

Dadisho‘ Qatraya’s *Letter to Abkosh*: the text according to MS Baghdad Archbishopric of the East n° 210 with critical notes and a translation

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Dadisho‘ Qatraya’s *Letter to Abkosh* was first edited by A. Guillaumont and M. Albert in 1984². Although their edition gives the impression that it is based on three witnesses, in point of fact there is only one: the Notre-Dame des Semences (or Alqosh) n° 237, called S by the editors. The other two manuscripts used are merely 20th century copies made for J. Vosté and A. Mingana from the previous exemplar and thus have

¹ The text of the *Letter* was one of the subjects of the Intermediate/Advanced Syriac course we gave during the 2012 edition of the *Académie des langues anciennes* at Digne-Les-Bains and we extend our thanks to our two students, Jean-Marie Mouesca and Bosko Eric who participated in the analysis of the textual variants.

² A. GUILLAUMONT and M. ALBERT, “Lettre de Dadisho Qatraya à Abkosh sur l’hésychia” in E. LUCCHESI and H.D. SAFFREY (ed.), *Mémorial André-Jean Festugière. Antiquité païenne et chrétienne* (Cahiers d’Orientalisme 10), Genève, 1984, p. 235-245.

no independent value, they are referred to as V and M respectively³.

We have already had the opportunity of drawing attention to the fact that another witness, Baghdad Archbishopric of the East n° 210 (which we have called G) has, in addition to Dadisho's *Commentary on the Paradise of the Fathers* (DQC), the complete text of his *Letter*⁴, on ff° 169v°-173v°, and that having been unknown to Guillaumont and Albert, it has not yet been used to provide a critical edition of the letter.

G's importance for Dadisho's works is paramount since it constitutes the oldest East Syriac witness to his writings. Although the exemplar is acephalous and its colophon is lacking, A. Kaplan has been able to date it, on palaeographical grounds, to the first half of the 9th century⁵.

Compared with the previously edited text (E), G provides more than seventy true textual variants for the *Letter*. Although, by and large, their nature is not earth-shaking, there are several interesting divergences. Given that a simple list of variants without having the text immediately available would be frustrating for the reader, it has seemed preferable to reproduce the whole text as it appears in G. All the divergences from E have been noted here in an apparatus provided for G's text. Purely orthographic variants have also been included for the sake of completeness, though their importance is marginal. Where it has been deemed useful, a brief analysis of the variants has also been provided and constitute a kind of critical commentary.

We can say that G is a witness to the same text form as E which is stable. G allows us to fill in a certain number of lacunae where text has fallen out through homoeoteleuton and is therefore useful for completing the text.

However it is far from having the best text. Of the 84 true variants, we have preferred only 30 of G's. These variants have been marked with an asterisk (*) in the apparatus.

Comparing E and G, we can notice that while both have a tendency to make stylistic improvements there are perhaps a few more in E. As to the mind-set behind G, one element for further investigation could be the question as to whether the "heart" can

³ For a description of the manuscripts, see GUILLAUMONT and ALBERT, "Lettre", p. 236.

⁴ D. PHILLIPS, "The Syriac Commentary of Dadisho' Qatraya on the *Paradise of the Fathers*: Towards a Critical Edition", BABELAO 1 (2012), p. 12. I take the opportunity of correcting my remark there saying that G is a "fourth" witness to the text – it is in fact only the second.

⁵ A. KAPLAN, "Expertise paléographique du ms. Syr Bagdad 210 en vue de sa datation. Dadisho Qatraya, Commentaire sur le Paradis des Pères", BABELAO 2 (2013), p. 105-121.

be the seat of “thoughts”. Two of the variants might indicate that G had a problem with this (see notes 64 and 118), but it would require more evidence to be confirmed⁶.

To facilitate reference to the text, we have kept the numbering of the sections established by the first editors of the text. We have added an English translation since it seemed a useful way of complementing the French rendering of thirty years ago.

What can we say about the context of the *Letter*? In all likelihood, it would seem that we are dealing with a real letter rather than a simple literary convention. The recipient, Abkosh (or Bakosh) was a friend of Dadisho’s on whose insistence he composed at least two of his writings⁷.

