

## SCANDALS IN THE CHURCH

– Part Two –

### Edifying Narrations

#### *The Anchorite Who Paid Alimony*

Abba Macarius said this about himself: “When I was young and living in a cell in Egypt, they took me to make me a cleric in the village. Because I did not wish to receive this dignity, I fled to another place. A devout layman joined me; he sold my manual work for me and served me. Now it happened that a virgin in the village, under the weight of temptation, committed sin. When she became pregnant, they asked her who was to blame. She said: ‘The anchorite.’ Then they came to seize me, led me to the village and hung pots black with soot and various other things round my neck and led me through the village in all directions, beating me and saying, ‘This monk has defiled our virgin, catch him, catch him,’ and they beat me almost to death. Then one of the old men came and said, ‘What are you doing, how long will you go on beating this strange monk?’ The man who served me was walking behind me, full of shame, for they covered him with insults too, saying, ‘Look at this anchorite, for whom you stood surety; what has he done?’ The girl’s parents said, ‘Do not let him go till he has given a pledge that he will keep her.’ I spoke to my servant and he vouched for me. Going to my cell, I gave him all the baskets I had, saying, ‘Sell them, and give my wife something to eat.’ Then I said to myself, ‘Macarius, you have found yourself a wife; you must work a little more in order to keep her.’ So I worked night and day and sent my work to her. But when it came time for the wretch to give birth, she remained in labour many days without bringing forth, and they said to her, ‘What is the matter?’ She said, ‘I know what it is; it is because I slandered the anchorite, and accused him unjustly; it is not he who is to blame, but such and such a young man.’ Then the man who served me came to me full of joy saying, ‘The virgin could not give birth until she had said, “The anchorite had nothing to do with it, but I have lied about him.” The whole village wants to come here solemnly and repent before you.’ But when I heard this, for fear that the people would disturb me, I got up and fled here to Scete. That is the original reason why I came here.”

Benedicta Ward, *The Desert Christian*. New York: Macmillan Co., Inc., 1980, pp. 124-125.

#### *All Those Who Judge Their Brothers Perish by This Sword*

Abba Paphnutius said, “When I was walking along the road, I happened to lose my way because of the fog; and finding myself near a village, I saw some people who were committing fornication. I stood still then, praying for my sins. Then behold, an angel came, holding a sword and he said to me, ‘Paphnutius, all those who judge their brothers perish by this sword, but because you have not judged, but have humbled yourself before God, saying that you have sinned, your name is written in the book of the living!’”

Benedicta Ward, *The Desert Christian*. New York: Macmillan Co., Inc., 1980, pp. 202.

#### *Where Was His Mind At That Hour?*

They told about a monk in Egypt who dwelt in an isolated cell. A certain brother and a virgin would visit him regularly. Once, when both the man and the virgin were found together with the Elder, night fell, and the Elder spread a straw mat and slept between them. The brother, however, was attacked by temptation for the virgin, assaulted her, and they sinned. The Elder, although he noticed it, said nothing to them. When it dawned, he accompanied them without showing that he was displeased with what happened. As they walked on their way, they

discussed between themselves whether the Elder understood what had happened. Then, turning back, they bowed before him and said: “Abba, did you not realise how the devil deceived us?” “Yes,” he responded. “And where were your thoughts at that time?” they asked. “My thoughts at that time,” he said, “were where our Saviour was crucified; I stood there and wept.” After having received an *epitimion* from the Elder, they left and became chosen vessels of God.

*The Great Book of the Holy Elders,*  
Vol. 4, Hermitage of the Birth of the Theotokos,  
Thessalonica, pp. 494- 495

### *The Hierarch Left His Omophorion*

A bishop once lived in a certain city. It so happened that the bishop became ill and it was feared that he would die. In that same city, there was also a convent. As soon as the abbess of the convent was informed that the bishop was ill, and indeed hopelessly so, she took two nuns with her and went to visit him. During the time that they were visiting and while the abbess was talking with the bishop, one of the nuns, who was seated nearby on the sick man’s bed, lightly touched the foot of the bishop, wishing to determine if he had a fever.

