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Divine Sovereignty, Divine Providence, and Prayer in the Thought of Evagrius Ponticus

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the history of the Christian Church, there exists a close interconnected relationship between theological belief and spiritual practice. This relationship resides especially in the thought of the eastern monastic figures of the patristic and medieval periods. The four volume *Philokalia*, which comprises a number of the writings of the monks of the early and medieval Eastern Church, bears witness to the interdependence between belief and spirituality.\(^1\) In the writers of the *Philokalia*, we find theological beliefs and doctrines such as the Trinity, the attributes of God, christology, soteriology, pneumatology, and eschatology informing and governing spiritual practices such as prayer, fasting, and liturgy. And conversely, we find spiritual practice deepening and shaping theological belief. In the eastern monastics, we find theological conviction expressed in spiritual practice, and spiritual practice expressed in theological conviction. However, the interrelatedness between theological belief and prayer does not find its genesis in the writers of the *Philokalia*. The *Philokalia* writers, particularly the Desert Fathers, inherited a phenomenon that preceded them by centuries. In the Desert Fathers in particular and all the *Philokalia* writers in general, we find a continuation of a paradigm that ultimately finds its roots in the Old and New Testament Scriptures, and a

paradigm that finds continuation in the earliest Fathers.\textsuperscript{2} In the early period of the Church, we find no dichotomy between belief and spiritual practice; rather, the two were mutually informing.

The present project intends to investigate the important aforementioned interrelationship between theological belief and spiritual practice. Specifically, the project will focus on the theological doctrine of God and the spiritual exercise of prayer.

**Thesis**

It is well beyond the scope of the present project to examine the relationship between belief and prayer in the thought of all the fourth-century Desert Fathers. Therefore, the project intends to focus on the Desert Father whose writings are most numerous, namely, Evagrius of Pontus, in whose thought we find a close relationship between theological conviction and prayer. Evagrius undoubtedly represents a good choice for such a project, especially because of his rich teaching on prayer. Casiday points out that for Greek Christianity, “Evagrius was, and still is, the teacher of prayer par excellence...That fact alone justifies the study, transmission, and the perpetuation of his writing.”\textsuperscript{3} Casiday indicates elsewhere that Evagrius “is a fully qualified teacher of


prayer.”⁴ And Gabriel Bunge designates Evagrius as “the master of prayer.”⁵ However, as Casiday points out, Evagrius’s contribution lies not in his teaching on prayer alone. Casiday states, “For Evagrius, theology and prayer are mutually implicated in the Christian life; spiritual growth and maturity are necessarily connected to good theology. Evagrius speaks with authority regarding theology as well as prayer. The earliest writing of his that we have is a letter (On the Faith)....In it, Evagrius expounds very clearly and very precisely on the orthodox confession of the full divinity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”⁶ Casiday offers another informative comment, stating, “In fact, Evagrius’ writings are also significant because they clearly demonstrate that theology can be thoroughly infused by prayer in a way that is no longer immediately available to us....Evagrius’ writings also show us how doctrinal orthodoxy can be closely connected to mystical experience.”⁷

In particular, we find a close relationship between Evagrius’s teaching on prayer, specifically the forms of prayer known as petition and pure prayer, and his teaching on theological belief, particularly divine sovereignty and divine providence. In Evagrius, sovereignty and providence, which are closely related in his thought, inform and govern the practice of prayer. We will find that prayer, for Evagrius, assumes the notions of

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⁶ Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 5. More will be said below concerning Evagrius’s trinitarianism, specifically his christology.

⁷ Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 38.
sovereignty and providence. Lastly, we will notice that Evagrius’s teaching on prayer deepens and shapes his teachings on divine sovereignty and divine providence, thus demonstrating the interrelatedness between theological belief and prayer in the spirituality of Evagrius. For Evagrius, theological conviction always attends prayer. In fact, in Evagrius, prayer ultimately expresses theological commitment. And in Evagrius, we will find no dichotomy between theological belief and prayer, for the two are mutually informing. Theological conviction concerning the person and work of God, however, assumes the gracious self-disclosure of God to human beings. Writing as a fourth-century monastic who was heavily influenced by the Cappadocian Fathers, specifically Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus, Evagrius acknowledged the gracious self-communication of God to humanity. The Holy Scriptures, according to Evagrius, serve as the ground of doctrinal affirmation. Furthermore, as we shall see, Evagrius also maintained that the created order represents a locus of divine self-disclosure. But God’s supreme revelation, however, is found in the Incarnation of God the Word in the

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8 Evagrius’s treatment of the Scriptures in all his works clearly demonstrates his commitment to the divine nature of Scripture. However, following Origen, Evagrius discerned multiple meanings in any given biblical passage. Biblical interpretation for Evagrius, then, involves more than a mere deciphering of the literal meaning, although he found the literal meaning important. Evagrius tended to give more emphasis to the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures, which, for him, most often relates to the spiritual life of the praktike and the gnostike. See Jeremy Driscoll, *The Ad Monachos of Evagrius Ponticus: Its Structure and a Select Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), p. 19-20. Furthermore, Evagrius’s monastic environment, specifically his perspective on prayer, also informed his theological beliefs. This will be expounded in chapter five.

man Jesus, to whom the Scriptures testify. But Evagrius did not interpret and expound revealed truth in isolation. The Church, according to Evagrius, is the authoritative interpreter and expounder of God’s self-disclosure. Throughout his entire monastic career, Evagrius remained a monk of the Church. He never viewed any of his teachings as conflicting with the Church. And during his lifetime, apparently, no one else did either. According to Casiday, there were some during Evagrius’s lifetime who wanted to appoint him bishop; during his life, he was not considered “theologically suspect.” So for Evagrius in particular and the fourth-century Church in general, certain data about the character and work of God can in fact be affirmed, for God has graciously communicated himself to humankind.

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10 See, specifically, The Great Letter, where Evagrius expounds the Incarnation of God the Word.

11 See Evagrius’s comment in his work To the Virgin, par 54, where he states, “As for you, my child, listen to the teachings of the Lord’s Church, and let no outsider win you over. God established heaven and earth and has forethought for them all and rejoices in them. Just as a human consists in a corruptible body and a rational soul, even thus was our Lord born, save for sin. In eating, he truly ate, and when he was crucified he was truly crucified, nor was it an apparition to deceive the sense of men. There will certainly be a resurrection of the dead, and this world will pass away, and we will receive spiritual bodies.” In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 171. Here the Church appears to be the authoritative interpreter of these doctrines. Reflecting the thought of Evagrius, Meyendorff comments, “Theology, therefore, is not simply a science, using Scripture as initial data; it also presupposes living in communion with God and people, in Christ and the Spirit, within the community of the church.” John Meyendorff, “Doing Theology in an Eastern Orthodox Perspective.” In Eastern Orthodox Theology. Daniel B. Clendenin, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1995, 2003), p. 83.

12 Evagrius received communion shortly before his death, thus demonstrating his lasting commitment to the Church. See Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 13

13 Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 12-14. More will be said below about the later controversies surrounding Evagrius, particularly with regard to his christology.

14 But as we will notice in the second section of the chapter, God can never be exhaustively known.
According to the thesis of the project, the intent is to detail the relationship in Evagrius’s thought between prayer and theological conviction, namely sovereignty and providence. The present work intends to illustrate that Evagrius’s position on sovereignty and providence informs his teachings on prayer. For Evagrius, theological affirmation serves as a necessary prerequisite to prayer. Proper belief must attend true Christian prayer. And as the monk progresses through the monastic life, and especially as his prayer life develops, his apprehension of theological truth deepens. Specifically we will notice that, in the teachings of Evagrius, divine sovereignty and divine providence inform the inner disposition of the praying monk. That is, these theological beliefs inform the inner manner in which the monk engages in prayer. And they also influence the very things the monk requests in prayer. And, as chapters two, three, and four will illustrate, they inform other matters related to prayer as well. Moreover, the project will demonstrate that for Evagrius, prayer functions as the channel through which God manifests his providential love and grace. Prayer serves as the point of contact, so to speak, between the gracious activity of providence and the human subject.\textsuperscript{15} Prayer, specifically, represents the providential means through which God expresses his loving gracious character in the form of providential provision. In Evagrius, prayer operates as the tool of divine providence, in that prayer serves as the divine

\textsuperscript{15} For Evagrius, generally speaking, the entire monastic life serves as the avenue through which God administers his gracious providence. However, the whole of the monastic life with all its practices is ultimately dependent upon prayer. For instance, one acquires the strength for the monastic practice of fasting through prayers of petition. See On Thoughts, par. 34. And see Chapters on Prayer 35, where Evagrius designates pure prayer as the “highest” expression of the monastic life.
providential medium through which the human subject encounters the gracious, loving providential character of God. As such, then, prayer itself deepens the apprehension of theological truth. So we will notice, specifically in the final chapter, that Evagrius’s teachings on prayer also deepen and inform his teachings on divine sovereignty and divine providence, thereby illustrating the interconnectedness in the thought of Evagrius between theological conviction and the spiritual practice of prayer.

**Contribution**

Regarding scholarly study of Evagrius, Casiday states, “Why, then, does Evagrius matter? He matters because his writings have not yet received the attention they fairly scream out for. They open onto a host of concerns that are extremely important for patristic studies.”\(^\text{16}\) The project intends to make a contribution in multiple ways, one of which will be to provide a fresh examination of Evagrius’s spiritual and doctrinal thought. Studies and evaluations of Evagrius’s view of prayer abound. However, outside of his view on the Trinity and christology, not much has been offered on his theological beliefs. Specifically, the project will examine Evagrius’s position on divine sovereignty and divine providence.

These two theological concepts, perhaps, “scream out for attention.” Extended treatments of Evagrius’s position on divine sovereignty are lacking. The present project intends to provide such a treatment by defining Evagrius’s understanding of divine sovereignty, a concept which, for Evagrius, comprises various providential expressions.

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\(^{16}\) Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 38.
The primary objective, however, is to detail the interconnection between Evagrius’ teaching on divine sovereignty and his teaching on prayer; and it is here specifically that the project hopes to make a scholarly contribution, especially since such an endeavor is yet to be undertaken. Detailed analyses will be given to the key texts, found in multiple works, that speak to the relationship between Evagrius’s position on divine sovereignty and his teaching on prayer, specifically petition and pure prayer. Chapter two will focus primarily on the informing role sovereignty exercises on prayer. The fifth and final chapter will investigate the deepening and informing role prayer exercises on sovereignty.

For Evagrius, divine sovereignty finds its expression in divine providence. We find works addressing Evagrius’s perspective on divine providence, although most of the time the treatments are quite brief, for the exception of Luke Dysinger’s work *Prayer and Psalmody in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*. The notion of providence occupies a central place in Evagrius’s doctrinal and spiritual thought. Other works, such as Dysinger’s, provide a helpful explanation of Evagrius’s understanding of the nature of divine providence but do not give extended treatment to the relationship between the concept and prayer. The present project will contribute by offering a fresh examination of Evagrius’s view of divine providence. In particular, the work will provide a detailed exposition of the relationship in Evagrius’s thought between divine providence and prayer. The third chapter will examine the relationship of providence to what Evagrius

terms “pure,” “true,” or “spiritual” prayer. After defining divine providence, the project will investigate a number of passages that speak to the interconnectedness of providence and pure prayer, thereby providing a detailed scholarly contribution. The project hopes to illustrate, particularly in chapter three, that pure prayer could not and would not exist apart from divine providence. Here we will notice that pure prayer marks a special form of providence. Chapter four will detail the relationship between divine providence and petition, another form of prayer for Evagrius. A detailed examination of the relevant texts will be provided, with the aim of illustrating the informing role providence exercises on petition. And the fifth chapter will expound the deepening role that petition and pure prayer exercise on providence.

Furthermore, the project will contribute by providing a detailed example of the interconnection between prayer and theological belief. In Evagrius, we will find that belief about God by its very nature is practical, and that prayer, by its nature, expresses theological belief. Prayer cannot be practiced apart from theological conviction, and theological commitment cannot be rightly manifested apart from prayer. Commenting upon Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Kallistos Ware observes that the Eastern tradition “understands doctrine in the context of worship.”18 And Evagrius certainly falls in line with this, since he understands theology in the context of prayer, which, as we will notice later, involves worship. The present project will make a valuable contribution by

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expounding the belief, prayer relationship in the thought of one of the early Church’s monastic masters.

**Methodology**

The primary method this project will employ is text analysis, for the best way to determine Evagrius’s position on the issues at hand is to turn to his writings directly. The goal is to determine what Evagrius himself meant to convey, so the focus will be upon authorial intention. To determine such intent, each individual statement of Evagrius will be interpreted in its immediate literary context, the context of the work as a whole in which it is found, and the context of the whole of Evagrius’s thought. Also, vague texts will be cross-referenced with or interpreted in light of clearer texts.

Moreover we must keep in mind that Evagrius’s works were all originally composed in Greek. However, a good many of his works did not survive in the original Greek, including *Antirrhetikos, Gnostikos, The Great Letter*, and the most controversial of his works, *Kephalaia Gnostica*. Wherever possible, the original Greek will be consulted. But English translations will be used for those works not surviving in the Greek. Three such translations will be used: Augustine Casiday’s *Evagrius Ponticus,*\(^{19}\) Robert E. Sinkewicz’s *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus,*\(^{20}\) and Luke

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\(^{19}\) Referenced above.

Dysinger’s *Evagrius Ponticus*. All of these translations represent the best in modern scholarship.

The primary intent of the project, as stated above, is to analyze certain texts in Evagrius’s writings that speak directly to the issues under consideration. However, the project will also take into consideration a number of secondary sources written by the best Evagrius scholars, including Augustine Casiday, Luke Dysinger, Robert Sinkewicz, Michael O’Laughlin, Columba Stewart, Andrew Louth, Jeremy Driscoll, Gabriel Bunge, John Eudes Bamberger, and others who have produced scholarly literature on Evagrius.

With regard to the original Greek, the project will mainly rely on Arndt and Gingrich’s *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. This work primarily addresses terms found in the New Testament and the earliest Fathers but explains the ways in which the terms were defined and understood up to the early medieval period. However, the volume does not contain all the terminology used by Evagrius, so it will be supplemented to a greater degree with Liddell and Scott’s *A Greek-English Lexicon* and to a lesser degree with Lampe’s *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. Generally the definitions of the Greek terminology provided in the following chapters will reflect the most common way the term was understood.

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21 Dysinger.com.


during the first four centuries of the Church, with primary emphasis given to the specific way Evagrius employs the term in a given text.

We now turn to the second section of the first chapter, where we will provide an overview of Evagrius’s definition of prayer.

The second section of the chapter will provide a brief explanation of Evagrius’s understanding of prayer. Such a section is clearly necessary; we must first apprehend Evagrius’s definition of prayer before understanding how prayer and belief relate in his thought. Here primary emphasis will be placed on what Evagrius terms “pure prayer”—not because the doctrine/prayer relationship resides in this form of prayer alone, but because this particular form of prayer is not as clear as the other types and therefore requires extended treatment. Furthermore, for Evagrius, pure prayer forms the climax of the monastic endeavor.

The section will be divided into two sub-sections: prayer involving words, and wordless prayer—which Evagrius defines as pure prayer.

**Prayer Involving Words**

Evagrius’s definition of prayer is clearly multi-faceted. In Evagrius, we find multiple forms of what can be labeled “prayer.” For instance, we find “petition,”

25 Although, as shall be explained later, in pure prayer we find the highest level of the doctrine/prayer relationship.

26 More will be said about this later in the chapter.
“intercession,” “thanksgiving,” “confession,” “antirrhesis,” and “pure prayer.” The first five forms involve the use of words, whether said silently or out loud. Pure prayer, on the other hand, uses no words. All the forms of prayer for the exception of intercession and pure prayer are practiced throughout the whole of the spiritual life—specifically the monastic life, which for Evagrius comprises the “practical life” and the “gnostic life.”

27 Stewart explains that in part, the plurality of prayer forms or types, for Evagrius, may derive from 1 Tim 2:1, where Paul mentions various types of prayers, such as “requests,” “prayers,” “intercessions,” and “thanksgiving.” See Columba Stewart, “Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus.” Journal of Early Christian Studies 9 no 2, Summer 2001, p. 186.

28 Evagrius states, “Christianity is the doctrine of Christ our Savior. It is comprised of the practical, the natural, and the theological.” See Praktikos, par. 1. “The Evagrian system is fundamentally pedagogic and consists in the three-fold division of ascetic practice, natural contemplation and theology.” See Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 27. The purpose of the praktikē or practical life, according to Louth, was the acquisition of virtue and the attainment of apatheia—“which literally means impassibility, freedom from passions.” See Andrew Louth, The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition, p. 103. Elsewhere, Louth defines the practical life as “the stage of active struggle [or ascetic struggle] on the part of the soul.” See Andrew Louth, Evagrius on Prayer.” In Stand-up to Godwards: Essays in Mystical and Monastic Theology in Honor of the Reverend John Clark on his Sixty-fifth Birthday. James Hogg, ed. Salzburg, Austria: University of Salzburg, p. 166. The purpose of the practical life, according to Harmless, was the “practical acquisition of virtue.” See William Harmless, Desert Christians: an Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism. Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2004, p. 318. And Gould notes that the “predominant task” of the practical life or praktike involves “combat against the passions.” See Graham Gould, “An Ancient Monastic Writing Giving Advice to Spiritual Directors.” Hallel 22, 1997, p. 98. And Dysinger explains that, for Evagrius, the practical life denotes the “inner work of moral improvement and the purification of the thoughts.” See Luke Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 34. Sinkewicz notes that for Evagrius, the practical life involves a battle on the part of the monastic to defeat vice and acquire virtue. See Robert Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. xxiv. Bunge provides a lengthy definition of the practical life, stating, “This spiritual method [i.e. the practical life] consists essentially of keeping the commandments, an endeavor assisted by all those practices that we designate as ‘ascetical’ in the widest sense. Their goal is, with God’s help, to restore the soul to its natural health, which consists of ‘apatheia,’ freedom from the ‘sicknesses’ (or passions) that estrange it from God.” See Gabriel Bunge, Earthen Vessels: The Practice of Personal Prayer According to the Patristic Tradition, p. 38. Clark, also, recognizes that apatheia represents the goal of the practical life. See Elizabeth Clark, The Origenist Controversy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.83. The “blossom of the practical life,” according to Sinkewicz, is apatheia. See Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 28. Stewart notes that Evagrius divides the “gnostic life” into “natural contemplation” and “theology” (and later we will notice that Evagrius identifies “theology” with pure prayer). So “natural contemplation” and “theology” both belong to the heading gnostike or the gnostic life. See Columba Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus on Monastic Pedagogy.” In Abba: the Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West. John Behr, Andrew Louth, and Dimitri E. Conomos, eds. (Crestwood, NY: Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), p. 253. Driscoll, like Stewart, also recognizes the two-fold composition of the gnostic life. “There are in Evagrius’
Intercession and pure prayer, however, are reserved for the gnostic alone—in fact, only the most advanced gnostic can receive pure prayer. The first sub-section will provide a brief explanation of petition, intercession, confession, antirrhesis, and thanksgiving.

Evagrius provides a concise definition of “petition” in his work Reflections.

“Petition is converse of the mind (nous) with God accompanied by supplication: it comprises assistance or requests for good things.”

The English “petition” renders the Greek dĕēsis, which, during the New Testament and Patristic periods, carried the idea of making an entreaty or appeal—and thus the idea of petitioning God. For “converse,” Evagrius employs the term hŏmilia, denoting verbal discourse, such as giving a speech or sermon. And for “supplication,” Evagrius uses ikĕsias. This term, similar in meaning to dĕēsis, was used to indicate prayer in the sense of making requests.

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30 The Greek text is found in Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Reflections.” Ldysinger.com. Furthermore, as we shall see, Evagrius often references petition with the Greek prŏseuchê, the most common term he uses for prayer.


33 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 565.

of God—and hence the meaning “supplication.” For Evagrius the point here is that in “petition,” the human subject converses with or speaks to the Creator, making heart-felt requests of God either for oneself or for another. These requests include petitions ranging from simple prayers for basic bodily needs to petitions for advanced spiritual needs, such as pure prayer. And petition clearly involves words, since in such prayer the human subject, specifically the monk, asks God for “help” and for “good things.”

We find examples of petition particularly in the Lord’s Prayer. Commenting on the clause “thy kingdom come,” Evagrius writes, “The kingdom of God is the Holy Spirit; we pray that he will descend upon us.” This represents a petition for the descent of the Holy Spirit. Concerning “Give us this day our daily bread,” Evagrius states, “Our daily bread is the inheritance of God; here, we pray that he give us today this pledge, that is, that in this age its kindness and its longing become visible to us.” Evagrius figuratively interprets the clause, applying ‘daily bread’ not to literal food, although the monk should petition God for such needs, but to spiritual blessedness. Here, then, we find an example of petitioning God for spiritual blessing. Furthermore, the monk can

35 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 374-375.
36 Chapters three and four will provide examples.
37 On the ‘Our Father.’ In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 151. This work no longer exists in Greek.
38 In this work, Evagrius designates the Holy Spirit as the “Kingdom of God” and Christ as the “Power of God.” See Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 152.
40 See, for example, Chapters on Prayer 129, which will be examined in the fourth chapter.
practice this type of prayer either alone or corporately and liturgically with other
monks.41 For instance, Psalmody—singing or chanting Psalms—constitutes a corporate,
liturgical exercise that includes prayers of petition.42 In prayers of petition, human
language serves as the medium of prayer.43

Another type of prayer using words is what Evagrius calls “intercession,” which
appears to be a specialized type of petition. “An intercession is an invocation presented
to God by a greater one for the salvation of others.”44 The word enteuksis45 represents
the Greek for “intercession.” The term denoted the act of making a request or petition,
particularly to a king—and especially to God, the ultimate king.46 “Invocation”
translates paraklēsis,47 which, in this context, signifies an earnest appeal.48 This form of

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41 Casiday points out that Evagrius’s position on public worship needs further investigation. “Whereas
Basil and Origen are preoccupied with the implications of public worship, Evagrius’ attention is directed
toward ascetic practices. (This is not to foreclose discussion of Evagrius’ understanding of public worship,
which is another important topic in serious need of further study).” Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 35.
However, concerning personal, private prayer, Florovsky’s comment must be noted. “Personal prayer is
possible only in the context of the community. Nobody is a Christian by himself, but only as a member of
the body. Even in solitude, a Christian prays as a member of the redeemed community, of the Church.
And it is in the Church that he learns his devotional practice.” This certainly rings true for Evagrius. The
comment was taken from Kallistos Ware, The Orthodox Church. New Edition. (London: Penguin Books,

42 That is, some Psalms take the form of petition. See Luke Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings
of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 140. Here Dysinger provides numerous examples of such Psalms.

43 The third and fourth chapters will give extended attention to petition.


46 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 268.

47 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Reflections,” 30. Ldysinger.com

48 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 618.
prayer, according to Evagrius, is reserved for the gnostic who has begun the life of contemplation. Only the spiritually advanced—a “greater one”—can intercede on behalf of another. This specialized intercessory prayer involves petitioning, but a special type of petitioning where the gnostic teacher beseeches God on behalf of another, specifically on behalf of another’s “salvation”—the Greek sōtērias, meaning deliverance from danger but typically in early Christian literature denotes salvation in the sense of being united to Christ and thus delivered from eternal damnation.

Moreover, in Chapters on Prayer Evagrius writes, “It is just not to pray only for one’s own purification, but also for the sake of all one’s kinsmen, so that you imitate the angelic way.” Here Evagrius uses his most common term for prayer, prŏseuchē. Arndt and Gingrich define the term simply as “prayer to God.” According to Louth, the term means “invoking someone, in this case God, for a purpose.” Evagrius uses the term for all the forms of prayer, but most often for pure prayer. In the Chapters on Prayer text just quoted, Evagrius encourages fellow gnostics to pray on behalf of others,

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50 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 801


52 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 40. Ldysinger.com

53 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 713.


55 We will note examples of this as the project progresses, especially in the third chapter.
specifically for their “purification.” More than likely, by “purification” Evagrius means purification from impassioned thoughts. It is sensible why Evagrius reserves this type of prayer for the gnostic, for only one who has reached purification can actually pray for the purification of others. For Evagrius, intercessory prayer is very specific; such prayer is offered to God by the advanced monk for the spiritual advancement of others.

Confession marks a third type of prayer involving words. Evagrius references this type of prayer in *Chapters on Prayer*. “Pray first to receive tears, so that through compunction you may be able to soften the savagery that exists in your soul and, once you have convicted yourself by announcing your sins to the Lord, perhaps you may obtain an acquittal from him.” Evagrius employs prŏseuchou (from prŏseuchē) for “pray,” ĕksagŏreusis for “announcing,” and aphĕsĕōs for “acquittal.” The term ĕksagŏreusis denotes declaring and confessing, in the sense of disclosing something. In confessional prayer, the monk discloses his sins to God, in hope of acquiring aphĕsĕōs—indicating pardon and cancellation of guilt. Here we find a link between

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57 Cf. *Chapters on Prayer* 38, where Evagrius encourages his readers to “pray firstly to be purified from the passions.” In Casiday, *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 190.

58 Sinkewicz affirms this point, noting that intercession is “most properly” carried out by the monk who has reached the level of the gnostic life. See Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. xxxiv.

59 *Chapters on Prayer*, 5. In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 188.

60 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer*,” 5. Ldysinger.com


62 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 125.
confession and petition, specifically with regard to “tears.” As shall be pointed out in a later exposition of this passage, tears must accompany confession of sin. In fact, the tears generate the compunction that is necessary for confession. However, according to this particular text, the tears are received through petition—“Pray first to receive tears” essentially denotes “pray for the reception of tears.” Therefore, prayer as petition and prayer as confession are intrinsically linked.  

Later in the same work, Evagrius then writes, “Perception of prayer is mental focus with piety, contrition and pain of soul in announcing one’s errors, with voiceless groaning.” Evagrius uses prōseuchēs for “prayer” and again employs eksagōreusei for “announcing.” The “announcing of errors” signifies confession, in which the penitent monastic prayerfully discloses his (or her) sins to God. Apparently this type of prayer can be practiced corporately and liturgically, specifically in the chanting of Psalms of petition that request forgiveness of sin.

A third form of prayer using words is what Evagrius terms “antirrhesis.” This particular term, which for Evagrius denotes “refutation” and “contradiction,” involves using biblical texts against evil thoughts or lōgismoi. The Greek term lōgismōs signifies

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63 The fourth chapter will provide a detailed discussion of Chapters on Prayer 5.

64 Chapters on Prayer, 43. In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 191.

65 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 43. Ldysinger.com

66 Chapters on Prayer 43 will be examined more closely in chapter two.

67 For examples, see Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus.

68 Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 132.
reasoning, mental calculating, and mental reflection—and therefore "thought." In Evagrius’s view, thought is not evil in and of itself; good thoughts must be distinguished from demonic, impassioned thoughts, which include thoughts of fornication, greed, despair, and pride. In antirrhetic prayer, the monk prayerfully cites biblical passages against evil thoughts. Such prayer, according to Clark, involves “hurling” biblical texts at the demons and their thoughts. Here the monk uses prayer as a weapon of warfare. And according to Brakke, antirrhesis denotes “the practice of talking back.” Dysinger points out that the Psalms in particular provide material for antirrhetic prayer. These types of prayers, Dysinger explains, generally take the form of petitions

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69 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 476.

70 Brakke points out that Evagrius assigns a demon to each of the evil thoughts, such as “the demon of vainglory.” In fact, the “demon of vainglory” is synonymous with the “thought of vainglory.” The same holds true for all the evil thoughts. See David Brakke, Demons and the Making of the Monk, p. 54.

71 See Evagrius’s work On the Eight Thoughts, which details these and other demonic thoughts. The work entitled Antirrhetikos, in particular, deals with evil thoughts and their refutation.

72 These types of prayers, according to Brakke, are short and intense. See David Brakke, Demons and the Making of the Monk, p. 73. And elsewhere Brakke mentions that Evagrius traced the practice of antirrhesis back to Christ, who employed Scripture against Satan during the wilderness temptations. See David Brakke, “Making Public the Monastic Life: Reading the Self in Evagrius Ponticus’ Talking Back.” In Religion and the Self in Antiquity. David Brakke, Michael L. Satlow, and Steven Weitzman, eds. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 223. Brakke makes the same point in Talking Back: a Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons. Cistercian Studies no 229 (Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 2009), p. 17. Bunge indicates that Evagrius’s antirrhetic prayer was undoubtedly influenced by his mentor Macarius the Great, who also allegedly used the Scriptures, particularly the Psalms, as a weapon against demonic forces. See Gabriel Bunge, Earthen Vessels: Personal Prayer According to the Patristic Tradition, p. 116.

73 Elizabeth Clark, The Origenist Controversy, p. 81.


75 Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 132-133. Concerning this type of prayer, Dysinger states, “In the practice of antirrhesis select biblical verses are employed to counteract the particular logismos (that is, thought) against which the monk is struggling. Antirrhesis entails the
for help against demonic forces. For example, in his work *Antirrhetikos*, Evagrius writes, “Against the demon of lust which stimulates the form of a beautiful naked woman who corrupts with her steps and delights with her whole body in a defiling way, and snatches away the prudence of many so that they forget higher things; Therefore may God destroy you forever, may he pluck you up and utterly remove you from your dwelling and your root from the land of the living (Psm. 51:7).” In this antirrhetic Psalm we find a petition against the demonic forces; the monk here, using the Psalm, invokes God for help against the demonic thought.

We find another example in the same work, where Evagrius states, “To the Lord, concerning the wild beasts appearing to fly in the air which make us leave the walls [of the monastery]; for we need the blessed elder, Macarius the Egyptian, to open his mouth, saying: Do not hand over to the wild beasts a soul that praises you; do not forget the souls of your poor forever (Psm. 73:19).” Here we find an antirrhetic prayer taking the form of petition. Against the deployment of biblical texts not only against the demons and their [thoughts], but also against sinful tendencies in the self, and even more broadly as ‘refutations’ of particular groups of people and forms of behavior.” See Dysinger, p. 132.

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76 Ibid., p. 139-140.

77 *Antirrhetikos* 2.32. In Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 139. The *Antirrhetikos* is not extant in the original Greek.


79 Macarius the Egyptian, also known as Macarius the Great, was one of Evagrius’s spiritual mentors. More will be said about this later.

demonic enemy, the monk prays the Psalm for deliverance. For the most part, antirrhesis constitutes a special form of petition where the monk cites biblical passages for deliverance from demons and their negative thoughts.

Thanksgiving, which also makes use of the Psalms and can therefore be practiced both privately and corporately, constitutes the final form of prayer employing words. We find two examples in the Antirrhetikos. First, Evagrius writes, “To the Lord, concerning the avaricious thought that anxiously reminds me ‘you have lost the inheritance of your parents’; The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup; you are he who restores my inheritance to me. The lines have fallen to me in the best places; indeed, I have a most excellent heritage (Psm. 15:5).” Here the monk, praying the Psalm, expresses gratitude to God for his faithfulness. This represents an antirrhetic prayer taking the form not of petition but of thanksgiving. We find another example, where Evagrius states, “To the Lord, against the demon which suddenly falls upon the body, but cannot conquer the spirit through the unclean thoughts he brings near to it; You have transformed my sadness into joy; you have loosened my sackcloth and girded me about with joy. Therefore I will sing praise and not be silent (Psm. 29:12).” In this passage we find another antirrhetic prayer taking the form of praise and thanksgiving.

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81 In antirrhetic prayer, according to Stewart, biblical texts are employed as “prayer formulas” against “besetting” passions. See Columba Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus on Prayer and Anger.” In Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice, p. 66. Furthermore, we assume that this type of prayer was practiced liturgically as well as privately, particularly in the chanting of the relevant Psalms.

82 Antirrhetikos 3.16. In Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 140.

83 Antirrhetikos 2.27. In Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 140, note 38.
Here the monk, recognizing the victory over the attacking demon, prays the Psalm in thanksgiving to God.

All of the aforementioned types of prayer employ words. Furthermore, for the exception of intercession, these forms of prayer could be employed throughout the whole of the spiritual journey, from the beginning practitioner of the practical life to the advanced gnostic.\textsuperscript{84} Intercession belongs only to the gnostic, who alone can intercede for the salvation of others. We now turn our attention to wordless prayer, pure prayer—the very concept for which Evagrius is probably best known.

\textbf{Pure Prayer}

In Evagrius’s thought, pure prayer marks the highest level of spiritual advancement one can attain.\textsuperscript{85} And this form of prayer marks the second stage of the gnostic life, the stage of theology or \textit{thēŏlŏgia}.\textsuperscript{86} Before one reaches this realm, he must

\textsuperscript{84} See Sinkewicz, \textit{Evagrius of Pontus}, p. xxxiv.

\textsuperscript{85} Pure prayer, according to Stewart, constitutes “the highest kind of prayer” in Evagrius. See Columba Stewart, “Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus,” p. 186. Like Stewart, Sinkewicz refers to pure prayer as “the highest stage of prayer.” See Sinkewicz, \textit{Evagrius of Pontus}, p. 28.

\textsuperscript{86} Stewart defines Evagrian “theology” as “knowledge of the Holy Trinity” See Columba Stewart, “Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus,” p.178. The exact nature of “knowledge of God,” or theology, and its relationship to pure prayer will be explained below.
complete the practical life,\textsuperscript{87} thereby acquiring \textit{apatheia}, and must also advance through the first stage of the gnostic life, natural contemplation.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{87} Stewart points out, however, that for Evagrius the practical life never fully ceases, for even the most advanced gnostic engages in and cultivates ascetic practices such as fasting, and even the most advanced gnostic continues to cultivate virtue throughout his entire life. See Columba Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus on Monastic Pedagogy,” p. 253.

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Apatheia} serves as the necessary prerequisite to pure prayer, a point Evagrius makes in \textit{Chapters on Prayer}, par 2 and 4. Stewart defines apatheia as “peace of soul.” He then explains, “The goal of the praktike [i.e. practical life] is freedom from pre-occupying thoughts and the emotional distortions they encourage.” See Columba Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus on Monastic Pedagogy,” p. 254. Elsewhere in his writings, Stewart defines \textit{apatheia} as “freedom from control of the passions”—that is, “emotional integration.” See Columba Stewart, “Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus,” p. 178. Like Stewart, Elm recognizes that \textit{apatheia} constitutes the goal of the practical life. See Susannah Elm, \textit{Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity} (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 264. And Louth mentions that for Evagrius, “\textit{apatheia} means a state of tranquility, a state in which the soul is no longer disturbed by the passions.” See Andrew Louth, \textit{The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition}, p. 103. Louth also defines \textit{apatheia} as “serenity.” See Louth, “Evagrius on Prayer.” In \textit{Stand-up to Godwards}, p. 168. And the \textit{praktike}, according to Louth, represents the avenue to \textit{apatheia}. In other words, the practical life has as its goal the attainment of \textit{apatheia}. See Louth, “Evagrius on Prayer.” In \textit{Stand-up to Godwards}, p. 166. Harmless defines \textit{apatheia} as “freedom from the dominance of the passions.” Harmless then states, “When the monk’s soul arrives at \textit{apatheia}, it begins to enjoy a healthy inner harmony. Virtue becomes natural—or, better, the soul’s God-given nature produces virtue naturally.” See William Harmless, \textit{Desert Christians}, p. 347, 348. Harmless also notes that \textit{apatheia} serves as a necessary prerequisite to pure prayer. See Harmless, \textit{Desert Christians}, p. 353. However, Harmless points out that the monk who has achieved \textit{apatheia} can in fact still fall into sin; the gnostic must maintain the state of \textit{apatheia}. See Harmless, p. 348. Harmless and Fitzgerald point out that the gnostic monk with \textit{apatheia} still deals with tempting thoughts, but the thoughts “lose their ability to subvert self-control.” See William Harmless and Raymond Fitzgerald, “The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The Skemmata of Evagrius Ponticus,” p. 516. Like Harmless, Gould also affirms that \textit{apatheia} serves as a necessary prerequisite to “knowledge,” that is, a necessary prerequisite to the gnostic life. See Graham Gould, “An Ancient Monastic Writing Giving Advice to Spiritual Directors,” p. 98. Prior to engaging in pure prayer, Sinkewicz explains, \textit{apatheia} must be attained, for an impassioned mind cannot engage in pure prayer. See Sinkewicz, \textit{Evagrius of Pontus}, p. 185. Dysinger also provides a clear definition of \textit{apatheia}. “\textit{Apatheia} does not mean freedom from temptation, since Evagrius emphasizes that certain temptations will continue until death. Rather, it refers to freedom from the inner storm of ‘passions,’ irrational drives which in their extreme forms would today be called obsessions, compulsions, or addictions.” Hence, for Evagrius, \textit{apatheia} is “the state of inner freedom from compulsions and obsessions.” See Luke Dysinger, \textit{Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 34, 77. Earlier it was mentioned that natural contemplation constitutes the first stage of the gnostic life. And according to Louth, natural contemplation or \textit{physikē} is, for Evagrius, “seeing created reality in God”—that is, discerning how the physical creation, as well as the non-physical creation (specifically angels), points to the Creator. See Andrew Louth, \textit{The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition}, p. 103. Harmless essentially makes the same point, defining Evagrian natural contemplation as “contemplating the natural world so that one sees through it to its divine order.” In natural contemplation, according to Harmless, the gnostic sees “the divine presence in creation.” See William Harmless, \textit{Desert Christians: an Introduction to the Literature of
The gnostic then transitions into the stage of theology or pure prayer.\textsuperscript{89} The term Evagrius normally uses for this form of prayer is \textit{kathara próseuchē}—literally “pure

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\textit{Early Monasticism}, p. 318, 349. In natural contemplation, the gnostic begins with the natural order and then moves to the contemplation of non-corporeal realities, such as angels. See Louth, \textit{The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition}, p. 108. O’Laughlin comments, “The will of God is perceptible in creation through the presence of his power and wisdom.” See Michael O’Laughlin, “Origenism in the Desert,” p. 88. And elsewhere in the same work O’Laughlin states, “We learn of God through perceiving the sensible world.” See “Origenism in the Desert,” p. 102. Bamberger indicates that in natural contemplation, one contemplates the “intelligence, beauty, and wisdom of God reflected in its [nature’s] structures and active in its operations.” See John Eudes Bamberger, “Desert Calm: Evagrius Ponticus: the Theologian as Spiritual Guide.” \textit{Cistercian Studies} 27, 1992, p. 194. Commenting on natural contemplation elsewhere, Bamberger states, “In his commentary on the Psalms, Evagrius was to take up a definition that St. Anthony had already employed, although he did not speak of the term [natural contemplation], when he spoke of the physical world as a book of God in which the Spirit can write.” See John Eudes Bamberger, \textit{Evagrius Ponticus: the Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer}, p. lxxix. Driscoll notes that natural contemplation involves contemplating “created things” for the purpose of discovering how all things point toward the Trinity. See Jeremy Driscoll, \textit{The Ad Monachos of Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 15, 16. Addressing natural contemplation, Ware indicates that in this contemplative practice, one sees God in created realities. In other words, all created things are “transparent,” so the gnostic can contemplate God indirectly through created reality, since this reality points to God. In natural contemplation, according to Ware, the gnostic contemplates God in and through nature. See Kallistos Ware, \textit{The Orthodox Way} (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999), p. 106, 117, 119. Stewart mentions the function of the Holy Scriptures in natural contemplation, referring to the Bible as the “primary contemplative medium, for there most directly, though not always plainly, the gnostikos monk [that is, the monk engaged in the gnostic life] reads traces of God’s work.” See Columba Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus on Monastic Pedagogy,” p. 254. Dysinger also recognizes the importance of the Scriptures in natural contemplation. “Evagrius encourages the \textit{gnostikos} to use the Scriptures as a starting point in reflecting on the significance of natural phenomena, human relationships and history, and the various ranks of angels and demons.” See Dysinger, \textit{Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 40-41. And in such contemplation, according to Dysinger, the gnostic begins by contemplating corporeal reality and then moves on to the “incorporeal”—that is, angels. See Dysinger, p. 41.

\textsuperscript{89} According to Louth, the three-fold division of \textit{praktikē} (practical life), \textit{physikē thēoria} (natural contemplation), and \textit{thēōlŏgia} (theology) may derive from Origen, although Origen used different terminology—\textit{ēthikē} (learning virtue), \textit{physikē} (adopting a right attitude to natural things), and \textit{ēnōptikē} (contemplation of God). See Andrew Louth, \textit{The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition}, p. 57-58. For a fuller discussion of Origen’s usage of these terms, see pages 59-60 in Louth. This point is also mentioned by Dysinger. “For Origen the discipline of ethics concerns the acquisition of an honorable life through practice of the virtues. ‘Physics’ teaches both the nature of things and God’s purpose in bringing them into being….Finally, contemplation [i.e. enoptics] enables us to ‘rise above the visible to contemplate something of divine and heavenly things, gazing upon them solely with the mind.’” See Dysinger, \textit{Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 64.
At times Evagrius substitutes *euchē* for *prŏseuchē*, but no significance attaches to this, since he occasionally uses the two terms interchangeably. The Greek word *katharōs* indicates physical cleanliness—such as a clean cup. It also denotes moral purity, in the sense of being free from sin. However, by the term Evagrius intends purity in the sense of freedom from all corporeal thoughts and concerns. The highest form of prayer is pure in the sense that it is devoid of thoughts concerning “things,” whether thoughts concerning earthly life, or thoughts concerning heavenly beings such as angels. In essence, pure prayer constitutes immaterial union between the Immaterial God and the immaterial *nous* or mind of the monk. The following will expound all of this by examining key texts in Evagrius’s corpus.

Evagrius articulates his position on pure prayer primarily, though not exclusively, in *Chapters on Prayer*, a work he essentially dedicates to pure prayer. Evagrius states, *prayer.*

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90 See, for instance, *Chapters on Prayer*, 97. Other examples will be provided as the project progresses. Evagrius also refers to pure prayer as “spiritual prayer” (*Chapters on Prayer* 50), “true prayer” (*Chapters on Prayer* 65), “place of prayer” (*Chapters on Prayer* 152), “state of the mind” (*Reflections* 26), and “state of prayer” (*Chapters on Prayer* 27). The context of each of these passages indicates that by these terms, Evagrius intends wordless, imageless prayer, or pure prayer. However, Evagrius often references pure prayer simply with the term “prayer” or *prŏseuchē*. See, for example, *Reflections*, 26. Detailed examples will be provided below.

91 See *Eulogios*, 28, which will be examined in detail in the third chapter.

92 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 388.

93 See *Chapters on Prayer* 70, 71, and *On Thoughts* 32. These texts will be discussed below.


95 See *Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 185. But, as we shall see later, this work references other forms of prayer as well. According to Driscoll, *Chapters on Prayer* deals with the highest stages in Evagrius’s
“Prayer is the mind’s conversation with God—so what sort of state does the mind need to be able to reach out unalterably toward its Lord and commune with him without intermediaries?” Evagrius uses prŏseuchē for “prayer” and hŏmilia for “conversation.” But, unlike petition, this “conversation” does not employ human speech. According to Sinkewicz, “without intermediaries” implies wordless prayer. So here hŏmilia denotes a wordless “communion” between the immaterial nous of the monk and the immaterial God. The term for “intermediaries,” mĕsiteuŏntŏs, derives from the verb mĕsiteuō, which denotes the action of mediating between two or more parties, where the mediator serves as a medium. In other forms of prayer, such as petition, words serve as the mediators between the monk and God. However, pure prayer is wordless; no corporeal mediation exists in such prayer, thus excluding the use of words. Stewart points out that for Evagrius, advancing from “wordy prayer to wordless prayer” forms the very goal of monastic prayer. And Ware, commenting thought, and thus deals with pure prayer. See Jeremy Driscoll, “Spiritual Progress in the Works of Evagrius Ponticus,” p. 58.

96 *Chapters on Prayer*, 3. In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 188.


100 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 506-507.

upon the present passage, explains that pure prayer is devoid of all “ mediums of images, words and concepts.” Ware explains that for Evagrius, pure prayer takes place in “a non-discursive manner, through a direct experience of unmediated reality.”

Evagrius then states, “You will not be able to pray purely while being tangled up with material things and shaken by unremitting cares. For prayer is the setting aside of mental representations.” Evagrius again uses prōseuchē and katharōs for “prayer” and “purely.” Pure prayer, Evagrius explains in the passage, cannot be attained while the monk concerns himself with “material” realities. According to Stewart, in pure prayer, “one becomes briefly free of temporal concerns.” For “material,” Evagrius employs hūlikois, from hūlikōs—signifying matter, or literally the material. For Evagrius this would include everything related to corporeal reality or earthly existence, since, as Stewart notes just above, in pure prayer one becomes free from all temporal reality. The English “mental representations” translates nŏēmatōn, from nŏēma.

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102 Kallistos Ware, “Prayer in Evagrius of Pontus and the Macarian Homilies.” In Introduction to Christian Spirituality, p. 17.
103 Chapters on Prayer, 71. In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 193. See also Reflections, 26: “Prayer (prōseuchē) is the state of the mind destructive of every earthly mental representation.” In Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 213.
106 H.G. Liddell and R.A. Scott, Greek-English Lexicon, p. 1848.
107 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 71. Ldysinger.com
According to Lampe, the term was used of mental images. And this is clearly the way Evagrius intends the term. If the monk envisions material things during prayer, this indicates that he is concerning himself with earthly or “material” life. Pure prayer, then, is devoid of all such things; it is completely devoid of concern for worldly, corporeal affairs. In pure prayer, the monk is to “go immaterial to the Immaterial.”

This means that the monk must not concentrate on material existence if he hopes to receive pure prayer. So this ultimately means that the monk cannot think of food, water, or even other people during pure prayer. This would also indicate that the monk cannot mentally envision non-corporeal beings, such as angels, either. Pure prayer, by its very definition, is devoid of all material thoughts. Driscoll notes that for Evagrius, “imageless prayer” represents the very “goal of the monastic life.”

Moreover Evagrius defines pure prayer as an encounter between the praying monk and God. “Stand guard, protecting your mind from representations at the time of prayer, and make your stand on your own state of rest so that he who sympathizes with

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108 Lampe, A Patristic Greek Lexicon, p. 916.

109 See Chapters on Prayer, 67. Here Evagrius warns his readers, who were gnostics embarking upon pure prayer, to avoid having their minds “imprinted by any form.” In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 193.

110 Sinkewicz notes that mental representations in themselves, like earthly life in general, are not inherently evil. The problem is that the demons use such representations for evil. See Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 145. Casiday, too, recognizes that Evagrius was not opposed to matter. See Augustine Casiday, “Christ, the Icon of the Father, in Evagrian Theology,” p. 46.

111 Chapters on Prayer, 67.

112 See Chapters on Prayer, 115, where Evagrius warns against mental representations of angels during prayer.

113 Jeremy Driscoll, “Spiritual Progress in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus,” p. 68.
the ignorant may also regularly visit you and then you will get the most glorious gift of prayer.”

Another designation Evagrius uses for pure prayer is “the time of prayer”—
tŏn kairŏn tēs prŏseuchēs. This “time of prayer”—i.e. pure prayer—is incompatible with “representations” or nōēmatōn. In other words, pure prayer is incompatible with a mind focused upon the material. Immaterial union between the immaterial God and the non-corporeal mind constitutes the goal. Such union cannot take place while the monk focuses on material existence. According to Dysinger, pure prayer involves union with God beyond all words and images. At all costs, the monk must keep his mind free from mental images if he hopes to receive pure prayer. The “most glorious gift of prayer” refers to immaterial union with God. In pure prayer, the Almighty Sovereign Creator “visits” the monk, and this encounter takes place in the mind or nous of the monastic. The English “visit” translates the Greek ēpīphoitoēsē, from ēpīphoitaō, a term referring to visitation where one party enters the company of

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114 Chapters on Prayer, 70. In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 193.


116 See the discussion of the previous passage just above.

117 See Chapters on Prayer, 67, which, again, mentions going to God “immaterially”—that is, going to God with a mind divested of all mental forms.

118 Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 5.

119 But as we shall see in chapter three, the monk cannot accomplish this unaided; he requires divine providential grace.

120 See Chapters on Prayer, 69, where Evagrius identifies pure prayer as “immaterial and formless knowledge,” which, as we shall notice below, designates immaterial union with God.

121 See the discussion of Chapters on Prayer 3 given above.
another for the purpose of interaction. In pure prayer, then, the Immaterial God comes upon or “visits” the immaterial mind in a Divine/human encounter, thus producing Divine/human communion. Like Moses, who experienced God on Mount Sinai, the monk experiences God in pure prayer—only the mind or nous of the monk, not Sinai, serves as the holy ground of meeting.

*Chapters on Prayer* is not the only work that mentions pure prayer. In his work entitled *On Thoughts*, Evagrius writes, “If someone aims at pure prayer and bringing God a mind without thoughts, let him master his irascibility and watch over the thoughts that come from it, by which I mean those arising from suspicion, hatred and grudge-bearing.” Pure prayer, Evagrius explains, aims to bring “God a mind without thoughts.” Evagrius uses *lògismoi* for “thoughts.” In this passage, “thoughts” refer to evil *lògismoi*—thoughts of “hatred” and “grudge-bearing” specifically. The monk cannot receive pure prayer with a mind permeated by such evil thoughts. Pure prayer, by its

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122 Liddell and Scott, p. 671.

123 Commenting upon *Chapters on Prayer* 3, Bunge states, “This ‘true prayer’ thus takes place *immediately*; as we would say today, it is a ‘personal’ encounter between God and man.” See Gabriel Bunge, *Earthen Vessels: The Practice of Personal Prayer According to the Patristic Tradition*, p. 133. Louth explains that in pure prayer, the praying subject receives access to the very presence of God himself—or the “immediacy of God’s presence.” See Andrew Louth, “…And if You Pray Truly, You are a Theologian: Some Reflections on Early Christian Spirituality.” In *Wisdom of the Byzantine Church*, p. 7. And according to Bamberger, in pure prayer the gnostic literally experiences God. See John Eudes Bamberger, “Desert Calm: Evagrius Ponticus: the Theologian as Spiritual Guide,” p. 195. Harmless notes that “the encounter of the praying mind with God” in pure prayer forms the very “core” of Evagrius’s spirituality. See William Harmless, *Desert Christians*, p. 354. And Casiday, also, uses the term “encounter” of pure prayer. See Augustine Casiday, “Christ, Icon of the Father, in Evagrian Theology,” p. 59.

124 William Harmless, *Desert Christians*, p. 353. See *Chapters on Prayer* 4, where Evagrius compares the experience of pure prayer with the Sinai revelation.

very nature, rejects such hateful lōgismoi. Concerning this Evagrius states, “If Moses
was turned back when he tried to approach the burning bush on earth, until he took the
sandals off his feet, how can you—who wish to see the one who is beyond all
perception and conception and to be in communion with him—not put off from yourself
every impassioned representation?” If the monk hopes to receive pure prayer, he
must first rid his mind of impassioned thoughts, which commonly take the form of
“representations”—that is, “mental representations” or nōēmatōn. By its very
definition, pure prayer is devoid all impassionedness. Pure prayer and a mind
dominated by the passions are mutually exclusive.

Evagrius then states, “Fight to set your mind deaf and dumb at the hour of
prayer, and you will be able to pray.” “The hour of prayer”—tōn kairōn tēs
prōseuchēs—designates pure prayer, as we have already noticed. And as we shall
notice in chapter three, receiving pure prayer can at times be rather difficult. Much of
the time, it involves great struggle, specifically a struggle on the part of the monk to
clear his mind of corporeal concerns. In the present text, Evagrius describes this
struggle as a “fight” in which the monk attempts to acquire a “deaf” and “dumb” mind

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126 Chapters on Prayer, 4. In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 188.

127 See the discussion of Chapters on Prayer 70 and 71 given above.

128 Chapters on Prayer, 11. In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 188.

129 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 11. Ldysinger.com. This phrase is translated “the
time of prayer” in Chapters on Prayer 70, examined just above.

130 “Pure prayer requires intense effort, for which the mind must remain free from all distractions.” See
Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 186. But we will notice, specifically in chapter three, that the monk
requires divine providential grace to free his mind of such concerns.
or nous. The Greek κόφὸν, from κόφος, is the term for “deaf.”

This noun denotes literal physical deafness. But the term also signifies figurative deafness, such as spiritual or intellectual deafness. And the Greek alalŏn, from alalŏs—denoting the inability to speak, both in a physical as well as a figurative sense—represents the term for “dumb.” Here Evagrius applies the terms figuratively, intending to indicate that in pure prayer, the mind, figuratively speaking, cannot speak or hear. The mind of the praying gnostic, according to Louth, must go before God completely naked—that is, without thoughts concerning created realities. Here Evagrius figuratively describes the mind of the monk engaging in pure prayer—such a mind is deaf and dumb in that it is completely free not only of impassioned thoughts and mental representations, but of all thoughts and representations. This, Stewart indicates, excludes all “words” and “images.” Two paragraphs earlier in Chapters on Prayer, Evagrius states, “Stand fast, pray vigorously and deflect the success of concerns and chains of thought—for they

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132 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 462.
133 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 34.
134 Andrew Louth, The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition, p. 109. Sinkewicz states, “Only after leaving behind completely all created reality in its materiality, its relationship with the passions, its intelligibility, and its multiplicity, is the mind then ready to receive the gift of true prayer and so honor God in and for himself alone and no longer through creatures.” See Robert Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 188.
135 According to Ware, pure prayer “is a shedding of thoughts,” which means that such prayer is completely devoid of “images, ideas, or concepts.” See Kallistos Ware, “Prayer in Evagrius of Pontus and the Macarian Homilies.” In Introduction to Christian Spirituality, p. 17.
136 Columba Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus on Prayer and Anger.” In Religions of Late Antiquity, p. 66. And Casiday notes that for Evagrius, such “imageless prayer” represents the very “goal of the Christian life.” See Augustine Casiday, “Christ, the Icon of the Father, in Evagrian Theology.” In Il Monachesimo, p. 14.
agitate and trouble you so that they may divert your attention." To engage in pure prayer, the mind of the monk must be free of the material. Pure prayer, for Evagrius, is devoid of all “conceptual thinking” or thoughts concerning material reality.

