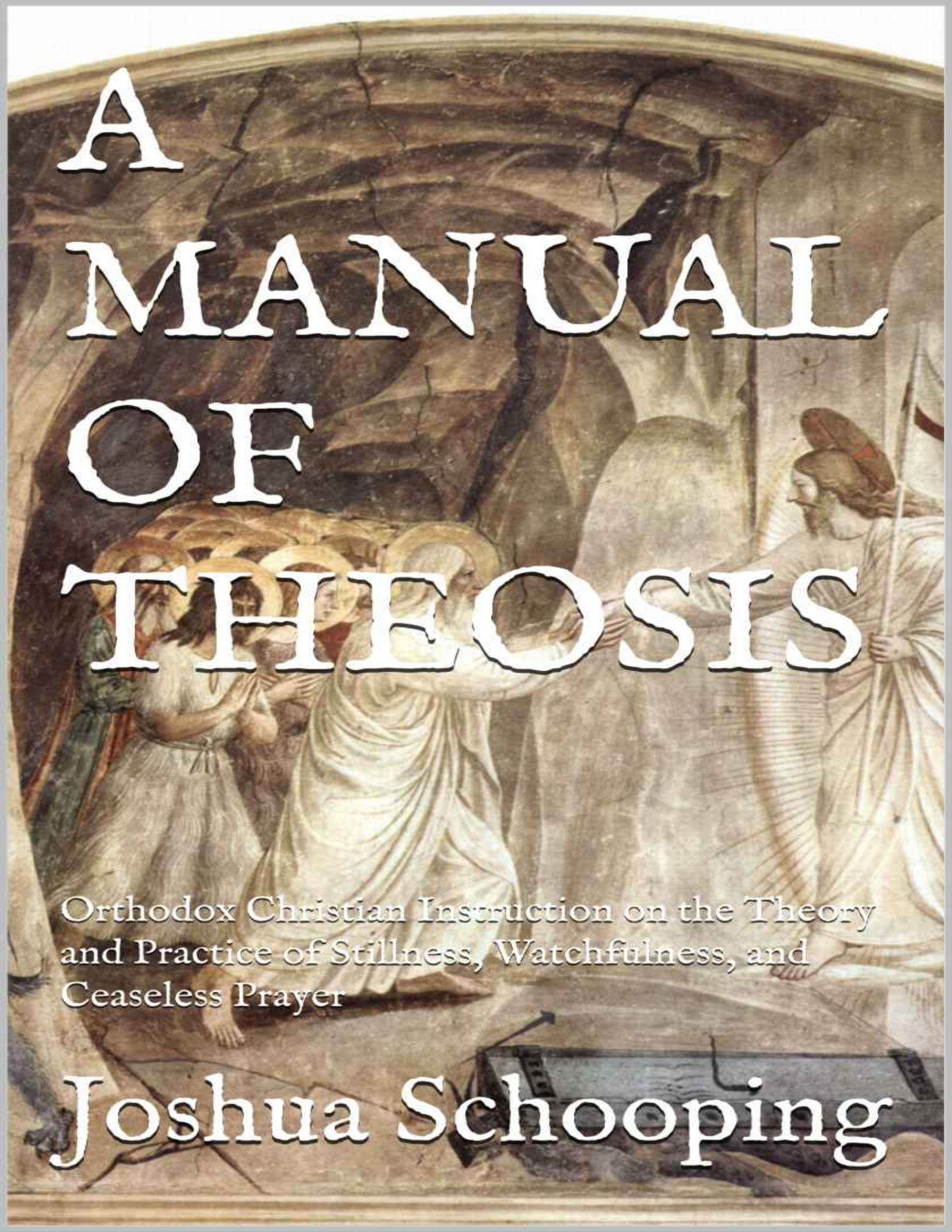




A MANUAL OF THEOSIS

Orthodox Christian Instruction on the Theory
and Practice of Stillness, Watchfulness, and
Ceaseless Prayer

Joshua Schooping

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Prayer

Fr. Joshua Schooping

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A MANUAL OF THEOSIS:
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STILLNESS, WATCHFULNESS, AND CEASELESS PRAYER

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DEDICATION

*To my family,
especially my children,
who are loved more than “gold beyond measure.”*

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1. Introduction

The present manual intends to present to the faithful reader a comprehensible, Patristically grounded method of proceeding as regards certain practical aspects of *theosis*. Theosis is as much an existential *cum* practical “goal” as it is a soteriological *cum* anthropological doctrine, and thus we “press on toward the goal (σκοπός) for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). Therefore there is no need to excessively idealize theosis such that the excitement produced by its possibility interferes with a realistic methodology. Theosis is an applied science that refers to a faith process of grace-energized and grace-dependent transformation unto “union with God,”^[1] and such transformation is precisely what the entire ascetical tradition of the Orthodox Church is aimed at producing. Transcending the goal of asceticism, St. Nicodemus, the compiler of the Philokalia, wrote of theosis:

This union is the final goal towards which are directed the creation of the world and the Dispensation of the Logos of God for our well-being, both temporal and eternal.^[2]

In other words, the union of man with God is the very purpose of the creation of the entire universe and the saving economy of the Incarnate Logos. It is also intended to produce both temporal and eternal well-being. This necessary unity of the temporal with the eternal is manifested through the systematic *practice* of ceaseless prayer, watchfulness, and stillness. It is the “one essential work.”^[3] And it is the only path to the reliable production of spiritual fruit:

For without the unceasing remembrance of the Lord, and purity of the heart and mind from everything evil - *a purity generated by this practice* - it is impossible to bear fruit.^[4]

Notice that St. Nicodemos states that it is a practice, not a vague goal reached haphazardly or through mere intellectual understanding. Thus one must practice intelligently and systematically, which is the reason for St. Nicodemos' compilation of the *Philokalia*:

Behold these texts which guide us systematically to purity of the heart, to watchfulness of the mind, to the recovery of Grace within us, and, theosis.^[5]

At five volumes, the *Philokalia* is a large collection of texts that span roughly ten centuries and twenty authors, each writing to different audiences. As such, the diversity of instructions can make it daunting to attempt to synthesize and represent both concisely and in the depth that they deserve. In order to provide a more succinct collection of teachings on the interior life, in the first half of the 20th Century Igumen Chariton of Valamo compiled many of the writings of the masters of prayer from 19th Century Russia, especially drawing from the writings of St. Theophan the Recluse who himself had translated *The Philokalia* from Slavonic to a more modern Russian. The work that resulted, *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, like *The Philokalia*, is an expert systematic condensation of teachings on ceaseless prayer, watchfulness, and stillness. At a single volume, it proves a much more wieldy tome to study. And yet it appears that there is still a need for a yet smaller work, one which lays out the framework for the systematic cultivation of theosis, not in order to replace the aforementioned *indispensable* works, but for the sake of connecting comprehension with clarity of application.

The present work therefore intends to supply this perceived need, that of a short manual or treatise which can present the basics of theory and practice, and the logic of their connection, in such a

way that a person can faithfully understand and apply themselves to the “upward call” with all earnestness of endeavor. For there is not another life with which we might undertake these efforts, thus I urge anyone who desires all that God has purchased for them by His Blood to not only take up and read, but apply themselves to the exercise of theosis.

Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind (*διάνοια*), be sober (*νήφω*), and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:13-16)

In other words, grace, effort, and holiness are a unity. And since holiness of conduct is not a matter of the outward dimension of man only, but also and especially of the inward man (cf. Romans 7:22; 2 Corinthians 4:16), as St. Peter indicates above in the reference to the mind and to lust, the current treatise hopes to elucidate the inner logic of the practices together with their specific relation to the theological framework of spiritual reality. Many presentations stress either one side or the other, often leaving their connection obscure, and so it is hoped that this connection will be presented so that the diligent student, resting hope fully upon grace, will be enabled to gain practicable insight into the inner workings of the methodology of applied sanctification.

It also must be said that such practices are for all. As St. Nicodemus states:

Come, all who are participants in the Orthodox call, both laymen and monks, all who are seeking to find the Kingdom of God which is within you, and the treasure which is hidden in the field of your heart.^[6]

Thus these practices are said to be “irreproachable from every point of view,” and cannot be restricted to the ordained or the tonsured.^[7] It is for all baptized Orthodox Christians because theosis is the promise and gift to all, St. Nicodemos citing multiple Fathers in support of this, including the Scriptures themselves.^[8]

It is also not simply for those who are far advanced in their walk with Christ, but also those beginning, as St. Theophan the Recluse makes clear:

A spiritual father should therefore introduce the practice of inner prayer among his children as early as possible, and confirm them in its use. It is even possible to start them in this before any exterior observances, or together with them; in any case it is essential not to leave it until too late. This is because the very seed of spiritual growth lies in this inner turning to God. All that is necessary is to make this clear, to emphasize its importance, and to explain the way to do it.^[9]

St. Theophan is stating that it is utterly suitable and necessary for beginners. To wait is even dangerous, for that leaves the seed of spiritual growth unwatered, and reduces the spiritual life to the mere “outward observance of rules.”^[10]

The most important thing that the Holy Fathers desired and recommended is the understanding of the spiritual state, and the art of maintaining it. There remains only one rule for whoever will attain this state: dwell within and worship secretly in the heart.^[11]

Thus it must “proceed step by step, slowly and with great restraint,” systematically and with clarity of purpose and direction, for “the unalterable principle must be this: to turn within as early as possible, and to kindle there the spirit of zeal.”^[12] St. Theophan, however, cautions:

Not that we should abandon exterior work, which is, on the contrary, the support of that which goes on within: they should both be done together. Priority must go to inner worship, because one must serve God in spirit, must worship Him in spirit and truth. The two must be interdependent - bearing in mind their relative value. Let neither enforce claims upon the other, or be the cause of divided allegiance. ^[13]

This caution, however, cannot be used as an excuse for procrastination:

The Name of the Lord Jesus is the treasury of all good things, the treasury of strength and of life in the spirit. It follows from this that we should from the very first give full instruction on the practice of the Jesus Prayer to everyone who repents or begins to seek the Lord. Only following on from this should we introduce the beginner into other practices, because it is in this way that he can most quickly become steadfast and spiritually aware, and achieve inner peace. Many people, not knowing this, may be said to waste their time and labour in going no further than the formal and external activities of the soul and body. ^[14]

It is thus essential not to linger “on what is easiest, the visible and external,” not falling into the trap of observing “with the utmost correctness all the formal and outward rules for devout conduct” while paying “little or no attention to the inward movements of the heart,” but instead to enter into the practice of heeding “the play of thoughts in the heart.” ^[15]

2. The Passions: Man's Existential Dilemma in Light of the Gospel

Sunk in his outward senses, fallen man's practical problem is his immersion, or rather submersion in the passions. This mode of being is grounded in what might be called sensoriality, which is to say man's fallen condition of confusing practically the phenomenal realm with ultimate reality. Man is created with a capacity and desire for the infinite enjoyment of the Triune God, but in his fallen condition man seeks rather for infinite pleasure in, and fulfillment from, the material world. Man as a fallen being in this way treats his five senses as a kind of *telos* such that his root desire for pleasure, an infinite desire originally created to be fulfilled in God, is now bound up with pleasant sensations and feelings. Man is on a constant hunt for pleasurable sensory experience.

St. Nicodemos gives two reasons for man's predicament:

There are two reasons why the mind was enslaved to physical pleasures. The first and main reason is the fact that after the disobedience of Adam, his body received the whole of its existence and constitution from physical pleasure that is impassioned and irrational. ...

The second reason, which follows the first, is the fact that even after birth man is nurtured with physical pleasure. ^[16]

By pleasurable sensation is meant such things as pleasant sights, pleasant sounds, pleasant smells, pleasant touch, etc. These pleasant sensations, in turn, produce pleasant feelings and then

pleasant moods. Since the physical world cannot provide such a ceaseless flow of pleasurable sensations, however, man is immediately thrust by reality into a sense of a lack of pleasure, with its consequent dissatisfaction and necessary misery. In the words of Ilias the Presbyter:

Desire and distress subsist in the soul; sensual pleasure and pain in the body. Sensual pleasure gives rise to pain, and pain to sensual pleasure (for, wanting to escape the wearisome feeling of pain, we take refuge in sensual pleasure); while desire results in distress.^[17]

This distress, dissatisfaction, and misery produces a desire for the reconstitution of pleasure, pleasurable sensations, pleasant feelings, and happy mood, but due to his fallen sensorial mode this desire re-seeks pleasure again and again at the sensory level, “thereby enslaving the mind to physical pleasure.”^[18] His reaction is fixated on seeking the impossible condition of permanent pleasurable sensation, which is also to say ceaseless perfect circumstances. Thus man’s existential dilemma is that his desires and motivations are born of a sense of a lack of sensory pleasure, and so enslaved to unreliable circumstances fallen man’s sensoriality drives him hither and thither in search of unremitting pleasure and ideal environments in such things as the perfect job, the perfect spouse, the perfect home, the perfect state, the perfect possessions, etc., unto utopia.

It can also be said that sensoriality functions as the organizing principle of fallen man’s given egoism or root pride. All sensory input is channeled and funneled into the soul or self as its central coordinating point, as it were. This self, then, is the central point to which the information of the senses is communicated, and since sensoriality operates as a kind of *telos*, or horizon, this immediately frames man’s sensorial life in quasi-ultimate terms, where his sensations and circumstances are made the criteria for evaluating the sum, substance, and purpose of reality. In this way

self becomes the centermost point of reality, life's very fulfillment, thus ensnaring the soul in constant egoism and pride. Needless to say, authentic love is impossible in such a condition, for the success or failure of such an egocentric life is perpetually measured against the sensorial rubric, i.e. how people and events make a person *feel*. Reality, reduced to and known only in terms of sensation, is framed as a screen upon which pleasurable sensation is projected as the theme and purpose of the narrative of personal existence. Other people, society, and the planet itself are only related to insofar as they make the ego-centric framework of sensorial man "feel."

Egocentric *perception* controls and renders any consequent *conception* correspondingly egocentric. Sensoriality in this way makes fallen man's transcendence of circumstances impossible, and so circumstances always act as a controlling mechanism for all of his relationships and all of his responses. Unable to see "beyond" how he feels, or how others "make" him feel, fallen man's sensory self is center-stage for all of existence. Pride is hard-wired into this mode of being because he is naturally the center of all his sensation, his sensations consequently operating as the center and circumference of his hopes and experience.

This brings up the issue of the passions, for the passions are the disordered energies within the soul of man that darken his mind, misdirect his emotions, and confuse his will. Whereas in his ontological composition he is made to find his fulfillment in God as his ultimate referent, constant pleasure, and total purpose, since fallen man is sensorial in his mode of being then in his basic and rightful urge towards this infinite fulfillment he is tragically and constantly attaching it to the unreliable fluctuations of material reality. As they fail to fulfill, the primordial urge he inexorably seeks with renewed vigor and more tragically the ineffectual objects offered to his senses. Since this process is doomed to failure, a complicated network of desires and urges, cravings and aversions, come to dominate the mind and heart of fallen man. These are the passions, the interior motions of the soul's rightful desire for fulfillment misdirected towards phenomenal reality in pursuit of ceaseless situational pleasure. Since fulfillment can never be had at this level,

the level of physical sensation, then due to his being entrapped in sensoriality he constantly seeks to accomplish this anyway, no matter how futile it is.

An important consideration now arises in which the presence of passions at any given moment must not be viewed in terms of mere failure. The passions are information. It is not simply that they must be suppressed or eradicated in a blunt or willful way. For example, many will seek to suppress passions or promote virtue out of egoism or pride, and so all effort against other passions on this basis will simply function to reinforce said egoism and pride. As born from the wound of man's fall, the passions are more like symptoms of a spiritual disease than failed performance on a moralist's stage. In this way they provide clues to the present problem of sin, *in an existential way*. The vital information that the passions provide is necessary to become aware of, for they are a constant source of feedback. Since *metanoia* or repentance refers to a transformation of mind, one must become aware of the actual present conditions and state of the mind. In this way repentance cannot be conceived as an effort of the will. Moreover, the passions cannot be framed as an indication of the failure of will, for they rather provide one's personalized curriculum, so to speak, and a link back to one's false sensorial view, the root delusion which produced the passion's emergence in the first place. This is what enables present moment surrender for, not in a merely general way, the passions give live feedback on what is presently pressing on the spirit and soul of man.

A passion is any emotion or feeling-response that emerges within the ego framework and from sensoriality, and so does not refer only to negative emotional states. Recall that sensoriality indicates an entire life and worldview, and means living from, through, and to the senses. And since the senses feel the most agreeable in the presence of pleasure, then according to sensoriality pleasure will automatically be perceived according to the logic of its worldview as the successful fulfillment of life's purpose. In other words, sensoriality means a pleasure-centered and driven worldview. Passions, then, are the alternately

pleasurable and miserable feeling-responses produced by this mode of being rooted in one's delusive sensorial perspective.^[19]

The term passion, etymologically, means to suffer, to be afflicted, to be acted upon by an external force or object, and so as objects act upon the senses, with the will agreeing, they produce through the sensorial worldview the impassioned responses that drive the cycle of misery, darkening the mind and dulling the heart. These are understood as motions or internal energies, and as such provide an immediate feedback mechanism concerning how committed one presently is to the sensorial worldview. This is the state of turmoil which characterizes fallen man. What is more, the passions, as they arise and subside, also provide essential information about stillness. This is because stillness is not an arbitrary state, but is precisely and coterminously relative to the decrease or even quiescence of the movement or motion that the passions *are*. Thus stillness is not accidental, and its presence not simply the swelling of feelings of devotion.^[20]

The root reactions or motions of the passions are lust and anger. Lust and anger, however, do not here simply refer to the developed emotions that go by the same name, but refer to basic pre-rational responses to sensory stimuli. For example, when an object intersects with one of the senses, whether sight, sound, smell, etc., there is an immediate evaluative reaction of pleasure or displeasure.^[21] St. Gregory of Nyssa puts it this way:

The soul obviously has a great impulse of desire and another great impulse of anger. We see each of these impulses, which belong to us as human beings, producing many different results by their combined activity.^[22]

In other words, these two major impulses produce the vast array of subsequent responses through the complexity of their combined and interwoven activity. On this issue St. Nicodemos quotes Theodore of Jerusalem:

Because the mind is prepossessed by sense perception, we have the duality of desire and anger. These are irrational tendencies and under the influence of nature and not of reason, becoming a habit in the soul that penetrates all the parts of our being and is difficult to uproot.^[23]

These two responses, desire and anger, or lust and anger, lie at the root of fallen man's sensorial mode of being and as such pervade all of his being.^[24] Their irrationality is simply that they are not the product of reason, and in this way their influence on man is extremely difficult to identify and uproot, for it takes an extremely attentive, sensitive, and concentrated mind in order to even observe their activity. St. Nicodemos calls this sensorial mode the "primordial drive toward the material."^[25]

It is also important not to understand the terms lust and anger in an excessively abstract way. They are deep responses, but they are also the most common, as common as liking and disliking. For example, people often mistake and think their likes and dislikes are in some sense who they are, defining them as persons in no small degree, not realizing how dangerous this process of mind and mode of passionate identity-construction is. The whole world is framed in terms of what is liked and disliked, what is lusted vs. what is hated, what is wanted and what is avoided, what is "loved" and what is feared. This subtle process of judgment is not rooted in truth but in pre-rational sensoriality, and yet it is even how many people will "get to know" each other, by asking what they like and dislike. Whole marriages and divorces are established on these premises, that of sharing or not sharing likes and dislikes. This is why the question of the root responses of lust and anger are important and existentially compelling.

As a pleasant sensation arises, immediately one lusts, desires, or craves for it.^[26] As an unpleasant sensation arises, immediately one has aversion and resists. There is a sense in which these two responses can be likened to pull and push, lust being the pre-rational pulling of what is pleasurable towards oneself, and anger

the pushing of what is displeasurable away from oneself. Through watchfulness (implying both attentiveness and sensitivity) and stillness one trains the mind to become aware of this play, aware of its subtle drama, and “little by little the mind deprives every sensory faculty of its customary bodily and pleasurable passions.”^[27]

The complexity of the problem is also described by St. Maximus the Confessor, who is quoted by St. Nicodemos:

When desire is added to the sense perception, it becomes a passion of pleasure procuring for itself a specific image. When the sense is moved by desire it again makes the perception it receives into a passion of pleasure.^[28]

In other words, when desire for pleasure motivates sense perception, then this becomes a passion for pleasure. The “specific image” is what might be understood as a motivating intention, the internal image or projection of what is sought as the solution to the desire for pleasure, whether a wanted object, position, or status. Desire functions essentially as misery-in-action, and tragically over and over again the mind keeps hooking itself deeper and deeper into its pursuit of sensorial fulfillment, for the mind of fallen man “has been hooked upon the bait of the same physical pleasures.”^[29]

Looking more closely into St. Maximus the Confessor’s thought on this issue, in *Ad Thalassium* 61 he discusses the nature of fallen man’s relation to pleasure in some detail. In sum, he states there that the human nature of fallen, Adamic man takes pleasure as his principle or law of life; also that this pleasure-principle necessarily results in pain, corruption, and death; that on the Cross the incarnate Logos freely takes God’s will as his principle, which is to say he introduces a new basis for human nature which reverses the pleasure-death cycle and embraces suffering rather than pleasure; that in Christ the Cross becomes the new criterion for a renewed human nature, a *theologia crucis*, which is to say the principle and way of being Christian is found in dying to the pleasure-principle, to choice based on “sensoriality” and desire; and that therefore God’s

will becomes, through the Christian's free choice, the new operating principle which thus condemns sin and converts suffering and death into the means of salvation, i.e. "divine and unending life."^[30]

At the center of St. Maximus' discussion is the concept of pleasure; where pleasure functions as a technical term indicating that, not mere pleasant sensation but, combining sensoriality and desire, pleasure is fallen man's most basic orientation towards reality and existence. In short, with sensoriality and desire as his basic building-blocks, St. Maximus is saying that pleasure is fallen man's most instinctual commitment and outlook, his inborn paradigm.

