diaconesses. Essai historique*, *BibEphL*, Subsidia 24 (Rome, 1982), 135 f.

¹³⁶ The prescriptive character of the *Sententiae*'s scriptural model, Proverbs, is well attested elsewhere; they formed the basis of Macrina's education, Gr. Nyss. *VSM* 3 (SC 178), 143; Bas. *M. Asc. RG XV.3*, PG 31, col. 953, regards them as fundamental for monastic education; Jer. Ep. 107, 12 (CSEL 55), 302 uses them in his program for Paula; Gr. Nyss. *In Cant. hom.* I, GN 6, p. 17, 12–18. Berger, "Hellenistische Gattungen," 1052, 1075, stresses repeatedly the educational, prescriptive, and legalistic character of gnomic literature, in particular the παραινέσεις and the sentences.

¹³⁷ Bunge, "Origenismus–Gnostizismus," 36–37; Elm, *Organization and Institutions*, 215–50.

women, are of particular relevance. All three writings are letters, originally addressed to one specific community, containing short precepts based on scriptural counterparts, often without any apparent order, and apparently written to answer direct requests from the ascetics concerned.¹⁴² Their precepts reinforce a hierarchical structure, regulating the behavior of individual ascetics toward each other and their superiors. They specify the times of prayer, work, the consumption of meals, and comportment with regard to the opposite sex. Virtually all the texts mentioned begin with an exhortation to live "harmoniously" together with the other members of the community, to obey, and to share all possessions. All texts are, of course, shaped by the author's fundamental concepts regarding the aims of ascetic life, the correct method for their achievement, and list retributions or punishments in case of default.¹⁴³

The profound difference between these writings and the *Sententiae*, however, is the nature of their distribution. There is no evidence to demonstrate that the *Sententiae* were consulted by a sequence of later generations or that the *Sententiae* were widely distributed to other communities. These aspects are directly linked to the fate of Evagrius and the communities of Melania and Rufinus.

During the 380s Melania, Rufinus, Evagrius, and Jerome were among the most influential ascetics of their time. Melania especially was the "nobilissima mulierum Romanarum," comparable only to the famous Thecla, who, according to Jerome, possessed "inter Christianos nostri temporis vera nobilitas."¹⁴⁴ Evagrius, who arrived in Jerusalem only in 383, became famous for his superior concepts of ascetic practice soon after he settled in Nitria and then Cellia, attracting fellow ascetics as well as visitors from afar, "so that his cell was filled daily with five or six strangers . . . Many sent him donations so that he had more than 200 pieces of silver deposited with his οἰκονόμος, who served him constantly in his abode."¹⁴⁵ Evagrius, together with Rufinus, was Melania's spiritual companion,

and he was known as such beyond Egypt and Palestine.¹⁴⁶

Only about thirty years later, in 417, another ascetic called Melania arrived in Jerusalem. She was Melania the Younger, Melania the Elder's granddaughter.¹⁴⁷ Neither upon her arrival nor during her fourteen-year sojourn in Palestine did she ever stay in her grandmother's convent. In fact, her biographer Gerontius never once refers to Melania the Elder and her foundation, although Palladius assures us that only seven years earlier, on the occasion of Melania's death in 409 or 410, "having disposed of her possessions, she fell asleep within forty days, in good old age . . . leaving behind both a monastery in Jerusalem, and the endowment for it."¹⁴⁸ Gerontius' general silence on the subject of Melania the Elder is more than mere chance.¹⁴⁹ Far from simply suggesting a discontinuity in Melania the Elder's monastic foundation, Gerontius bears testimony to the fate of Melania and her circle, which included Evagrius—a veritable *damnatio memoriae*. As has already been indicated, the history of Evagrius and Melania the Elder's circle is intrinsically tied to the so-called Origenistic crisis, which ended in 553 with the anathema of Origen and his followers, explicitly including Evagrius.¹⁵⁰

This crisis lasted roughly from 393 to 403, originated in Palestine, and progressed from there to Egypt. It was initiated by Epiphanius, bishop of