Evagrius’s pure prayer, according to Bunge, is Trinitarian in nature. To this end Evagrius writes, “The one who prays in spirit and truth no longer honors the Creator for what he has created, but sings his praises for his own sake.” According to Bunge, “spirit” refers to God the Holy Spirit, while “truth” refers to God the Son. Evagrius hints at this one chapter or paragraph earlier in *Chapters on Prayer*, saying, “If you want to pray, you need God who gives prayer to the one who prays. Therefore, call upon him, saying, ‘Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come’ [Mt. 6:9-10]—which means your Holy Spirit and Only-Begotten Son. He has taught you thus, saying that the Father is

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137 *Chapters on Prayer*, 9. In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 188.

138 Again, see *Chapters on Prayer*, 67—“Go immaterial to the Immaterial, and you will understand.” In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 193.

139 Kallistos Ware, “Prayer in Evagrius Ponticus and the Macarian Homilies.” In *Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, p. 15.


141 *Chapters on Prayer*, 60. In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 192. See also *Chapters on Prayer* 77: “The phials of incense that the twenty-four elders offer are said to be the saints’ prayers [Rev. 5.8]. Now ‘phial’ is to be understood as *philia* for God, that is, perfect and spiritual love, in which prayer is made ‘in spirit and truth’ [Jn. 4.23-24].” In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 194.

142 Commenting on this text, Bunge states, “This [i.e. *Chapters on Prayer* 60], finally, is that ‘conversation with God without any mediation whatsoever’ which was spoken of earlier. For creatures, however exalted they may be, are still always things mediating between us and God. ‘Spirit and truth,’ though, that is to say, according to the Evagrian interpretation of Jn. 4:23, the Persons of the Holy Spirit and the only begotten Son, are not creatures but rather ‘God from God,’ as the Creed of the Second Ecumenical Council teaches.” See Gabriel Bunge, *Earthen Vessels*, p. 137.
worshipped ‘in Spirit and Truth’ [Jn. 4.23-24]." Here Evagrius appears to identify “Spirit” with the Holy Spirit, and “Truth” with Christ. The English “in Spirit and Truth” translates the Greek ἐν πνευματί καὶ αλήθεια. This is the same terminology Evagrius uses in *Chapters on Prayer* 60. To pray in “Spirit and Truth” is, for Evagrius, to pray to God the Father in and through God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Evagrius does not explain precisely the exact nature of this. But nevertheless, in pure prayer, one enjoys immediate union with the Holy Trinity. That is, in pure prayer, one does not contemplate God through the medium of the created order, as they do in natural contemplation, but rather directly. In natural contemplation, the first stage of the gnostic life, the monk contemplates God through the works of His hands. But in pure prayer, the gnostic “honors the Creator for his own sake” or communes with the Triune Creator directly. There are therefore no mediums in this type of prayer, whether words, thoughts, or anything pertaining to created reality. In pure prayer the praying monk

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144 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer*,” 60. Ldysinger.com


146 Bunge states, “One who through ‘true’ and ‘spiritual’ prayer has become a ‘theologian’ in the strictest sense of the term, therefore, praises the Father at the highest level of prayer without any mediation whatsoever—neither of a creature nor of a mental representation or contemplation—immediately through the Spirit and the Son!” See Gabriel Bunge, *Earthen Vessels*, p. 137.

147 See note 88 above.
engages in immaterial union with the immaterial Creator, apart from any mediation whatsoever.148

Pure prayer results in “knowledge” of God, which Evagrius terms theology or “theologia,” the final stage and ultimate goal of the spiritual life.149 For Evagrius, Louth indicates, theology (knowledge of God) and pure prayer are indistinguishable.150 And in “theology” (as Evagrius understands it), Ware notes, “God is no longer known solely through the medium of what he has made but in direct and unmediated union.”151

Evagrius writes, “Psalmody is the part of diversified wisdom [cf. Eph. 3.10]; prayer is the prelude to immaterial and undiversified knowledge.”152 Evagrius uses the usual prŏseuchē for “prayer” in this passage,153 and the coupling of prayer with “immaterial knowledge” indicates that he intends pure prayer. For “knowledge,” Evagrius uses gnōsēōs,154 from the common gnōsis. The term, when used in early

148 Harmless, like Bunge, recognizes the Trinitarian dimension to pure prayer. “And what this praying mind encounters is the Trinity: Father, Son, and Spirit. To know—experientially—the Holy Trinity is, according to Evagrius, the very definition of the ‘kingdom of God.’” See William Harmless, Desert Christians, p. 350.


150 Andrew Louth, “Evagrius on Prayer.” In Stand-up to Godwards, p. 168.

151 Kallistos Ware, The Orthodox Way, p. 121.


153 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 85. Ldysinger.com

154 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 85. Ldysinger.com
Christian literature, literally means “knowledge,” and it had numerous applications generally speaking. For instance, it was used to describe knowledge as an attribute of God—hence “ omniscience.” It was also employed to signify human knowledge of facts or teachings, such as knowledge of the Scriptures and Christian truths. But the term also denoted “mystical” knowledge, especially with regard to “knowledge” of God, where one knows God through direct mystical experience. Evagrius employs the term in this last sense, specifically when speaking of “knowledge of God.” We will explain this specialized usage below, as we continue our exposition of *Chapters on Prayer* 85.

In contrast to pure prayer, psalmody, according to *Chapters on Prayer* 85, yields “diversified wisdom.” Psalmody reflects upon the created order, seeking to gain an understanding of God through His creation. As such, psalmody functions as an important tool in natural contemplation. When the gnostic engages in psalmody, he contemplates God, not directly, but through the medium of the created order, particularly created beings, who are diverse. In psalmody, the gnostic contemplates

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155 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 163.

156 Ibid., p. 163. And it also signified the heterodox “mystical” knowledge of Gnosticism. For more applications of the term, see Arndt and Gingrich, p. 163-164.


158 Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 98. According to Driscoll, psalmody “refers to the lower stages of knowledge. Psalmody belongs to ‘manifold wisdom.’” And, Driscoll points out, “it is called manifold because of the diversity of the worlds (and all that is in them).” See Jeremy Driscoll, “Spiritual Progress in the Works of Evagrius Ponticus,” p. 55.

159 For instance, created beings are diverse in that some are human beings, others angels, and still others arch-angels. See Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 185.
God through contemplating both human beings and the angels. This practice produces “diversified wisdom,” since it contemplates diverse, multiple beings. But pure prayer, on the other hand, relates to something altogether different. By “immaterial and undiversified knowledge,” Evagrius means direct “knowledge of God.” And pure prayer, according to the text, serves as the “prelude” (Greek prooimioũ) to such knowledge of God. The term prooimioũ derives from prooimiazõmai, which denotes the inauguration or prefacing of something. Therefore, proseuchē or pure prayer inaugurates or “begins” knowledge of God. Pure prayer, then, functions as the doorway whereby the gnostic receives Immaterial knowledge—i.e. knowledge of the Holy Trinity. But this still raises the question of what exactly Evagrius means by “knowledge of God.” By knowledge or gnōsis of God, Evagrius does not mean “knowledge about” God—such as intellectual affirmation and understanding of the concepts of the Trinity, Deity of Christ, etc. Every single practitioner of the monastic life, as we shall see later, in varying degrees must appropriate such “knowledge about”

160 Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 98. Dysinger points out that in such an exercise, the gnostic contemplates the “richly diverse wisdom” of God found in created beings.

161 See, for example, Chapters on Prayer 67, in which Evagrius refers to God as the “Immaterial.” And also see Chapters on Prayer 69, which equates “immaterial knowledge” with knowledge of God. Moreover, Driscoll states, “In Chapters on Prayer this knowledge [that is, knowledge of the Holy Trinity] is identified with prayer in spirit and in truth.” See Jeremy Driscoll, The Ad Monachos of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 182. And according to Bamberger, Evagrius identifies “the highest state of contemplation” with “the state of pure prayer.” See John Eudes Bamberger, Evagrius Ponticus: the Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer, p. xcii.

162 Liddell and Scott, p. 1492.

163 Commenting on this passage, Driscoll states, “Evagrius has chosen all his words carefully. Manifold wisdom refers to a manifold, diversified world. Prayer refers to an immaterial simplicity, God himself, in whose image the mind is made.” See Jeremy Driscoll, “Spiritual Progress in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus,” p. 56-57.
God—that is, appropriate theological belief.\textsuperscript{164} The gnōsis of God received in pure prayer is not intellectual but mystical—knowledge resulting from direct experience or direct unmediated union.\textsuperscript{165} As Driscoll indicates, knowledge of God denotes “knowing” God personally as opposed to a mere knowing “about” God.\textsuperscript{166} This marks a gnōsis derived not from books but from direct experience, a direct non-corporeal union with

\textsuperscript{164} Specifically, in the monastic context, the advanced gnostic was entrusted with teaching doctrinal and theological truth to the beginning novice. See Jeremy Driscoll, \textit{The Ad Monachos of Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 20. According to Louth, in the spiritual life, it is vital for the inexperienced monastic to learn from the experienced. See Andrew Louth, “Evagrios on Prayer,” p. 168. And interpreting the Bible, from which doctrinal truth and theological belief were derived, was the responsibility of the gnostic father. See Driscoll, p 328. (But, in the monastic context to which Evagrius belonged, interpreting Scripture was always carried out within the parameters of the Church. See \textit{To the Virgin}, 54, quoted in the first section of the chapter.) Furthermore, the very teachings of the spiritual fathers themselves were considered authoritative. “When a monk requested a word from an elder, the words were received—orally, person to person—as carrying the same weight and authority as the scriptures. This is because the father’s words were seen as being an extension of the scriptures in virtue of the fact that by the purity of his life the father was a living embodiment of the scriptures. Indeed, he was a living text.” See Driscoll, p. 330. But for Evagrius, as the monk advances in the spiritual life, and particularly in prayer, his apprehension of truths about God, such as sovereignty and providence, deepens. See Anthony D. Rich, \textit{Discernment in the Desert Fathers} (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), p. 42. And according to Harmless, the gnostics were teachers who instructed others in the monastic community. See William Harmless, \textit{Desert Christians}, p. 318. And Sinkewicz, too, recognizes the importance of gnostic teachers in the lives of less advanced monks. See Sinkewicz, \textit{Evagrius of Pontus}, p. xxxvi. Unlike most modern theologians, Evagrius does not equate “theology” with doctrine or beliefs about God, although theology certainly presupposes doctrinal commitment and correct belief about God, as the present project will explain in detail. As we will notice in next chapter’s analysis of \textit{Causes}, 11, even the beginning monastic must embrace correct beliefs about God, such as divine sovereignty. As the monk progresses in his life of prayer, however, his apprehension of such theological truths deepens, as he progressively experiences the sovereignty and providence of God in prayer. The “theologian”—that is, the pure prayer gnostic—would possess the highest apprehension of theological beliefs like sovereignty and providence, since he alone experiences the highest manifestation of sovereignty and providence in the monastic setting, the bestowal of pure prayer. The fifth chapter will address this fully.

\textsuperscript{165} Although, as the project progresses, we will notice that this special knowledge of God acquired in pure prayer presupposes correct belief about God—for instance, divine sovereignty.

\textsuperscript{166} Jeremy Driscoll, \textit{The Ad Monachos of Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 30. This point is also recognized by Ware, who indicates that for Evagrius, “knowledge of God” literally means to “know” God directly. Such knowledge therefore involves more than intellectual “knowing about God.” See Kallistos Ware, “Prayer in Evagrius of Pontus and the Macarian Homilies.” In \textit{Introduction to Christian Spirituality}, p. 16.
God received through pure prayer, as *Chapters on Prayer* 85 indicates. \(^\text{167}\) Knowledge of God, according to Louth, involves “genuine contact, participation (in some way) in the divine.” \(^\text{168}\)

Evagrius makes the connection between pure prayer and knowledge of God earlier in *Chapters on Prayer*. “When the envious demon is unable to set the mind in motion by memory during prayer, then he forces the temperament of the body into making some strange apparition in the mind and shaping the mind. And the mind will bend easily since it has the habit of being linked with representations, and the mind that was rushing toward immaterial and formless knowledge is cheated, accepting smoke instead of light.” \(^\text{169}\) In *Chapters on Prayer* 67-69 and 73-74, Evagrius addresses the issue of mental representations, specifically mental images of God that plague the monk during pure prayer. \(^\text{170}\) In the present text, Evagrius addresses that very issue. The “strange apparition” and “representations” (*nŏēma*) mentioned in the text are mental

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\(^\text{167}\) Louth points out that Origen understood “knowledge of God” in a similar way. For Origen, “knowledge of God” entails more than mere “intellectual recognition”; such knowledge involves union with God and therefore direct experience of God. See Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, p. 73.

\(^\text{168}\) Andrew Louth, “Evagrios on Prayer.” In *Stand-up to Godwards*, p. 168. Moreover, Louth indicates that such knowledge of God is received through “communion” with the Divine—and hence through pure prayer. See Louth, p. 170. Driscoll notes a very important point. Knowledge of the Trinity can never be exhausted, not even in the eschaton. “But to progress in knowledge of the Holy Trinity, there will be no end.” See Jeremy Driscoll, “Spiritual Progress in the Works of Evagrius Ponticus,” p. 84. Sinkewicz also affirms this point, saying, “The knowledge of God is without limit and can never be exhausted.” See Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 259, note 88.


\(^\text{170}\) In par. 67, Evagrius speaks of “immaterial [i.e. imageless] prayer,” which, as we have seen, designates pure prayer. Furthermore, paragraphs or chapters 68 and 73 use the designation “pure prayer” specifically.
images or representations of God. The point Evagrius seeks to convey here is that during pure prayer, the monk must not mentally envision anything, including God.\footnote{See also \textit{Chapters on Prayer}, 71, examined earlier in the section.} It is senseless to image God during prayer,\footnote{This rule applies not only to pure prayer but to all prayer. Evagrius indicates this in \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 117: “I shall say my part that I have said to the novices: blessed is the mind that at the time of prayer has attained total freedom from figures [i.e. mental images of God].” So even the monastic novice must refrain from attributing form and shape to the immaterial God.} for God is immaterial and formless.\footnote{See \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 68, where Evagrius explicitly identifies God as “formless.”} Such images, facilitated by demons, prevent the gnostic from receiving “immaterial and formless knowledge” (\textit{gnōsin}, from \textit{gnōsis}).\footnote{Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, \textit{Chapters on Prayer},” 69. Ldysinger.com} In pure prayer, as the text intimates, the gnostic monastic moves toward knowledge of God, here signified by “immaterial and formless knowledge.”\footnote{According to Driscoll, “immaterial knowledge” equates to “knowledge of the Holy Trinity.” See Jeremy Driscoll, “Spiritual Progress in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus,” p. 80.} So in this passage pure prayer once again serves as the medium of knowledge or \textit{gnōsis} of the Trinity.

We now turn to one of the most well-known statements in Evagrius’s corpus, where he explicitly identifies pure prayer with theology or knowledge of God. “If you are a theologian, you will pray truly, and if you pray truly, you will be a theologian.”\footnote{\textit{Chapters on Prayer}, 61. In Casiday, \textit{Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 192.} “Pray truly” renders \textit{prŏseuksē} (from \textit{prŏseuchē}) \textit{alēthōs}.\footnote{Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, \textit{Chapters on Prayer},” 61. Ldysinger.com} Earlier we noted that “true prayer” represents a designation for pure prayer; by “pray truly,” then, Evagrius intends
pure prayer. In the passage Evagrius links pure prayer with “theologian,” and likewise identifies being a theologian with pure prayer. The two are therefore inseparable.

During the Patristic era the term for “theologian,” thĕŏlŏgŏs, generally referred to one who spoke or taught about God. But more specifically the term designated “one speaking of God in prayer.” Evagrius clearly intends the last designation. And it is important to keep in mind that for Evagrius, theology denotes knowledge of God, as mentioned earlier. The theologian, then, is not simply one who “knows about” God but one who knows God personally through encountering the Divine Trinity in pure prayer. Harmless states the point well: “We tend to think of theology as something

178 Furthermore, earlier we noticed that the previous two chapters in Chapters on Prayer speak of pure prayer, or Trinitarian prayer in which one enjoys immediate union with the Holy Trinity. See the above exposition given to Chapters on Prayer 59, 60. Also, the following chapter, par. 62, speaks of imageless prayer. So the context here clearly indicates that in par. 61, Evagrius addresses pure prayer specifically.

179 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 61. Ldysinger.com


181 See Chapters on Prayer 85 and 69, discussed just above.

182 Evagrius’s view of pure prayer did not develop in isolation but within the context of his own fourth-century monastic environment. Casiday points out that Evagrius’s spirituality, undoubtedly including his understanding of prayer, was shaped by his two monastic mentors, Macarius the Great and Macarius of Alexandria. See Augustine Casiday, “Gabriel Bunge and the Study of Evagrius Ponticus: A Review Article.” Saint Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly no 2-3 (2004), p. 261. Bunge also recognizes this fact, and cites Praktikos 91, where Evagrius states, “It is also necessary to ask about the ways of those monks who went before us in an upright manner, and to be guided by them. For we find much that was beautifully done and said by them.” See Bunge, Earthen Vessels: The Practice of Personal Prayer According to the Patristic Tradition, p. 22. And along the same lines, Stewart appeals to Praktikos 29, where Evagrius describes Macarius the Great as “our holy and most ascetical teacher.” See Columba Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus on Prayer and Anger.” In Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice, p. 65. And according to Harmless, Evagrius “apprenticed under two of the greatest desert fathers, Macarius the Egyptian and Macarius the Alexandrian.” See William Harmless, Desert Christians, p. 314. And Bamberger states, “Evagrius was the first important writer among the monks of the desert. He was further the first to organize into a coherent system the teachings of the Desert Fathers on prayer.” See John Eudes Bamberger, Evagrius Ponticus: the Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer, p. lxxxi. Sinkewicz specifically mentions Evagrius’s reliance upon
one studies, something read in a book or examined in a classroom. Theology today is an academic enterprise, scholastic in the literal sense of the term. That is not what Evagrius envisions. For him theology is a knowledge of God that comes not from books, but from prayer.”

And Louth states, “For Evagrius, it [i.e. theology] is a state in which the intellect becomes naked, no longer entertaining concepts, but utterly empty before the overwhelming reality of God. Those in this state can be called theologians for they have attained that state in which their intellects are entirely receptive to God, and to nothing else.”

In closing the chapter, we turn to Ware, who sums up well Evagrius’ pure prayer. “The final aim of the spiritual ascent [i.e. pure prayer] seems to be to

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183 William Harmless, *Desert Christians*, p. 350. Harmless then continues, saying, “Evagrius did not doubt the value of reading, of study, or of reason; nor did he doubt the profound value of dogma, of liturgy, and of ecclesiastical authority. But for him, theology in the strict sense is the encounter of the praying mind with God.” And elsewhere Harmless, with Fitzgerald, notes that for Evagrius, theology equates to “knowledge of God gained from first-hand experience.” And this knowledge results from pure prayer. For Evagrius theology is, according to Harmless and Fitzgerald, the “encounter of the praying mind with God.” See William Harmless and Raymond R. Fitzgerald, “The Sapphire Light of the Mind: the Skemmata of Evagrius Ponticus.” *Theological Studies* 62 no 3 (S 2001), p. 498, 499. Also, Driscoll comments, “Thus does [Evagrius] point to the ultimate goal, represented with the term theology, as a turning of the mind toward God apart from all contact with material things.” See Jeremy Driscoll, “Spiritual Progress in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus,” p. 75.

disincarnate ourselves and to return as far as possible, even in this present life, to our primal state as pure nous, unencumbered by the external clothing of our bodies."  

The purpose of the present project, as stated in the thesis, is to detail the interrelationship in Evagrius between theological belief—specifically divine sovereignty and divine providence—and prayer, which, as the chapter detailed, is multi-faceted for Evagrius. And in the thesis, it was mentioned that the project will focus on petition and pure prayer. There are multiple reasons for this qualification. First, pure prayer and petition represent the two most dominant forms of prayer in Evagrius. Second, pure prayer constitutes the highest form of spirituality for Evagrius. Therefore, it is sensible to place heavy emphasis on this form of prayer. Third, in varying degrees, petition incorporates the other forms of word prayer. For example, tears, an essential component to prayer as sin confession, are received through petition. Furthermore, intercession represents a specialized form of petitioning, as does antirrhetic prayer. In intercession and some forms of antirrhesis, the monk prayerfully makes requests of God.  

In a broad sense, then, these forms of prayer constitute special forms of petitioning, and as such they will be treated at various points in the project, specifically

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186 Intercession, as pointed out earlier in the section, is a special form of petitioning where the gnostic monk petitions or supplicates God for the spiritual salvation of others. Antirrhetic petitioning involves using biblical texts, specifically the Psalms, to counteract demonic thoughts. All other prayers of request, such as personal requests for pure prayer, would appear to fall under the general category of petition or dēēsis—although Evagrius normally uses πρόσευχη and other terms to designate such prayer, as we have already noticed and will continue to note as the project progresses. Since Evagrius normally references all the forms of prayer with πρόσευχη, the context serves as the determining factor of the type of prayer he intends.
in chapter four, which focuses primarily on petition. And lastly, Evagrius links pure prayer and petition closely together. In the third chapter, we will notice that petition forms the primary avenue through which God grants pure prayer. For these reasons, the focus will be placed upon pure prayer and petition, which broadly conceived includes other forms of word prayer.

We will now move forward to chapter two, which will focus on the informing role Evagrius’s view of sovereignty exerts on his approach to prayer.
CHAPTER TWO

PRAYER AND DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

There exists an informing relationship between Evagrius’ s understanding of divine sovereignty and his approach to prayer. The former must inform the latter; otherwise the human subject prays in vain.¹ The second chapter will be devoted to demonstrating this claim, intending to illustrate the inseparability of theological belief and spiritual practice in Evagrius’s thought.²

We will begin by examining some key texts in Evagrius that touch the issue of divine sovereignty. The emphasis will be upon passages that use the terms “king,” “lord,” and “master” in reference to God.³ Such an examination is necessary, because we must first recognize Evagrius’s commitment to divine sovereignty before we can understand how this theological concept informs prayer. Following this brief exposition, we will turn our attention to the informing relationship under consideration.

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¹ And, as the final chapter in particular will detail, the latter also informs the former.

² As mentioned in a previous note, the gnostic was responsible for the theological education of less developed monks. According to Stewart, monasticism is learned “primarily from living it under the guidance of those who have grown wise in the life.” See Columba Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus on Monastic Pedagogy,” p. 269. Stewart then continues, explaining the importance of the monastic elder or teacher in the lives of less developed monks: “Mediating between asceticism and knowledge stands the teacher. Aiding discernment and interpreting the Bible, the monastic teacher points toward Christ and the fullness of life found ultimately in the Holy Trinity” (Ibid., p. 269).

³ The precise manner in which divine sovereignty is expressed will be examined later in the chapter. The purpose of this section is to provide a brief introduction to Evagrius’s view of sovereignty. A more detailed discussion will appear below.
Divine Sovereignty: God as King, Master, and Lord

In his treatment of the book of Ecclesiastes, Evagrius makes an important statement concerning the nature of God:

If, he [the author of Ecclesiastes] says, you see among men some who are oppressed, some being unjustly treated in judgment and some being just, do not be surprised that these things happen, as if there were no providence. Know, rather, that God watches over all things through Christ and he for his part, knowing everything upon the earth, exercises providence for them through the mediation of the holy angels. For God is king over the universe which he made.\(^4\)

The Greek term used for “king” here is *basileus*, a term designating the sovereign ruler of a kingdom.\(^5\) The term was used of the individual who possessed the highest authority in a particular realm or kingdom.\(^6\) The extent of the sovereign kingship of God is unlimited, for he is king over the “universe”—*kŏsmou*, from *kŏsmŏs*.\(^7\) First, this term was used in early Christian literature to denote the earth, the habitation of humanity.\(^8\) Second, the word also signified not merely the earth but the whole of the visible creation, including the sky and the stars—hence it is often translated as “the universe.”\(^9\)

The context of the verse under consideration suggests that Evagrius means the earth

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\(^6\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 136.

\(^7\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Notes On Ecclesiastes,*” 38. Idysinger.com

\(^8\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 446.

\(^9\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 445. In the New Testament and Patristic literature, *kŏsmŏs* also includes other meanings, such as “the world as mankind,” and “the world” as that “which is hostile to God, i.e. lost in sin, wholly at odds with anything divine, ruined and depraved.” See Arndt and Gingrich, p. 446.
specifically. God’s sovereign kingship, therefore, extends over the entire world or earth. God, and God alone, reigns as the sovereign king of the earth. Nothing on the face of the earth is therefore beyond the kingly sovereignty of the almighty, divine Lord. He alone possesses the highest authority possible. The term “God” (theōs) specifically refers to God the Father in this passage, as indicated in the distinction between “God” and “Christ.” But as we will see later in the chapter, divine sovereignty applies to the entire Triune Godhead.

The second paragraph in Notes on Ecclesiastes 38 declares the sovereignty of God further. “And he [the writer of Ecclesiastes] calls the angels ‘those of high rank,’ since they partake of the Lord Most High; for, he says, ‘The Lord is most high above all the nations’ [Psm. 112:4].” The statement “all the nations” serves as the phrase of interest here. The Greek term for “nations” is ēthnē, from ēthnŏs, a term designating peoples of particular lands and thus “nations.” In essence, Evagrius here asserts that all the nations and peoples of the earth are subordinate to God, the king and creator of

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10 Later in the same paragraph, Evagrius appeals to Mk. 13:38, which uses kŏsmŏs of the earth specifically. See Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 142.


12 The issue of “providence,” mentioned by Evagrius in the above comment on Ecclesiastes (and in some of the other texts discussed in this section), will be examined later in the chapter. A very detailed discussion of providence will be given in the next chapter.


14 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Notes On Ecclesiastes,” 38. Idysinger.com

15 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 218.
all things. God is “most high” or “exalted”\textsuperscript{16} over all peoples, meaning that there exists no one or nothing above God. Hence God exists as the Sovereign One before whom all are subordinate. God is sovereign over all, for he alone is “above all the nations.”

Evagrius also alludes to divine sovereignty in his important work \textit{The Great Letter}. Here he states, “What very much deserves remark is the providence of the Lord of all.”\textsuperscript{17} The “Lord” once again specifically refers to God the Father, who, in his “providence,” sent his Son into the world for the redemption of humanity.\textsuperscript{18} God is not said to be the “Lord” of some, but of “all,” meaning all human beings, who are the recipients of the redemption wrought by Christ.\textsuperscript{19} The divine sovereignty of God extends over all humans; there are none outside the scope of his sovereignty, since he is “Lord of all.”

In his work \textit{On Thoughts}, Evagrius touches upon divine sovereignty again, saying, “I think it is redundant to write concerning the fact that one ought not to be anxious about clothing or food, since our Savior himself forbade this in the Gospels....This is obviously the part of heathens and unbelievers who set aside the Master’s providence

\textsuperscript{16} See Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Notes On Ecclesiastes,” 38. Ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{The Great Letter}, 50. Translated in Casiday, \textit{Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 74. The original Greek for this work is no longer extant.


\textsuperscript{19} In its entirety, \textit{The Great Letter} emphasizes divine/human relations. The work as a whole explains, in Evagrius’s perspective, how God relates to the inhabitants of the earth, specifically with regard to the Incarnation. Therefore, “Lord of all” describes God’s relationship to human beings.
and deny the Creator.”

The Greek *despôtēs* renders the English “Master.” The term was generally used to designate the master of a household, of hired workers, or of slaves. But when used of God, it indicates absolute sovereign authority. Evagrius also refers to God as *dēspôtēs* in his treatise entitled *Eulogios*. “Serve God with fear and love; in the first case as master and judge, in the second as one who loves and nurtures human beings.” Again, “master” translates *dēspôtēs*. As the “king of the universe which he made,” God reigns as the ultimate “master” or “despot,” and as such he is above all and subject to no one. Thus he reigns as the sovereign “despot” or “master” of all.

Evagrius, following his Cappadocian mentors, strongly affirmed the full deity of all three members of the Holy Trinity. Given this, sovereignty would consequently

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22 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 176.


24 The Greek is provided in Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 316.

25 See *Notes on Ecclesiastes*, 38, examined just above.

26 See *On the Faith*, 4, where Evagrius states, “One must confess God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.” In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 47. And all throughout *On the Faith*, Evagrius strongly asserts the full deity of the Son and the full deity of the Holy Spirit. See, for example, paragraphs 8, 9, 11, 12, 29, 30. Stewart points out that Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus, in particular, were Evagrius’s theological mentors. See Columba Stewart, “Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus,” p. 174. Elsewhere, Stewart makes the very same point, stating that Evagrius “was taught his theology by Gregory of Nazianzus.” See Columba Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus on Prayer and Anger,” p. 65. In *On the Faith*, par 2, Evagrius refers to Gregory as the “mouthpiece of Christ,” thereby indicating the close association between himself and Gregory. Gribomont also recognizes Evagrius’s indebtedness to Gregory of Nazianzus, pointing out that Evagrius was actually a theological disciple of Gregory. See Jean...
apply to all three persons of the Trinity, since all three are equally God. For example, Evagrius uses “king” not only of the Father, but of the Son as well. 


Evagrius’s Trinitarianism, specifically his christology, has been an occasion of great controversy. To grasp Evagrius’s christology, we must first understand his cosmology, which clearly reflects the thought of Origen. Following Origen, Evagrius held the notion of preexistent immaterial rational beings—preexistent in that they existed prior to their union with bodies. Before the creation of the present order, these beings were united to God, until they fell away through disobedience. Sinkewicz explains, “In his cosmology Evagrius posits a double creation, as Origen had done. In the beginning God created the rational minds for the sole end of knowing him by their union with ‘substantial knowledge,’ that is, the knowledge of God in Unity and Trinity. They were created equal among themselves...As a result of an original negligence, a movement arose among them, distancing them from substantial knowledge and creating a disparity among them, for not all fell away from knowledge to the same degree; thus there appeared the three orders of angels, humans, and demons, each assigned to their own world.” And the individual worlds serve as the grounds upon which God leads the fallen intellects back to union with himself. See Robert Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. xxxvii-xxxviii. All of this is also recognized by Luke Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 31-33; Jeremy Driscoll, The Ad Monachos of Evagrius Ponticus: Its Structure and a Select Commentary, p. 8; Columba Stewart, “Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus,” p. 176; William Harmless, Desert Christians, p. 354-355. According to O’Laughlin, one’s becoming an angel, human, or demon resulted from the degree to which he fell away from God in the precosmic order. See Michael O’Laughlin, “New Questions Concerning the Origenism of Evagrius,” p. 532. Addressing the same subject, Tugwell points out that those who fell away the least became angels, while those who fell the most became demons. Those who were “in-between” became humans. See Simon Tugwell, “Evagrius and Macarius,” p. 170. Understanding all of this serves as a necessary prerequisite to understanding Evagrius’s position on the Trinity. Concerning the ecclesiastical condemnation of Evagrius, Dysinger states, “It was not until 553 that paraphrases and certain citations from Evagrius’ writings were condemned by the emperor Justinian; and it was not until some time later, perhaps as late as the seventh century, that Evagrius’ name began to appear regularly alongside that of Origen and Didymus in the list of anathemas.” See Luke Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 17. First, with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity, Evagrius follows his theological mentors, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus, and unabashedly affirms the orthodox conception of one God eternally existing in three persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Evagrius’s work On the Faith is dedicated to expounding this orthodox contention. Concerning the full deity of all three members of the Trinity, Kelly categorizes Evagrius with the Cappadocians. See J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines. Revised edition. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1978. Ultimately the real issue is Evagrius’s christology, particularly his view on the relationship between God the Word and the man Jesus of Nazareth. Undoubtedly following Origen, Evagrius, as we noticed above, affirmed the notion of preexistent rational beings. And as we also noticed above, there was a precosmic fall in which the rational beings fell into disobedience, which resulted in the creation of the present order of things. However, once again reflecting Origen, there was one rational
being who remained united to God, not falling away like the others. And this being is “the Christ.”

Evagrius states, “The Christ is adorable because of God the Word within him. By ‘Christ’ I here mean the reasoning and holy soul who came with God the Word into the life of men.” See Scholia on Psalms, Psalm 131:5. In Luke Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus.” Ldysinger.com. See Kephalaia Gnostica 4.18, where Evagrius also alludes to the preexistence of the rational being who remained united to God. This “soul,” as indicated in the Psalms text, became united to God the Word and became the soul of the human Jesus at the Incarnation. It is extremely important to note the terminology Evagrius uses, specifically the reference to “the Christ” having “God the Word within him.” Here we find that there is a true union that took place between this obedient rational being or “the Christ” and God the Word, and the union took place in the man Jesus, to the point where “Jesus Christ” is synonymous with “God the Word” or “God the Son.” So in reality Evagrius uses in fact affirm that God the Word was incarnate in the man Jesus. Evagrius comments, “The body of the Christ is connatural with our body, and his soul is of the nature of our souls; but the Word which is in him essentially is coessential with the Father.” See Kephalaia Gnostica 6.79. In Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus,” Ldysinger.com. So for Evagrius, Jesus Christ was a real human being with a true human body and a true human soul, and, as the passage indicates, there was a true union that took place between God the Word and the man Jesus. Cf. To the Virgin 54, where Evagrius indicates that Jesus was indeed truly human, both body and soul. Evagrius also states, “It is unnatural that God should be ‘born from a woman’ [Gal. 4.4]. Yet, because of his love for us and since his nature is not bound by or subject to any law, God was born from a woman in keeping with his will (so that his being was not destroyed)...God, who loves humans, became human....this God who became a man while being God.” See The Great Letter, 57, 59. In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 75–76. Here Evagrius clearly affirms the Incarnation, that it was indeed God the Word who was born of the Virgin. We find this affirmation elsewhere in Evagrius, “Alone of all bodies, the Christ is adorable by us because he alone has within him the Word of God.” See Kephalaia Gnostica 5.48. Evagrius also uses the same language in On the Faith. See par. 15. In the final paragraph of the third book of his work Antirrhetikos, Evagrius, in reference to Jesus, states, “Blessed be our Lord and our God, our Savior Jesus Christ.” In Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus.” Ldysinger.com. Here Evagrius makes it unmistakably clear that a true union took place between Jesus Christ and God the Word, to the extent that Jesus Christ “is” God the Word. And in On the Faith, par 28, Evagrius states that it was “God...who was ‘made a sin for us’ [2 Cor. 5:21].” So again we notice that God the Word was incarnated in the man Jesus. Also see Letters 6, where Evagrius refers to Jesus Christ as “Jesus our God.” In Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus.” Ldysinger.com. From the passages above, we conclude that for Evagrius, Jesus Christ was fully human, in that he had a true human body and a true human soul. The difference between Evagrius and his Cappadocian mentors here is that for Evagrius, the human soul of Christ was preexistent in relationship to his human body. Furthermore, we find that Jesus Christ was also fully divine or fully God, for a true union took place between the man Jesus and God the Word, and the union took place at conception, since it was truly “God” who “was born from a woman.” There are, from a post-Chalcedon perspective (and this is important, since it was well after Chalcedon that Evagrius was anathematized), certain difficulties that attend Evagrius’s views, specifically concerning the terminology he employs. First, there is his perspective concerning preexistence. It cannot be denied that Evagrius did in fact hold such a position. But this does not appear in any way to deprecate the Incarnation. It is important to note that Evagrius wrote against Arianism, which denied the full deity of Christ. In fact, On the Faith defends the full deity of Jesus Christ against Arianism. Also, the terminology Evagrius uses to describe the divine union—namely, that Christ has “God the Word within him”—also seems odd from a Chalcedonian standpoint. But this ultimately begs the issue, because Evagrius was not a post but pre-Chalcedonian Father; and certainly reading Chalcedon into Evagrius is as anachronistic as reading Nicaea into Justin Martyr or Tertullian. See David W. Bercot (ed.), A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), xiii.
We find examples of this usage in *Notes on Luke*. The first reference appears in Evagrius’s comments on Luke 19:11-27, which gives the story “of the servants who are made rulers over ten cities, or five.”

Evagrius comments, “So it must be asked what these cities are, and how they are, and where they might be, over which the King [basileus—the same term used of God the Father in Notes on Ecclesiastes 38] and Savior wishes to give power to those who carry out his charges to the utmost.” Here Evagrius applies the term “king” to God the Son, just as he does to God the Father. The Father alone is not basileus; the Son, being of the same essence as the Father, also reigns as basileus, thereby indicating that the Son, like the Father, reigns as the highest authority.

Evagrius is even more explicit later in the same work. “And finding the things that they learned here [i.e. on the earth] in word being accomplished there [in the heavenly city symbolized by the ten cities of Lk. 19:11-27] in deed, comparing what they have heard to the things they have seen, they say, ‘What we have heard, that we also see. For truly this is the city of the King of All, the Son of God, who is the Lord (so to speak) of all military powers.’” Again, basileus translates the term “king.” However, this time Evagrius is more explicit concerning the extent of the sovereign kingship of

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God the Son: he is “King of All.” Like God the Father, God the Son is sovereign over all human beings.  

But God the Son, with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, exerts his sovereignty not only over the human realm but also the demonic realm. In the prologue of Antirrhetikos, a work dealing primarily with spiritual warfare against demonic forces, Evagrius refers to God the Son as “Jesus Christ, our victorious king.” The victory mentioned here is over demonic beings. Christ is the victorious king who has conquered Satan and his minions, a victory won particularly through the Incarnation. The sovereign kingship of God, therefore, extends over demons as well as human beings. Christ reigns as king not only over the human realm, but over the demonic realm as well. All beings reside under the jurisdiction of the sovereign King and Master.

In Notes on Luke, Evagrius makes yet another important statement concerning divine sovereignty, specifically the sovereignty of the Son. Continuing his commentary on Luke 19:11-27, Evagrius states, “Thus they [those who have remained true to Christ] are declared rulers of the heavenly cities, having received leadership from God the Word himself, the Ruler of all.” Christ, “God the Word,” exerts sovereignty over “all,”

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32 By “all” Evagrius has human beings in mind, since the focus in the Lucan passage is human life. See Notes on Luke, 4.

33 This work, no longer extant in Greek, is translated by Dysinger. See Ldysinger.com

34 Again, this work focuses exclusively on warfare against demons and the thoughts they engender. Therefore, the victory mentioned here is over Satan and his demons.


since he rules over all. This statement, like similar ones above, asserts the limitless scope of divine sovereignty. The second person of the Holy Trinity, with the first and third persons, reigns above all human beings (and all beings, for that matter); his rule is limitless.

In summary, all of the above texts make it unmistakably clear that God is the absolute sovereign ruler of the entire kŏsmŏs. And not only does he reign over the visible domain, but over the demonic realm too. In fact, his sovereignty extends to all realms and worlds.  

No one or nothing is beyond the scope of God’s divine kingship—for all are subordinate to the sovereign King and Master. He reigns as the almighty God, the Sovereign King and Lord over all. And this divine sovereignty applies not only to the Father, but to the Son and Spirit as well, thus reflecting the Cappadocian influence on Evagrius’s Trinitarianism.

We will now turn to the informing relationship between Evagrius’s understanding of sovereignty and his understanding of and approach to prayer. Here

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37 For Evagrius, there are multiple worlds, all of which resulted from the pre-cosmic fall. See note 214 above.

38 As mentioned in a previous note, Evagrius presents his understanding of the nature of the three members of the Trinity as well as their relationships to one another most clearly in his On the Faith, a work which, according to Casiday, gives the clearest evidence of the Cappadocian influence on Evagrius. Casiday comments, “More specifically, the bedrock of Evagrius’ writings [that is, On the Faith] is the confession that he will have learnt from his time with Basil the Great and Gregory Nazienzen. Although the full extent of their impact upon his development remains at present an open question, a strong prima facie case can be advanced for supposing that Evagrius was, in every sense, a product of Cappadocia.” See Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 5. Furthermore, Casiday points out that throughout his monastic career, Evagrius remained an “outspoken” apologist for Nicene orthodoxy, addressing heretical teachings such as Arianism. See Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 12.
we will examine how Evagrius’s understanding of God as “king” informs his position on prayer, thus intending to detail the relationship in the thought of Evagrius between theological belief and spiritual practice. The importance of this relationship, especially for Evagrius, cannot be overstated. We would do well to keep Louth’s words in mind as we go through not only this chapter but the rest of the project as well: “The danger of a non- or un-theological spirituality is, I think, that it will tend to become a mere cult of devotion, or devotedness, not to anything in particular but just to itself.”

Furthermore, Casiday states, “The delicate relationship between belief and practice is nothing if not Evagrian.”

**Prayer and Divine Sovereignty**

We find an explicit example of the informing relationship between sovereignty and prayer in the work *Causes*. Evagrius states:

Prayer and petition and intercession become truly vain and useless when they are not brought to perfection in fear and reverence, with alertness and vigilance, as has already been said. Since one comes before a human king to make a petition with fear and reverence and alertness, is it not all the more appropriate to stand likewise and similarly and make one’s petition and intercession before God the Lord of all and Christ, the King of kings and Power of powers?

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39 Andrew Louth, *Theology and Spirituality* (Oxford: SLG Press, 1994 4th edition), p. 4. According to Louth, it was not until the Renaissance that doctrinal belief and spirituality began to become “divorced.” See *Theology and Spirituality*, p. 4-5. But, of course, such is not the case with all theologians who were schooled in the context of the Renaissance. See, for example, Erasmus of Rotterdam, particularly his *Concerning the Immense Mercy of God*.


Evagrius makes an important statement concerning the nature of God the Father, again employing the term *despōtē*\(^{42}\) or “Lord,” the same Greek word he used above in *Eulogios* and *On Thoughts*. As mentioned earlier in our exposition of these texts, this term denotes absolute sovereignty when applied to God. In the *Causes* text, Evagrius does not designate the Father as a mere lord or despot, but the Lord of “all,” a clear indication of the extent of divine sovereignty. “All” translates the Greek term ōlōn,\(^{43}\) the adverbial form of the word ōlōs,\(^{44}\) a term referring to the whole of something, such as the whole world.\(^{45}\) The term signifies the notion of completeness, and thus the entirety of something. In effect, Evagrius designates God the Father as the “Lord” or despot of all human beings. Every single person falls under his sovereign lordship; none are outside the parameters of his sovereign rule. This undoubtedly coheres with the texts examined in the first section.

We find a christological emphasis in *Causes* 11, as Evagrius also asserts the sovereignty of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Again, this reflects the Cappadocian influence on Evagrius’s Trinitarian thought: all three are equally God, so all three are equally sovereign.\(^{46}\) First, Evagrius refers to Christ as the “King of kings.” Here

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\(^{42}\) *Patrologia Graeca*, vol 40.

\(^{43}\) *Patrologia Graeca*, 40.

\(^{44}\) Danker, p.704.

\(^{45}\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 564.

we find yet another instance in which Evagrius applies the term *basileus*⁴⁷ (King) to Christ. In applying this term to the Son of God, Evagrius in effect indicates that Christ (along with the Father) possesses the highest power and authority, that he is the sovereign ruler.⁴⁸ Christ’s kingship extends over all, for he is not a simple king, but the King “of kings” (*basileuōntōn*).⁴⁹ Thus the sovereignty of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity—along with that of the First Person, since he is “Lord of all”—extends over all the kings of the earth. Christ therefore reigns as the Sovereign Ruler and Master of all the kingdoms of the world. Second, Evagrius declares Christ to be “the Power of powers.” The Greek word *archōnti* (from *archēn*),⁵⁰ the term translated as “Power,” signifies one with ruling authority, such as a prince.⁵¹ The same term is used for “powers” (*archētōn*). Christ, according to the passage, reigns as the supreme Lord and Prince over all other lords and princes, just as the Father reigns as the “Lord of all,” and thus Evagrius asserts the supremacy of Christ over all earthly rulers. Once again, this fully coincides with the discussion of sovereignty in the first section.

The passage, however, primarily focuses upon human prayer, particularly the prayer of the beginning monastic. Evagrius makes reference to prayer in this text by using three terms: “prayer” (*prōseuchē*), “petition” (*dēēsis*), and “intercession”

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⁴⁷ *Patrologia Graeca*, 40.

⁴⁸ See Arndt and Gingrich, p. 134-135.

⁴⁹ *Patrologia Graeca*, 40.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Arndt and Gingrich, p. 113.
(ikĕtēria).\textsuperscript{52} We cannot exactly determine what Evagrius intends to signify by “prayer” or prŏseuchē. Normally, when Evagrius distinguishes prŏseuchē from “petition” and “intercession,” he specifically intends pure prayer.\textsuperscript{53} But it is possible that Evagrius does not mean pure prayer at all, since Causes is a work intended primarily not for the gnostic, who alone receives pure prayer, but for the monastic novice. Casiday states, “The way the subjects are treated is deliberately accessible to novices.”\textsuperscript{54} But perhaps the text under consideration was intended to encourage the novice to look forward in anticipation to future spiritual advancement, to a time when he will be at the level of the advanced gnostic and thus be able to receive pure prayer. However, it is also conceivable that by prŏseuchē Evagrius means petition. Later we will notice that Evagrius often uses the general prŏseuchē for petition.\textsuperscript{55}

“Petition” (dĕēsis)\textsuperscript{56} denotes prayer in which one entreats God for something, and thus the meaning “petition,” a point mentioned in the first chapter.\textsuperscript{57} The third term Evagrius uses in this text to designate prayer, ikĕtēria (“intercession”),\textsuperscript{58} coheres in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[52] Patrologia Graeca, 40.
\item[53] See, for example, Reflections 26, 28, 30, all of which were referenced in the second section of the last chapter.
\item[54] Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 81. Sinkewicz also acknowledges that Causes deals primarily with the initial stages of the spiritual life. See Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. xxi.
\item[55] See, for example, Chapters on Prayer 31 and 32, both of which will be examined in chapter four.
\item[56] Patrologia Graeca 40.
\item[57] See Reflections 28, discussed in the second section of chapter one.
\item[58] Patrologia Graeca 40.
\end{footnotes}
meaning with *dēēsis*, and carries the meaning of supplicating God or making prayerful requests of God.\(^{59}\) This should not be confused with the gnostic “intercession” (*enteuksis*) mentioned in *Reflections* 30, which we examined last chapter. If Evagrius meant such specialized intercessory prayer, he would have been specific, as he is elsewhere when he uses terms for gnostic intercessory prayer other than *enteuksis*.\(^{60}\)

Here, as he does in *Reflections* 28, Evagrius probably uses *ikĕtēria* and *dēēsis* synonymously for basic prayers of petition or supplication, where the monk makes requests for the basic necessities of physical life, as well as for spiritual needs such as tearful contrition all the way through pure prayer.\(^{61}\) In the above text, then, Evagrius clearly has prayers of petition in mind, and possibly pure prayer as well.

Evagrius makes it clear that the prayerful ascetic must not petition God carelessly. After all, in prayer the monk does not entreat a mere being, but the almighty God, the ultimate King. The praying monk must therefore exhibit an attitude or demeanor appropriate for the occasion. First, the monk must show “fear”—*phŏbou*, from *phŏbŏs*.\(^{62}\) *Phŏbŏs*, from which the English word “phobia” derives, had multiple applications in the New Testament and Greek patristic literature. First, it literally means

\(^{59}\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 375.

\(^{60}\) See, for example, *Chapters on Prayer* 40, where Evagrius uses *prōseuchē* for intercessory prayer. This text was treated in the second section of chapter one. However, *ikĕtēria* in *Causes* does not suggest such intercession. Here we find no mention of an advanced monastic or gnostic petitioning God for the salvation of other monks.

\(^{61}\) See chapters three and four. Furthermore, the *Philokalia* translates *ikĕtēria* as “supplication” rather than “intercession.” See volume one, p. 37.

\(^{62}\) *Patrologia Graeca*, 40
“fear,” in the sense of being “frightened” or scared of someone or something. So it can consequently be used to denote “alarm,” “fright,” and “terror.” In this sense, the term has negative connotations. However, when the term is used in early Christian literature to describe the demeanor one should have in the presence of God, it carries the meaning of revering and respecting the Divine Being. It does in fact imply “fearing” God, not fear in the sense of “terror”—an attitude one would exhibit toward a cruel tyrant—but in the sense of deep, humble reverential respect. Reverence does include “fright,” but not fright in the sense of dread or terror. This represents a positive fright, so to speak; for the pious person does not dread God. Rather he or she exhibits fright in the sense of reverent respect. The person showing “fear” is humble, recognizing his or her own lowly state in the burning light of One far greater—in this text, One who is the absolute Sovereign King of all. And this “fear,” according to Harmless, “serves as a ‘custodian’ that leads one ‘in keeping the commandments.’” That Evagrius intends the term as such cannot be denied. God, Evagrius explains, “loves and nurtures human beings.” Therefore, the monk must fear God not in the sense of horror, but in the sense of deep reverential respect.

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63 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 862-863.

64 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 863.

65 William Harmless, Desert Christians, p. 347.

66 Eulogios, 11. In Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 37. We will return to this text later.
Second, when one petitions the Almighty King, he must show “reverence” (trŏmou, from trŏmós). When used with phŏbŏs, the term denotes a literal trembling and quivering when in a state of awe, basically indicating the idea of humility where one recognizes his own feebleness. Here, then, Evagrius describes the disposition or reaction a lesser being would have toward a superior being. In particular, the monk must exhibit such reverence in prayer, because in this spiritual exercise he beseeches the Almighty King and Lord. Again, this is not an unhealthy fear, like one would manifest when confronted with a phobia, but a healthy reverent awe. Like phŏbŏs, trŏmŏs describes the state one should exhibit when entering the presence of a sovereign being—in this case, the ultimate Sovereign Being.

Third, the lesser being, the prayerful monk, must entreat the King with “alertness.” The term nēphaliŏs, translated “alertness,” carried the idea of sobriety and temperance, both in a physical sense and a spiritual, figurative sense. For Evagrius, the petitioning monastic must not entreat the King with a mind “drunk” on impassioned thoughts. The monk petitioning the Almighty King must have a clear mind, a mind focused on the holy occasion of making humble petitions to the almighty Master

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67 Patrologia Graeca, 40.

68 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 827.

69 Patrologia Graeca, 40

70 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 538.
and King. Thus the praying monk, in his prayer, must exhibit “fear,” “reverence,” and “alertness,” because he prays not to a mere being, like an earthly king or lord, but to the all-powerful King and Lord, who is subject to no one.

The efficacy of the monk’s prayer depends on the manifestation of such a demeanor. In fact, if the monk is not fearful, reverent, and clear-headed, his prayer amounts to nothing. Prayer devoid of such an attitude, according to Evagrius, is “vain” (mataiōs) and “useless” (anōphēlēs). The Greek term mataiōs signifies something or someone that is powerless and therefore of no use. The term signifies something ultimately of no value, something that is truly without use and benefit. The term for “useless,” anōphēlēs, described someone or something that was without practical use—hence “useless.”

In Causes 11, we find a clear cut example of the relationship in Evagrius’s thought between theological conviction and spiritual practice. In effect, Evagrius makes it clear that prayer devoid of theological application is without value, and useless prayer amounts to no prayer at all. Divine sovereignty—the fact that God the Trinity is the absolute King and Lord of all—must govern the monk’s approach to prayer. Evagrius appears to set forth a universal principle in this particular text. The theological principle

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71 For example, in Chapters on Prayer 31 and 32, both of which treat petitioning, Evagrius exhorts the monk to make his requests in accordance with the will of God, not his own will. This indicates a clear-headed attitude; the monk clears his mind of his own desires and focuses upon God alone. The fourth chapter will treat both texts in detail.

72 Patrologia Graeca, 40.

73 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 495.

74 Danker, p. 77.
of divine sovereignty must not inform the monk’s approach to prayer some of the time, but all the time. Whenever the monk beseeches God in prayer, he must be mindful that the One to whom he prays is the King of all that exists; therefore, the monk must act accordingly with fear, reverence, and alertness. If the peasant, prior to entering an earthly king’s presence, knows how to display the proper respect due the king, then the praying monk all the more must manifest such an attitude before he engages in conversation with the King and Lord of all kings and lords. The very efficacy of his prayer depends on such an attitude. If the monk’s heart is not informed by the fear, reverence, and alertness that one should manifest in the presence of the King, then he cannot pray, for he will only be able to offer vain and useless prayer. Fear, reverence, and alertness describe one’s inner attitude or heart. But divine providence is undoubtedly operative here. It is ultimately God who bestows upon the monk the proper attitude and demeanor of fear and reverence.\textsuperscript{75} Divine sovereignty, therefore, must govern the heart of the monk who prays.\textsuperscript{76}

We find a similar passage in another work of Evagrius.

\textsuperscript{75} See \textit{Eight Thoughts}, 8.12, where Evagrius chastises the prideful monk, reminding him that everything necessary for accomplishing the monastic life ultimately finds its source in the providential provision of God. We will examine this passage in the third chapter, which shall focus upon Evagrius’s view of divine providence.

