

# ***The Heart in the Hesychastic Treatises of St Gregory Palamas***

***By Monk Vartholomaeos***

## **Introduction**

In a Russian village not so long ago, a pious middle-aged Russian woman, striving to live a conscientious Christian life, went to see her priest for confession. Having listened to her for a while, and perceiving her general instability of thought and therefore also life, the elderly priest took a small metal cross into his hand, and in a friendly, but stern manner, struck the woman twice upon the head saying, 'you silly woman, go inside, go inside, and you will find rest'. This unorthodox behaviour of the confessor, in a strange way, is a most practical and direct way to express what we mean by the term *Hesychasm*.

When one speaks about the heart, in an Eastern Christian context, one is somewhat obliged to talk about Hesychasm also. Furthermore, when one is talking about Hesychasm, St Gregory Palamas inevitably enters the equation.

The heart possesses a centrality few can claim. If one accepts that man is the centre and crown of creation,<sup>1</sup> it would not be an exaggeration to say that the heart is at the centre of the world. If this can be applied to the material world, even more so does it appertain to the spiritual. For the heart is the meeting point between the Creator and creation, between God and man. St Augustine asks the following question. 'Where can we find God?', and continues in answer, 'not on earth, for He is not here. And not in heaven, for we are not there. But in our own hearts we can find Him.'<sup>2</sup>

St Gregory Palamas was a prolific writer. It was not until the second half of the previous century that his works were finally compiled and published by Professor Christou Panagiotis in Thessalonica, the city where St Gregory served as Archbishop. It is a voluminous corpus consisting of theological treatises, letters, ascetic writings, homilies, and prayers. I have chosen to focus on three of his works: the *Treatises in Defence of those who Practise Holy Stillness*<sup>3</sup> (1338-40), commonly termed the *Triads* due to their structure, for they consist of three sets of triple tracts. This is, indisputably, St Gregory Palamas's most important theological work,<sup>4</sup> and another treatise *To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia* (1345/6), a statement of traditional Orthodox asceticism, written at Xenia's request, and finally, for obvious reasons, one of Palamas's briefest works, *On Prayer and the Purity of Heart* (1336/7).

## **I. Pre-requisites to Understanding St Gregory Palamas**

### **i. The Person**

After the sack of Constantinople, by the fourth Crusade in 1204, Byzantium never fully recovered. The material and military power under the Palaeologoi was nothing but a shadow of what it once was in the days of Constantine and Justinian. Throughout the fourteenth century, her borders were steadily declining in the face of the advancing Turks. Yet, the last two centuries of the Byzantine Empire were far from being a story of merely increasing weakness and steady decline. In the realm of the 'spirit', Byzantium continued to be vibrant and creative right until the very end. The fourteenth century witnessed the last Byzantine renaissance, marked by scholars and humanists such as Theodore Metochites<sup>5</sup> (1270-1331) and Nicephorus Gregoras (1296-1360). It was likewise a time of outstanding artistic brilliance. One only needs to look at the mosaics and frescos of the monastery of Chora in Constantinople,<sup>6</sup> and the later Byzantine churches of Thessalonica. Last, but not least, it was also an era of renewal for ascetic and mystical theology. It was at this time that the *Hesychast Controversy* broke out. An eloquent and authoritative spokesman came to its defence: Saint Gregory Palamas.<sup>7</sup>

Palamas has been described as the greatest Byzantine theologian of the fourteenth century, and one of the most renowned of all ages.<sup>8</sup> He was born at Constantinople 1296 into a noble and pious family. He grew up in the court of emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus. Palamas's father was so well respected by the emperor that the heir, Andronicus III, was placed under his personal tuition. Palamas himself received a first class education at the imperial university, which the emperor personally supervised, since Palamas's father had died when the young Gregory was still only seven years old. Indeed, it is said that when he had to talk about Aristotle in the presence of the emperor, at the tender age of seventeen, he was so successful that Theodore Metochites, Chancellor of the university at the time, exclaimed to the emperor that even if Aristotle himself were present he would have praised him.<sup>9</sup>

However, under the influence of the hesychast bishop Theoleptus of Philadelphia, Palamas, to the great disappointment of the emperor, decided to turn his back on a glorious secular future and to enter the

<sup>1</sup> See Gen. 1:26-28.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Anthony Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Light and Life, 1998), 261.

<sup>3</sup> Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς Ἡσυχάζοντων.

<sup>4</sup> John Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church* (New York: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982) 167.

<sup>5</sup> In fact, Palamas studied under his supervision.

<sup>6</sup> In the early fourteenth century, the church was restored and redeccorated by none other than the Grand Logothete Theodore Metochites, during the reign of Andronicus II Palaeologus (1282-1328).

<sup>7</sup> Kallistos Ware, *Act out of Stillness* (Toronto: The Hellenic Canadian Association of Constantinople, 1995) 1-3.

<sup>8</sup> George Mantzarides, *Παλαμικά*, (Thessalonica: Πουρναράς, 1998) 79.

monastic estate at the age of twenty. Prior to his death, Palamas's father had also taken monastic vows; now it was the turn of his mother, three sisters, and two brothers to follow suit. St Gregory Palamas was thus free to embark on a new life. Due to political turmoil, and the Hesychast Controversy, Palamas spent most of his monastic life on Mount Athos, Northern Greece, and Constantinople. At the age of thirty, he was ordained priest in Thessalonica. Following the hesychast custom, he generally spent his time in utter seclusion, returning to the monastery only at weekends, in order to celebrate the Divine Liturgy with his fellow ascetics.

The Hesychast Controversy broke out when the notorious Greek monk Barlaam (1290-1338) came from Calabria<sup>10</sup> to Thessalonica and started attacking various aspects of Hesychasm. St Gregory Palamas, prompted by his fellow monks, came to their defence writing his famous *Triads*. The anti-Palamite baton had been passed from Barlaam to Gregory Akindynos,<sup>11</sup> a former friend of Palamas, to the learned scholar Nicephorus Gregoras. Three councils were convened in Constantinople between 1341 and 1351 where Hesychasm was vindicated. This period was marked by civil strife and complicated turn of events. Palamas found himself imprisoned and excommunicated from the Church, only to later be exonerated and even raised to the rank of Archbishop of Thessalonica. Apart from a short period of imprisonment by the Turks, Palamas ended his life peacefully fulfilling his pastoral responsibilities with great diligence, as one can see from his homilies.<sup>12</sup> His life ended on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1359. By synodal act in 1368, Palamas's name entered the Church calendar of Constantinople, and he was officially revered as a saint. His memory is celebrated twice a year: on the day of his death and on the second Sunday of Great Lent.<sup>13</sup> This indicates the importance the Church ascribed to St Gregory Palamas and his teaching.

## ii. Hesychasm

The question we are faced with from the start is what is Hesychasm? It is derived from the Greek word *ἡσυχία*, which means silence/stillness. According to the Father Sophrony Sakharov, Hesychasm is such a rich and splendid 'culture' that any description of it sounds incoherent and incomplete.<sup>14</sup> Palamas refers to it as *ἱερὴ ἡσυχία*<sup>15</sup> (holy silence) and calls it, 'the art of arts'.<sup>16</sup> Hesychasm is a way of life in which a monk, in the midst of intense ascetic struggle, seeks inner stillness (*ἡσυχία*) and the cleansing from the passions, which in turn leads to a mystical union with God, essentially effected by divine grace. Great attention is given to *νήψις* (vigilant inner sobriety), and physical techniques have sometimes been employed.