¹⁴⁶Jer. Ep. 133 (CSEL 56), 246; E. A. Clark, "Elite Networks and Heresy Accusations: Towards a Social Description of the Origenistic Controversy," unpub. paper, 9; eadem, "New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy: Human Embodiment and Ascetic Strategies," *ChHist* 59 (1990), 145–62. Evagrius' trilogy—*Praktikos*, *Gnostikos*, and the *Kephalaia Gnostika*—was addressed to the communities on the Mount of Olives; Jer. Ep. 133, 3, 5; *Pr. Prol.* (SC 171), 482–83, with Guillaumont's commentary; Hunt, "Palladius," 471. O'Laughlin, *Origenism in the Desert*, 59–71; *ibid.*, 72–82 and *passim*, he advances the interesting hypothesis that the Letter to Melania was written in response to Pelagius, a rival ascetic teacher whose rising influence upon the élite Evagrius had reason to fear.

¹⁴⁷D. Gorce, ed., *Gerontius. Vie de sainte Mélanie* 34, SC 90 (Paris, 1962), 190; still fundamental is M. Rampolla del Tindaro, *Santa Melania Giuniore, senatrice romana* (Rome, 1905), 21, 176–80.

¹⁴⁸Pall. *HL* 54 (II.148); *Geront. V. Mel.* 35 and 40 (SC 90), 192 and 202; for the date see Murphy, "Melania the Elder," 77.

¹⁴⁹Ruf. *Apol.* II.29, PL 21, col. 608; Moine, "Mélanie l'Ancienne," 957; *idem*, "Mélanie la jeune," in *DSp*, X (Paris, 1980), 960.

¹⁵⁰For most of the following see Favale, "Teofilo," 46–77; Clarke, "New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy," 145–62; Bunge, *Briefe*, 54–70; Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalaia Gnostica"*, 47–101; Hammond, "The Last Ten Years of Rufinus' Life," 372–429; J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome. His Life, Writings and Controversies* (London, 1975), 195 ff; Y.-M. Duval, "Sur les insinuations de Jérôme contre Jean de Jérusalem: De l'Arianisme à l'Origenisme," *RHE* 65 (1970), 353–74.

¹⁴²De Vogüé, "Les règles monastiques anciennes," 17.

¹⁴³Aug. *Reg. Informatio = Praeceptum* 2 and 3, Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo*, 80 and 110; Bas. *RB* 2, (Lèbe) 176 and *passim*; A. de Vogüé, "Sub regula vel Abbate." Etude sur la signification théologique des règles monastiques anciennes," repr. in *idem*, *Saint Benoît, sa vie et sa règle. Etudes choisies*, Vie Monastique 12 (Bellefontaine, 1981), 209–41.

¹⁴⁴Jer. *Chron. Can.* 329, PL 28, col. 2390 and *idem*, Ep. 39, 7 (CSEL 54), 301.

¹⁴⁵Pall. *HL* 47 (II.137); Evagrius' letters 4, 16, 27, 28, 55, 60, 62 confirm the same impression of his "ministerial" activity.

Salamis, and soon split the ascetic community into two camps. One centered around Epiphanius and included Jerome, Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria, and eventually those Egyptian monks called “anthropomorphic”; they opposed Origen and his teachings. On the other side were Evagrius, Rufinus, Melania, Bishop John of Jerusalem, Isidoros of Egypt, the “Tall Brothers,” and other Origenistic monks. In 393 Epiphanius had forced the issue by demanding an open condemnation of Origen’s teachings, which supposedly lay at the root of Arianism. Jerome, an old acquaintance of Epiphanius, accepted the latter’s condemnation, whereas Rufinus dismissed it. Matters soon escalated to a complete rupture between Jerome and Rufinus. They were not reconciled until 397, when Rufinus departed for Rome.¹⁵¹