\textsuperscript{76} Here, as mentioned earlier, Evagrius addresses the beginning monastic. This indicates, then, that even the novice monk must engage in theologically informed prayer. However, the principles set forth here would also apply to the advanced gnostic, for he too must exhibit the proper demeanor when petitioning the Divine King. In fact, it is the advanced gnostic or the pure prayer gnostic, the theologian, who has the deepest understanding of divine sovereignty. As the monk progresses in his prayer life, his apprehension of theological truth deepens, especially as he progressively experiences the divine sovereignty of God in prayer. We will address this most specifically in the fifth chapter.
Now, if you are distressed, pray—but pray with fear and reverence, effort, alertness, vigilance, particularly on account of our invisible enemies who are perverse in their habits and given over to vice and who are accustomed to abuse us at this time. When they see us standing to pray, they also eagerly stand near us and suggest to our mind things that it is unseemly to ponder or consider at the time for prayer. In this way, they lead our mind captive and make the petition and intercession of our prayer idle and foul and worthless.  

This passage, from an obscure work in Evagrius’ s corpus, seems to mirror the Causes text, as Casiday recognizes. Like Causes 11, this text does not appear to emphasize pure prayer, but “petition” and “intercession.” Since the work no longer exists in Greek, it cannot be definitively determined if “intercession” refers to gnostic intercessory prayer or to petition, like in the previous text. But nevertheless prayer, no matter what form it takes, must be characterized and informed by “fear,” “reverence,” and “alertness,” among other things. Without the original Greek we do not know if Evagrius used phóbōs, trŏmōs, and nêphaliōs for these three terms, as he does in Causes 11; but the coherence of the two texts makes it quite possible, if not very probable, that he did.

The activity of the demons constitutes the key here. It is because of their perversity and “abuse” that the praying monk must exhibit fear, reverence, alertness, effort, and vigilance. However, we surmise that the demons do not form the object of the fear and reverence. In other words, fear and reverence are not to be directed toward the demons. Nowhere in his writings does Evagrius indicate that demons are to

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77 A Word About Prayer, 1. In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 118. This work is no longer extant in the original Greek.

78 Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p.222, note 2.

79 The fourth chapter will give extended attention to the role and work of demons.
be “feared” or “revered.” Such fear and reverence are reserved for God the King alone. For Evagrius, “fearing” and “revering” anything other than God results in idolatry. As Causes 11 intimates, sovereign rulers alone form the proper objects of fear and reverence, and this is true specifically of the Triune God, who alone is the ultimate Sovereign Master. So Evagrius in no way encourages his readers to direct their fear, reverence, and alertness toward the demons—for these are to be directed to the King alone, as the previous text in Causes indicates.

But although the demons do not form the object of fear, reverence, and alertness, they do, in this text, present the occasion for their exercise. In his writings, Evagrius occasionally points out that demons hate prayer more than anything. One of their primary functions, as mentioned in the text under consideration, is to prevent the monk from praying, and the way the demons attack is through inserting “thoughts” into the mind of the praying monk. The demons, Louth points out, actually “stimulate” the

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80 Demons certainly can generate “fear” in the sense of terror, but not fear in the sense of reverence and respect, which is the way Evagrius apparently intends “fear” in this text. Again, the coherence with Causes 11 suggests this interpretation.

81 See, for example, Chapters on Prayer 100, which will be examined later in the chapter.

82 See Chapters on Prayer, 50, where Evagrius mentions the hatred of demons for prayer, particularly pure prayer.

83 See, for example, The Eight Thoughts, 8.10. In Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 87. Here the demon of pride attacks by making the monk imagine that he is being assailed by “wild beasts.” See also On Thoughts 19, in Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 102. In this passage the enemy attempts to inject a “poisonous” or impassioned thought into the mind of the ascetic. Also, the whole of Antirrhetikos is devoted to giving such examples of demonic “thought” suggestion. In Evagrius there are, according to Stewart, eight evil thoughts: gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, greed, vainglory, and pride. See Columba Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus on Monastic Pedagogy,” p. 254.
prayer hindering thoughts.\textsuperscript{84} And according to the text, the demons “abuse” the praying monk by “suggesting” repugnant things to him during prayer.\textsuperscript{85} Evagrius mentions in other texts that such activity actually drives the monk to revere and fear God all the more. The demonic onslaught pushes the monk toward God, causing the monk to recognize that only through the King alone can he win the victory over the wicked demons.\textsuperscript{86} We find one such example in \textit{A Word About Prayer}, where Evagrius exhorts his readers to “beseech God that he grant you victory. For you cannot be victorious by yourself, since the fight against evil is too difficult for you alone. Therefore it is essential for us to invoke God and persevere in prayer, seeing that it is he alone who is able to calm our mind.”\textsuperscript{87} It is especially when demons attack, then, that the monk must be careful to show the proper respect due the King. When under demonic attack, the praying monk must revere and fear God all the more, realizing that he can be victorious only through God the King. The demons do not form the proper object of fear and reverence, but they occasion their greater exercise by driving the monk to beseech the King—who alone is the object of reverence and fear—for victory.

Like the \textit{Causes} text, \textit{A Word About Prayer}, paragraph one, presents us with a concrete example of the informing role divine sovereignty exercises on prayer. The

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{84} Andrew Louth, “Evagrius on Prayer.” In \textit{Stand-up to Godwards}, p. 167.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Brakke points out that if the monk acquiesces to the demonic thought, he risks being overrun by the passions. See David Brakke, \textit{Demons and the Making of the Monk}, p. 55.
\item \textsuperscript{86} See Eulogios 27, which recounts the story of a demonically assailed monk who requires God’s assistance for victory over the demonic forces. We will give a detailed exposition to this text in chapter four.
\item \textsuperscript{87} A \textit{Word About Prayer}, 3. In Casiday, \textit{Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 119.
\end{itemize}
terms “fear,” “reverence,” and “alertness” clearly substantiate this claim. All three of these, as mentioned in our exposition of Causes 11, must attend prayer, for they represent the appropriate attitude one must display when entering the presence of a sovereign monarch. Again, the monk must realize that, in his prayer, he invokes not simply anyone but the Sovereign Monarch of all sovereign monarchs. And the monk must be careful to display such a reverent attitude especially in prayer, because it is especially during prayer time that the demonic host attacks. And it is particularly during such times that the praying monk must humble himself and exhibit an attitude appropriate for petitioning the Almighty Sovereign Ruler, through whom alone he can secure victory.

In Evagrius’s primary work on prayer, Chapters on Prayer, we find divine sovereignty informing the monastic’s approach to praying. Evagrius comments: “Even if you seem to be with God, beware of the demon of impurity, for he is quite the deceiver and is very envious and wants to be quicker than the movement of your mind so as to remove it from God when it is standing by him in reverence and fear.” The “standing by” God undoubtedly represents a reference to prayer. And Evagrius most likely has

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88 According to Brakke, the demons hate the ascetic practitioner in particular; they have nothing but “malice” for the monastic and his practices. See David Brakke, Demons and the Making of the Monk, p. 54.


90 The immediate context focuses upon prayer, specifically pure prayer. See Chapters on Prayer 90-97.
pure prayer in mind—the context, especially paragraph 97, appears to suggest this.  

And here prayer finds its expression in “standing by [God] in reverence and fear.” In fact, Evagrius does not distinguish between prayer and such “standing before God in reverence and fear.” Prayer, then, must be attended by the demeanor one would display when entering the presence of royalty.

Evagrius uses eulabeias for “reverence.” According to Arndt and Gingrich, this term, when used in early Christian literature, primarily means “reverent awe in the presence of God.” The term carries the idea of anxiety, but a healthy anxiety in the sense of a humble respect for God. The monk must realize that in pure prayer he communes with One who is without equal and who is therefore sovereign; so the praying monk must be careful to pay the Sovereign One proper reverent respect.

But not only does prayer in this text include “reverence,” it includes “fear” as well. Once again, Evagrius uses phŏbou (from phŏbŏs) for “fear.” And, as explained in our examination of Causes 11, we noticed that phŏbŏs refers to the proper attitude one must exhibit when entering into the presence of a king. When the ascetic invokes God with fear (phŏbŏs), he acknowledges the complete sovereignty of God, that God reigns

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91 Chapter 97 specifically mentions demonic attack during pure prayer.


93 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 321.

94 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer.” ldysinger.com
as the “Lord of all, the King of kings, and the Power of powers.”\textsuperscript{95} One displays such fear only because of the fact that in prayer they are granted access to the Sovereign King.\textsuperscript{96} Again, it is interesting that Evagrius does not use the actual term “prayer” in the text but simply refers to prayer as “standing by God in reverence and fear.” Prayer finds its expression in reverence and fear—that is, prayer finds its expression in the acknowledgment of God’s sovereignty. Prayer only exists as prayer when it is attended by reverence and fear. Or, to put it in different terms, pure prayer must be informed by theological commitment—in this case, the sovereignty of God.\textsuperscript{97} So in Evagrius’s view, prayer and theological conviction cannot be separated.\textsuperscript{98} If the monk wants to engage in prayer—whether pure prayer, petition, or any other form—he must understand that in prayer he petitions and communes with the Sovereign King and Lord of the universe, and he must consequently conduct himself with the appropriate reverence and fear.

We find a similar point in another text located in \textit{Chapters on Prayer}. Evagrius states: “Do not pray with merely external gestures, but with great fear turn your mind to the awareness of spiritual prayer.”\textsuperscript{99} The focus of this text is pure prayer, as

\textsuperscript{95} See \textit{Causes}, 11, examined above.

\textsuperscript{96} All of this is made explicitly clear in the above exposition of \textit{Causes} 11.

\textsuperscript{97} But, as the fifth chapter shall detail, prayer itself serves as a ground for belief in divine sovereignty; therefore, there is a sense in which prayer informs one’s understanding of sovereignty.

\textsuperscript{98} Concerning the relationship between theology and prayer, Louth states, “The theologian is one who prays, and one who thinks about the loving object of his prayer.” See Andrew Louth, \textit{Theology and Spirituality}, p. 12.

indicated by the term “spiritual prayer” (*pneumatikēs prŏseuchēs*).100 Casiday compares this text to *Causes* 11, specifically the statement, “Prayer and petition and intercession become truly vain and useless when they are not brought to perfection in fear and reverence, with alertness and vigilance, as has been already said.”101 *Chapters on Prayer* 28, like *Causes* 11, asserts that prayer should be attended by “fear” or *phŏbŏs*.102 However, the praying monastic, in this case the advanced monastic or gnostic, must exhibit “great” fear. The Greek term *pŏllou*103 (from *pŏlūs*), when used with a noun to denote quantity, signifies a great or large number.104 The word can also be translated “much,” “many,” and “numerous.”105 Therefore, *pŏlūs* refers to something that is extensive or large. The monastic is to engage the King not with a mere, weak fear or *phŏbŏs* but with a qualitatively large or “great” fear. Now when this passage is understood with *Causes* 11, as Casiday suggests it should, then it becomes obvious why the monk should enter God’s presence in the spirit of great fear: divine sovereignty. In the passage under consideration, Evagrius does not mention God by name. But we must remember that God always forms the object of pure prayer, and all

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101 Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus,* p. 216, note 20. Also, see the exposition of *Causes* 11 given above.


104 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 687.

105 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 687.
other prayer as well. So in pure or spiritual prayer, the monk enters, by divine grace, into the very presence of God himself. In light of Evagrius’s clear comments concerning “fear” in Causes 11, we can only draw one conclusion concerning Chapters on Prayer 28: the monk must exhibit fear in “spiritual prayer” because in such prayer he communes with the Triune God, the King and Master of all. God the Trinity, the “King of the universe which he made,” “The Lord of all,” and “the King of kings,” always forms the object of prayer; for this reason the monk should approach “spiritual prayer” with “great fear.” Once again we find a concrete example of how divine sovereignty informs prayer in the thought of Evagrius.

We find a very clear example of divine sovereignty and prayer in another chapter in Chapters on Prayer. “Indeed, when you have understood your own measure, you will delight in compunction and call yourself a wretch, in the manner of Isaiah. For how, being impure and having impure lips and being in the midst of such a people (that is, of adversaries), how have you dared stand before the Lord Sabaoth (Isa. 6:5)?” Here Evagrius reflects upon the sixth chapter of the book of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, a chapter which extols the sovereignty of God. To understand Evagrius’s use of

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106 See Reflections 26-30, where Evagrius defines pure prayer, petition, and intercession. In each form or type of prayer, God is always the object.

107 The third chapter will give extended treatment to divine providence and pure prayer.

108 Notes On Ecclesiastes, 38.

109 Causes, 11.

the passage, we must first understand the particulars of the passage itself; otherwise Evagrius’s usage will not make sense.

The beginning of the sixth chapter of the book of Isaiah records the prophet’s vision of God sitting on a “throne.” The Septuagint translation, the version used by Evagrius, employs the term *thrŏnŏs* for “throne.”¹¹¹ This term, as implied by the English word “throne,” was used of the thrones of human kings and rulers.¹¹² The *thrŏnŏs* belonged specifically to the ruler, the king or emperor; it actually served as a sign of his reign and sovereignty. When used of God, the term usually refers to the throne of God in heaven, as it does in this passage.¹¹³ God does not sit on just any throne, but the very throne of heaven, indicating that his throne is above all other thrones—ultimately illustrating that he is the King above all kings. Further in the chapter, Isaiah uses even stronger language, saying, “I have seen with mine eyes the King, the Lord of Hosts.”¹¹⁴ Isaiah uses *basilea* for “King,” which, as we have seen a few times thus far, denotes absolute sovereignty when used of God.

But “king” is not the only term the biblical passage uses to designate divine sovereignty; the author modifies *basilea* with the phrase “the Lord of Hosts”: *kūriŏn*


¹¹² Arndt and Gingrich, p. 364.

¹¹³ Arndt and Gingrich, p. 364.

¹¹⁴ *The Septuagint*, p. 841.
saBaōth.  

Translated literally, the term reads “Lord Sabaoth.” According to Danker, the term means “Yahweh Lord of the armies”—i.e. the armies of heaven. This designation declares God to be the ruler of the angelic armies, for God is not only the King and Lord of human beings, but of the angelic realm as well. There exists no limit to his sovereignty; it is absolute.

In the biblical passage, the prophet enters the King’s presence with great humility: “‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.’” Given his own condition and the condition of his own people, and given the nature of the One in whose presence he stood, the prophet becomes extremely humble and contrite.

Evagrius exhorts his readers to engage God with the same attitude. Following the biblical text, he uses “Lord Sabaoth” (Kūriŏn SaBaōth) of God. In prayer, the monastic invokes the “Lord of Hosts,” the Sovereign King of all angels; so the monk must be careful to conduct himself properly. Like Isaiah, the praying monastic must recognize his own “measure,” that is, the monk must realize that he himself, like Isaiah, is “impure,” and that he, also like Isaiah, dwells in the midst of others who are impure.

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115 The Septuagint, p. 841.

116 Danker, p. 909.

117 For Evagrius, all human beings are “impure” in the sense that all are sinners. Evagrius nowhere develops a theology of sin, but based upon some of his statements, it appears he held that all beings, for the exception of Christ, are in some sense sinners and therefore impure. See The Great Letter 26, 24, and 29, for example, where Evagrius discusses the “movement,” the term he uses in reference to the
The King, on the other hand, reigns as the “Lord of Hosts,” the King of all, and is perfectly pure and good. In this text, then, we find another example of how Evagrius’s view of divine sovereignty informs his approach to prayer. The monk must realize that in prayer he, an imperfect being, invokes an absolutely perfect Being who reigns as the King and Lord of all. Like the prophet Isaiah, who entered the very presence of this perfect King, the prayerful monk, recognizing his own imperfections, must approach this King with complete humility and contriteness. In the presence of the Almighty King and Lord, the monk immediately recognizes his own imperfections and weaknesses in the burning light of God’s greatness and perfection. And the monk recognizes his own status, a finite imperfect being, in light of the nature of God, the perfect King and Lord of all.

We now turn to another text in Chapters on Prayer, which subtly alludes to divine sovereignty and prayer. “If you want to pray, you need God who gives prayer to the one who prays. Therefore call upon him, saying, ‘Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come’—which means your Holy Spirit and your Only Begotten Son. He has

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precocmic fall discussed in note 214 above. As a result of this fall, all are distanced from God, and all are born with a sort of concupiscence or natural tendency toward sin. O’Laughlin points out that the first “sin,” the precocmic fall of the immaterial beings, ultimately constitutes the cause of the separation existing between human beings and God. See Michael O’Laughlin, “Origenism in the Desert,” p. 98. Furthermore, O’Laughlin mentions the results of the precocmic fall: “alienation,” “ignorance” (i.e. ignorance of God), and “evil.” See O’Laughlin, p. 123.

118 God is good in the sense that he is free from all evil. In fact, he embodies the very opposite of evil. See The Great Letter 55, where Evagrius explains that it is impossible for God to “commit a sin.” Also see Notes on Ecclesiastes, 4; here Evagrius refers to God as “the source of all goodness.” As such, God “is not the cause of evils.” In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 134.
taught you thus, saying that the Father is worshipped in ‘Spirit and in Truth.’”\textsuperscript{119} This passage will figure prominently in the next chapter on pure prayer and divine providence; we will save our examination of the particulars for that discussion. Our main concern here is the notion of “worship.” First, Evagrius undoubtedly has pure prayer in mind here, for as Bunge points out, pure prayer is Trinitarian in nature, as the praying subject prays to the Father in “Spirit and Truth”—that is, in the Son and the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{120} So according to Bunge’s analysis of this passage, “worshipping” the Father “in Spirit and Truth” equates to pure prayer.\textsuperscript{121} Arndt and Gingrich explain that prŏskünkēō, the Greek for “worship,” was “used to designate the custom of prostrating oneself before a person and kissing his feet, the hem of his garment, the ground, etc.; the Persians did this in the presence of their deified king.”\textsuperscript{122} Thus, the term means “fall down and worship.” Arndt and Gingrich point out that such worship was oftentimes directed toward a king, but most often toward a deity.\textsuperscript{123} In this sense, then, prŏskünkēō represents the homage and reverence a lesser being pays to a powerful, sovereign being. Pure prayer, therefore, constitutes a form of worship or prŏskünkēō, wherein the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[120] Gabriel Bunge, \textit{Earthen Vessels}, p. 137. See the discussion above in the second section of chapter one, specifically under “Pure Prayer,” where this passage was also examined.
\item[121] Bunge, \textit{Earthen Vessels}, p. 137. Again, see the above discussion in chapter one.
\item[122] Arndt and Gingrich, p. 716.
\item[123] Arndt and Gingrich, p. 716.
\end{footnotes}
monk pays homage to the most powerful of all sovereign beings, the Triune God.\textsuperscript{124}

Pure prayer represents a form of Trinitarian worship in which the monk worships God the Father “in” God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. However, Evagrius does not indicate whether this “homage” is expressed in outward form or merely in inward disposition. More than likely, the idea here is inward disposition, since pure prayer takes place in the mind or \textit{nous} of the monk.\textsuperscript{125} In this sense, \textit{prŏskŭnēō} would not involve a literal prostrating of the body but rather an inner disposition in which the pure praying gnostic figuratively prostrates or subordinates his mind or \textit{nous} to the almighty King.\textsuperscript{126}

We will examine one more text, also found in \textit{Chapters on Prayer}, before turning our attention to Evagrius’ understanding of the manner in which God expresses divine sovereignty. Evagrius comments: “Perception of prayer (\textit{prŏseuchēs})\textsuperscript{127} is mental focus

\textsuperscript{124} Young recognizes the identification in Evagrius between worship and pure prayer. Young points out that at times, Evagrius uses the language of worship, particularly temple worship, when speaking of pure prayer. For example, in \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 21, Evagrius describes pure prayer as taking place at a figurative “altar,” and in \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 76 and 77 he uses temple worship terminology such as “incense” and “phials” in reference to pure prayer. See Robin Darling Young, “Appropriating Genesis and Exodus in Evagrius’ On Prayer.” In \textit{Dominoeloquio=in lordly eloquence: Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Louis Wilken}. Paul M Blowers, Angela Russell Christman, David G. Hunter, and Robin Darling Young, eds. (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 254. Furthermore, in \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 115, Evagrius appears to identify prayer with worship. “Do not yearn to see angels or powers perceptibly, lest you become utterly insane, accepting a wolf in the place of the shepherd and paying reverence to your enemies the demons.” Prayer, then, is an exercise in which one pays “reverence” (\textit{prŏskŭnōn}, from \textit{prŏskŭnēō}) to God, the Sovereign King.

\textsuperscript{125} See \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 35 and 36: “Undistracted prayer is the highest function of the mind.” “Prayer is the mind’s ascent to God.” In Casiday, \textit{Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 190.

\textsuperscript{126} This would appear to be the case, given the nature of pure prayer, where the gnostic goes “immaterially to the Immaterial.” \textit{Chapters on Prayer}, 67. In Casiday, \textit{Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 193.

\textsuperscript{127} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, \textit{Chapters on Prayer},” 43. Ldysinger.com
with piety, contrition and pain of soul in announcing one’s errors, with voiceless
groaning.” Given the terms “contrition” and “pain of soul,” as well as “announcing
one’s errors,” we can safely assume that Evagrius intends prayers of confession in this
text. And “perception,” Evagrius explains, attends this type of prayer. The word
aisthēsis (“perception”) denotes “insight,” not in the sense of intellectual perception
but rather the sense of inner perception of the heart, such as moral understanding. So “perception” includes more than mere intellectual belief or affirmation: it involves
perception or apprehension of the heart. Such perceptive prayer involves “mental
focus”—sünnoia, which denoted inner reflection, in the sense of meditating upon
one’s inner state. When understood in light of Chapters on Prayer 5, where Evagrius
probably gives the clearest statement on prayer as confession, “perception” and
“mental focus” would correspond to compunction and contriteness, both of which
would certainly include inner reflection or meditation, as well as a perception or
understanding of the heart where the monk recognizes his sinfulness and need for
contrite confession. And “piety,” along with “contrition” and “pain of soul,” attends

129 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer,*” 43. Ldysinger.com
130 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 25.
131 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer,*” 43. Ldysinger.com
133 See *Chapters on Prayer*, 5. Chapter one, section two, provided a brief examination of this passage; a
more detailed examination will follow in chapter four.
this mental focus. The Greek eulabeias (“piety”), the same term translated “reverence” in *Chapters on Prayer* 90,\(^{134}\) signifies the idea of reverential, deep humble respect for God.\(^{135}\) In *Chapters on Prayer* 90 Evagrius indicates that eulabeias, like phŏbŏs (fear), must attend the monk’s prayer; and divine sovereignty marks the reason, as we noticed. Like phŏbŏs, eulabeias constitutes a specific demeanor one has when entering the presence of a great one, or a disposition an inferior being has in the presence of one far superior. In prayer, the monk shows such reverential respect for God, because God is far superior to the monk and all beings, for “God is king over the universe which he made.”\(^{136}\) Since God is the all-powerful King of kings and Lord of lords, the praying monk must exhibit the proper attitude, the attitude displayed by one entering the presence of the almighty King, the attitude signified by eulabeias. Here again we find a concrete example of divine sovereignty informing prayer.

In the above, we examined general texts in Evagrius that touch the issue of divine sovereignty, and then we examined texts that describe the informing relationship between sovereignty and prayer. The divine sovereignty texts examined in the first section are general in that they touch the issue of sovereignty but do not indicate how sovereignty is expressed and manifested. In other words, the texts do in fact make it clear that God is “king” and “lord,” but nevertheless they do not explain how God

\(^{134}\) This text was examined just above.

\(^{135}\) See the reference to this term in the above examination of *Chapters on Prayer*, 90.

\(^{136}\) See *Notes on Ecclesiastes* 38, examined earlier in the chapter.
expresses his kingship and lordship. In the following section, we will elucidate the ways God manifests his sovereignty.

**Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment**

For Evagrius, it appears that divine sovereignty finds its expression in three works of God: creation, providence, and judgment. We will begin with the notion of creation, and then move to providence, and lastly to judgment.

Divine sovereignty appears to be linked with divine creation, in that creation appears to constitute an expression of divine sovereignty. However, before establishing this point, we will first establish the fact that all three members of the Godhead participated in the divine work of creation, thus illustrating the sovereignty of all three members of the Trinity. Three texts in particular, all of which are found in *On the Faith*, make this point clear. First, commenting upon 1 Cor. 8: 5-6, Evagrius states:

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137 By “creation,” we mean the creation of the present heavens and earth. The present universe, according to Stewart, is the “second creation.” See Columba Stewart, “Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus,” p. 176. This second creation, Bamberger notes, was the result of the pre-cosmic fall. But ultimately this second creation represents an expression of God’s mercy. Bamberger states, “Although the second creation is the result of a fall and a decree of punishment on the part of God, yet at the same time Evagrius considers it an act of mercy. Were it not for the material world and the corporal substance joined to the rational nature, this creature [man] would be in a position where it could not achieve liberation from its guilt, and so would remain in ignorance about God.” See John Eudes Bamberger, *Evagrius Ponticus: the Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, p. lxxvii. In other words, the pre-fall situation, in which the immaterial rational beings enjoyed communion with God prior to their fall, can be termed the first creation. When the beings fell from divine union, God created the present earth. See note 214 above. O’Laughlin indicates that in the view of Evagrius, “the bodily creation is a blessing.” See Michael O’Laughlin, “Origenism in the Desert,” p. 125. And it is in the second creation that bodies came into existence, Bamberger points out. See John Eudes Bamberger, "Desert Calm: Evagrius Ponticus: The Theologian as Spiritual Guide," p. 191. According to Bamberger, the second creation marks “the origin of the cosmos, the organized world of bodies, the visible creation.” See *Evagrius Ponticus: the Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, p. lxxvi. Harmless, too, points out that at the second creation, the rational beings were given bodies through which they would achieve reunion with God. See William Harmless, *Desert Christians*, p. 355.
Now here we may enquire why, after he [Saint Paul] said ‘one God’ he was not content with that word (for we have said that ‘One and Only’ refers to God’s nature), but also added the Father and mentioned Christ. Well, then, I suppose that Paul, the vessel of election, reckoned it was not enough here simply to proclaim God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—which he clearly indicated by the phrase ‘one God’—unless he also clearly indicated him ‘from whom everything exists’ by adding the Father and designated him ‘through whom everything exists’ by recalling the Son.138

In this text Evagrius makes his position clear concerning the deity of all three members of the Holy Trinity: all three are “God” (Thēŏs). But he also makes reference to creation and indicates that both God the Father and God the Son participated in this divine work, explaining that all things have come into existence “from” the Father, while all things have come to be “through” the Son. Or, to state the point in different terms, the Father created all things through the Son. The apostle appears to make this very point, and Evagrius cites the passage approvingly. In Evagrius’s perspective, the Father and the Son equally serve as the agents of creation.

Appealing to 1 Corinthians once again, Evagrius comments:

Let us listen again to him who was snatched up to the third heaven [cf. 2 Cor. 12:1]. What does he say? ‘Do you not know that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you?’ [1 Cor. 6:19]. But every temple is God’s temple. If, then, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit is God. One indeed may say ‘the temple of Solomon’—in the sense that Solomon built it. Even if we are temples of the Holy Spirit in that sense, the Holy Spirit is God: for ‘God it is who created everything’ [Heb. 3:4].139

Evagrius asserts the full divinity of God the Holy Spirit, applying the term “God” (Thēŏs) to him without qualification. The Spirit, like the Father and Son, is fully God.


139 On the Faith, 34. In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 56.
And as God, the Spirit participated in the work of creation, like the Father and the Son.

In the text Evagrius applies “God it is who created everything” to the Holy Spirit, thereby affirming God the Holy Spirit’s role in the work of creation.

Evagrius has more to say on this issue, stating, “We find that three creations are named in Scripture: first and foremost, the transition from non-existence to existence; second, the transformation from worse to better; third, the resurrection of the dead. In them, you will find the Holy Spirit cooperating with the Father and the Son. For example, the coming into being of the heavens—and what does David say? ‘By the Word of the Lord the heavens were established, and all their power by the Spirit of his mouth’ [Psm. 32:6].”

All three members of the Trinity serve as agents in all three creations. And the Holy Spirit, cooperating with the Father and the Son, served in the creation of the present “heavens,” indicating that all three members of the Godhead were involved in the work of creation.

With this in mind, we will establish that in Evagrius’s thought, creation represents an act of sovereignty—a point made in a key text examined earlier, Notes on Ecclesiastes, paragraph 38. The relevant statement in the text is, “For God is king over

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141 “The transition from non-existence to existence,” understood in light of “the coming into being of the heavens,” appears to refer to the creation of the present universe. “The transformation from worse to better,” perhaps, involves the process through which one “returns from vice and ignorance to virtue and knowledge”—that is, the process of the spiritual life composed of the praktike (practical life) and the gnostike (gnostic life). See Evagrius’s work Gnostikos, 48. In Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 175. And the “resurrection of the dead” involves the future eschatological resurrection in which all, including the devil and his angels, will return to union with God. See Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 192-195.
the universe which he made.”¹⁴² The Greek ginŏmai,¹⁴³ the term for “made,” in this particular text denotes the notion of bringing something into existence, and thus the idea of the creating activity of God.¹⁴⁴ Here Evagrius simply asserts the principle of creation: the kŏsmŏs owes its very existence to the creating work of God. The very clause itself, “For God is king over the universe which he made,” indicates the link between sovereignty and the work of creation: God is the Absolute Ruler of the entire universe or kŏsmŏs by virtue of the fact that he created the very same kŏsmŏs. To put it differently, God created the universe; therefore, God reigns as the Sovereign King of the very same universe. That Evagrius uses both basileus (“king”) and ginŏmai (“made”—the actual term used by Evagrius is gegŏntŏs, which is from ginŏmai) in the clause illustrates this claim. God created all things, so it follows that God rules all things. The latter is predicated upon the former. Now as pointed out earlier in the chapter, in this text Evagrius uses “God” (Thĕŏs) specifically of God the Father. But as we noticed just above in the On the Faith texts, all three members participated in the creation of the universe.¹⁴⁵ Given this, the statement would ultimately apply to the entire Holy Trinity. The clause, “For God is king over the universe which he made,” would by implication apply to all three members of the Godhead. Since the entire Godhead participated in

¹⁴² In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 142.

¹⁴³ Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Notes on Ecclesiastes,” 38. Ldysinger.com

¹⁴⁴ Arndt and Gingrich, p. 158.

¹⁴⁵ Evagrius penned On the Faith early in his literary career. But, as Casiday points out, Evagrius never at any point in his career rejected the principles set forth there—that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three persons in one God. See Augustine Casiday, “Deification in Origen, Evagrius, and Cassian.” In Origeniana Octava, p. 998.
the activity of creation, and since God is the King of what he has created, it follows that
the whole Godhead reigns supreme over the entire universe. So for Evagrius, the term
“creator” designates the sovereignty of the Holy Trinity. God the Creator thus equates
to God the King.

In Evagrius’s view, divine providence, as well as divine creation, represents an
eexpression of divine sovereignty. Louth states, “God is not merely sovereign, but One
who comes, has and does come.”146 We return once again to Notes on Ecclesiastes 38,
which makes this point clear. In this passage, as we noted earlier in the chapter,
Evagrius states: “Know, rather, that God watches over all things through Christ and he,
for his part, knowing everything upon the earth, exercises providence for them through
the mediation of the holy angels. For God is king over the universe which he made.”147
Evagrius uses two terms here for divine provision: “watches” (phϋlassei) and
“providence” (prŏnoias).148 The term phϋlassei, from phϋlassō, refers to guarding
something or someone in the sense of watching them closely and intently, often for the
purpose of protection and preserving.149 The Greek prŏnoias, often translated as
“providence” in Evagrius, denotes taking forethought for, with the intention of taking
care of, caring for, and providing for needs. Most often in early Christian literature, the

146 Andrew Louth, Theology and Spirituality, p. 11.
149 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 868.
term designates the care God takes for the world, care that is manifested in various ways.\textsuperscript{150} The term is very important for Evagrius; we will return to it later.\textsuperscript{151}

In the passage Evagrius then indicates the universal extent of divine providence: God watches over “all things” and exercises providence for “them.” The terminology for “all things” is \textit{ta panta},\textsuperscript{152} derived from the word \textit{pas}, which was used to denote the whole of something, such as “all” people or the “whole” ocean.\textsuperscript{153} Arndt and Gingrich mention that \textit{ta panta}, specifically, denotes “the whole of creation, all things, the universe.”\textsuperscript{154} Here Evagrius’s use of the term must be understood in light of his usage of \textit{kŏsmŏs} (here translated “universe”). In chapter one, it was pointed out that Evagrius uses \textit{kŏsmŏs} here of the earth specifically. The “all things” over which God exercises providence belong to the “universe” (world, earth) created by God. So by \textit{ta panta} Evagrius intends the whole earth and everything therein. The term “them,” for whom God exercises “providence,” translates the word \textit{pantōn}\textsuperscript{155}—which carries the same meaning as \textit{ta panta}. In fact, rather than translating the statement as Casiday does, “...exercises providence for them.....,” Dysinger’s translation reads, “...providence over

\textsuperscript{150} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 708.
\textsuperscript{151} We will give a detailed examination to the term in the next chapter, which will examine divine providence in detail.
\textsuperscript{152} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, \textit{Notes on Ecclesiastes},” 38. Ldysinger.com
\textsuperscript{153} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 631.
\textsuperscript{154} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 633.
\textsuperscript{155} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, \textit{Notes on Ecclesiastes},” 38. Ldysinger.com
Thus the exercise of divine providence extends to the whole earth and all things therein. The juxtaposition of *ta panta* and *pantōn* with *kōsmōs*, here translated “universe,” suggests this application.  

After making this point clear—that divine providence extends to the whole world—Evagrius then makes the statement we have examined a few times thus far, “For God is king over the universe which he made.” As we noticed earlier, “God is king over the universe which he made” essentially equates to “God is the absolute ruler of the entire universe.” Of special importance here is the Greek word translated “for” (*gar*). This particular conjunction had multiple applications. Casiday’s translation suggests that here the term denotes “cause and reason,” and thus indicates “because.” Evagrius’s statement can then consequently be paraphrased as such: “Know that God watches over all things through Christ...and he exercises providence for them through the mediation of the holy angels, *because (gar)* God is king over the universe which he made.” Or the passage can be paraphrased, “Know that God watches over all things through Christ...and he exercises providence for them through the mediation of the holy angels. *For, you see (gar)*, God is king over the universe which he made.” Evagrius thus declares that God exercises providence over all things due to, or because of, the very

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156 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Notes on Ecclesiastes,” 38. Ldysinger.com

157 This would then indicate that providence extends not only to “rational beings” but to the inanimate creation as well. In *Notes on Luke*, 6, Evagrius designates God as the “the Creator and Provider of all creation.” In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 160.

158 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 151.
fact that he is King over all things. In other words, God provides for all things because he is King of all things. The King expresses his sovereignty by providing for the very universe he has created.

We find a similar point in another text we examined earlier in the first section of the chapter, *Thoughts* 6. Here, as we saw in our earlier citation of this text, Evagrius chastises his readers for worrying about the basic necessities of life. Such lack of faith, Evagrius explains, characterizes not Christians but “heathens” who “set aside the Master’s providence and deny the Creator.” Like the *Notes on Ecclesiastes* text, we here find divine sovereignty (“Master”), divine providence (“providence”), and divine creation (“Creator”). Earlier it was explained that *děspŏtēs*, translated in this text as “Master,” represents a designation for divine sovereignty. And Evagrius once again uses *prŏnŏian*—from *pronoias*—for “providence.” The Sovereign Lord, according to the text, expresses his lordship through providential care, for this “providence” actually

159 In *Notes on Ecclesiastes* 38, God exercises this providence through the Son, thereby indicating that the Father and the Son both (as well as the Spirit, as we shall see later) are agents in the work of divine providence. A detailed examination of divine providence will be postponed until the next chapter.

160 “I think it is redundant to write concerning the fact that one ought not to be anxious about clothing or food, since our Savior himself forbade this in the Gospels: ‘Do not be anxious in your soul about what you will eat, or what you will drink, or what you will wear’ [Mt. 6:25, 31]. This is obviously the part of heathens and unbelievers who set aside the Master’s providence and deny the Creator.” In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 94.


162 See the earlier examination of this passage, and also see *Causes* 11, where God is said to be “Lord (*děspŏtēs*) of all.” The *Causes* passage was also examined earlier in the chapter.

163 Dysinger, “*Evagrius Ponticus, On Thoughts*,” 6. Lydysinger.com
belongs to the Sovereign Master—it is "the Master’s providence." Exercising providence therefore forms an expression of the sovereign rule of God.\textsuperscript{164}

Lastly, Evagrius makes the link between sovereignty and providence elsewhere in his writings, saying, “God established heaven and earth and has forethought for them all and rejoices in them.”\textsuperscript{165} By “forethought,” Evagrius denotes providence.\textsuperscript{166} More than likely, he uses prŏnoia, which, as we have seen, includes the notion of forethought.\textsuperscript{167} And this “forethought” or providence extends over “heaven” and “earth,” and thus the whole creation. The link between “forethought” and sovereignty is indirect here. The channel connecting the two lies in the divine act of creation—“God established heaven and earth.” God the Creator equates to God the King, as pointed out just above.\textsuperscript{168} “Creator,” then—like “king,” “lord,” and “master”—represents an appellation of sovereignty. So the statement “God established heaven and earth” ultimately implies divine sovereignty—i.e. God as King. Given this, the text under consideration could be paraphrased as, “God the King {that is, God the Creator} has forethought for his creation.” Understood as such, the Virgin text connects divine sovereignty and divine providence, albeit indirectly. The point here coincides with Notes on Ecclesiastes, 38,

\textsuperscript{164} Again, the exact nature of divine providence will be detailed in the third chapter.

\textsuperscript{165} To the Virgin, 54. In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 171.

\textsuperscript{166} In his translation, Sinkewicz uses “providence” rather than “forethought.” See Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 135.

\textsuperscript{167} The Greek for this text was unavailable.

\textsuperscript{168} See the exposition of Notes on Ecclesiastes 38 given above. Here the link between sovereignty and creation was established.
namely, that God manifests his sovereignty by exercising forethought or providence over his creation.  

Finally, divine sovereignty finds its expression in God’s role as judge. Before understanding the connection between this and sovereignty, we must first understand Evagrius’s definition of judgment.

In his commentary on the book of Psalms, Evagrius provides such a definition. “Judgment is for the godly the change from a body for asceticism to angelic things: but for the ungodly it is the change from a body for asceticism to darkened and gloomy bodies. For the ungodly will not be raised in the first judgment, but rather in the second.” “Judgment” translates the Greek *krisis*, a term literally denoting the activity of passing judgment in the sense of rendering a decision or making a decree, especially with regard to legal or religious matters. However, Dysinger explains that Evagrius uses the term in a qualified sense. According to Dysinger, “Here ‘judgment’ does not necessarily mean punishment or disaster; rather it is a ‘change’ and a ‘passage’ from one type of body to another.” But Dysinger goes on to point out that the notion of judgment should produce a “sobering effect on the contemplative, since the body and world most suited to the next stage of spiritual development may either be ‘angelic’ or

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169 Again, the purpose here was merely to provide a brief overview of providence, with the aim of connecting providence with sovereignty. The next chapter will treat providence more extensively.


171 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 450, 453.

'darkened and gloomy.' In "judgment" as Evagrius understands it, God decides, apparently upon a person’s death, whether he or she is to advance to an angelic realm or to a darkened realm. Evagrius makes a similar point in another passage found in his commentary on Psalms. Here he expounds what he calls the "logoi of providence and judgment." God, Evagrius explains, is known as "judge (kritēs) through the variety of bodies of the reasoning beings, and through the multiform worlds and the beings who comprise those ages." The Greek kritēs, related to the above mentioned krisis, was used in reference to a judge, as one who decrees or decides, especially the fate of others in legal or religious matters. The point here is essentially the same as the one made in the previous text: God exercises his role as judge by determining the type of change—that is, the type of body and type of world, either demonic or angelic—a being deserves, resulting in the "variety of bodies" and "multiform worlds."

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173 Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 177. We will see evidence of such a “sobering effect” in our examination of the informing role judgment exercises on prayer.

174 According to Bunge, “On the basis of the conduct of his life man becomes an ‘angel’ or a ‘demon.’” See Gabriel Bunge, Dragon’s Wine and Angel’s Bread: the Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus on Anger and Meekness. Translated by Anthony P. Gythiel (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009), p. 25. Also, there was an initial judgment, which took place after the pre-cosmic fall of the rational beings. In this judgment, God granted the fallen beings bodies and worlds appropriate to the degree of their fall. See Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 32; Jeremy Driscoll, The Ad Monachos of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 9. Moreover, there will also be a final judgment, which will witness the “restoration of all fallen noes [rational beings] to their naked, incorporeal state of union with God.” See Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 180.

175 Literally translated, this phrase reads “the reasons for providence and judgment.”


177 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 453.
We find two texts linking sovereignty and judgment. First, we will turn to a passage examined earlier, *Eulogios*, 11.178 “Serve God with fear and love: in the first case as master and judge, in the second as one who loves and nurtures human beings.” As he does in other texts, Evagrius uses *phŏbō* (from *phŏbŏs*) for “fear.”179 And, once again, “fear” constitutes the human response to entering the presence of a sovereign king—in particular, the Sovereign King.180 And, as we saw in our earlier exposition of this text, Evagrius uses *dĕspŏtēs*181 for “master,” a term denoting divine sovereignty when applied to God.182 Thus the human person must “fear” God, for He reigns as the ultimate Master, the “Lord of lords.”183 But God is not only to be feared because he is the ultimate “master” but also because he is the “judge” (*kritē*).184 This appears to indicate that “judge” and “master” signify the same degree of sovereign authority. In light of this text, we can conclude that God is both the Master of masters and the Judge of judges, who must be appropriately reverenced with the “fear” that his exalted person deserves. The term “judge,” therefore, like the term “master,” constitutes a designation of divine sovereignty when used of God.

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178 In Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 37.

179 Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 316.

180 See the above exposition of *Causes*, 11.

181 Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 316.

182 *Causes* 11, examined earlier, makes this clear.

183 See *Causes*, 11.

184 Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 316.
For the second text, we turn to the *Kephalia Gnostica*, undoubtedly the most controversial of Evagrius’s works.185 “That which sensible death normally does in us, ‘the just judgment of God’ (2 Thess. 1:5) will similarly accomplish for the other logikoi when ‘he is ready to judge the living and the dead’ (1 Pet. 4:5) and to ‘render to each according to his works’ (Rev. 22:12).”186 The link between divine sovereignty and judgment can be found in two of the biblical texts Evagrius references in this passage, both of which present God as the sovereign judge. In the 1 Peter verse, the “living and the dead” signifies all people—humanity in its totality. Here God serves as the “judge” of all, thereby implying his sovereign rule over all. God, in this biblical verse, exercises his sovereignty over all through his role as judge. In the Revelation passage, “rendering” essentially indicates the act of judging, and “each” denotes humanity in its totality—all people. Understood as such, the Revelation verse presents God as sovereign over all people, and here sovereignty finds its manifestation in the divine act of judging. Again we see that judgment forms an expression of divine sovereignty.

We conclude that in Evagrius’s view, God exercises his sovereignty through creation, providence, and judgment.187 We will now turn our attention to the informing role these expressions of sovereignty exercise on prayer.

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185 See Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 2.

186 *Kephalia Gnostica* 1.82. In Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus,” ldysinger.com. The original Greek for this work no longer exists.

187 As we have seen, Evagrius holds that creation was a Trinitarian work. And, as shall be pointed out in the next chapter, all three members of the Trinity engage in the work of providence. It would appear that the work of judgment also in some way expresses a Trinitarian work. At times Evagrius simply refers to
Prayer and Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment

In *Chapters on Prayer*, Evagrius makes an important statement regarding the informing role divine sovereignty should exert on prayer, and he designates sovereignty with the appellations “Creator” and “Provider.”

If in prayer you make your stand with God Almighty, the Creator and Supervisor of all, why are you so irrational in standing by him that, disregarding his unsurpassable awe, you are alarmed by mosquitoes and dung-beetles. Or have you not heard it said, ‘You shall fear the Lord your God’ {Deut 6:13}, and again, ‘whom all shutter and tremble at, before the face of his power’ {Dan. 6:27}, etc.?  

From the context, Evagrius apparently addresses pure prayer (using prŏseuchē for “prayer”) in this text. The word “stand” (paristasai, from paristanō) undoubtedly indicates prayer. In this passage, the term designates the idea of being present before another, in the sense of entering one’s presence or presenting oneself before the Divine Judge with the standard term “God.” See, for example, *Kephalia Gnostica* 6.20, as well as the above cited *Kephalia Gnostica* 1.82—specifically the allusion to 2 Thess. 1:5 and 1 Pet. 4:5. We must remember that all three members of the Trinity, for Evagrius, are fully God. And unless otherwise indicated by the context, it appears that Evagrius has all three members in mind when he uses the term “God,” so it would then follow that the entire Godhead participates in judging. See *On the Faith* 12, where Evagrius explicitly indicates that “God” (Thĕŏs) applies to all three members of the Trinity. But there are times when Evagrius specifically designates Christ as the “judge.” See *Kephalia Gnostica*, 2.59. Also, Casiday points out that in his comments on Psalm 49, Evagrius refers to Christ as “God the Judge.” See Augustine Casiday, “Deification in Origen, Evagrius, and Cassian.” In *Origeniana Octava*, p. 997.

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189 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer*,” 100. Ldysinger.com

190 The previous ten paragraphs or chapters in *Chapters on Prayer* address pure prayer, particularly pure prayer and demons, while the very next paragraph specifically mentions “spiritual prayer.”

191 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer*,” 100. Ldysinger.com
another. For Evagrius, this would not indicate that the gnostic, through his own power, presents himself before God, but rather that God graciously grants the gnostic the grace of His company. So in pure prayer the gnostic is granted access to the very presence of God, as immaterial mind (nous) communes with the immaterial God.

Evagrius then goes on to describe God. This God, Evagrius explains, is “Almighty”—the Greek pantōkratōr, from pantōkratōr. The term was used of God to designate his omnipotence, meaning that God is almighty or all-powerful. By implication, this term implies divine sovereignty, for God alone can rightly be said to be pantōkratōr. God alone reigns as the Almighty One, thereby indicating his supremacy, and therefore his sovereignty, over all others. Evagrius further references divine sovereignty with the terms “Creator” (dēmiourgō, from dēmiourgōs) and “Supervisor” (prŏnŏĕō, from prŏnoias). By dēmiourgōs, Evagrius declares God to be the Creator or “maker” of “all.” The term prŏnoias—the verb form of prŏnoias—denotes, once again, divine providence where God provides and cares for the created

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192 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 628.
193 See Chapters on Prayer, 70, examined in the second section of chapter one. In this passage Evagrius describes pure prayer as an encounter where God “visits” the monk in immaterial union. The next chapter will detail this concept further.
194 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 100. Ldysinger.com
195 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 609.
196 See Arndt and Gingrich, p. 609.
198 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 178.
order, and specifically for human beings.\textsuperscript{199} Evagrius indicates the universal extent of the divine activities of creation and providence with the term $\textit{pantōs}$ (here translated “all”), which for Evagrius, as we saw earlier, refers to the totality of things in the world.\textsuperscript{200} In essence, Evagrius here asserts the divine sovereignty of the Holy Trinity over all things, for as pointed out above, creation and providence are expressions and manifestations of the sovereignty of the Triune God. God the Creator equates to God the King. The same holds true for God the Provider. With this in mind, the beginning of the text under consideration could be translated as, “If in prayer you take your stand with God Almighty, the King of all (indicated by “the Creator and Supervisor of all”), why are you so irrational…” The Trinitarian dimension here is implied by “Creator” and “Supervisor,” since these are Trinitarian works. And “unsurpassable awe” characterizes this Almighty Sovereign Creator and Provider. The Greek term $\textit{anυpĕrblētŏs}$, here rendered “unsurpassable,” designates something that cannot be excelled, something of unequaled quality.\textsuperscript{201} For “awe,” Evagrius uses a familiar term, $\textit{phŏbŏn}$—from $\textit{phŏbŏs}$.\textsuperscript{202} He employs the term again in his citation of the biblical text Deuteronomy 6:13, “‘You shall fear ($\textit{phobēthēsē}$)\textsuperscript{203} the Lord your God.’” The word $\textit{phobēthēsē}$ derives from $\textit{phŏbēō}$, which is related to $\textit{phŏbŏs}$. Overall \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 100 indicates

\textsuperscript{199} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 708. The following chapter will treat in detail Evagrius’s understanding of divine providence.

\textsuperscript{200} See the discussion of the term $\textit{pas}$ above.

\textsuperscript{201} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 76.


\textsuperscript{203} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, \textit{Chapters on Prayer},” 100. Ldysinger.com.
clearly that the King must be revered and respected in a qualitatively different way than one would fear or respect an earthly king, for this King reigns supreme over all reality, since he is the Omnipotent Creator and Provider. One must exhibit the greatest reverential respect to the Lord, because he is not a mere lord, but the Sovereign Lord, he who created all and provides for all.\(^{204}\) In this particular passage, as elsewhere, “fear” describes the reverence and respect that a lesser being must show toward the Almighty Triune King.

Because God reigns as the Almighty Sovereign King, the Creator of and Provider for all, one must “shudder” (\(\text{phrissō}\)) and “tremble” (\(\text{trĕmō}\))\(^{205}\) before him. The Greek term \(\text{phrissō}\) literally indicated shaking from fright.\(^{206}\) Literally, “tremble” or \(\text{trĕmō}\) denoted fearful quivering, but figuratively it carried the idea of standing in awe of something.\(^{207}\) Figuratively this term denotes humility and reverence. Given Evagrius’s use of \(\text{phŏbōs}\) here, we conclude that \(\text{phrissō}\) and \(\text{trĕmō}\) in this passage indicate not a fearful dread but rather humble reverential respect. The ascetic, in particular, must shudder and quiver with awe in the presence of God, recognizing that the Almighty Creator and Provider is Lord and King of all.\(^{208}\)

\(^{204}\) See Causes 11, examined earlier in the chapter.

\(^{205}\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 100. Ldysinger.com

\(^{206}\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 866.

\(^{207}\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 825.

\(^{208}\) Again, cf Causes, 11, where Evagrius makes this point most clear.
In prayer, then, the monk—in this case the gnostic who has been granted the gift of pure prayer—must “fear” the Almighty Sovereign Creator and Provider, as well as “quiver” and “shudder” before him. The terms “fear,” “quiver,” and “tremble” constitute the appropriate disposition an individual must adopt when communing with the One who reigns supreme as the Almighty Sovereign King of all and everything, the very King who expresses his sovereignty through the acts of creation and providence. And the prayerful monk, Evagrius points out, must be careful not to “disregard” God’s “unsurpassable awe” by becoming alarmed at “mosquitoes” and “dung-beetles.” The “mosquitoes” and “dung-beetles” represent demons, as evidenced by the previous paragraph in *Chapters on Prayer*, where Evagrius informs his readers that, in an attempt to keep the monk from prayer, the demons might “appear suddenly from thin air” and “injure” the praying monk, like “wild animals.” The goal of demons here, Evagrius explains, is to “scare” the monk.²⁰⁹ By focusing on the attack of the demons, the monk allows them to become the focus of prayer rather than God. Rather than “quivering” and “shuddering” before the Almighty Providential King, the monk does so before the demons. By taking alarm at the demons, the monk allows the evil beings to usurp the sovereign place that ought to be occupied by God alone. In the text under consideration, Evagrius chastises such idolatrous behavior, calling it “irrational.” The monk, in his prayer, must “fear” God alone, for the Triune God alone reigns as the

Almighty King, the “Creator and Supervisor of all.” God must be revered and feared because he is the Sovereign Creator and Provider, the “king of the universe which he made.”\textsuperscript{210} Prayer devoid of such reverential respect amounts to “vain” and “useless” prayer.\textsuperscript{211} Here we find yet another example in Evagrius’s writings of theological belief informing spirituality—particularly divine sovereignty informing prayer.

In another text in \textit{Chapters on Prayer}, Evagrius states: “If it is only when things go ill that you recall that the Judge is awe-inspiring and cannot be bribed, then you have not learnt to ‘serve the Lord with fear and rejoice in him with trembling’ \{Psm. 2:11\}. Know, then, that even in times of spiritual relaxation and good cheer it is necessary to serve him with piety and modesty.”\textsuperscript{212} As he does elsewhere, Evagrius uses the term \textit{kritou} (from \textit{kritēs}) for “Judge.”\textsuperscript{213} And it was pointed out above that “Judge” represents a designation for sovereignty.\textsuperscript{214} Evagrius describes the Sovereign Judge as “awe-inspiring,” using the term \textit{phŏbĕrŏs}. This term, which coheres with \textit{phŏbŏs}, denotes something or someone that engenders \textit{phŏbŏs} or fear.\textsuperscript{215} The point here is that the Sovereign Judge, since he is the almighty King of the universe, engenders the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{210}{See \textit{Notes on Ecclesiastes}, 38, examined earlier.}
\footnote{211}{See the above discussion of \textit{Causes} 11.}
\footnote{212}{\textit{Chapters on Prayer}, 143. In Casiday, \textit{Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 200.}
\footnote{213}{Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, \textit{Chapters on Prayer},” 143. Ldysinger.com. See the discussion above on \textit{kritēs}.}
\footnote{214}{See the discussion above.}
\footnote{215}{Arndt and Gingrich, p. 862.}
\end{footnotes}
unexcelled reverential respect signified by *phŏbōs*. Sinkewicz translates *phŏbĕrŏs* as “fearsome,” which captures the point well. This indicates that God serves as the source of the reverential, humble fear the monk exhibits in prayer.