Abisho’s *Catalogue* tells us that Dadisho‘ composed **ⲕⲟⲓⲛⲁ ⲕⲁⲗⲏⲁ** “letters and questions”⁸, though the recipients are not mentioned. In this case, it means that the *Letter to Abkosh* is the only known surviving item of his correspondence and thus particularly valuable as being the sole witness to the epistolary genre among his writings.

The historical context is made clear by the letter itself. Abkosh had wanted to visit Dadisho‘, the latter not only refused him entrance to his cell, but also declined to even speak with him from the window. This greatly saddened his fellow monk and so Dadisho‘ decided to send him a letter to make up for his apparent lack of hospitality and justify his behaviour (Section 1). The justification is the need to preserve the monk’s quietude⁹. Dadisho‘ then develops on this at length by explaining the interdependence of the three basic virtues which are quietude, meditation and self-coercion (Sections 2 to 4) and the other virtues which come into being through them (Sections 5 to 7).

He concludes his analysis (Section 8) by making a correlation between the virtues and the passions to which they constitute a remedy. It is this part of the letter that is the most developed, from a literary and technical point of view. A triple correlation is established between each of the passions and, for each of them, three virtues that can cure them. Given the literary density of the section and its concluding position, we would like to suggest that it constitutes the real object of the *Letter*.

⁶ A cursory examination of the variants in G related to the word **ⲕⲁ** in DQC appears neutral in this respect, at least at first sight.

⁷ See note 11.

⁸ J.S. ASSEMANI, *Bibliotheca orientalis Clementino-Vaticana* [...], III/1, Rome, 1719-1728, p. 99.

⁹ On the choice of this translation, see note 172.

לַחַיִּים מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ כִּי־נִי־נִי׃ 63 וְגַם שֶׁעָבַד מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ 64
 וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ 65
 וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ 66 וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ 67
 וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ 68 וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ 69
 וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ 70 וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ 71
 וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ 72 וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ 73

[4] מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ 74 וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃
 וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃
 וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃
 וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ 75 וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃
 וְגַם כִּי־נִי־נִי מִלֵּוֹת מִיָּדָה׃ 76 (P^o171v^o)

*61 E. The addition of such joining words is likely to be secondary.

*62 *pr* E.

*63 *om naw* E. This and the preceding variant go together. E has an explicit hypothetical clause introduced by *pr* whereas G has a circumstantial clause, the hypothetical sense of which is implicit, but clear. E has “improved” the text and is secondary.

64 E. G has preferred using a word to designate the intellect which it felt better suited to *se'ek* “thoughts”; E’s reading is the older one. See also note 118 for a similar phenomenon.

65 E. The same remark on the repetition of the preposition in note 46 applies here as well.

66 *om* E. E has omitted this sizeable phrase by homoeoteleuton on *se'ek* which G has allowed us to recover.

67 E.

68 E. The *pe'al* and *ethpe'el/ethpa'al* all have the same meaning here. Perhaps it is easier to imagine the contraction of the longer form to the shorter, rather than the other way round.

69 E. [*l'ha'el*]

70 E.

71 E.

72 E.

73 E.

74 E. The addition of the suffix is secondary.

75 E.

76 E [*l'ha'*] G.

165 ܠܒܝܬܝܢ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ
 168 ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ 167 ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ
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 171 ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ 170 ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ
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Translation of the text

*The letter that Mar Dadisho‘ sent to Bakosh on the subject of quietude*¹⁷²

[1] Before anything else, I greet you in the fear of God and the love of our Lord and I beg your Charity to pray for the sinner I am. Next, I ask your Modesty¹⁷³ to be neither sad nor despondent because I did not let you enter my cell, nor did I speak with you from the window. I was hindered from this for two reasons: firstly, because you have no need of one as lowly as myself, for you have acquired many great teachers and helpers and, secondly, if I did this for you in particular, others would request and require the same thing. Now I am incapable of doing this for a great number, because it would be unprofitable for me.

As for me, my dear friend, I have found no profit whatever in being a recluse in my cell and holding conversation with brothers from the window. What profit would I acquire if I shut my body

*¹⁶⁵ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ E, by assimilation to the Peshitta text of Eph 4:22.

¹⁶⁶ E ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ G.

¹⁶⁷ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ] ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ E. The text is different from the Peshitta of Eph 4:22 which has ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ. Could ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ be a mistaken reminiscence of ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ?

¹⁶⁸ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ E.

¹⁶⁹ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ E.

