

**CHAPTER 9**

**SPEAKING OUT  
AND  
KEEPING SILENT**

**"For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned"**

**(Matthew 12:37)**

- A) The tongue, a dangerous member**
- B) Good and bad speech**
- C) Some guidelines concerning speech**
- D) Some etiquette of conversation**
- E) Some etiquette of discussion**
- F) Silence**

## A) THE TONGUE, A DANGEROUS MEMBER

### THE GIFT OF SPEECH:

Ancient philosophers knew that the human is "A speaking animal" as speech is among the most important characteristics which distinguish the human as "The crown of creation". We thus view the speech as a great gift which God specified for man, as St. Gregory the Theologian in his amazing meditating liturgy says "**You granted me the gift of speech**".

**Truly, how superb is this gift which God granted us!** It is the means of dealing and co-operating between men. It is the means of praying, chanting and praising. It is the means of teaching, preaching and advising, and the means of straightening and moralising. It is the means of comforting the distressed and those in difficulties, and the means of defending the right (1 Peter 3:15), and pleading the cause of the poor and needy (Proverbs 31:8, 9). It is the means of entertainment and comfort among friends, even the means of bringing people together and reinforcing their love. Its purpose goes beyond this worldly life, to the everlasting one, when we join the unseen hosts in their praises and when our voices mix with theirs as we bless Him Who is sitting on the living throne for ever and ever.

### A SMALL MEMBER:

The tongue is a small member of the body, created by God to perform a vital task, and co-operate with the rest of the members in their activities in performing the jobs of life. It has two functions: tasting food, and working with the lips and the vocal cords to express speech. When we talk about the sins of the tongue we mean the speech which comes out of the person and is considered sin.

**The errors of the tongue are not its own, but they are the errors of the mind and inner nature of the person.** The tongue is but an instrument with which a person expresses his thoughts and feelings, like the musician who expresses his thoughts upon his instrument. The tongue is then a signing or an expressing instrument. It is much more important than the hand and the face which are also used for expressing the thoughts of the person.

The errors of the tongue are referred to the tongue, as referring a matter to its doer, though in fact they are the errors of the mind and the heart. If a person is pure, his tongue utters pure words, and when the heart is unclean, the uttering of the tongue is unclean.

### A DANGEROUS MEMBER

#### (1) A Weapon with two edges:

The tongue is a small member but it can be a burning fire!! It is a weapon with two edges.

As we find it a holy and useful instrument, it can also be a means for committing sins and terrible evil, for which the wrath of God descends upon the disobedient children. St. John El-Dargy said **"The silence of Jesus astonished Pilate, but a word Peter uttered made him weep bitterly"**.

The danger of this member hiding in the mouth appears, when we realise that it is a weapon with two sides, which people use in both good and evil "With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. **Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing**" (James 3:9, 10). Wise men elaborated in stating this fact warning the people from it. Solomon the Wise said **"Death and life are in the power of the tongue"** (Proverbs 18:21). He also said "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit" (Proverbs 15:4). Jesus Ben Sirach said "Honour or shame can come through speaking and a man's tongue may be his downfall" (Sirach 5:13). He also said **"Blow on a spark to make it glow, or spit on it to put it out; both results come from the one mouth"** (Sirach 28:12).

Were not the few words which **the sinner tax collector** prayed a cause for his acceptance by God and he went to his house justified, to the contrary of the Pharisee with his proud words because of which he was refused and rejected? (Luke 18:10-14). Were not the words of **the wicked servant** which he said to his master "For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow", a cause to condemn him and the answer of his master was "Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant"? (Luke 19:21, 22). Did not the words of the atheist **woman of Canaan** cause the Lord to have compassion on her and heal her daughter, in spite of what He previously said to her? (Matthew 15:22-28). Finally were not the few words of **the thief on Jesus' right**, hanging on the cross, the cause of his eternal salvation, to the contrary of his colleague who was crucified with him and was blaspheming?! (Luke 23:39-43).

We read in the history of the children of Israel that the men of Gilead fought against Ephraim, and the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim. The Gileadites seized the fords of the Jordan before the Ephraimites arrived. And when any Ephraimite who escaped said, "Let me cross over", the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said "No", then they would say to him, "Then say, "Shibboleth"! And he would say, "Sibboleth", for he could not pronounce it right. Then they would take him and kill him at the fords of the Jordan. There fell at that time forty-two thousand Ephraimites (Judges 12:4-6). If one letter caused the death of this huge number, should we not care to control our tongues and guard our speech? **One word a person says may cause his misfortune, trouble and death. How many times the Jews collected around Jesus "to catch Him in His words"**! (Matthew 22:15, Mark 12:13). The devils also often gather around us to catch us from our tongues and in our words. Hence, we should control and guard our lips.