The bishop, however, was troubled by fleshly temptations at this nearness, and under the influence of the passions, when his visitors were making ready to leave, he said to the abbess:

“I beg you, Eldress, since I have no one to take care of me, leave this sister to serve me until I have recovered.”

The abbess, without imagining anything evil of it, complied with the request of the bishop and left the nun about whom he had entertained evil thoughts, the bishop being greatly reinforced in his sinful desires by the Devil and thus ready to acquiesce to his attack of evil thoughts. He went ahead and fell into sin with the nun, who soon began to carry within her the fruits of their sin.

Within a few months, the course of her pregnancy became obvious to all who saw the nun. And the clergy, seeking to know who had fallen into sin with the nun, went to see her and said:

“Tell us who made you pregnant?”

The nun would not, however, under any circumstances reveal who it was who was guilty — that is, the bishop. While the clergy were pressing her to reveal the guilty party, the bishop spoke up and said:

“Leave her alone — because I am the one who fell into sin with her.”

After this revelation, he got up from his bed, where he had lain ill, and went to the church. There, broken in spirit, he placed his Omophorion on the Altar, and, leaving the Church, took his walking stick and set off for a monastery where no one knew who he was. While the bishop was on his way to the monastery, the abbot of the monastery, wise man that he was, received a revelation from God that in a short time a bishop would arrive. So, he called the gatekeeper and commanded him as follows:

“Be on the watch, Brother,” he told him, “for a bishop is coming to our monastery. Don’t forget to meet him in accordance with his rank.” The doorkeeper, after this order, expected the bishop to arrive at the monastery in a fancy carriage and with his entourage, as is the custom of bishops. For this reason, he gave no heed whatever when, one day, a humble and undistinguished man on foot arrived at the monastery. He did not know who the visitor was and went to the Superior to inform him.

The abbot immediately realised that this undistinguished visitor was the bishop whom he expected and straightway went to meet him. As soon as he had kissed his hand, in the prescribed sign of respect towards such a Church dignitary, he said:

“Welcome to our monastery, Lord Bishop.”

The bishop was startled and astonished how someone wholly unknown to him could recognize him. So, he immediately thought of departing for another monastery. But the abbot — through his gift of foreknowledge — knowing the sin of the bishop, as well as his sincere intent to repent, said to the bishop with brotherly love:

“Wherever you go, I will go with you, to make known your rank.” Having comforted the bishop with kindness, the abbot took him into the monastery. The bishop, therefore, stayed for some time in the monastery and repented with all of his heart, attaining to eminent achievements of virtue.

After some years, the bishop died in peace, and God surrounded his death with many miracles, so as to demonstrate to the people the genuineness and sincerity of his repentance.

*The Evergetinos: A Complete Text*, Translated and edited by Hieromonk Patapios, Bishop Auxentios, and Archbishop Chrysostomos. California: Center For Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1999. Vol. 1 of the first book, pp. 54.

#### *He Was Cured Because He Judged Not*

Isidore Scholasticus narrated that in Alexandria someone had a swelling on his forehead from birth, the size of an apple. When he partook of the Holy Mysteries, he would touch the swelling with the Holy Blood.

One day, he came to partake of the Holy Mysteries at the Church of the Mother of God at Theona. As he stooped to look in the window of the door, by the malice of the devil, he saw the officiating priest having congress with a woman in the sacristy. After he had moved a little to the side, he saw the woman leaving. Without any hesitation, he reasoned very sensibly, saying within himself:

“And even if the clergyman sinned, tomorrow he will repent and be saved. It is not my job to judge until Christ, the Common Judge of the sinners and the righteous, comes and judges him. I, however, believe that the Holy Mysteries are not given to me by the hand of man, but from the hand of holy Angels. I will go then without being scandalised and partake of the Holy Mysteries.”

Since he told himself these things, he went for Communion. He opened his mouth, and after he said the “Amen,” immediately the swelling from his forehead disappeared.

Upon realising the miracle that occurred, the man began to glorify our truly compassionate God, Who loves mankind. He received healing because he did not condemn the priest.

*Treasury of Divine Knowledge*. Corpus Christianorum, Greek Series 5, Edited by Joseph A. Munitiz. Turnhout: Leuven University Press, 1979, pp. 181- 182.