¹⁷⁰ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ E.

¹⁷¹ ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ E.

¹⁷² We have opted for this voluntarily awkward translation of ܕܥܡܝܢܝܢ in order to bring out its specifically technical nature in Syriac spiritual literature with a semantic field ranging from tranquillity, quietness or stillness of the mind (partially corresponding to the Greek *ἡσυχία* in Byzantine literature) to physical solitude. See, for example, F. DEL RÍO SÁNCHEZ, *Los Cinco Tratados sobre la Quietud (Ṣelyā) de Dādīšō‘ Qatrāyā* (Aula Orientalis. Supplementa 18), Barcelona, 2001, pp. 29-35.

¹⁷³ The word is used as respectful means of address and also as an ecclesiastical title.

in a cell, but I let my mind wander everywhere? Indeed how could the mind not wander when the senses of the body roam free and wander? Moreover, how could the senses not wander when the three of them that are most in need of being kept under control are allowed to be free? By those, I mean the tongue, sight and hearing. How much harm does a brother who is a recluse suffer from lack of watchfulness over his senses and in particular that of hearing! We can learn this from the writings of the fathers and from the experience of things.

[2] From experience, it is as follows. When a brother who is a recluse speaks of profitable matters with another brother from the window, he can be watchful over his sense of sight in order not to look in an unrestrained fashion and he can also keep his tongue in order to stop any despicable and harmful word from escaping him. This is possible if he is very valiant and perfect. As to his sense of hearing however, how can he keep watch over it, since he has no power over the tongue of the person who is speaking with him? If it happens that he hears a word that is harmful to his observance, it will make him suffer more than a scorpion's sting and will be a cause for his thoughts to wander for a long time. Now if one word from one brother can hurt a recluse, how much more so many words from many brothers.

[3] So this is what we learn from experience. Listen now to the writings of the fathers. The blessed Evagrius, the greatest of the gnostics¹⁷⁴, that very grammarian of the passions and examiner of the thoughts, says this: "Because it is through the five senses that the intellect receives thoughts, let (the monk) look to see thus through which (sense) warfare waxes the strongest against him. It is clear that it is through hearing." This he demonstrates (by quoting) from the First-Born of the wise, saying: "According to the word of Solomon: 'A word of sadness troubles a man's heart.'¹⁷⁵"

We also learn the same thing from what happened to the glorious and blessed Arsenius following an order from God. When he was still in the royal palace¹⁷⁶, he desired the way of life of the angels¹⁷⁷, but was hindered from so doing because of the distractions of the world. He cried out in pain from the depths of his heart to God and said, "Lord, lead me to life." The Lord replied

¹⁷⁴ *ܩܕܝܫܐ* is the usually rendering of *γνωστικός* in the Evagrian sense of the word: one who, after practical experience, has moved on to the truly spiritual matter of contemplation (see A. GUILLAUMONT and C. GUILLAUMONT, *Évagre le Pontique. Le Gnostique ou À celui qui est devenu digne de la science* (Sources chrétiennes 356), Paris, 1989, p. 24-40 and *ibidem*, *Évagre le Pontique. Traité pratique*, (Sources chrétiennes 170), vol. 1, p. 38-63).

¹⁷⁵ Prov 12:25.

¹⁷⁶ Before becoming a monk, he was preceptor to the emperors Arcadius and Honorius (L. REGNAULT, *Les sentences des Pères du Désert. Collection alphabétique*, Sablé-sur-Sarthe, 1981, p. 23)

¹⁷⁷ i.e. the monastic life.

to him from his holy height¹⁷⁸, saying: “Arsenius, flee from men and you shall live.” So he went to Scete to be with abba Macarius and lived in a coenobium of many monks.

Once he had received sufficient instruction befitting a coenobium, he was deemed worthy of dwelling in a cell¹⁷⁹. Thanks to the ability of his knowledge and the discernment of his mind, he perceived that all his observance in the cell during the week was lost to him whenever he went to the community. This happened because of the commotion which occurred in his heart due to what he saw and the harmful things he heard, caused by dissolute brothers who are often to be found in monasteries. On this subject, Evagrius says, “As to those who wish to accomplish the disciplines¹⁸⁰ of virtue in a community, Satan arouses the dissolute brothers against them¹⁸¹.”