The mystical tradition to which Hesychasm belongs is marked by a strong use of apophatic theology. God cannot be properly comprehended by the human mind, and all language applied to Him is inevitably inaccurate. It is, therefore, less misleading to use negative theology when speaking about God, rather than positive. This negative, or apophatic theology as it is more commonly termed, reaches its classical expression in Dionysius the Areopogite (5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c.). Many have used this approach not only as a device indicating God's utter transcendence,<sup>17</sup> but more fundamentally, as a means for attaining union with Him through prayer. These negations act as a springboard whereby the monk seeks to leap up into the living mystery of God. This 'way of negation' is at the same time a 'way of union'.<sup>18</sup> Apophaticism, therefore, is seen as a spiritual pathway, which prepares one to see God.<sup>19</sup>

Chronologically, many have restricted Hesychasm to the controversies of the fourteenth century. Hesychasm has a long history and continues to play an essential role in Eastern monasticism to this very day. It has its roots in the first hermits who fled in the fourth century to the barren deserts of Egypt, Palestine and Syria.<sup>20</sup> From the sixth century, the word 'Hesychast' has been synonymous with the word 'monk'.<sup>21</sup> Besides, even from the time of Origen (c.185-c.254) the word *ἡσυχία* took on the meaning of 'solitude' and life far from

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<sup>9</sup> Philotheos Kokkinos, *Λόγος Ἐγκωμιαστικὸς εἰς τὸν ἐν Ἀγίοις Πατέρα ἡμῶν Γρηγόριον Ἀρχιεπίσκοπον Θεσσαλονίκης τὸν Παλαμά*, in J. P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, vol. 151 (Paris: 1865), 560A.

<sup>10</sup> Southern Italy.

<sup>11</sup> Born early 14<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>12</sup> Of which two volumes have already been published in English by St Tikhon's Seminary Press.

<sup>13</sup> For a fuller account see: Carmelo Giuseppe Conticello, and Vassa Conticello (eds.) *Le Théologie Byzantine et sa Tradition*, vol. II (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2002), 131-137, and Παναγιώτης Χρήστου 'Γρηγόριος Παλαμάς', in Α. Μαρτίνοβ (ed.), *Θρησκευτική και Ηθική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια* (Athens: Μαρτίνοβ, 1965) vol. IV, 775-794.

<sup>14</sup> See Sophrony Sakharov, *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (New York: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), 142.

<sup>15</sup> Gregory Palamas, *Défence des Saints Hésychastes*, Jean Meyendorff (ed.) (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, 1973), 2. 2. 12. 345.

<sup>16</sup> Palamas, *Défence des Saints Hésychastes*, 1. 2. 2. 321.

<sup>17</sup> An early patristic example of this would be the works of St Gregory of Nyssa *The Life of Moses* and the *Homilies on the Song of Songs*.

<sup>18</sup> Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 63-4.

<sup>19</sup> Don Fairbairn, 'Eastern Orthodox Mystical Theology', in C. Partridge and T. Gabriel (eds.), *Mysticism East and West: Studies in Mystical Experience* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003) 154-5.

<sup>20</sup> Alphonse Goettmann, *Prayer of Jesus – Prayer of the Heart* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), viii.

<sup>21</sup> Philip Sheldrake (ed.), *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 335.

the world.<sup>22</sup> From the very beginning *ἡσυχία*, was a characteristic feature of monasticism. According to one contemporary Greek theologian, Orthodox monasticism is at the same time Hesychasm.<sup>23</sup>

Some Hesychasts, and indeed Palamas himself, claimed that they would experience a vision of the divine light, that same divine light that shone on Mount Tabor, bringing about union with God.<sup>24</sup> Although this may be the result of the Hesychast's life, it cannot be his purpose. A Hesychast is warned not to enter the monastery or desert in order to receive supernatural visitations, but rather to engage in spiritual warfare. Thus, one may say that there are no 'mystics' in the Orthodox Church, since one is clearly warned to avoid contemplation and the seeing of visions.<sup>25</sup>

One of the fruits of Hesychasm is rest, essentially internal in character. However, this rest has little to do with absence of conflict or pain. It is a rest in God in the midst of an intense daily struggle.<sup>26</sup> Temptation and labour remains to the end. A Hesychast does not try to run away from temptation, but rather, seeks to obtain that inner strength that enables him to bear it. In deed, the Fathers knew that temptations were unavoidable, but also salutary. According to St Anthony the Great, 'whoever has not experienced temptation cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Without temptation no one can be saved'.<sup>27</sup>

For a better understanding of Hesychasm, it is essential to draw a distinction between loneliness and solitude. The word 'monk' is of Greek origin and is derived from the word *μόνος* (to be alone). However, the life of the monk is far from being an unbearable state of isolation or an undesirable banishment. Rather, the life of the Hesychast is rich in transformations and sensations, essentially spiritual in character.<sup>28</sup> The Hesychast tries to turn his aloneness into solitude, and not let it slip into loneliness. Loneliness is painful, whereas solitude is peaceful; and one might add, and Hesychasm is blissful. It is a lifelong struggle.<sup>29</sup> The Desert Fathers never thought of solitude as being alone with one's self, but as being with God. They did not think of silence as not speaking, but as listening to God. Solitude and silence are the context in which prayer is practised;<sup>30</sup> they are also the conditions that the Hesychasts sought.

One must be alone in order to realize how far one is from singleness of heart, and thus discover a deep longing for God. Getting on in the world clutters up the heart with an array of preoccupations and concerns which dampens this longing for God.<sup>31</sup> In order to express this theory - the manner in which external activities can obstruct the Hesychast from seeing his true inner state - the Desert Fathers would use the example of water being disturbed by the dropping of a stone. The ripples do not allow the onlooker to see his face clearly in the water. But once tranquillity has prevailed, one then is able to see an undisturbed reflection of one's self.

Hesychasm must not be perceived as an unhealthy esoteric movement of the later Byzantine period, but rather as a spiritual renewal of a most authentic tradition in the Christian East.<sup>32</sup> For some, the word Hesychast is synonymous with an uneducated monk. Undeniably, most of the monks were not learned, but it is not right to think of Hesychasm as only for the untutored. The example of Palamas himself is proof of this. Furthermore, it is also wrong to believe that Hesychasm leads to a Utopian, Nirvana-type of peace. Rather, it seeks a peace of God in the midst of intense daily struggle.<sup>33</sup>

There is nothing mechanical about Hesychasm. It is not some sort of spiritual technique that leads to divine contemplation, for God is not subject to automatic influence or compulsion. God freely communicates His grace to the soul when He wills and when the soul is ready. This readiness consists of the soul ardently aspiring towards God by the keeping of the commandments. The preparation for this is suffering, repentance, and tears.<sup>34</sup>

Palamas was no revolutionary innovator, but firmly rooted in the tradition of the past; yet he was a creative theologian of the first rank, and his work shows that Orthodox theology did not cease to be active after the eighth century and the seventh ecumenical council.<sup>35</sup> He was not one who merely repeats as the starting point of his theology was his own spiritual experience and not only the study of the Fathers.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Mantzarides, *Παλαμικά*, 80.

<sup>23</sup> George Mantzarides, 'Tradition and Renewal in the Theology of Saint Gregory Palamas', *Eastern Churches Review* 9, no. 1 (1977), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 66.

<sup>25</sup> John Romanidis, 'Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics – II', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 9, no. 2 (1963-64), 230.

<sup>26</sup> Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality*, 70.

<sup>27</sup> *Apothegmata Partum*, in J. P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, vol. 65 (Paris: 1865), 77A.

<sup>28</sup> Zacharias Zacharou, *Αναφορά στη Θεολογία του Γέροντος Σωφρονίου* (Essex: Ιερά Μονή Τιμίου Προδρόμου, 2000), 223.

<sup>29</sup> Henri Nouwen quoted from Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality*, 215.

<sup>30</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 69.

<sup>31</sup> See Andrew Louth, *The Wilderness of God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999), 52.

<sup>32</sup> John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, trans. George Lawrence (London: The Faith Press, 1964), 201.

<sup>33</sup> Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality*, 218.

<sup>34</sup> See Sophrony, *Saint Silouan*, 147.

<sup>35</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 70.

<sup>36</sup> Basil Krivoshein, *The Ascetic and Theological Theology of Gregory Palamas* (London: Coldwell, 1954), 48.