#### *The Robe of Saint Constantine the Great*

This narration concerning the blessed Emperor Constantine is from the First Ecumenical Council of 318 God-bearing Fathers.

After the deposition of the foul Arius, and the clarification of the Orthodox Faith, the devil, not able to endure the peace of the Holy Church, incited certain bishops against their fellow bishops and presented to the pious king writs of accusations and charges of impurity. Seeing these accusations, the Christ-loving Constantine the Great felt sorrow and displeasure. After he burnt up the documents, he said these God-loving words:

“Even if I saw with my own eyes a priest of Christ sinning, I would lay my mantle upon him and cover him.”<sup>1</sup>

He who defames a priest of Christ, openly defames the faith of the Christians and brings joy to the enemies of the Church.

*Treasury of the Divine Knowledge.* Corpus Christianorum, Greek Series 5. Edited by Joseph A. Munitiz. Turnhout: Leuven University Press, 1979, pp. 182.

### *What Happens to Those Who Are Scandalized*

A certain brother asked an elder, “If it happen that a man be tempted and commit sin, what can be done for those who are scandalized?”

The elder then related the following: “There once lived a renowned deacon in a cenobitic monastery in Egypt. It happened that a citizen who was being hunted by men of the governor fled to this monastery with his whole family.

“Under the influence of the Devil, the deacon fell into sin with one of the women of the family of the man from the city. When the sin became public, everyone was shocked with the disgrace.

“The deacon went away to an elder much respected by him and confessed the incident to him. At the back of his cell the elder had a crypt. The deacon begged the elder saying, ‘Bury me alive in the crypt, O elder, and tell nothing to anyone.’

“The deacon then moved into this dark place and repented sincerely before God, grieving unceasingly and taking nothing else as food, save only a little water and a little bread, which the elder from time to time provided for him.

“During the period of time in which the deacon was subjecting himself to the harsh practice of repentance, the water level of the [Nile] river had not risen at the appointed flood period, so that whole area [of Egypt] was in danger of drying up completely. To ward off the danger of drought, therefore, everyone offered up supplications and continually entreated God with faith to fend off disaster. Then the following was revealed to one of the holy men: ‘Unless you go to ask such-and-such a deacon, who is hidden in the cell of a certain monk, to pray to God, the river’s waters will not rise.’

“On receiving this message, the holy man revealed it to everyone. They who heard this message marvelled and all together went to the cell of the monk, called forth the deacon from his

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<sup>1</sup> “[Do not strive with men for the sake of the belly. And do not hate for the sake of honour. And do not find pleasure in judging.] Know, brother, that the reason why we must remain within the door of our cell is to be ignorant of the wicked deeds of men, and thus, seeing all as holy and good, we shall attain to purity of mind. But if we become castigators, chastisers, judges, investigators, vindicators, and faultfinders, in what respect does our life differ from the life in the towns? And if we do not give up these things, what could be more miserable than such a life in the desert, falsely quiet? If you cannot be still within your heart, then at least make still your tongue.” *The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian*. Homily 51, Translated by The Holy Transfiguration Monastery. Massachusetts: The Alpine Press, 1984, pp. 247.

dark crypt, and constrained him to pray to God, to deliver them from drought. No sooner had the deacon prayed, than immediately the river's waters rose.

“This miracle indicated that God had accepted the deacon's repentance; and thus all who had earlier been scandalized were now more greatly benefited by his repentance, and they glorified God.”

*The Evergetinos: A Complete Text.* Vol. 1 of first book.  
Translated and edited by Hieromonk Patapios, Bishop Auxentios,  
and Archbishop Chrysostomos. California:  
Center For Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1999, pp. 48, #3.

