

# THE MAIN ASPECTS OF ASCETICISM AND REPENTANCE IN THE WORK OF “*PRATUM*” BY JOHN MOSCHUS

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SMETANIAK, Atanasia Mariia The main aspects of asceticism and repentance in the work of “*Pratum*” by John Moschus. *Trans/Form/Ação: Unesp journal of philosophy, Marília*, v. 47, n. 2, “Feminine perspectives in philosophical thought”, e0240010, 2024.

**Abstract:** The theme of repentance is eternal for Christians. Almost all the Holy Fathers touched upon it with necessity and called to resort to this miraculous preparation given by the Church. It also runs like a red thread through the work of *Pratum* by John Moschus. The purpose of this study is to analyze the work of *Pratum* by John Moschus, which touches upon the theme of repentance and the main aspects of asceticism. The paper aims to identify the main characteristics of monastic life associated with ascetic practices of primitive monasticism described in the work. The study focuses on the addressees of the work, namely the monks for whom the work was written, and the topics about ascetic practices, the importance and necessity of repentance and the action of divine grace in human life. The study intends to ensure that these themes and practices are inherited by other generations and do not lose their relevance.

**Keywords:** Spiritual progress. Search for life. Monks. Monk. Gaining inner freedom.

SMETANIAK, Atanasia Mariia Os principais aspectos do asceticismo e do arrependimento na obra *Pratum*, de John Moschus. *Transformação: revista de filosofia da Unesp, Marília*, v. 47, n. 2, “*Perspectivas femininas no pensamento filosófico*”, e0240010, 2024.

**Resumo:** O tema do arrependimento é eterno para os cristãos. Quase todos os Santos Padres tocaram nele com necessidade e consideraram utilizar essa preparação milagrosa dada pela Igreja. Ela também corre como um fio vermelho através da obra de *Pratum*, de John Moschus. O objetivo deste estudo é analisar a obra *Pratum*, de John Moschus, que aborda o tema do arrependimento e os principais aspectos da ascese. O trabalho visa a identificar as principais características da vida monástica associadas às práticas ascéticas do monaquismo primitivo descritas na obra. O estudo centra-se nos destinatários da obra, nomeadamente os monges para os quais a obra foi escrita, e nos temas sobre as práticas ascéticas, a importância e a necessidade do arrependimento e a ação da graça divina na vida humana. O estudo pretende garantir que esses temas e práticas sejam herdados por outras gerações e não percam sua relevância.

**Palavras-chave:** Progresso espiritual. Busca pela vida. Monges. Monge. Ganhando liberdade interior.

Received: 15/03/2023 | Approved: 17/04/2023 | Published: 10/10/2023

 <https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2024.v47.n2.e0240010>



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## THE MAIN ASPECTS OF ASCETICISM AND REPENTANCE IN THE WORK OF “PRATUM” BY JOHN MOSCHUS

*Atanasia Mariia Smetaniak*<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

The term “asceticism” comes from the ancient Greek “ἄσκησις”, which means “exercise”. Initially, this term meant exercises to improve the physical body. Eventually, it acquired a moral factor. From this it can be come to the disappointing conclusion that asceticism is a conscious restriction of bodily pleasures and renunciation of the material to raise the soul above the body. The word “repentance” means a man’s radical change, rebirth, change of mind, change of life, sincere renunciation of sin. These two concepts were considered in John Moschus’ work. *Pratum* is an immortal book that describes in detail the ancient great ascetic monks’ exploits of the VI-VII centuries. They are monks Abba Dorotheus and John the Baptist’s contemporaries and have remained a model of Christian asceticism for centuries. Rejecting the deceptive charms of the world for the sake of the real truth – Christ – they went to the lifeless, burning desert, turning it with their prayerful and fasting efforts into a flourishing paradise of virtues, full of the fruits of immortal life (Chung, 2003, p. 477). Their deeds were inherited by all subsequent generations of Christians, and it must be learned from them higher science and deep wisdom – life in Christ (Moschus, 1865, p. 2843-3116; Krynyska, 2007, p. 120-135).