According to St. Maximus, fallen man's sensoriality and ontological hedonism are together a kind of "genetic" orientation towards pleasure, which first and foremost necessarily emerges from a precondition, a prior enslavement to the combination of sensoriality and desire, i.e. the flesh. Calling the flesh "a 'cloud' and a 'veil,'" Maximus elsewhere notes every human mind has gone astray and lost its natural motion towards God such that its motion is determined, if not predetermined, by passion and sensation, and so also controlled by the things perceived by and acting on the senses, and therefore the mind cannot be moved anywhere else because its natural motion towards God has completely atrophied, understanding that the flesh is "divided... into passion and sensation."^[31]

The dyad, passion and sensation, or desire and sensoriality, produces a "pleasure triangle" which itself necessarily results in a pleasure-pain cycle terminating in death, for death is "functionally linked" with the mode by which man enters into the world and takes being.^[32] As such, the precommitment towards pleasure is rooted in and comes from the more basic coupling of desire and sensoriality, and so fallen man is thus perpetually, paradigmatically, genetically, and as it were instinctively motivated to seek pleasure, which invariably results in pain and death. Maximus' discussion of suffering for the sake of righteousness is thus aimed precisely, and evangelically, at overturning this pleasure-driven death system.^[33]

Since pleasure, which is to say the product of sensoriality and desire, lies at the root as a law of fallen man's orientation towards reality, these necessarily structure and control his whole life and death, which is to say his attitudes, behaviors, relationships, goals, and his very *telos*. Thus, as St. Maximus explains, both desire and sensoriality are necessary *presuppositions* to pleasure because they not only converge as pleasure, but pleasure is the confirmation and fulfillment of the “successful” combination of the two. Pleasure, which is either absent or soon absent, assumes both desire and sensoriality because the desire is aimed at the acquisition and retention of pleasure in and for the senses.^[34]

As such, if one is paradigmatically committed to sensoriality, then by extension one is automatically relating to and evaluating life according to its principles and values, which St. Maximus elsewhere calls human nature's “liability to hedonistic passions.”^[35] Sensation is by nature evaluated in terms of sensation, which is to say pleasure and pain, and so as Adam “fell” into sensoriality, his “genetic” values adjusted towards sensorial values, towards values based on sensation, on pleasure and pain.^[36] This sensory-centrism gives the necessary push to desire, putting it in instinctual motion towards acquiring pleasant sensations. In this way fallen man's desire is “inclined” or “weighted” towards movement rather than stillness, towards seeking pleasurable sensation, for the “deceit of the senses [cause] the soul to be overcome by the appearance of things perceived by the senses,” and so as a “rule” he desires according to the values of his sensorial orientation.^[37]

The problem is that desire itself also presupposes the pain of absent or fleeting pleasure, a fact which serves as a perpetual motivation towards the continued and permanent acquisition of sensorial fulfillment, i.e. pleasure. Along these lines St. Maximus states further, “Unless that which is ultimately desired is possessed, nothing else is of such a nature as to bring to rest what is being driven by desire.”^[38] This restlessness is also itself a type of “pain,” and so desire, being likewise a key concept and a technical term, is a present pain ceaselessly oriented towards fleeting sensory pleasure and away from inevitable pain, and is thus unable to ever

either truly escape its painful precondition or rest from its own miserable motivations. Pleasure and pain are thus inextricably linked and, in this sense, pleasure is like a double agent. Pleasure, irremovably tied to pain, is like a Trojan horse, where once desire is successfully brought into the soul as a fulfilled pleasure, the soldiers of pain emerge into the defenseless city unto greater pain, renewed desire, and ultimately death.^[39]

Sensoriality, the orientation towards sensation, is also a presupposition of pleasure because pleasure is rooted in a process of continued pursuit and retention of pleasant sensation. It is a truism that there is functionally no pleasure where the feeling or sensing of pleasant sensation does not occur. Because man cannot ultimately control either his sensations or his environment, and must receive sensation passively from a fluctuating environment which stimulates his senses, pleasant sensation is likewise necessarily uncontrollable and impermanent. Pleasant sensation is thus inescapably followed by unpleasant sensation, ever frustrating and motivating sensoriality's continued acquisition and retention of pleasant sensation.⁷¹ Sensoriality, "fulfilled" in pleasant sensation, is in this way inherently unstable and so constantly feeding and giving rise to desire.

These, taken together, constitute the "life of pleasure," the "rule of pleasure and pain over our nature."^[40] And so, as each term (and what underlies them) encompasses and informs the others, the insidious nature of the pleasure triangle is revealed for the death trap that it is. Pleasure, having grasped its image or intention, being composed of a desire that is itself built of pain, which is to say unpleasant sensation, is sabotaged and collapses because desire's genetic pain undermines the very pleasure it seeks even when that pleasure is grasped. In short, even pleasure is a kind of pain. Furthermore, the inevitability of pain frustrates sensoriality and therefore gives rise to a desire for the repursuit of absent pleasant sensation.

From this perspective not only is desire composed of pain, but is itself really a type of disguised pain; whereas sensation,

inherently unstable, also inevitably experiences pain; and so pleasure (due to having desire and sensoriality as its constituents) is thus condemned to produce pain and yet, because of this, to also constantly reinitiate the cycle of pleasure until its corrosive corruption, like a spreading rust, finally breaks man's soul in death. In sum, this illustrates the pleasure triangle which, built of painful desire and oriented towards ephemeral sensation, cannot escape collapsing back into pain and therefore more desire, ultimately condemning human nature to end in utter corruption, exhaustion, and death.^[41]

Moving forward, St. Maximus also speaks of a few aspects of pleasure that are worth keeping in mind. The first use of the term "pleasure" in *Ad Thalassium* 61 combines a reference to both sensation and pain: "[God] did not create sensible pleasure and pain along with [human nature]."^[42] Keeping to the more practical bent of the current treatise, it is of essence to note that the type of pleasure St. Maximus is referring to was not concomitant with human nature as initially created. Spiritual pleasure, oriented towards God, renders man "able to enjoy God ineffably," whereas sensible pleasure is a type of pleasure, distinct from spiritual pleasure, which is not oriented towards spirit, but oriented towards and derived from what is "sensible."^[43] St. Maximus then states of man that the "instant he was created, the first man, by use of his senses, squandered this spiritual capacity... on sensible things."^[44] Again we see the mutual opposition, not of pleasure *per se*, but of spiritual pleasure and sensible pleasure, pleasure oriented towards "sensible things." St. Maximus even says that this happened in his "very first movement."^[45] In other words, at Adam's beginning he fell culpably into sin, a mode of being which is fundamentally flawed.

Another aspect of pleasure with which St. Maximus treats is a reference to "unnatural pleasure," making direct reference to its being "through the medium of the senses."^[46] The meaning is that pleasure oriented towards and derived exclusively from the senses is precisely what makes it unnatural. Again, it is not the mere fact of pleasure, but of its orientation. Pleasure derived from the senses is pleasure without reference to its source in God; it is sensory

pleasure as goal or *telos*, and this is precisely what makes it unnatural.

The next aspect of pleasure again emphasizes that it is “sensible pleasure” which St. Maximus has in mind, but alongside which “God therefore affixed pain.”^[47] Further emphasizing the sensorial nature of “unnatural pleasure,” St. Maximus drives the point home when he points to the origin of pain and death, which were “wisely implanted in our corporeal nature to curb the foolish mind in its desire to incline unnaturally toward sensible things.”^[48] This “unnaturalness” is the mode of “desire” which inclines foolishly towards the corporeal senses, and so God implants pain and death in order to limit or “curb” this inclination. Since there is no life in matter as such, the mind fixated on it eventually becomes correspondingly lifeless, but this is a mercy which puts a finite limit on the infinite thirst of man’s soul.

St. Maximus continues the theme of foolishness by referring to sensorial pleasure as “irrational.” Regarding this aspect he again contrasts the sensorial, and therefore sub-rational, bodily, or corporeal orientation of pleasure, which is to say the pleasure of the senses, with the “divine pleasure of the mind.”^[49] Since the mind is fitted to receive infinity, finite sensoriality is therefore unfit to provide the infinite pleasure the mind is created to receive. It is precisely these two modes which are opposed, sensoriality and spirituality, and so as Adam fell into sensoriality his “natural motion towards God... completely atrophied,” and as such turned his back on divine pleasure, turning all his “energy to sensible things,” a movement from divinity as center to body as center, and so, “overcome by forgetfulness to natural goodness,” pleasure tends functionally to become associated almost primarily with what is corporeal, sensorial, irrational, unnatural, unrighteous, etc.^[50] He states: “Every forbidden pleasure has come to be through passion aroused through the senses by some object of sense.”^[51] Thus any appearance of a blanket condemnation of pleasure by St. Maximus must be seen in this light, that it is not pleasure *per se*,

but pleasure as modally oriented towards, centered on, and derived from the senses, which is to say sensoriality.

St. Maximus then says that this “irrational pleasure” actually “entered human nature.”^[52] Because of this, pain also entered into human nature, by God's design, so that pain might “uproot,” though not completely destroy, pleasure.^[53] Here it is shown that unnatural, irrational, unrighteous, sensible pleasure, i.e. sensoriality, is the primary cause of suffering. It is also in this section where he begins to speak of the “law of pleasure.”^[54] This “law” underscores the invariability of suffering's relationship to sensoriality: “Indeed, such suffering invariably accompanies unnatural pleasure.”^[55] Unlike our inherited capacity for pleasure, the “pleasure stemming from the original transgression was 'uncaused' insofar as it... did not follow upon antecedent suffering.”^[56] In other words, Adam's pleasure was not preceded by suffering, whereas the law of pleasure and pain do precondition subsequent births such that St. Maximus can say: “no one at all was by nature free from birth subject to the passion associated with this pleasure; rather everyone was requited with sufferings, and subsequent death, as the natural punishment.”^[57] In other words, human beings are born with a pain-affixed pleasure and, what is more, a not unjust death sentence. As such, people have the inbuilt gears which condemningly grind the human inexorably towards a just death.

This section is also where St. Maximus introduces part of the inner logic of the Gospel, where “in order for suffering human nature to be set aright, it was necessary for an unjust and likewise uncaused suffering and death to be conceived.”^[58] An obvious reference to the Cross of Christ, it is especially interesting to note St. Maximus' definition of both “unjust” and “uncaused,” for he places them in the context of the sensorial problem: “‘unjust’ in the sense that it by no means followed a life given to passions, and ‘uncaused’ in the sense that it was in no way preceded by pleasure.”^[59] In other words, St. Maximus is attempting to identify the mechanism by which the Cross overturns the sensorial pleasure-triangle ending in death. The Cross, aimed at the passibility of sensoriality, “turned that very passibility into an instrument for eradicating sin and the death which

is its consequence – or in other words, for eradicating pleasure and the pain which is its consequence.”^[60] Pleasure, as such with pain affixed, operates again as a central theme in St. Maximus' very understanding of the Gospel.

In order for fallen man to escape the wheel of the passions unto death, he requires an alternate mode or principle of his being, a new Adam, one that is not fallen or corruptible, one that he can access and be united with. This new mode of being is initiated by faith in the Incarnate, Crucified, Risen, and Ascended Christ. The pain of the Cross functions as a new principle which works savingly in man, transforming pain from being a sign of failure and a motive to passionate sensorial pleasure-seeking, to being a sign of salvation in the surrendering of the will to abandon passionate movements and rest in God alone as the supreme pleasure. In this way suffering no longer motivates or reinitiates the cycle of desire for renewed pleasurable contact at the level of the senses, but instead offers to the soul an opportunity for being redirected towards God. Just as Christ stated in Gethsemane, “Not my will,” so the experience of pain awakens in the regenerated soul a desire for submission to God. No longer is the soul enslaved to sensoriality and led by the nose by circumstances and situations. And since passion means movement, this new principle introduced by the Cross then becomes the crux for authentic stillness, because stillness means a stillness of the movements of the passions. What remains is peace, the peace of the Cross, and the new life in Christ.

Now, returning to the passions, it is an unavoidable reality that the energy of man is finite. This means that as he spends and exhausts the energy of his life on the passions, according to the sensorial mode of being, his soul grows increasingly dissipated. Man's soul eventually loses its ability to move in any direction but towards matter. Since there is no life in matter, man functionally weds himself to that which is dead. The carnal mind is death in action, “for to be carnally minded is death” (Romans 8:6), and so the carnal man goes from death to death. At death, the mind is so utterly habituated to death that it simply functions to reject life, for “to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8:6). Thus the

cycle of interrupted sensory pleasure leading to a misery-inspired desire for and pursuit of sensory pleasure, which will again result in interrupted sensory pleasure and more misery-inspired desire, finally exhausts the soul in total death.

This is fallen man's faith, to find fulfillment in the pleasure of his senses. It is his way of seeing, his way of being, and so it is his peculiar spiritual problem. This is the engine driving the passions, for the "rule of pleasure and pain over our nature clearly originated in the liability to passions."^[61] What St. Maximus is setting up here is the pleasure triangle, discussed above, that, "wanting to escape the oppressive experience of pain we sought refuge in pleasure, attempting to console our nature when it was hard-pressed with pain's torment."^[62] Part of what this is saying is not only that pain is a prime motivating factor in our desire for pleasure, it is also saying that through a series of pleasure acts humans are attempting to correct a problem located at the level of "nature." Through this St. Maximus reveals the futility of pleasure to ever "work." Like a pile of band-aids over a gunshot wound, no amount of band-aids is ever going to stop the internal hemorrhaging. In the same sense, human beings cannot mend the gunshot wound because it is located in human nature, a spiritual genetic gunshot wound inherited at birth. This is why St. Maximus says, "Striving to blunt pain's spasms with pleasure, we merely sanctioned against ourselves a greater debt of pain, powerless to disconnect pleasure from pain and its toils."^[63] In other words, the more a person acts through sensoriality, the more ensnared in sensoriality and therefore death he becomes.

This, for St. Maximus, is the set-up for expressing his understanding of the Gospel. Christ overturns and transforms the entire pleasure-pain process: "In truth, then, God became a man and provided another beginning, a second nativity, for human nature, which, through the vehicle of suffering, ends in the pleasure of the life to come."^[64] In short, by willingly embracing suffering one countermands the principle of pleasure. Christ has actually introduced a new "beginning," a new point at which humanity might base itself and begin anew. It is an entire reset for human nature, one which is aimed at the heart of sensoriality, where the criteria of

pleasure is itself destroyed, and death is repurposed for the sake of life. Suffering, then, “for the sake of righteousness,” is the new basis, the new point of beginning, “having given our human nature impassibility through his Passion, remission through his toils, and eternal life through his death.”^[65] From this basis Christ thus converts not only suffering but also death, the free surrender of the sensorial system rooted in self-will, into the “‘father’ of eternal life.”^[66]

3. Faith's Role in Transformation

The starting point for dealing with man's predicament must be spoken of in terms of the functionality or dysfunctionality of his faith. The reason for this is that faith is the principle factor determining one's mode of viewing reality, which in turn determines his mode of action. In short, faith frames reality. Faith is one's hermeneutic, the grid that organizes perception. Fallen man, born with absolute, teleological faith in the sensory world, his experience of pleasure thus rules over his perception, filters and shapes what he sees, how he sees, what he seeks, and how he seeks. His worldview is framed and determined by the sensorial mode and, this being the case, it is also true that this is because the directionality of his faith is a feedback loop to and from the phenomenal world.

The Biblical definition of faith, as found in St. Paul's epistle to the Hebrews, states: "Now faith is the substance (*ὑπόστασις*) of things hoped for, the evidence (*ἔλεγχος*) of things (*πρᾶγμα*) not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). The "things seen" does not refer exclusively to objects of sight, but more generally to sensory phenomena, the "things" (*πρᾶγμα*) of sense, or as St. Paul further describes, the "things which are visible (*φαινομένων*)" (Hebrews 11:3). The Greek term he uses is *phainomenon*(*φαινομένων*), from the root *phaino*(*φαίνω*), from which the English word *phenomenon* derives, and refers to things "as they appear" to the senses. The idea of visuality functions as a synecdoche. St. Paul is stating that what appears to our senses does not find its origin in the sensible. He states:

By faith we understand (*νοέω*) that the worlds were framed (*καταρτίζω*) by the word of God, so that the

things which are seen were not made of things which are visible (*φαινομένων*). (Hebrews 11:3)

Phenomena are sensory experiences rooted in objects of sense. And so, when St. Paul writes about faith being the vehicle which knows beyond the senses, it is important to note that he is not critiquing empiricism; he is critiquing phenomenologically bound mind-states. He is stating that the nous (i.e. the mind or spirit of man) provides the means for understanding (*νοέω*) the nature and origin of phenomena. Empiricism is a mode of inquiry into natural phenomena, a mode of inquiry which itself includes non-phenomenological assumptions like order in nature, cause and effect, the intelligibility of natural phenomena, etc., and in this way is a kind of faith understood in the Pauline sense. Faith is the organ, so to speak, whose mode is understanding (*νοέω*). Just as eyes function to perceive objects of sight by seeing, and ears objects of sound by hearing, so faith perceives objects of mind through understanding (*νοέω*). In short, just as by the eye one sees physical objects, so by faith one knows mental objects.

Phenomenologically bound mind-states are not inherently more rational. People who are bound by their senses can very easily fall into magical or superstitious thinking about what they experience. And since fallen man's faith is in sensory pleasure, and his hope firmly established on the phenomenal world as a kind of ground, his mind is inescapably bound up with error. His faith is in phenomena. Matter (*πρᾶγμα*) is his stock and trade. The process of his conversion is, therefore, not the production of faith where there was none, but the turning of faith from one object to another, from the world to heaven, from changing phenomena to eternity, from fact to truth, from creation to Creator. In this light, repentance really means a transformation of mind (*metanoia*) by the taking up of an entirely new object of faith, which is to say one takes up a mode of seeing and framing self and reality in terms of God.

The ground for faith's conversion is the economy of the Incarnate Logos. His historic Incarnation, Ministry, Cross, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven thus form the new frame

of reference for the mind's *metanoia* or transformation. Man is given an entirely new light with which to see himself and the world.

Now, faith is not merely the affirmation of itemized ideas. Certainly faith includes specific content, but the heart of faith is its transformative nature, its ability to shape perspective, to transform the way one sees and so frame reality and one's relationship with said reality. Everyone already has some kind of faith, and so the question is naturally what kind of faith a person has. If a traveler, say, believes a jungle is too treacherous and thus impassable, he will not attempt to pass through even if for some reason he desired to get to the other side. He will seek some other way around even if it maximizes inconvenience and overextends his resources. But if a trustworthy jungle guide provides suitably reliable content for a different belief, teaching the traveler what to look for and what to avoid, assuring him that the dangers are manageable and that the jungle is passable, then the traveler will "see" and therefore experience the jungle differently. Faith is therefore more than information, but is an inward-formation that when accepted and relied on actually shapes perspective and transforms experience. In the case of this example, an informed faith will cause the same jungle to become in experience manageable and passable. Faith is therefore an experiential and engaged type of knowledge.

Faith in Christ is likewise a type of faith that transforms one's perspective and experience of reality. By way of the Cross, Christ has passed through the realm of death, revealing the way of and to heaven. What is more, He has Ascended into heaven and so Sits at the right hand of the Father. Scripture further reveals that in Christ "you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). Moreover, Christ "raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). Where Christ is, so is the Christian, and in that place is found the substance of the Christian's life. Faith in this fact transforms one's perspective, for "if then you were raised with Christ, seek (*ζητέω*) those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). This seeking (*ζητέω*) is not a looking with one's physical eyes, but seeking "[in order to find out] by

thinking, meditating, reasoning,” and also “to enquire into.” It is a way of seeing that has internalized a unique prioritization of divine reality over phenomenal appearance and circumstantial experience.

The foregoing is what St. Paul teaches when he writes that through faith “you also, reckon (λογίζομαι) yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:11). In other words, through faith one transforms one’s perspective of oneself so as to reckon, to conceive of oneself truly, on the factual basis of Christ’s redeeming work, that one is *already* dead and *already* alive to God in Christ. To reckon (λογίζομαι) means to account, compute, or calculate, and here points to the calculating that one is dead. One who thus calculates therefore perceives and experiences oneself in an utterly transformed light. Thus St. Paul can say:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

St. Paul reckons himself crucified, and so calculates that the life he lives is not under or in his own power, but the power he receives by faith in the Son of God. And this is not only true of St. Paul, but is also the fundamental *starting* position of each baptized Christian:

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)

Clearly St. Paul is not teaching that this is an advanced stage one aspires to, but the position from which each Christian begins: “buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working (ἐνέργεια) of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12). Thus it is God’s energy at work, and this is

realized, known, and touched by faith, walked out and worked out by faith.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out (*κατεργάζομαι*) your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works (*ἐνεργέω*) in you both to will (*θέλω*) and to do (*ἐνεργέω*) for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Notice he does not say work “for” or “towards” salvation, but work out salvation, accomplish it from the position of its being in one’s possession, for it is God who works through His presence by the instrumentality of faith to accomplish theosis through the free exercise of our will and its purposed action performed in union with Him. We begin with union to end in union, and it is by His power that this happens and has happened, for “you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him” (Colossians 2:13). He has done it, and so theosis is our progressively deepening faith-born realization of this already accomplished reality, through the activity of reckoning, which is to say the action of faith. This is the sum and substance of believing.

Faith possesses these things by trusting that it truly has them, and thus through this faith one’s perspective is shifted accordingly. Reality and self must appear differently in the presence and influence of Christian faith. The Ascension, inclusive of the entire saving Economy, stands as the Gospel ground by which the shift of faith and the consequent reframing of reality is made possible. The problem we experience, however, as discussed in the previous chapter, is that man is habituated to a fallen mode of perception and action which is sensorialistic and passionately driven by the misery-produced desire to impossibly seek a permanent condition of sensory pleasure. The Ascension of Christ and our presently being in Him provides the starting point for an entirely new basis of seeing and consequent ground of acting, unto theosis, but this does not

happen without our cooperation. The objective fact of Christ's work and our subjective appropriation of it must coordinate. In other words, the "working out" of this salvation is from theosis, in theosis, and to theosis. The working out of salvation is thus the thorough transformation of perspective from the fallen mode to the Christian mode.

The relationship between faith and effort must be understood clearly. Faith, which is also to say entrusting, is the mode or means by which God grasps the Christian and by which the Christian takes hold of Him. One is thus not saved by faith in and of itself, but by the Divine Person who grasps by means of faith. One is also not saved by one's own taking hold, i.e. one's efforts, but by one's being held. Similarly, it is by faith that one takes hold of the medicine, but it is specifically the medicine's hold that heals. Simply holding the bottle does nothing. Thus no one proclaims he has healed himself merely by reading the prescription, nor even upon completing his prescription, but rather declares that the medicine has healed him. The effort of faithful obedience is thus instrumental to the saving properties of the medicine, but the effort does not in and of itself heal the one who is ill, and in this way despite the effort to take the medicine the healing still takes place passively. Faith in the doctor receives the prescription of medicine, and faith in the doctor energizes the effort to take the medicine, but at all points the doctor receives the credit, which is to say God receives all the glory.

God is the cause of one's being saved. Self-will is not casual of salvation; it is receptive of the will of Another, of a Savior. God's will to save effects salvation; personal will is made to conform to His will, His light, His life, His love, and so on. Personal will is essentially one's faith receiving His working power. It is the surrender of one's will in the presence of Jesus' saving Lordship. How one's personal efforts could then be considered saving or transformative is beyond nonsense: it is blasphemy. Personal working, which is essential, is the activity of His saving activity working in the soul. They, the works, are therefore essential to salvation because His saving power is essential to salvation, His saving power necessarily producing in the

soul the energy of will to accomplish good works in loving faithful response to the Savior.

