

Concepts Plundered by Passions

**Early Christian teaching on the
Struggle with Tempting
Thoughts**

WHY THIS TITLE?

- It's pretty exotic and makes me sound smart.
- I was trying to grab as much space as possible in the brochure
- It's a quote from Evagrius

In *Peri Logismon* (On Thoughts) Ch. 17, Evagrius writes about the concepts (*noemata*) of this world being entrusted to human beings, like sheep to a good shepherd. To do this, humans are given two tools: **Indignation (*thumos*)** and **Desire (*epithumia*)**.

Indignation is for **fighting off** “concepts of wolves”.

Desire makes it possible to **lovingly** tend the sheep, despite bad weather.

Concepts of other people or of things are “caught by wild beasts” when we react to them in a disordered or passionate way. Then those concepts are **“plundered by the passions.”**



**So get your
ducks (I mean
sheep) in a
row!**

**What were you
thinking?**

The human capacity for self-deception is vast.

Fighting temptation is closely tied in with knowing what we are really thinking, why we are having the thoughts that we are having, and whether it is good to have the thoughts we are having or not.

WHO IS EVAGRIUS?

- A 4th century ascetic in Egypt
- An astute observer of human behavior (a psychologist)
- A thinker deeply respected for those psychological insights, but also despised for some of his speculative writing.

Evagrius Ponticus

*b. 346 at Ibora in Pontus
(today Northern Turkey)*

Disciple of:

- ❖ **Basil the Great,**
- ❖ **Gregory of Nazianzus**
- ❖ **Rufinus and Melania**
- ❖ **Macarius of Alexandria**
- ❖ **Macarius of Egypt**





Evagrius influenced:

John Cassian

Gregory the Great

**The Entire Christian West
through the notion of the
Seven Deadly Sins**

**The Entire Christian East (though mostly
anonymously) through his
psychology and ascetical
insights**

You can read some of the works of Evagrius:

- *Praktikos*, (about ascetic practice)
- *Gnostikos*, (about being worthy of knowledge)
- *Peri Logismon* (about thoughts)
- *Antirrhetikos* (about talking back to demons and their tempting thoughts)

You can read St. John Cassian in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Series II, Vol. XI). Of particular interest are Books 5-12 of the *Institutes* and Book 5 of the *Conferences*.

Early Christian Monastics

- **Earliest: Communities of Widows and Virgins**
- **3rd century Syrian “Sons and Daughters of the Covenant”**
- **Egyptian Monasticism:**
 - **Antony,**
 - **Pachomius (upper or Southern Egypt),**
 - **Amoun (Nitria),**
 - **Macarius (Scetis),**
 - **et al.**
- **Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, the West**

Evagrius, The Praktikos,86:

“The rational soul operates naturally when its desiring part (*epithumetikon*) desires virtue, and its spirited part (*thumikon*) fights for virtue, and its reasoning part (*logistikon*) applies itself to the contemplation of creatures.”

Rational Soul

1) Mind/Intellect (*Logistikon* or *Hegemonikon*)

Composed of

A) *Nous*

B) *Dianoia*

2) *Thumos* or *Thumikon*
(The Irascible Part)

3) *Epithumia* or *Epithumetikon* (The Desiring Part)

Evagrius, The *Praktikos*,

#1: "Christianity is the teaching of our Savior Christ consisting of:

- ascetical **practice** (*praktike*),
- the [contemplation of] **nature** (*physike*),
- and **theology** (*theologike*)."

***Praktike* (Ascetical Practice):**

The Battle with tempting thoughts (*logismoī*) that are full of passion and are suggested to us by demons. This battle is continual. Tempting thoughts come through sensation, memory or by direct suggestion by demons.

***Theoria* (Contemplation) or *Gnosis* (Knowledge):**

- ***Physike Theoria* (Contemplation of Nature)**
- ***Theologike Theoria* (Contemplation of God)**

From the *Praktikos*, 6:

“THERE are eight generic [tempting-] thoughts (*logismoi*), that contain within themselves every [tempting-] thought:”

“first is that of gluttony (*gastrimargia*);
and with it, sexual immorality (*porneia*);
third, love of money(*philargyria*);
fourth, sadness (*lype*);
fifth, anger (*orge*);
sixth *acedia* (*akedia*);
seventh, vainglory (*kenodoxia*);
eighth, pride (*hyperephania*).”

“Whether these thoughts are able to disturb the soul or not is not up to us; but whether they linger or not, and whether they arouse passions or not; that is up to us.”

In the end, the goal is to move beyond concepts altogether, and into direct, intuitive knowledge of God: conceptless union with God. That is *theologike theoria*, or simply **THEOLOGIA.**

**“If you are a theologian,
you pray truly; and if you
pray truly, you are a
theologian.”**

Evagrius, *On Prayer*, 61

**It's all about
what is true
and what isn't.**