Palamas's teaching is a new reading of traditional theology, formulated in response to the fresh challenges for the Orthodox faith.<sup>37</sup>

Tradition is not passive but active. It is active in two ways. Firstly, it is about receiving what your ancestors – namely the Fathers of the Church – have passed on. Secondly, it is active as an act of offering, of passing on that which you have received.<sup>38</sup> It was due to St Gregory Palamas's efforts that Hesychasm, that age long tradition, was set on a firm doctrinal basis, the Constantinopolitan councils of 1341 and 1351 confirming his teaching. Although these councils were local, they are of great importance for Orthodox theology; in authority, ranking just below the seven general councils themselves.<sup>39</sup> Palamas truly lived the tradition of the Church. He was thus in a position to defend it, subsequently also to add to it.

### iii. The Jesus Prayer

As the name suggests we are dealing with a prayer that has Jesus Christ at its centre. It is a very short prayer that, with a few variations, runs thus: 'Lord Jesus Christ Son of God have mercy on me a sinner'. At the heart of Hesychasm we find 'heart spirituality', and at the centre of this heart spirituality we find the Jesus Prayer.<sup>40</sup>

Phrases such as, 'Come, Lord Jesus' (Rev. 22:20),<sup>41</sup> the humble prayer of the publican: 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner' (Lk. 18:13), and the cry of the blind men: 'thou Son of David, have mercy on us' (Matt. 9:28) are all seen as prototypes of the Jesus Prayer. The parable of Jesus which urges men, 'always to pray and not to faint' (Lk. 18:1-8), and the admonition of St Paul, 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thess. 5:17), have been taken as the scriptural basis of the Jesus Prayer.

How to accomplish this unceasing prayer has long occupied the Christian mind. Others saw it as a combination of frequent prayers and good works (Origen). In their attempt to practice unceasing prayer, the Messalians<sup>42</sup> rejected other 'external' aspects of worship. In the fifth century we even had the so-called 'ἀκοίμητοι μοναχοί', literally translated the monks that never slept. Groups of monks that would take turns to stay in church so that pray would continue incessantly day and night.<sup>43</sup> Barlaam interpreted this injunction in a strange manner. For him, by prayer, the apostle meant to have the habit of praying; and to have this habit means to be aware that no one can do anything if God does not will it. Palamas rejected this understanding, for in such a case, he said, even the devil would be praying continually.<sup>44</sup>

All the above-mentioned techniques tried to accomplish unceasing prayer in an external and artificial manner. Gradually, in the East, prayer started to be seen more as a *state* rather than as an *act*. The Desert Fathers would use short 'arrow prayers',<sup>45</sup> which would lead to this perpetual state of prayer. It was not until the fifth-sixth century that these arrow prayers became integrated with the name of Jesus and thus gave us the standard form of the Jesus Prayer.

The Jesus Prayer has exercised immense influence upon the spirituality of the Christian East – not least in our own times as it is probably being practiced more than ever before, by lay people as well as by monastics.<sup>46</sup> Palamas did not discuss the Jesus Prayer specifically as a topic on its own, but it is taken for granted in almost all of his writings, since he was replying to attacks aimed against it.<sup>47</sup> Its practice was so widespread that it was superfluous to discuss it. However, he does speak about *μονολόγιστη εὐχή* (the prayer of a single thought),<sup>48</sup> which essentially is the Jesus Prayer. By the constant repetition of this short prayer, the mind is brought to a certain concentration. *Μονολογία*, thus, leads to *ἡσυχία*.<sup>49</sup>

Although Hesychasm is the work of the monk par excellence, it is not only confined to monasticism. Indeed, Palamas felt strongly about this himself. In his biography, it is recorded that he had a dispute with a certain monk Job over the matter.<sup>50</sup> The Hesychast teachers sought to spread the practice of the Jesus Prayer

<sup>37</sup> Conticello, *Le Theologie Byzantine*, 171.

<sup>38</sup> Mantzarides, *Παλαμικά*, 17.

<sup>39</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 67.

<sup>40</sup> Goettmann, *Prayer of Jesus – Prayer of the Heart*, viii.

<sup>41</sup> See Ware, 'The Beginnings of the Jesus Prayer', in B. Ward and R. Waller (eds.), *Joy of Heaven* (London: SPCK, 2003), 3.

<sup>42</sup> From the Syriac word *msl̄ȳn* (praying people) in Greek *εὐχέται*. An extreme ascetic movement widespread in the Near East during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. Characterised by an over spiritualised approach to prayer and anti-sacramentalism. They never formed an institutionalised sect, neither did they develop any doctrine. They were criticised by Fathers and councils, including the third ecumenical council in Ephesus (431).

<sup>43</sup> See George Galitis, 'Ἡ Αδιάλειπτη Προσευχή κατά τον Ἅγιον Γρηγόριον τον Παλαμά', in Γ. Μαντζαρίδης and Χ. Κοντάκης (eds.), *Πρακτικά Θεολογικοῦ Συνεδρίου* (Thessalonica: Ἱερά Μητρόπολις Θεσσαλονίκης, 1986), 177.

<sup>44</sup> See Palamas, *Défence*, 2. 1. 30. 283.

<sup>45</sup> Kallistos Ware, 'Praying with the Body: The Hesychast Method and Non-Christian Parallels', *Sobornost* 14, no. 2 (1992), 9.

<sup>46</sup> Ware, 'The Beginnings of the Jesus Prayer', 2.

<sup>47</sup> Lev Gillet, *The Jesus Prayer* (New York: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), 60.

<sup>48</sup> See *Défence*, 1. 3. 2. 109.

<sup>49</sup> Ware, 'The Beginnings of the Jesus Prayer', 20.

<sup>50</sup> Philotheos Kokkinos, *Λόγος Ἐγκωμιαστικός*, 573BC.

outside the cloisters, for to them it was pre-eminently a means of making the grace of baptism real and efficacious.<sup>51</sup>

The Jesus Prayer is said to contain the whole Gospel.<sup>52</sup> It declares that the second person of the Holy Trinity 'Lord Jesus Christ son of God' came into the world to save fallen man 'have mercy upon me a sinner'. Is this not that trustworthy saying given to Timothy? 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' (1 Tim. 1:15).

## II. The Heart in the Bible and the Ascetic Tradition

### i. The Old and New Testament

Without claiming to give a comprehensive analysis of the heart in the Bible, we shall now turn our attention to those passages that inspired and underlined the Hesychasts' understanding of the heart. Needless to say, the heart, with all its various shades of meaning, appears frequently in the Bible, over eight hundred times just in the Old Testament.<sup>53</sup>

From the beginning, it is important to reiterate the following words of Cooper. The New Testament neither implicitly contains, nor explicitly teaches, a philosophical anthropology as such or any theoretically precise or systematically consistent anthropology. Particular words such as *σάρξ* (flesh), *ψυχή* (soul), *πνεῦμα* (soul), and *καρδία* (heart) have a variety of meanings... Numerous examples could be given demonstrating that heart, soul, spirit, and mind are each used to refer to the seat of the emotions, the source of thoughts and actions, and the deep self, which knows and is known by God.<sup>54</sup> Undoubtedly, the same applies to the patristic literature, where all these key terms are often used as synonyms. However, this does not mean that we cannot say anything about them at all. Rather, it testifies to the inter-relation these functions have, without denying their individual reality and mode of activity.

