

THE INNER CLOSET OF THE HEART

be expanded into too many words. This is what the Holy Fathers also advise. In his commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew (vi. 7), St. Theophylact states, 'You should not make long prayers, for it is better to pray little but often.' And St. John Chrysostom, ¹ in his commentary on St. Paul's Epistles, observes, 'Whoever says too much in prayer, does not pray, but indulges in idle talk.' St. Theophylact also says in his interpretation of Matthew vi. 6: 'Superfluous words are idle talk.' The Apostle said well, 'I had rather speak five words with my understanding . . . than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue' (1 Cor. xiv. 19): that is, it is better for me to pray to God briefly but with attention, than to pronounce innumerable words without attention, vainly filling the air with noise.

There is also another sense in which the Apostle's words must be interpreted. 'Pray without ceasing' (1 Thess. v. 17) must be taken in the sense of prayer performed by the mind: whatever a man is doing, the mind can always be directed towards God, and in this way it can pray to Him unceasingly.

Therefore begin now, O my soul, little by little, the course of training set out for you, begin in the name of the Lord, according to the Apostle's instruction: 'And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus' (Col. iii. 17). Do all, he means, not primarily for your own profit, even spiritual, but for the glory of God; and so in all your words, deeds and thoughts, the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, will be glorified.

But before you start, explain to yourself briefly what prayer is. Prayer is turning the mind and thoughts towards God. To pray means to stand before God with the mind, mentally to gaze unswervingly at Him, and to converse with Him in reverent fear and hope.

And so collect all your thoughts: laying aside all outer worldly cares, direct your mind towards God, concentrating it wholly upon Him.

¹ St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople (†344-407), ascetic, preacher, and writer. Of all the Greek Fathers he is perhaps the best loved in the Orthodox Church, and the one whose works are most widely read.

CHAPTER II

WHAT IS PRAYER?

by Theophan the Recluse¹

(i) THE TEST OF EVERYTHING

Ultimate questions²

What is prayer? What is its essence? How can we learn to pray? What does the spirit of the Christian experience as he prays in humility of heart?

All such questions should constantly occupy the mind and heart of the believer, for in prayer man converses with God, he enters, through grace, into communion with Him, and lives in God. And the Holy Fathers and teachers of the Church give answers to all these questions, based on the grace-given enlightenment which is acquired through the experience of practising prayer—experience equally accessible to the simple and to the wise.

The test of everything

Prayer is the test of everything; prayer is also the source of everything; prayer is the driving force of everything; prayer is also the director of everything. If prayer is right, everything is right. For prayer will not allow anything to go wrong.

¹ On Bishop Theophan, see above, pp. 11-14.

² The first extract is not from Theophan but from Bishop Nikon of Volodsk, Russian spiritual writer in the late 19th and early 20th century.

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Degrees of prayer

There are various degrees of prayer. The first degree is bodily prayer, consisting for the most part in reading, in standing, and in making prostrations. In all this there must needs be patience, labour, and sweat; for the attention runs away, the heart feels nothing and has no desire to pray. Yet in spite of this, give yourself a moderate rule and keep to it. Such is active prayer.

The second degree is prayer with attention: the mind becomes accustomed to collecting itself in the hour of prayer, and prays consciously throughout, without distraction. The mind is focused upon the written words to the point of speaking them as if they were its own.

The third degree is prayer of feeling: the heart is warmed by concentration so that what hitherto has only been thought now becomes feeling. Where first it was a contrite phrase now it is contrition itself; and what was once a petition in words is transformed into a sensation of entire necessity. Whoever has passed through action and thought to true feeling, will pray without words, for God is God of the heart. So that the end of apprenticeship in prayer can be said to come when in our prayer we move only from feeling to feeling. In this state reading may cease, as well as deliberate thought; let there be only a dwelling in feeling with specific marks of prayer.

When the feeling of prayer reaches the point where it becomes continuous, then spiritual prayer may be said to begin. This is the gift of the Holy Spirit praying for us, the last degree of prayer which our minds can grasp.

But there is, they say, yet another kind of prayer which cannot be comprehended by our mind, and which goes beyond the limits of consciousness: on this read St. Isaac the Syrian.¹

¹ St. Isaac the Syrian (died c. 700), Nestorian Bishop of Nineveh and mystical author. His works, translated from Syriac into Greek during the ninth century, have long been widely read and honoured in the Orthodox Church.

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The essence of prayer

Without inner spiritual prayer there is no prayer at all, for this alone is real prayer, pleasing to God. It is the soul within the words of prayer that matters, whether the prayer is at home or in church, and if inner prayer is absent, then the words have only the appearance and not the reality of prayer.

What then is prayer? Prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God in praise and thanksgiving to Him and in supplication for the good things that we need, both spiritual and physical. The essence of prayer is therefore the spiritual lifting of the heart towards God. The mind in the heart stands consciously before the face of God, filled with due reverence, and begins to pour itself out before Him. This is spiritual prayer, and all prayer should be of this nature. External prayer, whether at home or in church, is only prayer's verbal expression and shape; the essence or the soul of prayer is within a man's mind and heart. All our Church order of prayer, all prayers composed for home use, are filled with spiritual turning to God. Anyone who prays with even the least part of attention cannot avoid this spiritual turning to God, unless he is completely inattentive to what he is doing.

Inner prayer is necessary for all

Nobody can dispense with inner prayer. We cannot live spiritually unless we raise ourselves in prayer to God. But the only way we can thus raise ourselves is through spiritual action: for God is spiritual. True, there is spiritual prayer linked with oral or exterior prayer, whether at home or in church, and there is also spiritual prayer, by itself, without any special outward form or bodily posture; but in both cases the essence of the thing is the same. Both forms are obligatory for the layman as well as the monk. The Saviour commanded us to enter into our closet and there pray to God the Father in secret. This closet, as interpreted by St. Dimitri of Rostov, means the heart. Consequently, to obey our Lord's commandment, we must pray secretly to God with the mind in the heart. This commandment

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embraces all Christians. The Apostle Paul also gives this direction when he says, 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit' (Eph. vi. 18). He means spiritual prayer of the mind, and directs all Christians, without distinction, to pray thus. He also directs all Christians to 'Pray without ceasing' (1 Thess. v. 17). But unceasing prayer is only possible by praying with the mind in the heart.

Rising in the morning, stand as firmly as possible before God in your heart, as you offer your morning prayers; and then go to the work apportioned to you by God, without withdrawing from Him in your feelings and consciousness. In this way you will do your work with the powers of your soul and body, but in your mind and heart you will remain with God.