The crisis intensified in 399 in Egypt. At that point, Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria, a staunch supporter of the Origenistic monks, gave in to the threats of their opponents, the “anthropomorphic” Coptic monks, and switched sides.¹⁵² He called a synod in Nitria, which, allegedly “protected” by armed forces, condemned Origen and his teachings and forced the “Tall Brothers,” together with approximately three hundred monks, into exile in Palestine and Constantinople.¹⁵³ Je-

¹⁵¹ In Easter of 393 Epiphanius himself came to Jerusalem to cure the bishop, John, from his “Origenistic” errors. A public éclat ensued with Epiphanius preaching against John and John against the “anthropomorphists” in each other’s presence. After his return to Eleutheropolis in 394, Epiphanius ordained Jerome’s younger brother, Paulinian, as priest with the intention of having him officiate in Bethlehem, at Jerome’s monastery. Bethlehem was, however, in John’s diocese, and John had not even been informed, much less given his consent. When he refused to accept Paulinian’s ordination and the accompanying Origenist accusations, Epiphanius retaliated by asking the Palestinian monks to break with John. In a countermove, John excluded the Bethlehem community from his Church, a de facto excommunication. As a result of this strife, John’s lifelong friendship with Jerome came to an end; John even attempted to have Jerome deported from Jerusalem. Thanks to the mediation of Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria and Abba Isidoros, things never went quite that far, and in 397 reconciliation was achieved; according to *Soz. HE VIII.15* (GCS 50), 1553, Epiphanius knew none of the Origenists personally; he received all his information from hearsay.

¹⁵² Theophilus had apparently incurred financial difficulties and was about to be exposed by his close advisors, the Origenist desert fathers Isidoros, Ammonios, Eusebios, and Euthymios; now, motivated as much by his need to placate the anthropomorphist desert fathers as by his wish to curb Isidoros’ increasing influence, he changed political and doctrinal sides, a volte-face neither Jerome’s nor Epiphanius’ purely doctrinal entreaties had been able to bring about.

¹⁵³ J. H. Leroux, “Jean Chrysostome et la querelle origéniste,” in J. Fontaine and C. Kannengiesser, *Epektasis. Mélanges Patristiques offerts au Cardinal J. Daniélou* (Beauchesne, 1972), 335–41.

rome and the anti-Origenistic faction, thanks to Theophilus, had remained victorious.

Evagrius died on New Year’s Eve 399/400. Melania was about to return to Rome.¹⁵⁴ Jerome, however—perhaps because of his own, at one time quite fervent Origenism—had a long memory.¹⁵⁵ In 414, writing against yet another “Origenist deviation,” Pelagianism, he fervently attacked Evagrius and Rufinus, and erased all passages in his *Chronici Canones* where he had once praised Melania: now he referred to her as one “cuius nomen nigredinis testatur perfidiae tenebras.” In short, his former close friends and allies had become his worst enemies. As Gerontius attests, this was a condemnation only very few dared to withstand.¹⁵⁶

Considering these circumstances, Evagrius’ *Sententiae* could hardly have had an impact much beyond the community to which they were originally addressed. Though Melania’s community continued after her death in 410, and the *Sententiae*’s precepts were observed after Melania’s return to Rome around 399–400, thus ensuring continuity in the sense of the now absent founder and leader, whoever dared to use or mention them after 399 would have been branded an Origenist and heretic. Who could admit to being influenced by the *Sententiae* in the face of Jerome’s verdict, not so much against Evagrius, but against Melania herself? Neither Melania’s nor Rufinus’ community could have expanded, and all traces of their continuity were erased.

This examination of the *Sententiae*’s actual function has been based on the criteria proposed by Dom A. de Vogüé as fundamental in defining a writing as a monastic rule: namely, a text’s normative value; its capacity to regulate the internal organization of a community and its relations to the outside world; the possibility of identifying an underlying social model, such as a corporation or a family; and a text’s authority as demonstrated by

¹⁵⁴ Pall. *HL* 54 (II.146); Baynes, “Alexandria and Constantinople,” 105 f; P. Brown, “The Patrons of Pelagius: The Roman Aristocracy between East and West,” *JTS* n.s. 21 (1970), 56–72; Murphy, “Melania the Elder,” 73.