The book *Pratum* was written by the stern ascetic and hermit blessed John Moschus, a highly educated Palestinian monk. He was Saint Sophronius’ mentor and teacher, the future Patriarch of Jerusalem. With him, blessed John Moschus traveled throughout the Orthodox East, recording in guidance to us, future generations, the great and glorified Fathers of the Church’s wonderful and glorious deeds. Between 578 and 582, St. John was in Egypt, then visited the Palestinian monasteries with Sophronius, and then around 603 they traveled to Antioch to its great pillars of Cilicia, Lebanon, Tarsus, Gaza, Ascalon and Mount Sinai. Around 607, travelers arrived in Egypt, the cradle of monasticism, passed by the ascetics of the famous Mount Nitra, Scythia and Thebes, and worked with Egyptian monks for more than ten years. Only in 619, the monastery scribes came to Constantinople

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and, two years later, to Rome, where in 622 the Blessed Scribe of the Spiritual Meadow passed away. Reverend Sophronius brought his teacher's body to Palestine, where he buried him in his native monastery. He later became a spiritual writer and patriarch (Špidlik, 2007, p. 205-218).

Among the monastic sources, John Moschus' work, known as Λειμών or *Pratum spirituale*, plays an important role. An authentic gem of monastic literature of the Byzantine period, written just before the Arab invasion, originally describes the characteristics and spirit of monastic life in Egypt and Palestine in the VI and VII centuries. In terms of style and language, the work is typically κοινή (a common, everyday language) VI century as "sermo cotidianus", written in colloquial language, with a simple structure. *Pratum (Pratum spirituale)* is a collection of instructive stories, instructive speeches, or monks or others' brief biographies. The collection offers an overview of the monastic life of the Palestinian-Egyptian environment between the second half of the sixth century and the first half of the seventh century. The author John Moschus describes episodes he saw with his own eyes or heard from stories during his travels through the monasteries of Palestine and Egypt. The work was probably written in the 7th century and has come down to us under various guises. Researchers have devoted much time to the title of the work, authorship and purpose of writing, but the main idea of authorship is in John Moschus' favor. It can be learned about this from other sources or research (Downey, 2003, p. 543-555; De Fiores; Goffi, 1989, p. 1005-1010).

The *Pratum* by John Moschus is considered a valuable primary source for understanding the spirituality and practices of early Christian monasticism. Scholars have recognized the work as a significant contribution to the literature of monasticism, providing insight into the ascetic practices and spiritual beliefs of the period. Nonetheless, some modern scholars also recognize that the work may contain certain biases or ideological viewpoints that reflect the context in which it was written. *Pratum* by John Moschus is considered an essential text for understanding the history of Christian monasticism and the development of Christian spirituality.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the work of *Pratum* by John Moschus and identify the main aspects of asceticism and repentance in it.

## 1 THE ESSENCE AND MEANING OF ASCETICISM

Asceticism is an important element of monastic life and for the man's spiritual progress (Špidlik, 2007, p. 15; Downey, 2003, p. 80; De Fiores; Goffi, 1989, p. 10; Goehring, 1999, p. 19; Kaplan, 1998, p. 53-66; Wimbush, 1995, p. 46; Binn, 1994, p. 55). The Holy Father's tradition speaks profoundly of the need for asceticism, often outlined in the monks' lives in

such a way that, in keeping with the spirit of the times, it sometimes seems incomprehensible today (Nusipalikyzy *et al.*, 2020). For the monks, being Christ's true followers meant embarking on difficult paths of strict discipline. Thus, asceticism is the *modus vivendi* or, better said, it is the search for life with God. This is not a phenomenon somehow organized and structured, but it is everyday life, a way of life, the ability to meet what is happening. One episode of *Pratum* is particularly significant in this regard. An Egyptian father, when asked by John Moschus and Sophronius, who was preparing to become a monk, answered them what a monastic life should look like: "You are doing well, son, that you want to renounce the world and save your soul. Stay in the cell in which you wish to live, soberly, silently, and in unceasing prayer, and I trust in God, my son, that He will send you understanding and enlighten your mind" (Moschus, 2005, p. 61). There are also many references in the work to various ways of asceticism as an instrument for gaining inner freedom and making one more attentive to the search for God. An elder, when asked what he had done during so many years of silence and asceticism, said he had never paid attention to the earthly: "Having spent so much time in silence and asceticism, what have you achieved, brother?" The guest asked: "Go and come back in ten days. Then I'll tell you". Arriving on the tenth day, the old man did not find his brother alive, but found the written words: "Forgive me, Father, that I never turned my thoughts to the earthly in the fulfilment of my rule" (Moschus, 2005, p. 63).