*Outward prayer is not enough*¹

Outward prayer alone is not enough. God pays attention to the mind, and they are no true monks who fail to unite exterior prayer with inner prayer. Strictly defined, the word 'monk' means a recluse, a solitary. Whoever has not withdrawn within himself is not yet a recluse, he is not yet monk even though he lives in the most isolated monastery. The mind of the ascetic who is not withdrawn and enclosed within himself dwells necessarily amongst tumult and unquietness. Innumerable thoughts, having free admission to his mind, bring this about; without purpose or necessity his mind wanders painfully through the world, bringing harm upon itself. The withdrawal of a man within himself cannot be achieved without the help of concentrated prayer, especially the attentive practice of the Jesus Prayer.

The achievement of passionlessness and sanctity—in other words, of Christian perfection—is impossible without acquiring inner prayer. All the Fathers are agreed on this.

The path of true prayer becomes incomparably more narrow when the ascetic struggler begins to enter upon it through the activity of the inner man. But when he enters this narrow path

¹ By Bishop Ignatii, not by Theophan.

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and feels how right, saving, and necessary this way is, and when he comes to love his work in the inner cell, then he will also come to love the narrowness of his exterior life because it serves as a cloister and treasury of inner activity.

Oral prayer

'In psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord . . . ' (Col. iii. 16). The words 'in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs' describe oral prayer, prayer with words; but the words 'singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord' describe inner prayer, of the mind in the heart.

Psalms, canticles, hymns, odes, and so on, are different names for religious songs. It is difficult to indicate the difference between them, because their contents and form are very similar. All are expressions of the spirit of prayer. When moved to prayer, the spirit glorifies God, thanks Him and raises its petitions to Him. All these manifestations of the spirit of prayer are essentially indivisible, having no separate existence. When prayer begins to work, it passes from one of these manifestations to another, often more than once. Expressed in words, it is oral prayer, whether called a psalm, a hymn, or an ode. Therefore we will make no attempt to define the difference between their names. The Apostle intended, by this phrase, to embrace all kinds of prayer expressed in words. All prayers which are now in use come under this heading. Besides the Psalter, we use Church songs, stichera, troparia, canons, akathists,¹ and the various prayers which are contained in our prayer books. You will not go wrong if, when reading the Apostle's words about oral prayer, you understand this as the oral prayer which we use today. The power of prayer lies not in this or that oral prayer, but in the *way* in which we pray.

¹ On troparia and canons, see above, p. 45, n. 1. A *sticheron* is a stanza of religious poetry, similar to a troparion. An *akathist* is a composition in 24 stanzas, addressed to the Saviour, to the Mother of God, our Guardian Angel, or one of the Saints. The title means 'not sitting': an akathist must always be recited standing up.

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In his use of the word 'spiritual' the Apostle shows us how we should pray orally. Prayers are spiritual because they are originally born in the spirit and ripen there, and are poured out from the spirit. Their spiritual nature is intensified because they are born and ripen by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Psalms and all other oral prayers were not oral at the very beginning. In their origin they were purely spiritual, and only afterwards came to be clothed in words and so assumed an oral form. But becoming oral did not deprive them of their spirituality: even now, they are oral only in their outer semblance, but in their power they are spiritual.

It follows from this that if you want to learn from the Apostle's words about oral prayer, you must act thus: enter into the spirit of the prayers which you hear and read, reproducing them in your heart; and in this way offer them up from your heart to God, as if they had been born in your own heart under the action of the grace of the Holy Spirit. Then, and then alone, is the prayer pleasing to God. How can we attain to such prayer? Ponder carefully on the prayers which you have to read in your prayer book; feel them deeply, even learn them by heart. And so when you pray you will express that which is already deeply felt in your heart.

The purpose of Church hymns

'Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord' (Eph. v. 19).

How should we interpret these words? Do they mean that when you are filled with the Spirit, you should then sing with your mouth and your heart? Or that if you wish to be filled with the Holy Spirit, you should first sing? Is the singing with mouth and heart, mentioned by the Apostle, meant to be the consequence of being filled by the Spirit, or the means towards it?

The infusion of the Holy Spirit does not lie within our power. It comes as the Spirit Himself wishes. And when it comes, this infusion will so greatly animate the powers of our spirit that the

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song to God breaks out of itself. Freedom of choice lies only between leaving this song to be sung in the heart alone, or expressing it aloud for all to hear.

The words of the Apostle must be taken in the second sense rather than the first. Desire to be filled with the Spirit, and sing with that aim in mind. Singing will set alight the Spirit, or lead to a state of infusion by the Spirit, or show forth His action. According to Blessed Theodoret,¹ the Apostle refers to spiritual rapture when he says, 'Be filled with the Spirit' (Eph. v. 18), and he shows us how to attain this, namely by 'unceasingly singing praises to God, entering deeply into oneself, and always stimulating thought'. That is to say: by singing with the tongue and heart.

It is not difficult to understand that the most important part of this is not good harmony in the singing, but the content of what is sung. It has the same effect as a speech written with warm feeling, which animates whoever reads it. Feeling, expressed in words, is carried by words into the soul of those who hear or read them. The same can be said of Church songs. Psalms, hymns and Church songs are spiritually inspired outbursts of feeling towards God. The Spirit of God filled His elect, and they expressed the plenitude of their feelings in songs. He who sings them as they should be sung enters again into the feelings which the author experienced when he originally wrote them. Being filled by these feelings, he draws near to the state wherein he is able to receive the grace of the Spirit, and to adapt himself to it. The purpose of Church songs is precisely to make the spark of grace that is hidden within us burn brighter and with greater warmth. This spark is given by the sacraments. Psalms, hymns and spiritual odes are introduced, to fan the spark and transform it into flame. They act on the spark of grace as the wind acts on a spark hidden in firewood.

But let us remember that this effect is conditional on their use being accompanied by purification of the heart. St. John

¹ Theodoret, Bishop of Kyrrhos (c. 393-c. 458). Some of his writings were condemned at the fifth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople, 553), but his commentaries on Holy Scripture are for the most part excellent, and continue to be read and respected in the Orthodox Church.

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Chrysostom enjoins this, guided by the teaching of St. Paul himself, and also says that the songs must primarily be spiritual, and sung not only by the tongue but also by the heart.

Therefore, in order that the singing of Church songs may lead us on to be filled by the Spirit, the Apostle is insistent that the songs should be spiritual. By this it should be understood that they must be not only spiritual in content but moved by the Spirit: they must themselves be the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and be poured forth by hearts that are filled with Him. Without this they will not lead to our possession by the Spirit. This is according to the law whereby the singer is given that which has been put into the song.

The second condition of the Apostle is that songs must be sung not by the tongue only, but by the heart. It is necessary not only to understand the song, but to be in sympathy with it, to accept the contents of the song in the heart, and to sing it as if it came from our own heart. A comparison of this text with others makes it evident that in the time of the Apostles only those who were in such a state used to sing: others entered into a similar mood and all the congregation sang and glorified God from the heart only. No wonder if, in consequence of this, the whole congregation was filled with the Spirit! What treasure is hidden in Church songs if they are performed properly!