## **(2) Since all time, it was dangerous:**

**When we view the life of man since Creation, we find that he fell because of his tongue, and its wrong usage.** The serpent spoke to Eve and deceived her, and she in turn deceived her husband (Genesis 3:1-6). And when God spoke to Adam in paradise about his disobedience, Adam answered in a twisted way to excuse himself. Cain also lied to God after killing his brother

Abel, to hide his crime (Genesis 4:9).

Until the end of the Flood, the whole earth had one language and one speech. But as they persisted in doing evil, they agreed to build a tall tower "whose top is in the heavens", so that another flood would not destroy them. Then the Lord came down and confused their language, and they started talking with different languages (Genesis 11:1-9). As we see, **many dangers come to us via the errors of the tongue. This was clearly indicated by the Lord Himself "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned"** (Matthew 12:37).

### **(3) Description of apostle James and others of its danger:**

One may underestimate what comes from the tongue. Let us listen carefully to the words of Apostle James describing the tongue "Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! **And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.** For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. **But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison"** (James 3:5-8). Even more, the Apostle shows that our worship is useless without bridling the tongue. He says "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless" (James 1:26). **This Apostle crowns what he has said by explaining that controlling the tongue is a measure of perfectness in the life of a person. He says "If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body"** (James 3:2).

**Jesus Ben Sirach said** "The lash of a whip raises weals, but the lash of a tongue breaks bones. **Many have been killed by the sword, but not so many as by the tongue"** (Sirach 28:17, 18). He Also said "Better a slip on the stone floor than a slip of the tongue; and the fall of the wicked comes just as suddenly" (Sirach 20:18). St. John El-Dargy said in the same meaning "It is better for a man to fall on the ground from a high place than he falls by his tongue". One of the poets said:

Guard your tongue man  
Let it not bite you, it is a snake  
How many people are killed by their tongues  
Courageous men used to fear it

### **(4) It presents the secrets of the heart**

**The importance and the danger of this small member is that the words and expressions it says, are a measure of the inside state of the person, his piety or the lack of it, his wisdom, or his foolishness, his knowledge or his ignorance, ... .** No wonder, it is a faithful translator to a large extent, of what is inside the person and his personal matters, as our Lord taught us **"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.** A good man out of the good

treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things" (Matthew 12:34, 35). Metals - their kinds, quality and purity - are known from the sound of its resonance when we hammer them. Likewise words show the reality of ourselves. Words are "the fruit of our lips" as the Apostle calls them (Hebrews 13:15), and the tree is known from its fruits (Matthew 7:16). That is how words express our personalities and our characters.

When Peter the Disciple denied his knowledge of Jesus his Master, in the house of Caiaphas on the night of the suffering of the Saviour, they said to him as he is insisting he does not know the Man "Surely you also are one of them, **for your speech betrays you**" (Matthew 26:73). St. John El-Dargy said "Close the door of the bedroom for the body, the door of the mouth for the tongue, and the door of the heart from the desires and from much thoughts".

## **B) GOOD AND BAD SPEECH**

### **GOOD USAGE OF THE TONGUE:**

God Who created man in His own image, did not create his tongue for evil usage, and He "Saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). God must have put in man the member of speech to be used in all what is good. Without doubt, it would be a great source of goodness and blessing to us, if we use it in the proper way. The Wise says "**The mouth of the righteous is a well of life**" (Proverbs 10:11). How beautiful is this expression "**is a well of life**". God created the tongue in us to be "**a well of life**". But, what is this life about which the Wise spoke that originates from the tongue? Is it not the good words which come from it, and its holy usage? Did not the Lord Jesus say "The words that I speak to you **are spirit, and they are life**" (John 6:63). When you speak the words of God which is "Spirit and Life", do they not come from the mouth which is "Spirit and Life"? On the contrary; "The mouth of fools pours forth foolishness" (Proverbs 15:2). In any case the tongue is "A source", either of life or of foolishness.

We mentioned that the tongue is a sword with two edges, and we should be very careful when we use it, as it should not be a means to fail us and destroy us. For this reason the saints guarded and controlled their tongues by strict exercises, in amazing and astonishing ways. They followed the saying of prophet David "I said, I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue" (Psalm 39:1). They looked to the tongue with reverence and regard, that prophet David said "Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and **speaks the truth in his heart; He who does not backbite with his tongue**" (Psalm 15:1-3).