So what did the blessed man do? He cried out again to God in the suffering of his heart and said, “Lord, lead me to life”. It is as if he was saying in the presence of God, “I had prayed before your Greatness and implored your Grace to save me from the tumult of the world, so to speak from the waves of the sea. You caused me to dwell in a haven of peace in order for me to be agreeable to you and for my soul to live in remembrance of your love. Yet now, among the brothers, I suffer even greater confusion and disturbance through what I see and hear.” Then he heard the divine voice again that said to him, “Arsenius, flee, be silent and remain in quietude.” These are the roots, that is to say the remedies, for a man not to sin. It is as if God said to him, “When you were in the world, I did not order you to be in quietude and silence in a solitary dwelling, because you lacked instruction and perseverance. Now however that you have been instructed and sufficiently trained, depart henceforth from the monastery of many brothers and remain in quietude and silence.”

By “flee”, God commanded him to go far from the company of the brothers and to shut up his body in a cell. By “be silent”, he instructs him not to speak from the door or the window with those who come to him. Finally, by “remain in quietude”, he warns him not to hold conversations with people in his mind all

¹⁷⁸ The translation in GUILLAUMONT and ALBERT, “Lettre”, p. 242 “du haut de sa sainteté” misses the point that the genitive with a substantive has an adjectival force, just as ܐܘܪܘܫܝܡܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐ means “holy Spirit” and not “spirit of holiness”.

¹⁷⁹ Life in a community is a simple preparation for the solitary life in a cell.

¹⁸⁰ See our remarks on the highly polysemic word ܐܘܪܘܫܝܡܐ in D. PHILLIPS, “Lost and found: Dadisho‘ Qatraya’s *Commentary on the Paradise of the Fathers* as a witness to the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia” in M. KOZAH *et alii* (ed.), *The Syriac Writers of Qatar in the Seventh Century* (Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 38), Piscataway, 2014, p. 210.

¹⁸¹ *Praktikos* 5 (GUILLAUMONT and GUILLAUMONT, *Évagre le Pontique. Traité pratique*, vol. 2, p. 504-505).

the time, because there is absolutely no profit to be derived from confining one's body in a hermitage while letting the senses go free through talking from the window. Neither does it serve any good to confine the body and the senses while allowing the thoughts of the intellect to wander and reflect about the brothers and exterior things. Apart from the set times of prayer when one reflects on one's fathers and brothers spiritually, as befits the law of spiritual love, a recluse should in no way remember anybody or reflect on anything, except on God and on himself.

He who does not divest himself of all things cannot put on the Lord of All. The remembrance of God cannot dwell with the remembrance of men in the heart. As it is written in the *Book of Paradise*, "A certain brother asked an elder and said, 'How should a monk dwell in his cell?'. The elder replied by saying, 'He should in no way have any remembrance of men when he dwells in his cell'¹⁸²".

[4] Contrary to my habit, I have obliged myself to write these few things to you¹⁸³, that they may serve as the apology I owe you. God knows how I love you in the person of our Lord and how I have profited from your aims and your zeal in the fear of God. That I owe you honour and satisfaction, this I know. However, I live among many people and it does not befit your Charity that you should be for me a pretext for complaint or gainsaying because I speak with you alone among this large community or that I give a pretext to others to be scandalized about me.

Now, if you keep the commandments of our Lord Christ, in spiritual love, and keep the gaze of your mind stretched towards him¹⁸⁴ at all times, with the insatiable¹⁸⁵ and ceaseless desire and zeal to do his will, it is he himself who will be for you a teacher, guide and helper for accomplishing his will and for the joy of your soul. Now, it is written, "The commandments of the Lord are upright and gladden the heart¹⁸⁶" – here is joy for your delectation; "the commandment of the Lord is choice and enlightens the eyes¹⁸⁷" – here is light for your soul to journey in his path without stumbling; "the testimony of the Lord is faithful and brings wisdom to children¹⁸⁸" – here is divine understanding and

¹⁸² WALLIS BUDGE, *The Book of Paradise*, vol. 2, p. 432 (translation vol. 1, p. 589).

¹⁸³ According to the French translation (GUILLAUMONT and ALBERT, "Lettre" p. 243), it is the "things" which are not habitual, not the fact of writing. It is however clear that it is the latter which is intended, whichever Syriac text is followed (see note 74).