St. John Chrysostom says: 'What is meant by "those who sing in their heart to the Lord"? It means: Undertake this work with attention, for those who are inattentive sing in vain, pronouncing only words, while their heart wanders elsewhere.' Blessed Theodoret adds to this: 'He sings in the heart, who not only moves his tongue, but incites his mind to understand what is said.' Other Holy Fathers, writing about prayer to God, believe that prayer is best achieved when offered by the mind established in the heart.

What the Apostle says here about gatherings in church, can also be applied to private psalmody. This everyone can perform alone at home. And the fruit of this will be the same, when it is done as it should be: that is, with attention, understanding and feeling, from the heart.

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Let us note also that although the words of the Apostle refer to singing, his thought indicates turning in prayer to God. It is actually this that arouses the Spirit.

The prayer of the mind in the heart

Sometimes we pray by using the words of prayers already composed; at other times prayer is born directly in the heart, and from there rises to God. Such was the prayer of Moses before the Red Sea. The Apostle refers to it in the words, 'By grace, singing in your heart to the Lord'. Explaining this text, St. John Chrysostom writes: 'Sing from the grace of the Spirit, says Paul, not simply with the lips but with attention, standing with your thought before God in your heart. For this is what singing to God means: otherwise the song is in vain, and the words vanish into thin air. It is not sung to show off, for even if you are in the market place, you can turn to God within and sing, without being heard by anyone. It is good to pray in the heart even when travelling, and be lifted on high.' Only this kind of prayer is real prayer. Oral prayer is prayer only in so far as the mind and heart also pray.

This prayer is formed in the heart by the grace of the Holy Spirit. He who turns to God and is sanctified by the sacraments, immediately receives feeling towards God within himself, which from this moment begins to lay the foundation in his heart for the ascent on high. Provided he does not stifle it by something unworthy, this feeling will be kindled into flame, by time, perseverance, and labour. But if he stifles it by something unworthy, although the path of approach and reconciliation to God is not thereby closed to him, this feeling will no longer be given at once and gratis. Before him is the sweat and work of seeking and of gaining it by prayer. But no one is refused. Because all have grace, only one thing is necessary: to give this grace free scope to act. Grace receives free scope in so far as the ego is crushed and the passions uprooted. The more our heart is purified the more lively becomes our feeling towards God. And when the heart is fully purified, then this feeling of warmth towards God

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takes fire. Even in those who have ceased for a time to experience the working of grace, this warmth towards God revives long before they have arrived at a complete purification from passions. It is still only a seed or a spark, but when it is carefully tended, it glows and begins to flame. Yet it is not permanent, but blazes up and then dies down, and in its burning is not of even strength. But no matter how dimly or brightly it burns, this flame of love always ascends to the Lord and sings a song to Him. Grace builds up everything, because grace is always present in believers. Those who commit themselves irrevocably to grace, will pass under its guidance, and it shapes and forms them in a way known only to itself.

Feeling and words

Feeling towards God—even without words—is a prayer. Words support and sometimes deepen the feeling.

The gift of feeling

Guard this gift of feeling, given to you by the mercy of God. How? First and foremost by humility, ascribing everything to grace and nothing to yourself. As soon as you trust to yourself, grace will diminish in you; and if you do not come to your senses, it will cease to work completely. Then there will be much weeping and lamentation. Secondly, regarding yourself as dust and ashes, dwell in grace and do not turn your heart or thought to anything else except from necessity. Be all the time with the Lord. If the inner flame begins to die down a little, immediately hasten to restore its strength. The Lord is near. Turning to Him with contrition and fear, you will immediately receive His gifts.

Body, soul and spirit

The body is made of earth; yet it is not something dead but alive and endowed with a living soul. Into this soul is breathed

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a spirit—the spirit of God, intended to know God, to reverence Him, to seek and taste Him, and to have his joy in Him and nothing else.

Draw down the mind into the heart

Turn to the Lord, drawing down the attention of the mind into the heart, and calling upon Him there. With the mind firmly established in the heart, stand before the Lord with awe, reverence, and devotion. If we would fulfil this small rule un-failingly, then passionate desires and feelings would never arise, nor would any other thought.

The primary work of our life

Prayer is the primary work of the moral and religious life. The root of this life is a free and conscious relationship with God, which then directs everything. It is the practice of prayer that expresses this free and conscious attitude towards God, just as the social contacts of daily life express our moral attitude towards our neighbour, and our ascetic struggles and spiritual efforts express our moral attitude towards ourselves. Our prayer reflects our attitude to God, and our attitude to God is reflected in prayer. And since this attitude is not identical in different people, so the kind of prayer is not identical either. He who is careless of salvation has a different attitude to God from him who has abandoned sin and is zealous for virtue, but has not yet entered within himself, and works for the Lord only outwardly. Finally, he who has entered within and carries the Lord in himself, standing before Him, has yet another attitude. The first man is negligent in prayer just as he is negligent in life; and he prays in church and at home merely according to the established custom, without attention or feeling. The second man reads many prayers and goes often to church, trying at the same time to keep his attention from wandering and to experience feelings in accordance with the prayers which are read, although he is very seldom successful. The third man, wholly

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concentrated within, stands with his mind before God, and prays to Him in his heart without distraction, without long verbal prayers, even when standing for a long time at prayer in his home or in church. Take away oral prayer from the second, and you will take away all prayer from him; impose oral prayer on the third and you will extinguish prayer in him by the wind of many words. For every rank of person, and every degree of drawing near to God, has its own prayer and its own rules. How important it is to have experienced instruction here, and how very harmful it can be to guide and direct oneself!

Sounding and soundless prayer

'Which is better: to pray with the lips or with the mind?' The answer is that we must use both forms: pray sometimes in words, sometimes with the mind. But it is necessary to explain here that mental prayer also involves the use of words which in this case are not heard, but are only pronounced within the heart. It is better put in this way: Pray sometimes with sounding words, and sometimes inaudibly with words that are soundless. But it is necessary to take care that both sounding and soundless prayer should come from the heart.

The power is not in the words

To pray is quite straightforward. Stand with the mind in the heart before the face of the Lord and cry: 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me', or just: 'Lord have mercy', 'Most merciful Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner'—or with any other words. The power is not in the words, but in the thoughts and feelings.

A vigilant tension of the muscles

We shall not contradict the meaning of the Holy Fathers' instructions, if we say: Behave as you wish, so long as you learn

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to stand before God with the mind in the heart, for in this lies the essence of the matter.

Among bodily activities, however, there are some which seem to go hand in hand with inner prayer, and never leave it. Our aim must be to stand with the attention in the heart, and to hold the whole body in a vigilant tension of the muscles, and not to allow attention to be influenced and diverted by exterior impressions of the senses.