John sometimes refers to the fundamental principle of monastic spirituality, widespread in primitive literature and still present in seventh-century literature: to feel traveling and temporary on earth and to make the body suffer in order to gain inner freedom because they believed that "more the more a person suffers on the body, the more the inner strength grows" (Moschus, 2005, p. 67). The monks sleep on the ground, or like an old man from *Pratum*, never slept on his side. The author quotes Elder Alexander as saying that the fathers never washed their faces, accusing their younger brothers of losing their angelic way of life.

Elder Alexander: "Our fathers flourished virtues: selflessness and humility, and now selfishness and pride reign. Our fathers never washed their faces, and public baths are now open to us. Unfortunately, brothers, we have lost our angelic way of life!"

The Elder's disciple Abba Vincent said: "Obviously, this is because we are weak, Father".

Elder Alexander: "What are you saying, Vincent? Are we weak? Brother, we are so strong in body that we could compete with Olympic wrestlers, but our soul is weak... We can eat and drink a lot and love to dress well, but we cannot be restrained and humble" (Moschus, 2005, p. 69).

Ascetics live in absolute silence for a long time, eating once every two or three days or once a week, looking for life in caves (*σπηλαίοται*), in trees (*δενδρίται*) or on pillars

(στυλίται) or, like Abba George, a hermit who, for thirty-five years, wandered without clothes in the desert, carrying a hairline (τριχίνας) and weeping incessantly. Asceticism, however, is not in the power of personal diligence, but above all in the endurance that comes from God's help: "Man's strength is not in his nature, it is fragile, but in holy determination with God's help. Let us, brothers, take care of the soul as we take care of the body!" (Moschus, 2005, p. 70). True asceticism is a life of dying every day, but it is only an instrument, not an end. Therefore, asceticism cannot be considered as an absolute, but only as an instrument that brings man closer to God and neighbor. Therefore, the monks warned against false asceticism, which, instead of approaching, distances man from God (Chung *et al.*, 2021, p. 857).

Perfect asceticism is living according to God's will. This aspect of asceticism is common in the desert fathers of the first centuries. However, asceticism in itself is not a guarantee of living with God: those who hope in themselves and their actions face their weaknesses and sins and lose hope, and only those who hope in God can be saved (Zhuszupov *et al.*, 2017, p. 11). Asceticism, therefore, is not an end in itself, but makes a person free to receive God's grace. Ascetic discipline, in fact, quenches the desire: "Nature itself, brethren, arouses us to passions. But increased asceticism quenches them" (Moschus, 2005, p. 73), and frees not only from themselves but also from bad thoughts, from the devil and his tricks, thus becoming the main tool of monastic life. Teacher Cosmas, having been alone for thirty-three years, answers the question of the result of such a long asceticism: "I believe that I have made progress in three things: I have learned not to laugh, not to swear, not to lie". In *Pratum*, one can often see nostalgia for the past, when asceticism was more important and practiced in a more severe way: "The ancient fathers were great and strong, they could allow and forbid again. And our family, brothers, we cannot allow and forbid. If we allow it, we will not be able to withstand strict asceticism" (Moschus, 2005, p. 76).

## 2 ASCETIC PRACTICES: DIFFERENT WAYS OF ASCETICISM (ἀσκησις)

### 2.1 FASTING

Fasting together with asceticism is of great importance in the context of monastic life. It manifests itself in various forms: from a small amount of food to abstinence from drinks and refusal to eat for more or less long periods of time (Špidlik, 1995, p. 48; 2007, p. 33; Bendaly, 2009, p. 59; Scarnera, 1990, p. 26; Francesco, 2011, p. 12). In Christian practice, fasting is a means or a way of preparing for prayer and renewal in Christ. Fasting is practiced by monks to be free from the passions and needs of the body. Hence the well-known idea of monks as angels who need not earthly food but spiritual food, which they receive by establishing a close and direct connection with Christ, always careful not to saturate the body and please it, but to be open in fasting on the spiritual food open to God Himself (Chung, 1987). The monks' fasting in *Pratum* often takes on ways that are unbelievable. The author

testifies about monks who fasted daily, or about those who ate only what was brought to him by visitors, and if no one came, they were left without food. However, it is not clear what the daily fasting was, but John Moschus cites the example of an elder who followed the following rule for thirty-five years: “For thirty-five years he followed this rule: he ate bread once a week with water, worked continuously and never left the church” (Moschus, 2005, p. 100).