¹⁵⁵ Bunge, *Briefe*, 56 f.

¹⁵⁶ *Jer. Chron. Can.* 329, PL 28, col. 2390; idem, Ep. 39, 7 (CSEL 54), 301; Ep. 133 (CSEL 56), 246; Rufinus *Apol. c. Hier.* 2, 26; not even Cassian, who spent five years in the same desert and was obviously deeply influenced by Evagrius, mentioned his name; Marsili, *Giovanni Cassiano*, 77–164. According to Bunge, “Origenismus–Gnostizismus,” 47, Jerome’s knowledge of Evagrius was also secondhand. As mentioned earlier, Bunge attempts to demonstrate Evagrius’ orthodox-Nicaean basis, arguing that his Origenism was in essence an anti-gnostic defense; see O’Laughlin, *Origenism in the Desert*, 243–48, for some of the problems inherent in such an attempt.

its general applicability, that is, its distribution to other communities.¹⁵⁷ The *Sententiae* have traditionally and quite explicitly been excluded from the corpus of early monastic rules, although Holstenius regarded them as such and accordingly included them in the appendix to his *Corpus Regularum*.¹⁵⁸ Specific reasons for their exclusion are seldom given. De Vogüé excludes them because they are addressed to one virgin only, and others consider that the literary classification of the *Sententiae* as a letter containing sentences or *paraineseis*, or at best as a *Speculum Virginum*,¹⁵⁹ is in itself sufficient to exclude them from being a rule.¹⁶⁰ As de Vogüé pointed out, literary genre alone is an insufficient criterion for inclusion into or exclusion from another literary genre like that of the rule, which itself is still in the process of formulation during our period.¹⁶¹ Further, to quote Berger, "eine Gattung kann auch lediglich durch ihr Verhältnis zum Kontext und durch ihre Funktion darin bestimmt sein."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷De Vogüé, "Les règles monastiques anciennes," 11–23, 37–52; idem, "Sub regula vel Abbate," 209–41; see also other definitions by, e.g., G. Rocca, "Regola," in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, VII (Rome, 1983), 1410–11. For more specifically sociological aspects, see G. Constable, "The Study of Monastic History Today," in V. Murdoch and G. S. Cause, eds., *Essays on the Reconstruction of Medieval History* (Montreal, 1974), 19–51, esp. 25–28; Felten, "Herrschaft des Abtes," 150–79; J. Ségué, "Une sociologie des sociétés imaginées: Monachisme et utopie," *Annales ESC* 26 (1971), 328–54, esp. 338 f, for the complex problem of normative values.

¹⁵⁸Holstenius, *Codex Regularum*, III, 465–69; Wilmart, "Les versions latines," 144.

¹⁵⁹A genre that reached the heights of its influence in the Middle Ages, following Honorius Augustodunensis; Bernards, *Speculum Virginum*, 1 note 5, 2–13, 20 f, 30–39, 70–73, 210–13; although the image existed earlier on, Meth. Olymp. *Symp.* VI (SC 95), 164–76, for wise virgins. Basil of Ancyra, *De Virg.* 30–31, PG 30, col. 730, describes the virgin's soul as a picture; Augustine recommends his Ep. 211, 16, 2 (CSEL 57), 370 = Praeceptum 8: "ut autem vos in hoc libello tamquam in speculo possitis inspicere." Ambrose follows Basil in considering his *De Virginitibus*: "Vestrae virtutis . . . imaginem quasi in speculo quodam sermonis istius cernitis refulgere"; Ambr. *De Virg.* II.6, 39 (Florilegia Patristica 31), 61.

¹⁶⁰For instance, de Vogüé, "Les règles monastiques anciennes," 11 note 1 and 53–55; idem, "Regola," in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, VII, 1430; A. and C. Guillaumont, "Evagrius Ponticus," in *RAC*, VI (Stuttgart, 1965), 1088–1107, here 1098.

