



## THE PASSIONS IN THE PLATONIC TRADITION, PATRISTICS AND LATE ANTIQUITY

**19-20 April 2021 [Virtual]**

### PRESENTATION

The effects of the pandemic this past year have given rise to a plethora of emotions: fear, anxiety, frustration, despair, pain, surprise, sadness. What are we to make of these intense emotions? What do these emotions make of us as individuals and communities? How are we to deal with them moving forward? Do we ignore them, reject them, accept them, transform them? How do they affect religious life and the experience of God? This interdisciplinary virtual symposium aims to explore how the treatment of the passions in the Platonic Tradition, Patristics and Late Antiquity can help provide answers to these questions. The symposium will be organized around the study of any emotion arising in the corresponding stages of the pandemic: (1) undergoing forceful **SEPARATION** at the outbreak of the pandemic, (2) experiencing **LOSS** during the pandemic and (3) embracing **CHANGE** as we reimagine a life after the pandemic. How do emotions in these stages affect corporeality, community, lived experience, identity and religious practice?

**Registration:** open to everyone; to register **free of charge**, please email the contact below.

Organizers: Pablo Irizar (School of Religious Studies, McGill University), Anthony Dupont (Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven), Mateusz Stróżyński (Institute of Classical Philology, Adam Mickiewicz University)

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## PROGRAM

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Monday, 19 April 2021

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### Session 1: SEPARATION [7h45 – 16h00 (Eastern Time)]

- 7h45**      **Welcome**
- 8h00**      **Opening Lecture**  
‘The Christianization of Emotions’  
Piroska Nagy, Université du Québec à Montréal
- 9h00      ‘Grief and Loss in *Confessiones* IV’  
Matthew W. Knotts, National Louis University
- 9h30      ‘Three Evagrian “thoughts” Related to our Feelings about COVID-19’  
Marc Malevez, Université Libre de Bruxelles
- 10h00      ‘Surprise and Fear as Conditions of Psychic Change and Progress in Proclus’  
Corentin Tresnie, KU Leuven and Université Libre de Bruxelles
- 10h30      ‘Individuality, Community, and Passions in the Philosophy of Plotinus’  
Mateusz Stróżyński, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
- 11h00      ‘Epidemics and the Game of Blame’  
Rafał Toczko, Nicolaus Copernicus University
- 11h30      ‘To Fear, or Not to Fear. Platonic Variations on *Phobos*’  
Claudia Luchetti, University of Tübingen
- 12h00**      **Break**
- 13h00      ‘Separation, Loss, and Change in Evagrius’  
Monica Tobon, University College of London
- 13h30      ‘The Passions in Saint John Cassian’s Monastic Writings’  
Alexandru Ojica, Centre Orthodoxe d’Étude et de Recherche « Dumitru Stăniloae »
- 14h00      Passions of the Body and of the Soul  
Panagiotis G. Pavlos, University of Oslo
- 14h30**      **Keynote Lecture**  
‘Separation and Suffering in Patristic Thought’  
Susan Wessel, Catholic University of America

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## Tuesday, 20 April 2021

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### **Session 2: LOSS [7h45 – 11h30 (Eastern Time)]**

- 7h45**            **Welcome**
- 8h00            ‘Claudian’s Gigantomachia: Coping with Reality’  
Adrien Bresson, Université de Lyon
- 8h30            ‘Plutarch and his Daughter: Coping with Loss as a Platonist’  
Konstantinos Gkaleas, University of Thessaly
- 9h00            ‘How to Cope with Loss: Plato’s Arguments on the Immortality of the  
Soul in the Everyday Life of the Late Neoplatonists’  
Benedetto Neola, Sorbonne University and University of Salerno
- 9h30            ‘The Theurgic Gift of Wellbeing’  
Marios Koutsoukosm, University of Liverpool
- 10h00           ‘Christ’s Grief: the Therapy for *timor mortis* of St. Augustine’  
Weicong Ruan, University of Tübingen
- 10h30           ‘Shall I show joy or sorrow? (Poem 31). Pain of loss – a study of Paulinus  
of Nola’s Works’  
Marcin Wysocki, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, KUL, Poland
- 11h00           ‘Suffering Loss as a Divine Turn to the Heavenly Hope: Insights from  
Augustine’s *City of God*’  
Jimmy Chan, University of Toronto
- 11h30           ‘Bridging the Gulf of Suffering: Sacramental Vision in John Chrysostom’s  
Preaching on Job’  
Douglas Finn, Saint Anselm College
- 12h00**            **Break**

### **Session 3: CHANGE [13h00 – 17h00]**

- 13h00           ‘Moments of (Potential) Transformation. Plato and the Pandemic’  
Vasilis Politis, Trinity College Dublin
- 13h30           ‘Into the Desert: a Call to Spiritual Renewal with Anthony of the Desert’  
Sydney Sadowski, Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków
- 14h00           ‘A Noble Compassion: ἔλεος in Plato’s *Gorgias* and *Laws*’

Santiago Eslava Bejarano Universidad de los Andes

- 14h30 'Deadly Passions in the Life of Christians: Isidore of Pelusium and Theodore Stoudites'  
Eirini Artemi, Hellenic Open University
- 15h00 'The Function of Pathos in the Central Myth of the Phaedrus'  
Pedro Mauricio Garcia Dotto, New School for Social Research
- 15h30 'Hope in Sadness and Desolation in Augustine of Hippo'  
Tamara Saeteros Pérez, Sergio Arboleda University
- 16h00 'Augustine on Hope in Times of Suffering'  
Matthew Drever
- 16h30 Closing Lecture**  
'Augustine's Tears: a Plea for the Virtue of Honesty'  
Anthony Dupont, KU Leuven
- 17h00 Concluding Remarks**