Evagrius then describes the character of the Sovereign Judge, explaining that He “cannot be bribed.” The word used for “bribed,” *adĕkastōs*, denotes the idea of impartiality, in the sense of fairness. As such, the term describes one who is just, one who treats all equally and without prejudice. Here the term describes the just or fair character of the Sovereign Judge: he is just, impartial, and fair; his judgments cannot be bribed. Evagrius then goes on to declare that the human subject must respond to God the Judge with “fear,” “trembling,” “piety,” and “modesty.” Once again Evagrius uses *phŏbō* for “fear,” *trŏmŏs* for “trembling,” and *eulabeias* for “piety.” Both *phŏbōs* and *trŏmŏs* were used in *Causes* 11, which renders *phŏbōs* as “fear” (as it usually is), and *trŏmŏs* as “reverence.” As we saw in the *Causes* passage, the two terms describe the demeanor of one who entreats a sovereign ruler, and in particular the Sovereign Ruler. The circumstances are the same here; for one must “serve the Lord with fear (*phŏbō*) and rejoice in him with trembling (*trŏmŏ*).” As he does in *Causes* 11, Evagrius exhorts his readers to approach the Sovereign Judge with the reverential respect his exalted

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218 See, for example, *Notes on Ecclesiastes* 4, where Evagrius refers to God as “the source of goodness.” And as such, “he [God] is not the cause of evils.” In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 132.

219 Dysinger, “*Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,*” 143. Ldysinger.com
sovereignty requires. Furthermore, an individual must “serve” the Almighty Sovereign Judge with “piety” (*eulabeias*). In *Chapters on Prayer* 90, the term *eulabeias* is translated “reverence.” In that text, we noticed that *eulabeias* was juxtaposed with *phŏbŏs*, indicating that *eulabeias*, like *phŏbŏs*, describes the manner in which a lesser being approaches the Almighty Sovereign King.\(^{220}\) The praying monk, therefore, must approach the Judge, the Almighty Sovereign King of all, with the appropriate disposition. And such a disposition also includes *aidous* or “modesty.”\(^{221}\) According to Arndt and Gingrich, the term denotes humility of spirit; and when used with *eulabeias*—and here we have such a case—it indicates reverence and respect,\(^{222}\) particularly with regard to God. When one invokes God in prayer, he or she must do so in the spirit of humility, and such humility signifies reverence and hence *aidous*. Since Evagrius employs *aidous* with three other Greek terms describing the manner in which a monk should engage in prayer to the Sovereign One, we can only conclude that *aidous* too, at least in this text, describes the same disposition and manner.

In the text Evagrius does not specifically use the term “prayer,” but “serve” and “rejoice” appear to imply prayer.\(^{223}\) Pure prayer seems to be in view here, since chapters 141, 142, and 144-146 specifically address pure prayer. And this pure prayer—and most likely all prayer, by extension—must be governed by divine sovereignty, in this

\(^{220}\) See the above exposition of this passage.

\(^{221}\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer,*” 143. Ldysinger.com

\(^{222}\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 22.

\(^{223}\) The immediate context, specifically paragraphs 141-142 and 144-146, focuses on prayer.
case God as “Judge,” at all times, whether good or bad times. At all times, the monk must realize that in prayer he communes with the Sovereign King who will one day judge all. This Judge, who exercises sovereignty over all, is awesome and cannot be bribed, ultimately meaning that his judgment is fair and therefore just. Given this, the monk must exhibit “fear,” “trembling,” “piety,” and “modesty”—the very demeanor one exercises when communing with an Almighty Sovereign King, the Creator and Judge of all.

In *Chapters on Prayer* 12, Evagrius states, “Whenever temptation or disputation should come upon you, or provoke you to set in motion your irascibility or mutter some ignoble word for the sake of exacting revenge, remember prayer and the judgment that comes with it, and the disorderly movement in you will quickly settle down.”

“Prayer” (*prŏseuchēs*) here probably refers to pure prayer, as the context appears to indicate. Evagrius uses *krimatōs* for “judgment”—which denotes the function of passing judgment. The praying monk, in this text, must not allow his prayer to be governed by “irascibility”—i.e. anger. Such wrathful anger engenders thoughts of

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224 *Chapters on Prayer*, 12. In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 188.


226 The tenth paragraph speaks of “true prayer,” while the eleventh refers to “immaterial” and “thoughtless” prayer, all of which designates pure prayer, as chapter one explained.


228 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 450. Evagrius’s distinctive understanding of “judgment” was detailed earlier in the chapter under “Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”

229 Such “irascibility,” according to Evagrius, produces “beastly thoughts.” See *On Thoughts*, 5.
revenge, and it is ultimately demonic in its source.\textsuperscript{230} There is no place for such wrath in the monk’s life, let alone in his prayer.\textsuperscript{231} The monk never, according to Evagrius, has just cause to be wrathful toward his neighbor.\textsuperscript{232} Wrath toward one’s fellow human beings, Louth points out, actually “darkens the soul.”\textsuperscript{233} And according to Bunge, prayer and wrath toward one’s neighbor are “mutually exclusive,” just like “fire and water.”\textsuperscript{234} Such hateful wrath is foreign to the prayer life of the monk and must never be the controlling factor of his prayer.\textsuperscript{235} Rather, God’s role as judge, which embodies an

\textsuperscript{230} David Brakke, \textit{Demons and the Making of the Monk}, p. 70. According to Brakke, the demons attempt to “stir up” anger against one’s neighbor in hopes of thwarting pure prayer in particular. And Stewart indicates that anger “darkens” the mind of the praying ascetic: “Everything is shrouded as if by fog or clouds or smoke.” See Columba Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus on Prayer and Anger.” In \textit{Religions of Late Antiquity}, p. 67. And anger against others is, Clark notes, the primary “impediment” to prayer. See Elizabeth Clark, \textit{The Origenist Controversy}, p. 67. Sinkewicz also recognizes this point—namely, that unjust anger serves as a great obstacle to pure prayer. See Sinkewicz, \textit{Evagrius of Pontus}, p. xxix

\textsuperscript{231} See \textit{Chapters on Prayer}, 14. Here Evagrius indicates that “freedom from wrath” must characterize prayer, in this case pure prayer. Concerning anger and prayer, Stewart states, “Its [i.e. anger’s] effect on prayer was to obscure the mind, so preoccupying it that there was no psychic energy left to transcend resentment.” See Columba Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus on Anger and Prayer.” In \textit{Religions of Late Antiquity}, p. 65.

\textsuperscript{232} See \textit{Chapters on Prayer}, 24.

\textsuperscript{233} Andrew Louth, “Evagrius on Prayer.” In \textit{Stand-up to Godwards}, p. 167.

\textsuperscript{234} Gabriel Bunge, \textit{Dragon’s Wine and Angel’s Bread: the Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus on Anger and Meekness}, p. 59. In particular, Bunge explains, such wrath is incompatible with pure prayer.

\textsuperscript{235} Bunge indicates that Origen, too, stressed the importance of anger free prayer. See Gabriel Bunge, \textit{Earthen Vessels: The Practice of Personal Prayer According to the Patristic Tradition}, p. 96. And according to Sinkewicz, Macarius the Great also influenced Evagrius’s position on anger-free prayer. See Robert Sinkewicz, \textit{Evagrius of Pontus}, p. xviii. Gould also acknowledges Macarius’s influence on Evagrius here. See Graham Gould, \textit{The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community}, p. 171. However, Stewart explains that for Evagrius, there is a proper use of anger, particularly against demons and their evil thoughts. When used properly, anger is directed against evil, but never against one’s fellow man. See Columba Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus on Prayer and Anger.” In \textit{Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice}, p. 67. Dysinger, like Stewart, recognizes that when used properly, particularly against demonic enemies, anger serves as a “help” to the monk. See Dysinger, \textit{Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 30.
expression of his sovereign rule, must inform the monk’s prayer. The praying monastic must “remember” that his prayer is subject to the righteous sovereign judgment of the Sovereign Judge. Here the divine sovereignty of the all-powerful God, expressed in this text through the activity of judgment, must govern the spiritual exercise of prayer. The monk must “remember” that his actions and thoughts are subject to the just sovereign judgment of the King, so he must be careful not to offer impassioned or vice filled prayer. Again, as Dysinger pointed out previously, judgment must not be confused with punishment; for, according to Evagrius, in judgment God decides whether a being deserves a better environment, where they continue spiritual advancement, or a “gloomy, dark” environment. The monastic must conduct himself in a godly manner, lest he be judged unworthy of entering into an angelic realm.

We will now turn to a final text, found in *Eulogios*. In this lengthy passage, Evagrius recounts a story of a demonically assaulted monk. While this “brother” was keeping vigil, the demons sought to terrify him with visions or “fantasies.” Evagrius then states, “For while the demons were terrifying his soul in many ways, the sufferer besought God in prayer; and while they were distracting his soul with fantasies, he gathered up the mass of his faults and disclosed them to God who sees all. And in turn,

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236 See the above discussion on the concept of judgment.

237 Harmless cites a statement allegedly from Macarius the Great warning against wrath. “If we keep remembering the wrongs which men have done us, we destroy the power of the remembrance of God.” See William Harmless, *Desert Christians*, p. 195. This very well may indicate that Evagrius’s warnings against unjust anger derive from his spiritual mentor Macarius.

when they tried to draw his eye from prayer, he countered with the fear of judgment and wiped out his fear of phantasms.”

Here Evagrius uses euchē for “prayer” rather than the usual prŏseuchē. Initially euchē signified an oath or vow, and thus came to mean prayer.

Confession appears to represent the type of prayer addressed in the passage. The statement “he gathered up the mass of his faults and disclosed them to God who sees all” appears to suggest this. Like he does in Chapters on Prayer 12, Evagrius uses krisis (krisĕōs) for “judgment,” a term referring to “judgment” as the “activity” of a judge. As the passage indicates, the demonic host attempts to thwart the monastic’s prayer; but the monk perseveres in his prayer by focusing upon the judgment of the Judge, and he does so with “fear” (phŏbŏs). Once again, Evagrius uses this term, thus indicating the disposition the monk must have toward the Sovereign King and Judge of all. In other words, the monastic exhibits such fear or humble reverence because in prayer he communes with the Sovereign King. The “fear” is directed toward the

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239 Eulogios, 27. In Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 54.

240 Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 329-330.

241 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 329.

242 Cf. Chapters on Prayer 43, which uses similar language—“Perception of prayer is mental focus with piety, contrition and pain of soul in announcing one’s errors, with voiceless groaning.” This passage was examined earlier in the chapter.

243 Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 329.

244 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 452.

245 Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 329.

246 See the earlier discussions of Causes, 11, and Chapters on Prayer, 100.
judgment and thus to the Judge, who passes the judgment.\footnote{But here Evagrius also uses \textit{phŏbŏs} for “fear of phantasms.” Earlier in our discussion of \textit{Causes} 11, it was explained that the Greek term can in fact mean “fear” in the sense of “frightful terror.” The context would appear to suggest that Evagrius intends this meaning for “fear of phantasms.” But when used to describe one’s relationship to God, who “loves and nurtures human beings” (see \textit{Eulogios} 11), the term does not indicate terror but reverential respect. In \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 43, examined earlier, Evagrius juxtaposes “fear” of God with “serving” and “rejoicing” in God. So “fear” of God is attended by service and rejoicing, a far cry from the notion of “terror.”} This passage coheres with \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 100, examined above. In the \textit{Chapters} text, Evagrius admonishes the praying monk to keep his focus upon the Divine King. The Divine King, not the demons, must serve as the governing principle of the monk’s prayer. The circumstances are very similar in the text under consideration. Rather than allowing himself to become distracted by the demonic onslaught, the monk must focus upon the “judgment” of the Sovereign Judge. In this passage, the sovereign activity of judgment focuses and governs the monk’s prayer. Here we find yet another instance of divine sovereignty governing and informing prayer.

We will now move to the third chapter, which will detail the relationship in Evagrius’s thought between pure prayer and divine providence.
CHAPTER THREE

PURE PRAYER AND DIVINE PROVIDENCE

Divine Providence in the Thought of Evagrius

In the previous chapter, we touched upon the notion of divine providence, which forms one of the most important aspects of Evagrius’s thought. The third chapter will investigate Evagrius’s understanding of providence in depth, intending to illustrate the relationship between this theological concept and pure prayer. In the thought of Evagrius, we discern an intrinsic link between pure prayer and divine providence. Apart from the providential intervention of God, pure prayer would be unachievable. Pure prayer, as we shall see, represents an important expression of divine providence. The relationship between these two concepts provides us with perhaps the most solid example of the connection in Evagrius’s thought between theological belief and spiritual practice.

We will begin with an overview of Evagrius’s view of providence, because we must first understand how Evagrius defines the concept before understanding the relationship between the concept and pure prayer. The first section of the chapter, then, will provide a definition of Evagrius’s view of providence, and the second will focus on the relationship between providence and pure prayer.

Dysinger gives a clear definition of Evagrius’s position on divine providence:
Evagrius uses the term ‘providence’ to describe God’s ongoing provision of what each logikos<sup>1</sup> requires in order for it to return to divine union. The reader of Evagrius’ *Scholia on Psalms* discovers that although providence is ultimately ordered to eschatological reunion with God, it is also present in everyday experience: providence is the basis of both the ascetical labor of the praktike and the contemplative search of the gnostike.<sup>2</sup>

In support of his claim, Dysinger appeals to Evagrius’s work on the book of Psalms, particularly the comment given on Psalm 138:16,<sup>3</sup> where Evagrius states:

> The book of God is the contemplation of bodies and incorporeal [beings] in which a purified nous comes to be written through knowledge. For in this book are written the logoi of providence and judgment, through which book God is known as creator, wise, provident, and judging: creator from the things that have come from non-being into being; wise through his concealed logoi; provident through those contributing to our virtue and knowledge; and furthermore judge, through the variety of the bodies of the reasoning beings, and through the multiform worlds and the [beings] who comprise those ages.<sup>4</sup>

Here Evagrius mentions his well known term “logoi of providence and judgment.” The Greek lŏgoi, from the familiar lŏgŏs, had various applications in early Christian literature. It denoted “speaking,” as in “speech,” as well as “written speech,” “God’s word”—i.e. God’s verbal utterance—“the divine revelation through Christ,” and

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<sup>1</sup> That is, reasoning being.


<sup>3</sup> We alluded to this passage above in our examination of Evagrius’s definition of “judge” and “judgment.” See chapter two.

<sup>4</sup> Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 171-172.
“account.” However, Arndt and Gingrich point out that the term also denotes “reason” and “motive.” Evagrius appears to have the latter meanings in mind—for by the “logoi of providence and judgment” he means the “reasons” for providence and judgment. For “providence,” Evagrius uses prōnoias. We came across this term in the previous chapter but now will examine it more closely. The Greek noun prōnoia (the verb form, prōnōēō) denotes gracious care, in the sense of thoughtful planning to meet one’s needs. And according to Danker, the term means “to give careful thought to,” “to think about beforehand in a solicitous manner,” and “thoughtful planning to meet a need.” The definitions indicate clearly that prōnoia does not involve an arbitrary sort of assistance but thoughtful care, a caring and providing that are well planned in advance. Given this, the term could be translated “forethought.” And furthermore, particularly for Evagrius, God’s sovereign activity of providence tells much about God himself: he is a loving God who cares for his creation, specifically for humanity. Let us go back to Evagrius’s statement in Eulogios, “Serve God with fear and love: in the first case as

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5 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 477-478.
6 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 478.
7 Both Casiday and Sinkewicz support this reading of the term. See Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 222, note 75; and Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 139, note 7. The “motives” or purposes of judgment are found, according to Evagrius, “in the diversity of bodies and worlds,” and for providence they are found in “the means through which we return from vice and ignorance to virtue and knowledge.” See Gnostikos 48. In Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 175.
8 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 708.
9 Danker, p. 872.
master and judge, in the second as one who loves and nurtures human beings.”

“Love” translates the Greek philanthrōpō, from philanthrōpia—meaning “love for mankind.” When applied to the Divine Being, the term denotes the benevolent, loving kindness of God directed to human beings, and thus it would include divine providence, which certainly would express loving kindness, as we shall see. The word for “nurtures” is trŏphei, which means “nurture” in the sense of rearing. God “nurtures” or “rears” monastics by administering his providence—providing for their spiritual and physical needs. The Sovereign King, Creator, Provider, and Judge is therefore a loving Sovereign Master who lovingly rears and nurtures his creatures. He is not a cruel lord but the loving Lord. And the love of God finds its expression in divine prōnoia. Driscoll, recognizing this point, states, “The fallen minds were not abandoned by God, who is merciful and provident.”

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11 Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 316.

12 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 858.

13 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 858.

14 Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 316.

15 Liddell and Scott, p. 1827.

16 This will become evident in the section addressing pure prayer and providence, as well as in the next chapter.

17 Jeremy Driscoll, The Ad Monachos of Evagrius Ponticus: Its Structure and a Select Commentary, p. 9. Dysinger cites Evagrius’s comment on Psalm 106:21, where Evagrius indicates that divine providence ultimately reflects the merciful character of God. “Let them acknowledge to the Lord his mercies (Psm. 106:21). The one who understands the logoi (i.e. reasons) for providence—he extols the Lord’s mercies.” See Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 188.
In the above cited comment on Psalm 138:16, to which we now return, Evagrius informs his readers that God is known as “provident through those contributing to our virtue and knowledge.” The term for “those contributing,” ta sündĕlounta, from the verb sündĕlĕō, denotes the act of fulfilling something or accomplishing. The statement could then be translated, “God is known as provident through the things which accomplish or fulfill our virtue and knowledge.” Dysinger explains the meaning of this, saying, “Providence’ is here defined as what God does to help the logikoi attain the goals of the praktike and the theoretike, namely our ‘virtue and knowledge.’” Dysinger further states, “Here Evagrius employs the key terms ‘virtue’ and ‘knowledge’ to indicate that providence is active throughout the spiritual journey in both praktike and gnostike. In every aspect of daily life it is providence which affords the possibility of acting virtuously and seeking God. At the level of the praktike providence is the grace which helps one resist sin and strive for virtue. For the gnostikos providence assists in the acquisition of spiritual knowledge.”

18 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 792.

19 Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 172. According to Driscoll, “The whole arrangement, which is designed for the mind’s reintegration, is called ‘providence.’” This “whole arrangement” involves the provision of bodies for the fallen souls, as well as the provision of a world upon which the fallen beings dwell. And the “arrangement” includes the practical and gnostic lives and everything they entail, through which one attains union with God. Through the spiritual life, arranged by providence, the fallen mind progressively, in stages, moves toward union with God. See Jeremy Driscoll, The Ad Monachos of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 9, 11, 15. Driscoll essentially makes the same point in another work, explaining that the entire process back to God was arranged by providence, and this would undoubtedly include the spiritual path of the practical life and the gnostic life. See Driscoll, “Spiritual Progress in the Works of Evagrius Ponticus,” p. 78.

20 Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 184-185.
means by providence or prônoia. Divine providence, for Evagrius, refers to loving grace whereby God provides for the needs of the monastic throughout the entire spiritual journey of the practical life and the gnostic life. From the beginning of the “practical life” to the very end of the “gnostic life,” the gracious King grants the monastic the grace for spiritual fulfillment, and in so doing the King shows himself to be loving, merciful, and graceful.

Evagrius also defines providence in other places in his writings.

‘Exercise yourself continuously in the *logoi* of providence and judgment,’ says the great *gnostikos* and teacher Didymus, ‘and strive to bear in your memory their material [expressions]; for nearly all are brought to stumbling through this. And you will discover the *logoi* of judgment in the diversity of bodies and worlds, and those of providence in the means by which we return from vice and ignorance to virtue and knowledge.’

Again, Evagrius indicates that divine providence extends throughout the entire spiritual life of the monastic. The key terms here are “virtue” and “knowledge,” which, as already pointed out, signify the practical life and the gnostic life—and thus the whole of the spiritual life culminating in pure prayer. At each phase of the spiritual life, God

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21 Regnault notes that the Desert Fathers’ dependence on divine providential grace distinguishes them from other ascetics. “Contrary to pagan ascetics, they [the Desert Fathers] counted most of all on divine grace.” See L. Regnault, *The Day-to-Day Life of the Desert Fathers*, p. 120.

22 Bamberger rightly points out that the first act of divine providence was the creation of the present universe. “Creation of the material world was an act of God’s mercy for the reason that it is in these bodies that salvation is to be gained and bestowed.” See John Eudes Bamberger, “Desert Calm: Evagrius Ponticus: the Theologian as Spiritual Guide,” 191.

23 *Gnostikos*, 48. In Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 175. Regarding the reference to Didymus the Blind, Dysinger explains that “the phrase ‘logoi of providence and judgment’ is not found in any of Didymus’ extant writings. Didymus writes at least twice of the ‘logos of providence’ and he associates judgment with providence in ten texts.” But, Dysinger explains, the phrase itself is not found in Didymus and is most likely original with Evagrius. See Dysinger, p. 175.
graciously assists the monastic through divine providence or “the means by which we return from vice and ignorance to virtue and knowledge” or, according to the above comment on Psalm 138:16, “the things contributing to our virtue and knowledge.”

This text and the comment on Psalms indicate that the monastic cannot accomplish the spiritual journey back to immaterial union with God apart from divine gracious provision. In other words, the texts do not present providence as a mere option but as a stark necessity. The gracious forethought of God, therefore, is absolutely essential for the spiritual life in its entirety.

For instance, in his commentary on Psalm 126:1, Evagrius states, “‘Unless the Lord build the house, in vain do they labor who build it; unless the Lord keeps watch over the city, in vain does the watcher keep vigil.’ Useful is this saying for the [tempting] thoughts of pride.”

The Greek term oikōdōmēsē renders “build.” The term refers to the literal building or erecting of something, such as a house or monument. But Arndt and Gingrich point out that the term also carries the figurative meaning of inner or spiritual edification—that is, a building up of the spirit, so to speak. In either case, whether literal or figurative, the term describes the work of a worker—in the literal sense, the work of building a house, and in the figurative, the edifying work done by the edifier. Evagrius probably intends spiritual edification, since monastic spirituality marks

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24 The “means” and “things” of providence will be discussed below.

25 Scholia on Psalms, scholion 1 on Psalm 126:1. In Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 145.

26 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 558.
his main concern in all his writings. 27 For “watches,” the passage uses phülaxe, from phülasseō, the term Evagrius uses in Notes on Ecclesiastes, 38, which we examined last chapter. 28 There we noticed that the term denotes the careful guarding or watching of someone or something, with the intent of preserving and providing protection. 29 In this text specifically, God performs the “building” and does the “protecting,” thereby manifesting his gracious provision. Here Evagrius does not provide the specifics concerning the nature of the providential help God gives, but we can conclude that such providential assistance is necessary; for without it the human builder builds in vain and the human watchman watches in vain. Apart from the providential assistance of God, the monk cannot advance toward divine union. 30 Dysinger adds a helpful comment, “Here Evagrius employs Psalm 126:1 to remind his reader that nothing can be accomplished without God’s help” (italics mine). 31

In another place, Evagrius writes, “For the soul that has by God’s aid rightly pursued ascetic struggle and been loosened from the body will be in the places of knowledge where the feathers of imperturbability will give it rest and whence it will at length receive the wings of that Holy Dove, and take flight through the contemplation of

27 See Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 35.

28 “Know, rather, that God watches [phülassei] over all things through Christ…” In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 142.

29 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 868.

30 This point will be made quite clear in the second section of the present chapter and in the next chapter.

31 Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 145.
all ages, and be at rest in the knowledge of the venerable Trinity.”

Here Evagrius mentions both divisions of the spiritual life. He designates the practical life, or praktikē, by the term “ascetic struggle,” and the gnostic life with the terms “contemplation” (thēōrēō) and “knowledge” (gnōsis).

In both divisions, we find the providential work of God operating. The monk fulfills the practical life, according to Evagrius, with the “aid” of God. Through this providential aid, the ascetic enters the state of apatheia, here translated “imperturbability.” The monk, therefore, does not accomplish the praktikē in his own strength but through the provision of God. This clearly coheres with Evagrius’s understanding of prônoia, for as Dysinger pointed out earlier, divine providence constitutes “God’s ongoing provision of what each lôgikōs requires” for its return to God.

Evagrius does not specify the exact form the “aid” takes, but regardless of its form, it certainly marks the “ongoing provision” the monk needs to accomplish the practical life. Furthermore, in the passage, this divine providence or “ongoing provision” extends to the gnostic life. Here God the Holy Spirit, “that Holy Dove,” grants the provision; for the monk engages in the “contemplation of all ages” and acquires “knowledge of the Trinity” by taking “flight” on the “wings” of the Spirit. The “contemplation of all ages” refers to the first stage of the gnostic life, natural

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33 See the above exposition of Evagrius’s comment on Psalm 138:16.

34 Casiday uses this term of apatheia throughout his volume.

35 Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 184.
contemplation. And the “knowledge of the Trinity” indicates pure prayer—we noticed in the first chapter that Evagrius identifies such “knowledge [or gnōsis] of the Trinity” with pure prayer. So here both natural contemplation and knowledge of God occur through divine provision. As elsewhere, Evagrius does not explain how exactly the Spirit provides, but that the monk “receives” the Spirit’s “wings” and “takes flight” on them indicates divine provision; in some fashion, the Spirit serves as the agent of the here mentioned contemplation and knowledge of God. The monastic does not grasp the Spirit’s “wings” through his own strength; rather, they are given to him. And it is on the Spirit’s wings that the monk engages in natural contemplation and knowledge of God; it is therefore not through his own abilities that the monastic acquires contemplation and divine knowledge but through the providential work of the Holy Spirit.

We now turn to two related texts in Kephalaia Gnostica. First, commenting upon God’s providential grace, Evagrius states, “Spiritual Sensation is apatheia of the reasoning soul, produced by the grace of God.” And then, in the second text, Evagrius states further, “Who will recount the grace of God? Who will scrutinize the logoi of providence and how the Christ leads the reasoning nature by [means of] varied worlds

36 See Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 271, note 44.

37 See the second section of chapter one, specifically under “Pure Prayer.”

38 It is important to bear in mind that Evagrius was not a systematic dogmatic theologian, so we should not find it surprising that ambiguity characterizes some of his statements.

39 The second section of the chapter will investigate in depth the relationship between providence and pure prayer.

to the union of the Holy Unity.” In the first text, Evagrius once again alludes to *apatheia*. This spiritual state, Evagrius explains, results from the “grace of God.” The monk does not achieve this, then, in his own power alone; he requires the grace of the Sovereign Lord. We must keep in mind Evagrius’s allusion to Psalm 126:1 examined earlier, which teaches figuratively that the monk can only be victorious in the spiritual life through the providential assistance of God. In the second *Kephalaia Gnostica* text, Evagrius directly links “providence” with “grace.” Divine provision is thus identified with the loving kindness of God. Divine provision or *prōnoia*, in which God leads a being to divine union, is thus an expression of the grace of God. Since the *Kephalaia Gnostica* no longer exists in the original Greek, we cannot be certain whether Evagrius uses *charis* for “grace.” But whatever term he used, we can be certain that he meant to denote the love of God, by which the Sovereign Lord lovingly and providentially provides for the spiritual needs of his creatures. Of interest here is the christological allusion in the text. Specifically, in this particular passage, Christ supplies the providential grace by which an individual is led to God. Most of the time, Evagrius refers to the Divine Provider with the term “God,” while at other times he specifically mentions Christ or the Holy Spirit as

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42 But, as we shall see below, the monk is not absolutely passive in all of this.
the Divine Caregivers. Nevertheless, for Evagrius, divine providence represents a Trinitarian work.

We will now turn to a lengthy statement made by Evagrius in his work *Eight Thoughts*. Chastising the prideful monk, Evagrius writes:

You have nothing good which you have not received from God. Why then do you glory in another’s (good) as if it were your own? Why then do you pride yourself in the grace of God as if it were your own possession? Acknowledge the one who gave it and do not exalt yourself so much. You are a creature of God; do not reject the Creator. You receive help from God; do not deny your benefactor. You have mounted to the height of this way of life, but he has guided you. You have attained the accomplishments of virtue, but he has wrought this together with you. Confess the one who exalted you that you may remain secure on the heights. You are a human being; remain in the bounds of your nature.

The second section of the chapter will provide a solid example of the providential work of the Holy Spirit, and multiple examples of the providential grace of Christ will be provided in the fourth chapter. However, it bears mentioning that for Evagrius, the Incarnation of God the Word represents the ultimate expression or “means” of divine providence. Evagrius expounds this concept most clearly in *The Great Letter*. “It is unnatural that God should be ‘born from a woman’ [Gal. 4:4]. Yet, because of his love for us and since his nature is not bound by or subject to any law, God was born from a woman in keeping with his will (so that his being was not destroyed), to free us from the conception and birth of the curse and transgression and to bear us anew in a birth of blessing and righteousness.” See *The Great Letter*, 57. In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 75. On this same point, Dysinger states, “Unaided the *nous* cannot rise above the world of sin and death to which it is subject. Re-ascent to its first rank is only possible because of what God accomplished through the incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ.” See Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 38. (By “re-ascent to its first rank,” Dysinger means immaterial reunion with God, which will find complete fulfillment in the eschaton.) And according to O’Laughlin, “Without Christ there can be, for Evagrius, no escape from the human predicament. God’s love is manifested in Christ’s actions on our behalf.” See Micahel O’Laughlin, “Origenism in the Desert,” p. 117. Therefore, the Incarnation makes possible the “re-ascent” to God accomplished through the practical life and the gnostic life.

Again, let us return to *On the Faith*, 33, examined in the previous chapter. In this text Evagrius indicates that all three members of the Trinity are involved in “the transition from worse to better.” In the previous chapter we noticed that this involves the spiritual path of the practical life and the gnostic life, which, as pointed out above, forms the very focus of divine providence.

The Greek text was not available.

The phrases “this way of life” and “accomplishments of virtue” refer to the monastic life. The monk’s monastic achievements, Evagrius indicates, result not from his own abilities alone but through the provision of God, which enables the monk to make spiritual achievement. But the monk is not completely passive in this enterprise; he has a part to play—“You have attained the accomplishments of virtue, but he has wrought this together with you.” However, Bunge explains that for Evagrius, the grace of God always goes before human effort—that is, priority belongs to the providential grace of the King. For Evagrius, Bunge indicates, ascetic achievement occurs through the grace of God and human effort, but “in that order!” The monk, according to the passage, has advanced in the monastic life only because he has been “guided” by the providential King. This appears to indicate the priority of divine providential grace. So the monastic must be careful not to “exalt” himself. In fact, “you have nothing good which you have not received from God.” Everything, therefore, that the monk has and does came and continues to come through the providential assistance of God.

47 Sinkewicz suggests that Eight Thoughts was intended for those engaged specifically in the practical life. See Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 68.

48 More will be said below about the monk’s contribution.

49 Bunge, Earthen Vessels: The Practice of Personal Prayer According to the Patristic Tradition, p. 41. And Sinkewicz states, “After much effort and with the assistance of God, the monk gradually achieves some degree of control over the passions and approaches the threshold of impassibility [apatheia].” The point here is that human effort cooperates with the providential grace of God. See Robert Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. xxxi.

50 The priority of divine providential grace will become quite evident in the second section of the chapter, where we will investigate the relationship between providence and pure prayer.
Such a statement says much about Evagrius’s view of the Sovereign Master: the Almighty King is not a tyrant but a loving Sovereign Lord who provides what is necessary for “each ‘logikos’ to return to divine reunion.” God’s giving of “good” things to the monk, his acting as “benefactor” to the monk, and his “guiding” of the monk all denote necessary provision and thus cohere with Evagrius’s definition of providence or prōnoia given above. It is ultimately by the “grace” of God, according to Evagrius, that the monk advances in the monastic life. And the monk does not possess this grace by right, for the grace of God is not the monk’s “own possession.” Rather, God graciously grants grace to the monk, thereby demonstrating His own graciousness and love. And the monk, Evagrius indicates, must “acknowledge” God who grants the provision. In other words, Evagrius exhorts the reader to acknowledge his dependence upon the One who providentially and graciously enables him to advance in the spiritual life, lest the monk lose his security “on the heights”—i.e. the “heights” of ascetic achievement—and fall into pride.

Evagrius refers to the monastic life and divine providential grace elsewhere, writing, “As for those who have received from grace the strength for ascetic labors, let them not think that they possess this from their own power, for the word of the

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52 See Dysinger’s definition of Evagrian providence given earlier in the chapter.

53 This particular text does not provide examples of the forms or expressions of divine providential grace. However, some of the texts examined below do provide such examples.

54 The eighth chapter of *Eight Thoughts* focuses primarily on pride.
commandments is for us the cause of all good things, just as the Deceiver is for evil suggestions. For the good things you accomplish, therefore, offer thanksgiving to the cause of good things.”

“Grace” translates the Greek *charitōs*, which denotes the unmerited granting of favor and help—and thus was used in early Christian literature to signify Divine grace. According to Arndt and Gingrich, *charitōs* refers to the “practical application of goodwill.” And in the text Evagrius teaches that the strength for “ascetic labors” derives from such grace. The Sovereign Master therefore providentially or graciously supplies the strength for ascetic accomplishment, once again illustrating the dependence of the ascetic upon the Divine Caregiver, and also manifesting divine love and nurture; for the ascetic does not “possess” such providential grace in himself.

Earlier in our exposition of the two key texts that define divine providence—*Scholia on Psalms*, 138:16, and *Gnostikos*, 48—we noticed that providence (*prōnoia*) involves “things” and “means” whereby God leads the *lōgikoi* back to union with himself. In other words, divine providential grace takes various forms. And the passage under consideration mentions one of these means, “the word of the commandments.”

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57 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 877.

58 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 877.

59 “Ascetic labors” essentially denotes the *praktikē* or practical life. See Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 34.

60 See *Eulogios*, 11, examined earlier in the chapter.
By this term, Evagrius normally means the commands given in the Old Testament, or the Law. But Evagrius does not limit this to the Decalogue, for in the Psalms we find such “commands,” as well as in the New Testament. Here Evagrius equates divine grace with the Holy Scriptures. Here the Scriptures represent one of the gracious providential “means” by which God exercises providence. This grace—“the word of the commandments”—finds its origin in God, not in man, for God is the author of the Scriptures, and he has providentially given the Commandments to the ascetic for spiritual instruction. The Scriptures, then, are a providential gracious gift given to the monastic by God.

For more on divine providence, we return to Notes on Ecclesiastes, 38, where Evagrius extols the sovereign providence of the Divine King. In the analysis given to this passage in the previous chapter, it was explained that divine providence represents an expression of divine sovereignty. The earlier analysis explained that in the passage, Evagrius asserts the scope of divine sovereignty—it extends to the whole world, and all “worlds” by extension, since God is the creator of all worlds. However, there are a few

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61 See, for example, Eulogios, 21.

62 See Eulogios, 6 and 22.

63 See On the Faith, 4, where Evagrius refers to holy writ as “the divine Scriptures.” In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 47.

64 The present work, Eight Thoughts, serves as an example. All of the eight evil thoughts, as well as their opposites, are referenced in the Scriptures. Again, let us remember that Evagrius, following Origen, discerned multiple meanings in the biblical text, often emphasizing the spiritual meaning more than the literal. See Jeremy Driscoll, The Ad Monachos of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 19-20.

65 The reader should refer to the beginning of the second chapter, which cites the passage in full.
other issues requiring attention. In the passage, as we have already seen, Evagrius explains that “God [the Father] watches over all things through Christ.” The “watching” (Greek phüllasei), as we noticed earlier, represents divine providence, with a christological focus, as the Father appears to exercise providence through the Son. It is thus through the Son that the Father provides for and keeps the entire creation, in particular human beings. Also of interest is Evagrius’s allusion to angels, for the Father “watches over all things through Christ and he for his part, knowing everything upon the earth, exercises providence for them through the mediation of the holy angels.” As explained earlier, Evagrius uses prônēei, from prônēō, for “providence.” In the previous analysis of this text given in the second chapter, we noticed that pantōn, which translates “for them,” designates the world and all things belonging to it. So through angelic agency, the Father and the Son (and the Spirit as well) exercise universal provision. The angels represent the special agents whereby God exercises much of his providence. In Evagrius, Dysinger explains, there exists a “chain” of providential

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66 See chapter two.

67 Again, the fourth chapter will provide extended examples of the providential work of Christ, specifically with regard to combat against demonic forces.


69 See chapter two.

70 See the exposition given this term earlier in the chapter.

71 See chapter two.
mediation “which has at its summit Christ.”

Dysinger continues, “According to Evagrius every order of intelligence above the human level is entrusted with responsibility for mediating divine providence. Angels are entrusted with responsibility for human beings; archangels are responsible for angels; and so on into ‘ages and worlds’ of which human beings know nothing.” This mediation of divine providence, especially with regard to angels, represents a key theme in Evagrius’s position on divine providence, and it is therefore worth investigating further.

Evagrius, commenting on Psalm 16:13, states:

Deliver my soul from the ungodly; [draw] your sword because of the enemies of your hand.

And the holy angels are the beneficent hand of God, through which God providentially cares for the sensible world, which [angels] are opposed by the demons who do not wish ‘all men to be saved and come to knowledge of the truth’ (1 Tim. 2:4).

The angels, the “hand of God,” serve as the agents of God’s providence in this text. Through them, God grants his providential care. Evagrius uses the usual prŏnŏai (from prŏnŏĕō) for “providentially.” The “sensible world” (kŏsmŏn, from kŏsmŏs) more than

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72 Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 185.

73 Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 185.

74 The angels, according to Bamberger, provide assistance to the “less advanced”—i.e. human beings. See Bamberger, “Desert Calm: Evagrius Ponticus: the Theologian as Spiritual Guide,” p. 191. Elsewhere, Bamberger points out that angels “enlighten” and “assist men on their upward path.” See Bamberger, Evagrius Ponticus: the Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer, lxix.

75 Scholia on Psalms, scholion 7 on Psalm 16:13. In Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 185.

76 Evagrius’s definition and application of the term were noted earlier in the chapter.
likely refers to the whole of the earth specifically, as we will notice just below. The world then represents the providential domain of angels. Evagrius makes this point also in *Notes on Ecclesiastes* 38: “Moses showed that the Lord has entrusted this world to angels when he said, ‘When the Most High separated the nations, as he dispersed the children of Adam, he set the boundaries of the nations in accordance with the number of the angels of God’ [Deut. 32:8].” Here “this world” (*kōsmōn* for world) refers specifically to the whole earth, as indicated by the context—the juxtaposition of *kōsmōn* with “nations” *ēthnē* would appear to support this. The Greek for “entrusted” is *pēpisteukēn*, from *pisteuō*. *Pisteuō* was used in early Christian literature to denote faith and trust in someone—for instance, trusting someone’s testimony, and particularly trusting in Christ. Here *pēpisteukēn* carries the idea of having entrusted something to someone, such as a task. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the angels are not the primary source of divine providence; this belongs to God alone. The above cited comment on Psalm 16:13 makes this point quite clear, for God “providentially cares for the sensible world through the angels”—so the actual operation of providential grace

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77 Cf Evagrius’s use of *kōsmōs* in *Notes on Ecclesiastes*, 38, examined in chapter two. There the term denotes the whole world, over which God, through Christ, administers providential care “through the mediation of the holy angels.” In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 142.


80 In an earlier exposition given this passage, we noted that *ēthnē* was used in reference to the various “peoples” and thus “nations” of the earth. See chapter two.


82 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 661-662.
belongs to God. The angels merely constitute the agency by which God operates divine provision. The angels, according to the comment on Psalm 16:13, represent the “hand of God”—which means that the angels represent the operating instruments of God, much in the same way that the hand serves as the operating agency of the human person.83

Evagrius has more to offer on this important subject in Thoughts 6, examined earlier.84 “I think it is redundant to write concerning the fact that one ought not to be anxious about clothing or food, since our Savior himself forbade this in the Gospels....This is obviously the part of heathens and unbelievers who set aside the Master’s providence and deny the Creator. But it is utterly foreign to Christians, once they have believed that even ‘the two sparrows that are bought for a copper’ are under the stewardship of the holy angels.”85 Here Evagrius focuses on the basic necessities of life, and unfortunately these concerns drive the ascetic to act like an “unbeliever.” Evagrius points out the foolishness of such unbelief; the monk need not be concerned, since God, through the agency of angels, provides for such necessities. Here divine providence finds its expression in the provision of basic necessities, such as food and

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83 Of course, angels are the hand of God not literally but figuratively. Concerning angelic providence, Sinkewicz states, “In the Evagrian theological system angels serve an important function as intermediaries between God and human beings. At the second creation the angels were entrusted with assisting and guiding human beings.” See Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 188.

84 See chapter two.

85 On Thoughts, 6. In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 94.
clothing. Again, we must remember that providential care ultimately belongs to God, since it is the “Master’s providence.” The angels, as in the previous passage, function as the instruments by which God grants the provision.

We now turn to a text that explains some of the ways in which God exercises divine provision through angels, especially for the spiritual advancement of the monastic. “Holy angels instruct some men through the word; they bring others back by means of dreams; they render still others chaste by nocturnal terrors, and they make others return to virtue through blows.” Here again we find divine providence taking the form of “the word,” or the Holy Scriptures. Divine provision takes place through instruction in the Holy Scriptures, which, as our exposition of Eulogios 14 mentioned, are a gift of God’s providential grace. In some manner, the angels use the Scriptures providentially to guide the monk “back” to union with the Holy Trinity. The Holy Scriptures, therefore, form one of the “means” by which God grants providential care. Moreover, through angelic agency, God uses dreams as an instrument of his providence. Although Evagrius does not provide examples of such providential instruction through dreams, he probably has particular biblical stories in mind, such as Matthew 1:20-25, where the angel instructs Joseph in a dream to take Mary as his wife. Nevertheless,

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86 Also see Chapters on Prayer 129, which also mentions provision for such necessities. The fourth chapter will discuss this text.


88 See Eulogios, 14, examined earlier in the chapter.

89 However, Evagrius does not explain exactly how the angels employ the Scriptures.
despite the lack of examples, the text indicates that at times, divine provision takes the form of instruction through dreams. “Nocturnal terrors” form yet another “means” of providential action. These nocturnal terrors probably include various forms of demonic attack. Through the angels, the Sovereign King uses even the demons to provide for an individual; divine providence, in this case, takes the form of chastisement. Also, the angels use “blows,” attempting to restore the monk, apparently the wayward monk, to virtuous living. Divine chastisement, then, forms one of the means of gracious providence—gracious and provident because the blows intend restoration. Here the Sovereign King intends not to hurt the wayward person but to effect repentance graciously. Apparently, the person needs such corrective action. As noted earlier, divine prōnoia involves “God’s ongoing provision of what each logikos requires in order for it to return to divine union.” At times the human person apparently “requires” divine chastisement for him or her to return to God, and here God, through the angels, administers providential chastising “blows.”

Earlier, allusion was made to the relationship between divine providence and human effort. It was mentioned that although divine providential grace is absolutely

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90 See, for example, Praktikos 54, which mentions nocturnal demonic attacks.

91 Addressing the relationship between mercy and providence in Evagrius, Dysinger states, “Paradoxically, however, this ‘mercy’ which Evagrius equates with providence may sometimes take an unexpected, painful form. Cries of anguish and pleas for divine assistance which recur throughout the psalter provide opportunities for Evagrius to explain that God sometimes abandons the soul, not in condemnation but rather out of mercy...This seeming abandonment should not, however, be interpreted as a complete withdrawal of divine aid, but rather as a providential act of God intended to lead the soul to repentance.” See Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 188.

92 Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 184.
necessary for spiritual advancement, human effort does in fact occupy a central place in
the spiritual enterprise. In other words, the human subject must cooperate with divine
providence. Dysinger appeals to Evagrius’s *Scholia on Psalms* in support of this claim:

Those who labor at the *praktike* with painful effort and tears are sowing in tears; those who effortlessly receive a share in knowledge are reaping with rejoicing. However, one should note in this saying that we come into [this] life possessing all the seeds of the virtues. And just as tears fall with the seeds, so with the sheaves there is joy.  

Dysinger then offers an important comment on the text.

For Evagrius the ‘seeds of the virtues’ represent our capacity to cooperate with divine providence and make spiritual progress. Since, as will be described, Evagrius believed that these ‘seeds’ can never be destroyed, it follows that the possibility of cooperating with providence and returning to God always remains, even for *logikoi* which have moved very far from God.

These “seeds of the virtues” have been implanted in every single “reasoning being,” as Dysinger’s comment intimates, thus making it possible for each being, no matter how far it has fallen from God, to cooperate with the grace of providence. Earlier we noticed human effort cooperating with divine providence, specifically in *Eight Thoughts*, 8.12. Here Evagrius admonishes the prideful monk, reminding him that “you have attained the accomplishments of virtue, but he [God] has wrought this together with you.” The term “together” implies Divine/human cooperation; the monk has a part to play. For

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94 See Evagrius’s comment on Proverbs 5:14, where he states explicitly that “the seeds of virtue [are] indestructible.” In Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 194.


96 See the exposition given this text earlier in the chapter.
Evagrius, divine providence guides, strengthens, and provides realities for the monk that he cannot provide for himself, but providence does not coerce or force. God is in fact sovereign, but in his sovereignty he allows the monk to make free choices. The monk is a free agent; ultimately he must decide whether to accept or reject God’s provision.97 For example, we noticed earlier that the Holy Scriptures represent one of the means of divine providence. Without the Scriptures, the monk would not understand virtuous living and would consequently be unable to acquire apatheia.98 But the monk must do his part: he must follow the teachings of the Scriptures; God will not force him to do so, although, in an attempt to move the monk to virtue, God may providentially chastise him with “blows.”99 Also, as we shall notice later, petition forms a providential means by which God provides for the spiritual and physical needs of the monk. But the monk must play his part: he must engage in the actual praying.100 Again, as Dysinger indicates above, the relationship between divine providence and human effort is one of cooperation, not coercion. But it is important to remember that the providence of God takes priority over human effort. In fact, the “seeds of the virtues,” which enable the monk to cooperate with divine providence, themselves represent a gift of providence— for apparently these seeds belong to the very constitution of each created being, since

97 Divine providence, although taking priority over human effort, “cooperates” with the human person. There is no mention of divine providence “forcing” the rational being, however. See Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 193. But, as we noticed above, at times God providentially chastises the monk in an effort to move him to repentance.

98 See the above exposition of *Eulogios*, 14, and *Kephalai Gnostica*, 6.86.

99 See *Kephalai Gnostica*, 6.86.

100 The second section of the chapter will provide examples.
“we come into this life possessing the seeds of the virtues.” Concerning the priority of divine providential grace, Sinkewicz states, “Evagrius insists that ultimately any progress in the ascetic life derives not from the monk’s own dedication and effort but from the grace and the assistance of God who is the cause of all good things.”

Even the demons in hell possess the “indestructible seeds of the virtues,” so even they are capable of cooperating with divine providence and eventually coming to repentance. In fact, the demons, even Satan himself, will eventually be brought back to union with God. Evagrius appears to hint at this in his *Scholia on Psalms*, “Just as paradise is the school of the just, so also hell is the sinners’ house of correction.”

Divine providence, according to this text, extends not only to human beings, the inhabitants of earth, but to the angels in paradise and even the demons in hell, presumably including Satan himself. The term κολαστηρίων, which is here translated “house of correction,” means most commonly in the Patristic era “house of punishment,” according to Dysinger. For Evagrius, Dysinger argues, the term should be understood not in the sense of eternal punishment but in terms of “remedial”

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101 Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 16. Sinkewicz further states, “For Evagrius, all progress in virtue and knowledge derives from grace. The ascetic who believes he can rely on his own ascetic efforts runs the risk of suffering fearful demonic delusions and eventually going mad.” See Sinkewicz, p. 16.

102 According to Stewart, Evagrius believed in “the ultimate restoration of all things.” See Columba Stewart, “Evagrius on Monastic Pedagogy,” p. 257. This point is also affirmed by Harmless, *Desert Christians*, p. 357.


104 Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 194.
correction, which is temporary and therefore not eternal.\footnote{Dysinger, \textit{Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 194. Dysinger appeals to Evagrius’s comment on Proverbs 5:14, where Evagrius alludes to the suffering of the rich man of Luke 16:19-31, explaining that the condemned man, even in hell, can “learn mercy and even grow in previously unknown compassion for others.” See Dysinger, p. 194. This expresses Evagrius’s teaching on the eventual restoration of all reasoning beings.} Evagrius does not explain how exactly God provides for the spiritual advancement of angels and demons, but for the “just” in paradise providence appears to involve some form of instruction, as indicated by the term “school.” And for the demons in hell, divine provision takes the form of chastisement.

This concludes the first section of the chapter. We will move to the second section, where we will investigate the relationship in Evagrius’s thought between divine providence and the highest form of spirituality, pure prayer. For Evagrius, pure prayer and divine providence are inextricably related; for apart from divine providence, pure prayer would be absolutely unattainable. Here we will notice that pure prayer represents a unique expression of God’s providential grace. By granting the providential grace of pure prayer, God reveals himself to be a gracious loving Sovereign King.

**Divine Providence and Pure Prayer**

In the first section of the chapter, we noticed that divine providence or \textit{prŏnoia} involves provision for spiritual, as well as physical, needs. But does pure or spiritual prayer constitute such a need? The answer, for Evagrius, would be yes. In Evagrius’s thought, pure prayer is the means whereby the monastic acquires knowledge of the
Holy Trinity. Such knowledge or gnōsis represents the very goal of the spiritual life.

Given this, pure prayer could perhaps be said to be the monk’s greatest need, since it is here that the immaterial mind enjoys immaterial, wordless union with the immaterial God. One of the clearest statements in Evagrius’s writings concerning the relationship between divine providence and pure prayer is found in Eulogios.

Sometimes we exert ourselves to make our prayer pure, and we may perhaps be unable. But in turn it also happens that pure prayer arises in the soul when we are making no effort; for our weakness on the one hand and grace from above on the other call on us to ascend to purity of the soul, while at the same time through both means training us not to attribute the work to ourselves in the practice of pure prayer, but to acknowledge the one who bestows the gift: ‘For we do not know how to pray as we ought’ (Rom 8:26). Whenever then we make an effort to have our prayer purified and are unable, but find ourselves in the darkness, then, having drenched our cheeks with tears, let us beseech God for the night of warfare to be brought to an end and for the radiance of the soul to be illumined.

In the first clause—“Sometimes we exert ourselves to make our prayer pure”—Evagrius uses katharan euchē̂n for pure prayer rather than the usual katharan prōseuchē. In the second sentence, however, Evagrius does employ kathara prōseuchē. Here we find an example of the interchangeability between euchē and prōseuchē. This passage, then, focuses upon pure prayer.

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106 See chapter one, section two, under “Pure Prayer.”


108 See chapter one, section two, “Pure Prayer.”


110 Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 330.
Evagrius then mentions the notion of “exerting” — the Greek biazōmētha,\textsuperscript{111} from biazō, a term which denoted violent force, such as violently entering an area or territory.\textsuperscript{112} This application, according to Arndt and Gingrich, is negative, since violence appears to form the main emphasis. But Arndt and Gingrich mention that the term has a positive application—“in a good sense” the term refers to seeking after something zealously.\textsuperscript{113} Here the gnostic strives for pure prayer with great enthusiasm. That the monastic “exerts” himself “to make his prayer pure” does not indicate that he achieves pure prayer through his own abilities; this would do violence to the rest of the passage. However, earlier we explained that the monk must cooperate with divine providence, and he must cooperate even in the acquisition of pure prayer. First, we must remember that pure prayer, by its very definition, marks prayer at its highest stage—prayer completely devoid of all earthly, material thoughts and concerns.\textsuperscript{114} The monk’s mind must be completely free from earthly concerns and images.\textsuperscript{115} It is precisely here that the monk puts forth effort or “exerts” himself; he seeks to free his mind of such material concerns.\textsuperscript{116} But try though he may, he cannot accomplish this in his own power.\textsuperscript{117} He

\textsuperscript{111} Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 330.
\textsuperscript{112} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 140.
\textsuperscript{113} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 141.
\textsuperscript{114} See, for example, *Chapters on Prayer* 3, 11, and 71, all examined in chapter one, section two.
\textsuperscript{115} See *Chapters on Prayer* 70 and 71, both of which were examined in chapter one, section two.
\textsuperscript{116} See *Chapters on Prayer* 63 and 64, for example. Both passages will be examined below.
\textsuperscript{117} See, again, *Chapters on Prayer*, 63.
must “beseech” God to have his prayer purified. Evagrius uses *ikĕteusômĕn* for “beseech.” This term derives from a verb examined earlier, *ikĕteuō*, which denotes making requests of God and thus “supplication.” Evagrius employs the noun *ikĕsias* in his definition of petition examined in the first chapter. In the present text Evagrius exhorts the monk to petition God for pure prayer. And this petitioning represents the role the monk plays in pure prayer; he must prayerfully put forth effort to free his mind of earthly thoughts and thus must ask or petition God for the gift of immaterial or pure prayer. So the monk fulfills his role by engaging in the actual petitioning for pure prayer, but it is ultimately up to God to grant the request.

The monk’s petitioning for pure prayer clearly demonstrates his inability to acquire this necessary and highest form of prayer through his own capacities. He requires the assistance of the loving King. The monk is weak and therefore needs divine “grace.” The Greek for “weakness,” *asthĕnēs*, was used to indicate physical infirmity, but figuratively the term denoted inner weakness and incapacity, such as moral or

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119 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 375.

120 See chapter one, section two.

121 Tugwell points out that in pure prayer, “All that is left to the formless mind is an intense yearning for God.” See Simon Tugwell, “Evagrius and Macarius.” In *Study of Spirituality*, p. 172. The mind does indeed yearn for God, but ultimately, as the passage under consideration indicates clearly, God is the sovereign source of pure prayer. Furthermore, even the monk’s petitioning depends upon the sovereign providence of God, for the “seeds of the virtues” that enable the monk to strive for the spiritual are themselves gifts of divine providence. See the above exposition given to *Scholia on Psalms*, Psalm 125:5.

spiritual weakness. The monk’s weakness here is spiritual, residing in his inability to free his mind from earthly or corporeal concerns. This does not suggest that Evagrius viewed earthly existence as evil. Such existence represents an expression of God’s gracious providential love, for by it God accomplishes reunion. But such material concerns, although not necessarily intrinsically evil, serve as a hindrance to pure prayer, for they are material and earthly, whereas pure prayer involves not union between the material and God but between the immaterial mind or nous and the immaterial Trinity.

