

Erik Bohlin, MA  
New Hope Counseling  
430 91st AVE NE STE 8  
Lake Stevens, WA 98258  
425-334-8916

## Logismoi or Assaultive Thoughts

Understanding assaultive thoughts and how to deal with them is key to living a victorious life in Christ. Logismoi, (pronounced, log-is-mee) are thoughts and thought/images that come to us to lead us away from Christ. They are distracting and are a result of the fall of mankind. There are many early church writers who teach us how to identify them and how to deal with them. St. John Climacus in his writing the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* speak of various stages of how they afflict us and how we should deal with them.

Kyriacos Markides, a sociologist from the University of Maine explores this understanding in his conversation with Fr. Maximos who is a monk from Mount Athos which is outlined in his book, "*The Mountain of Silence.*" The book is a must read for anyone who struggles with their thoughts and wants to be free.

### Excerpts from the *Mountain of Silence* by Kyriacos Markides in his conversation with Fr. Maximos on the stages of Logismoi

"The holy elders," Father Maximos claimed, "identify five stages in the development of a logismos. Of course, I am speaking of a logismos that goes contrary to God's laws. The first is the assault stage, when the logismos first attacks our mind."

"Let me give you an example. A thought enters our mind in the form of a suggestion urging us, let us say, to steal. It is as if this logismos knocks at the door of our mind and tells us: 'Look at this pile of money. Nobody is looking. Take it.'

"When such a logismos strikes, no matter how sinful it may be, it does not render us accountable," Father Maximos explained. "The quality of our spiritual state is not evaluated on the basis of these assaults. In simple language we commit no sin. The holy elders throughout the ages were relentlessly tempted and assaulted by similar and even worse logismoi.

"The second stage according to the holy elders is what they called interaction. It implies opening up of a dialog, an actual exchange with the logismos. When a logismos urges you, for example, to steal that pile of money, you begin to wonder, 'Should I or should I not? What's going to happen if I steal it? What's going to happen if I don't steal it?' This is risky and dangerous. However, even at this stage there is no accountability on the part of the individual, no sin committed as yet. The person can indeed examine such a logismos and consider several options without being accountable. But if the person is weak by temperament, then defeat may be the most likely outcome of that exposure to the logismos."

The third stage in the progression of a logismos is the stage of consent as we would say. You consent to commit what the logismos urges you to do, in this particular case, to steal money. You have made a decision. That's when guilt and accountability start to emerge. It is the beginning of sin. Jesus was referring to this stage when he proclaimed that if you

covet a woman in your mind you have already committed adultery in your heart. The moment this decision is allowed to take root in your heart, then you are well on the way to actually committing the act in the outer world.”

“In the event that a person is unable to free himself from the previous stage, then there is defeat. He becomes hostage to the logismos. The moment the person succumbs, the next time around the logismos returns with greater force. It is much more difficult to resist then. And so it is with the next time and the time after that. The holy elders called it the stage of captivity. That’s when the person can no longer retreat and proceeds along with this act which now becomes a habit that is repeated time and again.”

“Finally, the holy elders identify the end stage in the evolution of a logismos as that of a passion or obsession. The logismos has become an entrenched reality within the consciousness of the person, within the nous. The person becomes a captive of obsessive logismoi, leading to ongoing destructive acts to oneself and to others, such as in the case of a compulsive gambler. The holy elders have warned us that when we become dominated by such passions it is like giving the key or our heart to Satan so that he can get in and out any time he wishes. We see a lot of our brothers and sisters struggling desperately to overcome their obsessive passions and addictions but without much success. They are fully aware that what they do is self-destructive. They are capable of reasoning with clarity of mind, but their heart is captive. They cannot eject from themselves that negative energy that possesses and controls them.”

“So what can be done about these people? Are they beyond hope of freeing themselves from their destructive passions?” I asked.

“Through the Grace of the Holy Spirit everything is possible, including their healing,” Father Maximos replied. Then, like a good teacher, he summarized the five stages.

“So, we have five stages in the evolution of a logismos,” he concluded, spreading out the five fingers of his right hand. “Assault, interaction, consent, captivity, and passion. These are more or less all the stages. They unfold and grow within us sometimes gradually, sometimes like an avalanche.”

## Summary

Not Sin	1. Assault
Not Sin	2. Interaction, Dialogue
Sin of the heart	3. Consent - temptation moves to heart
Sin with the body	4. Captivity - temptation is acted out with body
Engrained Sin	5. Passion - becomes part of a person's life, sickness.