## **PRESENTERS**

**Piroska Nagy** (Université du Québec à Montréal), **Mateusz Stróżyński** (Adam Mickiewicz University), **Susan Wessel** (Catholic University of America), **Anthony Dupont** (KU Leuven), **Adrien Bresson** (Université de Lyon), **Douglas Finn** (Saint Anselm College), **Matthew W. Knotts** (National Louis University), **Konstantinos Gkaleas** (University of Thessaly), **Benedetto Neola** (Sorbonne Université and University of Salerno), **Sydney Sadowski** (Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków), **Santiago Eslava Bejarano** (Universidad de los Andes), **Marc Malevez** (Université Libre de Bruxelles), **Corentin Tresnie** (KU Leuven and Université Libre de Bruxelles), **Rafał Toczko** (Nicolaus Copernicus University), **Alexandru Ojica** (Centre Orthodoxe d'Étude et de Recherche « Dumitru Stăniloae »), **Weicong Ruan** (University of Tübingen), **Vasilis Politis** (Trinity College Dublin), **Eirini Artemi** (Hellenic Open University), **Marios Koutsoukosm** (University of Liverpool), **Monica Tobon** (UCL), **Pedro Mauricio Garcia Dotto** (New School of Social Research), **Tamara Saeteros Pérez** (Sergio Arboleda University), **Marcin Wysocki** (John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin), **Jimmy Chan** (University of Toronto), **Matthew Drever** (University of Tulsa), **Panagiotis Pavlos** (University of Oslo), **Claudia Luchetti** (University of Tübingen)

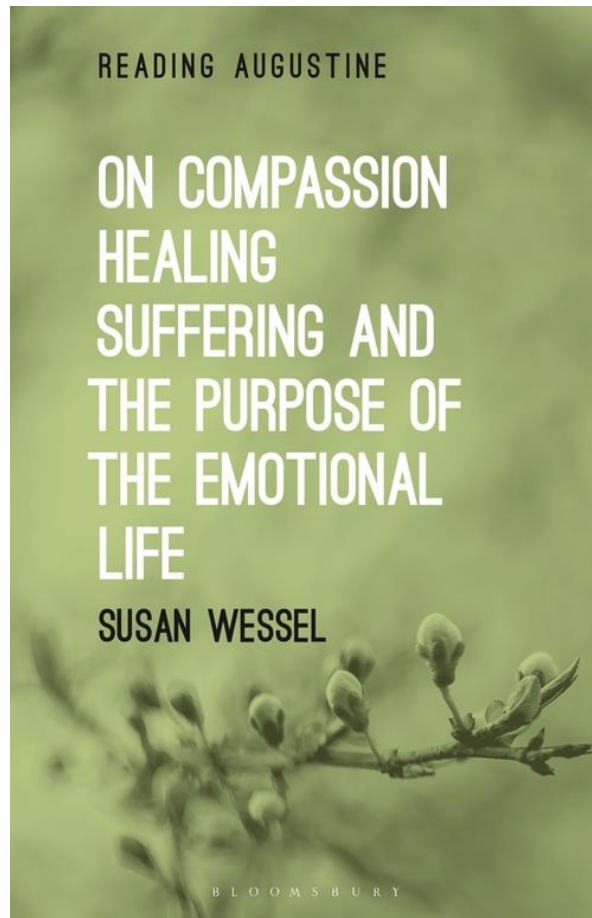
## **KEYNOTE LECTURE**

Separation and Suffering in Patristic Thought [Keynote Lecture]

Susan Wessel, Catholic University of America

In English, ‘to be separate’ is to be moved apart and disconnected, while ‘to separate’ is to divide something into its distinct parts. Among the early Christians, such ideas are expressed in a variety of Greek and Latin words, and are called to mind through actions and imagery. The Gospels attest to the earliest disciples leaving behind family and community to take up the Cross and follow Jesus. In doing so, they become pilgrims, set apart from the world. And once set apart, they form a community, both separate and united.

Patristic theologians have elaborated upon such biblical ideals to make separation a multi-layered and transformational reality for Christians. To the extent that separation produces radical disenfranchisement, it is interwoven with a theology of suffering. Gregory Nazianzen illustrates this point nicely when he discusses the plight of the lepers. Denied entry into the churches, their intense physical suffering separates them from the community of Christians. Gregory shows how that suffering connects them to Christ on the Cross, binds them to each other, and reintegrates them into the body of Christ. Likewise, Augustine addressed the confusion and despair among pagans and Christians alike after the Goths sacked Rome in 410. He saw it as a problem of discernment that was rooted in separation. While pagans and Christians seemed to experience a similar kind of suffering, there was a difference in its magnitude and in the way in which it was perceived. Among the body of Christ, it was a confirmation of their indifference to the world, and of their rightful place apart from it. Finally, for Maximus the Confessor, human beings are in a perpetual state of separation and division until we are transformed in Christ, the unifier, in whom all was created and by whom all become one.



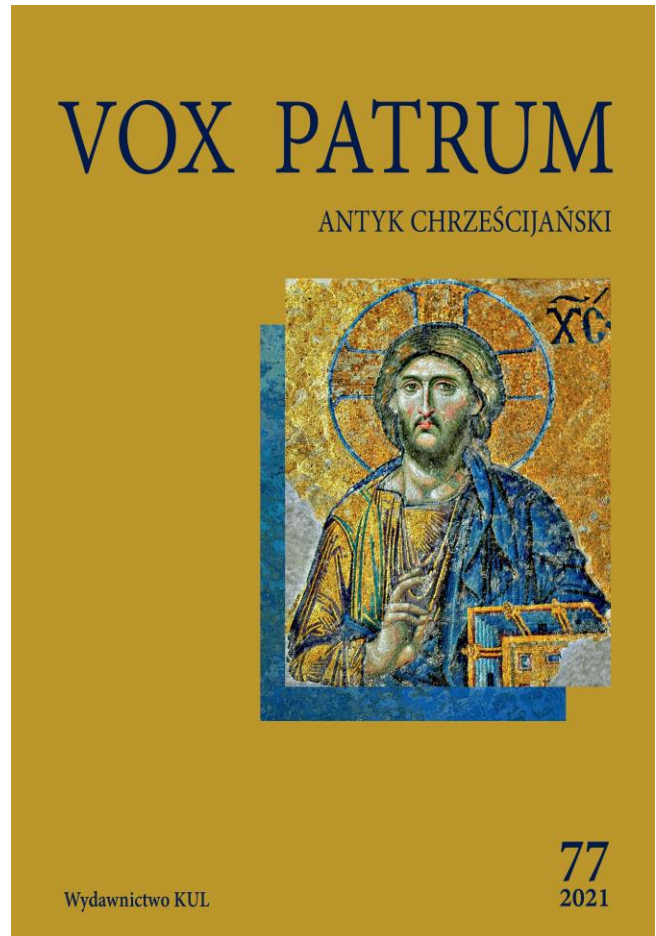
Susan Wessel is the James H. and Mary F. Moran Professor of the History of Early Christianity at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. An expert in Patristics and the early Christian world, she is the author, most recently, of [\*Reading Augustine: On Compassion, Healing, Suffering and the Purpose of the Emotional Life\*](#) (Reading Augustine, Bloomsbury Academic, 2020)\* and *Passion and Compassion in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, 2016).