Because of his inner weakness, the monastic requires divine “grace”—charitŏs, used in early Christian literature to denote the gracious loving care God kindly bestows upon creation, particularly human beings. According to Evagrius, the monk’s “weakness” and divine “grace” serve as instructing guides, instructing the monk “not to attribute the work to ourselves in the practice of pure prayer, but to acknowledge the one who bestows the gift.” Ultimately, God releases the monk from his earthly concerns and images, and thus immediately or directly bestows pure

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123 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 115.
124 See Chapters on Prayer 70 and 71. Here material concerns serve as the primary impediment to pure prayer. Both passages were examined in chapter one, section two, under “Pure Prayer.” And also see Chapters on Prayer, 63, to be examined below.
125 Casiday states, “Contrary to the claim that Evagrius felt theological discomfort with matter, and that this led him to ‘mental iconoclasm,’ Evagrius is known to have blasted heretics for calumniating against the body, against matter, and against Christ the Creator.” See Augustine Casiday, “Christ, the Icon of the Father, in Evagrian Theology.” In Il Monachesimo tra Eredita e Aperture, p. 46. Furthermore, Casiday states, “Matter is the platform for ascetic practice.” See Casiday, p. 59. Also, Sinkewicz notes that for Evagrius, “considering the body to be an evil creation” is “blasphemous.” See Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, xxxvi.
127 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 877.
prayer. The term Evagrius uses for “training” is paideuousēs, from the verb form paideuō. In this passage the term denotes instruction, education, and training, in terms of bringing one to understand something. Human weakness and divine grace inform the monk that pure prayer does not result from his own abilities. Rather, pure prayer represents a “gift” that is “bestowed.” The phrase “bestows the gift” translates the Greek tôn dōrōnmēnŏn—literally “the gift giver.” The Greek word for gift, dōrēa, literally denotes the notion of “gift,” something one party kindly grants to another.

Pure prayer, therefore, constitutes a gift of God’s providential grace. Such prayer is not acquired through human effort alone; rather, it represents a gift bestowed by the “gift giver,” God. The monk must do his part by trying to keep his mind free from earthly concerns and thoughts through prayerful petition, but Evagrius indicates that at times “pure prayer arises in the soul when we are making no effort.” Sometimes, according to the passage, the monk receives the providential gift without “exertion,” meaning that at times the monk does not undergo a struggle to free his mind. In such instances God apparently grants the gift quickly. But, as the text indicates, at other times the monastic must work very hard, through prayerful petitioning or “beseeching,” to clear his mind of

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128 In particular, see Chapters on Prayer 63 and 64, both of which will be examined below.

129 Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 330.

130 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 603.

131 Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 330.


133 Graham Gould, “The Image of God and the Anthropomorphite Controversy in Fourth-Century Monasticism,” p. 553. Pure prayer, according to Gould, is “something the mind is given.”
earthly, corporeal concerns. Nevertheless, as we will see in other texts below, the monk must persevere in petitioning God for this greatest of providential gifts.

Just above we alluded to the instructing functions of human “weakness” and divine “grace.” Divine grace, out of which God providentially bestows the gift of pure prayer, and human weakness instruct the monk to recognize or “acknowledge” (ἐπιγίνοσκείν)\textsuperscript{134} that pure prayer results from the providential provision of the almighty Lord. Generally, the Greek epiginōskō signifies the idea of understanding, where one comes to know or recognize someone or something, such as a teaching. In this passage, the term denotes the notion of giving recognition, and hence to “acknowledge.”\textsuperscript{135} Through his own weakness and divine grace, the monk comes to understand that divine providence, and not he himself, represents the gracious source of pure prayer.

In the passage Evagrius does not use the actual term “providence” (prōnoia), but the concept is clearly present. Let us once again return to Dysinger’s excellent statement on Evagrius’ view of providence, where he points out that “Evagrius uses the term ‘providence’ to describe God’s ongoing provision of what each logikos (or reasoning being) requires in order for it to return to divine union.”\textsuperscript{136} The term “requires” represents the key term here. We have already seen that pure prayer itself constitutes a requirement, since pure prayer forms the channel through which the

\textsuperscript{134} Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 330.

\textsuperscript{135} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 291.

\textsuperscript{136} Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 184.
ascetic receives “knowledge of God.” In other words, to achieve the ultimate goal of monasticism, knowledge of God, the monastic needs pure prayer. Since this is the case, we conclude that pure prayer is a divinely instituted means of providential assistance, especially assistance to the monk in the gnostikē. However, we notice a dilemma: the monk cannot attain such prayer through his own abilities alone; he needs “the gift giver” to bestow the gift. God’s gracious action of bestowing the gift of pure prayer clearly coheres with the definition of providence given by Dysinger above. By bestowing pure prayer, God grants “ongoing provision of what [the gnostic] requires for [his] return to divine union.” In this sense, therefore, the bestowal of pure prayer constitutes perhaps the highest expression of divine providence or prŏnoia in the monastic context. And here we find perhaps the highest manifestation in Evagrius of the relationship between theological truth, in this case providence, and spiritual practice.

Evagrius essentially makes the same point in a shorter passage. “If you want to pray, you need God who gives prayer to the one who prays [cf. 1 Kgs. 2.9]. Therefore, call upon him, saying, ‘Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come’ [Mt. 6.9-10]—

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137 See chapter one, section two.

138 See chapter one, section two.

139 Bamberger recognizes that pure prayer is a gift from God, for man cannot achieve it in his own power. See John Eudes Bamberger, Evagrius Ponticus; the Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer, p. 47. And Sinkewicz states that pure prayer “belongs ultimately to God alone, the giver of the gift. Thus the monk must seek the gift with tears and supplication.” See Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 28.

140 This is so, given the relationship between pure prayer and divine gnōsis.

141 The correct passage is actually 1 Sam. 2:9, LXX.
which means your Holy Spirit and Only-Begotten Son. He has taught you thus, saying that the Father is worshipped ‘in Spirit and in Truth’ [Jn. 4.23-24].”

Earlier we examined this passage and noticed the allusion to pure prayer in the reference to the Holy Spirit and to God the Son—“Spirit and Truth”—and we also noted the reference made to divine sovereignty, particularly with the term “worshipped.” But now we turn our attention to the manifestation of divine sovereignty found in the providential bestowal of pure prayer.

The passage uses the usual προσευχή for both “pray” and “prayer.” And if the monk, in this case the gnostic, desires such pure prayer, he requires divine assistance—he has “need” (Greek χρεία) of God. The term χρεία denotes being in need of something or someone; that is, requiring something or someone—a necessity. The point here mirrors Eulogios 28: the monk cannot, in and of himself, acquire pure prayer. The monastic requires, once again, the providential grace of God. Evagrius asserts the grace of the Sovereign King by designating him “the giver of prayer.” The English “who gives” renders the Greek τοῦ διδόντος—literally “the one who gives,” or “of the one who gives.” The term didόντος derives from the verb didόμι, which generally designated


143 See the second section of chapter one, and see chapter two.

144 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer.*” Ldysinger.com

145 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer.*” Ldysinger.com

146 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 884-885.

147 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer.*” 59. Ldysinger.com
the act of giving or granting. It appears that Evagrius uses the term here to denote “grant” and “bestow.” This corresponds to the “gift giver” (ton dōroumēnōn) of Eulogios 28. The “giver of prayer” is thus the gracious “gift giver” who provides for the spiritual needs of the monastic, in this case the greatest need of the monastic life, pure prayer. Like the Eulogios passage, this text teaches that pure prayer results from the providential provision of God, for it is ultimately God who grants the gift of pure prayer. This gracious bestowal of pure prayer clearly constitutes a “means by which we return from vice and ignorance to virtue and knowledge.” In fact, as we noticed in chapter one, pure prayer marks the “prelude” to knowledge of God. Pure prayer therefore represents the “means” through which one receives knowledge of God, and as such pure prayer represents the ultimate manifestation of divine providence in the monastic life. The monk receives pure prayer, only because the Source of such prayer is a loving Sovereign Provider. Apart from the providential intervention of God, the monk would be unable to attain pure prayer and thus knowledge of God. Again, here we find theological truth expressed in spiritual practice, in this case the reception of pure prayer.

148 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 192.

149 See Gnostikos 48, which was treated earlier in the chapter.

150 See Chapters on Prayer, 85, examined in chapter one, section two.

151 Commenting upon this particular passage, Louth states that pure prayer “is of grace, given by God and received by the soul.” See Andrew Louth, Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition, p. 110.
We now turn to a key passage that mentions the Trinitarian dimension to pure prayer. Evagrius writes, “Prayer [prŏseuchē] is a state of mind that arises under the influence of the unique light of the Holy Trinity.”

Evagrius undoubtedly intends pure prayer here, evidenced by the term “state of mind” (katastasis nou). The key term of interest here is “arises”—ginŏmĕnē, from ginŏmai, the same term Evagrius uses to reference divine creation in Notes on Ecclesiastes, 38. Here Evagrius designates pure prayer as something created or made by the Holy Trinity, just as in Notes on Ecclesiastes, 38, the kŏsmŏs came into existence or was made by the very same God.

“Unique light” translates phōtŏs mŏnou. The term mŏnŏs (“unique”) denotes something that is singular in quantity—such as “the only man left.” But the term designates “unique” in the sense of something not only singular in quantity but quality as well—something that is different, such as “the only God,” and in this case, the “light belonging only to the Holy Trinity.” The term for “light,” phōtŏs, has multiple applications. First, the term denotes “light,” in the literal sense of physical light. But figuratively, which is clearly how Evagrius intends the term in this passage, it refers to

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152 Reflections, 27. In Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 213.

153 See Reflections, 26: “Prayer (prŏseuchē) is a state of the mind destructive of every earthly mental representation.” In Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 213.

154 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Reflections,” 27. Ldysinger.com

155 “For God is king over the universe which he made (ginomai).” In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 142.

156 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Reflections,” 27. Ldysinger.com

157 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 527-528.

158 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 871.
inner or spiritual illumination. The English word “influence” is actually not found in the Greek text. So translated literally, the passage reads, “Prayer is a state of mind that comes about under the unique light of the Holy Trinity.” The English “under” translates the Greek upŏ. This preposition means “by,” in the sense of serving as the agent or cause of something. Also it speaks of physical location—such as the book is under the bed. But figuratively, it speaks of something or someone under the power of another. In effect, it appears that the text essentially indicates, “Pure prayer comes to be by [upŏ] the unique illuminating light of the Holy Trinity.” Or perhaps it can be paraphrased, “Pure prayer comes about under the power of [upŏ] the unique light of the Holy Trinity.” In whatever sense Evagrius employs upŏ, one thing is for sure: pure prayer comes about or arises only under or by the operation of the Triune God. Evagrius does not specify the exact nature of this illuminating operation, nor does he specify the roles played by each member of the Trinity; but nevertheless, the gnostic gains pure prayer only through the gracious provision of the Triune King.

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159 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 872.

160 “prŏseuchē ĕsti katastasis nou upŏ phŏtŏs mŏnou ginŏmĕnē tēs agias Triadŏs.” Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Reflections,” 27. ldysinger.com

161 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 843.

162 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 843.

163 Commenting upon this text, Harmless states, “During pure prayer, the purified mind sees itself, its truest self, its true state. And the self that it sees is luminous. But that luminosity which permits it to see itself is the divine light.” See William Harmless, Desert Christians, p. 354.

164 Again, it cannot be overstated that Evagrius was not a systematic dogmatic theologian, which explains the vagueness that, at times, characterizes his writings. Tugwell recognizes this fact, stating that Evagrius’s works “consist chiefly of disconnected propositions rather than systematic exposition.” See
passage the Triune God, not the monastic, serves as the source of pure prayer. And here again Evagrius links divine providence with pure prayer. Tugwell recognizes this point, stating that the “mind is illumined [that is, brought to the state of pure prayer] only by the light of the Holy Trinity.” Tugwell recognizes this point, stating that the “mind is illumined [that is, brought to the state of pure prayer] only by the light of the Holy Trinity.” And along the same lines Casiday remarks, “The pinnacle of spiritual progress is the communion of the immaterial mind with its immaterial God. This communion occurs during pure prayer, when the praying Christian, divested of all concepts and passions, is infused with the light of the Holy Trinity.”

In *Chapters on Prayer*, Evagrius specifically mentions the Holy Spirit and pure prayer.

The Holy Spirit, sympathizing with our weakness [cf. Rom. 8.26], regularly visits us even when we are impure. And if he should find the mind praying to him alone from love of truth, he lights upon it and obliterates the whole battle-array of thoughts or representations that encircle it, advancing it in the love of spiritual prayer.

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166 Augustine Casiday, “Christ, the Icon of the Father, in Evagrian Theology,” p. 49.

The Third Person of the Triune God, according to Evagrius, has sympathy for weak humankind. The word Evagrius employs for “sympathizing,” σύμπασχῶν (from σύμπασχω),\(^\text{168}\) denotes sympathy, in the sense of suffering someone’s pain or bearing another’s grief.\(^\text{169}\) For “weaknesses,” Evagrius uses ἀσθένια, the same term he employed for “weakness” in Eulogios 28.\(^\text{170}\) There it was explained that figuratively this term denotes spiritual or inner weakness, and there the weakness involved the monk’s inability to free his mind from pure prayer hindering corporeal concerns. As we shall see below, the term entails the same exact application in this passage. The Holy Spirit’s “sympathizing” here does not mean that he suffers “from” weaknesses, for he is completely perfect and pure, since he is God.\(^\text{171}\) The Spirit sympathizes with human weakness and feebleness in that he “feels sorry” for the weak one, thus demonstrating his very own love for his created creature, humanity—and specifically here for the monk who desires intimate prayerful communion with him, as well as with the Father and the Son.\(^\text{172}\) In the passage Evagrius explains that the Spirit, as an expression of his sympathetic love, “regularly visits” (Greek ἐπιποίητα, from ἐπιποίηταο)\(^\text{173}\) “us” (i.e. the

\(^{168}\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 63. Ldysinger.com

\(^{169}\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 779.

\(^{170}\) See the above exposition of this text.

\(^{171}\) See On the Faith 30-35, where Evagrius asserts the full divinity of the Holy Spirit.

\(^{172}\) As pointed out earlier, pure prayer is Trinitarian in nature. See Chapters on Prayer 59, examined in chapters one and two, and see Reflections 27, discussed just above.

\(^{173}\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 62. Ldysinger.com
monastic), despite the monk’s weaknesses. The Greek ἐπιφοιτάω is the same term Evagrius uses for “visit” in *Chapters on Prayer*, 70, which we examined in the first chapter.\textsuperscript{174} There we noted that the term refers to entering the company of another, which clearly describes the nature of pure prayer, as the gracious God “visits” or comes upon the praying monk, producing immaterial communion.\textsuperscript{175} This “visitation” tells much about Evagrius’s view of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit, like the Father and the Son, loves human beings and desires the best for them. And in this passage Evagrius speaks specifically of prayer (prŏseuchŏmĕnŏn, from prŏseuchē)\textsuperscript{176} to the Holy Spirit, as he does elsewhere.\textsuperscript{177} Prior to the Spirit’s visitation, the mind of the monk battles “thoughts” arising from “mental representations” (or mental images), thereby indicating that the monk has not yet reached the state of pure prayer. In *Eulogios* 28, examined earlier in the section, Evagrius mentions the struggle the monk undergoes when attempting to gain pure prayer—he “exerts” himself, attempting to free his mind of corporeal, earthly concerns. According to the *Eulogios* passage—as well as others we shall examine below—petitioning represents the means by which the gnostic “exerts” himself in the battle against pure prayer hindering concerns. Perhaps the first reference to prayer in the text under consideration (“and if he should find the mind praying to him alone from

\textsuperscript{174} See chapter one, section two.

\textsuperscript{175} See chapter one, section two, which explained that pure prayer takes the form of an encounter between the immaterial God and the immaterial mind of the praying gnostic.

\textsuperscript{176} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer,*” 62. Ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{177} See *On Thoughts*, 9. In this text Evagrius gives an example of the Holy Spirit providing gracious assistance through the medium of prayer.
love of truth”) serves as an example of such petitioning for pure prayer. In *Eulogios* 28, prayers of petition or “beseeching” precede the bestowal of pure prayer. In this passage, then, the first reference to prayer probably involves similar petitioning for pure prayer.

The emphasis then appears to shift specifically to pure prayer. During the monk’s prayers of petition, the Holy Spirit, recognizing the thought laden mind of the monastic, “lights upon” the monk’s *nous* and destroys or “obliterates” the hindering mental representations. “Lights” renders *epibainei* (from *epibainō*),\(^\text{178}\) here indicating the act of moving upon or setting foot in.\(^\text{179}\) For “obliterates,” Evagrius uses *eksaphanizō*\(^\text{180}\)—which denotes the act of utterly destroying something, or annihilation.\(^\text{181}\) During the monastic’s petitioning, then, the Spirit moves upon the *nous* and absolutely destroys the “thoughts” or “representations” that serve as barriers to pure or spiritual prayer. Again, we must remember that the monk cannot receive pure prayer as long as material concerns infect his mind.\(^\text{182}\) Before pure prayer can be received, the thoughts and representations must be vanquished. However, the monk is weak, here denoting his inability to clear his mind of earthly thoughts, just like the situation described in the earlier examined *Eulogios*, 28. The vexing thoughts “encircle”

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\(^{178}\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer,*” 63. Ldysinger.com

\(^{179}\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 289.

\(^{180}\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer,*” 63. Ldysinger.com

\(^{181}\) Liddell and Scott, p. 588.

\(^{182}\) See the discussion of pure prayer in chapter one, section two.
the monk, and he can do nothing to extricate himself, thereby demonstrating his inability. The monk requires help, and the Holy Spirit, out of love and sympathy, providentially grants the aid, completely removing the barriers, and “advances” (prōtrépōmēnōn, from the verb prōtrépō) the monk to “love of spiritual [or pure] prayer” (pneumatikēs próseuchēs). The Greek prōtrépō indicates helpful urging. Initially in this text, the monk apparently begins with petition, and then the Spirit, by crushing the opposition, providentially makes pure prayer possible. Apart from the providential operation of the Spirit, the monk, infected with corporeal concerns from which he cannot free himself, would be unable to receive pure or spiritual prayer.

Sinkewicz states, “In the end, it is always God and his Holy Spirit who bestow the gift of pure prayer, eradicating impure thoughts and instilling knowledge.” In this passage we find another example of divine providence, where God provides “ongoing assistance” for the needs of the monk, in this case the need of pure prayer.

In the very next paragraph in Chapters on Prayer, Evagrius writes, “Whereas all the rest implant in the mind thoughts or representations or contemplations through changing the body, God does the opposite. Descending upon the same mind, he inserts in it the knowledge of such things as he wills, and through the mind he lulls the body’s

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183 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 63. Ldysinger.com

184 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 722.

185 Again, see the above examination of Eulogios, 28, and Chapters on Prayer, 59.

186 Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 188.

187 See Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 184.
bad temperament.”⁸⁸ The context, as well as some of the terminology, suggests pure prayer.⁸⁹ Evagrius uses *epibainō* (the actual term is *epibainōn*, from the verb *epibainō*) for “descending,” the same term he employs for “lights upon” in the previous text examined above.⁹⁰ God’s direct descent or movement upon the *nous* indicates pure or spiritual prayer.⁹¹ In this prayerful encounter, Evagrius explains, God directly “inserts knowledge” in the mind, whereas “the rest” insert things into the mind through other means. The “rest,” more than likely, refers to demons.⁹² Casiday explains that “God knows the heart directly, whereas the demons only infer the heart’s contents by close observation of bodily movements.”⁹³

Evagrius describes the providential work of God with the term “lulling.” The Greek here, *kateunazei*⁹⁴ (from *kateuanazō*), carries the ideas of quieting and calming

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¹⁸⁹ Chapters or paragraphs 44-74 clearly address pure prayer, using such terms as “true prayer,” “praying in purity,” “spiritual prayer,” “the place of prayer,” and “the state of prayer.” All of these terms denote pure prayer, as the second section of chapter two noted.

¹⁹⁰ See *Chapters on Prayer* 63, discussed just above.

¹⁹¹ See the discussion of pure prayer in chapter one, where it was explained that pure prayer represents a direct, immediate encounter between the praying monk and God.


¹⁹³ Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 235, note 24. In the note Casiday references *Thoughts* 37, which speaks of demons not knowing the mind directly but only through bodily movements. Tugwell points out the same idea, stating that demons cannot read the minds of human beings, “but they are quick to observe our actions.” See Simon Tugwell, “Evagrius and Macarius,” p. 171.

¹⁹⁴ Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer*,” 64. Ldysinger.com
another, or even putting one to sleep.\textsuperscript{195} Through coming upon the mind, God calms the body’s “bad temperament”—\textit{akrasia},\textsuperscript{196} denoting lack of self-control as well as self-indulgence.\textsuperscript{197} The point of the passage appears to mirror \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 63. In that text, the Holy Spirit “lights upon” (\textit{epibainei} from \textit{epibainō}) the monk’s mind and providentially “obliterates” the obstacles to pure prayer. In this passage—which, again, immediately follows \textit{Chapters} 63—God performs similar providential functions. He graciously “descends” (\textit{epibainō}) or moves upon the \textit{nous}, as he does in \textit{Chapters} 63, and removes the hindrances to pure prayer; “lack of self-control” and “self-indulgence” are certainly not conducive to such prayer. Although “lulls” or \textit{kateunazei} is not as strong a term as “obliterates” (\textit{ĕksaphanizō}), the two passages essentially make the same point: God, in his gracious providence, provides for the monk by removing all that opposes pure prayer, for the monk cannot accomplish this in his own strength, as we have already seen. And here again we find another example of God providing for the monastic what he cannot provide for himself, and thus we find another example of divine providence, especially as it relates to pure prayer.

We now turn to the \textit{Antirrhetikos}, 6.16, where Evagrius inquires of “Ammonius, the servant of God,” about the source of the “light” of pure prayer. Is the intellect or

\textsuperscript{195} Liddell and Scott, p. 925.

\textsuperscript{196} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, \textit{Chapters on Prayer},” 64. Ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{197} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 33.
nous naturally “luminous,” or does some outside light illumine the mind?\textsuperscript{198} Ammonius replied, “Human beings are not in a position to judge this; and the nous also cannot be illuminated while praying without the grace of God, once it is freed from the numerous and fearful enemies trying hard to destroy it.”\textsuperscript{199} As we noted earlier, at times Evagrius refers to pure prayer as “the illumination of the intellect.”\textsuperscript{200} So for Evagrius, “illumination of the mind” represents a designation for pure prayer. When the mind experiences “illumination” during prayer, it is at this point that the monk prays purely. Ammonius appears to name the “grace of God” as the source of this “illumination,” and in so doing he names divine grace as the source of pure prayer. Here the gnostic Ammonius states his point in unqualified terms: the nous or mind “cannot” experience illumination or pure prayer apart from the grace of God, which provides the illumination.\textsuperscript{201} But such providential illuminating grace is not granted until the nous experiences liberation from all “enemies,” namely demons and their thoughts.\textsuperscript{202} However, as we have seen, such liberation itself results from the providential grace of

\textsuperscript{198} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Antirrhetikos,” 6.16. ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{199} Antirrhetikos, 6.16. Dysinger, ”Evagrius Ponticus, Antirrhetikos,” 6.16. ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{200} See Eulogios 28 above. And see William Harmless, Desert Christians, p. 354.

\textsuperscript{201} See the above analysis of Reflections, 27.

\textsuperscript{202} See Chapters on Prayer 90-99, where Evagrius discusses demons and their attempts to hinder pure prayer.
God; the monk cannot achieve this in and of himself.  This passage clearly coincides with Evagrius’s view of divine prōnoia or providence—for in divine prōnoia God provides the necessities for divine reunion, and pure prayer, as the climax of the monastic life, clearly constitutes a necessity for such reunion. So, again, we find another example where the gnostic acquires pure prayer under the providential provision of the Sovereign Master. And here again Evagrius links a theological concept, divine providence, with prayer.

In Chapters on Prayer Evagrius then states, “Sometimes when you stand to pray [prôseuchê] you will immediately pray well; other times, even when you have toiled much you will not attain your goal, so that you will seek it all the more and guard your accomplishment inviolate once you do receive it.” Here, as he does in Eulogios 28, Evagrius speaks of the exerting effort the monk puts forth in pure prayer. In the present passage the monk “toils” (pônēsis)—a term signifying hard work—just as

203 See Eulogios, 28, and Chapters on Prayer, 63, both examined above, and see particularly A Word About Prayer, where Evagrius exhorts the monk to “beseech” God in prayer, because, according to the passage, only through God can the monk be victorious against demonic enemies.

204 See Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 184.

205 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 29. Ldysinger.com


207 The context indicates pure prayer—Chapters 27 and 28 use “state of prayer” and “spiritual prayer,” both of which signify pure prayer. See the discussion of pure prayer in chapter one, section two.

208 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 29. Ldysinger.com

209 Liddell and Scott, p. 1448.
he “exerts” himself in *Eulogios* 28.\(^{210}\) Again, the monk has a part to play in every aspect of the spiritual life, including the acquisition of pure prayer.\(^{211}\) Based upon Evagrius’s comments elsewhere, we surmise that the “toiling” involves the monk’s hard-working attempt to free his mind from earthly corporeal concerns—which often take the form of mental images.\(^{212}\)

In the passage Evagrius indicates that pure prayer is something “received.” And he further designates pure prayer as an “accomplishment”—*katôrthôma*,\(^{213}\) which refers to success in the sense of something successfully completed.\(^{214}\) And the monk, according to Evagrius, must “seek” this accomplishment. The term used for “seek,” *zētēsas*,\(^ {215}\) derives from the verb *zētĕō*, denoting the act of looking for something or someone in terms of searching it or them out. But it also denotes desiring something and then aiming to attain it.\(^{216}\) Understood in light of *Eulogios* 28, the “seeking” probably refers to petitioning or “beseeching” God for the gift.\(^{217}\) Pure prayer is an accomplishment the monk “receives”; he does not attain this successful

\(^{210}\) See the discussion of *Eulogios* 28 above.

\(^{211}\) Again, see the above discussion of *Eulogios* 28.

\(^{212}\) See the above exposition of *Eulogios* 28 and *Chapters on Prayer* 63.

\(^{213}\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer,*” 29. Ldysinger.com

\(^{214}\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 424.

\(^{215}\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer,*” 29. Ldysinger.com

\(^{216}\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 338-339.

\(^{217}\) See the earlier exposition given to *Eulogios*, 28.
accomplishment through his own capacities alone. For “receive,” Evagrius uses labōn, from lambanō.\(^{218}\) Actively, the term denotes taking hold of something through one’s initiative.\(^{219}\) But passively, the word conveys the notion of receiving, in the sense of being given something, such as “receiving mercy.”\(^{220}\) Evagrius intends the latter application. Two passages examined earlier, *Eulogios 28* and *Chapters on Prayer 59*, support this interpretation. In the *Eulogios* passage, the monk does in fact exert himself to clear his mind of hindrances, and he seeks relief with all his heart through prayerful petition; but nevertheless, at the end God graciously bestows pure prayer upon the struggling monk in his own divine timing, thus demonstrating the priority of divine provision. God, apparently at his own discretion, descends upon the mind of the monk and frees it from the obstacles.\(^{221}\) Here God “gives,” and the monk “receives.” In *Chapters on Prayer 59*, Evagrius informs the monk that to attain pure prayer, he needs God, who providentially “gives prayer to the one who prays.”\(^{222}\) *Chapters on Prayer 59*, like *Eulogios 28*, presents God as the “giver” of pure prayer and the monastic as the “receiver.” The monk, despite the effort he puts forth, receives pure prayer passively—in other words, the monk does not ascend to God and grasp the gift, but rather God

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218 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer,*” 29. LDYSINGER.COM

219 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 464.

220 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 465.

221 This happens at God’s discretion—i.e. when God, in his sovereignty, decides to act. Pure prayer occurs, according to Gould, when “God wishes to seize” the mind—that is, when God decides to bestow the gift, and not before. See Graham Gould, “The Image of God and the Anthropomorphite Controversy in Fourth-century Monasticism,” p. 553.

222 See the discussion of this passage given earlier in the chapter.
graciously “descends” in response to the monk’s petition and hard-working effort, and
grants the gift. Furthermore, Eulogios 28, as we noted earlier in the chapter, exhorts
the monk to “acknowledge the one who bestows the gift [i.e. pure prayer].” God,
therefore, bestows the gift, and the monk receives it—the monk does not grab the gift
from the Giver, but the Giver graciously grants it. This clearly illumines the passage
under consideration, Chapters on Prayer 29. The monk “receives” (labōn) pure prayer
not through his own efforts alone but as a gift given by God. The monk does not “grab”
pure prayer from the Sovereign King; rather, the gracious King providentially grants the
gift, and the monk gratefully “receives” it. Sometimes the gift is given without a
struggle—“Sometimes when you stand to pray you immediately pray well.” However,
such is not always the case. Evagrius explains why—“so that you will seek it all the
more.” By not granting the gift immediately, God apparently teaches the monk the
value of pure prayer—he teaches the monk to long for the gift with ever increasing
desire. But whether God bestows pure prayer sooner or later, one thing is certain: the
monk does not attain pure prayer through his own efforts alone but rather through the
providential grace of God. God is the “giver” of pure prayer, and the monastic is the
“receiver,” thus indicating the priority of divine providence. Once again, apart from the
gracious providential intervention of God, the monk would not be able to experience
pure prayer. Divine providence and pure prayer are undoubtedly linked in Evagrius’s
thought, and thus we find the link between theological belief and prayer.
Evagrius makes the same point later in *Chapters on Prayer*. “If you have not yet received the gift of prayer [*prôseuchê*] or of psalmody, keep watch and you will receive it.” Again Evagrius designates pure prayer as a “gift” one “receives.” For “receive” Evagrius once again uses *lambanō*, the same term he employs for “receive” in our previous text. And he uses *charisma* for “gift,” which denotes a freely and graciously given gift. Pure prayer, therefore, constitutes a “freely and graciously” bestowed gift. Again, the monastic gnostic does not attain the gift of pure prayer through his own unaided efforts; rather, this highest form of spirituality is “given” by God and “received” (*lambanō*) by the monastic, thereby demonstrating the priority and gracious nature of divine providence. And this tells us much about Evagrius’s view of the gracious nature of the One who bestows the gift. He is a gracious King who lovingly provides for the needs of his people; for, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, pure prayer represents a monastic need, since it represents the means by which the monk receives knowledge of God.

223 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer,*” 87. Ldysinger.com

224 *Chapters on Prayer,* 87. In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus,* p. 195. Concerning the issue of psalmody, see the exposition of *Chapters on Prayer* 85, given in the second section of chapter one, specifically under “Pure Prayer.”

225 From the context, we conclude that Evagrius intends pure prayer in this text. Paragraphs 84-86 specifically focus upon pure prayer, identifying prayer with “immaterial knowledge” or knowledge of God.


227 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer,*” 87. Ldysinger.com

228 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 878.

229 See, again, the above exposition given to *Eulogios*, 28, and *Chapters on Prayer*, 59.
We now turn to the very next paragraph in *Chapters on Prayer*, where Evagrius states:

‘He told them a parable that they should always pray and not be faint-hearted.’ So do not be faint-hearted or discouraged for as long as you do not receive it for you will receive it.²³⁰ He goes on in the parable, “Even though I do not fear God or respect man, still because the woman is making trouble, I will judge her case.” So, too, God will also do vengeance soon for those who cry out to him day and night’ [Lk. 18:1-8]. So then, courage! Persist in the labor of holy prayer.²³¹

Here Evagrius continues the discussion begun in the previous text, where he encourages his readers not to become discouraged if they do not immediately receive the *charisma* of pure prayer. In this text Evagrius takes up the issue of discouragement once again.

Here, as in *Chapters 87*, Evagrius mentions the gracious nature of pure prayer—such prayer is a gift God graciously bestows upon the monastic, for, once again, the monk “receives” (*labōn*, from *lambanō*) pure prayer. This passage, like earlier ones, indicates that pure prayer results not from the efforts of the monk alone but from the gracious providence of the Sovereign Provider. So the monk should not become discouraged if he does not immediately “receive” the gracious gift of pure prayer; he will eventually “receive” it.

In this passage Evagrius appears to be a little more specific than elsewhere about the contribution of the monk. Like the persistent woman of the parable, the monastic must “always pray and not become faint-hearted.” Here Evagrius uses *prôseuchê* for

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²³⁰ That is, the gift of pure prayer.

prayer\textsuperscript{232} but intends petition, not pure prayer. In the biblical parable, “making trouble” and “crying out to God day and night” designate requesting. So like the persistent widow, the gnostic should not become discouraged but must continue petitioning God for pure prayer. In the first section of the chapter, we pointed out that the monk must cooperate with divine providence. In this text, like others, the monastic does his part by petitioning God for spiritual prayer.\textsuperscript{233} Through petitioning, the monk demonstrates his desire for pure prayer; such petitioning lays bare the monk’s heart, thus showing that the monk truly “seeks” this great gift.\textsuperscript{234} Since, however, the monk does not appear to receive the gift every time he requests it, we conclude that God grants the gift in his own time; this is his sovereign prerogative, as mentioned earlier. The monk persistently petitions, but the Divine Sovereign Provider providentially grants the gift when he pleases, and he does this not out of malevolence, but love.\textsuperscript{235} Here again we find divine providence linked with pure prayer.

In the first section of the chapter, where we investigated Evagrius’s definition of divine providence, we noticed that God often exercises his sovereign providence

\textsuperscript{232} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 88. Ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{233} Cf. Eulogios, 28; Chapters on Prayer, 63, both examined earlier in the chapter.

\textsuperscript{234} See Chapters on Prayer, 29, discussed above.

\textsuperscript{235} See, particularly, Chapters on Prayer 34, where Evagrius explains that the monk does not always receive his request quickly because “God wishes to do well to you [the monk] even more as you obstinately persist in praying to him. What is higher than conversing with God and being engaged in conversing with him?” We will examine this passage specifically in the next chapter.
through the agency of angels. This special operation of divine providence extends to
pure prayer. In the following, we will examine three such examples.\(^{236}\)

We find all three examples in *Chapters on Prayer*. “God’s angel, when he is
present, stops with a single word all the opposing activity for us and sets in motion the
light of the mind to work unwaveringly.”\(^{237}\) This passage coheres with *Chapters on
Prayer 63*;\(^{238}\) God, in chapter 75, appears to accomplish through angelic agency the very
same providential function he accomplishes directly in *Chapters 63*, where the Holy
Spirit “obliterates” all hindrances to pure prayer and “advances” the monk toward such
pure or spiritual prayer. First, the angel “stops” (*panei*, from *panō*)\(^{239}\) “all the opposing
activity”—or all obstacles to pure prayer. The Greek verb *panō* refers to making
something cease, or bringing something to an end.\(^{240}\) So through the angel, God
providentially fulfills a need, namely, he abolishes all activity opposing pure prayer—
more than likely “mental representations.”\(^{241}\) Such divine provision is clearly necessary,
since the monk cannot fulfill this need in his own power, as we have already seen.\(^{242}\)

\(^{236}\) According to Dysinger, pure prayer is a “gift God bestows either directly or through the mediation of


\(^{238}\) See the above discussion of this text.

\(^{239}\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer*,” 75. Ldysinger.com

\(^{240}\) Liddell and Scott, p. 1350.

\(^{241}\) In the previous two paragraphs or chapters in *Chapters on Prayer*, Evagrius addresses mental images
that plague the monk during pure prayer.

\(^{242}\) See the above discussions of *Eulogios 28*, *A Word About Prayer*, par 3, and *Chapters on Prayer*, 63.
After accomplishing this providential feat, the angel then “sets in motion the light of the mind to work unwaveringly”—or, to state the point in other terms, the angel frees the mind thus enabling it to receive pure prayer. For “sets,” Evagrius employs the Greek term *kinei*,²⁴³ from *kinēō*—which denotes moving something along, or bringing something about.²⁴⁴ To understand what exactly Evagrius means here by “light of the mind,” we turn to chapters seventy-three and seventy-four of *Chapters on Prayer*, where Evagrius addresses the issue of “imaging” God during prayer—that is, mental images of God, to which Evagrius is strongly opposed.²⁴⁵ In chapter seventy-four, Evagrius mentions a certain “light” (*phōs*) physiologically “joined” to a particular area of the brain. The demons, according to Evagrius, deceptively “pluck the veins” of this area of the brain and thus manipulate the light joined to it.²⁴⁶ By doing such, the demonic forces form a divine image—an image of God or perhaps of angels—in the praying monk’s brain. It appears, then, that the demons attack the monk physiologically—they “manipulate” this physical “light” joined to the brain of the monastic and thus produce

²⁴³ Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer*,” 75. Ldysinger.com

²⁴⁴ Arndt and Gingrich, p. 432.

²⁴⁵ Imaging God during prayer, according to Harmless, results in idolatry. See William Harmless, *Desert Christians*, p. 351.

²⁴⁶ *Chapters on Prayer*, 73. Concerning this, Clark indicates that the demons “stimulate precise sites in the brain to produce the forms that we misidentify with God.” Demons, then, and not merely material concerns form the source of such mental representations or images of God. See Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, p. 68.
something that, for Evagrius, is unholy. God, Evagrius argues, is without physical form or shape and thus should not be imaged during prayer.\(^{247}\)

In the passage under consideration, the angel providentially remedies these problems by bringing them to a halt. Upon abolishing the demonic activity, the angel “moves” (\(kinei\)) this light of the brain “to work unwaveringly.” The term rendered “unwaveringly,” \(a plan\odos\),\(^{248}\) indicates the idea of being steady and fixed, primarily in the sense of not erring or going astray.\(^{249}\) By halting the demonic activity, the angel moves this physiological light, so to speak, to a place of safety from the demonic enemy seeking to manipulate it. Here the light operates unhindered by demonic images. Apart from these providential operations of the angel, the monk would be unable to enter pure prayer; for pure prayer, by its very definition, “is a state of the mind destructive of every earthly mental representation.”\(^{250}\) In other words, pure prayer and all mental images are mutually exclusive. The “stopping” of the “opposing activity” and the “setting in motion” of the light surrounding the brain clearly represent an expression of

\(^{247}\) See \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 67 and 68, where Evagrius warns the reader never to “give a shape to the divine as such when you pray,” because “the divine admits of neither quantity nor shape.” This does not suggest that Evagrius denied the true Incarnation of God the Word. For Evagrius, God the Word did indeed assume a human nature. \textit{(See To the Virgin}, 54, where Evagrius makes this most clear.) In his commentary on these passages, Casiday states, “Evagrius’ emphasis on refusing to form an image of God flows from his insistence that God has no body and therefore makes no mental impression himself.” \textit{See Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 235, note 25. And concerning this Sinkewicz states, “At the higher stages of prayer one of the greatest dangers is the temptation for the mind to attach itself to some image of the divine, whether it be produced by the mind itself or imposed by the demons. Any such images must be immediately rejected, for they tie the mind to forms and quantitative objects, whereas the Divinity is without quantity and without form.” \textit{See Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus}, p. 188.

\(^{248}\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, \textit{Chapters on Prayer},” 75. Ldysinger.com

\(^{249}\) Liddell and Scott, p. 190.

\(^{250}\) \textit{Reflections} 26. And see the discussion of pure prayer in chapter one, section two.
divine providence, for apparently the monk cannot accomplish these in his own power alone; otherwise he would not require the assistance of the angel. Through the agency of the angel, God provides for a particular need of the monk: God providentially moves the monk toward pure prayer by defeating demonic opposition.\textsuperscript{251} Here divine providence finds its expression in the bestowal of pure prayer.

In the very next paragraph of \textit{Chapters on Prayer}, Evagrius continues addressing pure prayer and angelic providence. “When it says in Revelation [8:3] that the angel takes incense so that he may add it to the saints’ prayers, I think this refers to the grace worked by the angel. For he implants the knowledge of true prayer so that thereafter the mind stands outside every turmoil of despondency and contemptuousness.”\textsuperscript{252} This passage appears to correspond with \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 64, where God “descends” upon the monk and “implants knowledge” into his mind.\textsuperscript{253} Chapter seventy-six does not mention the descent of God, but like chapter sixty-four, it speaks of the gracious implanting of knowledge. First, by using the construction “true prayer” (\textit{alêthous próseuchēs}),\textsuperscript{254} Evagrius makes it clear that he intends pure prayer in the passage. In essence, the angel performs a work of grace, namely, he grants knowledge of pure

\textsuperscript{251} Addressing this passage, Sinkewicz states, “When the angel of God has destroyed within the monk at prayer all opposing influences, it begins to guide the light of the mind and instill a knowledge of true prayer.” See Sinkewicz, \textit{Evagrius of Pontus}, p. 188.


\textsuperscript{253} This passage was discussed earlier in the chapter.

\textsuperscript{254} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, \textit{Chapters on Prayer},” 76. Ldysinger.com
prayer. As he does elsewhere, Evagrius uses charin,\textsuperscript{255} from charis, for grace.\textsuperscript{256} Again, the term denotes benevolent favor finding expression in gracious care, help, and mercy.\textsuperscript{257} The providential gracious help operated through the angel takes the form of the implantation of knowledge of pure or “true” prayer. To implant (ēmpoiē, from ēmpoiō)\textsuperscript{258} denotes the action of placing inside, such as placing a seed into the ground.\textsuperscript{259} Evagrius employs the usual gnōsis for “knowledge.”\textsuperscript{260} The first chapter explained that in the view of Evagrius, gnōsis involves more than mere intellectual understanding. The concept, for Evagrius, involves experiential knowledge—or knowledge gained from experience.\textsuperscript{261} Therefore, there exists no distinction for Evagrius between “knowledge of pure prayer” and pure prayer itself. To “know” pure prayer equates to “experiencing” pure prayer. So in the passage God, through the angel, actually grants pure prayer itself. This clearly constitutes a work of divine provision, since the monk cannot acquire such knowledge or prayer in his own power alone.\textsuperscript{262}

\textsuperscript{255} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 76. Ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{256} See the above discussion of Eulogios 28.

\textsuperscript{257} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 877.

\textsuperscript{258} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 76. Ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{259} Liddell and Scott, p. 547.

\textsuperscript{260} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 76. Ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{261} See the discussion of pure prayer in chapter one, section two.

\textsuperscript{262} See the above discussion of Eulogios 28, Chapters on Prayer 59, and Antirrhetikos 6.16.
We now turn to a final passage in *Chapters on Prayer*.

When an angel approaches, immediately all those vexing us disappear and the mind will be found to pray in a state of healthy relaxation. But sometimes when the usual war is waged against us, the mind lashes out and is not permitted to rest, because it has been preconditioned by manifold passions. All the same, if it continues seeking, it will find, and it will be opened to the one who knocks vigorously [cf. Mt. 7.7].

To be understood correctly, this text must be interpreted in light of the previous paragraph, *Chapters on Prayer* 29, which we examined earlier in the chapter. Both the present text and *Chapters* 29 mention the “immediate” or quick acquisition of pure prayer. In our examination of chapter twenty-nine, it was mentioned that sometimes God providentially bestows pure prayer quickly, and in such circumstances the monk does not experience a great struggle. But other times, even after working hard to clear his mind through petition, the monk must wait a while before God finally bestows the gift. Chapter thirty continues the same discussion. In this passage, at times, God quickly bestows the gift through angelic agency. Through the angel, God removes all opposing obstacles; all “vexing” phenomena “disappear” (*aphistantai*, from *aphistēmi*) —

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264 “Sometimes when you stand to pray you will immediately pray well; other times, even when you have toiled much you will not attain your goal, so that you will seek it all the more and guard your accomplishment inviolate once you do receive it.” See the above examination of this text.

265 This passage clearly focuses upon pure prayer, as evidenced by the emphasis on “vexing” obstacles infecting the mind. Cf *Chapters on Prayer*, 71, which mentions the antithetical relationship between mind infecting concerns and pure prayer. Chapter one, section two, examined this text.

266 See the above discussion of Eulogios 28 and *Chapters on Prayer* 63.

denoting withdrawal.\textsuperscript{268} Indirectly through the angel, God vanquishes all activity opposed to pure prayer, the very same function performed directly by the Holy Spirit in chapter sixty-three.\textsuperscript{269} Once divine providential grace defeats the opposition, the monk begins to "pray" (prŏseuchômēnōs)\textsuperscript{270} purely, signified by the term "healthy relaxation"—that is, without distraction, freedom from impassioned thoughts.\textsuperscript{271} However, as in chapter twenty-nine, God does not always bestow the gift quickly; he allows the monk to endure the attack of impassioned thoughts. But God intends this ordeal for good.\textsuperscript{272} And despite the battle God allows the monk to endure, Evagrius exhorts his readers to continue "seeking" the gift of pure prayer. Like paragraph twenty-nine, the present passage uses zētōn\textsuperscript{273} (from zētĕō) for "seek"—denoting striving for and aiming at.\textsuperscript{274} And besides seeking, Evagrius encourages the monk to "knock vigorously." The Greek krouŏnti, from the verb krouō, renders "knocks."\textsuperscript{275} The verb describes the action of knocking upon a door.\textsuperscript{276} For "vigorously," Evagrius uses

\textsuperscript{268} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 126-127.

\textsuperscript{269} See the above examination of this passage.

\textsuperscript{270} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 30. Ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{271} Cf. Chapters on Prayer 4. Here only a mind divested of all impassioned “representations” can commune with God in pure prayer.

\textsuperscript{272} See Chapters on Prayer 34, which we will examine in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{273} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 30. Ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{274} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 338-339. See the above exposition of Chapters on Prayer, 29.

\textsuperscript{275} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 30. Ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{276} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 453.
eutōnōs,\textsuperscript{277} meaning “powerfully”—in the sense of passionately.\textsuperscript{278} The “seeking” and vigorous “knocking” signify petition, as indicated by some of the texts examined above.\textsuperscript{279} Once again, the monk must ask for the gift of pure prayer through petitioning. God, in his sovereign timing, answers the petitioning monk and “opens” the door of pure prayer. Evagrius uses anoigesetai,\textsuperscript{280} a passive participle of the verb anoigō, which literally denotes the act of opening something, such as opening a door or one’s mouth.\textsuperscript{281} Here the term signifies the gracious bestowal of pure prayer upon the petitioning monk.

In this passage, therefore, we find Evagrius giving priority to divine providence. The monk expresses his desire for pure prayer by “knocking” or petitioning, but ultimately it is the Sovereign King who bestows the gift by “opening” the door of pure prayer. If the King does not open the door, the monk’s knocking amounts to nothing. Here we find yet another example of divine providence and pure prayer. The monk cannot, in his own power alone, defeat the dark array of passionate thoughts assailing

\textsuperscript{277} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 30. Ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{278} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 327.

\textsuperscript{279} See Eulogios 28 and Chapters on Prayer 88. In both these texts, the monk experiences great difficulty in his quest for pure prayer—just as he does in the present text—and Evagrius urges him to pray for the gift, “crying” out to God, as well as “beseeching” him. Both of these passages were examined earlier in the chapter.

\textsuperscript{280} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 30. Ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{281} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 71.
him, which we have noticed a few times.\textsuperscript{282} He always requires God’s sovereign providence. Sometimes God providentially bestows the gift of pure prayer quickly, sparing the monk from struggle, whereas at other times God providentially allows the monk to struggle in petition, after which He graciously grants the request. Either way, the monk cannot acquire pure prayer through his own capacities alone; pure prayer constitutes a need only God can providentially fulfill. The monk “knocks” on the door of pure prayer, but for pure prayer to be attained God must “open” the door—we find no indication of the monk opening the door himself. Of course, though, the monk must do his part by earnestly desiring the gift through prayerful petition. The monk indeed prays to have his mind purified, but ultimately it is up to God to answer the petition and bestow the gift. By so doing, God demonstrates himself to be the loving Sovereign Provider, providing providential assistance to the monk, in this case pure prayer. We will now turn to the fourth chapter, where we will continue our discussion of divine sovereign providence and prayer. In the chapter, we will focus specifically on divine providence and petition.\textsuperscript{283}

\textsuperscript{282} See Eulogios 28, Chapters on Prayer 63, 75, and A Word about Prayer, par 3—all of which were examined earlier. Furthermore, the very fact that the monk requires angelic assistance indicates that he cannot, in his own power alone, rid himself of the thoughts.

\textsuperscript{283} Of course, petition was greatly emphasized already in the present chapter; for, as we have seen, petition represents the providential means whereby God providentially grants the gift of pure prayer. This ultimately illustrates the integral relationship between petition and pure prayer. However, petition generally speaking includes more than requests for pure prayer, and for this reason, we will devote an entire chapter to it specifically.
CHAPTER FOUR

DIVINE PROVIDENCE AND PETITION

In the thought of Evagrius, we find a direct link between divine sovereign providence and prayer as petition.¹ First, for Evagrius, the theological concept of divine sovereign providence must inform the petition of the monk. Second, petition constitutes one of the means or channels through which God providentially provides for the monastic.² Or, to state the point differently, prayer as petition represents one of the divinely appointed channels of providence through which God grants provision for both physical and spiritual needs. Here we will find that divine providence serves both an informing role and a mediating role.³

The first section of the chapter will examine petitioning for general spiritual needs and for physical needs, and the second will focus specifically on petition, demons, and divine providence.

Divine Providence and General Petitioning

Previously we noticed that Evagrius uses the Greek word prŏnoia (verb prŏnŏĕō) for providence. In beginning the present chapter, it would be beneficial to examine the

¹ Again, we discerned this already in the previous chapter; petition serves as the vehicle through which God grants pure prayer.

² We noticed this last chapter on pure prayer.

³ That is, mediating in the sense of serving as a medium.
term briefly one more time. According to Arndt and Gingrich, the word means to "make provision for someone or something," "think of beforehand," and "care for." Hence, when applied to God, the term is translated "providence." However, the second chapter mentioned that prōnoia does not signify an arbitrary sort of caring but provision planned in advance. Given this, the term can also be translated "forethought," since the provision and its means were planned in advance. According to Driscoll, divine providence for Evagrius includes the entire arrangement, planned out by God, by which reasoning beings are led back to Divine union. This arrangement involves the spiritual path of the practical life and the gnostic life and the "ongoing assistance" God provides in both. The practical and gnostic lives, then, are part of God's foreordained providential arrangement. In fact, Evagrius indicates that the practical and gnostic lives and everything they entail were given to human beings by God. This would then mean that prayer, in all its forms, derive from God. If the practical and gnostic lives are gifts of divine providence, then it follows that prayer in all its forms (including petition) are also gifts of divine providence, since prayer is integral to the practical and gnostic lives. In other words, all forms of prayer are part of the foreordained providential arrangement. Prayer, in all its forms, finds its origin in divine providence. Therefore, pure prayer,

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4 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 708.


6 “Christianity is the doctrine of Christ our Savior. It is comprised of the practical, the natural, and the theological.” The practical and gnostic lives here appear to derive from Christ. See Praktikos, 1. In Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 97.
although the summit of the monastic life, does not represent the only channel of divine
providence.\(^7\)

For Evagrius, the relationship between divine providence and petition is two-
fold. First, petition represents a channel through which divine providential grace is
bestowed. We have already touched on this in the previous chapter, where we noticed
that petition represents the channel through which God providentially bestows pure
prayer.\(^8\) Second, the concept of divine providence informs the monk’s petition, much in
the same way that divine sovereignty does.\(^9\) In his petitioning, the monk expresses his
commitment to the theological concept of providence.\(^10\)

We begin by turning to *Chapters on Prayer*. Evagrius states, “Trust God for
bodily needs and it will also be clear that you trust him for spiritual ones.”\(^11\) The Greek
for the first use of “trust,” *empisteusŏn*\(^12\) (from *empisteusis*), denotes placing faith in

\(^7\) But again, we cannot overemphasize that pure prayer represents the highest channel of divine
providence, since in pure prayer the monk receives experiential knowledge of God. See *Chapters on
Prayer*, 85, examined in chapter one, section two.

\(^8\) See Eulogios 28, *Chapters on Prayer* 63, 87, 88—all examined in the previous chapter.

\(^9\) See chapter two, where we detailed the informing role of sovereignty on prayer.

\(^10\) However, as noted earlier, the monk’s understanding of divine providence, as well as divine
sovereignty, deepens as he progresses through the spiritual life, particularly through prayer. The
“theologian’s” (that is, the gnostic who has been granted the gift of pure prayer) apprehension of divine
providence will be far greater than that of the beginning novice. This will be addressed in the fifth
chapter where we will detail how Evagrius’s teaching on prayer informs his teachings on sovereignty and
providence.


\(^12\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer,*” 129. Ldysinger.com
someone or something, such as a teaching or a teacher. Here Evagrius encourages his readers to entrust all their bodily or physical needs to God. In effect, Evagrius here exhorts his readers to “have faith in God.” The English “needs” translates the Greek *chreían*, from *chreias*, the same term Evagrius employs for “need” in *Chapters on Prayer*, 59, which we examined last chapter. Again, *chreias* signifies a requirement or necessity. The Greek term *sōmatōs*, here literally denoting “of the physical body,” renders “bodily.” Such needs would include food, water, and clothing. Furthermore, in the passage Evagrius exhorts his reader not only to trust God for bodily needs but for spiritual ones as well. The term *pisteuōn*, derived from the verb *pisteuō*, represents the Greek for the second occurrence of “trust.” The verb denotes deep heartfelt trust or faith, particularly faith or trust placed in God. For “spiritual,” Evagrius uses

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13 Liddell and Scott, p. 545.

14 Dysinger translates the term as “entrust” rather than “trust.” Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer*,” 129. Ldysinger.com

15 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer*,” 129. Ldysinger.com

16 “If you want to pray, you need God who gives prayer to the one who prays.” In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 192.