In Hebrew thought, the heart was not significant primarily as an organ of the body, but as the hidden control centre of the whole person. According to Cooper, 'the entire range of conscious, and perhaps even unconscious, activities of the person are located in and emanate from the heart...and above all it is the source of love and hate of both God and neighbour'.<sup>55</sup> The Hebrew *לֵב* (heart) and the Greek word used by the translators of the Septuagint (*καρδία*) are almost absolute synonyms.<sup>56</sup> The heart is a central organ not only of the body, but also of the soul. It is interesting to see that this is in some degree expressed in the Hebrew Old Testament where the word heart (*לֵב*) is practically synonymous with the word soul (*נַפְשׁ*) without ever becoming confused or identified.<sup>57</sup>

Especially in the Psalms, but generally in the whole Bible, we come across the notion of purity of heart. It is presented as an essential quality of those who turn to God, 'create in me a clean heart'.<sup>58</sup> Psalm 24 tells us that it is 'he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart'<sup>59</sup> that shall stand in God's holy place.<sup>60</sup> Another central text for heart spirituality is the succinct verse of Psalm 64, 'the heart is deep',<sup>61</sup> which shows what a complex and unfathomable creature man really is. In Ezekiel we find the following, 'I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh'.<sup>62</sup> That is to say the heart of every human is deadened to some degree and is thus in need of new life. In the book of Proverbs God is portrayed as one who earnestly seeks His estranged child, 'My son, give me thy heart';<sup>63</sup> that heart which never rests as the body does, 'I sleep, but my heart waketh'.<sup>64</sup>

Passing on to the New Testament, this theme of the purity of heart takes an even more central role. In the Beatitudes Jesus proclaims, 'blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'.<sup>65</sup> In the New Testament 'heart' is the word most commonly used to denote the inner nature of man, the secret core of his being.<sup>66</sup> This does not only apply to the Gospels. St Paul also uses this term to refer to the inner man in his totality.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>51</sup> John Meyendorff, *St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, trans. Adele Friske (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 83.

<sup>52</sup> Andrew Louth, *The Jesus Prayer and the Theology of Deification in Fr Pavel Florensky and Fr Sergii Bulgakov*, unpublished article, 4.

<sup>53</sup> John Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting* (Leicester: Apollos, 2000), 41.

<sup>54</sup> See Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, 96-7.

<sup>55</sup> Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, 42.

<sup>56</sup> Nicholas Mbratsiotis, *Ανθρωπολογία της Παλαιάς Διαθήκης* (Athens: Πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών, 1996), 12.

<sup>57</sup> Mbratsiotis, *Ανθρωπολογία της Παλαιάς Διαθήκης*, 178.

<sup>58</sup> Ps. 51:10.

<sup>59</sup> Verse 4.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew Louth, 'Holiness and the Vision of God in the Eastern Fathers', in S. C. Barton (ed.), *Holiness Past and Present* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 217.

<sup>61</sup> Ps. 64:6.

<sup>62</sup> Ezk. 11:10.

<sup>63</sup> Prov. 23:26.

<sup>64</sup> Song of Solomon 5:2.

<sup>65</sup> Matt. 5:8.

<sup>66</sup> George Hardy, 'Heart', in J. Hastings (ed.), *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1906), vol. I, 709.

<sup>67</sup> Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 305.

Initially, the Greek word *νήψις*, from the verb *νήφω*, meant to be sober. The term was adopted by many ecclesiastical writers; they gave to the word a metaphoric meaning, referring to man's spiritual state. Although the word *νήψις* is not found in the Old Testament, its metaphoric meaning is well expressed in the book of Proverbs: 'keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life'.<sup>68</sup> This need for spiritual sobriety/watchfulness is declared throughout the New Testament. For example, the parable of the ten virgins concerns this comprehensive, catholic need for sober vigilance, 'watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh'.<sup>69</sup> In the first epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul admonishes them saying, 'therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch (*γρηγορώμεν*) and be sober (*νήφωμεν*)'.<sup>70</sup> In the New Testament sobriety (*νήψις*) and watchfulness (*ἐγρηγόρησις*) go hand in hand, and the above mentioned passage is a fine example of this. *Νήψις* is an essential feature of Hesychasm. Palamas talks about the cultivation and the keeping of the heart,<sup>71</sup> and the sober watching/supervision of the heart.<sup>72</sup> *Νήψις* is a continual and all embracing watchfulness over the movements of the mind and the heart.<sup>73</sup> Basing his opinion of scriptural quotes,<sup>74</sup> Mantzaridis claims that it is the main characteristic of the Christians life.<sup>75</sup>

Having considered the Bible, we shall now look at the role the heart plays in the theology of various ecclesiastical writers. Early Eastern monasticism produced three great ascetic authors that helped shape hesychast spirituality: Evagrius Ponticus, Macarius, and Diadochus Photiki.<sup>76</sup> I have restricted myself to these three writers because they each represent a particular current of theology; and each of these currents contributes to what we generically term Hesychasm.

## ii. Evagrius Ponticus

Evagrius Ponticus was born in 346 at Ibora in Pontus,<sup>77</sup> hence his surname. He was well associated with the Cappadocian Fathers, being ordained reader by St Basil the Great, and deacon by St Gregory Nazianzus whom he accompanied to the second ecumenical council in Constantinople (381). He was a great orator and zealously defended the Church against heresy. Leaving the Byzantine capital for the Egyptian desert, he spent the remainder of his life in strict asceticism dying in 399.<sup>78</sup>

Evagrius is regarded as the first great teacher of mental prayer<sup>79</sup> and the father of Christian mysticism,<sup>80</sup> having one of the finest faculties of observation and discernment to be found in the ascetic literature of the Eastern Christian tradition.<sup>81</sup> Louth points out that Evagrius's ascetic theology 'was so compelling that one cannot begin to understand the monastic and ascetic theology of the Byzantines without a good grounding in the ideas of Evagrius'.<sup>82</sup> Not only has his influence been felt in the East,<sup>83</sup> but also in the West through the works of St John Cassian.<sup>84</sup>

However, his teaching was not completely above reproach. He was deeply inspired by Origen, borrowing certain theories such as the pre-existence of human souls, and the final restoration of all things in Christ (*ἡ ἀποκατάστασις τῶν πάντων*). As a result, the fifth ecumenical council (553) posthumously condemned him. Like Origen, Evagrius borrowed too heavily from Platonism; he wrote of prayer as being purely an activity of the mind rather than of the whole person. Neither did he allow the body a positive role in the process of redemption and deification,<sup>85</sup> something Palamas himself felt very strongly about.

Evagrius has been labelled a forerunner of Hesychasm,<sup>86</sup> for he placed great importance on the need for 'ἡσυχία' (stillness) and inner concentration in spiritual warfare. He would advise his disciples that during trial and temptation one should 'use a brief but intense prayer'.<sup>87</sup> For Evagrius the practise of *ἡσυχία* is a yoke

<sup>68</sup> Prov. 4:23.

<sup>69</sup> Matt. 25:13, see also Mk. 13:33 and Matt. 24:42.

<sup>70</sup> 1 Thess. 5:6.

<sup>71</sup> See *Défence*, 1. 1. 6. 21.

<sup>72</sup> See *Défence*, 1. 3. 16. 143.

<sup>73</sup> George Mantzarides, *Χριστιανική Ηθική* (Thessalonica: Πουρναράς, 2003), 82.

<sup>74</sup> See 1 Cor. 15:34, 1 Thess. 5:6-7, and 1 Pet. 5: 8-9.

<sup>75</sup> George Mantzarides, 'Πνευματικότης, Ορθόδοξος', in A. Μαρτίνοβ (ed.), *Θρησκευτική και Ηθική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια* (Athens: Μαρτίνοβ, 1967), vol. X, 471.

<sup>76</sup> Palamas may have been familiar with Evagrius, mainly through the pseudonym of Neilos. He knew, and uses, the Macarian homilies, but in a much briefer edition than the one we have today, whereas, Diadochus he quotes explicitly.

<sup>77</sup> Modern day Turkey.

<sup>78</sup> Johannes Quasten (ed.), *Patrology*, vol.III (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1960), 169.

<sup>79</sup> That is prayer that places emphasis on the mind above all else.

<sup>80</sup> See Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 135.

<sup>81</sup> Marcus Plested, *The Macarian Legacy*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 63.

<sup>82</sup> Andrew Louth, *Wisdom of the Byzantine Church* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1998), 1.

<sup>83</sup> Demetrius Constantelos, 'Evagrius of Pontus', in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), vol. V, 189-90.

<sup>84</sup> Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin, 1993), 181.

<sup>85</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 64.