Prayer from the heart

Every prayer must come from the heart, and any other prayer is no prayer at all. Prayer-book prayers, your own prayers, and very short prayers, all must issue forth from the heart to God, seen before you. And still more must this be so with the Jesus Prayer.

The principal thing

The principal thing is to stand with the mind in the heart before God, and to go on standing before Him unceasingly day and night, until the end of life.

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Three degrees of prayer

We may distinguish three stages:

1. The habit of ordinary oral prayer in church and at home.
2. The union of prayerful thoughts and feelings with the mind and heart.
3. Unceasing prayer.

The Jesus Prayer may go with both of the first two, but its real place is with unceasing prayer. The principal condition for success in prayer is the purification of the heart from passions,

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and from every attachment to things sensual. Without this, prayer will remain all the time in the first or oral degree. The more the heart is purified, the more oral prayer will become prayer of the mind in the heart, and when the heart becomes quite pure, then unceasing prayer will be established. How can this be done? In church, follow the service and retain the thoughts and feelings which you experience there. At home, awake in yourself the thought and feeling of prayer, and maintain them in your soul with the help of the Jesus Prayer.

Further distinctions

Prayer has various degrees. At first it is only the prayer of the spoken word, but with this must go prayer of the mind and heart, warming it and maintaining it. Later, mind-in-heart prayer gains its independence: becoming sometimes active, stimulated by one's own efforts, and sometimes self-moving, bestowed as a gift. Prayer as a gift is the same as inward attraction towards God, and develops from it. Later on, when the state of the soul under the influence of this attraction becomes constant, mind-in-heart prayer will be active unceasingly. All earlier temporary attractions now become transformed into states of contemplation; and it is at this point that contemplative prayer begins. The state of contemplation is a captivity of the mind and of the entire vision by a spiritual object so overpowering that all outward things are forgotten, and wholly absent from the consciousness. The mind and consciousness become so completely immersed in the object contemplated that it is as though we no longer possess them.¹

¹ Here Theophan apparently distinguishes five stages:

- (i) oral prayer
- (ii) mind-in-heart prayer, produced by our own efforts
- (iii) mind-in-heart prayer, bestowed as a gift
- (iv) unceasing mind-in-heart prayer
- (v) contemplative prayer (also described by Theophan as prayer of ravisment or ecstasy).

The last three stages are closely related, and cannot be sharply distinguished.

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Prayer performed by man, prayer given by God, prayer of ecstasy

There is prayer which man himself makes; and there is prayer which God Himself gives to him who prays (1 Kings ii. 9: Sept.).¹ Who is there who does not know the first? And you must also know the second, at least in its inception. Anyone wishing to approach the Lord will first approach Him by prayer. He begins to go to church and to pray at home, with the help of a prayer book or without. But thoughts keep running away. He cannot manage to control them. All the same, the more he strives to pray, the more thoughts will quieten down, and the purer prayer will become. But the atmosphere of the soul is not purified until a small spiritual flame is kindled in the soul. This flame is the work of the grace of God; not a special grace, but one common to all. This flame appears when a man has attained a certain measure of purity in the general moral order of his life. When this small flame is kindled, or a permanent warmth is formed in the heart, the ferment of thoughts is stilled. The same thing happens in the soul as happened to the woman with an issue of blood: 'Her blood stanch'd' (Luke viii. 44). In this state, prayer more or less approaches permanency; and for this the Jesus Prayer serves as an intermediary. This is the limit to which prayer performed by man himself can rise. I think that this is very clear to you.

Further on in this state, another kind of prayer may be given, which comes to man instead of being performed by him. The spirit of prayer comes upon man and drives him into the depths of the heart, as if he were taken by the hand and forcibly led from one room to another. The soul is here taken captive by an invading force, and is kept willingly within, as long as this overwhelming power of prayer still holds sway over it. I know two degrees of such invasion. In the first, the soul sees everything and is conscious of itself and of its outer surroundings; it can reason and govern itself, it can even destroy this state if it so desires. This too, should be clear to you.

¹ 1 Samuel ii. 9 (Authorised Version). Here the text of the Septuagint differs from the Hebrew.

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But the Holy Fathers, and especially St. Isaac the Syrian, mention a second degree of prayer which is given to or descends upon a man. Isaac considers that this prayer, which he calls ecstasy or ravishment, is higher than that described above. Here too, the spirit of prayer comes upon a man; but the soul, carried away by it, passes into such a state of contemplation that it forgets its outer surroundings, ceases to reason, and only contemplates; and it has no power to control itself or to break from this state. You remember how the Holy Fathers write of someone who began to pray before his evening meal and came to himself only next morning. This is the prayer of ravishment or contemplation. With some it has been accompanied by illumination of their faces, by light around them,¹ with others by levitation. St. Paul the Apostle was in this state when he was carried up into Paradise. And the Holy Prophets also were in the same state of ecstasy when the Spirit bore them away.

Gaze in wonder at the great mercy of God towards us sinners: a little effort and how great is the result. Rightly may we say to those who labour: Work on, for what you seek is of true value.

Three types of prayer: of the lips, of the mind, of the heart

You have probably heard such words as: oral prayer, mental prayer, prayer of the heart; you may also have heard discussions about each of them separately. What is the cause of this division of prayer into parts? Because it happens that sometimes through our negligence the tongue recites the holy words of prayer, but the mind wanders elsewhere: or the mind understands the words

¹ A number of eastern saints have shared in the mystery of Our Lord's Transfiguration, their face or entire body being surrounded and illuminated with Divine Light, just as Christ's face and body were illuminated on Mount Tabor. A particularly impressive instance of this bodily transfiguration occurred in the life of a Russian saint, Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833): see the eye-witness account by his friend Nicolas Motovilov, *Conversation of Saint Seraphim on the Aim of the Christian Life, in A Wonderful Revelation to the World, Jordanville (N.Y.), 1953, pp. 23-5.*

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of the prayer, but the heart does not respond to them by feeling. In the first case prayer is only oral, and is not prayer at all, in the second, mental prayer joins the oral, but this prayer is still imperfect and incomplete. Complete and real prayer comes only when the prayer of word and thought is joined by prayer of feeling.

Spiritual or inner prayer comes when he who prays, after gathering his mind within his heart, from there directs his prayer to God in words no longer oral but silent: glorifying Him and giving thanks, confessing his sins with contrition before God, and asking from Him the spiritual and physical blessings that he needs. You must pray not only with words but with the mind, and not only with the mind but with the heart, so that the mind understands and sees clearly what is said in words, and the heart feels what the mind is thinking. All these combined together constitute real prayer, and if any of them are absent your prayer is either not perfect, or is not prayer at all.