Faith in Christ receives His power, a power which produces a transformed perspective, a perspective which perceives reality in a new light that enables one to walk in holiness, and yet perception does not exist in a vacuum, but in the reality of the human person, spirit, soul, and body. Man's thoughts, emotions, and feelings all bear the stamp of whatever frame they belong to. Watchfulness and stillness, together with ceaseless prayer, therefore serve as the essential tools of transformation, the channels through which faith receives the transformative energy of Christ's salvation. They are not the products of a devotional mood, nor the self-effort of a sentimental piety, but a science of purification and enlightenment. They are a crucible in which a faithful Christian receives and exercises power to retrain the mind to entrustment; to focus and center on God and His merciful presence; to see all reality from the perspective of the Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension;^[67] to resist internal distraction and passionate disorder; to receive and learn how to exercise the gift of spiritual discernment; and to labor, according to grace, to enter ever more deeply, sensitively, and securely into His peace. For "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). With a faith position receiving power to produce a faith perspective, by remaining steadfastly aware in His presence, one is sanctified wholly.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

In Christ a person is already in substance what he is to become in experience. Faith in Christ, then, is the framework for the progressive process of unfoldment, of transformation of both being and perspective such that what is germinal becomes fully formed, Christ fully formed in the Christian, as St. Paul teaches: "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed

(*μορφώω*) in you” (Galatians 4:19). This is also to say, “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13; cf. Colossians 4:12).

Faith in Christ therefore means living from the place where He presently is, at the right hand of the Father, seeing oneself as centered there in Him, not buried in sensoriality but risen and seated in Christ. The consequence of this being that one's faith liberates their mind and heart from the tyranny of circumstances, for where the Spirit is there is freedom. Therefore, instead of seeking restlessly and relentlessly for unmitigated and constant sensory fulfillment in sensorial phenomena, the center of pleasure is restored to God-centeredness. This restored center then recenters man so that he is enabled to bring the righteousness, peace, and joy of Christ to their environment in such a way that the environment will not darken but rather be enlightened by His Spirit. Christ's victory over sin, darkness, death, and the devil will be manifest through the healed personality, which is to say the personality that is translucent of His light.

It is also important to note here that faith plays a decisive role in the struggle against sin. The fallen mode of striving against sin is through the assertion and strengthening of the fallen will. Since will is a function of nature, and man's nature is wounded, his free will is correspondingly wounded and even tyrannized by the passions.^[68] Man is bent on himself and on seeking pleasure from the world. And although the fallen will may seek to adopt and practice the virtues, even to become godly, its fundamental assumption is self and that virtue is the product of self striving. The false assumption is that God's role is to strengthen him in his own efforts. This, however, runs counter to reckoning oneself dead to sin. A dead man has no need to defeat sin, for since he has no ability to respond to it, sin has no ability to move him. Thus, instead of seeking to defeat sin, if in faith he reckons himself dead to sin then his ability to respond is correspondingly nullified. Faith then receives God's power to defeat present sin through the surrendering of self-will rather than the assertion of self-will. Instead of steeling oneself against it so as to

produce an internal self-power of opposition, one simply gives in to God's will and so allows the power inherent in His will to defeat it.

The foregoing is the extension of Christ's victory through the surrendered will via the channel of faith, the surrendered will manifesting Christ's already accomplished victory over sin in the life of the believer. In this way it is through "weakness" where one finds their strength, which is to say Christ in them the hope of glory. Rather than insisting on defeating sin through the strength and energy of the individual will, it instead internalizes Christ's Garden experience where He stated, "Not my will, but Thy will be done." In other words, it is not through the assertion of self-will against sin, but the laying down of self-will towards God, that manifests victory. To battle sin in one's own strength is a foolhardy endeavor, and yet it is fallen man's preferred method. God is only sought by him as a divine enabler in his fallen efforts at virtue.

In this way, moreover, theosis cannot be thought of as self-effort, but rather self-surrender to the power of the Other, which is to say of God. If theosis, or hesychasm considered practically, is self-effort, then man is still dependent on man, still looking to self and circumstance for success. Essential to the purpose of hesychasm, however, is the dehabitation of the mind's dependency on self and circumstance for its orientation towards life, especially as sources of love, peace, and joy. The "space" of stillness is in one sense precisely a detox from constant dependency on self and circumstance. Of course, it is also a gateway to theoria, that state of absorption wherein the truths of God are revealed in ever-increasing degrees of ever-deepening transformation, whether that be one's position in Christ, one's state of dependency on Him, the radicality of grace, the pervasiveness of providence, the instability of material creation to provide any source of abiding peace, the insubstantiality of the projected self, the apophatic mystery of personal being, the all-sufficiency of Christ, etc. This is all received through faith, which is to say through the state produced in the soul that has entrusted itself to the saving power of Christ.

In sum, faith is not about what self does, it's about what self receives through the instrumentality of believing or trust. It is,

moreover, not the power of the trust that accomplishes theosis, it's the object of trust, in this case the Person trusted, that produces and delivers the power of theosis, not to mention salvation. Faith receives this power because faith is the transformation of consciousness which takes the Person at His word. This transformation of consciousness functions to live and act in the light of that which is believed, which is to say received, i.e. the divine reality that is the Person of Christ. A particular person's greater power or ability to believe, then, implies only a deeper and more thorough going reception of the power inherent in the object of faith, i.e. Christ, not an independent source, amplification, or addition to His power. One is thus saved by Christ's own working through the instrumentality of that faith that receives Him as the power of God unto salvation. In short, Jesus Christ is the Gospel, the power of God unto salvation.

4. Practical Apophaticism: The Basic Elements of Praxis

The basic elements of praxis that will be dealt with are three: watchfulness, stillness, and prayer. The basic objects of praxis are body, breath, and mind. We will take them in turn, considering them in both their theological and practical aspects.

Watchfulness

St. Hesychios defines watchfulness as “a continual fixing and halting of thought at the entrance to the heart.”^[69] In other words, watchfulness is a continual process that attends to the presence and activity of thoughts, with the aim of their dissolution. He also states that watchfulness “is the heart’s stillness and, when free from mental images, it is the guarding of the intellect.”^[70] Thus watchfulness is not entirely distinct from stillness, and so in this way they interrelate. Moreover, this freedom is a bright open space of mental silence which guards the heart, protecting it from taking on the qualities of the restless and darkening energy of the passions. Without stillness, watchfulness remains restless, superficial, and unstable. Without watchfulness, stillness becomes dull and soporific. In both of these cases, it is the mind or nous that is restless or dull, but because of the soul’s intimate connection with the body, the energy of the passions is experienced in the body as restlessness and tension.

St. Nicephorus, having surveyed the Fathers, describes watchfulness as attention, “the safe-keeping of the mind... the guarding of the heart... sobriety... mental silence, and... other names. But all these names mean the same thing.”^[71] There is a freedom of reference due to the diversities of descriptions, experiences, and teachings of the various Fathers over the centuries. He goes on to speak of attention as the necessary

condition for contemplation, that it is “serenity of the mind, or rather its standing firmly planted and not wandering, through the gift of God’s mercy.”^[72] It is “the cutting off thoughts, it is the abode of remembrance of God and the treasure-house of the power to endure all that may come. Therefore attention is the origin of faith, hope, and love.”^[73]

St. Hesychios gives these reasons for practicing watchfulness:

In this way predatory and murderous thoughts are marked down as they approach and what they say and do is noted; and we can see in what specious and delusive form the demons are trying to deceive the intellect. If we are conscientious in this, we can gain much experience and knowledge of spiritual warfare.^[74]

Notice that the watchfulness includes an element that is quite simply observative. It is simply a mental noting of foreign or hostile thoughts. In other words, by continued watchfulness, one becomes aware of the inner disorder of the passions. But there is also a spiritual dimension to watchfulness that connects watchfulness to spiritual warfare. Thoughts bear an intrinsic relation to spiritual reality, not only psychosomatic, and watchfulness of thoughts thus assists one in becoming aware at this level. What is more, if one does not practice watchfulness, then:

He cannot free himself from evil thoughts, words and actions, and because of these thoughts and actions he will not be able freely to pass the lords of hell when he dies.^[75]

In other words, there is a soteriological imperative for practicing watchfulness. Not only a matter of healing, it is also a matter of salvation. Sins, which is to say evil thoughts, words, and actions, function in relation to the will such that when one allows sin into the heart, one agrees with the principle of the sin. At this point one freely

gives a foothold for evil. By agreeing to the sin, at death a person's will continues according to its prior agreement, and since most souls are a confusion of agreements between good and evil, virtue and vice, then the "lords of hell" beckon to the soul in such a way as to attract it and lead the soul according to its own prior evil inclinations, those that it had willingly agreed to up to the point of death. This is the frightful passage at death for those who do not eradicate sin from the will of their heart. It is not that God will not save them, or that they will necessarily fail to pass by, albeit not unscathed, but that the soul freely may freely consent to and so move towards the realm of attractions that evil provides. For example, if a soul plays with lust, then at death the demon of lust will seek to attract the soul toward itself through incitements to lust. In order to combat lust in this life, then, one must become watchful to the degree that any movement of lust is noted and dissolved before it enters into the heart, which is to say before the heart enters into agreement with it.

As thoughts or interior motions arise, and first noting their presence, one then interrupts or dissolves their activity through "undirecting" attention to them, redirecting attention to the mind itself to thus reestablish watchfulness. Initially, the approach of thoughts is experienced as a distraction from watchfulness, and so the solution to the problem of thought is simply to reestablish watchfulness. As skill, stability, and sensitivity increase, the thought will be seen more and more as if from a greater distance such that, at the very instant of noticing the energy and motion of the thought, one will dissolve and dissipate as it meets the stronger energy of watchfulness. The goal, then, is not to battle thoughts *per se*, but rather to simply and continuously establish continuity of watchfulness.

By interrupting the activity of thought, one keeps thoughts from entering into the heart. The essence of watchfulness is thus an increasingly clear and continuous attention that is sensitive towards the internal motions of passions and thoughts, sensations and emotions. Synergizing with stillness, the aim of watchfulness is clarity of mind and peace of body, a state that is simultaneously alert, clear, and calm. As St. Hesychios states:

The intellect's great gain from stillness is this: all the sins which formerly beat upon the intellect as thoughts and which, once admitted by the mind, were turned into outward acts of sin, are now cut off by mental watchfulness.^[76]

Watchfulness is thus not only opposed to stupor, confusion, insensitivity, and lethargy, but also cuts at the root where the initial stirrings of sin emerge. Since watchfulness is awake and alive, its stillness quells the energy of sin and does not admit its entry. St. Hesychios states that, “attentiveness is the heart's stillness, unbroken by any thought,” and so as a person cultivates attentive watchfulness, the awareness that is brought to bear will still the mind and heart in an unbroken, continuous way.^[77]

Watchfulness of the Body

It is important to relate the practice of watchfulness to watchfulness of the body. The question arises: Why is it that simply knowing accurate information about the Triune God, the two natures of Christ, and the sacred history of the Gospel that one is not immediately delivered from the force of the passions, and the influence of sin, ignorance, and delusion? Even after regeneration and faith one still struggles with these disordered and disordering energies.

Clearly there is more to the spiritual life than what the intellect alone can provide, and sanctification more than correcting one's moral math. It is thus that the matter of theosis is not merely an intellectual problem. Intellectual understanding alone, even grace-born, will not suffice to sanctify or provide stable peace and joy, for the fallen intellect is inherently unstable. This is why so many otherwise faithful Christians are filled with worry and anxiety, conditions that are as much physical as they are mental. In many, the body serves as a storehouse of subconscious negativity. Man is a psychophysical whole, and as such man must know his whole person with his whole person, both mind and body. This integrated knowledge then converts the body into a true temple of the Spirit of peace. In other words, not in the mind alone, one must also realize

the truth of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ experientially, in the framework of the body. This is the aim of watchfulness of the body, grace is the means, and the pathway is the increasingly integrated awareness of oneself as a whole being.

In order to know oneself as a whole person, one must become aware of oneself in the living reality of one's body. Since passions are motions and tensions within the body, i.e. the psychosomatic framework, watchfulness therefore includes watchfulness of the body. Passions, as interior motions, are not strictly thoughts, and in most cases precede thought and produce thought as thought's prior condition. Passions and thoughts thus form a kind of continuum. Watchfulness therefore necessarily includes attention to this pre-rational psychosomatic activity, usually discernable as some kind of fleeting or chronic tension, either subtle or conspicuous. Together with the soul, the body is thus bound up with the fallenness of man, the "law of sin which is in my members (μέλος)" (Romans 7:23), his whole being infected with sin's distortion, which is to say with passion, ignorance, and delusion. One does not need to learn or be trained in these, for they are fallen man's inheritance.

In sum, Orthodoxy affirms the sacred and positive role of the human body as essential to the totality of human nature. Human nature necessarily includes a body. The body is bound up with the soul such that what transpires in the soul is also communicated to the body. The soul communicates life to the body, and so as the soul experiences the activity of the passions, these motions have a corresponding somatic dimension. Likewise, stillness of the passions has its corresponding somatic quality. Thus a key to theosis is attentiveness to what is transpiring within the entirety of the psychosomatic person.

Practically speaking, the passions are experienced in the body as restlessness and tension, and stillness as lightness and calm. Therefore watchfulness must include a watchfulness of the body, for the body does not lie, but rather expresses the actuality of the state of the soul, and can even be said to actualize it. Given that at more than any other time in history man is encouraged to live in

such a way that his daily experience is at an ever-increasing distance from a meaningful mind-body connection, the Patristic teaching of somatic watchfulness may not only come as a surprise to many, but could also prove decisive for spiritual progress. In this light, St. Gregory Palamas asks:

Why should anybody who is endowed with a nous think it improper to bring their nous into a body whose very nature it is to be the dwelling place of God?^[78]

Not only does St. Gregory affirm that it is proper to bring the nous into the body, but grounds this in the theological fact of the body's very purpose to be the dwelling place of God. In short, "we must bring the nous back into the body and into itself."^[79]

Those who create a false dichotomy between the spiritual life and somatic dimension of human being are making a grave error, for it is by bringing the nous into the body that the purpose of the body is realized. It is this confining of the mind within the body that functions to align the body with God. As St. Gregory teaches:

For naturally, if the hesychast does not keep the inner life within the bounds of the body, if he makes a division on account of its natural form, if the outer and distinct is not properly aligned towards the essence of the nous, then as long as this natural form has life, the image of life appropriate to the union of its parts is not complete.^[80]

Thus in order to effect the total unity of man, the body must be incorporated into the practice of watchfulness, because it is by watchfulness that the nous is made to coordinate with the body. Thus "it is absolutely necessary to recall and keep the nous within the body."^[81] This is done by simply attending to or noting what is presently occurring in the body, i.e. the sensations. Rather than rolling in mental projections of the past, future, or an alternative present, the mind is made to coinhere within the living body, within

the actual somatic place where one touches immediate present and real experience.

Concerning attention being directed inwardly also to the body, St. Gregory continues:

“Attend to yourself,” says Moses, meaning, to yourself as a whole, not just a part while neglecting the rest. How? With the nous, evidently, for we cannot be attentive to ourselves as a whole with any other power. Therefore keep this guard over your psyche and body, it will deliver you from the evil passions of both body and psyche.^[82]

In other words, it is thus through the practice of interior attentiveness to one's body, which is to say its internal sensory reality, its living experience, as a whole, that one engages the nous with the passions, and by which the passions of the body are dissolved and made quiescent. More simply, we must remain attentive to the sensations in our body, aware of its interior motions at subtler levels, prior to their intensification as passions. In this way the nous knows the sensations without intensifying them or being hooked into the story of the passions. This interrupts sensoriality by going to its root in the sensations, thus disturbing the re-establishment of the sensorial mode. This is to say that attentiveness to the passions, insofar as they are mere sensations, creates a space in which one is freed from the nous' collapsing into the sensorial narrative. Thus it is not a cogitating on or conceptualizing of sensory experience, nor a seeking of particular sensations, but is simply the dispassionate attentiveness to the bare reality of somatic experiencing.

Although the physical heart will be seen to be a sort of central place wherein to center one's inward somatic attention, according to St. Gregory it is also necessary that one keep attention to the whole body: “Do not cease watching over any part of your psyche nor any member of your body.”^[83] Thus attention must be broad, systematic, and inclusive. The passions as internal somatic energy move throughout the whole body, and so the whole body, each member,

ought to receive watchful attention in order to guard against some stronghold of tension establishing itself there. For “in this way, you will become impervious to the spirits that attack you from below.”^[84] Of the heart, St. Gregory teaches:

Do you see, then, how greatly necessary it is for those who have chosen a life of self-attentiveness and stillness to bring their intellect back and to enclose it within their body, and particularly within that innermost body within the body that we call the heart?^[85]

Having surveyed the body, like a king who has subdued his domain, the attention centers in and on the heart, and centered there the entire body can be watched, as a king rules all things from his throne room, visiting the provinces as needed in order to ensure that peace and stability are firmly there.

Concerning the relation between the reasoning and conceptualizing mind and the bodily passions, Evagrius the Solitary states:

While all else produces thoughts, ideas and speculations in the intellect through changes in the body, the Lord does the opposite: by entering the intellect. He fills it with whatever knowledge He wishes; and through the intellect He calms the uncontrolled impulses in the body.^[86]

This shows how thoughts and interior somatic sensations have a direct relationship, and are not simply two parallel dynamics. If one is still and attentive enough, one can sense the passionate movement prior to its becoming a thought. The fleeting tensions and movements within the body thus have a deep relationship with one's thought life, and so by attending to sensations, which are the only things the body “knows” prior to their being conceptualized and interpreted by the mind, one can also calm both body and mind.

As stated above, watchfulness of the body must be broad, systematic, and inclusive. This means that as the mind begins to watch the body at the level of sensations, it must go through the whole body without omitting any part. From the top of the head to the bottom of the feet and back again, each part must have attention sweep through, sensing, noting. Broadness, then, refers to the body taken as a whole. By systematic is meant the orderly, symmetrical progression of attention through the body. By inclusiveness is meant from the surface of the body to the inside. No part of the body is to be left out of one's awareness, even if the awareness is not at every moment on the whole but rather attends to this or that part.

It is vital to understand that this attention to the body is not a stimulating of the body's energy; it is not a cultivation of internal energy. This watchfulness is not looking for energy centers. It is simply attention. The attention itself will act upon the passions and tensions to dissolve them. As the body becomes more aligned with the nous, the body will tend towards a *sense* of lightness and unobstruction. The passions act like tension and weight in the body, and so as the passions dissolve in the light of the attentive nous the body will naturally become more calm, more still.

As the sense of the body comes into conscious clarity through the aforementioned systematic attention given to the parts, the attention shifts from the parts as such to a general sense of the whole body. The whole body as a unit then becomes the object of watchfulness. Without incorporating the body into one's awareness, which is to say the unity of the psychosomatic person, the mind will ever struggle to retain stability of mind while a massive web of "subconscious" negativity seethes under the surface of awareness. Awareness of the whole body as such is then simply the sense of being, the sense of having life, existence.

It is not only the mind that ought to be quiet, but also the body. Peace is not simply a conceptual phenomenon, but has effects throughout the entire psychosomatic whole that is man.

Watchfulness of the Breath

Watchfulness of the breath in connection with the Jesus Prayer is a vital aspect of spiritual practice, and of significant consequence for theosis. As St. Gregory Palamas teaches, one “will be able to hold their nous steady by watching their breath.”^[87] In other words, watching the breath, which is quite simply paying attention to the inhale and the exhale, is of great assistance in keeping the nous within the body. There is, however, a lot of confusion regarding - and even some risk involved in - the use of the breath as an intentional object of attention, and so a few words concerning how to proceed safely with the breath are in order. St. Gregory of Sinai provides the guiding principle as regards the safe use of the breath, “do not impede your nasal breathing, as the ignorant do, in case you harm yourself by building up inward pressure.”^[88]

The lungs are an incredibly delicate organ, and so the principle rule for proceeding safely and avoiding harm is by not building up inward pressure. One can build up pressure by the unskillful restriction of the breath, either through holding the breath in or out, through the alternate closing and opening of the nostrils, or altering the breath to be intentionally deep or slow. There are Fathers who teach proper techniques for altering the breath, such as slowing and deepening the breath, even briefly holding it, but this manual will not treat of these practices and will instead, keeping to the “royal road,” communicate the safest and perhaps most effective and universally applicable use of the breath.^[89] If one chooses to slow and deepen the breath, finding this a helpful technique, then sensitive attention must be given to the exercise in order to make sure that no pressure is being built up.

That being said, the method of watching the breath as presented here in a certain sense cannot be called a “technique,” for the task is simply to watch the *natural* breath with lively attention and sensitivity. Man does not create his breath, is not its source. God is the source of man’s present breathing, His will causing him to breathe in and out, and so attention to the natural breath is actually a sensitivity to the divine action of God giving, sustaining, and regulating man’s life. One neptic Father, speaking mystically, even stated that “as we look up to Him with cries of distress and continual

lamentation, it is He Himself that we breathe.”^[90] St. Anthony the Great gives context for this insight when he states that “the soul is divine and immortal and, while being God's breath, is joined to the body to be tested and deified.”^[91] It is clear that the breath of God and the soul of man have an ontological connection, one which is grounded in the bodily life of man and thus mediated by the breath.^[92] Thus man’s “immaterial breath” and his material or bodily breath bear a significant and meaningful relation.^[93]

Concerning praxis, St. Hesychios instructs: “With your breathing combine watchfulness and the name of Jesus.”^[94] In this instruction the watchfulness is directed towards, or combined with, one’s breathing.^[95] Breathing, in other words, is itself an object of attention. Ilias the Presbyter states: “During prayer alienate yourself from everything except life and breath if you want to be with the intellect alone.”^[96] By life one may infer the sense of being, as indicated in the above section dealing with watchfulness of the whole body. In this way, the *sense* of embodied existence together with watchfulness of the breath become a foundation for stable absorptive concentration.

People who concentrate “too hard,” which is to say without sensitivity to the state of the body and breath, will tend to become insensitive to peace, and can even be a source of irritability. This error comes from unnoticed tension, often in the head, and is corrected by more closely connecting the prayer with the feeling of the breathing, using exhalation especially as a constantly repeated opportunity to continually or more deeply release unnecessary tension. This will help concentration become limpid and gentle. Alternately, people who cultivate a blurry calmness that slumps into a kind of hazy trance will need to sharpen and clarify their concentration in order not to allow awareness to grow too flaccid. This can also come from simple drowsiness, but in order to correct for this, focusing on the brighter coolness of the inhale, holding more firmly to one's intention to be aware, opening the eyes, and also sharpening the attention to the detail of the words of the prayer, can help renew one’s vigor. Sometimes one also may simply need rest, but if one is determined to pray, then one can also stand or walk, or

rinse their hands in cool water and splash some cool water on their face.

Returning to the breath, there are three places plus one where one can profitably watch the breath. These are the nose, the heart, and the belly button.^[97] The “plus one” is awareness of breathing as such without specific attention given to any place in the body, only the simple or general awareness of inhale and exhale.