**It is astounding to see a person pray, bless and praise God with his mouth, and with this very mouth he curses people, swears at them and utters that which is ugly and unclean!** The Apostle James is amazed and asks "Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring can yield both salt water and fresh" (James 3:12, 13). The Lord of Glory Himself says "Either make

the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:33, 34). Moreover, God confirms that with what the Psalmist says "But to the wicked God says: ""What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth"" (Psalm 50:16).

The Christian, as the light of the world and an example to others, has to be a model in good usage of the tongue. St. Paul said to his disciple Timothy **"Be an example to the believers in word"** (1 Timothy 4:12). He also said "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:6). He also said "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

The Jewish scribes who were writing the holy books, used to keep aside a special pen by which they only write the word "God". Is it not suitable for a believer who prays with his tongue, reads the Holy Bible with it, and also with it eats the Body and Blood of the Lord, to keep it aside for God?! **How much should we all imitate our Good Teacher Who when He spoke and the people heard Him "Marvelled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth"?** (Luke 4:22).

## **GOOD SPEECH**

**Good speech is what comes from God.** The saints realised this point, as we see prophet David say "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise" (Psalm 51:15). They did not speak from themselves, but they spoke when they felt that the hand of God opened their lips to say a useful thing, and that It put words in their mouths. Read for example the words of Jeremiah "He who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully (Jeremiah 23:28), and of the Psalmist "The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those who proclaimed it" (Psalm 68:11), and the words of Jesus Himself "For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me" (John 17:8).

## **BUT WHAT IS GOOD SPEECH?**

By good speech, we do not mean talking about theology and spiritual subjects in general - though without doubt - this kind of talk is at the top of good speech. But **it includes also all kinds of useful and valuable talks, which build the spirit or the mind or which minister to our worldly life.**

Good speech in general has a constructive function in life. It benefits its hearers, increases their knowledge, strengthens their mental abilities, and adds to their thoughts a new collection each day.

**From the spiritual point of view,** it has its noble message in both our private and general

lives. The Wise says "A man will be satisfied with good by **the fruit of his mouth**" (Proverbs 12:14). The Apostle says "Therefore by Him let us continually offer **the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips**, giving thanks to His name" (Hebrews 13:15). The mouth has good fruits which we gather in due time, and they are but the fruits of the good words.

**1 - In our relation with God, by words we express our hearty love to Him:** we praise Him, thank Him, ask for His help, cry for Him in our distress and difficulties, and He listens and answers our requests. He who knows how to speak well to God, gets all he asks for.

**2 - In our social relations with each other, it helps to strengthen the ties between people, and the bindings of their hearts.** We do that by speech, by showing our loving feelings, or getting rid of bad ones which may occur, eliminating their traces by confessing our mistakes and apologising to whom we trespassed against. We benefit our brethren with good speech and build their lives by preaching, teaching, advising and directing them. "**The lips of the righteous feed many**" (Proverbs 10:21). By it we also express justice and defend it. The Psalmist said "The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of justice" (Proverbs 37:30). By it we plead the cause of the innocent "Open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of all who are appointed to die. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy" (Proverbs 31:8, 9).

**3 - It solves disputes, calms down quarrels, and quenches the fires of anger.** Among the best examples to that is of Abigail, whose husband Nabal returned evil to David the prophet who did good to him. As David was preparing to avenge himself and destroy Nabal and all his household, Abigail hurried to him, and her speech calmed down his wrath, that David told her "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! And blessed is your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand. Go up in peace to your house. See, I have heeded your voice and respected your person" (1 Samuel 25:32-35).

Among these examples also is **the quiet speech of Jacob which he said to his brother Esau**, which resulted in turning away Esau's wrath after he was coming down to take revenge on Jacob (Genesis Chapter 33). The Wise said "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).

**4 - Divine words are bound to inflame our hearts**, as happened with the Disciples at Emmaus to whom the Lord appeared and was talking. When He disappeared "They said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32). Also the divine words sanctify our thoughts and cleanse our souls as the Lord Himself said "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3).

**By divine speech also God blesses our gatherings**, and raises them up as He said "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). This is what happened to the Disciples at Emmaus to whom the Lord Himself appeared while they were talking about matters of spiritual life (Luke 24:13-31). Also the Disciples - who when they were talking about the Lord Jesus - Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and He

gave them His peace" (Luke 24:36).

**5 - It helps us in our lives in general, and because of it we see much good.** David the prophet said "Who is the man who desires life, And loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit" (Psalms 34:12, 13). St. Peter said "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit" (1 Peter 3:10).