Another hermit fasted, working night and day, to the point that others thought he was disembodied, an attribute mostly attributed to angels in the literature: “For sixty-nine years he led this way of life: he fasted for weeks, so that some considered him incorporeal” (Moschus, 2005, p. 110). Many ate little food or only simple herbs: “I struggled in the vicinity of the Dead Sea for seventy years. He walked naked, ate only plants and did not eat anything else” (Moschus, 2005, p. 111). Speaking of fasting, John Moschus cites examples of the predecessors of asceticism, expressing nostalgia and admiration for their way of life compared to contemporaries: “Compared to the monks of that time, three advantages elevated him: frequent fasting, vigilance and great diligence” (Moschus, 2005, p. 113) – that can be interpreted as praise for the founders, and awareness of the remoteness of modern monasticism from the example of the founders’ life. Both asceticism and fasting are only a means, if very important, for the monks’ spiritual, but by no means an absolute goal: it is an ascetic practice that expresses the identification with the need to draw nourishment for the soul only from spiritual food, which is achieved in close and direct contact with God in prayer and silence.

## 2.2 SILENCE

Another element of asceticism that is common in the *Pratum spirituale* is silence (Špidlik, 1995, p. 93; 2007, p. 150-151; De Fiores; Goffi, 1989, p. 349; Chialà, 2010, p. 21; Regnault, 2008, p. 60; Mancini, 2002; p. 42-43; Miquel, 1998, p. 54), a natural and mysterious companion of life in solitude. It is in search of it and love for it that monks leave everything and go to live in the desert, in solitude, which promotes meeting and listening to God, who says: the desert, loneliness and silence become a monk’s tool for understanding unity with God. The author cites Abba Theodosius’ example, who, living thirty-five years in solitude, fasting and in complete silence, losing all connection with the word, expressed signs if it was necessary to say something: “I spent thirty-five years in solitude, and fasted for two days and remained completely silent, did not talk to anyone. If he wanted to say something, he expressed it in signs” (Moschus, 2005, p. 154). Elsewhere, John Moschus tells of a soldier who retired to the desert and limited the use of words to one verse of prayer he prayed every hour; and about Abba Paul, who lived alone for about fifty years without communicating with anyone. In other stories, although without explicit mention of the practice of silence, the author also emphasises the importance of loneliness and silence in prayer. But there is no

spiritual progress without spiritual struggle and without loneliness. Every person, in order to meet God, must fight with himself, cultivate the inner desert and be able to meet silence, to enter into listening only to God. Because, in silence, God speaks to man, purifies and transforms, but also requires from the person listening in silence and asceticism until the killing of the body (Jeong *et al.*, 2022, p. 3780-3781).

### **2.3 KILLING THE BODY (νέκρωσις τοῦ σώματος)**

Ascetic practices of bodily killing were very common among monks, namely monastic life, when the historical period of physical martyrdom ended. It was considered the martyrdom of conscience (Špidlik, 1995, p. 52; 2007, p. 40; Pricoco, 1996a, p. 27; Bormolini, 2004, p. 257-284). The need to die, and for all the carnal to die with you to lead a spiritual life, thus becomes a fundamental aspect of monastic life. Therefore, monks seek and practice bodily execution in different ways: they live in columns, in caves, in tree hollows, closing in on narrow spaces, sleeping on the ground, not washing, dressing in chains that testify to the ideal of complete rejection of the body as absolute self-denial. John Moschus tells numerous episodes about monks killing their own bodies. A hermit, on his way to the thorns, refuses to go to the doctor in order for the inner man to grow through the suffering of the body: "He told everyone who visited him: the more a person suffers on the body, the more the inner strength grows" (Moschus, 2005, p. 159). In another story, a young man, who promised not to drink anything for the rest of his life, remained true to his promise, even when he was sick, to receive eternal benefits for such hard work and patience: "This is how the great ascetics lived, exhausting themselves for the sake of God in order to earn eternal bliss" (Moschus, 2005, p. 160).