Regarding watchfulness of breath at the nose, St. Peter of Damaskos instructs:

The nose was given us, not so that we might debilitate and unbrace our soul with delectable perfumes, as St Gregory the Theologian puts it, but so that we might breathe the air bestowed on us by God, and glorify Him because of it; for without it neither man nor beast can live bodily.^[98]

Clearly the nose can be enlisted in God-directed attention. And as Job states, “All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils” (Job 27:3). Adam himself was brought to life through God breathing into his nostrils (Genesis 2:7). It is thus by implication that attention to breathing can rightfully be done at the place of the nose, for man “owes thanks to his Creator, who has given him a nose and the health to breathe and live.”^[99]

Breathing with attention at the place of the heart must mindfully keep in mind St. Ignatius Brianchaninov’s strong and consistent warning “that we reject all premature, self-willed, proud, rash exertions to enter into this mystical sanctum.”^[100] The attempt to *penetrate* the heart is ill-advised, for it either requires expert guidance from an experienced teacher who can provide skillful assessment and feedback, or it happens naturally without any force required. What is rather sought is *sympathy* with the heart, and to “constantly gaze at the depth of the heart.”^[101] St. Ignatius Brianchaninov teaches:

It is one thing to pray with attention with the participation of the heart; it is another thing to

descend with the mind into the temple of the heart and from there to offer mystical prayer filled with divine grace and power. The second is a result of the first. The attention of the mind during prayer draws the heart into sympathy. With the strengthening of the attention, sympathy of heart and mind is turned into union of heart and mind. Finally when the attention makes the prayer its own, the mind descends into the heart for the most profound and sacred service of prayer.^[102]

This sympathy, which is the prelude to spiritual warmth, must be guarded and kindled.^[103] Sympathy and natural spiritual warmth refer to the mind's ready inclination towards God-centered calmness, a sense of steady and sweet interiority. As St. Theophan the Recluse states:

The first-fruit of the warmth of God is the gathering of thoughts into one, and their ceaseless concentration upon God.^[104]

Thus one may and ought to find the place of the heart, be with the heart, and sensitive to it. But in doing this one does not attempt to penetrate it or to artificially produce merely physical warmth. Physical warmth is simply the product of concentrating in the area of the chest.^[105] Natural spiritual warmth of heart arises through the sympathy produced by watchfulness of body and breath together with stillness and clarity of mind absent of distracting thoughts. This sympathy may produce a natural warmth of heart, for natural warmth precedes supernatural warmth, but supernatural warmth can by no means be produced through any effort of the will.^[106] It is far better to ignore such phenomena for they are invariably passing and temporary, that is until later stages of experience. Attachment to such phenomena depends on the ego and the imagination. Oftentimes an inflamed imagination is mistaken for spiritual warmth of heart. Therefore, if one notices such warmth, simply return to the body, the breath, and the mind, and give it no undue significance.

Attention on the breath at the place of the naval or belly button is indicated by St. Symeon the New Theologian when he states to “focus your physical gaze, together with the whole of your intellect, upon the centre of your belly or your navel.”^[107] It is not indicated in the present treatise to bend the neck unless one has direct instruction from a knowledgeable teacher. Therefore, rather than bending the neck, simply keep the neck straight and give noetic attention to the area of the belly button or navel as it moves with the breathing.^[108] Concerning posture in general, St. Ignatius Brianchaninov states: “We must give the body the kind of posture that will give the spirit as much freedom as is necessary for its proper activity.”^[109] By this principle it is best understood here that there ought to be no unnecessary strain through the ignorant production of tension or by an unskilled contortion of the body.

Concerning the method of breathing, St. Symeon the New Theologian states:

Restrain [calm] the drawing-in of breath through your nostrils, so as not to breathe easily [carelessly], and search inside yourself with your intellect so as to find the place of the heart, where all the powers of the soul reside.^[110]

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov interprets the notion of the “restraint” of the breath to mean “to breathe slowly and without effort.”^[111] In other words, restraint does not refer to a breathing exercise, but to an effortless calming of the breath, for this “helps to bring one into a state of stillness and to gather the mind from its wanderings.”^[112]

St. Ignatius also refers to St. Nilus, who spoke of holding the breath and breathing “as little as possible.”^[113] St. Ignatius interprets this to mean that one must “pray very quietly.”^[114] In other words, holding the breath does not necessarily mean stopping the breath. Although St. Nicodemos in his treatise does refer explicitly to a “short interval” of holding the breath (for the amount of time it takes to say the prayer once), it is not necessary.^[115] St. Gregory of Sinai states in this regard: “Holding the breath also helps to stabilize the intellect,

but only temporarily, for after a little it lapses into distraction again.”^[116] Considering that the methodology given presently is for the sake of indicating a complete path that is also safe, it is worth remembering that “the “writings of the Fathers can be compared to a pharmacy in which many different kinds of medicines are found.”^[117] In other words, it is not possible to apply every method of every Father. Different methods are suited to different people, different temperaments, different contexts, some requiring more detailed instruction than others. It is moreover possible for the sake of expediency to judiciously practice methods of different Fathers where these are mutually supportive.^[118] In the present methodology, holding the breath is unnecessary. The goal of working with the breath, as St. Gregory Palamas’ inquirer says when speaking of the beginner’s method of the hesychasts, that it is to “draw their intellect into themselves by means of their breathing.”^[119]

Returning to the breath, St. Ignatius quotes St. Gregory of Sinai when he states: “Restrain [calm] your breath a little, so that you do not breathe carelessly.”^[120] There is a synergy where the calming of the breath functions to calm the mind:

That is why some teachers recommend them to pay attention to the exhalation and inhalation of their breath, and to restrain [calm] it a little, so that while they are watching it the intellect, too, may be held in check.^[121]

By attending carefully to the breath, the mind will be brought into stillness, and the breath will naturally slow down and even itself out. As St. Gregory Palamas states:

This control of the breathing may, indeed, be regarded as a spontaneous consequence of paying attention to the intellect; for the breath is always quietly inhaled and exhaled at moments of intense concentration, especially in the case of those who practice stillness both bodily and mentally.^[122]

In brief, the synergy of mind and breath acts such that intentional attentiveness to the breath is attentiveness to the mind, and attentiveness of the mind naturally acts to calm the breathing. Thus St. Gregory shows:

How vital it is for those who seek to be true masters of themselves, and to be monks according to their inner self, to install or possess the intellect within the body... Nor is it out of place to teach beginners in particular to look within themselves and to bring their intellect within themselves by means of their breathing.^[123]

The breath is a vital entry point, a place of articulation between the body, the soul, and the nous. All converge here, and so by gentle but persistent attention to the breath one harmonizes the whole psychosomatic unity that is man.

Breath awareness is as simple as being attentive to, being sensitively aware of, the sensation of air as it passes through the nostrils.^[124] Attention at first may only be as subtle as being aware at any given moment during an entire cycle of inhale and exhale. As the attention concentrates, one will be able to notice the breath at at least one point or moment both during the inhale and during the exhale. As watchfulness deepens, one will be able to notice, say, the beginning and end of an inhale and the beginning and end of an exhale. As concentration increases, one will be able to notice the beginning, middle, and end of an inhale, and the beginning, middle, and end of the exhale. From here an awareness of, an actual sensitivity to, the entirety of the inhale and the entirety of the exhale, especially the turn from inhale to exhale and the turn from exhale to inhale, in a single sustained act of attention may arise. At this point the breath has already begun to slow, to expand, as it were, to calm, and to grow more quiet. The mind has also synergistically calmed, and the noise of distracting thoughts has decreased. This process, especially in the beginning stages, can take quite a while, but as one develops skill of mind, the time will likely decrease. St. Nicodemos

recommends at least one or two hours per day “for this sacred and spiritual activity.”^[125]

The same process can be practiced at the place of the heart. St. Theophan the Recluse states:

To stand guard over the heart, to stand with the mind in the heart, to descend from the head into the heart - all these are one and the same thing. The core of the work lies in the concentration of attention and the standing before the invisible Lord, not in the head but within the chest, close to the heart and in the heart.
^[126]

This of course is not the forceful entering into the heart that St. Ignatius warned against, but is that sympathy of heart that is produced naturally through the concentration of attention. To descend into the heart, to bring the mind down into the heart, is what happens in the process of increased calmness and attentiveness to the breath and the place of the heart. It is also true that attention placed at the nose and naval also end up in the same sympathy with the heart as does attention placed in the chest, and so are not in any way opposed. The physical heart is aligned with the spiritual heart, but they are not as such an identity such that attention at the nose or naval leads away from the heart. Although in one sense the heart is the ideal place of focus, the fact that it is an internal organ means that attention there will require more discernment in distinguishing between various states that may be produced. As long as one pays no mind to changing sensations passing states, then all will be well. That being said, attention at the nose, although one must be attentive not to produce any tension in the head, avoids many of these potential distractions which may attend awareness directed within the body. In this way attention at the nostrils is especially recommended as the safest method.^[127]

To conclude this section on watchfulness of the breath, there is an important distinction between psychological phenomena and spiritual phenomena that needs to be kept in mind. Psychological phenomena leave a residue of passion and attachment because

they are bound up with thought, feeling, and will. Due to man's sensoriality, they have an imbalance in their energetic motions that causes them to look towards the environment for stability; they relish sensory pleasure. Man's spirit or nous, the core essence of his being, however, is not so limited, but in Christ is able to actually rest in such a way that any ensuing calm is not dependent on the outer environment for support. Rather than seeking peace from the situations of life, spiritual peace brings peace to the situations of life. As one practices watchfulness of the body and the breath, one of the key points requiring discernment is just this issue of distinguishing between psychological and spiritual calm. Contemplation has natural benefits which the fallen psyche of the old man is all too willing to co-opt for the purposes of his projected ego.^[128] This is not to condemn what is natural, but to point out the express need to not rely on what is produced in and by the psyche. Anything that lulls or dulls the mind in a pleasant "trance" is false, or that seeks to establish a state that simply flows as it were from the inertia of the "practice" ends up in the psychic or soulish realm, that is to say merely of the intellect, emotions, and sensation.

Watchfulness of the Mind

Although watchfulness of the mind was introduced at the opening of this chapter, it will be worthwhile to look at this practice in a little more detail. According to St. Hesychios, "watchfulness consists in freeing the heart from all thoughts, keeping it profoundly silent and still, and in praying."^[129] It is a supreme form of attention by which one is aware of thoughts as thoughts, emotions as emotions, images as images, etc. Also called attentiveness, it lets nothing escape, with the aim or end that the mind be kept clear: "Attentiveness is the heart's stillness, unbroken by any thought."^[130] This watchfulness is kept by the hesychast "in order always to keep his heart clear of all thoughts, even of those that appear to be good."^[131] It also "brilliantly illumines the mind."^[132] Attentiveness is "that guard and watch of the intellect, that perfect stillness of heart and blessed state of the soul when free from images."^[133]

In order to watch the mind, all that one need do is simply note the presence of any thought, concept, image, or idea. These phenomena arise and pass away, arise and pass away, arise and pass away, and one simply watches this activity, guarding against falling into them. The habit of attaching oneself to thoughts is profound, and so often it will happen that one will realize after a few or several moments that one has entered into the stream of thought. This simply requires the noting of this phenomena and the return to watching. Many confuse their very being with the activity of their thoughts, and so this process can be very disorienting. It requires great trust in God. As one grows familiar with this arising and passing away, and used to not falling into the thought stream, one experiences great freedom from the tyranny of compulsive identification with thought, which is passionate and sinful. True virtue implies a kind of freedom that is unknown to compulsive virtue, compulsive virtue being virtue in name and appearance only.

By practicing watchfulness of the mind, one will observe thousands and thousands of times how thoughts have a life or inertia of their own. By watching, one will also develop dispassion towards thoughts. This dispassion will be experienced as a kind of free space between personal being and the activity of thinking. When one does not confuse self with thought, thoughts lose their intensity to enslave one's attention. As one's attention accustoms itself to not being ensnared in the activity of thinking, one may begin to behold the mind itself. The mind is revealed as the "space" in which thoughts emerge and out of which they disappear. Subtler and subtler thoughts are then noticed, and as one maintains watchfulness, refusing to enter into thought's narrative, then freedom from thought increases. This freedom brings stillness into the mind. As Nikitas Stithatos teaches:

Bringing inner stillness to their thoughts, this dispassion raises them to a state of intellectual peace, making their intellect visionary and prophetic to the highest degree: visionary in matters divine, in

insight into supernal realities, and in the disclosure of God's mysteries.^[134]

These insights are released because the natural purity of the mind in stillness is fitted to receive divine illumination from God.^[135] In this way the activity of watchfulness synergizes with stillness in the experience of theoria. Peacefulness of mind is experienced in power as an unconquerable force, the very kingdom of God present in the indwelling Holy Spirit, “for the kingdom of God is... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). Of this power St. Paul also teaches: “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). This peace transcends conceptualization, and yet it can be known intuitively in the intimacy of watchfulness and stillness, and this peace of God will guard the heart and mind with tremendous divine power.

This practice of watchfulness also reveals the method for battling with thoughts, especially the self-thought, which is to say the assumption of self that is at the center of all of fallen man's activities. Before delving into that more deeply, it is important to note that one does not battle thoughts by directing energy towards them. This only feeds them the energy they require to maintain existential continuity. One starves thoughts by not identifying with them or by joining in their activity. Their very nature is to arise and pass away, and so in order to battle thoughts one simply stands one's ground, watching dispassionately without entering into the stream of the thought's world. It is counterproductive to focus on the fact of the presence of thoughts in an attempt to be rid of their presence, for this approach rather energizes thought. One must practice being dead to them, reckoning oneself dead to sin (Romans 6:11). Or as St. Symeon the New Theologian states: “you should be dead to everything.”^[136] Watchfulness of body, breath, and mind thus serves to liberate a person from the tyranny of the passions by creating a space of non-reaction to them.

The spirit of man is his life, and his life is his attention, his awareness, the activity or directionality of his mind. For a man to

watch his mind is, therefore, for man to attend to his attention, to become aware of his awareness, to rest simply in being his being, abiding in his real self. This is the circular method of St. Dionysios. In this light, watchfulness of the mind has a deeper dimension which is necessarily integral in any penetrative practice, and touches on fundamental aspects of Patristic anthropology. A kind of practical apophaticism, the question relates to *what* the mind is, what is watching the mind, or, put another way, who is watching what?^[137] Is there something “prior” or “superior” to the mind such that it can watch the mind? As will be seen, the mind is often confused with its contents, but the mind as discussed here is more properly understood as the “space” in which the contents, whether they be words or images, arise and pass away.^[138] To watch the mind is therefore to attend to the space in which thoughts, images, ideas, etc. arise and pass away. St. Nikitas Stithatos points to this deeper dimension of watchfulness when he teaches:

35. “*Know thyself*”: this is true humility, the humility that teaches us to be inwardly humble and makes our heart contrite. Such humility you must cultivate and guard. For if you do not yet know yourself you cannot know what humility is, and have not yet embarked truly on the task of cultivating and guarding. To know oneself is the goal of the practice of the virtues.

36. If having achieved a state of purity you advance to the knowledge of the essences of created beings, you will have fulfilled the injunction, “*Know thyself*.” If on the other hand you have not yet attained a knowledge of the inner essences of creation and of things both divine and human, you may know what is outside and around you, but you will still be totally ignorant of your own self.^[139]

Many comments could be made here,^[140] one especially being that self knowledge is essential, for it is the key gateway or point of access to authentic humility. As will be seen, watching the mind is

functionally equivalent to watching the self. In other words, watching the emerging and disappearing content of the mind is not merely a question of cataloging their mostly random content, nor even inquiring deeply into their nature, but looking deeply into the being to whom these thoughts present themselves. But how often do we stop and ask ourselves the question: “Who am I?” Or, “To whom do these thoughts occur?” It may strike one as a silly question, but, in fact, Abba Poemen, the famed desert father, instructed one of his disciples to inquire “at every moment: ‘Who am I?’”^[141] Clearly, the question has depths that require exploration and examination. So often one lives under the assumption that they know themselves. Often enough, the reason for this is that they confuse their habitual thoughts, their very personality, with who they are. One’s personality and characteristics, however, are that collection of experiences, memories, opinions, beliefs, likes and dislikes, etc., all rolled into one. None of those, however, are one’s self. One’s self exists from the womb, prior to birth, and is prior also to one’s name. It is prior to habits, memories, inclinations, attitudes, language, etc., and, moreover, one’s self remains the same self throughout all the changes one’s personality goes through, even regeneration.

Experiences come and go, but the self is always the same self, the same identity, the same *I*. The body changes, but the self remains a consistent person. Just as the eye cannot be confused with the objects it sees, likewise one’s self cannot be confused with bodily states or mental states. As will be quoted more fully below, St. Nikitas states: “What I am is not at all the same as that which characterizes me.” In other words, one’s place of birth does not say who or what one is. Family trees do not say who or what one is. For who or what one is is prior to all that. The self is not an object of knowledge, for it is *that* which is doing the knowing. The self is the subject, knowledge and perception the object. Man is created in the image of God, and since God transcends all knowledge, so “who I am” transcends all knowledge. This mystery must be sat with, examined, pursued, for:

What I am is an image of God manifest in a spiritual,
immortal and intelligent soul, having an intellect that is

the father of my consciousness and that is consubstantial with the soul and inseparable from it.
[\[142\]](#)

If one can see and remain in oneself as that, then, as Abba Poemen teaches, you will “find rest in this life and the next.” St. Nikitas, quoted above, further teaches:

37. What I am is not at all the same as that which characterizes me; nor is what characterizes me the same as that which relates to my situation; nor is what relates to my situation the same as that which is external to me. In each case the one is distinct from the other. What I am is an image of God manifest in a spiritual, immortal and intelligent soul, having an intellect that is the father of my consciousness and that is consubstantial with the soul and inseparable from it. That which characterizes me, and is regal and sovereign, is the power of intelligence and free will. That which relates to my situation is what I may choose in exercising my free will, such as whether to be a farmer, a merchant, a mathematician or a philosopher. That which is external to me is whatever relates to my ambitions in this present life, to my class status and worldly wealth, to glory, honor, prosperity and exalted rank, or to their opposites, poverty, ignominy, dishonor and misfortune.

38. When you know yourself you cease from all outward tasks undertaken with a view to serving God and enter into the very sanctuary of God, into the noetic liturgy of the Spirit, the divine haven of dispassion and humility. But until you come to know yourself through humility and spiritual knowledge your life is one of toil and sweat. It was of this that David cryptically spoke when he said, ‘Toil lies before me

until I enter the sanctuary of God' (Ps. 73:16- 17. LXX).

39. To know yourself means that you must guard yourself diligently from everything external to you; it means respite from worldly concerns and cross-examination of the conscience. Once you come to know yourself a kind of super rational divine humility suddenly descends upon the soul, bringing contrition and tears of fervent compunction to the heart. Acted upon in this way you regard yourself as earth and ashes (cf. Gen. 18:27), and as a worm and no man (cf. Ps. 22:6). Indeed, because of this overwhelming gift of God, you think you are unworthy of even this wormlike form of life. If you are privileged to remain in this state for some time you will be filled with a strange, unspeakable intoxication - the intoxication of compunction - and will enter into the depths of humility. Rapt out of yourself, you take no account of food, drink or clothing beyond the minimum needed; for you are as one who has experienced the blessed change that comes from 'the right hand of the Most High' (Ps. 77:10. LXX).

40. Humility is the greatest of the virtues. If as a result of sincere repentance it is implanted in you, you will also be given the gift of prayer and self-control, and will be freed from servitude to the passions. Peace will suffuse your powers, tears will cleanse your heart, and through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit you will be filled with tranquility. When you have attained this state, your consciousness of the knowledge of God will grow lucid and you will begin to contemplate the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven and the inner essences of created things. The more you descend into the depths of the Spirit, the more

you plumb the abyss of humility. Correspondingly you gain greater knowledge of your own limitations and recognize the weakness of human nature; at the same time your love for God and your fellow beings waxes until you think that sanctification flows simply from a greeting or from the proximity of those with whom you live.^[143]

In seeking to acquire true self knowledge, and an accurate understanding of one's real identity, it is essential to know what is most fundamental about oneself. For we almost invariably confuse our fundamental identity with traits or characteristics that are distinct from our fundamental nature. For example, the person that was in the womb is the selfsame person who is reading these words. Despite the innumerable experiences that have transpired between then and now, it is yet the same person. You were given a name, learned to walk, learned a language, had family and friends, and grew older, and yet you could have been born in this country or another; still you would be the same self. You could have learned this or that language; still you would be the same self. You could have grown up in a different household or had different friends; still you would be the same self. Whether in the country or the city, you are still you. You are not even reducible to your DNA. And so the question stands: What is it that makes you who you are and ever will be? The body changes, hair color changes, mood changes, thought changes, personality changes, and still you are you. So, what is the essence, the core of you? St. Nikitas continues: "What I am is an image of God manifest in a spiritual, immortal, and intelligent soul, having an intellect that is the father of my consciousness and that is consubstantial with the soul and inseparable from it." In other words, man is not of or from himself but Another, and so when one says "I am," it is precisely as an image of God; it is that which constitutes one's fundamental "I am." This "I am" is manifest as the intellect or mind (*nous*), which is to say conscious awareness is at the center of personal being, not any particular object of consciousness but rather consciousness itself. This intellect is the light of awareness, i.e. what

makes you to be self-aware. This root intellect generates consciousness, the fundamental power to be self-conscious, conscious of one's own being. By soul is meant life, the energy of being and existence. These three: intellect, consciousness, and soul, function in unity as an image and analogy of the holy and consubstantial Trinity, and as such we are one person with these three most fundamental facets of our being reflecting as an image God's being in Three Persons, the foundation of all true knowledge.

This knowing who or what we are is key to living life fully in Christ. Knowing what we are is key to knowing who we truly are. Today people are taught that they are fundamentally irrational animals. As irrational animals, intelligence is just the tool humans use to rationalize desires, urges, and impulses. These urges are themselves just the blind operations of survival mechanisms born randomly in a fragmented and directionless universe. Nothing like an image of God, man is said to be just a hairless ape without a purpose or destiny other than the one he vainly constructs for himself. Such a hopeless teaching, however, is far from the truth. God reveals in His Word that we are made in His image, and that we are fundamentally spiritual, immortal, and intelligent, and that we are born into a world of cosmic meaning and purpose that transcends the empirical cycle of creation but extends rather into eternity. St. Nikitas emphasizes this, and draws from the Scriptures the deeper truths of human being. He says man possesses at the core of his identity "an intellect that is the father of his consciousness and that is consubstantial with the soul and inseparable from it." In this way man is created in the image of the Trinity. Man is a single consciousness, which generates the intellect, and from which proceeds the soul, three facets and one being. He continues, saying "that which characterizes me, and is regal and sovereign, is the power of intelligence and free will." Thus making a clear distinction between, firstly, what man is and, secondly, what characterizes him, the meaning is that intelligence and free will are consequent characteristics that function to distinguish *how* a person is, not what or who a person is. Who a person is is prior to what they think or choose. This is why surrender and stillness are essential, for such

attentive silence allows one to experience the core of their being apart from any confusion with characteristics. Typically man reduces himself to his characteristics but, by going deeper than one's characteristics, surrender and stillness transform a person through the experience of what one most truly is: the image of God.