¹⁸⁴ Perhaps compare Heb 12:2.

¹⁸⁵ Not "sans lassitude" (GUILLAUMONT and ALBERT, "Lettre" p. 243).

¹⁸⁶ Ps 19:8.

¹⁸⁷ *ibidem*.

¹⁸⁸ Ps 19:7.

spiritual wisdom in order to be enlightened with spiritual considerations and to resist the enemies' attacks. As it is written, "Make me wiser than my enemies because I have kept your commandments¹⁸⁹." If you seek out consolation from my words in replacement of my conversation with you, (this consolation) will be a teacher and a consoler. I even dare to say that the narrowness of the seclusion in which I am, the poverty of the place in which I dwell and the confined hermitage which I inhabit will serve you in place of a teacher, if it is that you do indeed desire to draw some profit from my littleness and my simplicity.

[5] But if words are also necessary, listen then. You must learn and know, my dear friend, that before anything else a monk has to acquire these three virtues which will be for him like the tools of craftsmanship used by craftsmen. Just as every craft necessarily needs three things, by which I mean to say: an iron anvil, a hammer and pincers so all the different disciplines among monks have need of these three things. They are: quietude, meditation and coercion (of self). Without them, no virtue can be properly accomplished with the upright intention which behoves it. These (virtues) engender one another: quietude engenders meditation and meditation coercion. From these are thence engendered and established all the precious and glorious virtues.

Therefore, a monk must leave the world in order that his soul become used to living in quietude according to his strength and his stature, be it as a kelliote¹⁹⁰ or a coenobite. Accustom yourself, my brother, even if you are in a coenobium, when you have the opportunity, to sit and meditate. Reflect, saying to yourself, "For what reason did I leave the world and what do I run after in order to acquire it¹⁹¹?" Meditate on the passions and ponder on the virtues: what and how many are the virtues and what and how many are the passions? Then because of quietude and suchlike meditations, you will perceive how this monastic way of life is hard and that without constantly compelling yourself, you will be unable to accomplish it, for you have a combat against nature, old habits and will.

[6] So, when you will have received instruction concerning these three things and will have understood that without quietude there is no meditation, and that without meditation there is so coercion (of the self), you will then acquire the discovery of the knowledge of three other virtues which are even greater than the others. They are prayer without ceasing, the overthrow of thoughts and asceticism.

¹⁸⁹ Ps 119:98.

¹⁹⁰ **ܟܠܝܘܬܐ** is derived from **ܟܠܠܐ** and refers to a monk living a solitary life in a cell.

¹⁹¹ Perhaps compare Phil 3:12 (so GUILLAUMONT and ALBERT, "Lettre", p. 244), but the vocabulary of the Peshitta is somewhat differ (**ܟܠܝܘܬܐ** instead of **ܟܠܠܐ**).

Listen then to how they become known to someone and how they are engendered one from another. When someone is in quietude with his soul, this very quietude and silence awaken his mind to meditate on himself. Once he has meditated on himself and has correctly understood what sin is and what righteousness is, he knows that it is impossible to depart from evil and do good, except by compelling himself every day and at every instant. When he realizes that, however much he compels himself night and day, he is too weak for improvement, he then understands that, without divine help, he is unable by himself to free himself from the passions and accomplish the virtues.

Henceforth he applies himself to the labour of prayer and prays without cease in order to find help. When however, he sees that prayer is hindered by the thoughts arising from the passions, he continually takes care to purify his soul from the thoughts that are aroused in him by the Evil One. In this way, his heart is illuminated through prayer and his mind is strengthened against his enemies. Furthermore, when he realizes, thanks to his discernment and the teaching of experience, that he cannot overthrow his thoughts and pray all the time when lying with a full stomach on his bed, he devotes himself to the labours of asceticism. Once his body has become lighter through fasting, it becomes easier for the mind to overthrow the thoughts or pride¹⁹² which arise against the knowledge and love of God; and once the body has been somewhat weakened and emaciated through keeping vigil, the mind is immediately illuminated in prayer.

[7] These three other virtues are born from the first three and without them they cannot be learnt or acquired. Just as the king's crown, his ring and the cup of gold he drinks in cannot be fashioned without pincers, anvil and hammer so, without quietude, meditation and coercion (of self) one cannot acquire prayer without ceasing, the overthrow of thoughts, bodily labour and the other kinds of virtue.

