

< Letter 12 >

H5
 This book contains my discourses in defense of < Hellenic > learning against those who do not consider such learning a benefit. It also contains some iambs and hexameters. I wrote the discourses while still a layman and for this reason they have been neglected, but the verses < I wrote > after I became a monk. Some verses are easy to understand, as you will find out immediately when you read them, while others have a meaning somewhat deeper than the obvious. Such are those which have been arranged alphabetically. They have a spiritual significance and bear the fruit of contemplation picked from the labors of the Fathers, not mine. Since you are always piously anxious to talk with me and I am not quite able to do so, I cannot all the time refuse to share my possessions with your scholarly mind. Take this book and, if you like it, read it.

As for the book of the great and marvelous father, the metropolitan of Philadelphia, which, as you say, is instructive on contemplation and contains a useful discourse on the matter we are discussing, send it to me with the holy and marvelous father from whom you will learn all my news; having seen him and enjoyed his company, believe that you saw me, for we dwell in each other and by each other by the grace of Christ the All-benevolent.

I am grateful to you also for the sagacity and learning of the noble Aaron, who gave me additional reason to praise your judgment. For the object of a person's esteem, whatever its qualities may be, allows us to assume that the person showing esteem is possessed of the same qualities: if they be good, of good; if they be bad, of bad. Since, then, Aaron is preeminently good, he shows by being held in esteem that the person who decided to hold him in esteem and to befriend him is good.

*see at end of
 address - & list
 of books*

SH 15

< Letter 13 >

What is this you are saying, O most marvelous "man of God," most genuine servant of Christ and my most revered and holy father? Will he who has become acquainted with your discourses give up his desire to meet you, or rather will he become even more excited, and with fervor and ardor seek out the author, the finest intellect and the most beautiful tongue which charms both ear and mind? If you were not among the living and some intelligent man came upon your discourses, he would be sitting on your grave and crying wholeheartedly, hoping to hear a word from < a man of > such an extraordinarily beautiful soul and tongue. How can I, then, who was deemed by God worthy of finding you among the living, give up my good and profitable request? So, by the very means by which you were anxious to make me shun your company, you made me even more eager and determined. Please bear with me and "have patience" for I shall not hesitate to proclaim boldly before your God-inspired soul all the praises I can possibly muster.

most dramatic again

Is there anything about your discourses, O "man of God," which does not excite admiration? Is there < a virtue > they do not exhibit? Not the wisdom of an old man at an early age? Not the strictest observance of monastic discipline and life ahead of appointed time? Not a profound study and understanding of profane and sacred writings? Not < an inkling > (?) of the later movements of virtue which were of the highest < order > from the start? Not a wide compass of thought? Not a copious vocabulary? Not a flowing and lofty style? Will your *Alphabetos*—which I

precise
an advisor

have not learned yet—fail to amaze anyone? For if Saint Arsenios said about some ignorant peasant: “I have been educated in Greek and Latin, but I have yet to learn the alphabet of this ignorant peasant,” what must I say when the *Alphabetos* is heavenly and its author a great philosopher, whereas I who received it am most ignorant? I shall say, however, what the divine David said to God: “I magnify thy knowledge!” Thus I shall say about you also: “O my God, the disposition and nature and loftiness of spirit of this man of yours magnify Your powers of creation and wisdom and knowledge!”

So much for that. Now, why did you do this, O most holy Father? Why did you first praise learning as much as it deserves, and then left your discourses looking naked and dark and sad as if mourning their obscurity and nakedness and neglect and rejection and bemoaning the injustice done to them? But I suspect that you did this on purpose, to test the love of the lovers of learning who would stick to the reading. This is what happened to me too. The handwriting and its confusion made me turn away from reading, but the beauty of what you wrote held me bound by force with “manacles of iron.” I was under the sway of a sweet tyrant and did not mind the difficulty of the handwriting.]

I am only teasing, of course. You worked carefully and hard to acquire the wisdom of the world and have now brought and delivered it to the supreme wisdom to be its ministrant. For this reason you humble and crush it—because it met with a superior character < like yours >—that it may obey and work eagerly for its mistress and lady. As for the message you sent me with Aaron about your coming here, I am grateful and I wait and look forward to < your visit >.

agreed
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< Letter 22 >

May God forgive you! Go to the funeral of your aunt and derive a vital lesson from the death of the body. Let all fear go away from your soul, for this passion is the work of the enemy who wrests the soul away from meditation and the full assurance that it has in God. Neither should you fear the death of the body, for a pious person does not die but passes from death to life, and life without end at that. It is unnecessary, indeed, to say these things to you who have firm < convictions > acquired through long experience of God. As for me, I will come to you if possible.