## **BAD SPEECH**

We have seen great fruits coming from the good speech. We find the contrary for bad speech. **Bad speech tends to cool the temperature of the heart.** Our spiritual life is like wax, it melts with heat and solidifies with cold. The Lord said "**And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold**" (Matthew 24:12). The speech concerning divine and spiritual matters tend to generate heat and sacred desires in the heart. When our hearts soften we become ready to accept the image of God inside us, as the image of the king stamped on soft wax, and we become "Conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29).

**Bad speech defiles our bodies, and offends God himself Who is dwelling in them,** and took them as His temple "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" (1 Corinthians 6:14). The Apostle also says "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? " (1 Corinthians 6:15). Thus it is not proper for us to take the members of Christ and make them instruments of sin as the Apostle says "And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Romans 6:13).

**Added to that, bad speech "defiles the good hearings" as the saintly fathers say.** How many desire move inside a person because of bad speech he hears, not only related to sexual matters but also related to anger, for example? How many stumbling blocks a person meets because of bad speech he hears. We shall talk about that at length when we present some of the sins of the tongue.

For this reason the saints guarded their mouths carefully. **St. Anthony said "Our Lord Jesus asked us to enter from the narrow gate. What is this narrow gate except guarding the tongue from sinning. Let us then strive and keep a strong guard on our mouths in order not to utter evil wickedness".** We need to imitate the pious Job who said "My lips will not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit" (Job 27:4).

## **C) SOME GUIDELINES CONCERNING SPEECH**



## TIME TO SPEAK OUT

Solomon the Wise said "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: **A time to keep silence, and a time to speak**" (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7). **Often we do not choose the proper time for speaking.** Perhaps the same words we say on one occasion at a certain time, would get better results if we said them at another time, when circumstances are more suitable and people are ready to listen. The Wise said "A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is! (Proverbs 15:23). He also said "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (Proverbs 25:11).

David the prophet said "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3). We notice here that the prophet did not ask God to entirely close his mouth, but to keep a door to open and to close it in the proper time!

## PURPOSE OF SPEECH

Think well before you speak and ask yourself "Is there a need for me to speak?" If you do that, you will find that you can spare many speeches.

\* **Ask yourself also before you answer a question** posed to you, how would the Lord Jesus answer if He were in my place? If you did that you would answer correctly.

\* **Do not speak just for the sake of speaking**, as this is a bad habit which people hate and it lessens their liking and regard for you. The Wise Ben Sirach said "Answer a man if you know what to say, but if not, hold your tongue" (Sirach 5:12). **Think well** before you speak. God created two ears and one mouth for man, so that he hears more than he speaks "Let every man be swift to hear, **slow to speak**" (James 1:19). **The tongue is put between two doors - the teeth and the lips - in order to think before we open** these doors to speak! Ben Sirach said "Fools speak before they think; wise men think first and speak afterwards" (Sirach 21:26). This means that fools control their hearts by their mouths. On the contrary, the wise control their tongues by their hearts. **If a man should chew his food well before it goes to his stomach, likewise he ought to think well before speech comes out of his mouth.**

## MANNER OF TALKING

\* **Talk mindfully and with care.** It is better for you to speak one word carefully and in its place than lots of chatter with no meaning. The Wise said "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise" (Proverbs 10:19). Do not hasten to answer a question posed to you before you comprehend it well "He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him" (Proverbs 18:13).

**It is not possible to swallow back the words we spoke.** Solomon the Wise said "He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. Even a fool is

counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive" (Proverbs 17:27, 28).

\* **Speak with a low voice, just enough for your hearer to hear you.** Speaking with an undue loud voice does not agree with decency. The quiet low voice in the story of prophet Elijah, was the voice of God "And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice (1 Kings 19:12). It was also said about the Lord that "He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets" (Matthew 12:19).

\* **Do not be unnatural when you speak,** and do not imitate another person in the way he speaks nor the way he argues.

\* **Do not speak in a lengthy way needlessly:** do not answer with two words what could be in one word only.

\* **Avoid going around the answer,** which implies slyness and guile. Rather be clear and frank in what you say.

## D) ETIQUETTE OF CONVERSATION

\* **Do not interrupt others when they speak.** Beside appearing discourteous, it is against Christian humility, and is a sign of disrespect to what the speaker says. "Do not answer without first listening" (Sirach 11:8).