The difference between what a human being most fundamentally is, on the one hand, and what characterizes him, on the other, is essential to the spiritual life. It may seem like an obscure point, or perhaps too fine of a distinction, but this distinction is what gives all the value to man, and makes salvation possible. It is the difference between mere reformation and profound transformation. Reform a man and he can deform; transform a man and he can never be the same: he is a new creature! God thus does not call us to reformation, but repentance, transformation, and so not merely changing our thoughts and choices but transforming them through the renewing of our minds. God is not asking us to exchange one list of do's and don'ts for another list of do's and don'ts, but to be regenerated, to house and to be guided by His Holy Spirit. And so if man were merely intelligence and free will, then the change in man could only be the swapping of one set of thoughts and choices for another set of thoughts and choices, and so man would be graded on how well he performed at his new prescriptions. This is not the way of Christ. Christ calls us to entrust ourselves to Him so that we can have His mind (1 Corinthians 2:16) and therefore think with His mind and choose with His will. God wants to put His Law in our minds, write it on our hearts, abide in our hearts through His Spirit, and share His Kingdom with us by making us co-reign with Him in Christ. That could never happen if it were a matter of intelligence and will, but "consciousness of His divine knowledge, His ineffable wisdom, the vision of supernal realities, the prevision of human realities, the life-quickenning deadness induced by dispassion, and union with Himself, so that we co-reign with Him in the kingdom of God the Father." This is so much more than that which is accomplished through wit and will. God's way is not to change the thought but to change the man; He therefore does not change the

thought in order to to change the man, but rather changes the man and so changes his thought.

So many of us sadly waste our lives in confusing what we are with what is actually external to us. We will think of ourselves as rich or poor, honored or dishonored, high or low, country or city, employed or unemployed, or any number or combination of these. And yet, they are all external to who we truly are. What a tragedy it is that we overlook that we are an image of God and instead wrap ourselves in identities constructed out of what is external to us. What is external to us is constantly ebbing and flowing, rising and falling on the tides of circumstances, and as such they form no foundation for identity. And yet if we are exalted in the rising tide of circumstances we feel as if we in ourselves are somehow exalted, and conversely if we are brought low on the same tides we feel we in ourselves are low. But the truth is we are not defined by or established on the ground of circumstances. The freedom of the Spirit knows nothing of these. This is why St. Nikitas urges: "To know yourself means that you must guard yourself from everything that is external to you; it means respite from worldly concerns and cross-examination of the conscience." We must constantly resist the urge to fall into false patterns of identity, remaining vigilant in distinguishing what we are, on the one hand, from what is external to us, on the other, and also from what characterizes us. In fact, resting in our identity in Christ as an image of God, born of watchfulness, constitutes much of our spiritual labor, and is the guarding of our freedom in Him. Watchfulness of the mind in this way extends into watchfulness of self.

St. Anthony the Great taught, "he who knows himself knows all things."^[144] Watchfulness of mind, therefore, and in light of all that has been said, is essentially watchfulness of self, not confusing self either with any attending characteristics, with that which relates to one's situation, or with what is external to self. In other words, self is the subjective space of being in which one's person manifests itself as self-awareness, and watchfulness of this subjective space constitutes watchfulness of self. As thoughts arise, if one is not careful then the subjective space of self collapses into the narrative

of the thoughts such that these thoughts reproject a self framed in terms of the present thoughts such that one confuses one's actual self with the projected thought self. Self, however, cannot be thought, only known or experienced in terms of its total existential fact, i.e. as the experience of self apart from any particular conceptual content or characteristic.

Stillness

Stillness and watchfulness are intimately related. While watchfulness implies attention to some object, ideally the mind itself, stillness implies stability and tranquility. Watchfulness clarifies the mind; stillness rests in the clarified mind. In this way they mutually inform and upbuild each other. On the one hand, without stillness, watchfulness falls again and again into distraction, whereas on the other hand, without watchfulness stillness is hazy and, essentially, autohypnotic. Together, however, stillness becomes peace, and watchfulness a gathering of luminosity.

Echoing St. John Climacus, St Gregory of Sinai teaches that “stillness is the shedding of thoughts, ‘whether of sensible or of intelligible realities.”^[145] It is a state of receptive tranquility that is unassailed by the passions. There is a sense in which stillness is the fruit of watchfulness. As Evagrios states:

Stand on guard and protect your intellect from thoughts while you pray. Then your intellect will complete its prayer and continue in the tranquility that is natural to it.^[146]

Watchfulness, when active and effective, results in stillness. As St. Hesychios teaches:

Continuity of attention produces inner stability; inner stability produces a natural intensification of watchfulness; and this intensification gradually and in due measure gives contemplative insight into spiritual

warfare. This in its turn is succeeded by persistence in the Jesus Prayer and by the state that Jesus confers in which the intellect, free from all images, enjoys complete quietude.^[147]

The quietude he speaks of is that stillness that emerges through watchful attention to the mind when it becomes stable in its freedom from attachment to thought-production. The very continuity produces stability, a stability which allows for the non-dissipation of internal energy, i.e. attention, among thought objects. Attention is the fundamental energy, and this energy when harnessed can then concentrate and focus, this concentrated energy of attention being the substance of the stability in continuity of watchfulness. Together with ceaseless prayer, then, watchfulness blooms as a sense of authentic peace. According to Abba Philimon:

True devoutness and awe of God purify the soul from the passions, render the intellect free, lead it to natural contemplation, and make it apt for theology. This it experiences in the form of bliss, that provides those who share in it with a foretaste of the bliss held in store and keeps the soul in a state of tranquility.^[148]

This bliss and tranquility results from stable attention to God, a soul free from the disturbance of the passions, and a mind free of compulsive attachment to conceptualization.

Now they are embraced by great tranquility and stillness, peace nourishes them and they experience great delight; and now they acquire understanding, divine wisdom and unsearchable spiritual knowledge.^[149]

Tranquility and stillness are thus associated with *theoria* and the emergence of spiritual knowledge. Speaking of this phenomenon in relation to humility,

Peace will suffuse your powers, tears will cleanse your heart, and through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit you will be filled with tranquility. When you have attained this state, your consciousness of the knowledge of God will grow lucid and you will begin to contemplate the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven and the inner essences of created things.^[150]

St. Nikitas Stithatos further describes stillness:

Stillness is an undisturbed state of the intellect, the calm of a free and joyful soul, the tranquil unwavering stability of the heart in God, the contemplation of light, the knowledge of the mysteries of God, consciousness of wisdom by virtue of a pure mind, the abyss of divine intellections, the rapture of the intellect, intercourse with God, an unsleeping watchfulness, spiritual prayer, untroubled repose in the midst of great hardship and, finally, solidarity and union with God.^[151]

Attributed to St. John Climacus, St. Gregory of Sinai provides another description of stillness: “‘Stillness is the shedding of thoughts,’ whether of sensible or of intelligible realities.”^[152] Evagrios the Solitary describes the characteristic of stillness, saying “the practice of stillness is full of joy and beauty.”^[153] St. Gregory of Sinai states:

Stillness is initiated by attentive waiting upon God, its intermediate stage is characterized by illuminative power and contemplation, and its final goal is ecstasy and the enraptured flight of the intellect towards God.^[154]

The beginning of stillness is waiting upon God attentively, and so is authentically prayerful when it is inclined or oriented *towards* God.

Stillness that is not the presenting of oneself to God as a living spiritual sacrifice is still conformed to the *schema* or frame of reference of the world, and must be abandoned as a kind of carnal (*σαρκικός*) or merely psychological quietism.

St. Paul provides a verbal icon of the nature of Christian stillness:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present (*παρίστημι* , yield) your bodies (*σῶμα*) a living sacrifice (*θυσίαν ζῶσαν*), holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service (*λογικὴν λατρείαν*). 2 And do not be conformed (*συσχηματίζω*) to this world (*αἰών*), but be transformed (*μεταμορφώω*) by the renewing (*ἀνακαίνωσις*) of your mind (*νοῦς*), that you may prove (*δοκιμάζω* , thoroughly discern) what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

In light of the foregoing, stillness is, first of all, by the mercies of God, by the power or energy of His grace and love for man. Stillness is not, therefore, initiated by, governed, or accomplished according to one's own natural power. The will is engaged in being willing, not willful, for it is a surrendering of oneself Godward, a yielding of the whole (*όλοτελής*) person, body, soul, and spirit (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:23) as a living (*ζάω*) and attentive sacrifice (*θυσία*), neither dead nor slumbering. This is one's rational (*λογικός*), spiritual worship (*λατρεία*), a "divine communion."^[155] Through this worship, its fruit is that one is no longer formed according to the schema or pattern (*συσχηματίζω* , from *σχῆμα*) of this world aeon (*αἰών*). The Greek term *schema*(*σχῆμα*) refers to "the *habitus*, as comprising everything in a person which strikes the senses, the figure, bearing, discourse, actions, manner of life etc."^[156] In other words, the root pattern (*σχῆμα*) of the fallen mind (*νοῦς* , nous), which is "this world (*αἰών*)," i.e. sensorialism, is seen through and undone in the renewal (*ἀνακαίνωσις*) and transformation (*μεταμορφώω*) of the

mind (*νοῦς*). Through this transformation one proves (*δοκιμάζω*) the reality and truth of the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God, thoroughly discerning (*δοκιμάζω*) it in the framework of one's transformed mind (*νοῦς*).

When stillness arises together with watchfulness, the mind is both calm and clear. This means that the mind is quiet and free of conceptualization, at least to a significant degree. Watchfulness of the mind, free of thought, is the mind's reversal of attention, its circular return to itself, which is to say mind watching mind. Stillness is the mind's resting in the simplicity of one's own being. In theological terms, this is the practice of apophaticism. Practically speaking, apophaticism means being signless, entering into the signless. Knowledge and thought are mediated through signs. Verbal, emotional, and sensory sign-making, these are the web of sign relations that frame the world of internal and external perception. By entering into signless awareness, perception ceases being bound by conceptualization and so becomes introspection, inner vision. Now, introspection does *not* mean either thinking about, internally reviewing, or internally rehearsing memories and emotions, i.e. it's not psychological introspection. Psychological introspection is distinct from what is better called *ontological introspection*. By entering into the signless one enters into the silence of simple being, and there finds a natural and real peace. This peace is itself the gateway to a supernatural peace that cannot be reached by any effort of the will but by grace alone.

By entering into silence one has progressively laid aside personal willfulness, for one has simply been presenting oneself to God as a living sacrifice. The will uses signs as levers for its objectives, but approaching silence through signlessness means that the will has no handle to grab, and so is quiescent. In this state, rather than willfully holding, one is held in surrender by God. Since demons use signs to manipulate the thought and will of man, entering into silence means one is safe from their influence. The passions require a corresponding sign in order to link with an object of desire, thus moving man's will which is also linked with the sign-using intellect. Entering into the signless therefore means that the

passions cannot harm. Whereas Orthodox contemplation is bright and aware, false contemplation is dark and dull, a turning off and tuning out, and as such becomes a kind of entranced sink of passions.

St. Seraphim of Sarov taught: “Absolute silence is a cross upon which a man must crucify himself with all the passions and desires.”^[157] In other words, stillness and silence are the two beams of the inner Cross upon which the ego is crucified. The ego despises stillness and silence. It prefers movement, noise, motion, action, busyness, and is ever restless. Herein lies man’s exposure to evil, for as St. Seraphim also taught:

When we remain in silence, our enemy the devil will have no success with regard to a man with a hidden heart; this, however, must be understood of silence in the mind.^[158]

The devil cannot attack a still and silent mind. It is only through the stimulation of thoughts and desires that a man can fall victim to the enemy of his soul. As St. Ignatius Brianchaninov teaches, “the actions of the passions and the demons are linked.”^[159] Thus stillness is the school and silence the curriculum by which man enters into victory over the enemy of his soul: “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength” (Isaiah 30:15). In the words of Nicephorus the Solitary: “This practice, keeping the mind from dreams, renders it elusive and impenetrable to enemy suggestions.”^[160] Likewise, St Hesychios teaches that “only by means of a mental image can Satan fabricate an evil thought and insinuate this into the intellect in order to lead it astray.”^[161] This is so, “for the devil, being a bodiless intellect, can deceive our souls only by means of fantasies and thoughts.”^[162] In other words, a watchful and still mind will not fall prey to the evil one for the luminous and silent mind gives him no fuel for the dark fires of the noisome passions. Watchfulness and stillness thus play a key role in inner spiritual warfare, one whose victory is assured through the ceaseless invocation of the Name of Jesus: “Attentiveness

obstructs the demons by rebutting them; and Jesus, when invoked, disperses them together with all their fantasies.”^[163]

Practically speaking, in order to become still one must progressively release all *unnecessary* tension. Where watchfulness made one aware of tightness, stillness functions to release it. The mind stores habitual passions in various places of the body through frozen flexions of the voluntary muscles. The stress of one’s impassioned and imbalanced life is thus unconsciously counterbalanced with an entire network of subtle flexions, whether holding the breath, tensing the gut, raising the shoulders, locking the knees, knitting the brow, etc. These deep habits of tension can be incredibly subtle and interconnected. This kind of tension, moreover, is opposed to stillness, and so in concert with watchfulness there is the progressive calming of the body, the breath, and the mind. St. Theophan the Recluse speaks of holding “the whole body in a vigilant tension of the muscles,” but this notion of “vigilant tension,” in the original Russian is *bodrennom napryajenii* (бодренном напряжении) and is best understood not as tenseness or rigidity but as an enlivened or “awake tension,” which is to say the body is kept in awakeness and alertness without any slumping.^[164] This is to prevent slackness and bodily torpor, much like a bowstring that is neither too tight nor too loose.^[165] Thus neither unconscious tension nor undue slackness will interfere. This helps to safeguard attention, and provide for an enduring stillness.

Ceaseless Prayer

Ceaseless prayer, especially as the Jesus Prayer, is the permanent presence of the Name of Jesus abiding in the heart together with the sense of His nearness. It is the ceaseless entrusting of oneself to Christ, the prayer itself being the radiance or aura of His saving Presence manifesting as the words of the Prayer and as the holy desire to trust Him more and more completely. In terms of praxis, ceaseless prayer is the third and central pillar of the basic elements of theosis. As the activity of faith, its especial practical function is to provide total life continuity. The interconnections of watchfulness,

stillness, and ceaseless prayer play a vital role in the progression of theosis, but ceaseless prayer binds them all together in the whole of one's being and directs it Godward. All else can be lost but ceaseless prayer must remain. This is because ceaseless prayer is practiced both within and outside set periods of prayer and simply requires the turning of the mind to trust in God, and at its core simply is this turning, and requires even no definite form. For although set periods of prayer are essential, it is not enough to practice at delimited times each day with nothing in between to integrate them. True faith will not allow such a partitioning of God, for true faith is a power in the soul coming from God. One could even say that when the thought of calling upon the Name of the Lord erupts from deep within, having entrusted ourselves to the inconceivable power of Christ's everlasting gospel of grace (Revelation 14:6), which is the divine power that regenerates and saves us, we receive at that very moment the ultimate benefit of being grasped never to be abandoned. For to call out to God is to have responded to His prior call to come to Him. The power in His promise, His covenant faithfulness established in His blood, thus saves us. Ceaseless prayer, then, coming from the heart moved by grace, acts within to stabilize the nous in its receptive posture of faith and keeps it focused Godward, its very activity being the action of grace in and on the soul. Prayer's ceaselessness then acts outside of set periods of prayer by retaining the air of prayer and so like a thread ties all moments together.

Connecting ceaseless prayer with watchfulness of the mind, St. Hesychios teaches:

Watchfulness and the Jesus Prayer, as I have said, mutually reinforce one another; for close attentiveness goes with constant prayer, while prayer goes with close watchfulness and attentiveness of intellect. [\[166\]](#)

This is to say that constant or ceaseless prayer provides a positive framework for watchfulness, like a lamp such that even if one cannot

see far ahead due to the gathering fog of the passions, the lamp of ceaseless prayer provides the light necessary to at least stand one's ground. St. Hesychios even cautions:

If we trust only in our own watchfulness and attentiveness, we shall quickly be pushed aside by our enemies. We shall be overturned and cast down by their extreme craftiness. We will become ever-more fully entangled in their nets of evil thought, and will readily be slaughtered by them, lacking as we do the powerful sword of the name of Jesus Christ.^[167]

Thus it is shown that ceaseless prayer functions as a sort of center of gravity for watchfulness. Not only can one discern how far one's attention has strayed by having an objective center upon which the mind may revolve, but over time this center of gravity increases in strength and drawing power such that the nous more and more readily finds rest in the Name of Jesus. It is as if the Name of Jesus is spontaneously present at any given moment when the mind comes to itself, and even serves to call the mind back to itself when it has strayed.

Of the unlimited power of the holy Name of Jesus, St. Ignatius Brianchaninov states that:

The name by its exterior form is limited, but it represents an unlimited object, God, from Whom it borrows infinite divine value or worth, the power and properties of God.^[168]

In other words, the Name of Jesus, although a verbal sign and so in that sense limited, points to God as its unlimited object and source, and so links up the one who prays in His Name with "the power and properties of God," and with God Himself.

Not only interconnected with watchfulness, the teaching of Nicephorus the Solitary shows how ceaseless prayer connects with stillness:

When your mind becomes firmly established in the heart, it must not remain silent and idle, but it should constantly repeat the prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me!” and never cease.^[169]

In other words, ceaseless prayer provides a center for stillness as well as watchfulness, for the Name of Jesus held in ceaseless prayer binds these practices together, centers the nous in itself, and focuses it towards God.

Concerning the methodology of watchfulness of the breath, its connection with watchfulness of the mind is made clear by St. Hesychios when he instructs to “let the name of Jesus adhere to your breath, and then you will know the blessings of stillness.”^[170] He expands on this instruction:

If you really wish to cover your-evil droughts with shame, to be still and calm, and to watch over your heart without hindrance, let the Jesus Prayer cleave to your breath, and in a few days you will find that this is possible.^[171]

An important practical consideration regarding the attaching of the Name of Jesus to the breath is being careful not to force the breath or tighten the body. It is very easy to generate tension through one’s attempt at trying to concentrate on the Prayer. This subtle tension functions to deflect the mind from concentration. And although many think of concentration as a kind of eyebrow knitting, such “eyebrow knitting” actually funnels the body’s energy away from the task at hand. Whether this is a subtle restriction of breathing, a slight tightening of the throat, or stiffening of the jaw, neck, or shoulders, these accumulated tensions drain physiological energy and make long term sustainability of the prayer almost impossible. Long-term tension weakens the body and decreases the mind’s ability to function properly, and itself functions as a kind of psychic noise which pushes away noetic silence. The labor of asceticism is hard

enough without all that wasted effort. It is in this way that one falls prey to one's "own forces," as St. Gregory of Sinai teaches:

The origin and cause of thoughts lies in the splitting up, by man's transgression, of his single and simple memory, which has thus lost the memory of God and, becoming multiple instead of simple, and varied instead of single, has fallen a prey to its own forces.

[\[172\]](#)

Therefore, to unite the mind by connecting the prayer with the breath, one is assisted greatly by first knowing and being sensitive to the breath such that one may connect the prayer with it effectively. This is developed by spending time with the breath, hours even, simply learning to let the breath breathe.

As one begins to connect the Jesus Prayer with the breathing, it is helpful to begin by simply letting the inhale begin and *then* attaching the prayer to it as the breath is drawn in. The same goes for the exhale: let the breath begin to go out and *then* attach the prayer to it, making sure that the exhale is accompanied by a sense of release of any built up tension. The very prayer itself follows this pattern if, say, one breathes in "Lord Jesus Christ," and breathes out "have mercy on me." Without requiring any effort of will we breathe in due to the sovereign grace of the Lord, and as we exhale we surrender (bodily this means to release tension) our life into His hands as the Great Physician of our souls. (Remember, the prayer presupposes His presence and not His absence, His willingness and not His unwillingness.) In this way one functionally connects the Jesus Prayer with the breath.

At times, simply praying the prayer a single time with a general awareness of the breath will be an accomplishment. As the mind grows accustomed to this, however, one may "tie" the syllables of the prayer to the breath. By this is meant that each consonant of the prayer can act almost as if it were a subtle pulse within the breath, and each vowel simply part of the flow of the air. This binds the prayer to the breath, and greatly increases concentration. One

might start simply with one consonant, progress to two, and so on until the entire prayer is woven into the breath.

It is also important to note that the Jesus Prayer is not opposed to silence of the mind. Christ Jesus is the “Word which came forth from silence,”^[173] and so His Name is not other than the divine silence. Practically speaking, the silence of the mind refers negatively to the silence of extraneous thought and passionate motion, and refers positively to the Presence that reveals itself only after all else has settled into quiescence. Of course, there is a further silence in which even the Prayer becomes quiescent. At this point the prayer is stripped of its verbal sign and becomes a naked stirring towards God in stillness. As St. Theophan the Recluse teaches, “The power is not in the words, but in the thoughts and feelings.”^[174] Indeed, “feeling towards God - even without words - is a prayer. Words support and sometimes deepen the feeling.”^[175] In this vein, although less common, there are times or periods in a person’s prayer life in which prayer with words may be almost impossible, and only silence and a stirring towards God will be available. This is perfectly acceptable, although the element of ceaseless attentiveness is necessary and ought to remain.

Speaking of the manner in which the prayer is prayed, the prayer can be said in at least five ways: It can be sung or chanted, it can be spoken aloud, it can be whispered, it can be said silently but with movement of the tongue, and, as already mentioned, it can be said silently without movement of the tongue. The prayer can also be connected with the physical movement of bowing and prostration, uniting the prayer with both the movements and the breath, inhaling up and crossing oneself, and exhaling as one bows or descends to the floor. For example, inhaling while making the sign of the Cross, “Lord” is silently said while touching the forehead, “Je-” is silently said while touching the naval, “-sus” is silently said while touching the right shoulder, “Christ” is silently said while touching the left shoulder. Then, exhaling and descending, “have” is silently said; “mercy” is silently said when placing the hands on the ground; “on” is silently said when the knees touch the floor; “me” is silently said

when the forehead touches the floor. Rising and inhaling, one begins again. As Theoliptos taught:

Do not neglect prostration. It provides an image of man's fall into sin and expresses the confession of our sinfulness. Getting up, on the other hand, signifies repentance and the promise to lead a life of virtue. Let each prostration be accompanied by a noetic invocation of Christ, so that by falling before the Lord in soul and body you may gain the grace of the God of souls and bodies. [\[176\]](#)

In order to connect the prayer with the breath more readily, to enter as it were into the words, it is helpful to lengthen them as they are being mentally recited. St. Ignatius Brianchaninov teaches that “one must utter the words with extreme slowness, so that the mind will have time to mold itself to the words.”[\[177\]](#) The mind gets absorbed into the words by being filled with them. This method of slowing the words down helps one to “enclose” one’s thoughts in the words of the prayer, entering into them “as into forms.”[\[178\]](#)

Ceaseless prayer is as simple as constantly invoking the Name of Jesus, whether vocally or mentally. Above all it must be understood that it is the action of grace which moves the act of prayer, which is to say that prayer is the presence of God’s saving activity moving the soul to call out to Him. Accustoming oneself to this practice is thus of inestimable benefit, for it is the ceaseless posture of receptivity and inclination towards God. All of Christianity is contained in this practice, as it cleanses one from all defilement of body and soul. It must not be said merely mechanically, but with attentiveness to the words and conscious awareness of the Lord’s presence. The connection that ceaseless prayer has with watchfulness and stillness adds a crucial dimension to the practice for, on the one hand, without watchfulness one simply prays as if undoing with the left hand what one has just accomplished with the right, and, on the other hand, without stillness one prays as if trying to scale a sheer cliff with no hand-holds. Prayer directs the mind

Godward, watchfulness preserves the mind from being captured by distracting thoughts and passions, and stillness provides a place of peace wherein one can attend to the prayer more fully so as to commune with God in interior silence.