### *He Never Judged*

It was said of Abba Mark the Egyptian that he lived for thirty years without going out of his cell. The priest used to bring him Holy Communion. But the devil, seeing the remarkable endurance of this man, decided to tempt him, by making him blame the priest. He brought it about that a demoniac went to the old man, under the pretext of asking for prayers. Before anything was said, the possessed man cried out to the old man, “Your priest smells of sin; do not let him come near you any more.” But Mark, filled with the spirit of God, said to him, “My son, everyone rids himself of impurity, but you bring it. It is written: ‘Judge not, that ye be not judged’ (Matt. 7.1). However, even if he is a sinner, the Lord will save him, for it is written: ‘Pray for one another that you may be healed (James 5.16).’” When he had said this and when he had prayed, he drove the devil out of the man and sent him away healed. When the priest came, according to his custom, the old man received him with joy. Seeing the absence of malice in the old man, the good God showed him a marvel. When the priest prepared himself to stand before the holy table, this is what the old man related, “I saw the angel of the Lord descend from heaven and place his hand on the priest's head and he became like a pillar of fire. I was filled with wonder at this sight, and I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Man, why are you astonished at this? In truth, if an earthly king does not allow his nobles to stand in his presence in soiled garments, but only arrayed in glory, how much more will the divine power purify the servants of the holy mysteries who stand before the heavenly glory?’” And the noble athlete of Christ, Mark the Egyptian, became great and was judged worthy of this grace because he had not judged the priest.

Benedicta Ward. *The Desert Christian.* New York: Macmillan Co., Inc., 1980, pp. 150-151.

### *The People Have Taken My Authority to Judge*

A presbyter used to go to a certain anchorite and serve the Liturgy for him. However, someone went to the anchorite and accused the presbyter. So much was the anchorite scandalised, that when the presbyter came to serve the Divine Liturgy as usual, he didn't let him in, so the presbyter left. At that time, a voice was heard saying: “The people have taken my authority to judge.” He went into an ecstasy and saw a golden well with a golden bucket and a golden rope with very pure water.

He saw also, however, a leper who was drawing up the water and then pouring it out. Although he wanted to drink, he refrained because the leper was drawing up the water. The voice again said: “Why do you not drink from the water? What difference does it make if the man who is drawing up the water is a leper? He is only drawing it up and then pours it out.” Once the

anchorite awoke from the ecstasy, he understood the significance of the vision. He invited the presbyter then and asked him to perform the Divine Liturgy as usual.

*The Great Book of the Holy Elders,*  
Vol. 4, Hermitage of the Birth of the Theotokos,  
Thessalonica, 1999, 9:36.

#### *Where Do You Order Me to Put Him*

One of the holy fathers heard that a brother fell into the sin of fornication. The elder said, "He acted shamefully." After a few days, the brother reposed. An Angel of the Lord went to the elder bringing the soul of the brother and said, "Do you see him whom you condemned? He has died. Where do you order me to put him? In the Kingdom of God or in Hell?" Until his death, the elder unceasingly asked for forgiveness from God with tears.

*The Great Book of the Holy Elders,*  
Vol. 4, Hermitage of the Birth of the Theotokos,  
Thessalonica, 9:42.

#### *Even If You Saw With Your Eyes*

Some Fathers questioned Abba Poemen saying, "If we see a brother in the act of committing a sin, do you think that we ought to reprove him?" The old man said to them, "For my part, if I have to go out and I see someone committing a sin, I pass on my way without reproving him."

And in a while, he also added:

"It is written: 'Give witness of that which your eyes have seen' (cf. Proverbs 25:8); but I say to you, even if you have touched with your hands, do not give witness. In truth, a brother was deceived in this respect; he thought he saw his brother in the act of sinning with a woman; greatly incensed, he drew near and kicked them (for he thought it was they), saying, 'Now stop; how much longer will you go on?' Now it turned out that it was some sheaves of corn. That is the reason why I said to you: even if you touch with your hands, do not reprove."

Benedicta Ward. *The Desert Christian*. New York: Macmillan Co., Inc., 1980, pp. 183.

#### *He Hid Her In a Cask*

Abba Ammonas came one day to eat in a place where there was a monk of evil repute. Now it happened that a woman came and entered the cell of the brother of evil reputation. The dwellers in that place, having learnt this, were troubled and gathered together to chase the brother from his cell. Knowing that Bishop Ammonas was in the place, they asked him to join them. When the brother in question learnt this, he hid the woman in a large cask. The crowd of monks came to the place. Now Abba Ammonas saw the position clearly but for the sake of God he kept the secret; he entered, seated himself on the cask and commanded the cell to be searched. Then when the monks had searched everywhere without finding the woman, Abba Ammonas said, "What is this? May God forgive you!" After praying, he made everyone go out, then taking the brother by the hand he said, "Brother, be on your guard." With these words, he withdrew.