The fire of prayer and Paradise in the soul

When inner prayer gains power, then it will control oral prayer, gaining dominion over external prayer and even absorbing it. As a result, the zeal of prayer will take fire, because then Paradise will be in the soul. If you content yourself with exterior prayer alone, you may cool in the work of prayer, even if you practise it with attention and understanding. The principal thing in prayer is a feeling heart.

Confine your mind within the words of prayer

I have already spoken more than once about how this work is to be done. You must not allow your thoughts to wander at random, but as soon as they run away, you must immediately bring them back, reproaching yourself, regretting and deploring this straying of the mind. St. John of the Ladder says of this, 'You must make a great effort to confine your mind within the words of prayer'.

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Prayer of the imagination, of the mind, of the heart

As we pass from without to within, we first encounter the powers of imagination and fantasy.¹ Many people stop here, not realizing that they must immediately pass beyond this first stage: for if we work chiefly through our imagination and fantasy, we are not yet praying in the correct way. This, then, is the first incorrect method of prayer. The second stage on the way within is represented by the reason, intellect, and mind, and in general by the rational and thinking power of the soul. Nor must we linger here, but pass on: and gathering this rational power together, we must descend into the heart. If we linger, we shall become involved in a second incorrect method of prayer, whose characteristic feature is that the mind remains in the head, wishing by itself to direct and govern everything in the soul. Nothing comes of these efforts: the mind pursues everything, but cannot dominate anything, and only undergoes defeats. This feebleness from which our mind suffers is described very fully by St. Simeon the New Theologian.² This second way of prayer can appropriately be termed 'mind-in-the-head', in contrast to the third way, which is 'mind-in-the-heart'. At this second stage, while this mental fermentation takes place in the head, the heart goes its own way; nobody watches over it, and so it is invaded by cares and passions, and only with great difficulty comes to itself again.

To this account of the second way of prayer, I would add a few words from the introduction to the writings of Gregory of Sinai,³ written by the *staretz* Basil,⁴ monk of the great

¹ On the meaning of 'imagination' here, see above, p. 25.

² St. Simeon the New Theologian (949-1022), Abbot of the Monastery of St. Mamas in Constantinople: probably the greatest of Byzantine mystical writers.

³ St. Gregory of Sinai (late 13th cent.-1346), monk on Mount Athos, one of the leaders of the Hesychast Movement.

⁴ *Staretz* Basil (died 1767), a Russian by birth, Ighmen of several monasteries in Rumania. He wrote introductions to the works of various Greek authors who discuss the Jesus Prayer (see below, p. 106).

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habit,¹ companion and friend of Paisy Velichkovsky.² Having quoted Simeon the New Theologian, *staretz* Basil adds: 'How can you hope to keep the mind intact merely by guarding your exterior sensations, when your thoughts by themselves stream in different directions and whirl towards material things? It is essential for the mind, in the hour of prayer, to withdraw as quickly as possible into the heart and to stand there, deaf and mute to all thoughts. Whoever withdraws only outwardly from seeing, hearing, and speaking, obtains little result. Enclose your mind in the inner cell of the heart, and then you will enjoy rest from evil thoughts; and you will experience the spiritual joy which is brought by inner prayer and attention of the heart.'

St. Hesychios³ says: 'Our mind cannot defeat evil dreams by itself alone; and let it never hope to do so. Take heed, therefore, not to think highly of yourself like the old Israel, lest you also be delivered up to our invisible enemies. When the God of all creation delivered Israel from the Egyptians, the Israelites fashioned a molten image to be their helper. By the molten image you should understand our feeble mind: when it invokes Jesus Christ against the spirits of wickedness, it drives them away easily; but when in its folly it trusts wholly to itself, it experiences a sudden and grievous downfall.'

¹ Orthodox monks are divided into three grades: *rasophore* (one who wears the rason or cassock), monk of the little habit, and monk of the great habit (or *schema* monk). Only a few monks enter the third and highest of these grades, the great habit: in Russia a *schema* monk is normally expected to follow a life of strict seclusion and fasting (in Greek monasteries the rules for *schema* monks are often less rigorous).

² Paisy Velichkovsky (1722-94), Russian by origin, entered the monastic life on Mount Athos and later settled in Rumania, where he became Ighmen of the monastery of Niamets. Editor of the Slavonic edition of the *Philokalia*. The spiritual and monastic renaissance in 19th century Russia was in large measure inspired by his disciples and followers.

³ St. Hesychios of Batos was superior of a monastery on the Sinai peninsula during the 6th or 7th century.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Desire and longing for God

What happens to the soul when we greatly desire to pray, or when we are drawn to prayer, and how should we behave?

Everyone experiences this desire in greater or lesser degree as they proceed on the path of the Christian life, once they have begun to seek God by personal effort, until they finally reach their goal of a living communion with Him. They also experience it after having attained to this goal. It is a state resembling that of a man plunged in deep thought, withdrawn within himself, concentrated in his soul, paying no attention to external surroundings, to people, things, and events. But when a man is plunged in thought it is the mind which is at work, whereas here it is the heart. When the longing for God comes, the soul is collected within itself, and stands before the face of God, and either pours out before Him its hopes and the sufferings of its heart, like Hannah, the mother of Samuel; or glorifies Him, like the most holy Virgin Mary; or stands before Him in wonder, as the Apostle Paul often stood. Here all personal actions, thoughts, and intentions cease; and everything external departs from the attention. The soul itself does not wish to be occupied with anything extraneous. This may happen in church or during the rule of prayer, or during reading or meditation, and even during some exterior occupations or in company. But in no case does it depend on your will. He who has once experienced this longing may remember it and desire its repetition, he may strive towards it, but he himself will never attract it by his own exertion: it comes of itself.

Only one thing depends on our free will—when this state of longing comes, do not allow yourself to destroy it, but take the utmost care, so as to give it full opportunity to remain within you as long as possible.

Two kinds of inner prayer

Inner prayer means standing with the mind in the heart before God, either simply living in His presence, or expressing

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supplication, thanksgiving, and glorification. We must acquire the habit of always being in communion with God, without any image, any process of reasoning, any perceptible movement of thought. Such is the true expression of prayer. The essence of inner prayer, or standing before God with the mind in the heart, consists precisely in this.

Inner prayer consists of two states, one *strenuous*, when man himself strives for it, and the other *self-impelled*, when prayer exists and acts on its own. This last happens when we are drawn along involuntarily, but the first must be a constant object of endeavour. Although in itself such endeavour will not be successful because our thoughts are always being dispersed, yet as proof of our desire and effort to attain unceasing prayer, it will attract the mercy of the Lord; and because of this work God fills our heart from time to time with that compelling impulse through which spiritual prayer reveals itself in its true form.