To have saving faith in Christ is to have been grasped by Christ. Therefore, one can and even ought to say the Jesus Prayer with faith that He is presently saving. The action of saying the prayer and the action of God's saving are coterminous, for His saving grace moves the praying itself. One must shift the framework of effort from self-effort to dependent-effort, from self-power to Thou-power, from self-salvation (an impossibility!) to "God my Savior." It is His working in you, working grace in you, faith in you, life in you, that emerges as praying prayer. Prayer is thus a holy activity whose ultimate origin is found in God, and as a human activity it emerges through the freely trusting heart, and those who are trusting in Him and thus calling on Him are in those very actions receiving Him and being saved by Him, for "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13). Not merely a final stage, it is this *unio mystica* with Christ that effects both prayer and salvation, "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

Where even does the saying of the Jesus Prayer come from? Where does the desire, nay, that holy passion, to call on the Name of the Lord come from? It comes from the unfolding of grace in the heart, the energy and power of God's righteous compassion working to draw out this prayer from the lips of His children. Therefore, never say that the Prayer merely emerges from the personal will, for who would call unless they heard the Gospel, whose essence is the Name? As St. Paul declares: "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" (Rom 10:14) And so, having heard the Gospel is to have received the power of God (*δύναμις θεοῦ*), for the Gospel is "the power of God (*δύναμις θεοῦ*) unto salvation" (Romans 1:16), as St. Paul also teaches. And as he further states: "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being

saved it is the power of God (*δύναμις θεοῦ*)" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Thus it is not self-power but divine power that works in the soul of the believer, and that manifests as the holy passion to pray the Jesus Prayer without ceasing. In short, the power of God (*δύναμις θεοῦ*) energizes the Prayer.

The essence of the Orthodox conception of synergy is revealed here, for synergy does not mean: $1 + 1 = 2$, which is to say: God's energy plus man's energy equals salvation. No, it is $1 \times 1 = 1$, that is, God's energy in man plus man's freely willing cooperation with that divine energy equals Salvation: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). As St. John of Kronstadt puts it: "I myself am nothing, the Lord does everything."^[179] Self-will is therefore not a second principle constituting synergy, but a *cooperating* and *subordinate* principle constituting synergy, one where the will receives grace and freedom and so consequently acts freely with the energy supplied by God. The free will actions are therefore empowered with what might be called Other power, and so in praying the Jesus Prayer one believes "that not a single word is placed there in vain, that every one of them has its power, that in each word dwells the Holy Trinity the Lord Himself."^[180]

Of this paradox of man's free will, St. John of Kronstadt speaks:

The human soul is a free power, for it can become either a power for good or evil, according to the direction which you yourself give it. Lord, Almighty Power! strengthen mine infirm soul in every virtue! Stabilish my heart, weak for everything good, upon the immovable rock of Thy commandments! Lord, I daily recognise, through experience, that without Thee I myself am nothing; that without Thee I can do no good; without Thee evil in its various forms is alone within me: without Thee I am the son of perdition.^[181]

Notice that there are three aspects mentioned as being simultaneous: (1) the free power of the soul, (2) nothingness apart

from the Lord, and (3) that without the Lord no good can be accomplished, only evil. Thus St. John of Kronstadt states elsewhere:

Say inwardly, from your whole heart: "The Lord is everything to me; I myself am nothing; I am powerless, I am infirm." "For without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5), says the Lord Himself, for it might be added: "I am everything to you." Be heartily convinced of this every moment of your life, and have recourse to the Lord absolutely in everything, trusting to obtain from Him everything necessary for your salvation, and even for this temporal life besides. [\[182\]](#)

Thus free will is not a second, co-equal principle of synergy, but a receptive organ of the will of God, where synergy is man's grace-born cooperation with God's grace. Of this paradox St. Theophan the Recluse teaches:

Grace will not lend any help without our own efforts, nor can our own efforts do anything lasting without God's grace. It is the union of freedom and grace that accomplishes the task. Do not ask which is larger, which smaller; which one begins, which follows, because we cannot comprehend this. Both are equally important, for one can do nothing in us without the other. [\[183\]](#)

In other words, there is an essential mystery at work in synergy. To ask which is larger or smaller, first or second, is to fail to approach the question in light of its existential reality. The question is not asking who is prior, God or man, nor is it asking who initiates salvation, God or man, for clearly God is prior to man and initiates man's salvation. In questions about the will, however, it is certain that great effort is required, but grace is also an absolute requisite to all great effort. Grace fuels great effort, but does not obviate the need for great effort, though great effort depends on grace for its activity. They are coterminous in man's experience, for grace acts upon the

will, awakening it upon contact. Effort requires energy, and the energy of effort is the energy of grace, the power of God, but energy without activity is a contradiction in terms for grace is not a potential energy but a spiritually kinetic energy. Grace unlocks the will, but the unlocking of the will is a free choosing of God, and so the grace of unlocking the will and the free action of choosing God coincide. Just as having something revealed is simultaneous to the seeing of what is revealed, so what is revealed by the Other is something seen by the self. Revealing is God's action; seeing is man's action. Likewise, the action of God's grace upon the soul coincides with the free will's looking to God. In this way grace, as an energy, does not compel, but propels. St. Theophan further instructs:

The labor is definitely our own, but the fruits are produced by God's grace. Grace is already present in man from the moment of conversion and reception of the sacraments of baptism or repentance, but it enters his essence and penetrates all his faculties only after his own intense efforts. When a person does all he can, then grace comes and accomplishes that which is beyond his strength. To graft commandments to the heart to such an extent that they will permanently dwell there and direct the heart itself - this is the doing of God's grace. No matter how he may try, man cannot do it on his own. Thus, with all man's efforts, the transformation of the heart is achieved through grace and through grace alone. Here is the substantial difference between a Christian and a pagan. [\[184\]](#)

Notice that grace is *already present in man from the moment of conversion*. It is this energy which supplies the energy for effort, and it further supplies the transformation. Man supplies great effort, but considered in themselves his efforts are not saving. Man cannot look to his efforts for any hope of salvation, only to God, for everything man does towards salvation is merely his duty: "So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'" (Luk 17:10). In this

way it is not man saving himself, and man does not save himself merely with God's help. That would be a contradiction in terms. God alone is the Savior, and at all points God receives the glory, for of fallen man it is such that, "with his own effort alone he will not succeed in anything."^[185] This is further confirmed when St. Theophan states:

When God's grace awakens him, then the first movements of spiritual life begin; and when, having repented, he decided to live according to God's commandments, the life itself begins.^[186]

In other words, to live according to God comes from God, and looks to God as its means and end. The great effort of the free will thus receives, through faith, all that it needs for its intense activity, and because of this it is enabled to surrender the will rather than flex the will, to not look to the will of self but to the will of God, with "dependence on Him in every respect."^[187] This kind of effort sounds paradoxical to the fallen mind, but it is the manner in which God's strength is revealed in the weakness of men, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:25). For in us "we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Otherwise failure must result from all self-effort considered as such, for:

You exert yourself and sweat, but to no avail. All this is from willfulness, self-reliance, and a false sense of ability based on one's own self and not upon God.^[188]

This is to say, all righteous action must flow from the conscience that is "already enlightened and enlivened by the light of the Gospel and God's grace."^[189] In short, "the real work begins only now, when Thou art doing it, not I."^[190] As long as "I" am working, I am not fully surrendered. In other words, God alone is the true Savior, and the great effort of man's free will cannot rightly be attributed to man. In

his free acts of virtue man is still dependent on grace, not grace on man.^[191] As St. Theophan teaches of one who has repented:

He who has reached this state professes that God is acting in him, both in what he wants and what he does, and when he acts he says: *Not I, but the grace of God which was with me* (1 Corinthians 15:10).^[192]

The foregoing is essential to a discussion of the Jesus Prayer because in the Jesus Prayer is the power of God unto salvation. To pray the Jesus Prayer is to participate in the energy of His salvation, which is to say with Jesus Himself, our Salvation. To say the Jesus Prayer is to trust in His mercy. We are not praying for an absent salvation, an absent mercy, but are engaging in the activity of Salvation as it mercifully works and unfolds itself as the Prayer. As St. Ignatius Brianchaninov states, “the only true Doer of Christianity is Christ Himself.”^[193] This is the essence of Christian faith, of true entrusting.

Otherwise, salvation is individualistic, for as much as we believe that we are saving ourselves by our practice of Christianity, by our faith, prayers, and virtues, to that degree we are trusting in our own powers for salvation. As St. Ignatius Brianchaninov also states:

The works of salvation are the works of faith, the works of the New Testament. These deeds are performed not by human knowledge, not by human will, but by the will of the all-holy God.^[194]

It is the power of God that moves us to faith, and even moves us to pray, and so to pray the Jesus Prayer is to be within the sphere of the saving power and activity of Christ.^[195] Christ accomplishes our salvation, and the saying of the Prayer is Christ’s accomplishment, His grace unfolding as the Prayer, His eternal life in you welling up as the Prayer. This is the great effort of the Prayer, Christ’s great effort, for as St. Theophan was just quoted to say, *the real work*

begins only now, when Thou art doing it, not I. And as he further teaches elsewhere:

The production of Divine communion is brought about by the grace of the Holy Spirit. He prepares within us a dwelling, and together with God the Father and God the Son is established within us. Just how is this dwelling prepared?

The Divine Spirit acts secretly upon our spirit and sets it in motion. Our spirit, set in motion, recollects within itself its natural Divine knowledge that God exists, maintains everything, and is the Rewarder. The consciousness of this gives rise to a feeling of complete dependence on God, and enkindles the fear of God. [\[196\]](#)

In other words, salvation is not accomplished through our own devices, our self-originated effort. It is God's energy in the spirit, manifesting as faith, as the fear of God, and therefore as the products of these, such as prayer, and especially as the Jesus Prayer, as virtue, as obedience to the Commandments, and so on. [\[197\]](#)

It is all His, and all the glory is God's alone. In this way, then, it is clear that theosis is God's action in the soul. Theosis is God's work, and not the product of man's individual will. Genuine faith and prayer are not generated by human will. Man's will cooperates with God's will, synergizes with God's will. Prayer and faith thus emerge together as the working of God in the soul. Through hearing the Gospel, which itself is summed up in the Name of Jesus, which is to say being interfused with the power of God unto salvation, faith emerges in the heart and confession from the lips, and so one calls on the Name of the Lord in prayer as moved by the grace of God. Faith is awakened thus in the soul's being penetrated by the power of God communicated in the Gospel - God's covenant of salvation in His blood rising as trust in the heart. In this light, the Jesus Prayer said in faith is not a mere ordinary human act but an act given by God and arising as the entrusting heart, as the life of God moving

outward from the soul to the lips as the Prayer of the heart. Ceaseless prayer is the ceaseless activity of the Spirit of Christ moving the heart in prayer to Jesus.

A Brief Method of Proceeding

To begin, one sits or stands in a place that is devoted to prayer, such as a prayer corner or some other suitable, quiet place. Once in place, one establishes one's intention, becoming clearly aware of what one aims to do, which is to be attentive to God and self, to become still, to watch the breath, and to be attentive to what is happening in the space of the mind and body. This may sound like diverse things, but as one accustoms themselves to practice, it will become clear that these all fold into a single activity.

When beginning prayer, as one prayer book states: "pause a moment, until all thy senses are calmed and thy thoughts forsake all things earthly."^[198] At this point, after having said the usual beginning prayers,^[199] one simply begins to say the Jesus Prayer attentively, over and over, renewing attention to God and the ceaseless entrusting of oneself to His saving power with each prayer, trusting that His saving power is present and working in you even to enable you to pray.

Pray thus for fifteen to thirty minutes, increasing the time only as one grows accustomed to the discipline, seeking consistency of months and years rather than sheer count of hours. Steadiness of practice bears far greater fruit when over a longer time than rapid increase does with little stability. If you find an inability to sustain a longer practice, then shorten it, and if the desire to increase the time remains steady, do not increase hastily, but patiently add time as the Spirit leads. Consistency, however, is the only real measure of "progress."

All of the foregoing, moreover, presuppose a regular life in the Church. This includes regular participation in the Liturgical schedule of one's parish, regular Confession and frequent Communion, a good relationship with one's priest, and being a supportive and non-judgmental presence in one's parish. Despite the

presence of many faithful hermits in the history of the Church, there is yet no such thing as a lone Christian.

5. Theoria: The Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation

There are three levels of knowledge to be considered here, the conceptual (i.e. dogmatic or doctrinal), the experiential, and the actual (or perfected). The beginning of knowledge is typically conceptual. This introduces a truth, and provides rational access to what it contains. Without experience of what the concept points to, however, conceptual truth ends up creating a holographic illusion of depth. Experience is required for knowledge to move beyond the merely conceptual. The Gospel, for example, is not simply a conceptual truth, but a truth to be experienced and lived out. St. Paul stated “It is no longer I who live” (Galatians 2:20), and not only at the conceptual level but also at the experiential level. He wrote from experience, from knowing himself at the experiential level as crucified with Christ, and not only experientially, for experiential knowledge is not entirely stable. In order for knowledge to reach its pinnacle in man he must make it fully actual in such a way that it becomes known not only at the conceptual and experiential levels but at the depth level as part of his renewed nature and, if you will, spiritual instinct. This actualization or perfection of knowledge, which is to say its embodiment, is therefore the substance of theosis.

There are an endless number of radical, perception altering insights that a person may experience in the cultivation and unfolding of theosis. When the spirit of wisdom and revelation illuminate the nous, a kind of knowledge arises that is distinguishable from knowledge derived merely from rational inference. For example, a person can logically deduce that they are a fallen human person,

and yet have no experiential knowledge of the immediacy of their passions. They have rational knowledge, but no insight knowledge, and so their ability to make progress in sanctification will be limited and hampered to the degree that they lack experiential insight into the reality of their existential predicament. The transformation of one's fundamental perception at the depth level is required.

Usually translated as *repentance*, the Greek term for the requisite transformation is *metanoia*, and is a combination *meta* and *nous*, and as such refers to a transformation of the nous at the depth level. It is not merely a superficial change of mind like, say, the realization that one ought to take vitamins, or that one actually enjoys classical music, but is rather a profound inner renewal of one's most basic perceptual orientation. It is renewal and regeneration of the very mind and spirit of the inner man unto a new man.^[200] It is composed of two essential motions, one *away*, and one *towards*.

The first movement, the movement away, is the movement away from sin, but since what is being talked about is a transformation of the mind at the depth level, here the away motion of metanoia means a fundamental realization of the sinfulness of sin, an existential insight into the evil of it, its harm to oneself and others, the radically harmful nature of ignorance, delusion, and passion, and a vivid awareness of their presence in the psychosomatic totality of one's own person. This can be sudden and shocking, and it can also be slow and progressive.

The second movement, the movement towards, is a movement towards God. Again, since this refers to the mind, it refers to the radical realization of the fundamental truth of God's existence, the necessity of God for one's life and being, a recognition of the reality of His presence, the power of His truth and love, the ontological importance of His justice and mercy, and an earnest desire for and pursuit of His light and glory. The entire spiritual life can be understood as metanoia, and as such it has the qualities of being both a singular event and an ongoing process.

In order to come to real transformative insight, the practice of stillness, watchfulness, and prayer are employed in order to bring

one into states of increasing peace, clarity, and connection, i.e. receptivity to God. This experience of deepening communion can be further deepened by grace into a state of *theoria*. The experience of *theoria* is a special state produced by grace, of varying levels of intensity, that moves the nous into the experience, primarily, of divine intimacy or communion, and, secondarily, insight into the truth. In this sense *theoria* serves as both end and means. As an end, such intimate communion with God is in itself good and self-justifying. As a means, the purpose or function of *theoria* is to illuminate the nous so that it transforms the psychosomatic unity that is man more fully and thoroughly into the divine likeness. This experience of *theoria* thus enables the nous to have profoundly transformative insight and penetrating knowledge into the nature of reality, self, and God.

Although there are countless, the present chapter will discuss four interrelated principle subjects of insight that are part of theosis, and like metanoia they each have a negative and a positive aspect. The relation or movement from the negative to the positive is analogous to weaning, where the negative insight dislodges the nous from deeply held fallen convictions about the nature of God, reality, and self, and where the positive insight re-establishes the nous to a theological or revelational frame of reference, one that is not immediately available to the senses or to fallen man's intuition. These two motions are foundational for theosis.

Impermanence - Providence

The first insight, negatively, is an insight into the complete impermanence of phenomenal reality. Everything is constantly in flux, and there are no permanent created handholds, so to speak, for the nous to rest or rely on. This negative insight, easily understood intellectually but so easily misunderstood experientially, liberates a person from existentially looking for any permanence in any phenomenal construct, whether it be a job, a spouse, a forest, or the entire planet. Also there are no permanent psychological states, no permanent feelings, moods, or thoughts. Moreso, one's very

biological status is constantly changing, and there is nothing in one's physical being that is permanent or reliable. This is part of the impetus for the Fathers' consistent urging of the meditation on death. All things are changing, all things are passing away, for all things are subject to arising and passing away, even at the sub-atomic level. By seeing into this clearly with penetrative insight, one no longer seeks to find rest in the objects of the senses or in idealized moods or fleeting thoughts, or in psychological or biological states.

The positive aspect of this insight, which is distinct but necessarily connected, is the deeply experiential insight into the nature of God's providence. Although there is absolutely nothing phenomenal that is unchanging or fundamentally stable, God's hand, which is to say His unchanging power and purpose, is yet operating throughout all things. This insight allows one to - at all moments - intuitively accept phenomenal reality in terms of faith in the unseen operations of God. God acts in and through all that exists, for all live, move, and have their being in God (Acts 17:28). Through this insight one is set free to trust in an impermanent environment the permanent goodness of God such that one is not bound by appearances and circumstances, but lives at all moments as if before God's very face, which is to say a sense of His presence. This moves providence from a doctrinal conviction to an actual sense about the movement and activities within one's environment.

Without the negative insight, one's view of providence will always strive against the fallen intuition that there is some permanent state of blessed circumstances, whether of abundance, promotion, or health. One's view of providence will degrade into a kind of assumption of worldly benefit. And so, rather than seeing all events as being ordained for the sake of holiness, instead a permanent flow of good experiences will be seen as the sign of God's blessing and provision. Change will be a source of anxiety, trust will be for continued security, and prayer directed towards God's fixing of one's circumstances. With the negative insight, however, hope will not be placed in any material circumstance, including life and health, and so change will not be a source of any anxiety. Without the positive insight into providence, however, the constant

flux of materiality can lead to nihilism, apathy, and hopelessness. Events will not be oriented towards a larger purpose, but will instead simply be perceived as a directionless series of causes and effects hanging in an empty space. With the positive insight emerging from theoria, however, and together with the negative insight into the impermanence of created reality, the changing nature of events will not be a source of either anxiety or hope, but instead will function as a sign of God's provision for the growth and progress of holiness and the exercise of a love that is not dependent on the presence or absence of preferred circumstances.

Suffering - Contentment

A second insight, negatively, is into the dissatisfactory nature of phenomenal reality. Man is created with eternity in his heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11), and so nothing other than eternity, which is to say God, can satisfy it. Only the God who inhabits eternity can satisfy man's thirst for infinity (cf. Isaiah 57:15). Without God, nothing satisfies, but with God nothing needs to satisfy. The radical, experiential insight into the radically insufficient ability of created things, people, or events to provide contentment is thus necessary to interrupt fallen man's primal urge to find infinite satisfaction in anything created. Creation is neither bad nor evil, but good, and yet all created things have a purpose for which they are created, and none of these things are created to fully or completely satisfy the heart of man. This insight into the radically insufficient nature of created reality to be a source of peace or joy liberates man seeking for those things in it.

The positive, corresponding insight into the radically dissatisfactory nature of created reality is that of contentment. Contentment is the positive state of peace which exists in the presence of impermanent and unsatisfactory created elements. It is impossible to be content when happiness is made to depend on created reality, but when a person has been liberated from seeking

fulfillment in created elements by seeing their radical inability to provide it, then the nous is freed to be content in the world:

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned (μανθάνω) in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know (εἶδω) how to be abased, and I know (εἶδω) how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned (μυέω) both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens (ἐνδυναμόω) me. (Philippians 4:11-13)

St. Paul is not teaching merely an ideal; he is speaking from insight knowledge (μυέω) into the inner nature of reality, where he through learning (μανθάνω) no longer confuses circumstances with contentment. He has learned (μυέω), has gained insight knowledge (σύνεσις), understood at the depth level, experienced through the Spirit a revelation (ἀποκάλυψις) of the mystery (μυστήριον) of Christ (cf. Ephesians 3:3-4), that contentment does not and cannot come from one's state or condition in the material world, but only in Christ who strengthens (ἐνδυναμόω) him "by the effective working of His power" (κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, Ephesians 3:7). Whether abased or abounding, hungry or suffering need, he has learned and so knows how to be content. In and through the gift of Christ, being established in the negative insight makes it possible to release one's deathgrip on the senses and on circumstances, and the positive insight allows for authentic contentment to be had in the face of all that the senses and circumstances make present to the senses.

Without the negative insight into the nature of suffering, which is to say the inability of created reality to truly satisfy, then one's spirituality will always be striving against the fallen intuition that materiality ought to be a source of satisfaction and peace. Contentment will remain unstable because the soul will not be able to truly accept hunger and abasement. It will learn how to fast, but it will not be able to go beyond mere toleration or the ambition for

personal gain. Since created reality cannot provide peace, being that it is not designed to, the negative insight into suffering allows for equanimity in relation to circumstances.