Benedicta Ward. *The Desert Christian*. New York: Macmillan Co., Inc., 1980, pp. 28.

*He That Is Without Sin Among You, Let Him First Cast a Stone at Her<sup>2</sup>*

A priest of Pelusium heard it said of some brethren that they often went to the city, took baths and were careless in their behavior. He went to the *synaxis*, and took the habit away from them. Afterwards, his heart was moved, he repented and went to see Abba Poemen, obsessed by his thoughts. He brought the monastic habits of the brothers and told him all about it. The old man said to him, "Don't you sometimes have something of the old Adam in you?" The priest said, "I have my share of the old Adam." The abba said to him, "Look, you are just like the brethren yourself; if you have even a little share of the old Adam, then you are subject to sin in the same way." So the priest went and called the brothers and asked their pardon; and he clothed them in the monastic habit again and let them go.

Benedicta Ward. *The Desert Christian*. New York: Macmillan Co., Inc., 1980, pp. 168.

*Bowels of Compassion*

One day a brother sinned in a monastery. Now there was an anchorite in the district who had not gone out for a long time. The abba of the monastery went to see him and give him the news that the brother had sinned. The anchorite said, "Drive him away." So the brother left the monastery and he went into a cave and wept there. Now it happened that some brothers were going to see Abba Poemen and they heard him weeping. They entered, found him in great misery and invited him to go see the old man, but he refused, saying, "I am going to die here." So when they reached Abba Poemen's cell they told him about the brother. And he exhorted them, and he sent them away saying, "Say to him, Abba Poemen sends for you." Then the brother came. Seeing he was in such distress, Abba Poemen stood up, embraced him and was kind to him and invited him to eat. Then he sent one of the brethren to the anchorite, saying, "For many years I have desired to see you, having heard of you. But because of our lethargy, we have not yet met. Now, however, if God wills it and you have the time, give yourself the trouble of coming here, and we will see one another." The old man had never left his cell, but when he heard this he said, "If God had not inspired the old man, he would not have sent someone to summon me." So he got up and went to see Poemen. They embraced one another with joy and sat down. Abba Poemen said to him, "Two men dwelt in one place and someone belonging to each of them died; the first one, leaving his own dead, went to weep over the other's." Hearing these words, the anchorite was filled with compunction and he remembered what he had done and said, "Poemen, you have gone up to Heaven and I have gone down to the earth."

Benedicta Ward. *The Desert Christian*. New York: Macmillan Co., Inc., 1980, pp. 165-166.

*Tears for Your Brother*

Two brethren went to the market to sell their wares, and whilst one of them had gone to perform the service, he who was left by himself fell into fornication; and the other brother came and said unto him, "I cannot go, for I have fallen into fornication." Now whilst he was seeking to do better, the brother began to swear to him saying, "I also, when I was away from thee, fell in the same manner, nevertheless, come and let us repent together, and it may happen that God will pardon us." And when they came to their cells they informed the old men about the temptation which had come to them, and whatsoever the old men told them to do the two brothers did, and the one brother repented with the other, just as if he had sinned with him. Now God saw the labour of his love, and in a few days He sent a revelation unto one of the old men concerning the matter, saying, "For the sake of the love of that brother who did not sin, I forgive him that did

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<sup>2</sup> (John 8:7)

commit sin.” After this assurance, the Fathers loosed the brothers from their repentance, without knowing who actually committed the sin.

*The Paradise of the Holy Fathers.* Vol. 2, # 394, pg. 89.

### *How You Win Over the Sinner*

It happened that once when Abba Poemen came to live in Egypt, there lived a brother who had a woman with him. Abba Poemen never took occasion to rebuke this brother. One night this woman gave birth. The Elder understood this and sent for one of the younger brethren, “Take,” he said, “a jug of wine and give it to the neighbor, because he’ll need it today.” The brethren of Abba Poemen did not understand the matter, but the brother did as the Elder commanded.

And that neighboring brother was edified and came to compunction.