\*Professor Wessel's book will be available to purchase at special discount to Symposium presenters and participants, direct from the publisher.

## PUBLICATION OF PROCEEDINGS

1. Papers will be considered for publication in the topical issue entitled *The Passions in the Platonic Tradition, Patristics and Late Antiquity* in [VOX PATRUM](#) vol. 81 - **March 2022** [Editor: Marcin R. Wysocki (John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin), Guest Editor: Pablo Irizar (McGill University)].
2. Submission **deadline**: 1 September 2021  
[Submit through the website: [voxpatrum.pl](http://voxpatrum.pl)]
3. [Submission Guidelines and Typography](#)
4. About VOX PATRUM

VOX PATRUM is a patristic journal (quarterly), published since 1981, first by the Institute of Research on Christian Antiquity of the Catholic University of Lublin, then (since 1 October 2012) by the Institute of History of the Church and Patrology in John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. “Vox Patrum” is the only kind of so spacious journal in Poland, focused on early Christianity, well-known in all patristic centres all over the world. The journal is valued not only for the published scientific articles, but as well because of the published bibliographies, translations, reviews, and documentation of the patristic life in Poland and all around the world. Rev. Prof. Stanisław Longosz was its founder and the first editor-in-chief.





## ABSTRACTS

Claudian's Gigantomachia: Coping with Reality  
Adrien Bresson, Université de Lyon

When Claudian wrote his *Gigantomachia*, the 4th century AD was coming to an end in a politically troubled context, as can be seen through the various epics that the poet wrote to praise the emperor and his glorious general Stilicho. Yet, Claudian seems to be exceeding his place as a royal poet with the *Gigantomachia*, because if one considers his epic to be voluntarily uncompleted, then the poet expressed a rather pessimistic vision of the future. The status quo at the end of Claudian's work, as Delph is about to succumb to the Giants, could indicate that despite the joint efforts of Stilicho and the Romans, the war between mighty powers may cause the fall of all. As such, it is not impossible that, through his *Gigantomachia*, Claudian might have chosen to express more personal views and to represent his own trouble in coping with reality through mythology, so as to partially veil his intentions. When Claudian oversteps his role as an official poet in order to transcribe the state of the Empire as he saw and understood it, he may well be aiming at mirroring the general atmosphere of the world he lived in, that is a decaying Empire. Indeed, the Roman empire, once great and united, was divided in two parts in 395 AD, causing a considerable change in the mindset of Roman citizens, all the more so as both the Occidental and the Oriental parts considered each other as their arch enemy. Furthermore, Roman could not find refuge in their religious belief as Christianity was becoming the official religion and as a consequence paganism was about to be forbidden, which is why Claudian took a stand in writing a mythological epic poem. Then, and in that respect, Claudian's *Gigantomachia* could be studied as a work gathering the passions of the author in a fiction which would take on a cathartic value.

## How to Cope with Loss: Plato's Arguments on the Immortality of the Soul in the Everyday Life of the Late Neoplatonists

Benedetto Neola, Sorbonne Université and University of Salerno

*«A boy, older than the philosophers, was born to Hermeias from Aedesia, and when he was seven months old Aedesia was playing with him as is natural, and softening her voice she would call him “babion” or even “little child”. On hearing this, he became angry and castigated these childish diminutives, pronouncing his criticism in a clear and articulate voice. He [scil. Damascius] relates many other extraordinary anecdotes about this child and says that since he could not endure bodily existence, he departed from life at the age of seven; for his soul could not be contained in this earthly region» (Damasc., *Vit. Isid.* fr. 57 *apud* Phot., *Bibl.* 242, 341b1-11; transl. Athanassiadi 1999).*

Late antique Neoplatonists did not only further develop Plato's arguments on the immortality of the soul from a theoretical point of view, but that they also relied on Plato's tenets to cope with threatening emotions of the everyday life, notably the loss of the beloved ones. The premature death of Hermias of Alexandria and Aedesia's son is a striking and moving example. Hermias, Syrianus' pupil and co-disciple of Proclus, is the author of the only ancient commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus* that has been handed down to us (c. 410-455 AD). Indeed, Damascius tells us (fr. 54) that, lying on his deathbed, Hermias assured his friend, Egypt, that the soul is immortal to soothe his friend's deep sorrow and grief. Once again, the theoretical appropriation of Platonic stances turns out to be also a tool to cope with the loss. With my paper, I will then show, on the one hand, how Proclus and Hermias developed Plato's arguments on the immortality of the soul and, on the other, that in their everyday life, too, and faced with loss they relied on them to soothe their pains.

Augustine's Tears: a Plea for the Virtue of Honesty  
Anthony Dupont, KU Leuven

How honest was Augustine? This is not an easy question to place over an author who could be such an incisive theoretician of human traits on the one hand, yet who on the other hand, was so very open, so very willingly confessional with regard to the complex plays of his own emotions, and the practice of his concrete life. In our paper, (1) we will first consider Augustine's reflections about the opposite of honesty, namely lying. (2) Subsequently we will explore his *Confessions* to unravel his personal experience of honesty, (3) which will result, thirdly, in a reflection about the tears of Augustine.