## An Example:

I might have a thought come to me to steal *something from someone*. *The thought says, "I might want my buddy's hat." The thoughts say, "it is not like it is stealing...just borrowing...Christ would forgive you...it's okay."* (Logismoi tend to lead us away from Christ. Say like I steal the hat. Then the logismoi say, *"you think would will be forgiven...there is no hope... you don't need to confess this."* Always leading us away from Christ. This helps us identify them more easily.

Back to our example. So, after the **assaultive** stage of just thinking about stealing the hat, interacting with it or dialoguing with it looks like this. *"Oh..no! Why am I thinking this?" or "Well, he will be forgiving...it is like I am borrowing it."* It could also be, *"I really shouldn't think like this...This is awful."* Notice the **interacting** with the thought in any way. Best to ignore the thoughts completely.

If I decide to steal it and plan on it in my heart to do it, this is the **consent** and it is a sin of the heart. Best to repent now and quickly confess it to someone. That usually helps. The humility of exposing the sin of the heart helps it not progress. "God gives Grace to the humble. He is opposed to the proud." (Book of James)

If I actually steal it...that is the **captivive stage**. If I do this a lot so that it becomes chronic it becomes a passion. Passions because they are so ingrained in our souls it is harder and takes more time to heal from.

## So how do we handle them?

The answer is surprising. We ignore them. That is what the Church fathers tell us to do. They explain that they are like flies and we are to bat them away. From a neurological perspective this makes perfect sense. We don't want to think about the thought or even dialogue with it as it will grow even more. That brain cells that we neglect will eventually die. This should give any of us hope who has struggled with unwanted thoughts. When the logismoi, like the unwanted salesman comes to the door, we are to shut the door and not to even dialogue with him. To invited him into our house or our heart constitute sin--sin of the heart. The first two stages are not sin. This should make it easier to ignore the first two stages, assault and dialogue.

Of course, praying the Jesus Prayer is a great replacement for a repetitive assaultive thoughts. St. Mark the Ascetic said that he gave credit for his prayer life to Satan. Every time he was tempted by the devil, he prayed; thus, he prayed a lot. St. John Chrysostom talks about how a thief will not disturb a house where there is a party going on inside. So it is with the heart of the person who says the Jesus prayer continually. Logismoi, we are told, will always be with us in this life. Even the holiest of people still have to contend with them.

## Logismo and Mental Disorders

Some of us seem more prone to problems with thoughts and thinking than others. People who have obsessional, anxious and depressive thinking could be struggling with logismo. The stinkin' thinkin' and resentments that is associated with addiction and alcoholism are probably logismo. Worry and many anxiety disorders could be seen as logismo. How many people may be on medicine to sedate themselves against the attack of the enemy. I am not against the use of medicine for certain situations. But it is important to understand the origins of our thoughts and how to deal with them. I just want to point out that we may have be deceived into thinking that satan and his assaultive thoughts have no part of our lives and every thing is a biological condition. The other thing to consider is that not everything is spiritual. We live in an age where the spiritual world is downplayed and the biological and psychological is elevated. The enemy also tries to get us to believe that the thoughts are our own.

## Important Considerations

We tend to go about our lives thinking whatever thoughts come to us without considering this is warfare we are engaged in and the thoughts are the ammunition. We are asleep. We are walking through the battlefield and gunfire is whizzing past our heads, and we want to stop and have a closer look at the bullet. Unfortunately, this is how we get hurt. We look at the bullets when we take into our heart a resentment, hurt or angry thought about another person. We could choose to not "take into account a wrong suffered." We would be following Christ, who didn't not open his mouth when wrong things were said about him. We also take a closer look at the bullet, when we are taking a closer look at someone's beauty and are lusting. We get a closer look at the bullet when we judge ourselves as hopeless cases so we quit running the race or we judge ourselves as virtuous and we quit the race because we are "ahead."

We should ignore these bullets and keep our own on Christ, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. Why can we ignore the bullets? We can ignore them because of the work of Jesus Christ's work on the cross. He came to destroy the works of the enemy. The cross is our weapon of peace. What we need to think about and ponder is his word, his commandments, his truth and to call upon his holy name in prayer. Thank God we don't have to entertain, analyze, dissect, or interact with evil thoughts to overcome them. We can ignore them and focus on him. We can take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ by His grace.

Being in a state of awareness is another important asset in our fight. Perhaps, this is what the early Christian writers talked when they talked about "*nepsis*," this vigilance and alert state. We need to be like our computer security software that is constantly blocking and granting access for programs want the want to access our computer's files. It also guards what goes out from our computers, like putting a guard over our mouths.

*"If you keep your inner man full of wicked thoughts, even if you were on Golgotha, even if you were on the Mount of Olives, even if you stood on the memorial rock of the Resurrection, you will be as far away from receiving Christ into yourself as one who has not even begun to confess Him."*

St. Gregory of Nyssa

To be continued---