\* **Do not answer a question posed to another in order not to appear condescending or lofty.**

\* If you were in a gathering and a question is posed to all, **do not be the first to give an answer.** St. Pachomius said "If you know all the wisdom, still be the last person to speak". Do not be the first to answer, but let others feel the need of your speech and of knowing your opinion, by requesting you to speak. Then you find listening ears, and know that your speech has a message, and is of use to others.

\* **When you speak do not do any unsuitable gesture** with your members; your eyes, your hands, or your lips.

\* If you are a person among others discussing a certain matter, **form your own opinion and do not fluctuate with the opinions of others.** Ben Sirach said "Do not winnow in every wind or walk along every path" (Sirach 5:9).

\* **You should beware of the people you talk to,** their social stature and their ages. The speech of a young man with a young man friend ought to be different from the speech to elders, teachers or priests. Listen to the advice of the Wise "Never be garrulous among your elders" (Sirach 7:14).

\* **Don not be talkative.** Thus you gain wisdom and the love of others. Ben Sirach said "A garrulous man makes himself detested" (Sirach 20:8). St. Aphraam said "Remember brother that silence is the end of hosts of speeches. Who speaks excessively increases enmity and hatred for himself, and who guards his mouth is loved". St. John El-Dargy said "He who experienced bitterness from the falls of the tongue is careful not to speak, and he who speaks too much did not yet know himself what it should be". St. Isaac said "Anybody who speaks too much is empty from inside, even if he were knowledgable of many matters". **Garrulity beside being unappreciated by others, it is a waste of time which is counted in your life - even if the speech does not include bad talks.** You will give account of every minute of your life, **and you should have a useful message from it.**

## **E) SOME ETIQUETTE FOR DISCUSSION**

### **SUBJECT OF DISCUSSION**

\* **Do not interfere in every discussion, as you are not knowledgable in everything.** If a matter is discussed in your presence, do not rush in giving your opinion, or judge it. Rather listen carefully before you speak in order to comprehend - as much as you can - the subject of discussion. It is not improper - in fact it is better - if you are asked about something you do not know or understand to answer "Sorry, I do not know this subject", or "I have no experience with this matter", or "I need first to study or search the matter and understand it well", ... etc.

\* **Do not discuss trivialities** which produce neither good nor bad. Avoid thorny and stumbling issues, and foolish and "ignorant disputes" (2 Timothy 2:23) which are useless.

\* **Discuss with others what interests them** and they will be eager to listen to you. If you discuss what they feel is of no importance to them, start by making them anxious and point out the values of the subject, else they listen coolly or half heartily.

## PURPOSE OF DISCUSSION AND ITS MANNER

\* **Realise that the purpose of discussion is not to defeat the other person, but to direct him to the truthful side. Your aim is for truth to prevail and not your own opinion**, unless you were right in what you say. Discuss with fairness, without partiality or upholding your pride. Be honest in your opinion and observe the feelings of the other person not to embarrass him.

\* **Be honest in your discussion.** Do not bluff or mislead your hearer with information he does not comprehend. Do not mention the virtues of a matter and intentionally ignore its vices which your hearer is not aware of.

\* **If you discover some weakness in your opinion, do not be arrogant and sacrifice the truth to save your pride.** Agree with the correct points of the other side. Do not let him feel that you are inflexible, and you cannot change your mind, and all you want is his yielding to your side, rightly or wrongly.

\* Do not pretend that you know everything. If somebody asks you about something you do not know, do not be shy to tell him so. Ask the other person to explain to you what he knows about it, and accept from his explanation - in humility and with thanks - what agrees with truth and justice.

\* **Do not start your discussion by ruling on the matter**, but rather start in a questioning mood. The questions sometimes serve as an introductory way to enlighten your road. Passing judgement is like the job of a judge who finished with the matter and gave final verdict, and the questions are like the work of an investigator who is still clarifying the points of the subject to uncover its mysteries. Obviously, the investigation precedes the verdict.

\* **Beware of that which is obvious to you and do not try to impose it on others.** The obvious points are sometimes relative matters. What is obvious to you may not be obvious to others and vice versa.

\* **Beware not to generalise.** There exist special cases which are not subject to the general rules, or regulations. Such cases are the exceptions and need excessive care and study.

\* **Do not conduct your discussion in a harsh or with a loud voice.** Watch well your movements, gestures and attributes in your discussions, specially when you are talking to an older person. Be humble and calm in your discussion.

## SUITABLE TIME

\* **Choose the time which suits your hearer.** Select the suitable time for discussions, and avoid lengthy discussions which the other person has no time for.

\* If your hearer has not enough time, be brief as much as possible.