<sup>86</sup> Ware, *Act out of Stillness*, 5.

full of joy and beauty,<sup>88</sup> and is to be sought at all cost. 'Be like an astute businessman: make stillness your criterion for testing the value of everything, and choose always what contributes to it'.<sup>89</sup> He would advocate that a monk should seldom leave his room, 'for continual absence from your cell is harmful. It deprives you of the grace of stillness, darkens your mind, and withers your longing for God'.<sup>90</sup>

The theme of *νήπις* (inner sobriety) can also be found in Evagrius's works. As he points out in *The Praktikos*, the essential struggle of the monk is with his thoughts.<sup>91</sup> Evagrius categorizes them into eight generic groups (of gluttony, pride, fornication and so on). This analysis was adopted by Cassian, which in turn was adopted and adapted by other writers in the West to produce the familiar seven deadly sins.<sup>92</sup> In his chapters on *Prayer*, Evagrius urges, 'stand on guard and protect your mind from thoughts while you pray'.<sup>93</sup> In the same work he says, 'do not let your eye be distracted during prayer, but detach yourself from concern...and give all your attention to the mind'.<sup>94</sup>

Evagrius gave particular importance to the role of the mind in prayer. The most striking example of this are the following sayings, 'prayer is communion of the mind with God',<sup>95</sup> and 'prayer is the energy which accords with the dignity of the mind; it is the mind's true and highest activity'.<sup>96</sup> The mind is ever active, 'for by nature the mind is apt to be carried away by memories during prayer'.<sup>97</sup> In order to hinder this straying, Evagrius recommends spiritual reading, vigil, and prayer.<sup>98</sup>

Evagrius often talks about the mind, whereas the term heart he uses infrequently.<sup>99</sup> A possible explanation might be that for Evagrius the two terms were synonymous, or perhaps this is an indication of his platonic influence. However, he does speak about dispassion of heart,<sup>100</sup> the longing of the heart,<sup>101</sup> thoughts and desires of the heart,<sup>102</sup> and often, about purity of heart.<sup>103</sup> However, these seem to be no more than passing comments. He was certainly well aware of the biblical understanding of the place of the heart. Yet, as Plested points out, these references hardly amount to a developed understanding of this.<sup>104</sup>

### iii. The Macarian Homilies

On writing about the heart, Brock tells us that headlines about transplants and other wonders of modern medicine should not lead us to forget about the existence of the other heart, the 'spiritual' heart; this innermost point of our being – that cannot be located in space – where contact with God is possible.<sup>105</sup> This is why, for the Desert Fathers, salvation was equivalent to the 'finding of the heart'. Abba Pambo is quoted as saying, 'εἰ ἔχεις καρδίαν, δύνασαι σωθῆναι' ('if you have a heart, you can be saved'). To have a heart is understood as obtaining life-giving grace in the heart.<sup>106</sup>

*Fifty Spiritual Homilies* (short mystical treatises) have come down to us under the name of Macarius the Egyptian. It has long been accepted that the writer cannot be identified with the great monastic of the fourth century. Judging by the geography referred to in the homilies and the place of their circulation, it is more probable that they were written in Syria.<sup>107</sup> These writings had a lasting influence amongst Greeks,

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<sup>87</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John E. Bamberger, Cistercian Studies Series 4 (Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1981) 98. 71.

<sup>88</sup> See Evagrius Ponticus, 'Outline Teaching on Asceticism and Stillness in the Solitary Life', in G. E. H. Palmer, P. Sherrard, and K. Ware (eds.), *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, vol. I (London: Faber & Faber, 1979), 31.

<sup>89</sup> Evagrius, 'Outline Teaching on Asceticism', 32.

<sup>90</sup> Evagrius, 'Outline Teaching on Asceticism' 35.

<sup>91</sup> Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 48. 29.

<sup>92</sup> Simon Tugwell, 'Evagrius and Macarius', in C. Jones, G. Wainwright and E. Yarnold (eds.), *The Study of Spirituality* (London: SPCK, 1986), 171.

<sup>93</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, 'On Prayer: 153 Texts' in G. E. Palmer, P. Sherrard, and K. Ware (eds.), *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, vol. I (London: Faber & Faber, 1979), 70. 63.

<sup>94</sup> Evagrius, 'On Prayer', 110. 68.

<sup>95</sup> Evagrius, 'On Prayer', 3. 57.

<sup>96</sup> Evagrius, 'On Prayer', 84. 65.

<sup>97</sup> Evagrius, 'On Prayer', 45. 61.

<sup>98</sup> See Evagrius Ponticus, 'Extracts from the Texts on Watchfulness', in G. E. Palmer, P. Sherrard, and K. Ware (eds.), *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, vol. I (London: Faber & Faber, 1979), 54-5.

<sup>99</sup> Kallistos Ware, 'Prayer in Evagrius of Pontus and the Macarian Homilies', in R. Waller and B. Ward (eds.), *An Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (London: SPCK, 1999), 21.

<sup>100</sup> Evagrius, 'Texts on Discrimination in Respect of Passions and Thoughts' in G. E. Palmer, P. Sherrard, and K. Ware (eds.), *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, vol. I (London: Faber & Faber, 1979), 52.

<sup>101</sup> Evagrius, 'Outline Teaching on Asceticism', 34.

<sup>102</sup> Evagrius, 'Outline Teaching on Asceticism', 31.

<sup>103</sup> Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 53. 30, 59. 33, 83. 37, and 91. 39.

<sup>104</sup> Plested, *The Macarian Legacy*, 67-8.

<sup>105</sup> See Sebastian Brock, 'The Prayer of the Heart in Syriac Tradition', *Sobornost* 4, no. 2 (1982), 134.

<sup>106</sup> See Hierotheos Vlahos, *Ορθόδοξη Ψυχοθεραπεία* (Levadia: Ιερά Μονή Γενεθλίου της Θεοτόκου, 2000), 147.

<sup>107</sup> Plested, *The Macarian Legacy*, 33.

Syrians, Russians, Franciscans, Jesuits, Methodists - John Wesley wrote in his diary, 'I read Macarius and sang' - and even neo-Pentecostals.<sup>108</sup>

The heart<sup>109</sup> is simultaneously the source of life for the body and the centre of the soul.<sup>110</sup> The fact that the single term 'heart' is used to refer to the focal point of both our physical and spiritual mode of being is not a mere coincidence. There is a great advantage to this for it emphasizes the wholeness of the human person.<sup>111</sup> To demonstrate this wholeness of man, Justin the martyr (died c.165) asks the following question: 'Is the soul by itself a person? No, it is simply the person's soul. Do we call the body the person? No, we call it the person's body. So the person is neither of these things on its own, but it is a single whole formed together from them both'.<sup>112</sup>

Often commentators have interpreted Byzantine spirituality as consisting of two 'currents': heart centred spirituality and noetic<sup>113</sup> mysticism. Macarius is conventionally seen as the main representative of the first, while Evagrius as representative of the second. These are over simplifications that fail to take into consideration exactly how much interconnection there is between the two schools. However, it is a useful tool to help us distinguish specific trends within the Byzantine and Hesychast traditions. The so-called noetic tradition never displaced, or even contradicted, the more biblical conception of heart spirituality.<sup>114</sup> As Ware points out, both may be seen as groping towards the expression of the same spiritual reality. Far from distinguishing 'currents of spirituality' the classical Byzantine approach was one of synthesis. This approach is epitomised in Diadochus of Photiki,<sup>115</sup> and the fourteenth-century Hesychasts.<sup>116</sup>

In contrast to Evagrius, Macarius expresses a more holistic anthropology. To do this he employs the biblical notion of the heart which denotes the whole person: soul and body, mind and heart, not just the emotions and affections. The thoughts of man lie in his heart. This is why the monk must search in his heart, and there begin to commune with his thoughts,<sup>117</sup> 'for there in the heart is the mind, and all the faculties of the soul'.<sup>118</sup> It is, therefore, of utmost importance for the monk to take care what thoughts he entertains in his heart, 'For where your treasure is, as the Gospel says, there will your heart be also'.<sup>119</sup> Due to the Fall, man's heart is already captive to evil thoughts and desires that pollute it. To redress this state Macarius says that man's thoughts must be, 'taken captive to divine and heavenly things'.<sup>120</sup> The chief characteristic of Macarius' thought is the centrality that he ascribes to the heart. 'For the heart governs and reigns over the whole bodily organism, and when grace possesses the ranges of the heart, it reigns over all the members and the thoughts. ...on the other hand, as many as are sons of darkness, sin reigns over their hearts, and penetrates to all their members...as water runs through a pipe, so does sin through the heart and thoughts'.<sup>121</sup>

Macarius' system of theology, regarding the heart and man's spiritual journey can be divided into three successive stages:<sup>122</sup>

- 1) *The heart is under the domain of evil, which comes as a consequence of Adam's disobedience.*<sup>123</sup> Although humans do not forfeit freedom of will, evil is pervasive and cannot be overcome without the assistance of divine grace.