## **3 THE IMPORTANCE OF REPENTANCE**

### **3.1 REPENTANCE (εἰσέγνωσις)**

The path of conversion that follows from the monks' life is often combined with listening to the words of Scripture: hearing the God's Word, a person opens himself to these same words and receives the desire and strength to change his life. Thus, the first step comes from God, and only after Him and in response to Him man becomes capable of repentance (Špidlik, 1995, p. 96; 2007, p. 155; Chialà, 2010, p. 23; Stefanov, 2009, p. 254; Bloom, 2002, p. 12; Rizzi, 2003, p. 201-204). John Moschus (2005, p. 120) tells of an actor named Babil, who, hearing a passage from the Gospel, leaves his two mistresses everything he had and becomes a monk. But upon hearing this, the two women also became nuns, wanting to lead this way of life following the example of the actor's conversion, saying:

One day he went to church. By God's providence, they read the words of the Gospel: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand". Shocked by these words, he was horrified to remember all his life. Leaving the temple, he called out to his concubines, "You know how debauched I lived with you", he told them, "and you never preferred one to the other. Now – all yours that I got. Take all my property and divide it among yourself. And from now on I leave the world and go to the monks". "For sin and the destruction of the soul, we lived with you, they both cried in unison, bursting into tears, and now, desiring a godly life, you are abandoning us and wanting to save yourself?! This will not happen – you will not leave us! We want to be participants with you and for good!"

Therefore, it is an obligatory step for the spiritual life to admit one's guilt, because only one who is able to admit guilt is able to help God and be free from guilt. In the most common cases of spiritual life, monks, for the benefit of others, began to blame themselves for guilt, even what they did not do. An important episode in *Pratum* is about the robber David, who repents and enters the monastery at an early age to repent, surpassing in asceticism all the young monks who were already in the monastery before him: "And when he began to struggle, he surpassed all restraint, obedience and humble wisdom, and the monastery had about seventy monks. He taught everyone with his life, he served as an example for everyone" (Moschus, 2005, p. 122).

The thief, who has done many evils, comes to the monastery to find peace and perform penance. After nine years of monastic life, he asks to return to the world, because the thought of a child, killed during his previous gangster activities, took away all his peace. Here are the sharp words with which he asks the old man for permission to return to the world to redeem himself from his previous cruelty:

For nine years now, as you well know, I have spent in the convent, fasted as much as I could, restrained and lived in obedience, in silence and fear of God, and I know very well that the mercy of God has forgiven me many crimes... But every day I see before my eyes a boy who says to me: "Why did you kill me? I see him in my dreams, in church and at dinner, I hear his voice, and I have no time to rest... That's why, Father, I want to go and die for the boy... I killed him in vain..." (Moschus, 2005, p. 125).

Thus, repentance is not about correcting a fact that happened at a certain moment, but it is a consciousness of conscience that is lifelong and aware of being a sinner, feeling the need to pray, asking God for grace to be free from sin, and constantly aware of all the evil and suffering done.

### 3.2 REPENTANCE (μετάνοια)

With the beginning of the monastic life, a person goes to a new life, which is often identified with repentance (Špidlik, 1995, p. 36; 2007, p. 48; De Fiores; Goffi, 1989, p. 333; Miquel, 1998, p. 108; Petrà, 2005, p. 19; Maritano, 2002, p. 669-704). Even if a person, before the beginning of the monastic life, lived a life of sin, with God's grace he finds forgiveness. And the memory of forgiveness makes him capable of severe and deep penance. Thus man, even if he has committed a grievous sin, finds peace with God and with himself. The example from *Pratum* tells of the monk Isidore, who at first, as a follower of the teachings of North Antioch, did not allow his wife to take communion and, becoming a monk, always mourned this sin, admitting himself a terrible sinner: "I am such a great sinner..." (Moschus, 2005, p. 129). The devil, trying to distance man from God, causes the soul to fall into sin and despair. The Egyptian father, when John Moschus and Sophronius came to him to hear his words about monastic life, said:

The only concern of demons is to cast the soul into sin and then to despair to destroy it. Demons incessantly inspire souls: "When will he die and his name perish?" (Ps. 41: 6). But if the soul does not sleep, it will cry out against them: "I will not die, but live and tell the works of the Lord" (Ps. 118:17). But the shameless demons attack the soul again, persuading it: "Fly, bird, to the mountains!" (Ps. 11: 1). To this we must have a ready answer: "Only he is my rock and my salvation, my protection – I will not stagger" (Ps. 62: 7) (Moschus, 2005, p. 130).