If you find that time is over for your hearer, finish your discussion, and apologise if you have wasted his time. Do not wait for your hearer to look at his watch several times, and be uneasy in his chair, but rather - yourself - be sensitive, smart and quick to observe this point. If you are discussing a matter with a person who asks you to postpone it to another time, do not get angry, misinterpret him or feel that he insulted you. Rather accept it with simplicity, love and trust, and let him depart in peace. Be careful not to press him, not caring for his time or his commitments. Because of your enthusiasm for discussion do not ask him to extend the discussion disregarding his other responsibilities.

\* Even if your speaker does not excuse himself for lack of time, you should take that into account, assessing by yourself his circumstances, giving him a chance during the discussion to end his talk at any instant and go. But never - for shortage of time - end the discussion suddenly in an obvious way and ask him to leave because of his obligations. You may embarrass him by this rough way and it looks like you were kicking him out.

\* If you yourself have not enough time and want to leave, do that quietly, politely and in a nice way without embarrassing others. Choose for that the right moment in order not to be misunderstood.

\* In any cases if there is some time left for both you and your speaker to extend the talk, be discerning and give each point the time it deserves. Do not spend much time in trivialities, as you are going to give an account in front of God and your conscience on how you spend your time. You are supposed to be plentifully fruitful with it.

\* On the other hand, realise well that your basic principles in life and in general your fixed ideas, were not created yesterday. They may be the result of many years of experience and education, and of many circumstances and they are psychologically of certain kind. Hence do not expect from the other person to arrive - in one sitting with you - to what you have accomplished in a long period of your life. Do not assume that he will leave you trusting in all your views, no matter how convincing you are. It is his right that you give him a chance to embrace what he collected from new ideas, or what he disagrees with, a chance to think, wait on, meditate, search, saturate his thinking, and experiment with in his practical life. Therefore do not be disappointed or regret that you have spent a great effort in convincing him, and did not get a complete result. Rather consider yourself as a wise farmer who sows live seeds and waits until they grow and give fruits.

## **INTERRUPTIONS**

**Listen more than you speak. Do not interrupt your speaker, but give him a chance to say what he wants to say. Interruption is against the etiquette of speaking.** The person you interrupt may be offended by your behaviour. Practically, he may not be listening to you as he may be occupied by the rest of his speech. Again, frequent interruptions show your haste, or your need of some long-suffering, patience and tolerance. Did you not once hear whom you interrupt beg you by saying "Please be a little patient until I complete my speech. Allow me to finish my talk and you will understand me", "Yes I have an answer to your objection, you will hear it if you give me a

chance to say all I have"! Your interruption may also bother your speaker, scatter his speech and the sequence of his thought, and makes him start again from the beginning - after answering your interruption - in order to return back to the chain of his thoughts. Again, frequent interruptions may lengthen and intensify the discussion.

\* You may say "My interruptions are not to object or protest, but they are explanatory questions, trying to fill the gaps in the information given by the speaker". In fact this is the easiest kind of interruption and may sometimes be accepted if it comes out with a gentle quiet manner, being understood as clarification, and was not a cause to scatter the thoughts of the speaker. For this kind of interruption, it is better to choose the proper opportunity, such as for example when the speech of the speaker forms somewhat independent parts. Then the listener poses questions at the end of these parts, and before the beginning of the following part. He may politely say to the speaker "Allow me - before the start on this part - to enquire about certain points the preceding part".

\* If you yourself are the speaker and somebody interrupts you, first listen to him until he finishes, and understand his mind well. Then you have two choices: either to answer him right away in order to give peace to his mind, or to promise to answer him during your speech, making sure not to forget about him, and ask him politely to wait for a while.

## **FEELINGS OF OTHERS IN THE DISCUSSION**

\* **Know that your speaker has feelings which you should not offend**, even if he offends your feelings. He also has his own views and thoughts which you should not despise, but try to understand. Do not misrepresent or question his mentality or his honesty, but try to understand his point of view.

\* Do not focus on the wrong points in the discussion of your speaker, but also see the positive side, and praise him for it. It is nice to use expressions such as "This is good, this is reasonable, as you wish, ... ". In your discussion with someone, let him feel that he is in front of a friend whom he respects, not an enemy who wants to find mistakes in him.

\* **Do not be sarcastic about the speaker**, and do not try to present him as incapable or defeated.

\* **Do not ask awkward questions**, and if he wants to withdraw what he said do not embarrass him for this withdrawal.

\* **If you win a point during the discussion do not puff up in pride**, but rather move to the next point quietly without making your speaker or your listeners feel that you won a point.