After a few days, once he supplied the woman with whatever she needed, he dismissed her. The brother afterwards said to the Elder, “From today on, I shall repent.” This brother built a cell near Abba Poemen, and he went frequently to the Elder. The Elder directed him on the enlightened path to God and won the brother over.

*The Great Book of the Holy Elders,*  
Vol. 4, Hermitage of the Birth of the Theotokos,  
Thessalonica, 9:30.

### *The Monk and the Young Jewish Woman*

Above all, Saint John the Almsgiver, Patriarch of Alexandria, ever honoured and revered the monkish habit and felt special sympathy for any monk who was hard pressed for his bodily needs. And he had this peculiarity which was not shared by many, that he would never listen to an accusation, either false or true, against any wearer of the monkish habit. For owing to the suggestion of some slanderers he once had the following experience:

A monk wandered round in the city, begging alms for several days, accompanied by a rather young girl; some persons who saw him were scandalized and imagined she was his wife, and therefore carried accusations against him to the Patriarch, ‘Because, reverend father,’ said they, ‘he is turning the angelic robe of the monkish life into ridicule, by having a girl as wife.’

Accordingly the Patriarch thinking to prevent sins against God—Who had appointed him to this end—immediately gave orders for the woman to be beaten and separated from him, and for the monk to be scourged and to be imprisoned in solitary confinement. The Saint’s order was carried out with all speed, and in the night the monk appeared to him in his dreams, showing him his back which was all torn to ribbons — for the church police-officers had scourged him pitilessly—and said to him: ‘So it please you, my lord Patriarch, this once you have made a mistake as any other man might,’ and with these words he vanished.

In the morning the holy man recalled the dream which had come to him in the night and sat on his bed full of thought. Then quickly he sent and had the monk brought to him by his chancellor from the place where he had been confined, for the blessed man kept wondering in his mind whether he would resemble the monk whom he had seen in his dream. So when the monk came in, walking with great difficulty — for he could hardly move because of the terrible flogging he had endured—and the Patriarch saw his face, he remained speechless and immovable and buried in thought, unable to utter a sound. Only with his hand he motioned to the monk to sit down near him on his couch. After he had regained his self-possession and signed himself with the Cross, he begged the monk to gird a cloth round him and then to undress without shame so

that he might see whether his back was in such a state as he had seen in his dream; with much reluctance the monk consented, girt on his own loin-cloth, and began to undress. Now, as he was undressing to show his back to the holy Patriarch, by the unexpected will of God the loin-cloth he had on got loose and dropped to the ground, and all there saw that he was a eunuch, which no one had noticed before as he was a very young man.

When the Patriarch and all who were with him had seen this and especially his horribly mutilated back, the Patriarch immediately sent and subjected to an *epitimion* those who had slandered the monk without inquiry, while he made many apologies to the most holy monk, saying that it was through ignorance that he had sinned against him and against God. Further, the just man gave to the monk this counsel: ‘It is not right, my son,’ he said, ‘that those who are clad in the holy and angelic robe as you are should wander about unguardedly in cities and, above all, they should not take a woman about with them to the scandal of the beholders.’ Then the monk in deep humility made his defence to the holy Patriarch, saying: ‘I assure you, master, I am not lying—I was in Gaza a few days ago and as I was coming out of the city to go and worship at the shrine of the holy abbot, Cyrus, this girl who has so skilfully hung herself on to me, met me—it was already evening — and falling at my feet she begged that she might journey with me; “For,” said she, “I am a Jewess and wish to become a Christian.” And then she began to invoke horrible curses upon me if I left her to perish. Therefore through fear of the judgment of God I took her, thinking that Satan does not send temptation to eunuchs; I did not realize that he does not spare anyone. So when we came to the church, your Holiness, and had finished our prayers, I baptized her there in the church of the holy abbot, Cyrus. And in simplicity of heart I travelled about with her asking a few alms in order that I might place her in a convent.’