'Self-moving' prayers

In the case of 'self-moving' prayers, when the spirit of prayer comes on a man, we have no power to choose which form of prayer shall be given to us; they are different streams of one and the same grace. But these 'self-moving' prayers are in fact of two kinds. In one kind the man has the power of obedience or of disobedience to this spirit; he can help it or can thwart it. In the other kind he has no power to do anything, but is driven into prayer and kept in it by a force outside himself, which leaves him no freedom to act differently. Thus complete absence of choice occurs only in this last kind of prayer. As regards all other kinds choice is possible.

Prayer of the Spirit

'But the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered' (Rom. viii. 26).

This will be easier to understand if we can relate it to something that happens in our own experience. The Spirit moves in us

WHAT IS PRAYER?

in the prayer which comes by itself. Usually we pray using either a prayer book or our own words. Prayer may be accompanied by feelings and sighings, but we cannot arouse them within ourselves deliberately. Besides these feelings and sighings, it sometimes happens that the very inspiration to pray comes by itself, forcing us to pray and giving no peace until prayer is completely poured out. This, or something similar, is what the Apostle describes. The content of such a prayer can seldom be clearly defined, but it is almost always inspired by surrender to the divine will, and by complete trust in the guidance of God, who knows better than we do what is good for our inner and outer being, who desires this for us more strongly than we do for ourselves, and who is ready to give us all that is good and to set all in order for us—as long as we ourselves do not put up a resistance. All prayers by the Holy Fathers which have come down to us are of this origin and are moved by the Spirit: that is why they remain so permanently effective.

The approach to contemplative prayer

In purely contemplative prayer, words and thoughts themselves disappear, not by our own wish, but of their own accord. Prayer of the mind changes into prayer of the heart, or rather into prayer of the mind in the heart: its appearance coincides with the birth of warmth in the heart. From now on in the usual course of spiritual life there is no other prayer. This prayer, taking deep root in the heart, may be without words or thought: it may consist only in a standing before God, in an opening of the heart to Him in reverence and love. It is a state of being irresistibly drawn within to stand before God in prayer; or it is the visitation of the spirit of prayer. But all this is not yet true contemplative prayer, which is prayer's highest state, appearing from time to time in God's elect.

Active and contemplative prayer

The action of prayer in the heart may be twofold. Sometimes

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the mind reacts first, by cleaving to the Lord in unceasing remembrance of Him in the heart; sometimes it is the prayer itself that acts, when it is moved by the fire of joy and attracts the mind into the heart, holding it there in invocation of the Lord Jesus and in reverent standing before Him. The first kind of prayer requires effort, the second works by itself. In the first case, when the grip of passions is lessened, the action of the prayer begins to open out through fulfilment of commandments and warmth of heart, as a consequence of a strenuous invocation of the Lord Jesus. In the second case, the Spirit attracts the mind towards the heart and establishes it there in the depths, holding it from its usual wandering. In that case it is no longer like a prisoner who is taken away from Jerusalem into Assyria, but on the contrary it is a home-comer from Babylon to Zion, calling with the prophet: 'Thou, O God, art praised in Zion, and unto thee shall the vow be performed in Jerusalem' (Ps. lxxiv. 2. Sept.).¹ Out of these two kinds of prayer there comes sometimes an active mind, sometimes a contemplative one. The active mind defeats the passions with the help of God. The contemplative mind sees God, in so far as this is possible for man.

The inner journey of the mind and heart

He who has repented travels towards the Lord. The way to God is an inner journey accomplished in the mind and heart. It is necessary so to attune the thoughts of the mind and the disposition of the heart that the spirit of man will always be with the Lord, as if joined with Him. He who is thus attuned is constantly enlightened by inner light, and receives in himself the rays of spiritual radiance (as Theodoret says), like Moses, whose face was glorified on the Mount because he was illumined by God. David refers to this, 'The light of thy countenance, O Lord, has been marked upon us' (Ps. iv. 7. Sept.). The means whereby this state can be achieved is prayer of the mind made in the heart. Only when this takes shape will the sight of the mind

¹ Ps. lxxv. 1 (B.C.P.).

WHAT IS PRAYER?

become clear,¹ and the spirit, beholding God clearly, will receive from Him the power to see and drive away everything which could put it to shame before God.

Yet there are many who expect to approach God merely by outer words and deeds. They live in expectation, but they never come near; for they do not follow the right way. To such we make this appeal: approach God with the mind and heart and you will be enlightened and will no longer be defeated by the enemy, who at present—despite all your external correctness—constantly overcomes you and puts you to shame in your thoughts and in the feelings of your heart. Drawing near to God in your mind and heart will give you power over all other movements of the soul, and power to put the enemy to shame whenever he attempts to shame you.

Pray as if beginning prayer for the first time

You must never regard any spiritual work as firmly established, and this is especially true of prayer; but always pray as if beginning for the first time. When we do a thing for the first time, we come to it fresh and with a new-born enthusiasm. If, when starting to pray, you always approach it as though you had never yet prayed properly, and only now for the first time wished to do so, you will always pray with a fresh and lively zeal. And all will go well.

If you are not successful in your prayer, do not expect success in anything. It is the root of all.

¹ Compare King Alfred's petition for 'clear eyes of the mind to see Thee'.

CHAPTER III THE JESUS PRAYER from various authors

(i) SECRET MEDITATION¹

The fruits of secret meditation

The wise man who is the owner of riches hides his treasures inside his house; for treasure which is on view excites the rapacity of robbers, and is coveted by the powerful ones of the earth. And in the same way the virtuous and humble monk hides his virtues as a rich man his treasures, and does not follow his own wishes. But he reproaches himself every hour and forcibly devotes his energies to secret meditation, following the words of Scripture: 'My heart grew hot within me, and a fire kindled in my meditation' (Ps. xxxviii. 4. Sept.).² What kind of fire? The fire of which Scripture speaks here is God: 'our God is a consuming fire' (Heb. xii. 29). Fire melts wax and dries up mud: in the same way secret meditation melts our evil thoughts and withers the passions of the soul; it enlightens our mind, makes the

¹ 'Secret meditation': in Greek, *κρυπτῆ μέλτη*; in Russian, тайное поучение. The term *μελέτη* (поучение) means literally 'practice', 'exercise', or 'study': in an ascetic and spiritual context it embraces both of 'meditation' and of 'prayer'. According to Bishop Ignatii, 'Under the name of *meditation* (поучение) the Holy Fathers understand any short prayer or even any short spiritual thought, which they have acquired as a habit, and which they have endeavoured to assimilate with their mind and memory, in place of all other thoughts.' Thus the phrase 'secret meditation' can refer, among other things, to the practice of the Jesus Prayer, or to meditation upon some verse from the Psalms or other text in Scripture.

² Ps. xxxix. 4 (B.C.P.).

CHAPTER V
THE KINGDOM OF THE HEART
from various authors

(i) THE KINGDOM WITHIN US

The ladder to the Kingdom

Enter eagerly into the treasure-house that lies within you, and so you will see the treasure-house of heaven : for the two are the same, and there is but one single entry to them both. The ladder that leads to the Kingdom is hidden within you, and is found in your own soul. Dive into yourself and in your soul you will discover the rungs by which to ascend.

ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

The essence of Christian life

People concern themselves with Christian upbringing but leave it incomplete : they neglect the most essential and most difficult side of the Christian life, and dwell on what is easiest, the visible and external.

This imperfect or misdirected upbringing produces people who observe with the utmost correctness all the formal and outward rules for devout conduct, but who pay little or no attention to the inward movements of the heart and to true improvement of the inner spiritual life. They are strangers to mortal sins, but they do not heed the play of thoughts in the heart. Accordingly they sometimes pass judgements, give way to boastfulness or pride, sometimes get angry (as if this feeling were justified

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by the rightness of their cause), are sometimes distracted by beauty and pleasure, sometimes even offend others in fits of irritation, are sometimes too lazy to pray, or lose themselves in useless thoughts while at prayer. They are not upset about doing these things, but regard them as without significance. They have been to church, or prayed at home according to the established rule, and carried out their usual business, and so they are quite content and at peace. But they have little concern for what is happening in the heart. In the meantime it may be forging evil, thereby taking away the whole value of their correct and pious life.

Let us now take the case of one who has been falling somewhat short in the work of salvation ; he becomes aware of this incompleteness, and sees the incorrectness of his way of life and the instability of his efforts. And so he turns from outward to inward piety. He is led into this either by reading books about spiritual life, or by talking with those who know what the essence of Christian life is, or by dissatisfaction with his own efforts, by a certain intuition that something is lacking, and that all is not going as it should.

Despite all his correctness he has no inner peace ; he lacks what was promised to true Christians, 'peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. xiv. 17). Once this troubling thought is born in him, then by talking with people who have knowledge he will come to realize what the matter is, or he may read about it in a book. Either of these things will enable him to see the essential defect in the order of his life, namely his lack of attention to the movements within himself, and his lack of self-mastery.

He understands then that the essence of the Christian life consists in establishing himself with the mind in the heart before God, in the Lord Jesus Christ, by the grace of the Holy Spirit : in this way he is enabled to control all inward movements and all outward actions, so as to transform everything in himself, whether great or small, into the service of God the Trinity, consciously and freely offering himself wholly to God.

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Mind, heart, and feeling

Once a man has become conscious of what the essence of the Christian life is, and has found that it is something that he does not yet possess, he sets to work with his mind in order to achieve it. He reads, thinks, and talks. And so he comes to realise that the Christian life depends on union with the Lord. But though he reflects on this truth with his mind, it still remains far from his heart, and still is not felt. And so it bears no fruit.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Look inward: what do you find?

At this point the zealous man looks inward, and what do you think he finds there? Ceaseless wandering of thoughts, constant onslaughts from the passions, hardness and coldness of heart, obstinacy and disobedience, desire to do everything according to his own will. In a word, he finds everything within himself in a very bad state. And seeing this, his zeal is inflamed, and he now directs strenuous efforts to the development of his inner life, to controlling his thoughts and the dispositions of his heart.

From directions on inner spiritual life he discovers the necessity of paying attention to oneself, of watching over the movements of the heart. In order not to admit anything bad, it is necessary to preserve the remembrance of God.

And so he sets to work to achieve this remembrance. But his thoughts can no more be arrested than the wind; his bad feelings and worthless impulses can no more be evaded than the stench of a corpse; his mind, like a wet and frozen bird, cannot rise to the remembrance of God.

What is to be done? Be patient, they say, and go on working. Patience and labour are exercised, but all within remains the same. At last someone of experience is found who explains that all is inwardly in disorder because the forces within are divided: mind and heart each go their own way. Mind and heart must be united; then wandering of thoughts will cease, and you will gain a rudder to steer the ship of your soul, a lever by which to set in

THE KINGDOM WITHIN US

movement all your inner world. But how can one unite mind and heart? Acquire the habit of praying these words with the mind in the heart, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me.' And this prayer, when you learn to perform 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 cut off your wandering thoughts, and give you the power to govern the movements of your soul.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

From impotence to strength. An autocrat on the throne of the heart

If all goes well, a man who seeks after God will, upon reflection, decide to give up distractions and live in self-denial, inspired by fear of God and by his conscience. In answer to this decision the grace of God, which until now has acted from without, enters within through the sacraments; and the spirit of man, previously impotent, now becomes full of strength.

The man now acquires self-awareness and freedom within, and begins an inner life before God—a life truly free, reasonable and self-directed. The importunities of the soul and body and the pressure of outward events no longer distract him; on the contrary he begins to control them in accordance with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He sits as an autocrat on the throne of the heart and from there he ordains how things should be directed and carried out. Such autocracy begins from the first moment of the inner transformation and entrance of grace, but it does not show itself at once in its full perfection. Former masters often force their way through and not only produce disturbance in the inner city, but frequently lead away the ruler of the city as a prisoner.

At the beginning such occasions often occur; but the strength of vigorous zeal, together with constancy of attention to ourselves and to our work, and wise patience in our efforts to perform it, assisted by divine grace, gradually make these occasions more and more rare. Finally the spirit becomes so strong that the attacks of those who formerly had influence over it become like a speck of dust driven against a granite wall. The spirit dwells

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ever within itself, standing before God; and by the power of God it reigns firm and untroubled.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Theory and practice. The dangers of too much reading and talk

He who seeks the inner kingdom of God and a living communion with Him, will naturally seek to remain continually in the thought of God. Turning his mind towards Him with all his might, his one desire will be to read only of Him, to speak only of Him. But these occupations alone will not lead to what is sought, unless accompanied by other, more practical activities. A certain type of mystic talks only of these occupations: the reason is that such teachers are people of theory and not of practice. There is some exaggeration on this subject in Roman Catholic instructions concerning spiritual life, and this is not without danger.

This practice of reading and speaking of God will, used on its own, create a facile habit for such things: it is easier to philosophize than to pray or pay attention to oneself. But since it is a work of the mind, which falls so easily into pride, it predisposes a man to self-esteem. It may altogether cool the desire for practical effort, and consequently hinder sound progress by a flattering successfulness in this mental activity.

For this reason sound-minded teachers warn their pupils of the danger, and advise them not to concern themselves too much with such reading and talk to the detriment of other things.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Do not be too much attached to reading

It is wrong to become too much attached to reading. It leads to no good and builds a wall between the heart and God. It leads to the development of a harmful curiosity and sophistry.