## Three Evagrian “Thoughts” Related to our Feelings about COVID-19. An Approach Based on Late Antiquity Egyptian Texts

Marc Malevez, Université Libre de Bruxelles

The current epidemiological crisis causes many feelings that come from the so-called “passions” by authors of late Christian antiquity, from what Evagrius calls the “bad thoughts” or the “spirits of malice”. This author is certainly the one who reflected the most on these “vices” and their classification. We will therefore first quickly expose his system, comparing it to other visions of time. Then, we will focus on three of these “thoughts”, “sadness”, which is very much linked to “anger”, and followed, according to Evagrius, by the “acedia”, namely, the disgust of everything, the renunciation of his spiritual reasoning. These three “vices” are clearly found, among others, in our present suffering: isolation and illness that surrounds us leads us most often to be sad and, lacking solutions, to fall into anger which, in many cases, provoke despair, which leads us to give up the rules and the confinement, to allow ourselves to take unreasonable risks, simply to escape the reality of the situation. We will follow the main Evagrian classification by first evoking sadness, good or bad, then anger, also good or bad, then acedia which can only be bad, bringing the monk back to the world and the starting point of his reasoning. We will obviously rely on Evagrius but also above all on the apothegms, in order to approach as much as possible the real thought of the anchoritic monks. We will also use the text of the Life of Onnophrius/Mission of Paphnutius, at the base of our doctoral thesis. We will discuss the causes, but also the consequences and, finally, the remedies that were then considered against these disorders.

Individuality, Community, and Passions in the Philosophy of Plotinus  
Mateusz Stróżyński, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

Too much emphasis has been put in the last century on the famous last sentence of Plotinus' *Enneads*: "escape of the alone to the Alone", which was generally misunderstood as expressing a very individualistic or narcissistic type of spirituality and ethics. Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* gives us a completely different picture of Plotinus, a very sociable and generous man, taking care of orphans, associating himself with the aristocratic elite of Rome, even to the point of trying to get the permission of the emperor Gallienus to found a city ruled according to Plato's *Laws*. This puzzling contradiction is not puzzling at all, if we look closely at what Plotinus means by being alone (*monos* or *mone*) and at his conception of passions, the body, and the fall of the soul. In the paper, I will present briefly Plotinus' view that passions do not in fact link us to other people, but separate us from them, while the purification of our affective life and attaining the state of aloneness, deepens our relationships with others.

Plutarch and his Daughter: Coping with Loss as a Platonist  
Konstantinos Gkaleas, University of Thessaly

During one of his journeys, an unfortunate event came upon the Platonist philosopher, Plutarch. Receiving the news at Tanagra, it is being said, his granddaughter informed him of his daughter's loss. In order to console his wife, Plutarch then proceeds to write her a letter. The specific text known as Παραμυθητικός πρὸς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα, literally in English Consolation to his wife, constitutes a consolation in epistolary form, where the philosopher clearly acknowledges the gravity of the misfortune, since he was not born "from oak or rock" (608C), yet he urges his wife to cope with this loss in a philosophical, measured way that, according to the philosopher, is most suitable to her simple and cultivated personality. Plutarch begins his argumentative effort underlining the importance of moderation for not only "in Bacchic riot" must the virtuous woman remain uncorrupted; but she must hold that the tempest and tumult of her emotion in grief requires continence no less, a continence that does not resist maternal affection, as the multitude believe, but the licentiousness of the mind (609A-B). Plutarch presents a plethora of arguments drawn from the Ἀκαδημία and the platonic corpus along with other philosophical sources, showing his syncretic spirit. One could say wisely that he chooses not to neglect the religious tradition, all the while aiming to comfort not only logically, but also emotionally his wife, since it is rather in our ancestral and ancient usages and laws that the truth of these matters is to be seen (612 A). Thus, the text radiates a universal message that remains completely relevant and applicable to our era, helping us to deal with an immense stressful impact of the allpervading fear of loss in the midst of a pandemic.

Surprise and Fear as Conditions of Psychic Change and Progress in Proclus  
Corentin Tresnie, KU Leuven and Université Libre de Bruxelles

In his *Commentaries*, Proclus (Neoplatonic philosopher, 5th century A.D.) describes the ways in which a teacher can awake the desire for knowledge and philosophy in a given soul, and help this soul to make cognitive and moral progress. He considers such an intervention to be a case of providence, analogous to both the action of divine *Pronoia* and the care of one's personal daemon. As the soul to be thus educated is still unaware of the merits of rational thought, the teacher needs to use the emotions of his student to stimulate him; he might even want to generate desirable emotions in his soul. In this paper, I will focus on two interrelated emotions: surprise and fear. According to Proclus, they are the natural state of the soul of any young person. For lack of enough experience, we tend to be overly impressed by any external stimulus, which hinders us to properly articulate rational thoughts. A long process of preliminary education (*paideia*) of the irrational soul is thus necessary as a preparation for rational thinking. But even when it comes to the education of the rational soul, they are instrumental to generate astonishment, which is the starting point of philosophical discovery, but also one of the preconditions for being able to learn at all and for entering a state of *sumpatheia* with the good order or things. Moreover, surprise is necessary to compensate for some side effects of pride, another affective state very important for the learning process. Fear, on the other hand, is to be understood as awe rather than anxiety, as it is meant to induce one's soul to accept the daemonic care of the teacher. To summarize, I claim that in Proclus' theory, fear and surprise are both the initial irrational state to be overcome, and a mean for inducing someone to think rationally and to turn towards the divine Good.

Into the Desert – a Call to Spiritual Renewal With Anthony of the Desert  
Sydney Sadowski, Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków

Separation is often the cause of anxiety and fear, especially when forced upon us as at the beginning of the pandemic. Loss and uncertainty of how to manage our day-to-day existence can quickly arise leading toward despair. During these times we can look to the Desert Fathers, especially to Anthony of the Desert, for guidance on how to manage the passions and learn to embrace our forced hermitage as well as find ways of connection in seeking a path toward a spirit of renewal. The Christian way of life has always called for detachment from the world, to be in the world but not of the world. Embracing a new religious praxis founded on the principals of the Desert Fathers can lead individuals to a deeper and fundamentally stronger faith and sense of well-being as well as establishing a foundational shift in the individual to answer the Church's call toward mission, for when an overwhelming spiritual rejuvenation occurs in individuals, as is seen with Anthony, others are drawn up, strengthened and called to join on this new path to freedom. This paper will show how identifying spiritual attacks by the enemy and learning to live in a modern way by the disciplines outlined by Anthony, we will find that faith in God through simple ascetic disciplines will lead to a good life no matter what our present circumstances.