Without the positive insight into contentment in God, however, the truth of suffering can empty contentment of any joy in the celebration of creation. Whereas providence points more to the sense of created things participating in a transcendental or cosmic meaning, divine contentment points more to a deep satisfaction that attains in relation to created things and circumstances while not yet relying on them for identity, meaning, or peace. In other words, without the positive insight into contentment, the joy of holding a newborn baby, the beauty of a sunset, or the successful completion of a difficult and virtuous project, would not be experienced as goodness manifesting in things, for only its inability to be a source of abiding satisfaction would have prominence. Where the truth of suffering allows for equanimity in the face of the ultimate inability of creation to truly satisfy, contentment, which is to say independence of external circumstances, moves into positive engagement with creation. It is not insensitivity to circumstances but rather the skillful relation of self with them.

Apophatic Self - Being In Christ

A third insight, in its negative form, is the radical insight into the fact that no thought of self, no feeling of self, no theory of self, no moment of self, no memory of self, is self. Self is subject, not object. One's self cannot be found in any thing. For no matter how long a person searches, the existential self will never reveal itself as an object of contemplation. The self thus forever remains mysterious, and is beyond all thinking and all theorization. No matter how true the thought or theory, nothing encountered as a thought can be the self. This is startling because a person is raised to associate their identity with thoughts, memories, talent, family, society, culture, health, ability, job, etc., and yet absolutely none of these things are self. All of these are happening, but there is no self in them. There is

absolutely no ground for a self in any perceived phenomenon. This insight liberates the nous from seeking to ground itself either in the soul's own products (such as thoughts, emotions, sensations, memory, personality, etc.) or in the products of society (understood broadly to include family, genetics, country, culture, etc.). The self remains mysterious and elusive to all these, existentially prior to them, and cannot be reduced to any of them. This insight can be termed an existential apophaticism. It frees man from endlessly seeking to establish or defend his arbitrary persona, and serves as the authentic ground of humility, for as pride means being "full of oneself," so humility means being "empty of oneself," seeing the emptiness of oneself, for to become humble one must see through the constructed self by touching the apophatic self. This insight is related to what is meant by "poverty of spirit," and to what St. Gregory of Sinai calls "self-belittlement," which is to say the profound awareness that one is nothing. ^[201]

Not in self, the positive insight that follows this *theologia crucis* is that one is *in Christ*. The cataphatic ground of self is not in self, nor in Adam, nor in the world, but only in Christ. Man is made in God's image, and reborn kenotically, which is to say self-emptyingly, in Christ, and so at the root of man's being is not an icon of himself, but of God, Christ, in whose image we are being renewed. This is the insight knowledge that puts off the old man and puts on the new:

You have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge (ἐπίγνωσις) according to the image (εἰκὼν) of Him who created him, (Colossians 3:9-10)

By this positive insight knowledge one is renewed according to the image of Christ, putting on an entirely new framework of perception:

Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. (Colossians 3:11)

This is not merely a novel theoretical model, but a deeply transformed perspective that realigns one's entire relationship with reality. This developing insight is what drives the process of theosis. St. Paul is thus not speaking in merely ideological terms, but in a knowledge that was wed to his soul through grace-born insight that changed the very way reality is perceived and conceived.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

It is important to recall and keep recalling that St. Paul was speaking from experience. In baptism one is crucified with Christ, buried with Christ, resurrected with Christ, and raised to sit with the ascended Christ at the right hand of the Father, and through insight knowledge gleaned in the skillful use of stillness and watchfulness unto *theoria* this sacramentally realized truth is actualized in the transformed nous. The very spirit of the nous is renewed.

Be renewed in the spirit (*πνεῦμα*) of your mind (*νοῦς*), 24 and... put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:23-24)

Extending the Field of Apophatic Insight

There is a similar coordinated negative and positive insight, intimately related to the insight that the self is not grounded in itself but in God, that likewise nothing in all of creation is grounded in itself but in God. Each *logoi* is grounded in the *Logos*, and therefore the *metanoia* that results from *theoria* includes the intuitive perception, an actual sense, that all things immediately depend for life and being on God. In other words, to look at a thing or a person is to see them in the light of their dependent relation on God. This moves beyond the sense of Providence as the divine ordering of things and events,

and so to the things themselves. As St. Paul states of the Father regarding His Son, that He has:

In these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Hebrews 1:2-3)

It is through the Logos that all the worlds were made, and it is by the divine power of the Logos that all things are upheld. To the Colossians St. Paul states even more comprehensively of Christ, that:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist (*συνιστάω*). (Colossians 1:15-17)

Not only is this true as doctrine, but it is also St. Paul's divinely inspired and experiential insight into the true nature of Christ, that He is the source and telos of reality, and that in the transcendental reality of Christ all things hold together (*συνιστάω*). St. Paul thus did not merely speculate or theorize that this is true; he was made by grace to *seeingly* know it through the illumination of his nous in the framework of theoria:

that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both

which are in heaven and which are on earth - in Him.
(Ephesians 1:10)

Without a revelatory insight into the apophatic dimension of self and reality, one will constantly be forced to bind self and reality to cataphatic mental projections. Seeing oneself as *in Christ* will thus inevitably suffer from a distorted view of the projected “self” that is *in Christ*. This will functionally make peace and trust impossible because one will never be able to let go, to rest in God, for the effort to maintain the projected identity cannot abate without sensing the total annihilation of that self, and so because of this confusion of the self with self-image there is a subtle fear that one will disappear in the act of surrender. Too many Christians see themselves in Christ while still seeing too much of themselves. They seek to grasp both Christ and self, and fear letting go of mental projections and false identities. Of course, the false identity is deconstructed in total surrender, but rather than annihilation, in Christ a fuller, more real self emerges. Likewise, without the apophatic insight, created reality will take on a dualistic, deistic light, and loom as a Manichean project that must either submit to man in the name of God or be abandoned as fundamentally flawed and evil. On the other hand, if one has an apophatic insight into self and reality, but not seeing oneself or the world in Christ, one will tend towards quietism and disengagement, and fall into the false idea that there really is no self at all.

Effort - Grace

A fourth revelatory insight that is pivotal in spiritual life regards the radical insufficiency of efforts and techniques in the light of the powerful presence of the energy of grace. The negative insight reveals the reality that all efforts in spiritual discipline are incommensurate with the activity of grace when it manifests. In other words, insofar as prayer can be considered a natural activity, a person could pray for aeons, but that prayer in and of itself will not produce anything. A person may do billions of bows, trillions of prostrations, and pray countless rounds of the Jesus Prayer, but in

and of themselves these will not effect any fundamental change in oneself, nor make one worthy of His love.^[202] As St. David sings:

Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain
who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the
watchman stays awake in vain. (Psalm 127:1)

The insight that effort is utterly useless of itself to acquire grace liberates man from a lifetime of labor undertaken under the false premise that standing, sitting, serving, chanting, fasting, praying, confessing, and/or obeying in this, that, or any other configuration will make one right with God. This insight therefore frees the soul from spiritual self-aggrandizement and/or frustrated bargaining with God, makes authentic humility possible, and also enables the right use of effort for the things for which effort is fitted and required. The conscience, moreover, breathes as if for the first time, for it now realizes at the experiential level that grace comes in the energy of God's own freedom and sovereignty, and so it is no longer a question of whether or not one has been failing at technique and effort, for one did not earn the grace in the first place, nor receive it as a reward in any direct correlation to said techniques or efforts. Spiritual effort is, rather, only required insofar as it is a posture of humble trust and dependence, and without trust and dependence one will simply not be positioned to receive what God freely gives.

The positive insight into grace, known at the depth level of the soul and body, is a nigh palpable experience of the presence of God in the power of His freedom, for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17). Not only are efforts perceived to be comparatively insignificant in this light, and certainly are not levers of grace, but God is seen to accomplish far more in His free grace than the will ever hoped to achieve in its feeble efforts at trying to perfect oneself or draw near to Him. God is known in His overflowing and intimate relationality and kenotic Self-giving, and this "God of all grace" is seen as All-Attractive, All-Sweet, and All-Compelling. In this vein, St. Peter prays:

May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. (1 Peter 5:10)

In other words, it is God who perfects, establishes, strengthens, and settles the Christian soul, and the experience of this “God of all grace” really moves beyond words, because His presence of itself is known as All-Sufficient. The very method of victory is revealed here, for the victory is not seen as a progressive development and enlargement of self and will, but a progressive entrusting dependence on God. He does it all, and this excludes even the hint of cheap grace because God does not inspire inactivity. In this light, one is freed to run with greater freedom the life of faith, because prior to grace one depended on one’s own strength as a source of life and salvation. One tried to do God’s will rather than let God’s will be done. Here one learns the secret of the Garden of Gethsemane: “Not My will, but Thy will be done.” In other words, man is not victorious by adding his will to God’s will as if they were two parallel lines, but by surrendering his will to allow God’s will to rule in and through him. All further effort can truly begin with a right understanding, reducing a tremendous amount of wasted psychological motion.

Although certainly many more transforming insights could be given, whether the radicality of sin, the reality of spiritual warfare, or something else, the foregoing four ought to give an adequate idea of the nature and necessity of having a mind thoroughly transformed by the presence of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Simply knowing about the truth, having the history and system of Orthodox theology worked out, and being able to prove the existence of God to the most ardent skeptic, as valuable as they may be, none of them equal a mind transformed by Christ or a heart indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This transformation moves the mind from the theoretical and conceptual to the experiential and actual. Watchfulness, stillness, and ceaseless prayer act as catalysts in this process, assisting the

mind to be dehabituated from fallen modes of perception and the schema of this world so that the light of Christ can truly guide the perception of the mind rendered docile to the movement and guidance of the Spirit. Theosis then becomes not so much a distant goal but a necessary way of living according to Christ while in the fallen world.

6. Conclusion

Theosis is both an act of God in man and an endeavor of man in God. True Christian life is the manifestation of heaven on earth, the bringing of heaven into the sphere of human activity. In order to achieve this true Christian life, the power and influence of the Holy Spirit must operate through one's personality. One's personality must become heavenly. Theosis is precisely this process of becoming heavenly.

Many say that "they are who they are," that their personality is as if set in stone, and that they've always been the way they are. The problem, according to Orthodox Christian teaching, is that that is not a true belief, and is even a form of self-deception. In fact, in regeneration God makes us new people, shaped according to His image: "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Colossians 3:9-10). We are to live in a renewed way, in the same way Jesus lives, with truth and love in every word and gesture. It is thus not true that our personalities are set in stone.

God promises: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). Our whole personality is to be one of peace and joy, righteousness and mercy. In order to accomplish this, one must say Yes to God definitively, and acquire and be filled with the Holy Spirit. The heart is our central organ, and all of our life flows from our heart. To internalize the Holy Spirit then means to have Him living inside your heart in such a way that you live His Life through your life. It means doing everything with Jesus in your heart and mind. Theosis is the promise that this is possible and practicable.

It is my solemn prayer that the foregoing has provided fuel for your holy efforts, and that the connection between the theory and practice of the Christian life is more clear. Too often I have seen the Christian life, both in myself and others, reduced merely to a kind of ascetical perfectionism, mystical impressionism, or moral pietism, and too often I have seen theology wander through trackless spaces of speculation while leaving the soul arid and unchanged. By making clear the place of intersection of theology and life, these dangers may more readily be overcome. We are called to make our life look like our theology, and the way this is accomplished is by God's reigning in us and allowing the Holy Spirit to transform our way of seeing. How we see then transforms how we experience being in the world, of which St. Paul familiarly commands: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Romans 12:2). In other words, the transformation of mind functions through the energy of grace to transform the self in theosis, and this happens by faith through the systematic and intentional practice of watchfulness, stillness, and ceaseless prayer. Now go, be ye transformed!

Appendix

1. On Holy Sorrow

Holy sorrow is not a mood, it is more akin to a posture of soul. Likewise such things as holy love and holy anger. And so it must be stressed that the adjective “holy” is not a mere affectation placed at the front of these terms in order to speak of sanctified moods. The contemporary man's excessively psychologized attitude, however, is so inclined to moodiness that it can be very difficult to internalize this thoroughly. Holy sorrow is a posture or an orientation that stands in relation to sin such that the presence of sin causes one to lament and seek God. It does not mean that one sins and rolls around in the mud of self-abuse and despair. Holy sorrow refers as such parabolically to the prodigal son when he came to his senses and arose to return to his father. It would be utterly false sorrow if he came to his senses and simply stuck his head deeper in the mud and declared that's what he deserves for his sinfulness. The mark of holy sorrow is therefore not its sadness of mood, but its dedicated reorientation towards God upon recognition of the sad state of one's distance from He who is Life.

It must also be said that holy love must precede holy sorrow in the spiritual life, as it is fundamental to it. For it is possible that one simply accepts one's sinful state in such a way that rather than seeking or hoping in God, they rather nihilistically condemn themselves to what they believe they deserve, i.e. hell. Thus their sorrow becomes a sort of cave of lightless justice, where God's love is functionally rejected. This conceals a hidden pride that still tries to stand on the ruin of a belief that one ought to have earned God's love, mercy, and grace. This is decidedly not what the phrase means that one should keep their mind in hell and despair not, for that is not referring to standing without hope of mercy, but to not deluding

oneself that they are anything more than the object of the loving God's mighty grace. It is a reference to radical self-honesty. But if it translates into a posture of self-centered striving or impassioned despair that darken or dim the sense of hope that one has in God, then the meaning of the phrase has been lost. Thus insight into divine love must precede holy sorrow.

Contemporary man is raised to sense that he is worthless, that he is merely a cog in a machine, a blip on a digital display, an accidental mote in a vast, uncaring, and purposeless universe. All his worth is simply held to be a conceit, a false assumption generated by evolution's imperative of survival and held merely as a genetically encoded biological tool. Meaning or value, according to this view, is simply a fabrication that incentivizes reproduction, for man is utterly worthless. Secular, atheistic existentialism even declares that man invents his own meaning, whereas at bottom the man who does this knows that it is just a play of his own mind and will. Thus an intuition of divine love is required as an antidote, the sense that man has been given real and great value, not only that he is made in God's image and likeness, but that God thinks man is worth His own life. Granted, man has wounded and marred his likeness with God, and for that he must lament, but he cannot lament as if he were not made in God's image or as if he were metaphysically worthless. Man is constantly trying to set his own value according to his own standard, and so when fallen man hears of holy sorrow, he strays into feelings that he is ontologically worthless, and that since he deserves hell then it wouldn't be ethical to hope, nor even wish, for heaven; it would even be a form of dishonesty and cowardice to want mercy and salvation. Rather his fallen mind settles to live without any sense of hope or desire for anything but hell, and to see God's justice done.

It should be clear that the foregoing is prideful self-delusion, for it is God who sets man's value at the price of His blood, and so man must surrender his nihilistic pride and accept God's holy love in order to even begin to comprehend holy sorrow. And yet there is no possibility of pridefulness here, for holy love humbles sinful man because it immediately communicates to the soul both its

immeasurable value and the utter undeservedness of the grace that makes it so. This sense of undeservedness is the source of true humility because it is accompanied by the sense of grace and love that also frees and strengthens it to move with faith and hopeful boldness towards God in loving response to His initiative. If one cannot accept that God assigns such value, then they have not yet truly recognized God's grace as revealed in the Gospel.

Thus part of man's healing includes the cultivation of goodwill towards himself. One must have holy love for oneself, wishing for oneself that they succeed in working out their salvation, that they remain strong and increase in faith, that they avoid what is harmful to the soul and body, that they grow in wisdom and virtue, assuring oneself of the truth that in the Cross is displayed the very nature of God's love for "me."

2. On Humility

Humility, being essential, is acquired through self knowledge. What kind of self knowledge, then, produces humility? This question is key because it distinguishes a humility born of a conceptual reflection on man's accidental characteristics, on the one hand, from that born of experiential knowledge of man's very nature, on the other. For example, many will perhaps seek to root humility in a knowledge of personal sinfulness which is itself rooted in the memory of sins. But if personal knowledge of sinfulness is of the essence of humility, then in principle Christ could not be humble. And yet, Christ is both sinless and also the perfection of humility, and such so that He can with absolute truth state: "Take up my yoke and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). Therefore, humility and sin bear no essential relation. As a consequence, the personal *fact* of sinfulness plus the *knowledge* of that sinfulness maintained through the *remembering* of sins cannot be a *sine qua non* of humility, and has no *essential* relation to humility.

The pursuit of humility through the constant sense and remembrance of one's sin and one's tendency to sin can only produce a soulish, temporary imitation of humility, and the intensification of this can never arrive at or produce true, spiritual humility. True and spiritual humility must come from elsewhere and, as St. Nikitas indicates, it comes from self knowledge, actual insight, which is to say "a knowledge of the inner essences of creation and of things both divine and human." In other words, true humility arises from a profound and experiential knowledge of the nature of one's own being, both as human and as fallen. This is to say, one requires revelational insight into one's utter dependence on God for all things, seeing one's ontological inability to live unto oneself or be a source of one's own existence, seeing one's profound foolishness as a fallen human being, and seeing one's incapacity to regenerate oneself or produce saving righteousness apart from God's mercy and grace.

Not only this, true humility means seeing the utter magnificence of God's love towards oneself in the Cross, that His grace seeks out and embraces such fallen and undeserving creatures, that His mercy forgives such radically rebellious humans, and that His compassionate kindness lifts them out of the mire of sin and death. Measuring ourselves we find we must give a zero, but God's measure gives man the infinite value of His Blood. Such living insight into the sheer magnitude of such freely given love cannot but produce humility. In short, humility is a realization of truth. It is the realization of the Gospel. It is not a mood, not an attitude, not a product of self. Nor is it the product of the manipulation of oneself through the psychological stimulation of memories and emotions. Such self-humility is self-righteousness. Rather, authentic humility is insight coming from seeing into one's utterly dependent nature as a piece of wet clay for a body plus a borrowed portion of wind for breath, and not only this but that one is fallen, and not only this but that God gives Himself in love to such fallen mankind. Of course, this seeing ever implies a corresponding insight into God's utter holiness, power, and transcendence.^[203] Such profound realization thus consequently produces the kind of humility which is not a vain and self-centered psychological self-effacement, but a true knowing.

When the Fathers speak of being wretched or self-loathing, it is in the fundamentally metaphysical sense of recognizing human being as fundamentally *ex nihilo*, as radically nothing considered apart from God who is "all in all," and that everything emerging from self as if it were metaphysically autonomous is by nature a corruption and a further distancing from God and the authentic nature of human being. This self-awareness is what holy "self-hatred" means, which likewise is not a mood or an attitude but an insight into God's greatness and man's dependence and fallenness. This insight serves as the ground of true humility, for true humility should never feel heavy with despair or self-cynicism but rather correlated with lightness and freedom. Holy self-hatred and holy self-love are thus not mutually exclusive but mutually necessary. Knowledge of personal sinfulness, i.e. the memory of sins, then accompanies this more fundamental awareness of Almighty God's loving response to the reality of personal human fallenness as a support to the

realization of humility. This allows sinfulness to be known in the heart without soulish distortion, as either false contraction or magnification, or the constant liability to the passion of despair.

Combined in existential tension, then, is knowledge of God in His holy, glorious, and transcendental greatness and goodness, of one's self as a dependent creature, of oneself as fallen, of oneself as sinful, and of God as merciful and gracious. Thus humility, as a concomitant of the Gospel, is accompanied by a sense of sober freedom, for "the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17). And only in this freedom, the freedom of humility, does godly love arise, for His image in us manifests as a radiation of love.

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Shall We, Then, Be Baptized For the Dead: An Answer to the Problem of 1 Corinthians 15:29 and Vicarious Baptism

Apophatic Anthropology and Hesychasm: Attending to the Mysterious Depths of Human Being

[1] *The Philokalia*, tr. Constantine Cavarnos, Proem by St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, (Belmont, MA: Institute For Byzantine And Modern Greek Studies, 2008), 34.

[2] Ibid, 34-5.

[3] Ibid, 35.

[4] Ibid, 35. (Emphasis added)

[5] Ibid, 37.

[6] Ibid, 39.

[7] Ibid, 39. It is a common myth that ceaseless prayer, hesychia, and watchfulness are not for laity. Even some hieromonks have been heard to say such things about themselves! If only they would but humbly listen to the Fathers' counsel on such things! For typically *prelest* or delusion are cited as the reason for any caution, but such caution cannot be elevated to the level of phobia or superstition, as is regrettably demonstrated by some who avoid the necessary effort at theosis. We are commanded to risk striving, not inertia. Wise caution must be taken, not unwise negligence.

[8] Ibid, 38-9. St. Gregory Palamas also speaks of the appropriateness of these practices for beginners in his Second Answer in defence of hesychasm. See *Holy Hesychia: The Stillness That Knows God*, tr. Robin Amis, (Southover, Wells U.K.: Pleroma Publishing, 2016), para 2.7, pg 54. For alternate translations of St. Gregory's statements, see also Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, tr. Nicholas Gendle, Classics of Western Spirituality, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), C.1.2.7, pg 45. See also *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, tr. Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), para 7, pg 337.

[9] *The Art of Prayer*, compiled by Igumen Chariton of Valamo, tr. E. Kadloubovsky and E.M. Palmer, ed. Timothy Ware, (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), 78.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid, 79.

[12] Ibid, 78.

[13] Ibid, 79.

[14] Ibid, 96.

[15] Ibid, 164.

[16] Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, *A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, tr. Peter Chamberas, The Classics of Western Spirituality, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 76.

[17] Ilias the Presbyter, "A Gnostic Anthology," Part 1, *The Philokalia*, Vol. 3, para 11, pg 35.

[18] Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, *A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, 76.

[19] The eight basic passions are gluttony, lust, avarice (love of money/worldly power), acedia (spiritual or mental sloth/apathy), anger, despondency (despair/depression), vainglory (pride of achievement), and pride.

[20] There is an appropriation of stillness at the natural level, and there are also supernatural levels of stillness beyond the natural, but these are purely from the hand of God and not subject to human skill or effort, nor initiated by human willpower, although there is a sense in which natural stillness is a virtuous condition which more easily opens up to supernatural stillness or *theoria*.

[21] Neutral is also an option, but that is not a reaction *per se* and so will not require treatment here.

[22] St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, tr. Catherine Roth, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), 49.

[23] Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, *A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, 76.

[24] Showing their peculiarly basic nature, St. Maximus the Confessor in his Commentary On The Our Father speaks of anger and lust in terms of the dyad of male and female, respectively. See the Classics of Western Spirituality Series edition of *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings*, tr. George Berthold, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985) 108, cf. 112-13.

[25] Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, *A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, 81.

[26] Lust here does *not* refer merely to sexual lust, but to the desire for sensual fulfillment apart from God. Thus one can lust for food, lust for a car, lust for praise, etc.

[27] Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, *A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, 79.

[28] Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, *A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, 80.

[29] Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, *A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, 84.

[30] See St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* (AT) 61:81-91, 95-99. Cf. *Ambiguum* 7:1093C. *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings of St Maximus the Confessor*, tr. Blowers, Paul and Wilken, Robert, (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003).

Pleasure can also functionally be understood as self-choosing, self-as-basis, or self-based choice, where decision-making is limited to that which is isolated to self (i.e. sensoriality and desire), which can be further seen to extend into autonomy, self-law, i.e. Maximus' "law/rule/principle of pleasure." Furthermore, this self-law is no law, and is therefore sin. As 1 John 3:4 states, "sin is lawlessness." Perhaps a summary could be rendered: Autarchy is anarchy.