¹⁶¹As Dom de Vogüé states, "Les règles monastiques anciennes," 7: "Dans leur ensemble et en tant que genre, les règles monastiques anciennes ont été très peu étudiées. . . . Les règles monastiques anciennes (400–700) forment un ensemble compact et relativement homogène, mais difficile à définir et à délimiter. On entend par là tout écrit latin destiné à un groupe de moines ou de moniales et présentant un certain caractère législatif"; *ibid.*, 11; see also 16–22.

¹⁶²Quoted in Berger, "Hellenistische Gattungen," 1377; see also esp. pp. 1035–44 and 1377–78, and idem, "Die sogenannten 'Sätze heiligen Rechts' im N. T. Ihre Funktion und ihr Sitz

Now it has been demonstrated, based on their content, the authority of their author, and the repeated consultations by their recipients,¹⁶³ that the *Sententiae* did exercise all the functions commonly associated with a rule. However, the issue is not to include the *Sententiae* at all costs into this category (though one might easily conclude that this is where they belong). It is rather to ask what reasons led to their exclusion.

These reasons are difficult to identify because of the overwhelming impact of one factor: the *damnatio memoriae* of a group and its monastic foundations declared heretical. However, other factors also played a part.

As has been said, the *Sententiae* fulfilled virtually all criteria associated with a rule with the exception of their distribution among other communities and documented acceptance by more than one generation. The latter criterion, continuity in time, however, has been prevented not by a shortcoming of the text itself but by external circumstances. This leaves the criterion of distribution.¹⁶⁴ This criterion, apparently so decisive in classifying the *Sententiae*, is of particular relevance in highlighting a problem inherent in the entire discussion of texts regulating the organization of female ascetic life, and thus in our understanding of these organizations as a whole.

A writing's distribution, as defined by de Vogüé

im Leben," *ThZ* 28 (1972), 305–30; Felten, "Herrschaft des Abtes," 151–79. The issue is further complicated by the distinctively "prescriptive," gnomic nature of the genre of "sentences," and the catchall function of the genre of "letter." None of the authors of the other rules mentioned regarded their precepts as rules. Augustine thought of his precepts as a "libellus"; only Eugippius explicitly called them a "rule" (in contrast to Evagrius, whose contemporaries were well aware of the fact that he had written to monks and virgins), and Basil never thought of his *Ascetica* other than in terms of "advice." It was Gregory of Nazianzus who characterized them as ὄροι γραπτῶς καὶ κανόνων, written "rules" and canons; Aug. Ep. 211, 16, 2 (CSEL 57), 370 = Praeceptum 8; *Eugippii Regula* (ed. F. Villegas and A. de Vogüé, CSEL 87, Vienna, 1976), 3–16; Gr. Naz. Ep. 6 (I.7); Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo*, 123–31; Berger, "Hellenistische Gattungen," 1326–63.

¹⁶³This is the substance of the criterion "normative," in itself somewhat vague, since in the eyes of the ancient authors the Scriptures alone merited true legislative value, and the term "Law" usually referred to the Mosaic one; Evagrius Ep. 8, (Frankenberg, *Evagrius*, 573 = Bunge, *Briefe*, 221); Cassian, *Institutiones* 2:5–6; 3:1–2 (ed. J. C. Guy, *Jean Cassien, Institutiones cénobitiques*, SC 109, Paris, 1965, 64–70, 92–94). See De Vogüé, "Sub regula vel abbate," 212–20, for the "surprisingly personal character of many early rules"; also idem, "Les règles monastiques anciennes," 20–22.