When he heard this tale, the Patriarch said: ‘Upon my soul, how many hidden servants God has, and we, simple ones, do not know them!’ Then he related to all those who were present the vision concerning the monk which he had had in the night, and afterwards taking 100 *nomismata* in his hand, offered them to the monk. But he, the God-loving man and true monk, would not hear of taking any sum worth mentioning, but spoke these words to the Patriarch: ‘I do not want these coins, master, for if a monk has faith, he does not need money; and if he does need money, he has not faith.’ This remark more than anything else convinced his hearers that he was a servant of God. After kneeling before the Patriarch he went away in peace. From henceforth therefore the Patriarch showed special honour and hospitality to monks, both to the good and to those who were reputed to be evil, and he at once built a hostel entirely for them and called it ‘The Monks’ Inn’.

From the Life of Saint John the Almsgiver, Patriarch of Alexandria,  
*Three Byzantine Saints*, Oxford, 1948, chap. 24.

### *The Abbot and Porphyria*

Amongst his wonderful achievements the blessed man attained unto this also, I mean never to judge his neighbour without good reason, or to listen to those who condemned him. Here let me give his teaching on this point from which all may profit.

A young man eloped with a nun and fled to Constantinople. On hearing this the just man almost died of grief. But some time later when sitting in his sacristy with some of the clergy and enjoying a profitable conversation someone happened to speak of the young man who had carried off the nun. Those who were sitting with the Saint began cursing the youth for having destroyed two souls, his own and the nun’s. But the blessed man interrupted and stopped them saying: ‘No, my children, do not speak like that! For I can prove to you that you yourselves are committing two sins, one because you are transgressing the commandment of Him who said:

“Judge not that ye be not judged,”[Matt. 7:1] and the second because you do not know for certain whether they are still living in sin, and have not repented.

‘For I read the life of a father which has the following story. In a certain city two monks were starting on an errand, and as one of the two passed through a square a harlot called out to him: “Save me, father, as Christ saved the harlot.” And he, without a thought of men’s censure, said to her: “Follow me!” and taking her by the hand he went out of the city openly in full view of everyone. Thus the rumour spread that the abbot had taken the woman, Porphyria, (for that was her name) to wife. As the two travelled on so that he might put her into a convent, the woman found a baby which had been exposed and was lying on the ground near a church and took it with her intending to bring it up. A year later some of the citizens came to the country where the abbot and Porphyria (she who had been a harlot) were staying, and seeing her with the child said to her, “You have certainly got a fine chick by the abbot,” for she had not yet adopted the monastic robe. The men who had seen her spread abroad the report when they got back to Tyre (for that was the city from which the abbot had taken her) that Porphyria had had a fine son by the abbot. “We saw him with our own eyes,” they said, “and he is [just] like his father.”

‘Now when the abbot knew beforehand by revelation from God that he would shortly die, he said to the nun, Pelagia, for so he named her when he gave her the holy habit of a nun, “Let us go to Tyre for I have business there and I want you to come with me.” She did not like to refuse, so she followed him and they both came to Tyre with the boy who was now seven years old.

‘When the abbot fell ill with a mortal sickness about a hundred people from the city came to visit him, and he said to them: “Bring hot coals!” When the censer arrived full of hot coals he took it and poured all the hot coals on to his robe and said: “Now be assured, brethren, that as God preserved the bush unburnt from the fire, and as the live coals have not even singed my robe, so, too, I have never committed sin with a woman from the day I was born.” And all were struck dumb with amazement that his robe was not burnt by the fire and they glorified God who has such servants, though they are unrecognized by men. From the example of the nun Pelagia who had once been a harlot several other harlots followed her and renounced the world and went with her into her convent. For after the monk, the servant of the Lord, who had received her profession, had fully satisfied everybody of his innocence, he surrendered his soul to the Lord in peace. For this reason,’ the Patriarch continued, ‘I warn you, my children, not to be so ready to mock at, or judge, the acts of other people.

‘For we have often seen the sin of the fornicator, but his repentance, which he made in secret, we did not see, and we may have seen somebody steal, but we know nothing of the groanings and tears which he has offered to God. We still think of him as we saw him, a thief, a fornicator or a perjurer, but in the sight of God his secret repentance and confession have been accepted, and in His eyes he is honourable.’

Thus all were astonished at the teaching of this virtuous shepherd and teacher.

From the Life of Saint John the Almsgiver, Patriarch of Alexandria  
*Three Byzantine Saints*, Oxford, 1948, chap. 43.