Countless times Macarius speaks about the heart as being full of uncleanness, wicked spirits, and the powers of the devil; it is there where sin reigns.<sup>124</sup> That which injures and pollutes a man, according to his teaching, comes from within the heart,<sup>125</sup> as the Gospel proclaims: Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?" (Mth. 9:4). 'For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts...These are the

<sup>108</sup> Tugwell, 'Evagrius and Macarius', 173.

<sup>109</sup> Here, we are referring to both the physical and the spiritual.

<sup>110</sup> Panagiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, trans. Norman Russell (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 179.

<sup>111</sup> Brock, 'The Prayer of the Heart in Syriac Tradition', 133.

<sup>112</sup> Justin the Martyr, *Περὶ Ἀναστάσεως*, in J. P. Migne (ed.) *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, vol. 6 (Paris: 1857), 1585B.

<sup>113</sup> A clumsy translation into English to render the Greek word *νοερός*, a derivative of the word *νοῦς* (mind). It could be translated as 'intellectual'.

<sup>114</sup> John McGuckin, *Standing in God's Holy Fire: The Byzantine Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001), 56-8.

<sup>115</sup> See the following sub-heading, iv.

<sup>116</sup> Plested, *The Macarian Legacy*, 70.

<sup>117</sup> See Macarius the Egyptian, *Ὁμιλῖαι Πνευματικαί*, in J. P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, vol. 34 (Paris: 1860), 11. 8. 549C.

<sup>118</sup> Macarius, *Ὁμιλῖαι*, 15. 20. 589B.

<sup>119</sup> See Lk. 12:32.

<sup>120</sup> *Ὁμιλῖαι*, 8. 1. 528D.

<sup>121</sup> *Ὁμιλῖαι*, 8. 1. 589B.

<sup>122</sup> See Kallistos Ware, Preface to George Maloney, *Pseudo-Macarius: The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1992), xiii.

<sup>123</sup> *Ὁμιλῖαι*, 15. 35. 600A.

<sup>124</sup> See *Ὁμιλῖαι*, 15. 33. 597C; 13. 1. 569B; 11. 552D; 43. 7. 776D; 15. 21. 589B; 15. 35.

<sup>125</sup> *Ὁμιλῖαι*, 42. 2. 772A.



things which defile a man' (Mth. 15:19-20). For Macarius this inner pollution constitutes real death.<sup>126</sup> Man cannot overcome this appalling state of the heart alone; only divine power is able to root out sin.<sup>127</sup>

2) *The stage of spiritual struggle, when the heart is indwelt simultaneously by both sin and grace.*<sup>128</sup>

Man must enter into conflict to overcome this state and to uproot evil from within the heart. Man may be overcome by wickedness but Macarius tells us that man is not susceptible only to evil but also to good.<sup>129</sup> The heart has an unfathomable depth wherein is found both death and life.<sup>130</sup> He describes man's heart as a beautiful garden in danger from vehement streams.<sup>131</sup>

Macarius says that the monk must battle with his mind and not 'consent, nor take pleasure in the thoughts of wickedness'.<sup>132</sup> It is via the thoughts that the devil attacks the monk, 'from the time when he (the Satan) gained this power, he does nothing but sift with thoughts of deceit and agitation all the sons of this age.'<sup>133</sup> This battle is not perceivable at once. It is only when man has cast away the affairs of this life and the bonds of this world that he is in a position to discover that there is this hidden battle.<sup>134</sup>

3) *When sin is cast out from the heart by the Holy Spirit, working in co-operation with the human will.*

In order for man to reach this stage he has to turn to God with his whole heart and of his own free will, otherwise no cure can be accomplished.<sup>135</sup> Macarius explains this casting out of sin from within the heart in biblical terms as the shedding of the old man.<sup>136</sup> However, it is not just a matter of putting off but also of putting on. 'Let us then beseech God that He would put off from us the old man, and put on the heavenly Christ, here and now.'<sup>137</sup> He stresses that all this takes place in this life: '...that heavenly fire of the Godhead, which Christians receive in their hearts now in this present world'.<sup>138</sup> Yet even so, a person continues subject to temptation and liable to fall.<sup>139</sup> There is no indelible perfection in this life. Having all the above in mind, it is fair to say that Macarian spirituality is truly one of the heart.<sup>140</sup>

#### iv. Diadochus of Photiki

Apart from the fact that he was bishop of Photiki in Epirus, Greece, and that he was one of the great ascetics of the fifth century, very little is known about his life.<sup>141</sup> As Plested puts it, 'Diadochus's work represents a conscious and creative synthesis of the spiritual traditions of Evagrius and Macarius'.<sup>142</sup> For this reason we have chosen to consider what he has to say about the heart. Phrases such as the 'light of the mind', and the 'warmth of the heart' are just two examples that indicate Diadochus's leaning on both Evagrius and Macarius. Naturally, Diadochus also finds himself within the Hesychastic tradition. Much of the terminology he uses such as *κάθαρσις νοῦ* (the cleansing of the mind), *προεσυχὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ* (the Jesus Prayer), *νοερὰν αἴσθησιν* (noetic feeling) and many others, are also found in many later Hesychastic writers, who sometimes explicitly refer to him.<sup>143</sup>

Many of the notions present in Macarius' writings are also found in Diadochus; for example: attraction to this world obstructs the inner spiritual life,<sup>144</sup> the heart is deep,<sup>145</sup> producing both good and bad thoughts,<sup>146</sup> and that both grace and sin can be found in the heart. However, Diadochus goes to pains to explain that this indwelling of both sin and grace does not happen simultaneously. In doing so, he is opposing the Messalians who had such an understanding. Interpreting the Gospel parable of the unclean spirit that had gone out of man seeking again to find rest,<sup>147</sup> Diadochus understands the heart as being that barren house into which the unclean spirit returns. He thus goes on to say, 'from this we must understand that so long as the Holy Spirit is

<sup>126</sup> Ὁμιλία, 15. 39. 601D.

<sup>127</sup> Ὁμιλία, 3. 4. 469C.

<sup>128</sup> Ὁμιλία, 17. 4. 625B.

<sup>129</sup> Ὁμιλία, 15. 25. 592D.

<sup>130</sup> Ὁμιλία, 15. 32. 597B.

<sup>131</sup> Ὁμιλία, 43. 6. 776B.

<sup>132</sup> Ὁμιλία, 3. 3. 469BC.

<sup>133</sup> Ὁμιλία, 5. 1. 496A.

<sup>134</sup> Ὁμιλία, 21. 3. 657A.

<sup>135</sup> Ὁμιλία, 20. 8. 653D.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Rom. 6:1-7, Eph. 4:21-23, and Col. 3:8-10.

<sup>137</sup> Ὁμιλία, 14. 3. 572B.

<sup>138</sup> Ὁμιλία, 11. 1. 545A.

<sup>139</sup> Ὁμιλία, 26. 14. 684B.

<sup>140</sup> See Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 161.

<sup>141</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, 509.