The Passions in Saint John Cassian's Monastic Writings  
Alexandru Ojica, University of Bucharest

The goal of this paper is to present how can the monastic writings of Saint John Cassian (The Institutes and The Conferences) be full of relevance for humankind in the Covid-19 pandemic context? Which is the link between the spiritual diseases and body diseases? Can we apply the teachings of Saint John Cassian? The phenomenon of monasticism in the first Christian centuries, especially in the fourth century, in Egypt, offers us an exemplary model of life in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. We live in a consumer society, whose pillars of support are supply and demand and whose main rule is competition. The ideal of the monastic community is to live *in God*. Monks are called to live alone, not necessarily in the solitude of the desert, away from people, but alone in the middle of one community. In this order, we find Saint John Cassian talking of the Desert Fathers as *angels in the flesh* so as to assert very robustly the possibility of attaining this lofty state. Saint John Cassian says that “we must always keep in mind the origin of our thoughts and carefully consider all the thoughts that arise in our hearts”. He is a spiritual therapist with a spiritual objective: “We should then be able to expel this most injurious passion from our hearts, so that by spiritual meditation we may keep our mind constantly occupied with hope of the future and contemplation of the promised blessedness”. The diseases of the soul are the same for both layman and monks. The medication is obviously the same. Saint John Cassian finds a connection between the origins of the spiritual diseases and body diseases, generally called passions.

## Bridging the Gulf of Suffering: Sacramental Vision in John Chrysostom's Preaching on Job

Douglas Finn, Saint Anselm College

For the advertised conference, I propose to draw upon the late antique bishop John Chrysostom's preaching on Job's disease for insight into how Christians today might seek to overcome one of the most devastating aspects of the coronavirus pandemic: separation and isolation. The scholar Antigone Samellas has studied Greco-Roman views on the isolating aspects of pain—particularly public pain—and how early Christian preachers sought to overcome that isolation by turning Christians into co-sufferers in the ecclesial body of Christ. Drawing upon the work of Samellas, as well as Blake Leyerle, Jan Stenger, and Susan Holman, among others, I would like to investigate how, through his rhetoric, John Chrysostom turns both the liturgy and, within that context, Job's diseased body, into a spectacle. John compels his hearers to see what they would often rather push away, and, in the process, he hopes to enable them to see differently. He attempts to lead his hearers to a new kind of vision—a sacramental mode of seeing—which helps them reorder their priorities and detach themselves from worldly values and things. In so doing, Chrysostom strives to cultivate in his congregants a bond of love and sympathy for the poor and diseased, a form of spiritual and material attachment intended to overcome the social isolation that often accompanied disease, e.g., leprosy, in the ancient world. I will conclude by reflecting on some of the lessons we might be able to draw from Chrysostom regarding preaching, the recognition of others in spiritual, emotional, and physical distress, and the building of spiritual and affective community even when, on account of the pandemic, we must remain physically distant from one another.

Grief and Loss in *Confessiones* IV  
Matthew W. Knotts, National Louis University

This contribution focuses on grief (*dolor*) in Augustine's account of the death of his friend in the *Confessiones* (4.4.8–4.7.12), with particular attention to the stage of Loss. I concentrate especially on the implications of Augustine's grief for lived experience and religious practise. I argue that Augustine's reflections can inform our own response to grief during the pandemic. Augustine is struck with grief at the death of his friend, and his entire experience is transfigured, becoming a living torment (4.4.9). Now everything reminds him of his loss, intensifying his pain. How often have the sights of empty streets only irritated our own feeling of grief? Moreover, Augustine finds no refuge, for he carries his grief with(in) himself (4.7.12; cf. Coyne 2015). Our own experience of confinement, especially for those completely alone, is reflected in Augustine's own struggle to be with himself. Augustine locates the source of his misery in loving finite things as if they were infinite. Thus not only does their loss cause one grief, but even the fear of their potential loss (4.6.11). The suddenness with which the world changed little more than a year ago serves as a stark reminder of the finite and contingent nature of human existence. Augustine's reflections may also teach us something about religious practise. O'Donnell (1992) describes Augustine's haunting psychological account of grief as 'God-less'. Because he held a false conception of God (*phantasma*), not even prayer could provide Augustine with any relief. However, this traumatic loss serves to move Augustine to look for God, and so becomes a kind of contact with God, albeit oblique (Fischer 2013). To what extent is God 'present' in absence? Can God be found even in the most apparently negative experiences of life?

A Noble Compassion: ἔλεος in *Gorgias* and *Laws*  
Santiago Eslava-Bejarano, Universidad de los Andes

The testimonies and images of healthcare workers and Covid-19 patients worldwide have reminded us of our shared vulnerability. In addition to the expectable fear that these images elicit, there is another significant emotion that arises in many of us: compassion towards those who face the virus or have lost loved ones during the pandemic. Compassion also occupied a prominent place in Greek philosophy, and both Plato and Aristotle commented on this emotion, albeit in apparently contrasting ways — Plato's stated disregard for compassion (in *Apology* and *Republic*) standing at odds with Aristotle's appraisal of it as a legitimate and even desirable response (in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*). Given the scope and extent of compassion's role in Greek thought, however, one may revisit and reassess this commonplace opposition, and especially its guiding premise, namely that Plato did away with this emotion entirely. I argue against this assumption, proposing instead that Plato conceived a form of compassion that would constitute an appropriate answer to a specific kind of misfortune. Indeed, in *Gorgias* and *Laws*, there is a kind of pity that is positive and can even serve reason (just as anger —θυμός— can be an ally of reason in R. 440b). In this presentation, I will show how this pity does not contradict the critiques that Plato outlines in other dialogues insofar as they are directed to the common Greek notion of pity, which is different from the emotion presented by Socrates and the Athenian in *Gorgias* and *Laws*. This comparative study will elucidate how Plato reinterpreted the common notion of pity in order to accommodate it to his own views about justice and virtue.