¹⁶⁴Despite Rufinus' Latin translation and the independent tradition edited by Wilmart, they were not circulated widely in the West, although the Syriac and Armenian translations indicate a certain popularity in the East.

and others, presupposes a very specific organizational model, that of a male monastery—a monastery consisting of a “main” complex, such as Annesi for Basil, Tabennesi for Pachomius, the White Monastery for Shenoute, and subsequent filial foundations.¹⁶⁵ The writings considered rules for these communities developed their now extant form precisely to cater to such an organizational development: to ensure equal practices in all filial foundations, regulate contacts with the central monastery and its superior, establish a set hierarchy among the various superiors, and so on. Regulations regarding women always occur in the context of these larger organizational structures. Basil’s, Pachomius’, and Shenoute’s foundations all had a “female” branch, regulated either by a female transcript of the rule or by additions addressing issues arising directly from the presence of “sisters.” None of these rules address a female foundation in its own right.¹⁶⁶

Here the *Sententiae* differ. They are specifically addressed to a community of women and reflect at the very least the author’s concept of how a female community ought to be organized. Now, as far as I am aware, none of the fourth-century female ascetic communities had filial foundations. As I am showing elsewhere, female asceticism at the end of the fourth century was organized in a multitude of different ways, although most often in small, loosely structured communities surrounding a specific founding figure, with members often

¹⁶⁵ Some rules included in the corpus were addressed to one community only: the second Rule of the Fathers, the Rule of Paul, and, significantly, the female rules of Caesarius and Donatus; de Vogüé, “Les règles monastiques anciennes,” 20. The vast majority is addressed to communities as here described; for Shenoute see Elm, *Organization and Institutions*, 173–81; for the fundamental difficulties the “real in den Orden vorfindlichen Wertorientierungen und Zwecksetzungen zu erkennen,” see, e.g., G. Schmelzer, *Religiöse Gruppen und sozialwissenschaftliche Typologie. Möglichkeiten der soziologischen Analyse religiöser Orden*, *Sozialwissenschaftl. Abhandlungen der Görres-Gesellschaft* 3 (Berlin, 1980), quote on p. 191.

¹⁶⁶ Basil’s and Pachomius’ prescriptions for women form part of their overall opus addressed mainly to men, and Augustine’s rule for nuns is a later female adaptation of the *Præceptum*, the male version; see Verheijen, *La Règle*, II, 186–206; Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo*, 135–48 and 152–54, for the date of the female version, perhaps before 423.

being relatives or close friends.¹⁶⁷ It is to such individual communities and their leaders that the Fathers address their writings regulating ascetic life, most often in the form of letters and treatises *On Virginity*.

In other words, the third criterion proposed by de Vogüé and others cannot be applied to female communities, because it is a reflection of an underlying organizational model that is predominantly male. Women organized their ascetic life differently, and this is reflected in the normative writings regulating it. However, this by no means implies that these writings were not considered to be of the same normative character as the “rules,” or that these specifically female forms of ascetic organization were considered to be of lesser value.

Again, Evagrius’ *Sententiae* are an important example. Quite clearly, for him and in his way of understanding, the ultimate aim of an ascetic life was the same for men and for women: mystical union with the divine. However, the nature of this mystical union and the ways to achieve it differed according to one’s sex: one was a more abstract notion, the other a more concrete one; one was *gnōsis*, the other a heavenly marriage. Nowhere does Evagrius imply that a mystical wedding with the divine bridegroom represents a mystical union of a lesser order than that achieved via *gnōsis*. Male and female ascetics may achieve their common goal in a different fashion, both as far as practical organization and spiritual progress are concerned, but ultimately their standing was the same, since “in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female.”¹⁶⁸

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¹⁶⁷ If they are connected with male organizations, it is often in the form of double monasteries, founded by a brother and a sister or by two friends, and if this original structure then expands, it is on the male side only; see also Elm, *Organization and Institutions*.

¹⁶⁸ I deal with the methodological implications of the above in greater detail elsewhere; see also Elm, *Virgins of God*, forthcoming; and C. Walker Bynum, “Women’s Stories, Women’s Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner’s Theory of Liminality,” in R. L. Moore and F. E. Reynolds, eds., *Anthropology and the Study of Religion* (Chicago, 1984), 105–25.