<sup>142</sup> Plested, *The Macarian Legacy*, 134.

<sup>143</sup> Panagiotis Christou, 'Διάδοχος', in A. Μαρτίνοσ (ed.), *Θρησκευτική και Ηθική Εγκυκλοπαιδεία* (Athens: Μαρτίνοσ, 1965), vol. IV, 1124.

<sup>144</sup> See Diadochus of Photiki, *Κεφάλαια Γνωστικά 100*, Sources Chrétiennes 5 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1955), 57. 117.

<sup>145</sup> See Diadochus, *Κεφάλαια Γνωστικά*, 59. 119.

<sup>146</sup> See *Κεφάλαια*, 83. 143 and 88. 148.

<sup>147</sup> Mth. 12:43-45.

in us, Satan cannot enter the depths of the soul.<sup>148</sup> Diadochus repeatedly speaks about a *conscious* feeling of God's love and God's presence in the heart,<sup>149</sup> a theme common in the Macarian corpus as well. In fact, for Diadochus this is the sole purpose of the ascetic life: 'Our one purpose must be to reach the point when we perceive the love of God fully and consciously in our heart'.<sup>150</sup> Diadochus, in agreement with Macarius, believes that the fruits of spiritual labour are harvested in the present life, and not only in the life to come.

As a genuine Hesychast, Diadochus talks about prayer as the guarding of the heart, the mind, and the senses.<sup>151</sup> Such a man (one who dwells continually within his own heart) henceforward walks up and down within the fortress of the virtues which keep guard at all times the gates of his purity. The assaults of the devil are non-effective against him, even though the arrows of sensual desire reach as far as the doorway of his senses.<sup>152</sup> A useful tool for the monk in this act of 'guarding' is the continual calling upon the name of Jesus in the heart. This, according to Diadochus, cleanses the heart and attracts grace, enabling the monk to reach perfection.<sup>153</sup>

The heart of man can produce either good or bad thoughts (cf. Lk. 6:45). As a result of the primal deception, the remembrance of evil has become, as it were, a habit of the heart. Diadochus goes on to say, "that the heart conceives most of its evil thoughts because of the attacks of the demon... And we do indeed make them our own when we consent to indulge in them... Is it not clear that whoever indulges in the thoughts suggested to him by Satan's cunning and engraves them in his heart, produces them thereafter as the result of his own mental activity?"<sup>154</sup> The importance here is that the thoughts a man entertains in his heart are not ultimately dictated by fallen nature but by man's free will. It is only after a man has fully consented to these thoughts that they became natural, as it were, hence the need to engage in spiritual warfare.

Diadochus tells us that man's mind is ever active. It either fosters goodness, or promotes wickedness. Because of man's fallen nature his mind is prone to evil. However, it is no good telling the mind to stop thinking; just as you cannot tell the lungs to stop breathing. This is where the practice of *νήψις* (inner sobriety) comes into play. When we have blocked all its outlets by means of the remembrance of God, the mind requires of us imperatively some task which will satisfy its need for activity. For the complete fulfilment of its purpose, we should give it nothing but the prayer, "Lord Jesus"... Let the mind continually concentrate on these words within its inner shrine.<sup>155</sup> The inner shrine, in which this unceasing meditation takes place, is the deep heart. The above passage can be regarded as a summary of St Diadochus's teaching. That is to say, the recitation of the Jesus Prayer offered by the mind in the heart<sup>156</sup>

### III. The Heart According to St Gregory Palamas

#### i. Νοῦς

In the medieval West there was a well-established distinction between the *ratio* or discursive thinking and the *intellectus* or spiritual understanding. The Greek Fathers draw a similar distinction between *διάνοια* (discursive thinking) and *νοῦς* (spiritual understanding). To use the *νοῦς* in realms which the *διάνοια* is incapable of apprehending is neither irrational nor obscurantist. On the contrary, the obscurantist – willing or unwilling – is one who makes his *ratio* or *διάνοια* the measure of the divine realm and who refuses to accept the possibility that there may be truths which the *διάνοια* cannot grasp. The *διάνοια* works by means of dissection and analysis deriving its information from objects that are foreign to it. The *νοῦς*, on the other hand, works through direct experience and intuition and not through abstract concepts. What is a contradiction to the *διάνοια* is not necessarily so to the *νοῦς*.<sup>157</sup>

*Νοῦς* is a word that is at the very heart of any Greek mystical theology. It is usually translated as 'intellect' or 'mind', neither being particularly appropriate. These words suggest man's reasoning and thinking, whereas *νοῦς* suggests an intuitive grasp of reality. It is more like an organ of mystical union than anything suggested by mind or intellect.<sup>158</sup> It is natural that Palamas, basing his theology on direct and immediate experience, emphasised the role of the *νοῦς* whereas some of his opponents, leaning heavily on philosophy, put their trust in the *διάνοια*.<sup>159</sup> Through discursive thinking, we *know about* God, whereas through the mind, we *know* God.<sup>160</sup> To avoid the confusion of transliterations we have opted for the word mind to render the Greek *νοῦς*, asking the reader to bear in mind the mystical and intuitive character of the word.

The mind has an extremely important role to play, for it governs the whole person, as the helmsman governs a ship. After the Fall, man is subject to all kinds of passions and desires. Many of them are natural,

<sup>148</sup> *Κεφάλαια*, 82. 140.

<sup>149</sup> See *Κεφάλαια*, 14. 91; 16. 92; 33. 103; and 91. 153.

<sup>150</sup> *Κεφάλαια*, 40. 108.

<sup>151</sup> See *Κεφάλαια*, 64. 124, and 97. 159.

<sup>152</sup> *Κεφάλαια*, 57. 117-8.

<sup>153</sup> See *Κεφάλαια*, 85. 144; 85. 148; and 97. 159.

<sup>154</sup> *Κεφάλαια*, 83. 143

<sup>155</sup> *Κεφάλαια*, 59. 119.

<sup>156</sup> Ware, 'The Beginnings of the Jesus Prayer', 20.

<sup>157</sup> Kallistos Ware, 'The Debate about Palamism', *Eastern Churches Review* 9, no. 1 (1977), 50-1.

<sup>158</sup> Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, xv-xvi.

<sup>159</sup> Lowell Clucas, 'The Hesychast Controversy in Byzantium in the Fourteenth Century' (Ph.D. thesis, California University, 1975), 576.

<sup>160</sup> Ware, 'Prayer in Evagrius', 16.

and therefore harmless, such as the desire to rest and to eat.<sup>161</sup> However, often these desires are sinful, subjecting the mind to their whim. The Hesychast endeavours to rectify this status-quo. This he does by testing and subjecting the suggestive thoughts that assail him and not simply letting the impulses of the soul dictate how he acts. The mind should determine the movements of the soul. The monk must oust the law of sin that dwells in his members, and replace it with the law of grace. 'But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members'.<sup>162</sup> Alluding to the above, Palamas continues: "That is why we grapple with the 'law of sin' (Rom. 8: 2) and expel it from our body, establishing in its place the surveillance of the mind. Through this surveillance, we prescribe what is fitting for every faculty of the soul, and every member of the body".<sup>163</sup>

Palamas attacks the idea of the ancient Greeks that says that man must drive his mind out of his body in order to attain spiritual visions as an erroneous belief and a ruse of the devil.<sup>164</sup> In paradise, the mind of the first created man was able to see God in a direct manner. However, after the Fall, man's mind lost the agility it once had, and became dispersed upon creation, being continually engaged with creation, and not with the Creator as before. 'After the Fall our inner being naturally adapts itself to outward forms'.<sup>165</sup> The aim of the Hesychast is to prevent his mind from, 'straying hither and thither',<sup>166</sup> and for it to once again draw close to God.<sup>167</sup> St Gregory Palamas says the following:

'For the mind,' writes St Basil, 'when not dispersed outwardly' – note that it does go out from itself; and so having gone out, it must find a way to return inwards – 'returns to itself, and through itself ascends to God'.<sup>168</sup>