Moments of (Potential) Transformation. Plato and the Pandemic  
Vasilis Politis Trinity College Dublin

It is a common view that Plato propounds a rationalist ethics, with reason as the single authority. But this view is one-sided. It is hard to reconcile with the role that Plato affords love (erōs) when he has Diotima conclude that it is through this passion, which springs from the contemplation of beauty, that we are able to give birth to genuine virtue (Symposium, 211d–212a); and with Socrates’ statement (in the Phaedrus) that “the greatest of goods”, of which erōs is foremost, “come to us due to madness, provided that it is given as a divine gift” (244a). It is also difficult to reconcile with the way in which, in the Cave story, Plato characterizes a moment in us of liberation and reorientation: not as part of rational enquiry but rather as something that triggers and enables such enquiry at its best (Republic 515c). What triggers such moments of (potential) transformation? And what forms can they take? I want to take up these questions, by bringing a Platonic perspective in touch with our current situation of the pandemic and our reactions to it. I suggest that our situation presents us with an opportunity of certain recognitions; which include: that we can do without much of the overly active character of the world as we know (or knew) it; and without some of the overly regulated character of such a world. However, it is doubtful whether such recognitions are available if we confine ourselves to predominantly analytical and scientific responses. Rather, a mentality is called for that is (also) passionate. Plato’s favourite passion is love, understood as the openness to the beauty of things and the potential this has for bringing us together in shared creative activity. This may be a good model for such recognitions in our present situation

Christ's Grief: the Therapy for *timor mortis* of St. Augustine  
Weicong Ruan, University of Tübingen

Against the historical background of the sack of Rome in 410 A.D., Augustine of Hippo paid more attention than ever to the teaching of death in his eschatological salvation. His explanation of *timor mortis* (the fear of death) directly responded to the inner anxiety and restlessness of the Romans. For Augustine, *timor mortis*, on the one hand, as the natural passion (first-order passion), is inevitable in this life and unable to be rid of by oneself. It exposes the affiliation to this life and points forwards the death of the body. On the other hand, although the despair derived from this very fear (second-order passion) is more terrible for pointing towards the death of the soul (second death), it is still possible for one to relieve it when death is approaching. Christians could console themselves by learning from Christ's grief, which thereby indirectly heals and overcomes *timor mortis*. To make it clear, I will first combine the passages on death from the City of God and some anti-Donatistic sermons to clarify why Augustine regards *timor mortis* as a natural (in a sense even justified) passion of humans. Second, according to the two-order structure consisting of passion and the passion generated by the former, I will elaborate on the diagnosis of *timor mortis*, an illness of human nature, given by Augustine in the City of God and other relevant works. Finally, by analyzing the Tractatus LX on the Gospel of St. John and other sermons regarding the martyrs, I will investigate what kind of therapy Augustine gives for *timor mortis* and how it exactly works in the human soul with the aid of Christ's grief in Scripture. It will be manifest that, unlike the "cold" philosophy in late antiquity, the Christian theology of Augustine presented a kind of pastoral care in the way of faith, hope, and love.

Deadly passions in the life of Christians: A comparative study according to Isidore of Pelusium and Theodore Stoudites  
Eirini Artemi, Hellenic Open University and Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Adam and Eve served their passion of gastrimargy and their ambition to become gods without the grace of God. The result was their exile from Paradise and death. The incarnation of Logos, His crucifixion, His death on the cross and His resurrection gave a second chance of man's salvation. Unfortunately, people don't put into practice this gift of their reconciliation to God. In this paper, we will compare the opinion of two important Church Fathers, Isidore of Pelusium and Theodore Stoudite . It is important to underline for what kind of passions these Church Fathers speak. Do they relate the passions only with monks or general with Christians? How can we get rid of a passion? Can their teaching be put into practice in nowadays? Which is the worst passion according to them? Are diseases and pandemic a punishment of God for our sins? Of course we should explain that the passions in the life of a Christian can be proved deadly but they have no connection with the view that diseases are punishments from God for our passions. This was an opinion which exists in the Ole Testament. Through the texts of these two fathers we will present the results of the passions in the life of the Christian and in the life of priests and monks. Is it easy someone to get rid of the passions? What is the method that he should follow?

Epidemics and the Game of Blame. A Comparative Study  
Rafał Toczko, Nicolaus Copernicus University

From Homer, through Sophocles and Thucydides to Ammianus Marcellinus all the ancient authors reflecting on the sudden outbreak of some life-threatening disease imprint in the mind of the readers a similar impression: there is always someone to blame for the epidemic. And people do not hesitate to ascribe the guilt to a certain groups or individuals, mostly foreigners, cultural or religious minorities. All this was driven by a widespread, yet somewhat atavistic, belief that some form of impurity invites the Gods to punish the humankind with an ultimate form of it: the rotting and disintegration of the bodies. In a striking opposition to this, early Christian moralists (of which I choose to focus on Cyprian and Augustine) contextualise pestilence and disease as just a radical sign of *conditio humana*, a rather normal event on our pilgrimage through *saeculum*. It is quite astonishing to learn how, nowadays, some Christians throughout the world picked-up this pagan game of blame to emotionally cope with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. In my paper I discuss some of the most vivid examples of this sort of reaction.



The Theurgic Gift of Wellbeing  
Marios Koutsoukosm, University of Liverpool

This presentation intends to explore a Middle Platonic method for attaining happiness (εὐδαιμονία) through the practice of theurgy. Drawing on Iamblichus' *On The Mysteries* and, more specifically, from the tenth and final chapter of the work, which addresses this particular subject, I will examine individual religiosity in late antique Middle Platonism as a tool for achieving self-actualisation through methexis with the divine first principle. It will be argued that it is through detachment from the world of generation, wherein all things perishable and prone to dissolution reside, that the individual can attain a sustainable form of happiness, especially in challenging periods. At the same time, it is important that this process is not merely a noetic exercise or a deliberate flight of fancy. Since we are referring to a theurgic practice, it is important to keep in mind that one of the main components of theurgy was material and firmly grounded upon the realm of the tangible. Within this context, the individual's private religious practice plays a key-role in the attainment of happiness and lived religion becomes an active process of engagement in safeguarding one's mental and spiritual well-being. I would argue that presently, in a time of crisis which we are seemingly powerless to fight against, with the world undergoing radical changes for us all and threatening to overwhelm our established emotional balance, there is much to be gained by exploring this proactive approach to individual happiness that Iamblichus proposed more than sixteen centuries ago.