The fathers were well aware that repentance was not an action done only once, but perseverance daily and every moment in the thought of God and in the remembrance of one's sin. Therefore, the elders remember that the need for penance is not only for young people, but also follows a person throughout his life. Abba Menas' words, quoted by John Moschus (2005, p. 131), are very effective in this regard: "At all ages, the old and the young must repent in order to earn eternal life, which will bring great glory and honor: to the young, for they are in a flourishing age, in the midst of passions, they have bowed their necks under the yoke of innocence; to the elders for being able to eradicate the bad habit they have learned over the years". The decisive moment of the monastic life is the revelation of one's sins, one's actions and thoughts before the elders, who are able to help a person in his difficulties, in the realization that there is a cure for every sin. Abba John says that he encouraged a young man, who wanted to become a monk, to find out what sin he had committed in order to lead him to a proper life of repentance. Here is what Abba John says to the young man:

Believe me, my son, no matter how great and varied the transgressions, there are many healing remedies. Only if you really want healing, tell me the truth about yourself so that I can prescribe the appropriate penance. One way to treat a prostitute, the second – a murderer, the third – a lying doctor. And something completely different is needed for a money lover. The young man burst into tears and beat himself loudly in the chest. He was taken aback by the unusual emotional excitement, and he could not utter a single word (Moschus, 2005, p. 131).

Only by revealing one's sins can one begin a new life by deciding to do good and leave evil, but always have one's sin before one's eyes to remind oneself of its weakness, or even more, of love for God in the forgiveness of sins. That is why monks spend their whole lives in continuous repentance, which becomes a real companion of their existence (Kim, 2017, p. 86). In fact, the fathers remember that God always gives time for repentance, as Abba Taleley, who lived as a monk for sixty years without ceasing to weep, said: "[...] not a cry of discouragement or sorrow, but tears of gratitude to God who gave the grace of repentance".

### 3.3 CRY (πένθος)

Another teaching of the desert fathers about repentance is that repentance has an impact not only on the man's personal level, but also on others (Špidlik, 1995, p. 28; 2007, p. 62; Miquel, 1998, p. 60; Hausherr, 1994, p. 116). The state of sorrow or tears is often present in Eastern monks, who said that the only reason we should grieve is the sin we have lost. But looking at God's mercy, the soul also cries out for the joy of forgiveness and salvation that God has given (Seo *et al.*, 2021, p. 1410-1411). Very often, in the texts, there is the fathers' awareness that monastic life is a cry for sins. John Moschus tells of an elder who wanted to be appointed abbot for his great virtue, but the elder asked not to do so, but to leave him "to mourn my sins". And people also knew that the monks' task was to sit in a cell, pray and mourn sins, as it can be read in the story about the murderer who told a monk who came to watch that criminal's death to have deeper repentance: "So why don't you sit in a cell and grieve for your sins?" Your truth, my brother", replied the monk. – "I do not worry about my soul. That's why I'm going to look at your execution, so that at least because of this I will come to grief" (Moschus, 2005, p. 134). Finally, there are also the elders' hints and mentions about the true repentance and the monks' true repentance, avoiding any form devoid of true feeling: "Unfortunately, brother, we have no heartache. We are in negligence, and I am afraid that we are at the door, and the wrath of God has overtaken us" (Moschus, 2005, p. 135).

While many Byzantine writers and theologians of the time wrote about the significance of asceticism and repentance, Moschus' ideas stood out for placing a strong emphasis on the physical aspect of asceticism, including fasting and bodily discipline, as a means of achieving spiritual growth. Moreover, he regarded repentance not just as a way to turn away from sin but also as a path to reach a deeper communion with God. While other Byzantine writers and theologians of the time, such as St. John Climacus and St. Symeon, the New Theologian, also recognized the importance of asceticism and repentance, their focus was more on the individual's inner spiritual transformation.