[31] St. Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, tr. Nicholas Conostas, *Ambigua to John*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014) *Ambiguum* 10.2, para 1112A-B, p 159.

[32] AT 61.11 , para 98, p 441.

[33] AT 61.12, p 443. Maximus is in this way locating the problem of Adam deeper than either a philosophic Epicureanism or a merely decadent hedonism. In etiological terms, these would be symptoms or expressions of the deeper illness of sensoriality.

[34] As noted above, it is also intrinsically selfish, as sensoriality is paradigmatically a sensing of one's own sensations. The idea that St. Maximus affirms a libertarian view of free will is thus false. Certainly fallen man has free will, but according to St. Maximus it is dominated by the fallen mode such that its free choices necessarily reflect the passionate mode of fallen man's being.

[35] AT 21.5. St. Maximus states here that "man's *will inclines* toward wicked *pleasure*," such that man "in his *desire* to live, clings to his slavery to *pleasure*."

This section also connects the important concept of “passions” with “pleasure.” Cf. AT 61:6.

[36] St. Maximus elsewhere (Cf. *Commentary of the Our Father*, 108, 112-13) speaks correspondingly in terms of anger and lust, indicating a type of push-pull to sensoriality that, “by the sensual softness of pleasure” the mind is led away from “divine perception” and “sets up flesh as more valuable than spirit.”

[37] *Ambiguum* 10:1112B

[38] *Ambiguum* 7:1069B

[39] Rather than an inheritance of sin or guilt conceived extrinsically, St. Maximus might rather state that man inherits Adam's pain, where “original sin” is a wound, as he says in *Ad Thalassium* 61.7 of those after Adam who “retain only the pain which Adam brought upon them.”

[40] AT 61:6.

[41] The self-referential nature can make this sound very convoluted, and yet the conversation must omit certain important things, such as imagination and memory; each of which could exponentially complicate any attempt at succinctness. This could also explain why free will plays such an important role for St. Maximus, for only when desire, the functional will in fallen man, is freely surrendered to the will of the Lord can the pleasure-pain cycle be stopped.

[42] AT 61.2.

[43] AT 61.2.

[44] AT 61.2.

[45] AT 61.2. Of course, when St. Maximus says of Adam that “instantly” with his coming into being he fell, St. Maximus is not likely speaking in chronological terms. An analogy would be when, say, a man gets a bus ticket to start life in a new city and that, upon arriving in this new city, he “immediately falls into the wrong crowd.” This, like St. Maximus’ statement, is a figure of speech which functions not as chronological exactitude, for the man may have spent the first few chronological days *not* in the wrong crowd. No, the statement is best understood as indicative of an inclusion of all the events at Adam’s beginning, taken as a whole, and not as distinct sequential units where the very first chronological unit is a fall. Otherwise it would mean that Adam made no choice to sin, but was made sinning. As such, not an actual reference to temporal chronology, by “instantaneously” St. Maximus is speaking relatively about Adam's beginning taken as a whole.

[46] AT 61.2.

[47] AT 61.2-3.

[48] AT 61.2.

[49] AT 61:3. More descriptive than pejorative, the word “irrational” also functions within St. Maximus’ regular use of dichotomy, such as pleasure and pain, body and spirit, irrational and rational, etc. Similarly, the sensorial mind is “foolish” in a technical sense.

[50] *Ambiguum* 10:1112B.

[51] *Ambiguum* 10:1112C.

[52] AT 61.3.

[53] AT 61.3.

[54] AT 61.3.

[55] AT 61.3.

[56] AT 61.3.

[57] AT 61.4.

[58] AT 61.4.

[59] AT 61.4.

[60] AT 61.6.

[61] AT 61.6.

[62] AT 61.6.

[63] AT 61.6.

[64] AT 61.7.

[65] AT 61.6.

[66] AT 61.7.

[67] Belief that the world stands or exists in itself must be removed. The world stands in God, exists in God, and depends on God for its moment to moment existence and continuity. This is the substance of a “providential worldview.”

[68] St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 61, tr. Paul Blowers, “On the Cosmic Mystery of Christ,” 61.5, pg 134.

[69] St Hesychios the Priest, “On Watchfulness and Holiness, Written for Theodoulos,” *The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, tr. Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), para 6, pg 163.

[70] Ibid, para 3, pgs 162-3.

[71] Nicephorus the Solitary, “Profitable Discourse on Sobriety,” *The Philokalia: On the Prayer of the Heart*, pg 31-2.

[72] Ibid, 32.

[73] Ibid, 32.

[74] St Hesychios the Priest, “On Watchfulness and Holiness, Written for Theodoulos,” *The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, para 6, pg 163.

[75] Ibid, para 4, pg 163.

[76] St Hesychios the Priest, “On Watchfulness and Holiness: Written for Theodoulos,” para 111, pg 181.

[77] St Hesychios the Priest, “On Watchfulness and Holiness: Written for Theodoulos,” para 5, pg 163.

- [78] St. Gregory Palamas, "In Defense of the Holy Hesychasts," Book 1, in *Holy Hesychia*, para 2.1, pg 50.
- [79] Ibid, para 2.4, pg 52.
- [80] Ibid, para 2.6, pg 54.
- [81] Ibid, para 2.7, pg 54.
- [82] Ibid, para 2.9, pg 55.
- [83] Ibid, 2.9, pg 56.
- [84] Ibid.
- [85] St Gregory Palamas, "In Defense of Those who Devoutly Practice a Life of Stillness," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, para 2.3, pg 334
- [86] Evagrios the Solitary, "On Prayer: One Hundred and Fifty-Three Texts," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, para 63, pg 63.
- [87] St. Gregory Palamas, "In Defense of the Holy Hesychasts," Book 1, in *Holy Hesychia*, para 2.7, pg 54.
- [88] St. Gregory of Sinai, "On Prayer: Seven Texts: On Delusion and Other Subjects," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, pg 285.
- [89] Ibid. "That is why a hesychast must always keep to the royal road. For excess in anything easily leads to conceit, and conceit induces self-delusion."
- [90] St John of Karpathos, "Ascetic Discourse Sent at the Request of the Same Monks in India: A Supplement to the One Hundred Texts," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, pg 325.
- [91] St Antony the Great On the Character of Men and on the Virtuous Life One Hundred and Seventy Texts," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, para 124, pg 348. Cf. para 157, pg 353.
- [92] Although too much can be made of the etymological connection, it is yet noteworthy that the Greek term for soul is *psyche*(ψυχή), and refers especially to breath. Similarly, the Greek term for spirit is *pneuma*(πνεῦμα) also refers to breath or wind. These overlapping meanings are rich sources of reflection.
- [93] Treating of man as being created in God's image, Nikitas Stithatos spoke of man's "immaterial breath - his incorporeal and immortal soul, understood as intellect, consciousness and the power of the Holy Spirit - from God." See Nikitas Stithatos, "On Spiritual Knowledge, Love and the Perfection of Living: One Hundred Texts," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, para 10, pg 142.
- [94] St. Hesychios, "On Watchfulness and Holiness: Written for Theodoulos," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, para 189, pg 196.
- [95] The aspect of watchfulness dealing with the mind will be treated below.
- [96] Ilias the Presbyter, "A Gnostic Anthology: Part 11," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 3, para 93, pg 44.
- [97] The throat is also an option, but this will not be dealt with here.

- [98] St. Peter of Damaskos, "Book 1: A Treasury of Divine Knowledge: Spiritual Reading," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 3, pg 157.
- [99] St. Peter of Damaskos, "Book 1: A Treasury of Divine Knowledge: Spiritual Reading," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 3, pg 80.
- [100] St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Refuge: Anchoring the Soul in God*," (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Publications, 2019), pg 220-21. Cf. pgs 214-216, 219, 222-23, 226
- [101] St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Refuge*, pg 232, cf. 214.
- [102] St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, tr. Fr. Lazarus, (Boston, MA: New Seeds, 2006), *On the Prayer of Jesus*, pg 50.
- [103] *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, pg 158.
- [104] *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, pg 159.
- [105] *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, pg 160.
- [106] For a further discussion of this distinction, please see the chapter entitled "From Theology to Methodology and Technology" in the author's work, *An Existential Soteriology*.
- [107] St Symeon the New Theologian The Three Methods of Prayer," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, pg 72.
- [108] St. Gregory Palamas also speaks of attention being directed towards the navel, e.g.
- [109] St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Refuge*, pg 232.
- [110] St Symeon the New Theologian The Three Methods of Prayer," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, pg 72.
- Citing St. Symeon, St. Gregory of Sinai repeats this instruction; see: St Gregory of Sinai, "On Stillness: Fifteen Texts: The Beginning of Watchfulness," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, para 3, pg 265. He also cites Isaiah the Solitary as instructing one to "restrain the breath." Ibid, 264-65.
- [111] St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Refuge*, pg 232.
- [112] Ibid.
- [113] Ibid.
- [114] Ibid.
- [115] Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, *A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, Pg 160. A calm and comfortably deep breath, briefly held, however, presents the least danger, and should not be considered a source of danger or prelest. The point is to be careful not to produce or build up pressure in the lungs.
- [116] St Gregory of Sinai, "On Prayer: Seven Texts: How to Master the Intellect in Prayer," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, pg 277.
- [117] St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Refuge*, pg 229.
- [118] Ibid, 233.

- [119] St Gregory Palamas, "In Defense of Those who Devoutly Practice a Life of Stillness: Answer," *The Philoklia*, Vol. 4, pg 331.
- [120] Ibid, 233. Cf. St Gregory of Sinai, "On Stillness: Fifteen Texts: The Beginning of Watchfulness," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, para 2, pg 264.
- [121] St Gregory Palamas, "In Defense of Those who Devoutly Practice a Life of Stillness: Answer," *The Philoklia*, Vol. 4, para 7, pg 337.
- [122] St Gregory Palamas, "In Defense of Those who Devoutly Practice a Life of Stillness: Answer," *The Philoklia*, Vol. 4, para 7, pg 337.
- [123] St Gregory Palamas, "In Defense of Those who Devoutly Practice a Life of Stillness: Answer," *The Philoklia*, Vol. 4, para 7, pg 337.
- [124] Attention held at the heart or naval, or simply to the breath in general, ought to be adapted accordingly.
- [125] Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, *A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, pg 161.
- [126] *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, pg 194.
- [127] Like the heart, attention at the naval similarly requires discernment. The guiding principle is to give no importance to sensations, simply notice them come and go, and keep returning to the bare attention to the breath and to the sense of life or being. Dispassion towards these things is essential, and an essential part of the purpose of practice.
- [128] Although this is not a work of apologetics, New Age beliefs and practices are almost totally characterized by, pardon the oxymoron, psychological spirituality. Their consistent inability to internalize the spiritual reality and necessity of the Cross is demonstrated by their consistent focus on endless "searching," personal "empowerment," manifesting desires, and the evasion of moral truth.
- [129] St Hesychios the Priest, "On Watchfulness and Holiness: Written for Theodoulos," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, para 15, pg 164.
- [130] St Hesychios the Priest, "On Watchfulness and Holiness," para 5, pg 163.
- [131] St. Hesychios, para 20, pg 165.
- [132] Ibid, para 90, pg 177.
- [133] Ibid, para 115, pg 182.
- [134] Nikitas Stithatos, "On the Practice of the Virtues: One Hundred Texts," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, para 89, pg 103.
- [135] The insights produced by theoria will be discussed below in Chapter 6.
- [136] St Symeon the New Theologian, "The Three Methods of Prayer," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, pg 72. St. Nikitas Stithatos speaks of this as "the life-quickenning deadness induced by dispassion" ("On the Inner Nature of Things," *The Philokalia*, Vol 4, para 42, pg 118).
- [137] Simply, apophaticism is the transcending of all conceptual categories as they relate to God, the progressive realization that God is more than the human mind can conceive. It is contrasted with cataphaticism, which is the positive conceptual

affirmation of God's Attributes. Apophaticism is not merely conceptual negation, however, and so has a necessary existential component which moves it beyond any merely privative conceptual affirmation. For a further discussion of this subject, see also the present author's work: *An Existential Soteriology*, especially chapters 27-31.

[138] In English terms like mind, intellect, and consciousness are not fixed as regards their referent and must be discerned according to context and usage. Some will speak of mind as that space in which mental objects appear. Some will refer to mind as the activity of attending to objects, i.e. "minding," as in mind your manners, and so in this way to speak of mind as a space would not make sense because is precisely that attending to some mental object. In this case "consciousness" is used to indicate the space in which *mind* happens. Others will prefer terms like awareness as referring to that "space," while others will state that awareness is the focusing and directing of consciousness towards an object, with mind being that which identifies and understands the objects of awareness. Further permutations exist, and it can become extremely muddy. It is also worth mentioning that the term intellect can sometimes refer to that superior faculty which stands "prior to" or "above" the mind, and sometimes intellect can refer to that activity of intellectualizing, conceptualizing, or rationalizing.

[139] Nikitas Stithatos, "On the Inner Nature of Things and on the Purification of the Intellect: One Hundred Texts," *The Philokalia*, Vol 4, para 35-36, pg 116. (Italics added)

[140] A question could arise as to why in paragraph 36 St. Nikitas states that knowing the essences of created beings is prior to knowing oneself. It is important to note here that he states "... having achieved a state of purity you advance to the knowledge of essences..." This points to the necessary relation between virtue and true knowledge. In this he is following the order conveyed by St. Peter: "make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge," (2 Peter 1:5). Watchfulness, stillness, and ceaseless prayer are the fundamentals of the Orthodox practice of virtue, unto knowledge.

[141] *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*, tr. Benedicta Ward, (London: Penguin, 2003), para 5, pg 85.

[142] Nikitas Stithatos, "On the Inner Nature of Things and on the Purification of the Intellect: One Hundred Texts," *The Philokalia*, Vol 4, para 37, pg 116.

[143] Nikitas Stithatos, "On the Inner Nature of Things and on the Purification of the Intellect: One Hundred Texts," *The Philokalia*, Vol 4, para 37-40, pgs 116-118.

[144] St Antony the Great, "On the Character of Men and on the Virtuous Life: One Hundred and Seventy Texts," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, para 130, pg 349. Cf. St. Peter of Damaskos: "To the person who knows himself is given knowledge of all things." From "Book 1: A Treasury of Divine Knowledge: Introduction," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 3, pg 85-86.

- [145] St Gregory of Sinai, "On Prayer: Seven Texts: How to Psalmodyze," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, para. 5, pg 278.
- [146] Evagrius the Solitary, "On Prayer: One Hundred and Fifty-Three Texts," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, para 70, pg 63.
- [147] St Hesychios the Priest, "On Watchfulness and Holiness: Written for Theodoulos," para 7, pg 163.
- [148] Abba Philimon, A Discourse on Abba Philimon, *The Philokalia*, Vol. 2, pg 355.
- [149] St Symeon Metaphrasis, "Paraphrase of the Homilies of St Makarios of Egypt, V. Love," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 3, para 89, pg 325.
- [150] Nikitas Stithatos, "On the Inner Nature of Things and on the Purification of the Intellect: One Hundred Texts," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, para 40, pg 117.
- [151] Nikitas Stithatos, "On the Inner Nature of Things and on the Purification of the Intellect: One Hundred Texts," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, para 64, pg 125.
- [152] St Gregory of Sinai, "On Prayer: Seven Texts: How to Psalmodyze," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, para 5, pg 278.
- [153] Evagrius the Solitary, "Outline Teaching on Asceticism and Stillness in the Solitary Life," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, pg 31.
- [154] St Gregory of Sinai, "On Commandments and Doctrines, Warnings and Promises; On Thoughts, Passions and Virtues, and Also on Stillness and Prayer: One Hundred and Thirty-Seven Texts," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, para 111, pg 237.
- [155] St. Gregory Palamas, "In Defence of the Holy Hesychasts, Book One," *Holy Hesychia*, para 2.9, pg 56.
- [156] <<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?strong=G4976&t=NKJV>>, accessed 05-05-2020.
- [157] *Little Russian Philokalia*: Vol. I: St. Seraphim of Sarov, ch. 38: "Absolute Silence," (Platina, CA: Saint Herman of Alaska, 1980), pg 61.
- [158] Ibid, ch. 37: "Solitude and Silence," pg 60.
- [159] St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Refuge*, pg 205.
- [160] Nicephorus the Solitary, "Profitable Discourse on Sobriety," *Writings From The Philokalia: On Prayer Of The Heart*, tr. E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer, (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 33.
- [161] St Hesychios the Priest, "On Watchfulness and Holiness: Written for Theodoulos," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, para 14, pg 164.
- [162] Ibid, para 46, pg 170.
- [163] St Philotheos of Sinai, "Forty Texts on Watchfulness," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 3, para 25, pg 26.
- [164] *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, pg 63.
- [165] *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, pgs 131 and 158.

[166] St Hesychios the Priest, "On Watchfulness and Holiness: Written for Theodoulos," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, para 94, pg 178.

[167] Ibid, para 152, pg 189.

[168] St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *On the Jesus Prayer*, tr. Father Lazarus, (Boston, MA: New Seeds, 2006), pg 4.

[169] Nicephorus the Solitary, "Profitable Discourse on Sobriety," *Writings From The Philokalia: On Prayer Of The Heart*, 33.

[170] St. Hesychios, "On Watchfulness and Holiness: Written for Theodoulos," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, para 100, pg 179.

[171] St. Hesychios, "On Watchfulness and Holiness," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, para 182, pgs 194-95.

[172] St. Gregory of Sinai, "Texts on Commandments and Dogmas," *The Philokalia: On the Prayer of the Heart*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), para 60, pg 48.

St. Theophan the Recluse speaks similarly: "All your inner disorder is due to the dislocation of your powers, the mind and the heart each going their own way. You must unite the mind with the heart: then the tumult of your thoughts will cease, and you will acquire a rudder to guide the ship of your soul, a lever with which to put all your inner world in movement. How can this be achieved? Make it your habit to pray these words with the mind in the heart: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me." And this prayer, when you have learnt to use it properly, or rather, when it becomes grafted to the heart, will lead you to the end which you desire: it will unite your mind with your heart, it will quell the turbulence of your thoughts, and it will give you power to govern the movements of your soul" (*The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, pg. 195).

[173] St. Ignatius to the Magnesians 8:2, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Updated Edition, tr. J.B. Lightfoot, ed. and rev. Michael Holmes, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 155.

[174] *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, pg 62.

[175] *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, pg 60. Cf. St. Theophan the Recluse, *Kindling the Divine Spark: Teachings on How to Preserve Spiritual Zeal*, (Wildwood, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1996), pgs 71-72.

[176] Theoliptos, Metropolitan of Philadelphia, "On Inner Work in Christ And the Monastic Profession," *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4, pg 185.

St. Nicodemos even recommends for those able doing fifty to one hundred prostrations each day as a form of spiritual exercising of the body. (Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, *A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, pg 102-103.)

[177] St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Refuge*, pg 224.

[178] St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *On the Prayer of Jesus*, pg 62.

[179] St. John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ*, (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1994), pg 176.

[180] Ibid. The full quote is: “When praying, pay steadfast attention to the words of the prayer, feeling them in your heart. Do not withdraw your mind from them to any other thoughts. When praying during Divine service, during the celebration of the Sacraments, and the singing of the prayers and hymns upon various occasions, lay surely to your heart the words themselves of the church prayers, believing, that not a single word is placed there in vain, that every one of them has its power, that in each word dwells the Holy Trinity the Lord Himself, “Who is everywhere present and fills all things”: think thus:--I myself am nothing, the Lord does everything. Also think: when I speak--God the Word, speaks in me. I need be careful for nothing. “Casting all your care,” it is said, “upon Him, for He careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7).”

[181] Ibid, 213.

[182] Ibid, 192.

[183] St. Theophan the Recluse, *Psalm 118: A Commentary*, (Liberty, TN: St. John of Kronstadt Press, 2014), pg 23.

[184] Ibid, 38.

[185] Ibid, 39.

[186] Ibid, 50.

[187] Ibid, 51. Cf. 66, 86.

[188] Ibid, 70.

[189] Ibid, 81.

[190] Ibid, 85. The false conceptions of synergism which run rampant seek to rehabilitate Semi-Pelagianism, if not Pelagianism itself. And although it is perhaps a homely phrase, these are countered by Orthodox synergism, which can be described as a *consequent synergism*, or perhaps even a *cooperative monergism*, as long as it is understood that the free will of man is preserved in all considerations of Orthodox anthropology, and as long as man’s dependence on grace is likewise preserved: that grace is seen as the necessary energy fueling all actions that correspond to salvation, man’s will not adding to grace but depending on it.

[191] In his free acts of sin, man simply obeys the tyranny of his passions.

[192] Ibid, 87.

[193] St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Field: Cultivating Salvation*, tr. Nicholas Kotar, (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 2016), pg 55. Cf. 54-55.

[194] St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Refuge: Anchoring the Soul in God*, (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 2019), pgs 279-80.

[195] That faith is a gift, see Ephesians 2:8. That in that verse faith should be read as a gift of God, see St. John Chrysostom’s homily on Ephesians 2:8, where he states: “Neither is faith, he [Paul] means, ‘of ourselves.’ Because had He not come, had He not called us, how had we been able to believe? for ‘how,’ saith he,

‘shall they believe, unless they hear?’ (Rom. 10:14) So that the work of faith itself is not our own.” Blessed Theophylact likewise interprets this passage.

[196] St. Theophan the Recluse, *The Spiritual Life and How to be Attuned to it*, tr. Alexandra Dockham, (Safford, AZ: St. Paisius Serbian Orthodox Monastery, 2003), 98-99.

[197] Commenting on Galatians 2:20, Blessed Theophylact states: “It is Christ Who acts and rules and has dominion over us in everything. Our will is dead; His will is alive in us and governs us.”

[198] *Prayer Book*, (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 2011), pg 7.

[199] These begin, “In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... Glory to Thee, our God... O Heavenly King... Holy God... O Most Holy Trinity... Our Father... Lord, have mercy... O come let us worship...” continue with Psalm 50, and conclude with the Creed. Now one begins the Jesus Prayer without any haste and with all trust in God.

[200] Cf. 2 Corinthians 4:16; Ephesians 4:23-24; Colossians 3:10.

[201] St. Gregory of Sinai, “Instructions to Hesychasts,” *The Philokalia: On the Prayer of the Heart*, pg 83.

[202] All effort depends upon the principle of the will, but the human will cannot produce life, nor can the human will produce grace. Although effort is required in the spiritual life, it is required as a *response* to grace, not a mechanism for obtaining or purchasing it. If it is seen as a means for earning or controlling grace, then effort only reinforces a spiritually dangerous falsehood, for grace means *gift*. The power of grace is such that it is beyond anything that the will could accomplish.

[203] Cf. Isaiah 6:1-5; Job 42:5-6; Daniel 10:6-8; Luke 5:1-8; Revelation 1:16-17.