Separation, Loss, and Change in Evagrius  
Monica Tobon, University College of London

For Evagrius, separation and loss are the preconditions of the change whereby the nous is freed from the *pathe* it acquired in falling. Our true nature is a nous united to God in love and true knowledge of reality, but when the nous fell it fragmented into a soul, its body became mortal, and knowledge was detached from love. Although Evagrius never makes the connection, we recall the plight of the sea God Glaucus (*Republic* 611d-612a). While some Evagrian *pathe* coincide with states we would call emotions, a *pathos* is not an emotion but, echoing the Stoics, the affective aspect of a false evaluation; for Evagrius, of *de facto* idolatry. Characterised by excess, it is sustained by assent to such evaluations and enslaves the nous to the pursuit of false goods. Because *pathos* is so deeply rooted in us, to become free of it the monk must first embrace radical separation and loss, just as an addict who wishes to become free of addiction might start a new life elsewhere. Then, sustained by ascetic disciplines and virtues, they undergo a protracted struggle to reduce its hold on them. *Apatheia* frees the soul from attachment to false goods; harmonises its three powers by reorienting them to the true good, thereby beginning the reunification of the nous; and establishes love as the soul's stable disposition, meaning that love becomes the foundation of knowledge and true knowledge of reality is re-enabled. Evagrius shows us how to cope with separation and loss, and resulting trauma, by endowing them with meaning as the start of a journey into a more authentic way of living, by mapping that journey, by describing the various forms the *pathe* can take, by prescribing remedies for them, by recognising the need to include the body in such remedies, and by describing how to recognise progress. In doing all this he also shows us that others have, in his words, embarked upon the same path.

The Function of Pathos in the Central Myth of the Phaedrus  
Pedro Mauricio Garcia Dotto, New School for Social Research

There are several ways by which one may define what is distinctive about philosophy for Plato. Most of the definitions are concerned with demonstrating who the philosopher is by what the philosopher does, that is, the activities that are proper to him: “to philosophize is to learn how to die” (*Ph.* 67e); “philosophy is an acquisition of knowledge” (*Euth.* 288d); “love of learning is the same thing as philosophy” (376b); those who philosophize make use of the dialectical art (*Soph.* 253e). In this paper, nonetheless, by closely following the central myth in the *Phaedrus* I will analyze the distinctiveness of the philosophers in relation to his fundamental experiences, instead of his peculiar activities. The palinode in the *Phaedrus* reports that the perception of intense visual beauty in this world can trigger in the philosopher a recollection of the form of the Beauty first gazed in the mythical-cyclical procession with the gods in the prenatal state (250a-b); that the experience (τὸ πάθος) of love is essential to the philosophical life (252c); and that it is the shame that the charioteer feels in approaching the beloved what allows for their relationship to be sublimated into a higher and purer form (254d-e). In all of these instances, *pathos* has precedence *praxis*, so that what one undergoes comes before what one undertakes. In other words, the right form of *pathos* is necessary for one to turn into a philosopher. Against this backdrop, I believe that in the current struggle against the pandemics, and in an effort to prevent future disasters of this kinds, perhaps we would need not just to take vigorous actions (*praxis*), but also to allow ourselves to be receptive in the right way to the magnitude of ongoing misery in order to assume a responsibility that is suitable to our collective experience (*pathos*).

Hope in Sadness and Desolation in Augustine of Hippo  
Tamara Saeteros Pérez, Universidad Sergio Arboleda

During 2020, we have experienced a big deal as humanity with the COVID-19 pandemic, and we have felt many emotions, passions, and contradictory wishes in this time. For a moment, it seemed like everything was lost. With this context in mind, I would like to analyze three emotions as Augustine explains them in his work in order to illuminate our path: hope, sadness and desolation. I would like to begin with the example of Proba. Proba is a widow who writes Augustine with the question of how to pray. Augustine explains her that prayer is necessary as we are always in this world in a desolation condition and as pilgrims to the eternal life. During the pandemics, we have learnt there is no way to live safely due to the continuous dangers and risks that we are exposed to as humanity. Beside this, we have lost friends, relatives, but also energy, enthusiasm, and joy. We can find this in Augustine's life, his resilience based in hope, and the enjoyment of friendship can help us to face this adversity. Because of this, desolation and sadness are not "a small illness for the soul". In letter 244, Augustine explains that sadness is produced when we lost some goods that have a special place in our hearts or maybe some cared people for us. However, if we realize the most important thing is not losing the Great Good, in whom we recuperate all the other things; we will be able to take care of our friends and ourselves, and we will rejoice again with Christian hope in mind and heart.

Shall I show joy or sorrow? (Poem 31). Pain of loss – a study of Paulinus of Nola’s Works  
Marcin Wysocki, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, KUL, Poland

“Shall I show joy or sorrow?” (Poem 31). Pain of loss – a study of Paulinus of Nola’s works  
2. Abstract: Without a doubt, one of the most interesting, but also not known very well, personalities of the turn of the 4th and 5th centuries was Paulinus of Nola. Born into a wealthy senatorial family, appointed governor of Campania, he abandoned his wealth and political career, was baptized and settled in a monastery he founded at the tomb of St. Felix in Nola near Naples where he lived till his death as a bishop of Nola. The period he was living in and his life gave him many occasions to feel the pain after the loss of his dear ones – first his brother, then his only child, or share such a pain with others, after the death of their relatives, friends, and believers during the invasion of the barbarian hordes. As a well-known and appreciated spiritual director Paulinus, mostly in his letters, gave an answer to the pain of those who lost their children, partners, and friends. The aim of the proposed paper is to show on the example of his life and his preserved poems and letters, which are among the most interesting examples of early Christian epistolography and poetry, what kind of advices he gave to the people who felt the pain of loss, how he understood this pain and loss itself and what he advised them to deal with this pain moving forward in their lives, what can be helpful in dealing with it in and after pandemic time.

To Fear, or Not to Fear. Platonic Variations on *Phobos*  
Claudia Luchetti, University of Tübingen

In my contribution, I intend to discuss two different ways in which Plato, in the *Phaedo*, describes the feeling of fear. My analysis starts from the conception of virtue accompanied by intelligence (*arete meta phroneseos*), in which Plato describes, by contrast, cases of apparent virtue. Contradictory situations such as that of being "tempering by intemperance", controlling pleasures that we do not fear to lose, being dominated by superior pleasures that we fear to lose. There is therefore a fear (and an absence of fear) which is unjustified, that is, not based on a knowledge of the truth. The second kind of fear is that of the true philosopher and follows him wherever he goes like his own shadow: it is the awareness of his own ignorance, authentic driving power of philosophical research. What is the relevance of these platonic reflections to the situation in which we citizens of the world are all involved at the moment with the pandemic? In my speech I will try to show that the first type of fear described by Plato enters in our lives when we behave only apparently virtuously by following the rules, not because we believe they are right, but for fear of losing things that we consider goods. The second type of fear, by giving us the opportunity to seriously question both the foundations of our social life and our existence as species of our planet, presents us as a more unique than rare opportunity, which we should try to exploit.