Thus, we must cherish quietude as being the root from which all the virtues sprout. In this quietude, it does not behove us to reflect on anything else apart from our sins and passions and on how we can free ourselves from them, and acquire purity of heart and be deemed worthy of the vision of God and his love. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God"¹⁹³ and "He

¹⁹² GUILLAUMONT and ALBERT, "Lettre", p. 244 translate, we think, *ad sensum* with "obstacle". No such meaning is attested in the lexica. Although the mention of pride seems unexpected, an almost identical text is found in DQC I, 52 **ܠܗܘܢ ܕܡܫܟܘܢܗܘܢ ܕܡܫܟܘܢܗܘܢ ܕܡܫܟܘܢܗܘܢ ܕܡܫܟܘܢܗܘܢ ܕܡܫܟܘܢܗܘܢ ܕܡܫܟܘܢܗܘܢ** "We overturn their [the demons'] thoughts and any pride which arises in us through them against the knowledge of God and the love of our Lord".

¹⁹³ Mt 5:8.

who loves me and keeps my commandments, I shall love him and show myself to him¹⁹⁴. This is pledge of perfection to come.

[8] I also add the following for your instruction. At all times, investigate the generic passions and the comprehensive virtues and meditate on them. The generic passions are the following: concupiscence, love of money and vain glory. These were vanquished by our Saviour on our behalf and he gave us victory over them, we¹⁹⁵ who run after his knowledge seething with love. He showed us in the Gospel the spiritual remedies by which these three passions can be healed, they which are the fathers of all the passions. The remedies are fasting, prayer and mercy. Now, since the rational soul has three parts, I mean, concupiscence, anger and thought – which is the intellect –, and the three of them have fallen sick through sin, our Saviour has offered the healing which is appropriate to our passions. To this end, he says, “When you fast, when you pray and when you give alms, do not do so and so, but do so and so¹⁹⁶”. Through fasting, he healed concupiscence, through alms, he cured anger and through prayer he purified the intellect.

The holy fathers, seeing our Lord’s aim given in the Gospel, have expanded on these three generic virtues by way of a more developed explanation which they have made triple for each of them¹⁹⁷. Thus the concupiscible part of the soul, which fell sick through being mixed with the concupiscence of the body, is healed and with it the concupiscence of the body also, so that both of them become one pure desire in God. This takes place through fasting, the restriction of desirable things and keeping vigil which engender sobriety. As for the irascible part of the soul which, through sin, was mingled with bodily anger, it is cured and bodily anger with it, so that both of them become one natural anger of the soul which proves itself constantly valiant against the passions and the demons and is strengthened in divine hope. This takes place through gentleness, humility and mercy which engender neighbourly love. As for the intellect, which is the cognitive part of the soul, it is purified and healed through the reading of divine writings¹⁹⁸, the recitation¹⁹⁹ of psalms and constant prayers which engender the love of God.

¹⁹⁴ A loose adaptation of Jn 14:21.

¹⁹⁵ The Syriac has switched from a first person plural to a third person plural used generically.

¹⁹⁶ See Mt 6:15, 6, 2.

¹⁹⁷ For each of the generic passions, Dadisho‘ expands the single remedy “of the Gospel” into three. The correspondence between the passion and the remedy to be applied varies, but the basic idea comes from Evagrius (see GUILLAUMONT and ALBERT, “Lettre”, p. 245, note 6).

¹⁹⁸ This could be Scripture in the strict sense, but also religious books in general.

In this way, the whole man is healed in his soul and in his body from the sicknesses of sin which is a transgression of the law. He acquires perfect health which is in righteousness, puts off “the old man corrupted through the desires stemming from error²⁰⁰” and puts on the new man in holiness and sanctity. “He is renewed in knowledge in the image of his Creator²⁰¹”, our Lord Jesus Christ who chose you for his service. He, through his grace, will make you perfect in his love, will fulfil you in his kindness and will make you strong in order to perform his will and will keep you from Satan’s snares. He will teach you his knowledge, affirm you in his hope and make you worthy of his kingdom and of his glory together with all the saints who accomplish his will. Amen.

End of the letter of saint Mar Dadisho‘

¹⁹⁹ Or “office”.

²⁰⁰ Eph 4:22.

²⁰¹ Col 3:10.