## **4 DIVINE GRACE AND HUMAN TRANSFORMATION**

### **4.1 MIRACLES (σημεῖα)**

A person who has lived a life of great asceticism, in constant prayer, in the struggle against the devil and against his thoughts or desires, receives the grace to change the world around him (Gajano; Modica, 1999, p. 48-56; Elpidio, 1951, p. 61-94; Maisano, 2002, p. 210-222). God has given grace to work miracles through holy people. And monks had power over disease, evil, or even death while they were still alive (Chung, 1988, p. 159). Saints also gain power over animals, and in the work, it can be found examples of power over lions, such as Abba George, who prevented two lions from capturing a herd. Another Abba, Paul, wanted the lion to eat him because of the sin he had committed, but the lion did not touch him, and this was a testimony to the elder that God had forgiven his sin. Another Abba Gerasim's very amazing story. A lion came to him because he was stung by a thorn and his paw hurt. The old man carefully removed the thorn, and the healed lion no longer left the old man and followed him like a faithful disciple. Author also finds other examples of lions becoming friends with monks who fed them as humans. And those examples are typical of desert fathers who gain power over animals and are no longer afraid of beasts, because, as they say, the only thing that causes fear is sin: "If we kept the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ, beasts would fear us. But for our sins we have become slaves, and now we are more afraid of them" (Moschus, 2005, p. 142).

Not only do monks work miracles on animals, but also on enemies who disappeared after prayer, and on the sick, doing the grace of healing the sick. John Moschus tells of a young monk who received God's grace to heal the sick. He healed a woman with breast cancer, and through her God performed many other miracles both in life and after death. A miracle that Abba Peter said that an old man mourns his brother's death, who did not say goodbye to him before his death. When he approached the deceased, he told him to stand up and hug him, and the deceased stood up and then became dead again. And another story, when a hermit revived a young monk, who died after he lost a lot of blood because of a snake bite. A word similar to the one Christ said, "arise", and the young man came to life. The elder explains the real reason for the miracles they perform: to strengthen souls and convert those who believe: "Strange signs... appear for the protection and affirmation of weak souls in the faith, and for the conversion of false teachers themselves, if they so desire. That is why the holy fathers and, from the first times of Christianity, the holy martyrs, still perform daily signs in the Catholic Church of God" (Moschus, 2005, p. 143). Thus, miracles serve not so much for life in this world, but for the good of the soul both in this world and for eternal life (Kim, 2021, p. 101).

#### 4.2 KNOWING (γνώσις)

Another important element in the fathers' life is that they receive God's gift of foresight. The gift of knowing what will happen. God gives this gift to those who are open-hearted and able to see the invisible (Wortley, 1992, p. 268-282; Berardino, 2008, p. 120-124; Pricoco; Simonetti, 2000, p. 543-560). John Moschus tells of Abba George that he had a vision after which the old man began to cry, and his brother, hearing the cry, asked why he was crying. The old man talked about the vision, saying:

How can I not cry, the old man sighed from the depths of his soul, when our Lord was angry with us! In a vision, my son, I was standing in front of someone sitting on a high throne. Many, many thousands stood around the throne, begging him for something. But he did not accept their prayers. And a woman dressed in purple approached him. Clinging to him, she cried out, "Mercy for me!" But he remained relentless. That is why I cry and weep, because something terrible threatens us (Moschus, 2005, p. 191).

And the next day after this vision, there was an earthquake that destroyed the cities of the Phoenician coast. And the old man says that misfortunes happen because of sins or lack of compassion in hearts. Fathers receive God's grace to foresee people who come to them, at certain times they knew their names or even foresaw a person's importance or task, such as the old man who recognized in Abba Gregory the future Patriarch of Antioch, who became him six years later after the elder's visit.

#### 4.3 PREDICTION OF DEATH (προφητεία)

The anticipation of one's own death is also present in fathers. The anticipation of death serves to spend the last days in penance, and it was also God's gift for the salvation of the soul (Pricoco, 1996b, p. 107-116; Lampe, 1961, p. 1193). The young monk foresaw his death and with great zeal began to think of his soul, saying that he would soon have to die. Three days later, he died. The day of his death was revealed to some with extraordinary precision. An old man, while burying the dead, weeping, said that, in two days, he would die himself. And it happened as he said. Another John Moschus' story about Abba Julian, when, at a great distance, he saw pillar Simeon's soul, who was struck by lightning and died. Abba Julian told his disciples to light incense because he saw the deceased's soul: "Brother Simeon, who lived in Egah, died struck by lightning, and his soul departs with joy" (Moschus, 2005, p. 199). Two monks who became patriarchs and were exiled by Emperor Anastasia, hearing of the emperor's death, said that they would be in court with him and died two days later. And another abbot also predicted his death two days before his death, and so it happened. The fathers of the wilderness were not afraid of dying alone, because, trusting only in God, they knew that He would take care of them. Abba Zosima's story is about a person, who went to live in a cave and met an old man there. The old man had a vision that the reverend was

about to come and told Abba Zosimus that God Himself had sent him to bury the body. And with these words, he died. It is true that the fathers said that he, who has love for God throughout his life, will have a worthy end to his life: "All marveled and glorified God. 'Here is what death he deserved, a death worthy of the love with which he loved Christ!' – everyone said" (Moschus, 2005, p. 200).