Passions of the Body and of the Soul: Coronavirus Pandemic in a Fallen World  
Panagiotis G. Pavlos, University of Oslo

Rarely in the modern era has humanity experienced such a great amount of fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and loss of hope due to a threat to human health, as in the current state of coronavirus pandemic. What seems to be a powerful constituent of the present global health crisis is not the severity of a virus alone, but rather its appearance on a global scale -what precisely makes it a 'pandemic'- and the specific emotions that this threat generates, and which -to a large degree- define the mode of response to it in a globalizing world. Yet, how much justifiable are the emotions that such an apparent state of emergency causes into human beings? How much real is the threat? And, even, how much real are these very emotions? To what extent do they associate with the very phenomenon of the pandemic rather than with a sequence of secondary consequences that derive from it? This paper wishes to offer relevant reflections by discussing insights to the passions of the human compound (body and soul). I shall argue, inter alia, that the fear caused by a pandemic is a fully irrational one, mainly due to the fundamental ignorance about the cosmos being an entity and a living whole, a rather old idea, stemming from Plato's *Timaeus* and preserved throughout in the Christian philosophical tradition. Moreover, that the state of health of the body is a state of reduced and partial health, due to the body's corruptibility caused by the Fall. In such a view, what the real problem is, is death itself and not the way it comes. This presentation shall mainly draw from the brief work *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, of Gregory of Nyssa, with references, whenever necessary, to the Ascetic works of Abba Isaak the Syrian.

## Augustine on Hope in a Time of Suffering

Matthew Drever, University of Tulsa

Augustine's era was no stranger to widespread suffering and social dislocation. As a bishop and public intellectual, Augustine confronted myriad problems on both practical and theoretical levels. Today, his writings still have much to contribute to how we face the current pandemic and the suffering it has wrought. Interestingly, Chan Hellman, a researcher at the University of Oklahoma with joint appointments in Social Work and the Medical School, has developed a body of research that argues that for those who face trauma and deep suffering hope is a lead indicating factor for recovery. This has led Hellman to found the Hope Institute, which offers social services, especially to poor and adversely affected communities, that promote the development of practices that cultivate and train individuals in hope.

I would like to consider what Augustine might offer us on the topic of hope, which I admit may not be the most obvious resource. Known as the Doctor of grace, Augustine is not often associated with hope. Indeed, of the three theological virtues—faith, hope, and love—Augustine's views on faith and love are developed more explicitly in his works, in part through his views on grace, while hope receives the least amount of press both within his own writings and within secondary scholarship. Augustine's *Ench.*, a late work on the virtues of faith, hope, and love typifies this point. The text is oddly weighted with only 3 paragraphs (out of 121) devoted to hope. Does this leave the Doctor of grace in a hopeless place? Sensing the mixed bag Augustine seems to present, contemporary scholarship can be skeptical and dismissive of Augustine on the topic of hope. Often the criticism goes something like this: Augustine's scattered references to hope throughout his corpus reduce to an avoidance strategy of enduring suffering and repressing emotions in the hope of future reward, coalescing into an otherworldly prescriptive approach to human suffering.

While Augustine may not give us a systematic account of hope, he has much to say on the topic within his wider writings—especially his Letters and Sermons—that he intended to help those suffering within his own time, even as they can offer us guidance today. Augustine develops nuanced stances on hope, using it to bridge the historical and eschatological without a reduction to either. Augustine draws on hope to maintain a tension between temporal and eternal life, between the present reality of suffering and the future hope of happiness. We can see here a close connection between hope and its compatriots of faith and love, a connection Augustine utilizes to explore how hope epistemically and affectively transforms the moral and spiritual principles that guide our actions in the world. Reading Augustine's views on hope as superficially otherworldly, mistakenly reduces the historical-eschatological tension in such way that the hope of eternal life completely eclipses and neglects the reality of temporal sufferings. This misses the way Augustine treats hope as a bridge to the promise of eschatological happiness in a transformative manner to realign and reevaluate both spiritual practice and civic (public) virtue without reducing either to a purely otherworldly end.



## Suffering Loss as a Divine Turn to the Heavenly Hope: Insights from Augustine's *City of God*

Jimmy Chan, University of Toronto

The pandemic that has lasted over a year brings all kinds of loss, or sense of loss, to the world, including the loss of lives, the loss of financial status and more subtly, the loss of freedom and self-worth. And suffering these losses brings negative passions such as grief, sadness and despair. Augustine faced similar situation when he composed the *City of God*, where he had to deal with the aftermath of the sack of Rome in 410. Augustine's discussion on the passions in *his magnum opus et arduum* is arguably the most extended one in late Antiquity. In those days, the Stoic theory of emotions were still very much in the air; nowadays there is a surge of resorting to a Stoic way of dealing with losses by freeing oneself of bad emotions. Exploring Augustine's ambivalent reception of the Stoic theory of the passions would give us insights of coping with losses that would not just heal people from the negative emotional traps but also turn them into the heavenly hope in Christ. On one hand, Augustine acknowledges the fourfold Stoic categorization of emotions —*delight (laetitia)*, distress (*aegritudo*), desire (*libido, cupiditas or appetitus*), fear (*primarily, metus or timor*). On the other hand, he rejects the Stoic appreciation of *apatheia*, and yet approves of their idea of *eupatheia*. And those who suffers loss could turn around and receive divine hope by focusing not on oneself but on the passions of God and share his misericordia with this suffering world. Hence, while true happiness cannot be attained in this troubled world, such as one going through the pandemic, Augustine re-baptizes the Stoic theory of the passions and asserts that right-ordered passions that resembles that of God are indispensable for one to live with temporal peace and to seek eternal happiness.