17 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 885.

18 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 799.

19 See *On Thoughts*, 6, where Evagrius mentions such bodily needs. This text was examined in both chapters two and three.

20 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer*,” 129. Ldysinger.com

21 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 661-662.
pneumatōs,\(^{22}\) from pneuma—here indicating “of the spirit” as opposed to “of the body.”\(^{23}\) Here Evagrius intends spiritual needs, which would involve the necessary grace to fulfill the whole of the spiritual life from apatheia all the way through the grace of pure prayer.\(^{24}\)

Evagrius does not use the term “prayer” or “petition” in this text, but the “entrusting” certainly signifies prayer, as implied by other texts where Evagrius exhorts his pupils to petition God for both spiritual and physical needs.\(^{25}\) For our purposes, the term “needs” (chreias) may hold the key to the passage. Earlier in our discussion of Evagrius’s definition of divine providence,\(^ {26}\) it was pointed out that for Evagrius, providence involves “God’s ongoing provision of what each logikos requires [or needs] in order for it to return to divine union.”\(^ {27}\) In the present passage the requirements for the spiritual life, which would include both bodily and spiritual needs, are met by God; and Evagrius indicates that through petition, God fulfills all needs, whether physical or

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\(^{22}\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 129. Ldysinger.com

\(^{23}\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 675.

\(^{24}\) See the whole discussion in chapter three under “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer,” and see Kephalaia Gnostica 1.37, examined also in chapter three. Here Evagrius declares that apatheia results from divine grace.

\(^{25}\) See Chapters on Prayer 87 and 88 for spiritual needs, particularly pure prayer. Both passages were examined in the previous chapter. Also, see Reflections 28, where Evagrius mentions petitioning God for “good things,” which would presumably include things relating both to the physical and spiritual lives.

\(^{26}\) See chapter three, particularly under “Divine Providence.”

\(^{27}\) Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 184. See chapter three, under “Divine Providence.”
spiritual. This clearly corresponds with Evagrius’s understanding of divine providence, where God graciously meets the needs of the spiritual life.\(^{28}\)

In the passage, we find the notion of divine providence informing petitioning prayer. First, prior to engaging in prayerful petitioning for physical and spiritual needs, the monk must recognize that the One to whom he prays “loves and nurtures human beings.”\(^{29}\) Petitioning for needs assumes this theological principle, for Evagrius. In fact, divine providence is predicated upon the love of God, for divine love finds its expression in divine providence.\(^{30}\) Before the monk makes petitions of such a nature, he must have faith or “trust” that the One to whom he prays expresses His sovereign love in divine providence.\(^{31}\) Petitioning for spiritual and physical needs, therefore, expresses the monk’s commitment to the doctrine of divine providence. And this involves more than mere “belief” in divine providence; to “entrust” his physical and spiritual needs to the Creator,

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\(^{28}\) But we must remember that the monk cooperates with divine providence in this entire enterprise, as Evagrius’s position on divine providence suggests. For example, the monk must participate in the liturgical chanting of the Psalms, must engage in the work of petitioning, and must actively engage in all ascetic practices, such as fasting and vigils. Again, Evagrius nowhere indicates that divine providence forces the monk but rather that it cooperates with the monk. But as mentioned a few times thus far, divine providence always remains preeminent in the entire process, because ultimately the monk derives the ability to engage in such activities through divine gracious provision. See the discussion in chapter three under “Divine Providence,” which details Evagrius’s understanding of the nature of divine providence, and also see chapter three, “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer,” which also touches upon the cooperation between divine providence and the human subject.

\(^{29}\) Eulogios 11. In Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 37. This text was discussed in both chapters two and three.

\(^{30}\) See the discussion above in chapter three, “Divine Providence.”

\(^{31}\) As mentioned earlier, the gnostic teacher was entrusted with the task of theologically educating the practical life monastic. However, again, as the monk progresses through the life of prayer, his understanding of doctrine deepens, as he experiences the gracious sovereign providence of God firsthand. Chapter five will develop this line of thought.
the monk must first “trust” in divine providence. In other words, petitioning for needs involves a commitment of the heart to divine providence; the monk must wholly trust that God lovingly provides for all the needs of his people, and specifically for the monk traveling the path of divine knowledge. In the passage Evagrius does not qualify the needs of which he speaks; therefore, this heartfelt trust in divine providence extends to all the monk’s physical and spiritual needs, from the novice’s petition for basic bodily needs to the petition of the gnostic for pure prayer. The Greek term *chreia*, as mentioned just above, is the same term Evagrius uses for “need” in *Chapters on Prayer* 59 (examined in the previous chapter), where he states, “If you want to pray, you have need [chreia] of God who gives prayer to the one who prays.” In *Eulogios* 28, *Chapters on Prayer* 88, and *Chapters on Prayer* 30, all of which were examined in the previous chapter, the gnostic recognizes the need for pure prayer and then petitions God for the gift. Such petitioning assumes that the monastic, in this case the gnostic, has embraced the notion of divine providence. So, in petitioning God for any need, the monk must first trust in divine providence, lest he pray in vain. *Chapters on Prayer* 129 provides us with an example in Evagrius of theological affirmation, in this case divine providence, governing and informing prayer.

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32 See chapter three, under “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”

33 Ibid.

34 In fact, the reception of pure prayer itself deepens the gnostic’s understanding of and commitment to divine providence. As a “theologian” who receives pure prayer, the gnostic has the deepest understanding of divine providence, since he has personally experienced providential provision at its highest level. See the fifth chapter, which will detail the informing role prayer exercises on divine providence, as well as divine sovereignty.
We now turn our attention to another passage in *Chapters on Prayer*, in which Evagrius declares, “Do not pray that your will be done—for it is not always in accord with God’s desire. Instead, pray as you have been taught, saying, ‘Your will be done’ in me [cf. Mt.6.10]. And ask him thus in every situation that his will be done—for he wills what is good and expedient for your soul, whereas that is not always what you seek.”

For both occurrences of “pray,” the passage uses prŏseuchou (from prŏseuchē). Evagrius intends petition here, as evidenced by “ask,” which translates the term aitei, from aitēō—denoting “asking” in terms of making requests. Here Evagrius informs the monk that divine sovereign providence must govern all petitioning. First, the monk must not pray for the fulfillment of his own “will.” For “will,” Evagrius employs thĕlēmata, from thĕlēma—which denotes “willing” in the sense of desiring or wishing. Instead, the monk must subordinate his own wishes to the “desire” (thĕlēmati, from thĕlēma) or “will” (thĕlēma) of God, and he must do so in “every situation.”

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40 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 354.


42 According to Sinkewicz, Macarius the Great influenced Evagrius’s position on humble submission to the will of God. See Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, xvii.
term is *panti*,\(^{43}\) from *pas*), denotes the whole of something, and can therefore be translated as “all.”\(^{44}\) “Situation” translates *pragmati*,\(^{45}\) from *pragma*, which here denotes “matters” or “affairs.”\(^{46}\) What Evagrius means here, then, is “all matters whatsoever.”\(^{47}\) Here Evagrius sets a universal principle for the praying monk: in all matters and affairs, regardless of their nature, the monk must subordinate his desires to the will and desires of the Sovereign King. And this Sovereign King reigns as a good King who provides for the needs of his people, for the King “wills what is good and expedient for your soul.” The term for “wills,” *thēlei*\(^{48}\) (from *thēlō*), indicates wishing and desiring, as well as wanting.\(^{49}\) For “good,” Evagrius uses *agathou*,\(^{50}\) from *agathōs*. This key biblical term has multiple applications. First, the term designated moral uprightness, such as a good man or a good teaching. But when speaking of “things” in general, it referred to that which is beneficial, such as “fertile soil.”\(^{51}\) The context here allows for

\(^{43}\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 31. Ldysinger.com

\(^{44}\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 631.

\(^{45}\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 31. Ldysinger.com

\(^{46}\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 697.

\(^{47}\) Dysinger translates the term as “matters.” “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 31. Ldysinger.com

\(^{48}\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 31. Ldysinger.com

\(^{49}\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 354.

\(^{50}\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 31. Ldysinger.com

\(^{51}\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 2-3.
either application. And the English “expedient” translates σὐμφήρων, \textsuperscript{52} from σὺμφόρος, signifying something or someone that is profitable and hence beneficial. \textsuperscript{53} The “willing” of the “good” and “expedient” certainly reflects the loving and gracious character of the King, for if the King were not loving, he would not desire the good for the monk.

In the above we find an allusion to divine providence. God “wills” what is good and expedient; therefore, it follows that God actually “grants” the good and expedient, thereby manifesting his gracious providence. And all the petitioning of the monk must be informed by this theological truth. In all his petitioning, the monk must bend his own desires to the will of the Sovereign King, recognizing the providence of the King, who provides for the well-being of the monk; for the monastic does not know how to “seek”—ζῄτεις, \textsuperscript{54} from ζῄτεω—the “good,” whereas God, being the “good” itself, \textsuperscript{55} will only provide the good and beneficial. \textsuperscript{56}

Evagrius continues this discussion in the next paragraph in Chapters on Prayer.

Often in praying I requested that what seemed good to me would be done and persisted in my request, irrationally contending with God’s will and not yielding to him so that he would providentially arrange what he knew to be more

\textsuperscript{52} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 31. Ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{53} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 780.

\textsuperscript{54} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 31. Ldysinger.com. See the above exposition given this term in chapter three under “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”

\textsuperscript{55} Cf. On the Faith 10, where Evagrius uses “good”—Greek ἀγαθὸς—of God.

\textsuperscript{56} Sinkewicz addresses the passage and states, “The ideal of such prayer is to pray not for one’s own wishes or intentions but for God’s will to be done, trusting that in his goodness God will arrange all that is needful.” See Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 187.
expedient. And in the event when I finally got it, I was deeply disappointed that I had requested instead that my own desire be done, for the thing did not turn out to be for me such as I had reckoned.\footnote{Chapters on Prayer, 32. In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 190.}

For “praying,” Evagrius uses \textit{prŏseuchômēnōs},\footnote{Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 32. Ldysinger.com} from \textit{prŏseuchē}. The terms “requested” and “request” signify petition. “Requested” translates \textit{ētēsamēn},\footnote{Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 32. Ldysinger.com} from the verb \textit{aitēō}, which, as already noted, denotes the act of making requests.\footnote{Arndt and Gingrich, p. 25.} “Making a request of God” forms the general idea here, and hence petition. Evagrius uses the noun form for “request”—\textit{aitēmati},\footnote{Arndt and Gingrich, p. 26.} from \textit{aitēma}, which denoted a request and therefore petition.\footnote{Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 32. Ldysinger.com}

In this passage we find a clear example of divine providence informing petition. Like the previous passage, the monk must submit his own will to the will (\textit{thēlēma})\footnote{Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 32. Ldysinger.com} of God. Again, this indicates divine sovereignty—the will of God must take precedence over the will of the monk. The monk must submit to the King and trust that He will “providentially arrange” that which is “expedient.” For “providentially arrange,” Evagrius does not use a term from the \textit{prŏnoia} group but instead employs \textit{oikŏnŏmēsē},\footnote{Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 32. Ldysinger.com}
from oikònŏmēō, indicating the idea of managing in terms of planning something out.\textsuperscript{65}

The term for “expedient” is sümpherōn,\textsuperscript{66} the same word Evagrius uses for “expedient” in the previous passage examined just above.

The “providentially arranging” or planning for the “expedient” clearly coheres with Evagrius’s understanding of divine providence. For Evagrius, as we have already seen, divine providence involves divine provision, where the Holy Trinity provides “ongoing assistance” for the monk’s physical and particularly spiritual needs.\textsuperscript{67} In the administration of his sovereign providence, God “providentially arranges” things so that they work out for the monk’s benefit or “expedience.” In his petitioning, the monk must submit not to his own desires but to the providential will of God, who, in “providentially arranging” things for the “expedience” of the monk, will provide for the good of the monastic in all circumstances. If the monk does not submit to the sovereign providential will of God, he risks great disappointment, because, in his attempt to “force” God’s hand, things may not turn out as the monk had hoped. Such disappointment can be avoided if the monk does not attempt to force God’s will but instead submits to God, accepting that God is Lord and King, as well as Provider of the good. Here theological conviction informs the spiritual practice of prayerful petition.

Continuing the discussion, Evagrius states, “What is good other than God [cf. Mt.10:18]? So then let us yield to him in all matters pertaining to us and it will be well

\textsuperscript{65}Arndt and Gingrich, p. 559.

\textsuperscript{66}Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 32. Ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{67}See Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 184.
for us. For the Good One is surely the purveyor of good gifts [cf. Mt.7.11].”

Evagrius does not specifically mention prayer in this text, but chapter 33 appears to be a continuation of chapter 32, where Evagrius specifically addresses petition. In this particular passage, chapter 33, Evagrius asserts the goodness of God, which, Evagrius implies, finds its expression in divine provision. First, Evagrius declares that God is “good,” using the term *agathōn*, from *agathōs*. According to Arndt and Gingrich, this term indicates moral perfection when applied to God—in terms of God’s complete goodness and righteousness in a moral sense, free from all the impurities of sin.

Concerning Evagrius’s understanding of the divine goodness of God, Bunge states, “God alone is essentially good and incapable of anything evil.” The term “the Good One” carries the same meaning. “The Good One” translates *agathōs pantōs*—literally “fully

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69 Chapters 31-34, Sinkewicz notes, address prayers of petition. See Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 187. Louth also acknowledges that these passages address petition. See Andrew Louth, “...And if You Pray Truly, You are a Theologian: Some Reflections on Early Christian Spirituality.” In *Wisdom of the Byzantine Church: Evagrius of Pontus and Maximos the Confessor*, p. 6.

70 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer,*” 33. Ldysinger.com

71 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 2-3.

72 See *The Great Letter*, 55, where Evagrius asserts that God cannot “commit a sin.” And also see *Notes on Ecclesiastes*, 4. Here Evagrius declares God to be the “source of goodness,” and as such God is never the “cause of evils.”

73 Gabriel Bunge, *Dragon’s Wine and Angel’s Bread: the Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus on Anger and Meekness*, p. 25. Along the same lines O'Laughlin mentions that God’s “goodness is certainly ‘natural’”—that is, natural in the sense that God could never act contrary to his good, perfect nature. See Michael O'Laughlin, “Origenism in the Desert,” p. 115.

74 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer,*” 33. Ldysinger.com
good.” Dysinger’s translation reads, “For he is wholly good.”75 Here Evagrius declares God to be absolutely righteous and good, free from all evil.

And this fully good God is generous, expressing his generosity in the granting of good things—he is “the purveyor of good gifts.” The term “purveyor” means “provider,”76 as indicated by the meaning of the Greek term parōcheus. So God “purveys” good gifts in that he provides or grants them. For “good gifts,” Evagrius employs agathōn dōrēōn. The term agathōn derives from agathŏs, examined just above, while dōrēōn is from dōrēa, which we examined earlier as well.77 When applied to things in general, which Evagrius more than likely does here with the unqualified use of dōrēōn, agathŏs denotes that which is beneficial, in the sense of being useful as opposed to detrimental.78 Dōrēa denotes “gift”—something someone graciously gives to another. Here Evagrius indicates that the perfectly good God, as a manifestation of his goodness, graciously grants good, beneficial things to the monk. Evagrius does not specify the contents of such gifts, but it is very likely that pure prayer represents one of the good gifts mentioned here, since paragraphs 31-34 immediately follow texts that

75 Ibid.

76 Liddell and Scott, p. 1344.

77 See the exposition of Eulogios 28 above in the previous chapter.

78 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 2-3. And see the above exposition of Chapters on Prayer, 31.

specifically address petitioning for pure prayer. Earlier it was explained that, for Evagrius, pure prayer forms the highest gift of God’s providential grace, and that petition represents the divinely appointed providential channel through which God bestows the grace of pure prayer.

God, according to the passage, reigns as the fully or wholly Good King who graciously provides for the monk. And this truth must govern the monk’s petitioning; in “all matters” the monk, in his prayer, must “yield” to the providential King, trusting that the fully Good King will provide the good and expedient. For “yield,” Evagrius uses the term apŏdōmēn, from apŏdidōmi, which referred to the idea of giving up something or giving something out to another, but it could specifically denote giving up in the sense of surrendering one’s will to another. By “yield,” then, Evagrius means giving up to God, or surrendering one’s will to God. The passage uses panta for “all matters”--again from pas, which denotes the whole of something and thus the idea of “all.” Therefore, in the whole of his petitioning, the monk must yield to the Ultimate Good, trusting that the Truly Good will provide the beneficial or “good.” Divine sovereign providence must inform and govern all petitioning. And thus again we find the link in Evagrius between theological belief and prayer.

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80 Chapters on Prayer 29 and 30, both of which were examined in the previous chapter, specifically mention petitioning God for the gift of pure prayer.

81 See the entire discussion in chapter three under “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”

82 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 33. Ldysinger.com

83 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 90.

84 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 33. Ldysinger.com
In the very next paragraph of *Chapters on Prayer*, Evagrius then states, “Do not become distressed if you do not receive at once from God [your] request; he wishes to benefit you even more as you continue steadfastly in prayer. For what is higher than [enjoying] conversation with God and being taken up with [conversational] intercourse with him?”

This passage explains why God does not always grant pure prayer and other goods quickly. God does not grant the petition quickly, not out of malice—because God is the Ultimate Good—but as an expression of his goodness. According to the passage, there is nothing better than unceasing prayerful conversation with God. By not immediately granting the request, whether for pure prayer or anything else, God lovingly provides for the monk in a most wonderful manner: he drives the monk to seek him even more. Here God provides by granting the monk unceasing loving conversation with Himself. God provides this gracious gift through what may appear as silence—the monk petitions but does not quickly receive the answer. But this apparent silence ultimately serves as an expression of the benevolence of God, whereby he “loves and nurtures human beings.”

Furthermore, let us keep in mind Evagrius’s definition of divine providence, “God is known as…..provident through those [i.e. the things]...

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86 Remarking upon this text, Sinkewicz states, “Even if the petition is not immediately answered, it still has inherent value in that it engages the individual in converse with God.” See Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 187.

contributing to our virtue and knowledge.” Could the silence mentioned in the passage under consideration possibly constitute an expression of divine providence? It would appear so, for, through this perceived silence, God provides for the monk by granting him unceasing, intense communion with Himself. Through perceived silence, God provides Himself, the monk’s greatest need. Here the monk’s petition serves as a channel of providential grace. God uses the monk’s unceasing petitioning as the channel through which He graciously provides grace, namely, loving conversational communion with Himself.

We now take up another issue, prayer as confession, which, as indicated earlier, involves petition. Returning to Chapters on Prayer, Evagrius writes, “Pray first to receive tears, so that through compunction you may be able to soften the savagery that exists in your soul and, once you have convicted yourself by announcing your sins to the Lord, perhaps you may obtain an acquittal from him.” “Announcing your sins to the Lord” represents a particular form of prayer for Evagrius, prayer as confession of sin. And, according to the passage at hand, this form of prayer involves petition. For “pray,” Evagrius uses prŏseuchou, from prŏseuchē. “Pray first to receive tears” signifies petition, specifically a request to God for the gift of tears. The English “receive” renders

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88 Scholia on Psalms, scholion 8, Psalm 138:16. In Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 184. See the exposition given to this passage in chapter three under “Divine Providence.”

89 Chapters on Prayer, 5. In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 188.

90 See chapter one, section two.

91 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 5.
the Greek *lēpseōs,*\(^92\) a term denoting the idea of accepting something from someone, such as a gift\(^93\)—and hence being given something by someone else. The monastic, then, receives tears from God, indicating that the monk himself is not the source of such tears. God therefore gives the tears, and the monk receives them. The term rendered “compunction,” *penthous,*\(^94\) designates the feeling of sorrow and grief.\(^95\) Here the monk expresses sorrow on account of his failures. The tears, given to the monk by God, express contrite sorrow. So the passage appears to indicate that tears are essential for proper compunction. Evagrius then points out the purpose of such tearful compunction: it enables the monk to “soften the savagery” in his soul. And “softening” is necessary for the next step: “conviction” leading to the actual announcing of sin, which results in divine “acquittal.”

The initial ingredient here, leading to all the rest, appears to be the reception of tears. Without the tears, there would be no compunction, ultimately meaning that the divine acquittal would be unattainable.\(^96\) Here, as in the acquisition of pure prayer, we find human effort cooperating with divine providence; but, as always for Evagrius, divine providence takes precedence. The human effort finds its expression in the actual

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\(^{92}\) Ibid.

\(^{93}\) Liddell and Scott, p. 1046.

\(^{94}\) Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 5. Ldysinger.com

\(^{95}\) Arndt and Gingrich, p. 642.

petitioning for tears. However, we must remember that petition itself, like all prayer, is a gift of God, as was pointed out earlier in the chapter. In other words, petition represents a divinely appointed means of providence. Divine providence, then, takes priority in all circumstances.

And in this passage, divine providence finds its clearest manifestation in the bestowal of tears, which ultimately makes tears a divine providential gift. By bestowing the tears, God fulfills a need for the monk. As pointed out just above, the tears are necessary for the compunction leading to the “acquittal.” The tears, therefore, represent a need for the monk. And the monk’s petition forms the channel through which God providentially provides for the need. Petition, itself a gift of divine providence, constitutes the channel through which God providentially fulfills a need, namely tears. Here petition functions as a channel for divine providential grace.

Furthermore, there are certain prerequisites attending this type of petitioning, and all petitioning. Prior to engaging in such prayer, the monk must recognize his need for tears, and evidently he recognizes his inability to acquire them. So prior to engaging in the petitioning prayer, the monk realizes and embraces his need for divine providence. He recognizes that he is not sufficient in himself, that he cannot acquire the necessary tears through his own unaided efforts. Second, the monastic would not make this petition unless he trusted that the God to whom he prays is loving and willing to

97 Ware recognizes the gracious nature of tears, referring to them as “the gift of tears.” See Kallistos Ware, “Prayer in Evagrius of Pontus and the Macarian Homilies,” p. 19. Sinkewicz also refers to tears as a “gift.” See Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 186.
meet the need. In this passage the concept of divine providence informs the petitioning, and the petitioning itself also serves as the divinely appointed means through which God providentially acts. Here again we find the link between divine providence and prayer, particularly petition.

Evagrius continues the discussion on confession in *Chapters on Prayer*. “Even should you pour out fountains of tears in prayer, never think highly of yourself as though you were superior to the masses—for your prayer has got assistance so abundant that you eagerly announce your sins and propitiate the Lord by your tears. So do not transform the remedy of passions into another passion; otherwise you will all the more enrage him who gave this grace.”

According to Casiday, tears are not a “magical formula for getting one’s desires.” And certainly Evagrius never intends them as such. But nevertheless, they are necessary because they produce compunction in the heart of the penitent monk. And it is in this sense that they assist the monk. Here Evagrius uses *prŏseuchē* for both occurrences of “prayer.” The passage does not specifically mention petition, but this paragraph continues the discussion begun in the text examined just above, which emphasizes petitioning, specifically for tears.

Here, as in the previous text, tears have a providential function: they provide “assistance” to the monk, enabling him to “announce” his sins “eagerly.”

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98 *Chapters on Prayer*, 7. In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 188.


100 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Chapters on Prayer,*” 7. Ldysinger.com
“assistance,” bŏēthein, from bŏētheia, denotes “help” and “aid.” Helping someone in need represents the general idea conveyed by the term. Evagrius indicates clearly in the passage that God constitutes the source of this help or aid, for the Sovereign Lord is he “who gave this grace.” The term “him who gave” translates tôn dĕdŏkata, which according to Dysinger means “the one who gave.” The term derives from the verb didōmi, examined earlier. The verb, again, denotes the act of giving to another, in the sense of granting or imparting. In effect, Evagrius here designates God as “the giver of the grace (charin, from charis) of tears.” The term charis, also examined earlier, signifies gracious goodwill, finding its expression in gracious care and help. So here tears represent a gracious “help” or aid received from God.

The terms “assistance,” “the one who gave,” and “grace” all denote divine providence, for, in the present text, they all designate “God’s ongoing provision of what each logikos requires in order for it to return to divine union.” We have already noticed that tears are a necessity or requirement—they form the key ingredient in

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101 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 7. Ldysinger.com
102 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 144.
103 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 7. Ldysinger.com
104 See the discussion of Chapters on Prayer 59 in the previous chapter under “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”
105 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 193.
107 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 877.
108 Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 184.
prayer as confession, since they engender compunction. In the acquisition of contrite tears, the monk does not, according to the two texts we have examined on the topic, acquire the necessary tears solely on the merits of his own efforts—although the monk does his part by desiring the tears and engaging in the actual petitioning. Rather, divine providence takes precedence here. The designation “the one who gave” and the term “grace” indicate the priority of divine provision. Ultimately, it is the Sovereign Master who graciously grants the grace of tears, thus enabling the monk to engage in contrite, tearful confession. Tears do not constitute a reality the monk grasps through his own ability but rather a gracious gift given the monk by the Sovereign Creator, who is also the Provider. When this text is understood in light of the previous text examined just above, Chapters on Prayer 5, we see that petition represents the divinely appointed providential means by which God providentially bestows the gift of contrite tears, much in the same way that petition serves as the divinely appointed providential channel for pure prayer.

This concludes the first section of the chapter. We will now move to the second section, where we will consider petition, demons, and divine providence.

**Divine Providence, Petition, and Demons**

According to Evagrius, demons hate prayer more than anything, especially pure prayer.\(^{109}\) Concerning this, Evagrius writes, “All the warfare struck up between us and

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\(^{109}\) As we have already seen, pure prayer, by its very nature, is thoughtless and imageless. The demons, according to Brakke, attempt to destroy pure prayer by suggesting thoughts and implanting images into the mind of the praying monk. See David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, p. 47. Bunge, too, recognizes that demons use thoughts to attack the praying monastic. See Gabriel Bunge, *Dragon’s*
the impure demons is about nothing other than spiritual prayer—for it is particularly hostile and most grievous to them, but salvific and most pleasant to us.”

Evagrius then continues, “Why do the demons want to activate in us gluttony, impurity, avarice, wrath, grudge-bearing and the other passions, unless it is that the mind, flaccid from them, be unable to pray as it ought?”

Regarding the hatred of demons for pure prayer, Tugwell states, “The whole spiritual life is directed towards this goal [i.e. the acquisition of pure prayer], and the whole strategy of the demons is designed to prevent us from getting there.”

The demons hate prayer, because they know that through it the monk communes with God. The main objective of the demons, according to Evagrius, is to prevent the monk from engaging in prayer, particularly pure prayer. To accomplish their goal, the demonic forces insert or implant impassioned thoughts in the

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110 *Chapters on Prayer*, 50. In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 191. But, as Brakke points out, Evagrius recognized that the monk battles demons throughout the whole of the spiritual life, and not merely in the gnostic life. See David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, p. 54.

111 *Chapters on Prayer*, 51. In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 191. There are, according to Corrigan, demons that “correspond” to each of these evil thoughts. See Kevin Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory*, p. 44. And the demons, Bamberger points out, are “experts” at “inflaming” the passions. See John Eudes Bamberger, “Desert Calm: Evagrius Ponticus: the Theologian as Spiritual Guide,” p. 193.


113 If one gives in to the attacks of the demons, according to Brakke, great depression results, since the demonically controlled monk cannot acquire pure prayer. See David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, p. 50.
mind of the praying monk, attempting to arouse the passions.\textsuperscript{114} In fact, the demons not only attack the monk with temptations during prayer, but at other times as well.\textsuperscript{115} The monk, in and of himself, cannot defeat the satanic onslaught; he requires divine providential aid. Evagrius makes this point very clear in a text we cited earlier.

When you strive to pray in your petitions, the thought of fornication vexes you; if you struggle against it, the desire for money or thought of wrath rushes upon you; and when you make peace, you will glow with anger within—and as long as you are weary, the powers of the Evil One harass you all the more. Therefore, my child, you must not be remiss. Instead, steel your soul for the battle against evils and beseech God that he grant you victory. For you cannot be victorious by yourself, since the fight against evil thoughts is too difficult for you alone. Therefore it is essential for us to invoke God and persevere in prayer, seeing that it is he alone who is able to calm our mind.\textsuperscript{116}

More than likely, \textit{A Word about Prayer} was intended primarily for those in the practical life or \textit{praktike}.\textsuperscript{117} However, this text could apply equally to the gnostic as well, since, as \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 51 (cited just above) indicates, the demonic forces use the technique of thought implantation on the gnostic as well as on the practical life monk.

\textsuperscript{114} Clark notes that the demons present mental images to the monk’s mind as part of their attack, using thoughts involving sex, money, and food. It is important, according to Clark, for the monk to thwart the tempting thought immediately upon its arrival. See Elizabeth Clark, \textit{The Origenist Controversy}, p. 79-80. The demons, according to Sinkewicz, “will use a great variety of tricks and stratagems to divert the monk from this effort [i.e. pure prayer].” Here \textit{Chapters on Prayer} Evagrius cites their recourse to the distractions arising from the necessities of daily life.” See Sinkewicz, \textit{Evagrius of Pontus}, p. 186. And persistent thoughts, Brakke points out, give rise to impassioned mental representations. See David Brakke, \textit{Talking Back}, p. 29.

\textsuperscript{115} See \textit{Praktikos}, 12, where Evagrius mentions the “noonday demon” or the “demon of acedia.” This demon attacks the monk normally for five hours at a time, and apparently not just during times of prayer.


\textsuperscript{117} A few factors substantiate this. First, the opening paragraph of this work coheres practically verbatim with the eleventh paragraph of \textit{Causes}, a treatise specifically intended for the practical life (see chapter two). Second, \textit{A Word about Prayer} makes no reference whatsoever to “knowledge,” therefore indicating that the work was intended for those in the practical life.
Furthermore, even the most advanced gnostic cannot defeat the demonic evil thoughts through his own abilities alone, as we noticed in our discussion of pure prayer and divine providence. So the principles laid down in this passage apply to the practical life and gnostic life both.

According to the passage, not only do the demons attack during pure prayer but during prayers of petition as well, thus indicating their hatred for all forms of prayer. Notice the similarities between this text, which addresses petition, and Chapters on Prayer 51, which addresses pure prayer. Chapters on Prayer 51 mentions “impurity,” “avarice,” “wrath,” and “grudge-bearing.” The present passage mentions “fornications,” “the desire for money,” and the “thought of wrath.” The satanic strategy for petition appears to be the same as that for pure prayer, namely, to keep the monk from praying through thought suggestion. In the present text (A Word about Prayer 3), beseeching God for victory appears to indicate petition—here the monk petitions God for victory against the demonic thoughts. The “invoking” of God and “persevering in prayer” appear to be synonymous with the “beseeching” petitions; all three appear to indicate continuous prayer against the troubling, demonically inspired thoughts.

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118 See Chapters on Prayer 63 and 75, which were discussed in the previous chapter under “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”

119 According Brakke, the demons attempt to entice the monk with all the evil thoughts, including gluttony, pride, and avarice. See David Brakke, Demons and the Making of the Monk, p. 54. And elsewhere Brakke notes that Evagrius does not distinguish between demons and the evil thoughts they inspire; the two are closely connected, since demons form the source of such thoughts. See Brakke, Talking Back, p. 16.
In this particular passage, the inability of the human monk, the wickedness and cruelty of the demons, and the loving gracious providence of God all converge. Earlier we noticed that the monk, even the gnostic on the threshold of pure prayer, cannot clear his mind of thoughts, including demonic ones, unassisted. The demonic onslaught is simply too powerful or “too difficult” for the monk to defeat through his own abilities alone. However, the monk is not completely passive: he expresses his desire to be free of thoughts by engaging in petition. Through the petitioning, the monk battles the demons. The petition, in a sense, represents the monk’s weapon of warfare.

Here Evagrius also extols the sovereign providential grace of God. First, we find the sovereignty of God asserted in the passage, in particular sovereignty over the demonic realm. The very fact that Evagrius encourages the monk to petition God for victory over the demons assumes God’s sovereignty over these forces. The demonic thoughts are indeed too powerful for the monastic but not for God. And this sovereignty, in the present text, finds its expression in divine provision—exhorting the monk to petition God for victory assumes divine providence; it assumes God’s ability and willingness to grant the providential victory.

In the present passage we find Evagrius’s understanding of divine sovereign providence governing and informing his approach to petitioning. God reigns sovereign over the demonic realm, and he manifests his sovereignty in granting providential aid to the struggling monk. These theological concepts inform the monk’s “beseeching” and

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120 See Eulogios 28, Chapters on Prayer 30, 63, 75, all discussed in the previous chapter under “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”
“invoking” in the passage. In fact, such petitioning expresses the monk’s commitment to these theological truths. If the monk did not trust that God is sovereign over the demonic realm, and if the monk did not trust that God would providentially grant him victory over the evil forces, making such petitions would be senseless. Furthermore, we notice in the passage that petition represents the channel through which God provides assistance against the demonic forces. It is through the “beseeching” and “invoking” that God grants his providential assistance to the assailed monastic. In this sense, then, petition can be said to be a means or channel through which God grants providential provision. Here we find yet another example of the link between theological conviction and prayer.

Evagrius appears to be even more explicit in *Chapters on Prayer*.

See that the wicked demons do not deceive you through any vision, but focusing your mind and turning to prayer, invoke God so that he may enlighten you as to whether the representation is from him and, if not, drive the wandering thought quickly from you. Be confident that the dogs will not stand against you if you expertly use the stick of petitioning God. Being lashed invisibly and inaudibly by God’s power, they will be driven away directly.\(^{121}\)

Here again we find demonic forces attacking the monastic through impure thoughts, which, in this case, are produced through a manifestation of a “representation” or form. This, according to Brakke, is one of the ways the demons attempt to frighten the monk.\(^{122}\) When such things occur, the monk must test the vision to see whether it

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\(^{122}\) David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, p. 73.
comes from God. The monk must turn to “prayer” (prōseuchē)\(^{123}\) and “invoke” God to discover the source of the vision. For “invoke,” Evagrius employs parakalei,\(^{124}\) from parakalēō, which here indicates summoning, particularly for aid.\(^{125}\) Here the monk calls upon God for aid—namely, the monk requests that God aid him in understanding the source of the manifestation. The point here, however, is petition: the monk “invokes” God for the purpose of finding out if the representation originates from him—that is, the monk “asks” God if He is the source of the vision.

The monk’s “invoking” or petitioning serves as the channel of God’s gracious providential provision. And, in this instance, divine provision takes the form of “enlightening”—phōtisē,\(^{126}\) from phōtizō, denoting the act of illuminating in the sense of laying bare or revealing.\(^{127}\) By granting the illumination, God, through the monk’s praying, provides for a need, specifically the monk’s need to know the source and nature of the vision.\(^{128}\) If the vision does not find its origin in God, then the Sovereign Lord exercises divine providence further by “driving the wandering thought” away. The Greek apēlasē,\(^{129}\) from apēlauνō, represents the term for “drive.” The term denotes

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123 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 94. Ldysinger.com
124 Ibid.
125 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 617.
126 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 94. Ldysinger.com
127 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 872-873.
128 Evagrius does not explain the exact nature of this “enlightening.”
129 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 94. Ldysinger.com
literally “to drive away”—that is, to force out.\textsuperscript{130} In other words, God expels the thought. And here God provides for a need, for as we saw in the previous chapter, the monk cannot accomplish this in his own unaided power. Evagrius describes this providential “driving” or expelling in very vivid terms. First, the “stick of petitioning”—or weapon of petitioning—constitutes, in this text, the monk’s weapon of warfare.\textsuperscript{131}

For “petitioning,” Evagrius uses ἐνευκαὶς,\textsuperscript{132} from ἐνευκασία. Interestingly, this is the term he employs for “intercession” in \textit{Reflections} 30.\textsuperscript{133} There Evagrius denoted what can be termed gnostic intercession, where the advanced monastic specifically petitions God for the spiritual advancement of others.\textsuperscript{134} The term itself denotes the idea of making a request or an appeal, especially to one in authority, such as a king.\textsuperscript{135} Here, however, Evagrius does not intend such gnostic intercession but rather petitioning where the monk, for his own sake, appeals to God to fulfill a need. And here again petition represents the divinely appointed channel or means through which God providentially assists the monk. Through the monk’s petition, God drives the “dogs”

\textsuperscript{130} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{131} “Prayer” for the Desert Fathers, Regnault explains, “was for them the mightiest weapon of spiritual warfare because they were conscious of the need they had of God’s assistance in this battle against evil.” See L. Regnault, \textit{The Day-to-Day Life of the Desert Fathers}, p. 120. Gould also recognizes prayer as a weapon of monastic spiritual warfare, especially against tempting thoughts. See Graham Gould, \textit{The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community}, p. 169.

\textsuperscript{132} Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, \textit{Chapters on Prayer},” 94. Ldysinger.com

\textsuperscript{133} See chapter one, section two.

\textsuperscript{134} See \textit{Reflections}, 30, examined in chapter one, section two.

\textsuperscript{135} Arndt and Gingrich, p. 268.
away, “lashing” them out of sight. The monk requires such divine assistance, for the monk “cannot be victorious by [himself].” This divine activity is certainly in keeping with Evagrius’s view of providence or prōnoia. Let us once again recall Dysinger’s comment on Evagrius’s understanding of divine providence: “Evagrius uses the term ‘providence’ to describe God’s ongoing provision of what each logikos requires for it to return to divine union.” Demonic visions certainly would hinder the monk’s progress toward divine reunion, so the “enlightening” and “driving” activities of God in this passage undoubtedly cohere with Evagrius’s understanding of divine sovereign providence. And, in the text at hand, petition represents the means whereby God exercises his provision.

In this passage we find theological conviction applied. Prior to his prayer, the monk obviously embraces and trusts that God is sovereign over the demonic realm, and that God, as a loving and gracious King, is willing and able to provide for the necessities of the monastic life. These truths, then, inform the monk’s petition. So in this text, divine providence informs the monk’s petitioning; and furthermore, petition represents the channel or point of contact between divine providence and the monk, since it is through petition that God manifests his providential care.

Continuing the discussion on demons, specifically demons and pure prayer, Evagrius writes, “Be intent on much humility and courage and no insolence from the

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136 See A Word about Prayer, 3, examined just above.

137 Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 184.
demon will touch your soul and ‘the scourge will not draw near your tent, for God will give his angels charge over you to protect you’ [cf. Ps. 90:10-11], and they will chase away the whole enterprise opposed to you.”138 Here we find another example of God exercising providential care through angels. Like in the previous texts, the monk requires protection against the demonic horde; he cannot battle them unaided.139 First, according to the biblical text Evagrius quotes in the passage, God “gives” his angels to “protect” the ascetic. The English “protect” translates the Greek diaphύlaksai,140 from diaphύlassō—signifying the idea of guarding someone from danger and thus to “protect.”141 By giving the angels for protection, God fulfills a need: He provides something for the monk that the monk cannot provide for himself unaided. The providential protecting basically takes the same form as the protection given in the previous text, where God “drives” the demonic adversaries away from the monastic. In the present passage God accomplishes the very same feat through the angels; he “chases away” the enemies. And again, such providence is necessary because the monk cannot defeat the enemy in his own power alone. And here, therefore, we find another example of divine providence.

However, we notice that Evagrius makes no specific reference to prayer in the text. Instead, he mentions two virtues, “courage” and “humility.” But it is important to

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139 See A Word about Prayer, 3, discussed just above.

140 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Chapters on Prayer,” 96. Ldysinger.com

141 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 191.
note that the monk does not cultivate virtue without divine assistance. For Evagrius, all ascetic accomplishment results from the providential assistance of God.\footnote{See Eight Thoughts, 8.12, examined above in chapter three under “Divine Providence.”} But nevertheless, Chapters on Prayer 94-100 appear to form a single unit, since all seven texts address the issue of demonic attack during pure prayer. Given this, the principles laid down in chapter 94, which mentions petitioning God against demons,\footnote{See the examination of this passage just above.} would also apply to the chapter under consideration, chapter 96. We noticed in chapter 94 that Evagrius exhorts the monk to use the “stick” or weapon of continuous petitioning against the demonic enemies. Just because Evagrius does not mention such petitioning in the present text does not mean that he expects the monk to abandon the principle laid down two short paragraphs earlier. The providential “driving” away of the demons in chapter 94 coincides with the “chasing away” of the same demons in the present text.

We should not suppose that Evagrius expects the monk in chapter 96 to employ a different strategy from the monk in chapter 94. Moreover in chapter 96 Evagrius mentions courage and humility, but it is important to note that petitioning represents one of the key channels through which God providentially enables the monk to acquire virtue.\footnote{This point is intimated in Chapters on Prayer 129, examined earlier in the chapter. Here Evagrius encourages his readers to trust God for both physical and spiritual needs, and certainly the acquisition of virtue would constitute a spiritual need, since acquiring virtue leading to \textit{apatheia} represents the aim of the practical life.} So apparently the present text involves petition, even if only by implication.

With all this in mind, we find another example of petition serving as the divine
channel through which God grants providential protection. It is through petition that God providentially “gives” his angels to “protect” the monastic, thus accomplishing for the monk a feat he cannot accomplish alone. Here the notion of providence informs the petitioning. In other words, petitioning for providential aid assumes that the monk embraces the concept of divine providence, in which God graciously provides for needs.

Before the monk engages in this type of prayer he must first recognize that the One to whom he prays reigns as the Sovereign King who providentially provides for his people; he must trust in the fact that God is sovereign over the demons, that they are subject to his rule, and that God will provide the necessary assistance, granting the monk victory against the evil horde. Such petitioning expresses the monk’s commitment to this theological concept. And yet again we find another example in Evagrius of the link between theological conviction and prayer.

Evagrius continues his treatment of demons and prayer in the next chapter or paragraph in *Chapters on Prayer*. “The one intent on pure prayer will hear noises, crashes, voices and tortured sounds from the demons, but he will not fall or forsake his thought, saying to God, ‘I will not fear, for you are with me’ [cf. Ps. 22.4], and so forth.”146 In this text Evagrius continues the discussion begun in chapter 94, demons and pure prayer. The demons attack, attempting to thwart pure prayer, and here the attacks seem to be quite intense, as the demons manifest themselves audibly. But the

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146 *Chapters on Prayer* 97. In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 196. Regnault notes the importance of such prayer for the Desert Fathers, referring to prayer as “the shield that protected them and the spear used to attack the enemy.” See L. Regnault, *The Day-to-Day Life of the Desert Fathers*, p. 120.
monk does not need to “fear.” For “fear,” Evagrius uses a familiar term, 

phŏbēthēsŏmai, \(^{147}\) from phŏbĕō. In the second chapter, where we treated divine 

sovereignty and prayer, phŏbĕō (and the noun phŏbŏs) describes the inner disposition 

of the monk entering the presence of the Sovereign King in prayer. As such, the term 

denotes “fear of God”—in the sense of reverencing God.\(^ {148}\) But in chapter two we 

noticed that the term also has negative connotations; it also denotes “fear” in the sense 

of being “terrified.”\(^ {149}\) It is in the latter sense that Evagrius employs the term in this 

passage, as the context would suggest. Here the demons serve as the source of the 

fear, so the notion of respectful reverence is clearly absent here. But there is no need 

for the monastic to take fright at the demonic spirits; when they attack, the monk 

should cite the Psalm. Here we find an example of “antirrhetic” prayer.\(^ {150}\) And 

according to the prayer, the monk does not need to fear, because God resides with him. 

Such a prayer carries certain theological assumptions. First, it assumes or presupposes 

the sovereignty of God over the demonic realm. It is not necessary for the monk to take 

fright at the roaring of the demons, because God’s sovereign power extends even over 

the forces of evil. Second, the prayer assumes the gracious providence of God, which
represents an expression of his sovereign rule.\textsuperscript{151} The prayer assumes that God will grant providential aid by “driving” and “chasing” away the demonic enemies.\textsuperscript{152} The theological concept of the sovereign providence of God, therefore, informs the antirrhetic citation of the Psalm. In the present passage Evagrius makes no specific reference to petition. However, it is important to note that antirrhetic prayers most often take the form of petition.\textsuperscript{153} This text, then, could probably also take the form of a petition, where the monk would say, “Be with me,” rather than, “for you are with me.”

Leaving \textit{Chapters on Prayer}, we now return to \textit{Eulogios 27}, examined in the second chapter.\textsuperscript{154} Recalling our earlier exposition, we remember that in this text Evagrius mentions a particular monk who was undergoing severe demonic attack. The monk, recognizing his own inability to defeat the attacking demons, turns to God in prayer.

For while the demons were terrifying his soul in many ways, the sufferer besought God in prayer; and while they were distracting his soul with fantasies, he gathered up the mass of his faults and disclosed them to God who sees all. And in turn, when they tried to draw his eye from prayer, he countered with the fear of judgment and wiped out his fear of phantasms. For when one dimension of fear exceeded the other, it overcame error with the help of God. When the soul was humbled by the remembrance of its sins and awakened from sleep by the fear of judgment, it exhaled from its inward parts the terrors of the demons. But everything came from grace from above: driving away the terrors of the

\textsuperscript{151} See chapter two under “Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”

\textsuperscript{152} See the discussion of \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 94 and 96 just above.

\textsuperscript{153} See, for example, \textit{Antirrhetikos} 8.23, 4.36, and 8.24. In these passages, as well as numerous others in \textit{Antirrhetikos}, antirrhetic prayer against demonic thoughts takes the form of petition. In these three texts, the monk, citing biblical texts in antirrhetic fashion, petitions God for help and victory against various demons.

\textsuperscript{154} See chapter two, under “Prayer and Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”
demons and sustaining the soul that was falling, for ‘the Lord upholds all those who are falling and sets aright all those who are cast down’ (Ps. 144:14).  

Evagrius uses *euchē* and *euchēs* for “prayer.” And here he intends confession—“gathered up the mass of his faults and disclosed them to God who sees all.” But we must remember that confession and petition are closely related. For instance, in the passage Evagrius alludes to contriteness—“When the soul was humbled by the remembrance of its sins...” In *Chapters on Prayer* 5 and 7, both of which were examined in the first section of the chapter, Evagrius indicates that tears must accompany the contriteness necessary for genuine confession; in fact, it appears that tears actually generate the contriteness. However, the tears are only received through petition.

Therefore, petition would appear to be implied in the present passage.

Theologically, the text asserts both the sovereignty and providence of God. The term “fear of judgment” indicates divine sovereignty, since judgment serves as an expression of God’s sovereignty. And “fear of divine judgment” appears to exercise a providential role here in that it refocuses the monk’s thinking. The monk recognizes

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156 Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 329. As mentioned earlier, Evagrius sometimes uses *euchē* and *prōseuchē* synonymously. See, for example, *Eulogios*, 28, examined in chapter three under “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”

157 See *Chapters on Prayer*, 5.

158 See chapter two under “Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”
that one day he will stand before the Divine Judge—“fear of judgment” implies this. And the monk’s “fear” of this fact extinguishes the fright generated by the demons.

God’s sovereign role as Judge functions here as a providential aid. In *Chapters on Prayer* 100, Evagrius chastises the monk for directing his fear toward the demons rather than toward God. God alone reigns as the Sovereign King and Master of all; therefore, one should “fear” him alone. It is, according to *Chapters on Prayer* 100, blasphemous to fear demons rather than God. In our present text, directing fear toward demons is designated as “error.” And here fear of God, or fear of judgment, provides for the monk by extinguishing the erroneous fear of demons; for the “help of God” enables the monk to overcome the error of misapplied fear. “With the help of God” translates *sŭn Theō*—literally, “with God.” Evagrius appears to identify the “help of God” with the “fear of judgment.” So here we notice that God’s role of Sovereign Judge represents the divine providential help that redirects the monk’s misplaced fear

Evagrius then becomes even more explicit concerning divine providence, explaining that “everything came from grace from above.” The victory over the demons in its entirety derives from divine providential grace (Greek *charitōs*—from *charis*).

The Sovereign Judge expresses his gracious providence in the activities of “driving” and

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159 We must remember Evagrius’s understanding of “judgment” as God’s decision on whether an individual deserves to move to an angelic or demonic realm after his or her death. See chapter two under “Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”

160 See chapter two, “Prayer and Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”


162 Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 330. See the earlier exposition given to the term in *Eulogios*, 28, examined last chapter.
“sustaining.” For “driving,” Evagrius uses apēlasai\textsuperscript{163} (from apēlaunō), the same exact term he uses for “driving” in Chapters on Prayer 94, which we examined earlier in the chapter. The King provides for the monk by expelling the demons, and also by “sustaining” (ūpōstēriksai, from ēpōstērigma)\textsuperscript{164} the soul of the struggling monk. According to Liddell and Scott, the Greek term denotes “sustain” in the sense of “propping” or supporting.\textsuperscript{165} Here the Omnipotent Judge provides for the monk by keeping him from falling prey to demonic fear. That “everything came from grace” implies the monk’s inability to provide for himself. He requires the providential gracious assistance of the Sovereign King. And apparently the monk receives this gracious aid through the providential means of prayer. The prayerful invoking or beseeching represents the monk’s first response to the demonic onslaught. In fact, it is during prayer that the monk “counters with the fear of judgment.” In this text prayer, consisting of both confession and petition, marks the means whereby the monk receives the sovereign providential assistance of God. Through the monk’s prayerful remembrance of impending divine judgment, God expels the demons and sustains the monk from falling. Once again prayer functions as the means or channel of divine providence. In other words, in the passage prayer serves as the medium whereby God executes his providential grace.

\textsuperscript{163} Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 329-330.

\textsuperscript{164} Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 329-330.

\textsuperscript{165} Liddell and Scott, p. 1896.
In the first section of the third chapter, where we expounded Evagrius’s definition of divine providence, we cited *Kephalaia Gnostica* 4.89, which makes special mention of divine providence and Christ. In Evagrius’s writings, we find examples of Christ providing aid against demons, particularly through the channel of petition. We now turn our attention to these.

We will begin with Evagrius’s *Letters*. Addressing a fellow gnostic, Evagrius writes, “I therefore ask Your Holiness to beseech Jesus the Shepherd for me, that he would save us from the wild beasts, make us worthy of the number of his flock, give us the pasture of virtue, and let us drink the water of knowledge.” Here we find an example of gnostic intercession, where the advanced gnostic petitions for the spiritual advancement of another. Again, such intercession does in fact involve petitioning or making prayers of request, but of a specialized sort. The “beseeching” of Jesus designates petition; “beseech Jesus, that…” certainly involves requesting. Evagrius exhorts the gnostic to petition the Second Person of the Holy Trinity for four realities: salvation from “wild beasts,” “making us worthy of his flock,” “granting virtue,” and

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166 “Who will recount the grace of God? Who will scrutinize the *logoi* of providence and how the Christ leads the reasoning nature by means of varied worlds to the union of the Holy Unity?” In Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 184, note 112.


168 See *Reflections*, 30, and *Chapters on Prayer*, 40, both of which were examined in chapter one, section two.
granting “knowledge.” This appears to encompass the whole monastic life. By “wild beasts,” Evagrius probably intends demons and the thoughts they use as weapons. The granting of virtue and the granting of knowledge sum up the whole spiritual journey of the monk. Here virtue (ἀρετή) indicates the πρατική or practical life, and knowledge (γνώση) designates the γνωστική or gnostic life.

In the passage we find Christ performing providential functions such as “saving” and “giving.” The English “save” renders the Greek λευτρόει, from λευτρόο—used in reference to rescuing someone in a dire situation or from harm. This appears to cohere with Chapters on Prayer 94, where Evagrius exhorts the monastic to use the “stick of petitioning” to “drive away” the demonic spirits and their thoughts. The Greek δοι, from didομί, renders “give.” Didομί, a verb we examined earlier, indicates

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169 “Virtue” and “knowledge,” as we already noticed, indicate the practical life and the gnostic life, respectively. See Scholia on Psalms, scholion 8 on Psalm 138:16, and Gnostikos 48, both of which were discussed in chapter three under “Divine Providence.”

170 See Chapters on Prayer 91, which refers to demons as “ferocious animals.” In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 195.


172 Again, see Scholia on Psalms, scholion 8 on Psalm 138:16, and Gnostikos 48, examined in chapter three.


174 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 482.

175 See the examination of this passage given above.

the act of granting or imparting and therefore “giving” to someone. “Let us drink” translates *pŏtisēi*, from the verb *pŏtizō*—“give to drink,” in the literal sense of giving someone water. In effect, Evagrius exhorts the gnostic to petition Christ for protection against demonic forces and for the acquisition of virtue and knowledge. We have already seen that the monk, even the most advanced gnostic, cannot defeat the forces of evil in his own power alone. The petitioning for protection against demons assumes the sovereignty of Christ over the demonic realm. In the prologue to the *Antirrhetikos*, Evagrius refers to Christ as “Jesus Christ, our victorious King”—that is, victorious King over demonic beings. In the present passage Christ expresses his sovereignty over the demons by delivering the monk from their power. Here we find another example of divine sovereign providence informing petition, and of petition serving as the providential channel of divine providence. Such petitioning assumes Christ’s willingness and ability to deliver the monk from the clutches of the evil demons. And it is through the petitioning that Christ grants the providential aid. Petitioning, then, serves as the point of contact between the loving, providential, sovereign Christ and the finite monk.

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177 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 192.


179 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 695.