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Finding the place of the heart

At last the period of vexatious searching passes; the fortunate seeker receives what he has sought. He finds the heart and establishes himself in it with his mind before God, and stands before Him unswervingly like a faithful subject before the King, receiving from Him the power and strength to rule over all his inner and outer life, according to God's good pleasure. This is the moment when the kingdom of God enters within and begins to manifest itself in its natural strength.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

The kingdom of God within us; and the spiritualization of soul and body

Now begins the task of accustoming ourselves to spiritual prayer to the Lord. The first-fruits of this prayer quicken our faith, faith reinforces our efforts and multiplies their fruits; and so the work proceeds successfully.

If we attain this habit of spiritual prayer to the Lord, we shall find that, by God's mercy, the inward longing for Him comes more frequently. And subsequently it comes about that this interior involvement is confirmed for ever, and the man dwells inwardly before God without ceasing. This is the establishing of the kingdom of God within us. But let us add that with this comes also the start of a new cycle of changes in our inner life, which may be called the spiritualization of soul and body.

From the psychological point of view, this must be said of the kingdom of God: it is born in us when the mind is united with the heart, both alike adhering steadfastly to the remembrance of God.

Then man surrenders to the Lord his consciousness and freedom as a sacrifice pleasing to Him, and receives from God power over himself; and by strength received from Him he rules over all his inner and outer life as God's vicegerent.

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A Teacher within you

Instead of concentrating upon external behaviour, all those who work on themselves must have as their aim to be attentive and vigilant, and to walk in the presence of God. If God grants it, a soreness will appear in your heart; then what you desire, or even something higher still, will come of itself. A certain rhythm will set itself in motion, in virtue of which everything will progress aright, coherently and in the proper way, without your thinking about it. Then you will carry a Teacher within you, wiser far than any earthly teacher.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

The new heaven of the heart

Much labour and time is needed in prayer, in order painfully to achieve a state of mind free from all disturbance—that new heaven of the heart in which Christ dwells, as the Apostle says: ‘Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ dwells in you?’ (2 Cor. xiii. 5).

JOHN OF KARPATHOS¹

Three kinds of communion with God

It may seem strange that communion with God still has to be attained when it has already been given to us in the sacrament of baptism and renewed through the sacrament of confession, since it is said: ‘For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ’ (Gal. iii. 27); ‘Ye are dead (that is, dead to sin through baptism or confession), and your life is hid with Christ in God’ (Col. iii. 3). And we also know that God is everywhere, not far from each one of us, ‘. . . if haply they might feel after him. . . .’ (Acts xvii. 27), and He is ready to dwell in everyone who is willing to accept Him. It is only

¹ John, Bishop of Karpathos (an island between Crete and Rhodes), Greek spiritual writer of the 7th century.

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unwillingness, carelessness, and sinfulness that separate us from Him. Now if a person has repented and repudiated everything, and so gives himself to God, what then is the obstacle to the coming of God to dwell in him?

In order to remove misunderstanding it is necessary to discriminate between different kinds of communion with God. Communion begins from the moment when hope of it is stimulated, and it shows itself on man’s side in a yearning and aspiration towards God, and on God’s side in good-will, help, and protection. But God is still outside man, and man is outside God; they do not penetrate nor enter into one another. In the sacraments of baptism and confession the Lord enters into man by His grace, vividly establishes communion with him, and gives him to taste of all the sweetness of the Divine, as abundantly and intensely as those who have achieved perfection experience it; but afterwards He again conceals this manifestation of His communion, renewing it only from time to time—and then but slightly, merely as a reflection, not as the original. This leaves man in ignorance about God, and about His dwelling in man, until a certain measure of maturity or education has been attained, according to the wisdom of His direction. After this the Lord perceptibly reveals His abode in a man’s spirit, which then becomes a temple filled by the Three Persons of the Godhead.

There are, in fact, three kinds of communion with God: a first in thought and intention, which happens at the time of conversion; and two others which are actual, of which one is hidden, invisible to others and unknown to oneself, and the other is evident both to oneself and to others.

The whole of our spiritual life consists in the transition from the first kind of communion with God—in thought and intention—to the third kind—a real, living, and conscious communion.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Communion with God should be our constant state

It would be wrong to think that since communion with God is the supreme aim of man, it will be granted only at some later

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time, for instance at the end of all our labours. No, here and now it must be our constant and unceasing state. When we have no communion with God, and do not feel Him within us, we must recognize that we have turned away from our aim and from the way chosen for us.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Grace enters within through the sacraments of initiation

A mystical communion with our Lord Jesus Christ is granted to believers in the holy sacrament of baptism. At baptism and chrismation¹ grace enters into the heart of the Christian, and thereafter remains constantly within him, helping him to live in a Christian way and to go from strength to strength in the spiritual life.

All of us who have been baptized and chrismated, have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. He is in all of us, but He is not active in all of us.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Grace and sin do not dwell together

Sin is now driven out from its stronghold and goodness takes its place, while the strength of sin is shattered and dispersed.

'Grace and sin do not dwell together in the mind,' says St. Diadochos, 'but before baptism grace incites the soul to goodness from without, while Satan lurks in its depths, endeavouring to bar all the doors of righteousness in the mind; but from the very moment that we are reborn the devil remains outside and grace dwells within.'

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

¹ *Chrismation*: according to the practice of the Orthodox Church, immediately after baptism the newly-baptized is anointed with the Holy Chrism (*μύρον*). The priest makes the sign of the Cross with the Chrism on the various parts of the body, saying, 'The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit'. This sacrament of chrismation is equivalent to confirmation in the west.

THE KINGDOM WITHIN US

Christ lives within us through the sacraments

You are making strenuous efforts to attain the habit of the Jesus Prayer. May the Lord bless you! You must believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is within us—by the power of baptism and holy communion, according to His own promise; for He is united with us through these sacraments. For those who are baptized are clothed in Christ, and those who take holy communion receive the Lord. 'He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him' (John vi. 56), says the Lord. Only mortal sins deprive us of this great mercy: and even then it can be regained by those who repent and go to confession, and after receive holy communion. You must believe this. If your faith is insufficient, pray that God may increase it and establish it in you, firm and unshakable.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Be filled with the Spirit

The Spirit of grace lives in Christians from the time of baptism and chrismation. And to participate in the sacraments of repentance and communion—is not this to receive the most abundant floods of grace?

To those who already have the Spirit it is obviously appropriate to say: 'Quench not the Spirit' (1 Thess. v. 19). But how can one say to such people: 'Be filled with the Spirit' (Eph. v. 18)? The grace of the Holy Spirit is indeed given to all Christians, because such is the power of the Christian faith. But the Holy Spirit, living in Christians, does not effect their salvation by Himself, but works together with the free actions of each individual. In this sense the Christian can offend or extinguish the Spirit—or else he may contribute to the perceptible manifestation of the Spirit's action within him. When this happens, the Christian feels himself to be in an extraordinary state which expresses itself in deep, sweet, and quiet joy, sometimes rising to the rejoicing of the spirit: this is spiritual exultation. Contrasting it with intoxication from wine, the Apostle says that we must

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