\* **Do not use the means of the world**, such as to present your view and laugh victoriously, as if nobody has a better view; nor make the people around you laugh at the speaker, ending the discussion without hearing his point of view, leaving him like a defeated person.

\* **Avoid harsh words which hurt your speaker directly or indirectly.** For example, you should not say "Those who believe this view are stupid, or are weak in personality", when it is clear that your speaker is among those who believe in this view. Say in simplicity, for example "The Bible, the Church rules, or the sayings of the fathers, say the opposite to that". Or show the flaws in the view without swearing at those who support it.

\* If you find in the speaker something you do not like, such as his voice, the way he speaks, his stuttering, or his appearance, do not let him feel that you notice that. Ignore these things as mostly they are out of his hands.

\* **Do not take the position of a teacher but of a person who wants to understand your speaker.** If you want to teach him something new, do not let him feel that. Rather let him feel that the new point you present is his view not yours.

\* If the other person agrees with you about a certain point, do not try to confirm it, in order not to annoy him.

\* **During discussions, do not speak much about yourself.** Win the discussion by your views not by your personality.

\* If the other person is specialised in certain aspects in science which is the subject of discussion, do not ignore such speciality, **and do not ignore the other gifts of your speaker.**

\* Try to end the discussion - no matter how the two views are apart - by the spirit of love, friendship, and closeness between hearts.

## F) SILENCE

### A. WHY IS SILENCE PRAISED?

The saints viewed silence as an important virtue. They trained themselves to attain it, lived in it, experienced it and wrote for us their experiences about it. Somebody may ask: If speaking is useful and valuable, as we mentioned in the previous section, **why then silence is considered among the important virtues, and why the saints loved it and lived in it?**

The answer to that is easy and simple. The numerous sins of the tongue occur easily and frequently. Thus one ought to have a strong bridle on the tongue, and silence is among the strongest and most effective bridles. Beside that, the saints found that man can perfect his speech with silence, contrary to science and other knowledge, which he perfects as he utilises them more. In that St. Basil the Great said "Better speech is not gained except with silence and its perpetual practice". St. Eronimos also said "Let us learn silence before every thing, in order to be able to speak well later on".

**Let nobody think that controlling the tongue leads to the suppression of the feelings and complicating the self, which is generated from suppression as described in psychology. There is a big difference between controlling the tongue and suppressing the feelings. In suppression, the desire in the self is not expressed when the person wants to realise it, because of fear.**

But controlling is when one controls himself or his tongue, which is the tool for expressing his feelings. **Suppression is pressure, deprivation and sadness, while control is striving, cleansing, joy, with striving and victory.**

**Here is what some of the fathers said about silence:**

**St. Gregory the Theologian said** "One wishes that speech is as useful as silence!". He also said "When I was pressed to speak, I did not speak except about silence, in order to guide people to silence, by silence and by speech. This is my view about silence and this is my philosophy about speech".

**St. John Chrysostom said** "Silence is immense growing up for man because it gives the heart perpetual isolation, brings modesty and drives away anger. It is like asceticism, creates knowledge and keeps love. Silence is the completion of philosophy. Who practises silence can keep all other good habits". **St. Anthony in an advice to his disciples the monks said** "Keep silent, for in front of God a silent person is counted among the hosts of angels".

\* **However, not every silence or every speech is praised.** There are times when one should speak, and it is a considered shortcoming if he does not speak, a matter to be blamed for. **St. Bimen was once asked** "Which is better, speech or silence?". He answered "Silence for God is good, and speech for God is also good".

\* Real silence is the silence of thoughts and heart. Someone may practise silence from the outside, but his mind waves with many wrong and evil thoughts. At the same time there is another who speaks all his day, but he is keeping silent. **In this sense, St. Bimen said** "You may find a person whom you think is silent but his thought is condemning others. He who has this character is always speaking. Again you may find another who speaks from the beginning of the day to its end, and in spite of that he is practising silence, meaning he does not say any useless word".

## **B. SOME BLESSINGS OF SILENCE**

1 - By silence **we see the reality of ourselves as in a mirror.** We see our failures and mistakes. St. Isaac said "If one stops much talking with people, he goes back to himself and straightens his behaviour in front of God".

2 - **It is a chance to free the soul in its worship and its relation with God.** Silence



gathers the mind, while it scatters from too much talk. St. Arsenius considers silence as the main factor in cleansing the mind of man. St. Isaiah from Eskiet said "Love silence more than speech, because silence gathers and speech disperses".