180 *Antirrhetikos*, prologue. Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Antirrhetikos.” Ldysinger.com. In the prologue, Evagrius references Christ’s victory in the wilderness over the devil. Given this, “Jesus Christ, our victorious King,” refers to the power and sovereignty of Christ over the devil and his demons.
The same holds true for the petitioning for virtue and knowledge. According to Dysinger, divine providence operates throughout the entire spiritual enterprise, throughout the whole of the practical life and the whole of the gnostic life.\footnote{181} And according to the texts we have examined thus far in both chapters three and four, the monk requires providential assistance in both the practical life and the gnostic life, for he cannot accomplish them unaided.\footnote{182} Again, petitioning Christ for the acquisition of virtue and knowledge assumes his providential provision in both the practical life and the gnostic life. Prior to engaging in such petition, the monk recognizes and trusts that the Second Person of the Triune God is King over all, including the demons, and that this same Person is loving and willing to provide for all aspects of the spiritual life. This indicates the informing role divine providence exercises on petitioning, in particular gnostic intercession here. And petition also serves as the point of contact between the loving, gracious Christ and the finite, weak monk. Through the petitioning, Christ grants the providential aid the monk seeks. And in this passage we find the link between divine sovereign providence and prayer, specifically with a christological focus.

We now turn to another work of Evagrius, where he references the providence of Christ further.

One must watch the demons’ thoughts closely: some sow them secretly; and their periods of intensity and relaxation and their interrelations and duration; and which demon follows which. And aid must be sought from Christ to stand

\textit{\footnote{181} Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius, p. 184-185.}

\textit{\footnote{182} See Scholia on Psalms, scholion 8 on Psalm 138:16, Gnostikos 48, On Thoughts 29, and Eight Thoughts 8.12. All of these texts were discussed in chapter three under “Divine Providence.”}
arrayed against them. For they are particularly harsh to those who are wisely participating in ascetic struggle.\textsuperscript{183}

Here Evagrius exhorts the monastic to observe the demonic thoughts closely. By doing so, the monk discovers their strategy. Casiday compares this text to another which essentially makes the same point.\textsuperscript{184}

If there is any monk who wishes to take the measure of some of the more fierce demons so as to gain experience in his monastic art, then let him keep careful watch over his thoughts. Let him observe their intensity, their periods of decline and follow them as they rise and fall. Let him note well the complexity of his thoughts, their periodicity, the demons which cause them, with the order of their succession and the nature of their associations. Then let him ask from Christ the explanations of these data he has observed. For the demons become thoroughly infuriated with those who practice active virtue in a manner that is increasingly contemplative. They are even of a mind to ‘pierce the upright of heart through, under the cover of darkness’ [Psm. 10:3].\textsuperscript{185}

As in the \textit{Excerpts} passage, Evagrius encourages his readers to observe their thoughts carefully. Engaging in such enables them to discern demonic strategy.

Regarding prayer, both texts make reference to petition. In \textit{Excerpts}, Evagrius exhorts his reader to “seek aid from Christ.” This appears to coincide with the \textit{Letters} passage examined just above, where Evagrius asks a gnostic friend to “beseech Jesus that he would save us from wild beasts.”\textsuperscript{186} In \textit{Letters} Evagrius mentions petitioning Christ for victory against demonic forces; he appears to do the same thing in \textit{Excerpts},

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{183} \textit{Excerpts}, 20. In Casiday, \textit{Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 175.
\item \textsuperscript{184} Casiday, \textit{Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 175.
\item \textsuperscript{185} \textit{Praktikos}, 50. In Bamberger, \textit{The Praktikos & Chapters on Prayer}, p. 29-30.
\item \textsuperscript{186} \textit{Letters}, 9.
\end{itemize}
for one cannot receive “aid” from Christ unless it is requested. Here we find Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, providentially providing for the monk. The demonic forces are quite “harsh”; apparently the monk cannot handle them by himself, and for this reason he calls upon the One Evagrius designates “the King of Kings, and the Power of Powers.” Even the demons, therefore, would be subject to the sovereignty of such a King. In the Excerpts passage, then, we find another instance of divine sovereignty, particularly the sovereignty of God the Son, governing the monk’s approach to prayer. The monk would not engage in such prayer to God the Son unless he recognized the sovereign nature of the One to whom he prays. Also, the monk would not engage in such petitioning unless he understood that God the Son providentially provides for his people. The monk needs help against the powerful foes, and he recognizes this fact and consequently petitions Christ for help. Through the petition, Christ enables the monk to “stand” against the foes. Again we find divine providence informing petition, and we also find petition serving as the channel through which the providential aid operates. All of this coheres with Evagrius’s position on divine providence, which involves God’s “ongoing provision” for the monk’s needs. Certainly, defeating the dark enemy—who seeks to keep the monk from divine knowledge—constitutes a need. Apart from divine provision, the monk would be overrun, since the monk, from the beginning novice to the advanced gnostic, cannot defeat the satanic

187 However, unlike the Letters entry, this passage does not involve gnostic intercession but rather the monk petitioning God on behalf of himself.

188 See Causes 11, examined in chapter two.
forces and their impassioned thoughts apart from divine providence. But we must remember that the monk is not completely passive in this enterprise. In Excerpts, as well as in the Praktikos text, the monk contributes by analyzing his thoughts. However, even here divine providence is operative, since God provided the mind with which the monk engages in the analysis of thoughts. The monk does not engage in the actual analysis of thoughts unassisted, for even here God must provide assistance in some way, since all ascetic achievement results from the providential assistance of God; the monk accomplishes nothing unaided.

In the Praktikos text cited just above, the monk petitions Christ for information—namely, the monk asks Christ for “the explanations of these data he [the monk] has observed,” that is, the data derived from the analysis of demonic thoughts. Evagrius undoubtedly intends petition here, as indicated by “ask.” That the monk must petition Christ demonstrates his inability to acquire this information through his own power. And the petitioning here assumes the providential activity of God the Son in the practical life specifically, since Praktikos was intended for the practical life. In divine prônoia, God providentially operates in both the practical life and the gnostic life. We should recall Evagrius’s comment in his Scholia on Psalms, “God is known as... provident

189 See A Word about Prayer 3, examined earlier in the chapter.

190 See, specifically, Eight Thoughts 8.12, where Evagrius states clearly that all ascetic achievement finds its source in the providential aid of God. See chapter two, under “Divine Providence.”

191 According to Sinkewicz, this work is “a treatise on the practical life.” See Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 91.

192 Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 184.
through [the things] contributing to our virtue and knowledge.”193 Petitioning, as we have already seen, represents a divine providential channel or means by which God assists the monk in the acquisition of both “virtue” (the practical life) and “knowledge” (the gnostic life).194 Through the providential channel of petition, Christ providentially assists the monk, providing the “explanations” of the “data” derived from the monk’s thought analysis.195 The providing of the explanations by Christ forms an expression of divine prōnoia. Apparently it is vital for the monk to acquire the “explanations” in order for him to advance or gain “experience” in the monastic life. By providing the explanations, Christ helps the monk advance in monasticism, particularly the practical life. This provision by Christ, then, represents an example of divine assistance in the praktike. In this passage we find yet another example of petition serving as the providential channel through which providential assistance is mediated, and we also find another example of divine providence informing petitioning. In other words, with regard to the informing role, this petitioning assumes that the monk has embraced the concept of divine providence, that the monk understands and trusts that God the Son expresses his love in providential provision.


194 See specifically *Chapters on Prayer*, 129, examined earlier in the chapter. In this text, Evagrius exhorts his readers to “trust” God for the needs of both the body and the spirit.

195 Evagrius does not specify the nature of this provision. Does Christ perhaps influence the practical life monk to seek counsel from a gnostic in this matter? In other words, does Christ provide the sought after “explanations” through the counsel of an advanced monk? Or does Christ provide here through other means, such as inner awareness? Evagrius gives no indication.
We now turn to *On Thoughts*. In the thirty-fourth paragraph, Evagrius addresses the issue of demons and their means of attack. He writes:

When the mind beholds such things, let it flee to the Lord. Receiving the ‘helmet of salvation’ and donning ‘the breastplate of righteousness,’ drawing the ‘sword of the Spirit’ and raising ‘the shield of faith’ [cf. Eph. 6.14-17], let the mind say with tears as it gazes up to its heavenly home, ‘Lord’ Christ, ‘the power of my salvation’ [Ps 138.8], ‘incline your ear to me, hasten to deliver me, be for me a protecting God and a place of refuge for saving me’ [Ps. 30.3].

In this passage, Evagrius alludes to the sixth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, which addresses spiritual warfare. The type of prayer we find in the passage is antirrhetic prayer, here taking the form of a petition addressed to Christ. Evagrius exhorts his readers to petition Christ for deliverance from demonic forces, particularly from the impassioned thoughts they seek to engender. For “deliver,” Evagrius employs the term ἐκσῆλῆσθαι, from the verb ἐκσαίρεω, indicating deliverance in the sense of removing one from danger. By the term, Evagrius intends rescue or deliverance from the demonic attack. “Protecting God” translates Θεόν ὑπὲρασπιστέν—“the God who protects.” The term ὑπὲρασπίζω, deriving from ὑπὲρασπιστέο, denotes protection in the sense of “holding a shield over.” The term σῶσαι represents the Greek for “saving.”

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196 That is, “the sequence of demons” that attempt to generate impassioned thoughts. See *On Thoughts* 34.


198 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *On Thoughts,*” 34. Ldysinger.com

199 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 272.

200 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *On Thoughts,*” 34. Ldysinger.com

201 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 840.
The term appears to be related to *sōtēria*—“salvation,” primarily signifying salvation in terms of being united to Christ and thus delivered from damnation, but the term also denotes preservation from any type of danger. Here Evagrius uses the term particularly of deliverance from demonic attack.

The concepts of “delivering,” “protecting,” and “saving” all indicate providential actions performed by Christ. When enduring demonic attack, the monk must petition Christ to rescue, protect, and deliver him from the demonic enemies. The very fact that the monk requires such action signifies his inability to accomplish this in his own power alone. If the monk could defeat the demonic horde unassisted, he would not need Christ to deliver him; he would not need Christ to be a “protecting God” or a place of “saving refuge.” The monk requires assistance when faced with such opposition. By providing the providential protection and deliverance, Christ asserts his sovereignty over the devil and his minions. And Christ’s sovereignty finds its expression in the providential “delivering,” “protecting,” and “saving.” In divine providence or *prōnoia*, God provides what the monk cannot provide for himself. Again, let us recall Dysinger’s explanation of Evagrian divine providence: “Evagrius uses the term ‘providence’ to describe God’s ongoing provision of what each *logikos* requires in order for it to return to divine union.”

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202 Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, On Thoughts,” 34. Ldysinger.com

203 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 801.

204 Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 184.
delivering, protecting, and saving all describe God’s “provision of what [the being]
requires for divine union”; deliverance from the enemy certainly represents a
requirement for union with God. Here the monk’s petition serves as the channel
through which Christ exerts his providential care. And this petition assumes the deity of
God the Son, as indicated by the application of “God” (Théōn) to Christ, and thus the
absolute sovereignty of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Moreover, the prayer
assumes the love of Christ, which is expressed in his gracious provision for the
demonically assaulted monk. We cannot overemphasize the relationship between the
love of God and the providence of God, since the latter is clearly rooted in the former.\textsuperscript{205}

In the \textit{On Thoughts} text we find theological conviction expressed in spiritual
practice. The petitioning presupposes the monk’s commitment to divine sovereign
providence. Before engaging in the petition, the monk must trust that the Second
Person of the Trinity reigns as King over all, including the demons, and that therefore
the demons fall within the parameters of His sovereignty. The monk does not need to
fear the demons, because the Almighty Christ is sovereign over them. Also, the monk,
in making the petition, recognizes that the Sovereign King loves him and will provide the
necessary assistance. In this text we find another example of the informing role divine
sovereign providence exercises on petition.

Evagrius continues his discourse on demonic activity in a lengthy passage in
\textit{Eulogios}.

\textsuperscript{205} See chapter three, under “Divine Providence.”
This account was given by the holy bishop Epiphanius. ‘It happened,’ he said, ‘that the son of a faithful widow was possessed by the demon of Python and after some time in the affliction could not submit to healing. With his mother rendered humble by mourning, thanksgiving cooled the passion, and having suspended his soul from the cross, it cast the demon out of the child by means of her prayers. While the youth was wandering in the parts round-about and his mother was at home praying, the demon crying out the woman’s name was plagued with torments. But when the woman heard of this, she did not run to the scene, binding the battle of nature to humility; but, drawn by others, she was led there against her will, and henceforth, the demon too was driven mad to the point of taking flight. Standing by, then, she embraced her child in tears and cast forth her thanksgiving and humility against the demon; and after she had wept bitterly, imploring Christ and making the sign of the cross, the demon quickly ran away from her child before so many lashes of the whip.’

The English “prayers” and “praying” translate euchais, from euchē. Here Evagrius undoubtedly intends petition, as evidenced by the term “implore.” The mother petitions God, specifically Christ, to deliver her son from the demonic enemy. For “implore,” Evagrius uses ikēteusasa. The term derives from the verb ikēteuō—Evagrius employs a related term, ikēsia, for “supplication” in Reflections, 28, where he speaks specifically of petition. The verb ikēteuō refers to making a request or supplication, and thus the idea of prayers of petition. So in the passage we find petition, where the woman supplicates or petitions Christ on behalf of her son.

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207 Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 327-328.

208 Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 327-328.

209 See chapter one, section two.

210 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 375.
The passage, like those examined above, clearly asserts the sovereign providence of God. In the text God fulfills a need for the woman: He drives out the invading demon. Apparently, both the woman and her child are helpless; they cannot, in and of their own power, accomplish this feat. But the woman does contribute, namely by engaging in the petitioning. But nevertheless, by means of the woman’s supplication, the provident King drives the demon out of the child, thereby demonstrating his sovereign power over the invading spirit, as well as his love—here expressed in the gracious providential assistance. The passage then declares the loving kindness of God, loving kindness that finds its manifestation in divine providential grace.

But the story does not end with the actual exorcism of the demon. The child, while wandering about, was still plagued by the evil being. The woman, now on the scene, continues to battle the enemy, using both virtue and prayer as her weapons of warfare. At this point the passage specifically mentions Christ. Through the woman’s supplication or petition, Christ manifests his sovereign providential love. Both his sovereignty and providential love find their expression in the driving away or “lashing” of the demon. Christ thus illustrates his sovereign power over the demon and his providential gracious love for the woman and her child. Again, in keeping with Evagrius’s understanding of providence, Christ fulfills a need for the woman and her son by expelling the demon. Individuals possessed by demonic spirits cannot advance toward divine knowledge. In the passage, then, we find another example of God
graciously providing what individuals need in order to “return to divine union.” Here divine providence takes the form of deliverance.

In the passage we find the woman employing humility, thanksgiving, and prayer. She attacks the invader with humility and her thankfulness. She is thankful because of God’s providence, through which He drove the demon out of and away from her son. The woman’s “thanksgiving” or thankfulness, then, represents her response to God’s providential love. And the “humility,” like all virtue, represents a gift of providential grace. Without the “seeds of virtue,” which are providentially implanted in all beings, an individual would be unable to cultivate virtue, including humility. The Sovereign King, therefore, is the source of all virtue. However, prayer is ultimately the key here, for it is through prayer that God initially expelled the demon from the child’s body, and it is also through prayer that God, specifically Christ, completely secured victory over the demon. In this particular passage we once again find prayer, specifically petition, functioning as the medium or channel of divine providence; it is through the woman’s petition that the Sovereign King granted his providential care, so petition serves as the medium or point of contact between God’s providence and the woman and her son. And we notice that the concept of divine sovereign providence also exercises an


212 See *Scholia on Psalms*, scholion 3 on Psalm 125:5. The passage was examined in chapter three under “Divine Providence.”

213 The person’s ability to cultivate and develop virtue, which Evagrius terms “seeds of virtue,” is inherent in each created being and therefore finds its source in God, the Creator of all things. Again, see the discussion of *Scholia on Psalms*, scholion 3 on Psalm 125:5.
informing role here. Prior to engaging in prayer, the widow—obviously a faithful member of the Church, since Evagrius labels her a “faithful woman”—clearly acknowledged and trusted in the universal sovereignty of the One she implored, a sovereignty extending over all, including the powerful demons. Her prayer expresses her commitment to and trust in divine sovereignty. Furthermore, her prayer expresses her recognition of and trust in Divine Love, which, in her case, found its expression in providential deliverance. This particular passage corresponds to a text we examined earlier in the chapter, Letters 9, where Evagrius asks a fellow monk to petition God on his behalf for deliverance from demonic forces.

We now turn our attention to three texts in Evagrius’s Antirrhetikos. First, Evagrius writes, “For the Lord,214 concerning the demons that fall upon the skin scorching like flames with their touch and then leave circular marks like those made by a cupping instrument. These I have often seen with [my] eyes and been amazed. ‘Judge, O Lord, those that injure me, fight against those that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and arise for my help’ [Psm. 7:2].”215 Here we find an antirrhetic prayer taking the form of petition. The Psalm itself is a plea for help against demonic forces, which apparently injure the monk physically. And we notice that there are certain theological assumptions attached to the Psalm or prayer. First, the petition assumes the monk’s inability to wage war against the demons in his own power. The

214 “For the Lord” actually denotes “To the Lord.” See Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 138.

very fact that Evagrius suggests the antirrhetic Psalm indicates this. If the monk were able to conquer the foe through his own unaided capacities, there would be no need to pray the Psalm. In his own abilities alone, the monk is powerless against the demonic foes, especially these particular demons, who appear quite violent. The monk must recognize his need for divine help, lest he fall victim to pride.  

Second, the prayer assumes God's sovereignty. Unless one recognizes God's sovereignty over the demonic realm, praying such a prayer would be fruitless. The monk making use of the Psalm trusts that his Lord reigns supreme over all others, including Satan and his minions. The prayer expresses this theological conviction. Third, the prayer assumes that God expresses his sovereignty in providential, gracious provision. The monk should not pray the Psalm unless he understands and trusts that God loves him and desires the best for him, and that God expresses this love in providential provision. In making use of the Psalm against the demonic foe, the monk expresses his commitment to divine providence, trusting that his Sovereign Lord will fulfill his need for victory over the evil demons. Here divine sovereign providence informs the antirrhetic petition.

Evagrius makes a similar point later in the same work, writing, “For the Lord because of the blasphemous thought persisting in us: ‘O Lord my God, in thee I have put my trust; save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me’ [Psm. 7:2].”

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216 See Eight Thoughts, 8, and Antirrhetikos, 8, where Evagrius discusses pride and its drastic results. According to Evagrius, pride results when one foolishly denies divine providence. The prideful monk believes that he himself is the cause of monastic achievement. See Eight Thoughts, 8.12, which was examined in chapter three under “Divine Providence.”

the eighth chapter of this particular work, *Antirrhetikos*, Evagrius addresses the enemy of pride, which in the present passage is labeled “the blasphemous thought persisting in us.” And the antirrhetic Psalm petitions God for deliverance from this demonic thought. Here “trust” serves as the foundation of the petition. The monk can make such a petition only because he not only “believes” intellectually in the concept of divine providence but “trusts” in his heart that God can and will fulfill the requests.\textsuperscript{218} In the passage divine providence finds its manifestation in the “saving” and “delivering.” In order to progress in the spiritual life, the monk requires such delivering activity on the part of God, since a mind blinded by demonic thoughts cannot acquire contemplation and especially pure prayer.\textsuperscript{219}

Here we find another example of divine sovereign providence informing antirrhetic petitioning. The monk trusts that God is sovereign over the demonic forces and that the Sovereign Master will provide what is needed—in this case, deliverance from the invading demonic thought of pride. In fact, the petition itself expresses the monk’s trust in and commitment to the notion of divine provision. The monk trusts in his heart that, despite the power of the demons, God will prevail over the enemies, for God reigns as the Sovereign “Lord of all.”\textsuperscript{220} Moreover, the petition assumes the monk’s

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[218]{According to Louth, “Acceptance of God’s revelation is more than a merely intellectual matter.” See Andrew Louth, *Theology and Spirituality*, p. 6.}
\footnotetext[219]{See, for example, *Chapters on Prayer*, 4. In this passage Evagrius explains that a mind infested with impassioned thoughts cannot receive pure prayer.}
\footnotetext[220]{*The Great Letter*, 50. The first chapter examined this passage under “Divine Sovereignty: God as King, Master, and Lord.”}
\end{footnotes}
commitment to the providential love of God—the very God who “loves and nurtures 

human beings.” Here God’s love finds expression in the providential vanquishing of 
the demonically inspired thought, and the antirrhetic petition of the monk serves as the 
channel through which this providential undertaking is accomplished.

Addressing the thought of acedia, Evagrius writes, “For the Lord on account of 
the demons of acedia, that fight against me all day long: ‘Have mercy on me, O God, for 
man has trodden me down; all the day-long his warring has afflicted me’ [Psm. 55:2].” Here Evagrius figuratively references the “demons of acedia” with the term “man.” And 
there is no let up in this fight against these adversaries; it appears to be ceaseless, for 
these evil forces battle the monk “all day long.” As we have already seen a number of 
times, the monk cannot defeat these forces alone; he needs the provision of the 
Almighty Lord and King.

The prayer, again taking the form of an antirrhetic Psalm, assumes the mercy of 
God. In fact, the Psalm takes the form of a plea for mercy. Ultimately the monk, in 
praying the Psalm, pleads for deliverance from these demons—“Have mercy on me” 
represents a plea or petition for divine help against the demonic horde of acedia. Such 
a petition assumes, or is governed by, divine sovereign providence. Prior to praying the 
Psalm, the monk understands or trusts in sovereignty, recognizing that the demons are 
subject to God. Moreover, before engaging in the antirrhetic Psalm, the monk must 

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221 See Eulogios, 11, examined in chapter three under “Divine Providence.”

222 Antirrhetikos 6.21.
trust in divine providence—that is, he trusts that God desires to deliver him from the ordeal, and he trusts that God will in fact deliver him. Praying the Psalm, therefore, assumes the sovereign love of God, which finds its expression in divine provision for the monk’s need of deliverance. Again, this clearly coheres with Evagrius’s definition of divine providence, for deliverance from the impassioned demonic thought of acedia clearly represents an example of God’s “ongoing provision of what each logikos requires” for divine, immaterial union.\(^{223}\)

We now move to the fifth and final chapter, which shall address the informing and deepening role Evagrius’s teaching on prayer exercises on his doctrines of sovereignty and providence.

\(^{223}\) See Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 184-185.
CHAPTER FIVE

PRAYER INFORMING SOVEREIGNTY AND PROVIDENCE

In chapter two, we demonstrated how Evagrius’s teaching on divine sovereignty informs his teaching on and approach to prayer, while the third chapter pointed out the intrinsic link between divine providence and pure prayer. Here we noticed that pure prayer marks an expression of divine providence, and in fact the ultimate manifestation of providence in the monastic context, since pure prayer constitutes the very goal of the monastic struggle, namely, “theology” or direct, unmediated knowledge of God.¹ In the fourth chapter, we turned specifically to the informing role divine sovereign providence exercises on prayers of petition. And in both chapters three and four, we noticed how petition and pure prayer represent the providential avenue through which the monastic experiences the sovereign providential grace of God. The fifth and final chapter will be devoted to demonstrating how Evagrius’s teaching on prayer shapes and deepens his teaching on God, particularly his teachings on divine sovereignty and divine providence. The fifth chapter intends to develop this line in Evagrius’s thought, hoping to provide a worthwhile example of how spirituality informs and deepens thelogical commitment and belief. To accomplish this goal, it will be necessary to revisit a number of the texts

¹ See Chapters on Prayer, 61 and 85, both of which were examined in chapter one, section two, under “Pure Prayer.” And see Jeremy Driscoll, The Ad Monachos of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 17. Here Driscoll explains that Evagrius identifies “knowledge of God” with pure prayer.
examined earlier. First, we will briefly recap Evagrius’s view on divine sovereignty and divine providence, and then we will explain how Evagrius’s teaching on prayer informs his position on these theological concepts.

Evagrius strongly maintains the absolute sovereignty of the Triune God over all reality and over all beings. As chapter two detailed, the Triune God is “king over the universe which he made.” This indicates, for Evagrius, that the Holy Trinity reigns supreme over the world and everything therein. God the Father is “Lord of all” and Christ reigns as the “King of kings, and the Power of powers.” As the second chapter examination of Causes 11 detailed, this ultimately signifies the sovereignty of God over all human beings, over all the kingdoms and rulers of the world. However, Evagrius does not limit the sovereignty of God to the earthly realm. The Almighty Triune King reigns supreme over the angelic realm, for this God is the “Lord of Hosts.” Furthermore, the King reigns supreme over the demonic realm as well, for Evagrius designates the Second Person of the Triune God as “Jesus Christ, our victorious king”; that is, victorious king over Satan and his horde. This God reigns as the Omnipotent

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2 Notes on Ecclesiastes, 38. See chapter two under “Divine Sovereignty.”

3 See chapter two under “Divine Sovereignty.”

4 Causes, 11. This passage was detailed in chapter two under “Divine Sovereignty and Prayer.”


6 See Antirrhetikos, prologue, referenced in chapter two, “Divine Sovereignty.”
Creator of and Provider for the whole creation; nothing resides outside the parameters of his sovereignty, not human, demon, or angel.⁷

In chapter two, we noted that in Evagrius’s thought, divine providence marks one of the primary channels through which the Sovereign Master operates his sovereignty. God, Evagrius explains, is “known as provident through those [things or realities] contributing to our virtue and knowledge”—that is, God expresses his providence in the practical and gnostic lives and everything therein.⁸ Evagrius makes the same point in another text, where he teaches that God expresses his providence in the “means by which we return from vice and ignorance to virtue and knowledge.” In other words, God operates his providence for rational beings through the practical and gnostic lives.⁹ The entire “arrangement” through which one moves to reunion with the Holy Trinity designates the providence of God.¹⁰

Upon what does Evagrius base his views of sovereignty and providence? For Evagrius, the Church and her Scriptures fully declare the sovereignty of the Triune God, and they also clearly teach that God provides for the created order, particularly for

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⁷ See *Chapters on Prayer*, 100. The second chapter, under “Prayer and Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment,” examined this text in detail.

⁸ See *Scholion on Psalms*, scholion 8 on Psalm 138:16. This passage was detailed in chapter three under “Divine Providence.” And see Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 184.

⁹ See *Gnostikos*, 48, also examined in the third chapter under “Divine Providence.” And see Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 184.

human beings, his image bearer.\textsuperscript{11} Biblical texts such as Psalm 112:4,\textsuperscript{12} Luke 19 (which uses the term “king” of Christ),\textsuperscript{13} the temptation narratives in Matthew 4 and Luke 4 (where Christ demonstrates his sovereign power by vanquishing Satan),\textsuperscript{14} Isaiah 6 (where God is designated “The Lord of Hosts”),\textsuperscript{15} and Daniel 6:27 (which extols the sovereign power of God)\textsuperscript{16} assert the sovereignty of God. Furthermore, Holy Scripture indicates that the sovereign God providentially provides. For example, Matthew 6:25-31,\textsuperscript{17} Psalm 126:1,\textsuperscript{18} and Psalm 144:14\textsuperscript{19} indicate that God provides for both physical and spiritual needs. The Church’s Scriptures, therefore, clearly assert the sovereignty and providence of the living God.

However, it is imperative that we keep in mind that Evagrius did not write as an ivory tower biblical scholar detached from the world of spiritual experience. Rather, he compiled his works in the context of his teachings on the spiritual life. Evagrius wrote as

\textsuperscript{11} See chapters two and three, which provide a detailed definition of Evagrius’s view on divine sovereignty and divine providence.

\textsuperscript{12} “The Lord is most high above all nations.” Notes on Ecclesiastes, 38. In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 142. This text was covered in chapter two.

\textsuperscript{13} See Notes on Luke, 4, examined in chapter two, “Divine Sovereignty.”

\textsuperscript{14} See Antirrhetikos, prologue, par. 5.

\textsuperscript{15} See Chapters on Prayer, 79, examined in chapter two under “Prayer and Divine Sovereignty.”

\textsuperscript{16} See Chapters on Prayer, 100, analyzed in chapter two, “Prayer and Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”

\textsuperscript{17} See On Thoughts, 6, which was covered in both chapters two and three.

\textsuperscript{18} See chapter three under “Divine Providence.”

\textsuperscript{19} See Eulogios 27, covered in chapter four under “Divine Providence, Petition, and Demons.”
a theologian—that is, an advanced gnostic who received direct, unmediated knowledge of God through the avenue of pure or spiritual prayer. To be sure, Evagrius was well acquainted with theological doctrine, but we notice that in the previous three chapters, he expounds theological belief and doctrine in the context of his teaching on prayer. The previous three chapters clearly indicate that Evagrius was not merely concerned with theological affirmation, but theological affirmation and doctrine expressed in spiritual practice, namely prayer. So it would then appear that Evagrius’s teachings on prayer shaped his teachings on divine sovereignty and divine providence. We will begin by turning again to pure prayer.

**Pure Prayer Informing Divine Sovereignty and Divine Providence**

In the third chapter, we noted that *Eulogios*, 28, represents one of the key texts in Evagrius concerning pure prayer. We now revisit it.

Sometimes we exert ourselves to make our prayer pure, and we may perhaps be unable. But in turn it also happens that pure prayer arises in the soul when we are making no effort; for our weakness on the one hand and grace from above on the other call on us to ascend to purity of the soul, while at the same time through both means training us not to attribute the work to ourselves in the practice of pure prayer, but to acknowledge the one who bestows the gift: ‘For we do not know how to pray as we ought’ (Rom. 8:26). Whenever then we make an effort to have our prayer purified and are unable, but find ourselves in the darkness, then, having drenched our cheeks with tears, let us beseech God for the night of warfare to be brought to an end and for the radiance of the soul to be illumined.21

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20 See, specifically, *Chapters on Prayer*, where Evagrius expounds most clearly the notion of pure prayer.

The third chapter examined this text in detail, and there it was pointed out that the monastic, no matter how advanced, cannot acquire pure prayer through his own efforts alone, try hard though he may. The gnostic enters the realm of pure prayer through the providential grace of God, although the monk contributes to this process by earnestly petitioning for the gift. Here we found the inherent link between pure prayer and divine providence.\(^{22}\)

Furthermore, in the previous exposition of this text, we noticed that God does not always grant the gift of pure prayer quickly. At times God allows the monk to undergo a struggle in his attempt at pure prayer. God grants the gift of pure prayer in his own timing.\(^{23}\) This, for Evagrius, is the very nature of pure prayer.\(^{24}\) Pure prayer resides outside the grasp of the monastic. This highest form of prayer, therefore, is not a reality immediately available to the monk. God grants the gift whenever he deems to do so, and not beforehand. Pure prayer, it would appear, deepens Evagrius’s understanding of divine sovereignty. In the second chapter, where we detailed Evagrius’s view on the sovereignty of God, it was noted that God reigns supreme over all

\(^{22}\) See the examination given this passage in chapter three under “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”

\(^{23}\) See especially *Chapters on Prayer*, 88, which was examined in detail in chapter three under “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.” Again, in *Chapters on Prayer* 87 and 88, the monk strives for pure prayer through earnest petition. However, the language in these passages suggests that the monk does not always receive pure prayer at his first request; but as long as the monk is persistent, God in his own sovereign timing grants the desired gift. The point here is that pure prayer belongs to God, and he grants it when he wills.

\(^{24}\) See *Chapters on Prayer*, 29, 30, 63, 87, and 88, all of which were examined in the third chapter under “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”
This would indicate that pure prayer falls within this all-encompassing reality. Drawing upon the desert tradition which he received, Evagrius knows that God grants pure prayer whenever he sees fit. Evagrius draws upon the experiences of his mentors and perhaps his own experiences, and from this he has come to learn that pure prayer ultimately belongs to God—it is God’s possession to give as he pleases. This indicates, then, that God is the King of pure prayer. In this sense, Evagrius’s teaching on pure prayer deepens and informs his doctrine of divine sovereignty. Holy Scripture asserts God’s sovereignty over human beings, demons, and angels; in fact, Holy Scripture asserts God’s sovereignty over all reality. Along the same lines, through pure prayer Evagrius has been granted a deeper understanding of God’s sovereignty over the spiritual life, particularly over pure prayer itself. The tradition of prayer has informed Evagrius of this truth. Moreover, through pure prayer, the monk receives a deeper understanding of his own subservience to God. The second chapter explained that Evagrius held God to be sovereign over human beings. The process of pure prayer grants the gnostic a deeper understanding of this teaching. By granting pure prayer in his own sovereign timing, God reveals himself to be sovereign over the human subject.

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25 See Notes on Ecclesiastes, 38, and To the Virgin, 54. The second chapter treated both of these texts.

26 See, for example, Chapters on Prayer, 32, where Evagrius appears to recount his own experiences with prayer. The passage was examined in chapter four.

27 According to Bamberger, Evagrius organized into “a coherent system the teaching of the Desert Fathers on prayer.” See Bamberger, The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer, lxxxi.

28 See Causes, 11; Antirrhetikos, prologue; Chapters on Prayer, 79; and Chapters on Prayer, 100. All of these texts were given a detailed exposition in chapter two.

29 See The Great Letter, 50; and Causes, 11. Both passages were examined in the second chapter.
The human subject does not determine the bestowal of pure prayer; he or she does not “rip” pure prayer away from God. Pure prayer belongs to God and he grants it when he thinks best, as the present text in *Eulogios* indicates. The human subject, in this case the monk, is not the controlling agent of pure prayer; rather, God is that agent. Pure prayer, then, gives the monk a deeper understanding of God’s sovereign rule over human beings. Here the gnostic asserts through the highest experience, the experience of pure prayer, that God reigns supreme over human beings. Pure prayer does not reveal truths found outside the Church’s Scriptures; rather, pure prayer, for Evagrius, simply confirms the teaching of Holy Scripture. For Evagrius, the God who revealed himself in the Scriptures, especially in the Incarnation of God the Word, is the very same God who acts through prayer. And through his acting in prayer, this God confirms the teaching of his revealed Scriptures. The theologian, therefore, has the deepest understanding of divine sovereignty and divine providence, for through pure prayer God reveals his sovereignty over pure prayer itself and over the human subject. Through pure prayer, the gnostic apprehends divine sovereignty not simply through a propositional formula declaring God’s sovereignty but through first-hand experience—in

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30 But the monk does have a part to play by petitioning for the gift, as the present text and others assert. However, God ultimately decides when to grant pure prayer, thereby denoting his sovereignty over the greatest of monastic gifts. All of this was explained fully in chapter three, “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”

31 As the first chapter explained, the “theologian,” for Evagrius, was specifically the advanced gnostic who received direct, unmediated knowledge of God in pure prayer. See chapter one, section two, under “Pure Prayer.”
fact, the highest experience, since pure prayer marks the channel through which the
gnostic personally “knows” the Holy Trinity in immaterial union.  

Above we alluded to Evagrius’
s position on divine providence, where God “is
known as provident through those [the things] contributing to our virtue and
knowledge.” Does Evagrius’ teaching on pure prayer contribute to his definition of
providence? We refer again to *Eulogios*, 28. In this passage, God acts. He acts by
granting pure prayer. Here God confirms in action what He states through the Psalmist:
“Unless the Lord build the house, in vain do they labor who build it; unless the Lord
keeps watch over the city in vain does the watcher keep vigil.” Again, Evagrius teaches
from the standpoint of an advanced gnostic, a theologian. Evagrius knows that God
lovingly provides, and he affirms this not simply through a set of propositional dogmatic
statements but through the reception of pure prayer. Pure prayer reveals the gracious
nature of God. Pure prayer itself has actually informed Evagrius of this truth. From pure
prayer, one can assert that God is loving and that he provides what the monastic cannot
provide for himself. Evagrius appeals to Scripture to assert the fact of divine
providence. For instance, Psalm 126:1 declares God to be the Provider. However,
Evagrius’ teaching on prayer, in this case pure prayer, asserts the “how” of divine

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32 See *Chapters on Prayer*, 85, which was examined in the second section of chapter one under “Pure

33 *Scholia on Psalms*, scholion 8 on Psalm 138:16. In Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of
Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 171-172.

34 *Scholia on Psalms*, scholion 1 on Psalm 126:1. In Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of
Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 145.
providence—that is, Evagrius’s teaching on pure prayer, especially his teaching found in *Eulogios* 28, explains how exactly God provides: God provides by freeing the mind of the petitioning monastic and by mercifully granting the same monastic the gift of Divine/human immaterial union or pure prayer. Therefore pure prayer grounds the claim that “God is known as provident in the things contributing to our virtue and knowledge.” The theologian, then, has the highest apprehension of divine providence, since the theologian has personally experienced the highest form of divine providence in the monastic context, the bestowal of pure prayer.\(^{35}\) This is not to suggest that lesser monks do not have experiential understanding of divine providence, as we shall note below. But the theologian has the deepest understanding of divine providence; he alone has been granted the ultimate gift of the monastic life, knowledge of God in wordless, imageless, immaterial prayer.\(^ {36}\) To be sure, the monk is expected to have an understanding of theological truth, such as sovereignty and providence, at each stage of the monastic journey. The passage *Causes*, 11, serves as an example. The entire work *Causes* was intended for the beginning monastic practitioner.\(^ {37}\) Paragraph eleven, examined in chapter two, assumes that the beginning monk has some understanding of divine sovereignty, albeit in a rudimentary sense. In the monastic environment to which Evagrius belonged, the monk begins by learning theological principles under his spiritual

\(^{35}\) Recall *Chapters on Prayer*, 61, where Evagrius writes, “If you are a theologian, you will pray truly, and if you pray truly, you will be a theologian.”

\(^{36}\) See chapter one, section two, under “Pure Prayer,” where it was explained that Evagrius identifies “theology” with pure prayer.

father,\textsuperscript{38} and then as he progresses in the monastic life, especially when he reaches the first stage of the gnostic life or natural contemplation, he studies the Scriptures.\textsuperscript{39} All the while, the monk’s understanding of and commitment to theological truth deepens.\textsuperscript{40}

And undoubtedly, for Evagrius, prayer plays a fundamental role. As the monk progresses in his prayer life, his understanding of theological truth deepens as he personally experiences the sovereignty and providence of God in prayer. Therefore the theologian, the monk who receives the gift of pure prayer, has the highest understanding of sovereignty and providence, since he personally experiences God’s sovereignty and providence at their highest level—in pure prayer.

We now return to another text examined in chapter three, where Evagrius states: “If you want to pray, you need God who gives prayer to the one who prays [cf. 1 Sam. 2:9]. Therefore call upon him, saying, ‘Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come’ [Mt. 6:9-10]—which means your Holy Spirit and Only Begotten Son. He has taught you thus, saying that the Father is worshipped ‘in Spirit and in Truth’ [Jn. 4:23-24].”\textsuperscript{41} Previous expositions of this text pointed out that Evagrius intends pure prayer, as signified by “Spirit and Truth.”\textsuperscript{42} And in the third chapter, this text was used to


\textsuperscript{39} See Dysinger, \textit{Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 40-41.

\textsuperscript{40} See Anthony D. Rich, \textit{Discernment in the Desert Fathers}, p. 42.


\textsuperscript{42} See chapter one, section two, under “Pure Prayer”; and see chapter three, “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”
support the claim that apart from divine providence, pure prayer would be unattainable, thus demonstrating the link between divine providence and pure prayer.

This passage, like the previous one, appears to inform and particularly deepen Evagrius’s position on divine sovereignty. First, as chapter three detailed, we notice here that God “gives” (didōmi) pure prayer. Evagrius grounds this on the Septuagint translation of 1 Samuel 2:9, which designates God as the provider of prayer. However, prayer confirms what the Scripture teaches. For Evagrius, the teachings of the Scriptures and the reality of prayer do not conflict but are rather complimentary, as the above on Eulogios 28 and Psalm 126:1 indicates—both have God as their author. First, like Eulogios 28, the present text signifies clearly that pure prayer is God’s possession, that He is sovereign over it. God is the One who graciously grants pure prayer, as the third chapter explained in detail. This then implies that the monk does not possess pure prayer by right. If the monk possessed pure prayer by right, he would not require God to “bestow” the gift. God, therefore, is the Sovereign Master of pure prayer. Through pure prayer, the gnostic experientially recognizes God’s sovereignty over such prayer, and therefore over the whole monastic life itself, since pure prayer marks the climax of the monastic endeavor. Pure prayer demonstrates to Evagrius that God is sovereign over monastic advancement, that God alone decides when to grant the monk immaterial, wordless, imageless union with Himself. So the monastic cannot acquire pure prayer through his own unaided capacities; he “needs” (chreia) God, and this informs the monk of God’s sovereignty over pure prayer, over the human monk himself,
and over the monastic life. The monk does not determine the actualization of pure prayer. This belongs to God alone, and this demonstrates God’s sovereignty over the human person, thus confirming Evagrius’s teaching that God is “Lord of all”—that is, Lord of human beings. In this sense Evagrius’s teaching here on pure prayer deepens his position on divine sovereignty. In asserting that the monk has “need” of God in order to enter the realm of pure prayer or theology, Evagrius in essence declares God to be the Sovereign King of such prayer. The “universe” (kŏsmōs) over which God is “king” (basileus) includes pure prayer. And Evagrius explains this not in a dogmatic treatise but in the context of his teaching on prayer.

*Chapters on Prayer* 59 also appears to contribute to Evagrius’s definition of divine providence, which itself serves as the manner in which God expresses and manifests his sovereignty. Holy Scripture indeed asserts the providence of the King, and prayer in this passage confirms the teaching of the Church’s Scriptures. By granting or “giving” pure prayer to the spiritually mendicant gnostic, God reveals something of his character: He is the gracious King who providentially provides for the needs of the monastic. Evagrius’s teaching on pure prayer appears to ground his understanding of divine providence. In *Gnostikos* 48, as we observed earlier, Evagrius states that the “lŏgoi of providence”—or “reasons” for providence—are discerned “in the means by

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43 See the *Great Letter*, 50, examined in chapter two under “Divine Sovereignty.”

44 *Notes on Ecclesiastes*, 38.

which we return from vice and ignorance to virtue and knowledge.”\textsuperscript{46} In other words, God’s providence finds its manifestation in the “means” contributing to the practical life (\textit{praktikē}) and the gnostic life (\textit{gnostikē}).\textsuperscript{47} The third chapter explained that pure prayer represents the highest “means” of divine providence. And Evagrius’s understanding of pure prayer as a “means” of the spiritual life is grounded upon the very bestowal of pure prayer itself. Evagrius understands that pure prayer represents divine providence, because in essence, God himself has communicated this very truth—not verbally but through His divine actions in pure prayer, namely, through the actual gracious bestowal of pure prayer. Like \textit{Eulogios}, 28, \textit{Chapters on Prayer}, 59, explains the manner in which God providentially provides. In \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 59 Evagrius identifies divine providence with the gracious bestowal of pure prayer, a reality the monk cannot acquire unaided. And through this providential action, God defines himself as the God of providence and grace, the God who provides the greatest need of the monastic life, direct imageless knowledge of Himself. Here then Evagrius’s teaching on pure prayer informs his teaching on divine providence. Evagrius’s teaching essentially explains what divine providence involves, at least regarding pure prayer—it involves gracious immaterial union.

\textsuperscript{46} In Dysinger, \textit{Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 175.

\textsuperscript{47} See the above exposition of \textit{Gnostikos}, 48, in chapter three, “Divine Providence.”
We now revisit another text examined in the third chapter. “Prayer is a state of the mind that arises under the influence of the unique light of the Holy Trinity.”

Chapter three noted that the passage intends pure prayer, a point confirmed by the phrase “state of mind” (katastasis nou). And the passage indicates that pure prayer marks a Trinitarian endeavor, although Evagrius does not specify the exact roles each member of the Trinity plays. Furthermore, in chapter three, it was pointed out that pure prayer marks a special expression of divine providence—apart from this Trinitarian providence, pure prayer would not exist. Moreover, this passage, like the previous two, deepens Evagrius’ commitment to divine sovereignty and divine providence.

Like Eulogios 28 and Chapters on Prayer 59, the present text asserts divine sovereignty—and again we note that this theological assertion, though indirect, finds its location not in a systematic theology text but in a passage addressing prayer, ultimately pointing to the intrinsic link in Evagrius’ thought between theological belief and prayer. That pure prayer “arises” (ginomai) or comes about only through the gracious operation of the Holy Trinity clearly indicates that the Triune God is sovereign in the exercise of pure prayer. Pure prayer comes about only when the Holy Trinity acts, thus demonstrating the sovereignty of the Triune God over the greatest of monastic gifts, pure prayer. In Evagrius’s teaching here on pure prayer, we notice that divine

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48 Reflections, 27. In Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 213.

49 See chapter three under “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”

50 Again, let us remember that Evagrius was not a systematic, dogmatic theologian. So at times vagueness characterizes his work.
sovereignty finds its manifestation in divine acting—namely, the granting of pure prayer. It also appears that the granting of pure prayer demonstrates God’s sovereign omnipotent power. In *Chapters on Prayer* 100, Evagrius refers to God as “God Almighty,” using the term *pantókrator*, which, as our examination of the text in chapter two explained, was used to designate the omnipotence of God. The idea here is that God is all-powerful; nothing in existence possesses superior power. In chapter two, we noted that this implies divine sovereignty—God alone is omnipotent; therefore, God reigns supremely over all. God alone is all-powerful; thus everything else is subordinate to Him. This would include pure prayer, as indicated in the text under consideration. This pure prayer only comes about when God decides to act, and nothing can prevent God from distributing it when he so wills. Here Evagrius’s teaching on pure prayer shapes his teaching on divine sovereignty.

Moreover, in *Notes on Ecclesiastes* 38, Evagrius states, “For God is king over the universe which he made.” God is sovereign over the universe because of, or due to, the fact that he created the same universe. In the second chapter we noted that this links creation and divine sovereignty, in that creation represents an expression of God’s sovereignty. And the second chapter noted that Evagrius uses *ginomai* for “made.” Interestingly Evagrius uses *ginomai* for “arises” in the text presently under

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51 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 609. And see chapter two under “Prayer and Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”

52 In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 142. This passage was examined multiple times in chapters two and three.

53 See chapter two, “Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”
consideration, Reflections 27. Therefore, both the kŏsmŏs in general and pure prayer in particular owe their existence to the creating work of the Holy Trinity. Just as the Holy Trinity created the universe in general,\(^{54}\) so the same Triune God creates pure prayer in the mind of the gnostic monk. In the second chapter, as mentioned above, the creation of the universe or world marks an expression of the sovereignty of the Holy Trinity.\(^{55}\) In Reflections 27 we discern the same concept: the work of creation, in this case the creation of pure prayer, expresses the Triune God’s sovereignty. If the creation of the kŏsmŏs in general designates divine sovereignty, it would also follow that the generation of pure prayer also designates the same sovereignty. If God is sovereign over the world by virtue of his having created the same world, then on the basis of Reflections 27 it follows that God is sovereign over pure prayer by virtue of his having created such prayer. Pure prayer, therefore, deepens Evagrius’s understanding of divine sovereignty—by bringing pure prayer about in the mind of the gnostic, God declares himself to be the King of pure prayer.

The passage also appears to ground Evagrius’s position on the providence of the Trinity. The second chapter cited a passage in On the Faith, where Evagrius mentions three particular works, the second of which he terms “the transformation from worse to better.”\(^{56}\) By this, Evagrius intends the whole process of the spiritual life involving the

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\(^{54}\) See chapter two, “Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”

\(^{55}\) See chapter two, “Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”

praktikē and the gnostikē. 57 And this entire life was marked out and is guided by divine providence; in fact, the entire spiritual life and everything therein expresses providence, which has as its goal eschatological reunion between the Trinity and the fallen rational beings. 58 Upon what does Evagrius ground his understanding? In other words, what serves as the basis for Evagrius’s claim of divine providence, his claim that God desires to effect “transformation from worse to better”? In chapters two, three, and four we noticed that Evagrius grounds his claims upon the Church’s Scriptures. However, Evagrius interprets Holy Writ in the context of his monastic environment, an environment which, in his view, coheres with the Church and her interpretation of Scripture. 59 Pure prayer confirms what the Scriptures verbally declare, namely, that the Triune God provides for the monastic what he cannot provide for himself. Above Evagrius asserts that the Trinity seeks to effect “transformation from worse to better”—that is, the Trinity through various means leads fallen humans back to divine/human communion. 60 God’s bestowal of pure prayer in Reflections 27 grounds this claim. Evagrius learns of divine providence not merely through intellectual study but through prayer, in this case the gracious bestowal of pure prayer. Evagrius can definitively affirm that the Triune God is graciously provident, because God himself declares his graciousness in the granting of direct, immediate Divine knowledge in pure prayer.

57 See chapter two under “Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence and Judgment.”

58 See Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 184-185.

59 See chapter one, section one, under “Thesis.”

60 See Gnostikos, 48, which was detailed in chapter three, “Divine Providence.”
Evagrius’ teaching on pure prayer here deepens his position on divine providence. In pure prayer, God reveals the manner in which he manifests his providence—here the manifestation takes the form of the actual bestowal or “creation” (ginŏmai) of pure prayer in the mind or nous of the monastic.

We turn now to Antirrhetikos 6.16, also examined in chapter three. We recall here that Evagrius sought out the gnostic Ammonius to discover the source of the “light” of pure prayer. Ammonius responds, saying, “’Human beings are not in a position to judge this; and the nous also cannot be illuminated while praying without the grace of God, once it is freed from the numerous and fearful enemies trying hard to destroy it.’” Chapter three explained that this passage links pure prayer and divine providence. The illumination mentioned here and the freeing of the intellect from enemies denote pure prayer. And we find that divine grace serves as the source of the illumination and the freeing; that is, God serves as the providential source of such prayer.

The passage appears to shape and deepen Evagrius’ view of divine sovereignty. First, the text should be understood in light of Eight Thoughts, 8.12, which we examined in chapter three. In this passage, Evagrius informs the monk that he does not possess the grace of God by right. The monastic, Evagrius explains, should not “pride [himself]

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61 In Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, Antirrhetikos.”Ldysinger.com

62 See the exposition given this text in chapter three, “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”

63 See chapter three, “Divine Providence.”
in the grace of God as if it were [his] own possession.” Grace, therefore, belongs to God; and this would certainly involve the “grace” by which God “illumines” the nous of the monk. In other words, the grace of pure prayer does not belong to the monk but to God. God is therefore the Sovereign King of all grace; it is His grace to bestow. The passage then should also be interpreted with Eulogios, 28. Here, as chapter three indicated, Evagrius teaches that God does not always grant the gift of pure prayer upon the gnostic’s first request. Rather, he grants it at his own discretion, thereby revealing God’s sovereignty over pure prayer, as well as God’s sovereignty over the human person—for it is God, not the monk, who determines when pure prayer comes to pass. Such is the case in Antirrhetikos 6.16, the text presently under consideration. Through pure prayer, Evagrius has come to learn that God’s sovereignty extends even over the greatest of monastic gifts, pure prayer itself. All grace belongs to God, as Eight Thoughts 8.12 states. Evagrius’s teaching on pure prayer here shapes his understanding of divine sovereignty. In pure prayer, God declares his sovereign character, as he grants his grace in a sovereign manner. In proving himself to be the source of pure prayer, God asserts his sovereign kingship. And Evagrius explains this in a text addressing prayer, not in a dogmatic treatise.

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64 In Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 88.
The Antirrhetikos passage also deepens Evagrius’s understanding of divine providence. The point lies in the term “grace.” The granting of the grace of pure prayer reveals something of the character of God, namely, that God is lovingly gracious, that God “loves and nurtures human beings.” In the third chapter, we noted that God expresses his love in providential provision. And chapter three also explained that pure prayer represents the highest expression of divine providential love. In granting pure prayer, God reveals himself as the Sovereign Gracious Provider, and this gracious revelation contributes to Evagrius’s understanding of divine providence. Again, Evagrius did not expound his doctrinal and spiritual beliefs as a detached biblical scholar but as an experienced gnostic, a theologian. The monastic life of prayer does not conflict with the teachings of the Church’s Scriptures but rather confirms them. Scripture teaches that God is providentially involved in the world, and for Evagrius, pure prayer reveals one of the ways, and in the monastic context the highest way, in which God manifests his providence. In this sense, the teaching on pure prayer in Antirrhetikos 6.16 informs and deepens Evagrius’s understanding of divine providence.

We return to another key text on pure prayer, which the third chapter also treated in detail.

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65 The Antirrhetikos did not survive in the Greek, so we cannot be certain of the term Evagrius employs here for “grace.” More than likely he uses charis. See chapter three’s examination of Eulogios, 28, under “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”

66 See Eulogios, 11, examined in chapter three under “Divine Providence.”

67 See Eulogios, 23. And see Chapters on Prayer, 85.
The Holy Spirit, sympathizing with our weakness, regularly visits us even when we are impure. And if he should find the mind praying to him alone from love of truth, he lights upon it and obliterates the whole battle-array of thoughts or representations that encircle it, advancing it in the love of spiritual prayer.  

Being fully God with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is fully sovereign. The Holy Spirit, with the Father and the Son, participated in the sovereign work of creation and continues to participate in the ongoing sovereign work of providence. The divine works of creation and providence thus reveal the sovereignty of the Spirit. And for Evagrius, pure prayer reveals the very same sovereignty. The Holy Spirit’s actions of freeing the mind from pure prayer hindering “thoughts” and “representations” certainly designates divine providence, as chapter three detailed, but it also reveals divine sovereignty. The work of pure prayer, specifically, reveals the Spirit’s sovereignty over “thoughts” and “representations” and over pure prayer itself. Here we find Evagrius’s teaching on pure prayer shaping his teaching on divine sovereignty. The Spirit’s activity in prayer demonstrates his sovereignty over those things which hinder pure prayer. His “obliterating” (ĕksaphanizō) the thoughts and mental images signifies clearly that such realities fall under his authority; they are subject to him and cannot withstand his sovereign work, which here finds its manifestation in annihilation. In pure prayer, we learn of God’s sovereignty over “representations” (mental images) and “thoughts.” These realities, like the rest of existence, fall within the parameters of the sovereignty of 

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69 See *On the Faith*, 12, where Evagrius asserts the full divinity of all three members of the Trinity.