According to John Moschus, the practices of asceticism and repentance play a crucial role in attaining spiritual growth and salvation. He asserts that asceticism, characterized by the rigorous discipline of the body and the renunciation of worldly pleasures, is essential for achieving purity of the soul and the capacity to connect with God. Additionally, John Moschus views repentance as a means of turning away from sin and restoring a harmonious relationship with God. In his literary work, the author portrays repentance and asceticism as interdependent practices that operate together to purify the soul and draw the individual closer to God.

## CONCLUSIONS

One of the foundations of monasticism is the belief in asceticism as a means of salvation. In other words, it can be said this: action requires contemplation. The ascetics never doubted the value of killing the flesh, often quite harshly, and firmly believed that this "substitute for bloody martyrdom" was a true manifestation of love for God, a return to the "nature" God created, a purification of the world and a testimony of the power of the Holy Spirit. For monks, ascetic practice was a way of transitioning "from slavery to freedom". In fact, this practice looked like a desire to get rid of social "structures", the so-called laws of decency. But internally, asceticism retained its original purpose: impartiality, the inaccessibility of the human heart to sin, passions and anything that could break the sail: the free access to God. Although there is nothing "passive" for this purpose, on the contrary, it involves a constant struggle for purity of heart.

The apokregmatic tradition of *Pratum* by John Moschus provides several conclusions about the process of repentance and its significance for Christians. It is associated with the suffering of the body and the prosperity of the soul. Repentance is the healing of the soul and it is ontologically, aesthetically and ethically beautiful. It transforms man into a God's temple. Repentance is a bloodless life of martyrdom. It results from the synergy of human and divine will. Repentance is a linear process. It represents a true Christian philosophy. It is a form of escape from the kingdom of sin and the devil. Repentance can manifest as complete hatred of sin.

*Pratum* by John Moschus is considered important for science, particularly for the study of monastic or Christian literature. The work depicts the basic principles of monastic

life and highlights the importance of ascetic practices, repentance and the action of divine grace in human life. Although the lack of clear terminology in the work can make it difficult to find integrity, a careful reading can reveal its main elements. *Pratum* is important for understanding the Byzantine mentality and the role of repentance and asceticism as a spiritual and social force that greatly influenced the life of late antique and early Byzantine society.

All these conclusions are very valuable both for understanding the early Christian and early Byzantine mentality. And for understanding repentance and asceticism as a well-known spiritual and therefore social force that greatly influenced the life of late antique and early Byzantine society. John Moschus' work is important for monastic or Christian literature. Although it depicts the basic principles of monastic life, due to the lack of clear terminology, it is sometimes difficult to find integrity, so the main elements are found in a careful reading of the work. The choice of basic principles is not accidental, but it is about the elements that the author emphasizes the most and that can serve for present generations for man's deeper and holistic life with God and neighbor.

Further studies on the topic of asceticism and repentance in monasticism can be conducted in different directions. One possible area of research could be to explore the influence of ascetic practices on the individuals' physical and mental health in modern times. Another direction could be to examine the impact of asceticism on the social and political structures of different societies throughout history. Additionally, comparative studies could be conducted to compare the role and meaning of asceticism and repentance in different religious traditions. Another interesting avenue of research could be to investigate the relationship between asceticism and creativity, as many great artists and writers have been known to practice asceticism.

The scientific significance of this study lies in its exploration and analysis of the fundamental principles of asceticism and repentance in the context of monasticism, as depicted in John Moschus' work. By highlighting the importance of ascetic practices and the action of divine grace in human life, the study contributes to a better understanding of the role of monasticism in the Byzantine society of the late antique and early Byzantine periods. Overall, the findings of the study have significant implications for the fields of monastic and Christian literature, as well as for the wider understanding of spirituality and its role in human society.

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