**3 - When the mouth shuts up, the soul calms down.** Then the inner ear can hear the voice of the Beloved Who knocks on the door of the heart. It opens to Him (Revelation 3:20). On the contrary to that, too much talk excites the soul which then cannot hear the voice of God. For this St. John El-Dargy said "The ear of the silent person hears wonders from God".

4 - In general, **the spiritual life as a whole flourishes and grows in silence.** A pot put on fire boils faster if it has a tight cover. The Spiritual Elder said "If your tongue is accustomed to talk much, your heart is shut off from the illuminating movements of the spirit. But if your mouth is quiet and silent, your heart is always inflamed from the heat of the spirit". From his famous expressions is "**Silence your tongue for your heart to speak, and silence your heart for God to speak**". The worshipping fathers taught that silence kills the thoughts in the heart. St. Bimen said "**Who controls his mouth, his thoughts die. It is like a pitcher containing serpents and scorpions, when its opening is covered they die**".

**5 - Silence gives the person a chance to think quietly, resulting in mature thoughts.** For this the book of Ecclesiastes says "For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice is known by his many words" (Ecclesiastes 5:3).

6 - If silence helps us to speak well with people, it also **teaches us how to speak with God** - In other words it is a teacher who teaches us prayer. St. John El-Dargy said "The heavenly hosts stand with the silent man to join him in worship and praises, even they are eager to accompany him for ever".

**7 - Silence leads us to humility.** St. Isaac Said "The difference between the wisdom of the spirit and the wisdom of the mind is that the former leads you to silence and the latter pushes you to impudence and arguments. Wise silence leads you to humility. but arguments and stubbornness lead you to arrogance and pride".

8 - As a whole, **silence is a strong bridle to the whole body.** For this St. James the Apostle said "Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! (James 3:3-5). Have you seen brother, how the Apostle makes comparison between the bridle and the rudder of the ship from one side and the tongue from the other side? The similarity is that in each, man can control the horses, the ship or the body. The Apostle settles this idea by saying "For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, **able also to bridle the whole body**" (James 3:2).

From the other side **silence shows the ability of man to control the movements of his body and his desires.** St. Isaac said "If you want to recognise the man of God, find him from his continuous silence". The Wise said "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls. (Proverbs 25:28). St. Eronimos commented on this verse by saying "The city

without walls is subject to be taken and be swindled by the enemy. Likewise who is not guarded by the wall of silence, the attacks of the devil are aimed at him, and he is in danger of defeat".

### C. EXAMPLES OF MEN OF SILENCE

Without exception, all the worshipping fathers practised silence until they perfected it. History keeps for us the names of those who excelled in it. Among them are:

\* **St. Arsenius** the tutor of the kings' sons, who loved serenity and silence and made for it a symbol; his famous saying "**I often spoke then I regretted, but I never regretted my silence**". A poet re-phrased this saying in the following words:

I have never regretted my silence once,  
But I regretted my speaking many times

\* **St. Agathon**, when he wanted to train himself in silence, he put a pebble in his mouth for three years, until he perfected it!

\* **The great saint Youhanna El-Assuity (Al-Tabaisy)** guarded his silence for thirty years, in which he did not utter one word. It was said that he lived in a cave for thirty years in which he did not meet anybody. Others gave him what he needed from an opening. Those who went to seek him, he dealt with in writings. Many people used to go to see him because of the gift of healing God gave him. Once four thieves thought that he kept lots of money in his cave. They went at night to the cave to steal, but they were blinded and kept standing outside the cave till morning. When people came, they caught them and wanted to hand them to the ruler. The saint spoke to them saying "If you do not let these go, the gift of healing will leave me", so they were let go. It was said that this is the only phrase he uttered during this thirty years.

\***St. Bemwa**, when he left the world to go to the desert, went to seek one of the saintly elders asking advice to help him in his new life. The elder opened his mouth with what prophet David said "I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue" (Psalm 39:1). When St. Bemwa heard this verse he said "Enough teacher, do not teach me anything else until I learn that". He went to his room and never came back to the elder. When the elder met him after sometime, he asked for the reason why he did not come back for another lesson. St. Bemwa replied "Believe me father that I did not learn the first lesson well". After many years, a friend asked him if he finished learning the first of David's lessons (meaning the verse of David's psalm). The saint replied "It has taken me forty five years to meditate in this verse, and I hardly practise it well". The saint said that in humility, as "Baladius" the historian mentioned that the saint perfected silence well and when he was asked about anything, he first lifted his heart to God for guidance before he talked and God helped him in guarding this virtue. It was said that at the moment of his death, his conscience did not rebuke him for a word he said for which he was sorry.