70 See *On the Faith*, 33, examined in chapter two under “Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”
the Sovereign King. And Evagrius has discerned this through the Spirit’s sovereign work in pure prayer. In the passage it is the Spirit, not the gnostic, who destroys the opposing activities. To be sure, the monk contributes by petitioning the Spirit, but the Spirit ultimately reveals his supremacy by “obliterating” the thoughts and representations. 71 Again, this reveals God’s sovereignty over the human monk as well as His sovereignty over the processes of the monastic life. God, then, reigns sovereign over the monastic life, particularly over pure prayer, and God, in this case the Holy Spirit, demonstrates this through his sovereign activity in pure prayer. So here we find pure prayer informing Evagrius’s teaching on divine sovereignty, a teaching found not in a dogmatic treatise but in a text on prayer.

The passage also appears to inform Evagrius’s view on divine providence. Let us recall Dysinger’s explanation of the concept, “Evagrius uses the term ‘providence’ to describe God’s ongoing provision of what each logikos requires in order for it to return to divine union.”72 The Church’s Scriptures undoubtedly assert this fact. However, God’s action in prayer brings to life the teachings of Holy Scripture. Again, let us compare the present passage, Chapters on Prayer, 63, to Evagrius’s use of Psalm 144:14, which in the Septuagint version used by Evagrius states, “‘The Lord upholds all those who are falling and sets aright all those who are cast down.’”73 Evagrius employs this

71 See the exposition given the passage in chapter three under “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”

72 Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 184. See chapter three under “Divine Providence.”

73 Eulogios, 27. In Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 55.
biblical text, which describes the providential provision of God, in a passage recounting the struggles of a demonically assailed monk. God provides for the monk by vanquishing the opposing enemies.\textsuperscript{74} However, the principles certainly apply to the passage at hand, \textit{Chapters on Prayer}, 63. The monk in the passage desires pure prayer but cannot enter the realm, since mental representations and corporeal thoughts plague his mind.\textsuperscript{75} In this sense, the predicament of the gnostic in the present text corresponds to that of the demonically assaulted monk of \textit{Eulogios}, 27: like the monk in the \textit{Eulogios} passage, the gnostic in \textit{Chapters on Prayer}, 63, is “falling” and “cast down,” and here such falling and oppression take the form of pure prayer hindering images and thoughts. In \textit{Chapters on Prayer}, the Holy Spirit confirms the teaching of the biblical text. The Spirit’s “obliteration” of the pure prayer hindering realities and his “advancing” of the gnostic to pure prayer correspond to the “upholding” and “setting aright” of the “fallen” in the Psalm. In pure prayer the Holy Spirit brings to life the teaching of the Scriptures. Through his actions in pure prayer, God, in this case the Holy Spirit, confirms the teaching of the biblical text. Evagrius knows that the biblical teaching on divine providence is true, because the Holy Spirit, through pure prayer, has informed him of such. Evagrius knows indeed that the Holy Spirit cooperates with the

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Eulogios}, 27, was examined in both chapters two and four.

\textsuperscript{75} To receive pure prayer, according to Ware, the monk must not focus upon corporeal reality. See Kallistos Ware, “Prayer in Evagrius Ponticus and the Macarian Homilies,” p. 19.
Father and the Son in the providential “transformation from worse to better.” The Holy Spirit makes this clear in the providential, gracious bestowal of pure prayer.

We now return to *Chapters on Prayer*, 88, which was examined in the third chapter.

‘He told them a parable that they should always pray and not be faint-hearted.’ So do not be faint-hearted or discouraged for as long as you do not receive it— for you will receive it. He goes on in the parable, “Even though I do not fear God or respect man, still because the woman is making trouble, I will judge her case.” So, too, God will also do vengeance soon for those who cry out to him day and night’ [Lk. 18.1-8]. So then, courage! Persist in the labour of holy prayer.

In the previous analysis of this text given in the third chapter, we discovered that the passage links pure prayer and divine providence. Here pure prayer finds its source in the providence of God. Also allusion was made to divine sovereignty; God grants the gift of pure prayer in his own sovereign timing. The passage indicates that pure prayer finds its source in God. Therefore, God owns pure prayer; he is its Sovereign Master. The following will expand on this theme.

We have appealed to *Notes on Ecclesiastes*, 38, a number of times throughout the project. Again, in this important text Evagrius states, “For God is king over the universe which he made.” As previous analyses of the passage pointed out, this in effect means that the world and everything connected to it is subject to God the

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76 See *On the Faith*, 33, examined in chapter two under “Divine Providence as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”


78 See, in particular, chapters two and three.

79 In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 142.
Certainly the monastic life belongs to the “universe” (kōsmōs) created by God. And God’s activity in pure prayer, specifically here in *Chapters on Prayer* 88, deepens Evagrius’ commitment to this concept of divine sovereignty.

Evagrius can confidently assert that God is the “King,” since God, by demonstrating his ownership of pure prayer, has distinguished himself as such. And the present passage, *Chapters on Prayer*, 88, also extols God’s sovereignty over the human person, in this instance the gnostic monk, and over the monastic life. The gnostic petitions for the gift of pure prayer, but in his own timing God grants the gift; the human monk does not take the gift from the King, but rather the King grants the gift. And God grants the gift not out of compulsion, since He reigns supreme, but out of providential grace and love. Furthermore, by granting pure prayer, God allows the monk to advance in the monastic life. So in granting the gift in his own sovereign timing, God demonstrates his sovereignty over monastic advancement.

In *Chapters on Prayer*, 29, Evagrius essentially makes the same point. Here he states, “Sometimes when you stand to pray you will immediately pray well; other times, even when you have toiled much you will not attain your goal, so that you will seek it all the more and guard your accomplishment inviolate once you do receive it.” Here we find that the monk “receives” (lambanō) pure prayer, ultimately indicating that God bestows it. Chapter three explained that in the passage, we find a clear link between

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80 See chapter two, “Divine Sovereignty.”

pure prayer and divine providence. The granting of the gift appears to declare the sovereign providence of God.

Like the previous passage examined above, *Chapters on Prayer* 29 makes it most clear that pure prayer belongs to God alone, who bestows the gift in his own timing. This gift is therefore not available to the monk at all times. At times God bestows the gift quickly, while in other instances the Master gives pure prayer only after the monk has “toiled” (pŏnēsis) for a period of time. Here Evagrius learns of the sovereignty of God, and pure prayer functions as the instructing master. Through hard-working effort, here taking the form of petitioning for pure prayer, Evagrius realizes that pure prayer belongs to God, that God is the King of such prayer, just as he reigns supremely sovereign over all of reality. In this passage, then, Evagrius presents God as the King of pure prayer. Here pure prayer informs Evagrius’s understanding of divine sovereignty—pure prayer itself falls within the sovereign Kingship of God. And it is through prayer itself that the monk learns this truth.

Moreover, divine providence is clearly in view here. In the third chapter’s analysis of the passage, God manifests his providence in the granting of pure prayer. Certainly this gracious bestowal informs Evagrius about the character of God. In *Eight

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83 See the exposition given this passage in chapter three.

84 See *Notes on Ecclesiastes*, 38; * Causes*, 11; *Antirhetikos*, prologue; and *Chapters on Prayer*, 79, all of which were expounded at various points in the second chapter.
Thoughts, 8.12, Evagrius describes God as the monk’s “benefactor.” Holy Scripture most certainly designates God as such, as we have seen. And pure prayer deepens Evagrius’s position on divine providential benevolence. From pure prayer, Evagrius can assert with certainty that God benevolently provides for the monk what he cannot provide for himself, in this case pure prayer itself. Pure prayer informs Evagrius that God is benevolent and graciously provident.

We now appeal to Chapters on Prayer, 64. “Whereas all the rest implant in the mind thoughts or representations or contemplations through changing the body, God does the opposite. Descending upon the same mind, he inserts in it the knowledge of such things as he wills, and through the mind he lulls the body’s bad temperament.”

The third chapter, which provided a detailed exposition of the passage, pointed out that Evagrius intends pure prayer here. And as the third chapter explained, the passage presents a direct link between pure prayer and divine providence—the “lulling” (kateuanazō) here denotes God’s providential activity of freeing the monk from pure prayer hindering obstacles. Pure prayer would be unreachable for the gnostic apart from this providential activity of God. But here we also find pure prayer informing Evagrius’s understanding of divine sovereignty and divine providence.

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85 In Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus, p. 88.
86 In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 193.
87 See chapter three, “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”
88 See chapter three, “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”
First, Evagrius’s teaching in the passage declares God’s sovereignty, which finds its expression in the providential “lulling” or calming of the mind. This providential calming, which then leads to pure prayer, indicates God’s supremacy and thus sovereignty over the realities that thwart pure prayer. For Evagrius, the things which prevent pure prayer, such as mental representations and corporeal thoughts, are ultimately subject to God. In this passage on prayer we are given details regarding God’s sovereign rule: His rule extends over “thoughts” and “representations” that prohibit pure prayer.89 And it is through pure prayer that Evagrius has learned this truth.

For our final example concerning pure prayer, we move to *Chapters on Prayer*, 30. Here Evagrius states, “When an angel approaches, immediately all those vexing us disappear and the mind will be found to pray in a healthy state of relaxation. But sometimes when the usual war is waged against us, the mind lashes out and is not permitted to rest, because it has been preconditioned by manifold passions. All the same, if it continues seeking, it will find, and it will be opened to the one who knocks vigorously [cf. Mt. 7:7].”90 In the third chapter, we noted the role played by angels in the administration of divine providence. According to Evagrius, God often exercises his providence through the agency of angels, and this would include pure prayer.91 The

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89 See *Chapters on Prayer*, 70 and 71, both of which were expounded in the second section of chapter one.

90 In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 189-190.

91 See chapter three above.
present passage, which was given a detailed exposition in chapter three, serves as an
example of God granting pure prayer through angelic assistance. In the earlier analysis
of the text, it was explained that through the providential channel of petition, God
graciously grants the gift of pure prayer through angels, thus linking pure prayer and
divine providence. But Evagrius’s teaching also appears to inform his understanding of
sovereignty and providence.

In chapter three it was explained that the passage indirectly asserts the
sovereignty of God—God grants the gift of pure prayer in his own sovereign timing. But
upon what does Evagrius base this assertion? He bases it not upon a propositional
dogmatic statement but upon God’s gracious activity in pure prayer. Evagrius declares
God to be the Sovereign Master of pure prayer, and the process of pure prayer itself has
informed Evagrius of this truth. Pure prayer belongs to God, and he grants it when he
sees fit. At times God grants the gift quickly; other times he does not, thus allowing the
monk to struggle for the gift through prayerful petition. The petitioning monastic,
despite his effort, is not the sovereign agent of pure prayer, for the human monk cannot
extricate himself from his dire situation. Rather, pure prayer belongs to God, and He
manifests his sovereignty over this most desired gift, in this case through the agency of
angels. Therefore, God is the Sovereign Lord of pure prayer and of the monk, and pure
prayer itself has instructed Evagrius here

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92 See chapter three under “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer.”

93 See chapter three’s analysis of the passage.
Furthermore, pure prayer here informs Evagrius that God provides for needs, that God grants “ongoing provision of what each \textit{logikos} requires in order for it to return to divine union.”\textsuperscript{94} And in this case, the provision finds its expression in pure prayer. In granting pure prayer, God reveals himself as the one who provides what the monastic cannot provide for himself. In his comment on Psalm 16:13, Evagrius refers to angels as the “beneficent hand of God.”\textsuperscript{95} By this Evagrius means that angels serve as the tools of God’s providence. And the present world, according to Evagrius’s interpretation of Deuteronomy 32:8, “has been entrusted to the angels.”\textsuperscript{96} The text under consideration, \textit{Chapters on Prayer}, 30, confirms the teaching of the biblical passages. The gracious bestowal of pure prayer informs Evagrius that the angels do in fact operate as the providential instruments of God. The realities recounted in the present passage, \textit{Chapters on Prayer} 30, grant Evagrius an example of angels functioning as the “beneficent hand of God.” Pure prayer informs Evagrius that God does in fact provide, in this case through angelic agency, for the needs of the monastic life. And so Evagrius’s teaching on pure prayer informs his understanding of divine sovereignty and divine providence.

In the above, we listed multiple concrete examples of how Evagrius’s teachings on pure prayer inform and deepen his position on the sovereignty and providence of

\textsuperscript{94} Dysinger, \textit{Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 184.


God. We will now turn specifically to petition, and here we will notice that petition also informs and deepens Evagrius’s views on sovereignty and providence.97

**Petition Informing Divine Sovereignty and Divine Providence**

Like the previous chapter, we will return to earlier passages. We will begin with *Chapters on Prayer*, 129, where Evagrius exhorts his readers, “Trust God for bodily needs and it will be clear that you also trust him for spiritual ones.”98 In the previous examination of this passage in chapter four, it was explained that Evagrius intends petition here.99 And the earlier exposition noted that the petitioning assumes the monk’s commitment to divine providence; it assumes that the monk has embraced the notion of providence. And in this sense, divine providence governs the monk’s petition. However, it would appear that Evagrius’s teaching here also informs and deepens his understanding of both sovereignty and providence.

The passage itself is predicated upon the belief that God provides for physical and spiritual needs. But upon what does Evagrius base this belief? The Church’s Scriptures undoubtedly affirm God’s provision in these areas. Again, Evagrius employs Psalm 126:1 to this end, as we noted multiple times earlier in the chapter. For Evagrius,

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97 It bears repeating that there is an intrinsic link between pure prayer and petition, since the latter represents the primary vehicle of the former, a point explained in detail in the third chapter. However, petition involves more than requests for pure prayer, and for this reason petition will be given its own section.

98 In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 199.

99 See chapter four under “Divine Providence and General Petitioning.”
the Psalm asserts that God provides needed help. But does Evagrius base his understanding of providence upon his intellectual understanding of the biblical text alone? The answer would apparently be no. Prayer also grounds his perspective. Evagrius knows that God provides for physical and spiritual needs; prayer itself confirms this and thus brings to life the teachings of the Scriptures. Pure prayer represents a perfect example, for certainly this highest of gifts would fall in the category of “spiritual needs.” The tradition of pure prayer itself, a tradition Evagrius received from his own monastic environment, has informed Evagrius that God graciously provides for this greatest of spiritual desires and needs. But petition certainly plays a vital role here, since it represents the providential vehicle through which God grants pure prayer, as we have seen more than a few times thus far. In this sense, petition deepens Evagrius’s understanding of providence—petition confirms in prayer what Scripture declares in words. Evagrius speaks of divine providence from his understanding of Holy Scripture as well as from prayerful petition. So both Holy Scripture and prayer ground Evagrius’s position on divine providence. In prayer God confirms in action what he declares through the Scriptures. Through answering petition, God declares himself to be the God of providence. The monk makes a humble supplication, such as a petition for pure

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100 See Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 145.


102 See, for example, *Eulogios*, 28, and *Chapters on Prayer*, 88. In both these passages, petition represents the providential channel through which God grants pure prayer. Both passages were examined in chapter three under “Divine Providence and Pure Prayer,” and both were referenced in the previous section of this chapter as well.
prayer, and God answers the petition, thus revealing something of his character, namely, his providential love. Therefore, as the monk progresses in his prayer life, his apprehension of divine providence deepens. The ever-maturing monk begins to speak of God’s providence not through mere intellectual teaching but through his own experience of God in prayerful petition. The theologian would have the deepest understanding of divine providence, for he receives the highest grace, pure prayer.

Evagrius’s teaching on petition in *Chapters on Prayer*, 129, would also appear to shape his understanding of divine sovereignty. Petitioning has ultimately taught Evagrius to be submissive to God. Prayerful petitioning for pure prayer again serves as a sound example, particularly concerning spiritual needs. God is the One who provides—he grants pure prayer as he wills. Petitioning for pure prayer has ultimately taught Evagrius that pure prayer itself belongs to God, thereby demonstrating God’s sovereignty over this gift.  

The granting of pure prayer certainly represents a special dispensation of God’s sovereign providence, but the principle would appear to apply to all needs; for according to the Gospels, all necessities are subject to the “Master’s providence.”  

It would therefore follow that all needs, whether physical or spiritual, fall within the unlimited parameters of divine sovereignty. Through petition, Evagrius has been the recipient of both physical and spiritual necessities; he therefore knows that God is in control of all such necessities—the very fact that God grants all such

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103 Again see *Eulogios*, 28, and *Chapters on Prayer*, 88, both of which were examined in chapter three and earlier in the present chapter.

104 See *On Thoughts*, 6, examined in chapter two under “Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”
needs demonstrates his authority over them and thus his sovereignty. Petition informs Evagrius of God’s sovereignty over all needs, physical and spiritual. Here again Evagrius’s teaching on prayer informs his understanding of theological truth, in this case sovereignty.

We will now move to Chapters on Prayer, 5, which chapter four examined in detail. “First pray to receive tears, so that through compunction you may be able to soften the savagery that exists in your soul and, once you have convicted yourself by announcing your sins to the Lord, perhaps you may obtain an acquittal from him.” Here, as pointed out in chapter four, Evagrius intends prayer as confession. And the tears, leading to the “acquittal” (aphēsēōs), are granted through petition, as the fourth chapter explained. We also noted that divine providence informs the petitioning here. However, the converse also appears to be the case—namely, that Evagrius’s teaching in the passage also shapes and deepens his perspective on sovereignty and providence.

In the passage, we notice that God grants the tears. This presents God as sovereign over the necessary tears. Like pure prayer, God grants the tears when he wills. The tears are not readily available to the monk, ultimately indicating that he does

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105 Also see Reflections, 28, where petition serves as the vehicle through which God provides for all needs. Chapter one, section two, examined the passage in detail.

106 See chapter four under “Divine Providence and General Petitioning.”

107 In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 188.

108 See chapter four.
not control them. Here we find that God controls the tears; he alone bestows them.\(^{109}\)

In this text, then, we find a concrete example of the sovereignty of God. God, not the monk, constitutes the source of the tears. Therefore, we find that tears belong to the “all things” or kōsmōs over which God reigns as King. And we find this aspect of sovereignty asserted in the context of Evagrius’s teaching on prayer, specifically confession and petition. Moreover, in *Chapters on Prayer*, 7, Evagrius describes tears as a “grace” (charin) given by God.\(^{110}\) Again we find that tears fall within God’s sovereignty: God bestows them; therefore, he is the sovereign source of this gracious gift.\(^{111}\) No one can take them from God, for he is sovereign over them, as he is sovereign over all things in the “universe which he made.”\(^{112}\) Here we find Evagrius’s teaching on prayer informing his understanding of sovereignty.

The teaching also informs divine providence, which, as chapter one detailed, marks an expression of God’s sovereignty.\(^{113}\) For Evagrius, “God is known as provident through [the things] contributing to our virtue and knowledge.”\(^{114}\) The question here is whether tears represent a monastic necessity. And if so, what does Evagrius ground this

\(^{109}\) Ware acknowledges that for Evagrius, tears represent a “gift.” See Kallistos Ware, “Prayer in Evagrius Ponticus and the Macarian Homilies,” p. 19.

\(^{110}\) This passage was examined in the fourth chapter, “Divine Providence and General Petitioning.”

\(^{111}\) Sinkewicz, like Ware, recognizes that tears represent a divine gift. See Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 186.

\(^{112}\) See *Notes on Ecclesiastes*, 38.

\(^{113}\) See chapter two, “Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”

upon? Evagrius does not appeal to a certain passage of Scripture for his teaching on tears. Perhaps he derived the practice from his monastic teachers. Through the tradition bequeathed to him, Evagrius discerns the importance of tears for contrite, prayerful confession of sin. And petition marks the channel through which the penitent monk experiences tears and their effect. Through receiving tears in petition, the monk experiences the gracious effect of tears: they produce compunction in the heart, and this compunction leads to the necessary “acquittal.” Through petition, Evagrius recognizes that tears are a requirement for proper confession, a requirement that can only be met by God. Experiencing tears through the channel of petition informs the monk that such tears do indeed constitute a monastic necessity. Furthermore, through granting the necessary contrite tears in petition, God reveals himself as the God of providential love who provides for the monk’s needs. Petition then informs Evagrius that God reigns as the King of divine provision. Through prayerful tears, Evagrius can assert divine providence, that God does indeed provide for the monk travelling the path of monasticism. At the foot of his monastic father, the monk is taught the value of tears. However, as the monk receives the gift through petition, as he progresses in his life of prayer, he can then speak of God’s providence through experience. Therefore as the monk progresses in prayer, his commitment to divine providence, as well as divine sovereignty, deepens.

115 See Bamberger, The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer, lxxi.
We now return to another text examined in chapter four, *Chapters on Prayer*, 34.

“Do not become distressed if you do not receive at once from God [your] request; he wishes to benefit you even more as you continue steadfastly in prayer. For what is higher than [enjoying] conversation with God and being taken up with [conversational] intercourse with him?"\(^{116}\) Here Evagrius recounts the discouragement that results when the monk does not receive a quick answer to his petition, especially with regard to pure prayer.\(^{117}\) In our previous exposition of this passage, we found petition serving as the providential channel through which God grants gracious provision—in this case, the granting of prayerful communion with himself.\(^{118}\) And in this we found the link between divine providence and petition. However, it appears that the teaching in this text also informs Evagrius’s view of divine sovereign providence.

First, Evagrius’s teaching here on prayer clearly presents God as sovereign. That God does not give the monk an immediate answer to his petition demonstrates divine sovereignty. God grants the request in his own timing, thereby illustrating that ultimately God is in control; he decides when it is best to act. Here the monk learns of God’s sovereignty through prayer, in this case petition. Petition confirms the teaching of the Church’s Scriptures, the very Scriptures that declare God to be the all-powerful

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\(^{116}\) In Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus.” Ldysinger.com

\(^{117}\) See, for example, *Eulogios*, 28.

\(^{118}\) See chapter four under “Divine Providence and General Petitioning.”
By not immediately granting the request, God demonstrates his supremacy; he ultimately informs the monk that he, and not the monk, is in control. This extols the sovereign rule of God. God acts whenever he desires. He does not owe the monk an immediate answer, thus demonstrating his sovereign Kingship. Again, let us return to *Notes on Ecclesiastes*, 38, where Evagrius asserts, “God is king over the universe which he made.” The petitioning monk belongs to the *kŏsmŏs* created by God; therefore, it follows that the monk falls within the unlimited bounds of God’s sovereignty, since the *kŏsmŏs* and everything therein is subordinate to the King. To be sure, the Church’s Scriptures inform the monk of this fact. But petition deepens the monk’s understanding of this theological concept. When the monk does not receive an immediate answer to his prayer, when the monk has to wait upon God, he experiences the sovereignty of God; and thus he receives an experiential and therefore deeper understanding of God’s sovereignty. In petition, as Evagrius understands it, God acts when God decides to act; God answers the petition when he sees fit. Here we find that Evagrius’s teaching on petition shapes his perspective on divine sovereignty, and we find this teaching in a passage addressing prayer.

The passage, therefore, extols the sovereignty of God. But here the exercise of sovereignty takes the form of providential love. By not immediately granting the

119 See Chapters on Prayer, 100, which was examined in detail in chapter two under “Prayer and Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”

120 In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 142.

121 See chapter two.
petition, God shows himself not to be cruel but loving, as the fourth chapter explained. In *Eulogios*, 11, Evagrius describes God as he “who loves and nurtures human beings.” Earlier we noted that Evagrius uses *philanthrōpō*, a term denoting the benevolent love God exercises toward human beings. And in the present passage Evagrius speaks of this benevolent love from the standpoint of prayerful petition. By not immediately receiving his request, the monk comes to understand that God is not acting cruelly toward him but rather lovingly. By not immediately granting the petition, God drives the monk to engage in continuous petition, meaning that God grants the monk the opportunity for unceasing “conversational intercourse” with himself. By so doing, God confirms that he is indeed he “who loves and nurtures human beings,” that he is indeed the God of loving providence. God’s action through the vehicle of petition has alerted Evagrius to this fact. So here Evagrius’s teaching on prayer shapes his perspective on the loving providence of God.

We now move to another key passage examined last chapter, *Chapters on Prayer*, 32.

Often in praying I requested that what seemed good to me would be done and persisted in my request, irrationally contending with God’s will and not yielding to him so that he would providentially arrange what he knew to be more expedient. And in the event when I finally got it, I was deeply disappointed that I had requested instead that my own desire be done, for the thing did not turn out to be for me such as I had reckoned.

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122 See chapter four under “Divine Providence and General Petitioning.”

123 See chapter three under “Divine Providence.”

In the exposition given this text in chapter four, we noted the importance of theologically informed prayer. Divine sovereign providence must govern the monk’s prayer, for if it does not, the monastic risks great disappointment.125

Our purpose here is to detail the informing role this teaching on prayer exercised on Evagrius’s understanding of sovereign providence. The passage, as the fourth chapter detailed, indicates that providence, in particular, must govern petitioning. However, is the converse true here for Evagrius? Does petition inform and shape the notion of providence? The answer appears to be yes.

Evagrius’s stubborn petitioning here appears to reveal two truths, the inadequacy of the human person, and the loving providence of God. In the passage Evagrius insists upon his own way, and God grants him the request. The granting of the request informs Evagrius that he ultimately does not know what is best for him. Therefore, in and of himself, Evagrius is insufficient; he does not truly know what benefits him. Evagrius’s petitioning has informed him of this fact; thus he speaks from the standpoint of one who prays. In effect, Evagrius’s prayer reveals his own shortcomings. Here we find prayer, specifically petition, functioning as an instructing master. Evagrius learns about himself through his petitioning—he learns that he should not acquiesce to his own desires. Rather, as the passage indicates, he should have yielded to God. Through his disappointment, Evagrius ultimately learns, albeit painfully, the meaning of the statement, “Unless the Lord build the house, in vain do they labor who

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125 See chapter four, “Divine Providence and General Petitioning.”
build it; unless the Lord keeps watch over the city in vain does the watcher keep vigil."126 Through petition, Evagrius learns that God, not he himself, knows what is truly best for him, so here petition instructs Evagrius concerning God’s providential love. To be sure, divine providence must inform petitioning, but petition itself grounds the monk’s perception of providence, for as the monk progressively experiences God’s sovereign providence in prayer, he consequently attains a deeper understanding of such sovereign providence.

In the second chapter, which detailed Evagrius’s position on divine sovereignty, we noted that the sovereign Kingship of God extends over all beings, including human beings, angels, and demons.127 The fourth chapter gave extended treatment to the role of demons. And there we examined texts addressing demons and their hatred of prayer. And we found prayer functioning as a providential weapon of warfare by which the monk battles the enemies.128 There we were concerned with the informing role sovereign providence exercises on petitions against demons. We now return to some of these texts. We begin with Chapters on Prayer, 94.

See that the wicked demons do not deceive you through any vision, but focusing your mind and turning to prayer, invoke God so that he may enlighten you as to whether the representation is from him and, if not, drive the wandering thought quickly from you. Be confident that the dogs will not stand against you if you

126 Scholia on Psalms, scholion 1 on Psalm 126:1. In Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 145.

127 See Causes, 11; Chapters on Prayer, 79; and Antirrhetikos, prologue. All of these texts were covered at various points in chapter two.

128 According to Gould, monks relied heavily on prayer in their battle against demonic forces. See Graham Gould, The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community, p. 169.
expertly use the stick of petitioning God. Being lashed invisibly and inaudibly by God’s power, they will be driven away directly.\textsuperscript{129}

The earlier analysis of this passage detailed the informing role divine providence exercises on the petitioning. The petitioning against the demons assumes God’s sovereign power over the enemies, and it assumes God’s gracious providential activity. But Evagrius’s teaching here on prayer also informs his view of sovereignty and providence. Again, Evagrius acknowledges that demons fall within the scope of God’s sovereignty. But upon what does Evagrius ground this claim? The Scriptures, particularly the Gospels, assert the sovereignty of God over Satan and his minions. Appealing to the Gospels, Evagrius specifically designates Christ as “Jesus Christ, our victorious king”—that is, victorious king over Satan, as evidenced by Christ’s victory in the temptation narratives.\textsuperscript{130} However, it appears that petition itself also serves a substantiating role here. How does Evagrius truly know that “the dogs will not stand against you if you expertly use the stick of petitioning God”? How does he truly know that through prayerful petition, God will vanquish the demonic foe? Again, the Church’s Scriptures assert this, but the experience of prayer itself appears to drive his comments as well. We must remember that Evagrius transmits the desert tradition on prayer, a tradition that preceded him. He therefore recounts the desert tradition’s experiences

\textsuperscript{129} In Casiday, \textit{Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 196. For a detailed exposition of the passage, see chapter four under “Divine Providence, Petition, and Demons.”

\textsuperscript{130} See \textit{Antirrhetikos}, prologue, which was referenced in chapter two under “Divine Sovereignty.”
with prayer. Evagrius can have complete confidence that God reigns supremely sovereign over demons, because both Scripture and prayer confirm this. Here we find petition shaping Evagrius’s teachings on divine sovereignty, especially with regard to demons. In the desert tradition, monks have personally petitioned God for help against demons, and God responded by providing the necessary aid, thus demonstrating his sovereignty over the evil ones. Petition confirms the teachings of the Gospels, namely, that even the rebellious enemies are subject to the King. Here petition deepens Evagrius’s perspective on divine sovereignty, because through petition God reveals his sovereign authority over the forces of evil.

The same principle applies to divine providence, which here, as elsewhere, represents the manner in which God expresses his sovereign rule. In chapters three and four, we noticed that prayer represents the channel through which God expresses his sovereign providence. Prayer functions as the primary point of contact between divine providence and the human subject. And this experiencing of divine sovereign providence actually deepens the monk’s understanding of the concept. When God acts in prayer, he authenticates the teachings of the Church’s Scriptures, thus bringing them to life. Evagrius has complete confidence that God will provide the necessary aid through petition; God’s action in petition confirms the teachings of the Scriptures, namely that God will indeed carry out the provision he promises. In divine providence,

131 See Antirrhetikos, 6.16; Chapters on Prayer, 106-12; and Eulogios, 25. And also see Bamberger, The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer, lxxxi.
God provides for the monk what he cannot provide for himself unaided.¹³² The monk cannot defeat the dark forces in his own power. By providing the necessary aid through the providential channel of petition, God demonstrates his sovereignty over the demons, and also reveals his love for the monk, providing what the monk cannot provide for himself. Petition thus reveals the sovereign providential love of the King. Through petition, Evagrius can confidently assert the loving providence of God. Here again, then, prayer informs Evagrius’s position on divine providence.

We now move to Chapters on Prayer, 97. “The one intent on pure prayer will hear noises, crashes, voices and tortured sounds from the demons, but he will not fall or forsake his thought, saying to God, ‘I will not fear, for you are with me’ [cf. Psm. 22:4], and so forth.”¹³³ Here we find a clear example of an antirrhetic prayer, in which Evagrius prayerfully cites passages of Scripture to counteract demons and their thoughts.¹³⁴ By implication, petition would also be in view here, since in paragraph 94 Evagrius exhorts the demonically assailed monk to employ against demons “the stick of petitioning.”¹³⁵ The passage of Scripture Evagrius appeals to, Psalm 22:4, assumes the gracious provident activity of God, as well as his sovereignty. It assumes that God acts—he delivers the assailed monk from the demonic attack, as indicated in the previous text...

¹³² See Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 184-185.

¹³³ In Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, p. 196. The fourth chapter, under “Divine Providence, Petition, and Demons,” treated this passage in detail.

¹³⁴ See chapter one, section two.

¹³⁵ Regnault refers to prayer as the monk’s “mightiest weapon” in spiritual warfare. See L. Regnault, The Day-to-Day Life of the Desert Fathers, p. 120.
above, *Chapters on Prayer*, 94. The monk does not need to “fear” because he can be sure of divine deliverance. By effecting the deliverance, God reveals himself to be the Sovereign Provident God, and the antirrhetic prayer of the Psalm marks the avenue through which this revelation is accomplished. The monk does not need to fear the demons, for God reigns supreme over them, and God proves this through the vehicle of prayer.\(^{136}\) Through prayer God reveals his supremacy and thus sovereignty over the demonic horde; prayer reveals the subordination of demons to God. Furthermore, through the prayer God reveals his love for the monk, here taking the form of providential deliverance from demonic attack. Through prayer, the monk encounters the providential love of God. By defeating the demonic enemies, God illustrates his providence. And thus prayer grounds Evagrius’s position on Divine Sovereign Providence.

We return to *Excerpts*, 20, also examined in the fourth chapter.

One must watch the demons’ thoughts closely: some sow them secretly; and their periods of intensity and relaxation and their interrelations and duration; and which demon follows which. And aid must be sought from Christ to stand arrayed against them. For they are particularly harsh to those who are wisely participating in ascetic struggle.\(^{137}\)

In the exposition given this text in the previous chapter, it was explained that Evagrius’s teaching here concerns petition. And it was also explained that the petitioning in this passage assumes the monk’s commitment to the sovereignty and providence of God.

\(^{136}\) See *Chapters on Prayer*, 94, referenced just above.

\(^{137}\) In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 175. For a detailed exposition of the passage, see chapter four, “Divine Providence, Petition, and Demons.”
Therefore, divine sovereign providence informs the petitioning. But the passage also suggests that petition, for Evagrius, informs the notions of sovereignty and providence.

In the prologue to the *Antirrhetikos*, as alluded to above, Evagrius asserts Christ’s supremacy over Satan, designating him “Jesus Christ, our victorious king.”\(^{138}\) Evagrius’s teaching in *Excerpts* appears to contribute to his christological position. He affirms the sovereignty of Christ over demons not only through his reading of the Gospels but also through prayer. Through prayer, the monastic practitioner experiences the victory of Christ over demons. And in the present passage, that victory finds its realization in prayerful petition. Here we then find Evagrius’s teaching on prayer deepening and shaping his perspective on divine sovereignty, particularly the sovereignty of God the Son. In *Causes*, 11, Evagrius designates Christ as the “King of kings, and Power of powers.” And in *Notes on Luke*, 4, Evagrius refers to Christ as “God the Word, the Ruler of all.”\(^{139}\) Christ’s providential activity through petition informs Evagrius that God the Son rules not only over human beings but over Satan and his demons as well. Evagrius’s teaching on petition, then, extols the sovereignty of Christ. It is prayer, and not propositional teachings alone, that inform Evagrius’s affirmation of Christ’s supremacy and sovereignty over the devil and his angels.

Moreover, it appears that Evagrius’s teaching on petition in *Excerpts* substantiates his understanding of divine providence, through which God expresses his

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\(^{138}\) In Dysinger, “Evagrius Ponticus, *Antirrhetikos.*” Ldysinger.com

\(^{139}\) In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 88, 158. Both passages were examined in the second chapter.
sovereign rule. Scripture clearly asserts the gracious providence of God the Son. God the Son, with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, manifests his providential love most clearly in his Incarnation, especially his death and resurrection. And as God, to whom providential provision belongs, Christ continues to provide for the human person, especially the monk traveling the road of pure prayer. But what serves as the point of contact between Evagrius and the providential love of Christ? In the passage under consideration, it is clearly prayer. By granting providential aid through the channel of prayerful petition, Christ informs Evagrius of His providential provision; Christ communicates to Evagrius that He does indeed provide for the monk, leading him “from vice and ignorance to virtue and knowledge.” Earlier we noticed that “virtue and knowledge” denote the practical life and the gnostic life. Christ’s providential action here through prayer informs Evagrius that Christ does indeed provide in the journey of the praktikē and the gnostikē. Christ provides for the monk; He is involved in the entire process of Divine, human reunion. Evagrius learns of this gracious provision through prayerful petition. He can therefore assert the providential love of God. And Christ’s action in prayer serves as the ground upon which Evagrius can make this assertion.

140 See chapter two under “Divine Sovereignty as Creation, Providence, and Judgment.”

141 See The Great Letter, 57, 58, and 59. Here Evagrius expounds most clearly on the gracious provision of the Incarnation.

142 Gnostikos, 48. In Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus, p. 175. The passage was detailed in chapter three under “Divine Providence.”

143 See chapter three, “Divine Providence.”
The fourth chapter also examined *On Thoughts*, 34. We now return to this important passage.

When the mind beholds such things, let it flee to the Lord. Receiving the ‘helmet of salvation’ and donning the ‘breastplate of righteousness,’ drawing the ‘sword of the Spirit’ and raising the ‘shield of faith’ [cf. Eph. 6:14-17], let the mind say with tears as it gazes up to its heavenly home, ‘Lord’ Christ, ‘the power of my salvation’ [Psm. 139:8], ‘incline your ear to me, hasten to deliver me, be for me a protecting God and a place of refuge for saving me’ [Psm. 30:3].

Here, as mentioned in chapter four where we detailed the passage initially, Evagrius appeals to the sixth chapter of Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians. In the passage Evagrius also cites two passages from the book of Psalms, both of which take the form of antirrhetic petitions. The earlier exposition of the passage emphasized the informing role divine sovereignty and divine providence exercise on the antirrhetic use of these Psalms. But this passage also contributes to the claim of the present chapter, namely, that Evagrius’s teaching on prayer also informs his view on sovereignty and providence.

Of interest here is Evagrius’s reference to Christ, who, of course, was not mentioned by name in the actual Psalms Evagrius references here. But nevertheless the monk should invoke the name of Christ when undergoing demonic attack. Why does Evagrius specifically insert Christ’s name into the biblical Psalm? Why should the monk invoke the Second Person of the Trinity here? Evagrius encourages the monk to invoke

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144 That is, when the monk undergoes demonic attack.

145 In Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 112.

146 See chapter four under “Divine Providence, Petition, and Demons.”

147 The Psalms in general, according to Dysinger, furnish excellent material for antirrhetic prayer. See Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 132-133.
Christ, because through the providential avenue of prayer, Christ personally delivers the assailed monk from demonic attack. Prayer itself makes this point clear. Here Evagrius transmits the desert tradition on prayer, in which the Psalms were read christologically. Speaking from the standpoint of patristic monastic prayer, Evagrius encourages the monk to beseech Christ through prayerful use of the Psalms. Evagrius knows that Christ is more powerful than the demons and that therefore Christ reigns supremely sovereign over these enemies. And Evagrius also has faith that Christ will in fact providentially deliver the monk from the clutches of the satanic horde. Prayer itself has taught Evagrius this truth. Through prayer Christ confirms in action what the Scriptures teach in word. Prayer then grants Evagrius a deeper understanding of divine sovereign providence, and it does so by functioning as the providential channel through which the monk experiences the sovereign providence of God. Prayer, then, grounds Evagrius’s understanding of sovereignty and providence, in this case the sovereignty and providence of God the Son. This does not suggest that Evagrius held prayer to reveal truths found outside of the Church’s Scriptures but rather that prayer enlivens and confirms divine Scripture.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the present project was to demonstrate the interdependent link in Evagrius’s thought between theological belief and spiritual practice. Specifically, we attempted to detail the informing relationship in Evagrius between prayer and the notions of divine sovereignty and divine providence. Golitzin defines spirituality, particularly for the Eastern tradition, as “theology in praxis.”¹ This would clearly reflect the thought of Evagrius, for theological commitment finds its expression in spiritual practice, and spiritual practice finds its manifestation in theological commitment.

The second chapter detailed Evagrius’s position on the sovereignty of God. For Evagrius, God is the absolute King and Master of all that exists.² Reflecting the influence of his Cappadocian mentors, Evagrius attributed sovereignty to all three members of the Holy Trinity, since all three members of the Triune God are fully divine.³ Therefore, the Son, as well as the Father, is fully sovereign—as is the Holy Spirit.⁴ The Triune God, who


² See Notes on Ecclesiastes, 38; and To the Virgin, 54.

³ See On the Faith, 12.

⁴ See Notes on Luke, 4; Causes, 11; Antirrheticos, prologue; and On the Faith, 33.

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expresses his sovereignty in creation, providence and judgment,\(^5\) reigns supreme over all beings, including angels, humans, and demons.\(^6\)

As chapter two detailed, Evagrius’s position on sovereignty informs his teaching on prayer; and, as the fifth chapter explained, Evagrius’s teaching on prayer informs his doctrine of divine sovereignty. Therefore, we find that Evagrius’s teaching on divine sovereignty and his teaching on prayer are mutually informing. For Evagrius, the monk, even the novice, must understand that in prayer he does not entreat a mere being, such as a human being, but the absolute Sovereign King of the universe—the very One who is the “Lord of all; King of kings and Power of powers.”\(^7\) Given this, the monastic, from the beginner to the theologian, must exhibit the proper manner for the holy occasion of entreating and being given access to the presence of this most Sovereign of all beings. The monk must exhibit “fear” (phobos) and “reverence” (tromos, eulabeias).\(^8\) The “fear” Evagrius describes here does not denote frightful dread but rather fearful, alert reverence. When the monk entreats God with such a demeanor, he acknowledges that he invokes the absolute King of all. In prayer, the monk must exhibit such a manner always and everywhere.\(^9\) If the monk does not do so, his prayer will amount to nothing.

\(^5\) See Notes on Ecclesiastes, 38; On Thoughts, 6; To the Virgin, 54; Eulogios, 11; and Kephalaia Gnostica, 1.82.

\(^6\) See Chapters on Prayer, 79; The Great Letter, 50; Causes, 11; and Antirrhetikos, prologue.

\(^7\) See Causes, 11.

\(^8\) See Causes, 11; and Chapters on Prayer, 90.

\(^9\) However, the demeanor itself results from the providential grace of God, as do all things related to the monastic life. See Eight Thoughts, 8.12.
He will offer nothing but “vain” and “useless” prayer, which amounts to no prayer at all.¹⁰

Throughout his monastic training, the monk learns theological truth from his spiritual mentor. Once the monk advances to the level of the gnostic, he then engages in the study of the Holy Scriptures, which aid him in the first level of the gnostic life, natural contemplation.¹¹ All the while, the monk gains experience in prayer. And as the monk progresses in his prayer life, his apprehension of divine sovereignty deepens, as he progressively experiences the sovereignty of God, particularly in prayer.¹² When the monk employs the “stick of petitioning” in his prayer against demons, he then is granted a deeper understanding of divine sovereignty, an understanding derived from the experience of prayer.¹³ From the experience of prayer, the monk receives a deeper apprehension of the sovereignty of God over the demonic horde. Furthermore, through prayer the monk learns of the sovereignty of God over the necessities of life, both physical and spiritual, as well as God’s sovereignty over the human person, the entire monastic life, and all prayer hindering realities such as “thoughts” and “mental representations.”¹⁴ Once, through divine providential grace, the monk progresses to

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¹⁰ *Causes*, 11.

¹¹ See chapter one.

¹² See chapter five.

¹³ See chapter five’s evaluation of *Chapters on Prayer*, 94.

¹⁴ See *Chapters on Prayer*, 129; *Eulogios*, 28; *Chapters on Prayer*, 59, 63, and 64.
the second level of the gnostic life, theology (*theologia*), he then receives the deepest understanding of divine sovereignty, since he experiences the sovereignty of God over the greatest of monastic gifts, pure prayer. By bestowing pure prayer in his own timing, God reveals his sovereignty over pure prayer.\textsuperscript{15} God, not the monk, is the controlling agent of this greatest of gifts. To be sure, the monk does his part by earnestly petitioning for the gift, but ultimately God decides when the gift is to be granted.\textsuperscript{16} Through pure prayer, the monk learns of his subservience to God, that God is the King and Master, not he himself. In pure prayer the monk learns that the demons and their prayer hindering antics fall within the sovereign control of the omnipotent King.\textsuperscript{17} The theologian, since he experiences the highest expression of the sovereignty of God in the bestowal of pure prayer, has the highest apprehension of divine sovereignty.\textsuperscript{18} We notice here, then, that as the monk progresses in his prayer life, sovereignty exerts an ever greater informing role on his prayer.

For Evagrius, then, Holy Scripture, which is always to be expounded in the parameters of the Church, clearly asserts the sovereignty of the Triune God.\textsuperscript{19} The Church’s Scriptures therefore ground Evagrius’s commitment to the absolute sovereignty of the Holy Trinity. However, prayer itself also grounds Evagrius’s

\textsuperscript{15} See Eulogios, 28; *Chapters on Prayer*, 29, 87, and 88.

\textsuperscript{16} See Eulogios, 28; *Chapters on Prayer*, 30, 63, 87, and 88.

\textsuperscript{17} See *Chapters on Prayer*, 63 and 64.

\textsuperscript{18} See chapter five.

\textsuperscript{19} See chapter two.
commitment to sovereignty. Prayer does not reveal truths found outside the Church’s Scriptures; rather, prayer confirms and deepens the teachings of Scripture. Through prayer, God confirms in action what the Scriptures reveal verbally, namely, that He is the Sovereign King of all beings and all things. In this sense, the desert tradition of prayer deepens Evagrius’s commitment to divine sovereignty—in fact, prayer helps shape his teachings on sovereignty. In one place in his writings, Evagrius refers to Christ as “Jesus Christ, our victorious king,” that is, victorious king over Satan and his temptations.20 Indeed, the Gospels assert this theological principle, but prayer confirms it. Therefore, through prayer Evagrius can assert the sovereignty of God over Satan and his demons. Evagrius’s teachings on sovereignty certainly inform his approach to prayer; the Holy Scriptures declare the Triune God to be the King of all things. However, Evagrius’s teachings on prayer also inform his teachings on sovereignty, since prayer itself helps ground Evagrius’ claim of sovereignty. In his teachings concerning prayer, Evagrius speaks not only from his intellectual understanding of the Scriptures but also from the desert tradition on prayer.21 Furthermore, it is important to note that for the most part, Evagrius’s teachings on divine sovereignty are found in passages addressing prayer.22 This clearly evidences the intrinsic link in Evagrius’s thought between


21 See Chapters on Prayer, 106-112.

22 See Causes, 11; A Word about Prayer; and Chapters on Prayer, 79, 90, 143.
theological affirmation and spiritual practice, for the two, according to Clendenin, should never be separated.\textsuperscript{23} No such separation exists in Evagrius.

The third chapter expounded Evagrius’s understanding of divine providence, which occupies a central place in his thought. The purpose of the chapter was to demonstrate the intrinsic link in Evagrius between divine providence and pure prayer. The chapter began by defining Evagrius’s understanding of divine providence (prŏnoia). According to Dysinger, “Evagrius uses the term ‘providence’ to describe God’s ongoing provision of what each logikos requires in order for it to return to divine union….In every aspect of daily life it is providence which affords the possibility of acting virtuously and seeking God. At the level of the praktike providence is the grace which helps one resist sin and strive for virtue. For the gnostikos providence assists in the acquisition of divine knowledge.”\textsuperscript{24}

In the third chapter, we noticed the intrinsic link between divine providence and pure prayer. In fact, apart from gracious provision, pure prayer would be absolutely unreachable. Evagrius’s position on divine providence, however, leaves room for human cooperation. The human subject, in this case the monk traveling the road of pure prayer or knowledge of God, must cooperate with the grace of providence. This does not suggest that God and the human monk are equals. Divine providence always takes precedence over human effort, although such providence does not force human


\textsuperscript{24} Dysinger, \textit{Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus}, p. 184-185.
effort. We see the relationship between divine providence and human effort most clearly in the enterprise of pure prayer, which represents the ultimate goal of the monastic endeavor. \(^{25}\) As we noted in a number of texts in the third chapter, the monk cooperates by earnestly supplicating or petitioning God for pure prayer. \(^{26}\) However, it is ultimately God who providentially frees the mind of the petitioning monastic from corporeal thoughts and metal images, and grants pure prayer. \(^{27}\) This, then, demonstrates the link in Evagrius’s thought between pure prayer and divine providence. Pure prayer represents a reality residing outside the monk’s grasp. The gnostic petitions, but God grants the gift not in the monk’s timing but His own. Evagrius’s statement in *Chapters on Prayer*, 59, sums up his position best, “If you want to pray, you need God who gives prayer to the one who prays.” \(^{28}\) This passage, as the third chapter explained, clearly indicates that the monk cannot acquire pure prayer through his own unaided efforts, although he does contribute to the process by petitioning. This passage, like others, locates pure prayer in the providential grace of God. At times, Evagrius presents God as bestowing the gift directly, \(^{29}\) whereas at other times God does so indirectly through the agency of angels. \(^{30}\) But whether directly or indirectly, pure

\(^{25}\) See chapter three.

\(^{26}\) See, for example, *Eulogios*, 28; *Chapters on Prayer*, 29, 30, 87, and 88.

\(^{27}\) See chapter three.

\(^{28}\) See chapter three.

\(^{29}\) See *Eulogios*, 27; *Chapters on Prayer*, 59, 63, 64; *Reflections*, 27.

\(^{30}\) See *Chapters on Prayer*, 30, 75, 76.
prayer belongs to God, and he determines when the monk enters this most blessed state of mind. Pure prayer, therefore, marks a special manifestation of the sovereign providence of God. And as Evagrius indicates a few times in his corpus, pure prayer constitutes a Trinitarian work, in that all three members are in some way involved in the bestowal of the gift.  

For Evagrius, the bestowal of pure prayer speaks to God’s character. In other words, by granting pure prayer, God confirms truths concerning his character as well as his work. The Holy Scriptures declare clearly the gracious providence of the Holy Trinity. In the bestowal of pure prayer, God confirms the teaching of the Scriptures. The granting of pure prayer presents God as the King of providential love who provides for the monk what he cannot provide for himself. Here the monk experiences the gracious providence of God at its highest level. As the fifth chapter explained, the bestowal of pure prayer deepens Evagrius’s understanding of divine providence. In fact, Evagrius’s teaching on pure prayer contributes to his definition of providence. Evagrius can define God as provident, because God has defined himself as such in the gracious bestowal of pure prayer. Of all the monks, the theologian, or the monk who receives knowledge of God (gnosis tou Theou), has the deepest understanding of divine providence. The advanced gnostic, the monk receiving pure prayer, has experienced the greatest of

31 See Reflections, 27; and Chapters on Prayer, 63.
providential gifts, wordless and imageless prayer in which the mind or *nous* receives unmediated knowledge of the Holy Trinity.\textsuperscript{32}

The third chapter, as indicated above, focused primarily on pure prayer and secondarily on petition. The fourth chapter, however, focused specifically on petition, since petition involves more than requests for pure prayer. The purpose of the chapter was primarily to detail the informing role providence exercises on petition. All prayers of petition, whether for the basic necessities of life or for the highest gift of pure prayer, assume the gracious providence of God.\textsuperscript{33} Here we found that divine providence and petition are intrinsically related. Evagrius’s teaching on petition assumes commitment to the loving providence of God. It assumes the graciousness of God, graciousness that finds its manifestation in divine provision. From the beginning monastic through the theologian, the monk must acknowledge that the One to whom he prays provides for needs that the monk himself cannot meet, and the monk must also acknowledge that God, and not he himself, knows what is most beneficial for him. The monk must therefore yield to the loving providence of the King.\textsuperscript{34} The struggle against demons represents a sound example. Petitioning for help against Satan and his horde assumes certain theological principles, such as divine sovereignty and divine providence. Such requesting assumes God’s sovereignty over the demons as well as the gracious

\textsuperscript{32} See chapter one, section two.

\textsuperscript{33} See *Eulogios*, 28; *Chapters on Prayer*, 31, 32, 33, 129.

\textsuperscript{34} See *Chapters on Prayer*, 32.
providence of God. It assumes God’s love for the demonically assailed monk and that God will provide the necessary aid, for the monk undergoing demonic attack cannot advance in his monasticism until relieved of his ordeal. Here we found Evagrius’s teaching on divine providence informing his teaching on petitioning.

However, as the fifth chapter detailed, Evagrius’s teaching on petition also informs his teaching on providence. The fifth chapter explained that Evagrius’s teachings on prayer are grounded in his own monastic environment and tradition. Through the tradition of prayer, Evagrius knows that God providentially uses petition as the vehicle through which He defeats the demonic enemy. This gracious activity of God through the channel of prayer deepens Evagrius’s position on divine providence. Prayer itself has influenced Evagrius to exhort the monk to use “the stick of petitioning God. Being lashed invisibly and inaudibly by God’s power, [the demons] will be driven away directly.” Through petition, then, Evagrius can acknowledge that God reigns as the provident King who provides “ongoing provision of what each logikos requires in order for it to return to divine union.” Certainly provision against demons would constitute a “requirement,” a requirement that the monk cannot meet in his own unaided capacities. In prayer, God confirms the teachings of his Holy Scriptures. Like

35 See *Letters*, 9; *Chapters on Prayer*, 94, 97; *Eulogios*, 25, 27; *Antirrhetikos*, 8.23.
36 See chapter five, “Pure Prayer Informing Sovereignty and Providence.”
37 And, of course, Evagrius also realizes that through the channel of petition, God grants the gnostic pure prayer. See chapter three.
sovereignty, the monk acquires a deeper understanding of and commitment to divine providence as he progresses in the life of prayer. The beginning practical life monk learns of divine providence through his monastic master, and this teaching informs his prayer. But as the monk makes progress in prayer, he speaks of divine providence through first-hand monastic experience. Consequently divine providence exerts an ever-increasing informing role, especially once the monk reaches the summit of pure prayer—which he only attains through divine providential grace.

In Evagrius, theological belief and prayer are mutually informing and therefore interdependent. Doctrine and theological affirmation can only be properly understood and appropriated in the practice of prayer. And in Evagrius, we find no purely dogmatic, systematic theology divorced from spiritual practice. For this monastic master, such a thing would have been unthinkable. According to Ware, “Orthodoxy” signifies “alike right belief and right worship, for the two things are inseparable.” In the thought and practice of Evagrius, correct doctrine finds its realization in correct prayer. And perhaps Evagrius’s lasting contribution may be found in his definition of the theologian. The theologian, properly understood for Evagrius, does not merely know about God and the doctrines of the faith; rather, the theologian is he who “prays truly,” he who has been granted the gift of “knowledge of the Holy Trinity” in that prayer which is truly pure.

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