To demonstrate this dispersion of the mind, Palamas, again basing his theology on the Fathers (this time Dionysius the Areopogite) speaks about two different movements of the mind. He does this by drawing a comparison with the eye. The mind is like the eye, in that it sees and observes visible things other than itself. This, to use Dionysian terminology, is called the 'direct movement' (*κατ'εύθειαν κίνησις*) of the mind. The second movement is termed the 'circular movement' (*κυκλική κίνηση*). This is when the mind returns to itself, and operates within itself, and so beholds itself, something the eye is not able to do. According to Palamas, this is the highest and most befitting activity of the mind. Palamas continues, 'and through it (the circular movement) it even transcends itself and is united with God'.<sup>169</sup>

St Gregory Palamas is renowned for drawing the distinction between God's essence and His energies. He applies the same device to man's mind stating that the essence of the mind is one thing, and its energies something else. 'The activity consisting of thoughts and intuition is called mind, and the power that activates thought and intuition is likewise the mind'.<sup>170</sup> Therefore, the same word refers both to the source of the action as well as the action itself. This is why Palamas can talk about the heart as being the place where the mind and the thoughts abide, but at the same time, he can talk about the mind as being dispersed through the senses.<sup>171</sup> That is to say, the essence of the mind is found in the heart, but the energies may be scattered outwards.<sup>172</sup>

## ii. Heart

St Gregory Palamas follows a long tradition of writers who have spoken about the heart. His teaching is unique in its synthesis without being revolutionary in its content. It is in accordance with the Biblical interpretation of the heart, as well as that of the Macarian Homilies, which he uses explicitly. His teaching about the heart has had a lasting effect on Eastern Christianity. It is still called upon today as an exposition of the traditional Orthodox viewpoint. He has not written a complete and systematic work about the heart, but its teaching can be traced in nearly all of his works,<sup>173</sup> showing the importance he gives to it.

In his treatise on *Purity of Heart*, St Gregory Palamas portrays the heart as being a power of the soul, one of the soul's many powers, all of which are susceptible to cleanliness and filth. Palamas also tells us that, 'the mind is pre-eminent among our inner powers'.<sup>174</sup> First, one perceives the impurity of one's heart, and only then is one able to see impurity of the other powers.<sup>175</sup> In the second *Triads* he also speaks about the heart as

<sup>161</sup> Palamas even speaks about blessed passions (*μακάρια παθήματα*). See Palamas, *Défence des Saints Hésychastes*, 2. 2. 12. 343.

<sup>162</sup> Rom. 7:23.

<sup>163</sup> Palamas, *Défence*, 1. 2. 2. 77.

<sup>164</sup> *Défence*, 1. 2. 4. 83.

<sup>165</sup> *Défence*, 1. 2. 8. 89-90.

<sup>166</sup> *Défence*, 2. 2. 26. 375.

<sup>167</sup> Palamas, *Περὶ Προσευχῆς καὶ Καθαρότητος Καρδίας*, in Π. Χρήστου (ed.), *Συγγράμματα*, vol. V (Thessalonica: Βασιλικό Ἰδρυμα Ερευνῶν, 1992), 1. 157.

<sup>168</sup> See *Défence*, 1. 2. 5. 85.

<sup>169</sup> See *Défence*, 1. 2. 5. 85.

<sup>170</sup> See Palamas, *Περὶ Προσευχῆς*, 3. 159.

<sup>171</sup> See *Défence*, 1. 2. 4. 83.

<sup>172</sup> More shall be said in part iii of this chapter.

<sup>173</sup> The treatise *Three Texts on Prayer and Purity of Heart* is far too brief to be considered as a thorough handling of the subject.

<sup>174</sup> Palamas, *Περὶ Προσευχῆς*, 3. 159.

<sup>175</sup> See Palamas, *Περὶ Προσευχῆς*, 3. 159.

being the inner man,<sup>176</sup> thus indicating his Biblical understanding, that is to say he does not think of the heart simply in terms of emotions and affections.

One of the key issues in the *Hesychast controversy* was the vision of God - was it possible and what was the nature of such a vision? Palamas affirmed that it was. However, there was one presupposition: purity of heart.<sup>177</sup> Palamas' argument was based on the words of Christ, 'blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God' (Mth. 5:8). He understood this beatitude in a most literal sense. He argued, 'for it is those who have a clean heart that see God, according to the infallible beatitude of the Lord'.<sup>178</sup> The parable which speaks about the cleansing of the cup, he understood in the same way, and that cup was the heart.<sup>179</sup> Palamas accepts that anyone can know about God, even those who have an unclean heart. However, in order to receive illumination (*ἐλλαμψις*) from God the heart must first be purified.<sup>180</sup>

How does Palamas understand the process of cleansing one's heart? It is commonplace in the ascetic tradition that the passions pollute man and obstruct him from drawing near to God. Palamas tells us that, 'the mind while still passion-dominated cannot be united to God'.<sup>181</sup> Along with prayer and ascetic struggle, man needs to reach *ἀπάθεια* in order to cleanse his heart.<sup>182</sup> *Ἀπάθεια* literally translates passionlessness, which can be misleading. A monk does try to mortify his passions. However, apart from harmful passions there are also positive ones which are necessary in the ascetics effort to reach *ἀπάθεια*, such as anger, when used against sin and evil, and love of neighbour and God.<sup>183</sup> Therefore, the *ἀπάθεια* Palamas speaks about must not be confused with a Stoic-like killing of all the passions. Palamas did not subscribe at all to the idea that man must completely mortify the passionate part of his soul, as his adversaries believed. He says:

We have not been taught that the killing of the passionate power of the soul is passionlessness, but its transformation from the lower to the higher...having turned away completely from the wicked and turned towards the good.<sup>184</sup>

Palamas believes that the passionate part of man's soul must be presented to God 'alive' as a sacrifice, in the same way that the apostle Paul exhorts the Christians to offer their bodies to God as a living sacrifice.<sup>185</sup> With *ἀπάθεια* the soul becomes sufficiently detached from earthly attraction to be able to contemplate and pray with undisrupted mind.<sup>186</sup> From very early on the 'pure of heart' have been identified in Christian spirituality with those who have obtained the gift of *ἀπάθεια*. Overlooking its etymological meaning, *ἀπάθεια* constitutes a divine passion.<sup>187</sup> *Ἀπάθεια* is a state of self-mastery and attention, which brings to mind the *νήψις* we spoke about.<sup>188</sup> Its best rendering would be 'freedom from the domination by the passions'.<sup>189</sup>

In the heart - the inner man - is the place par excellence where prayer takes place. Palamas reiterates the words of the apostle who tells us that it is in the heart one cries, 'abba father'.<sup>190</sup> The heart is also the place where true faith resides. Palamas's opponents gave special emphasis to the need of acquiring knowledge in order to be saved. In response, Palamas says:

He that has in his heart the knowledge of beings (*ἡ γνώσις τῶν ὄντων*), does not have, due to this, God inside himself, but he that has believed in the Lord Jesus in his heart with honest faith, has God enthroned in his heart.<sup>191</sup>

Almost everything Palamas says about the heart is directly related to Scripture. For the above, he slightly paraphrases Rom. 10:9. Within the same framework of defence Palamas quotes the apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians, 'Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart'.<sup>192</sup> It seems Palamas wants to stress the direct contact in the heart between man and God. Once man has thus 'found his heart' he no longer needs the word of God directing his actions, for he has God himself telling him how to act. Palamas wants to underline that God is not known through knowledge of created things but through direct experience with God in the heart.

### iii. Unification

We have briefly considered the two faculties of mind and heart separately. Now we shall turn our attention to the nature of their very close interrelation as it appears in the theology of St Gregory Palamas.

<sup>176</sup> *Défence*, 2. 3. 62. 517.

<sup>177</sup> See *Défence*, 1. 3. 5. 117-119.

<sup>178</sup> *Défence*, 1. 3. 9. 127.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. Mth. 23:25-26, and Lk. 11:39. See *Défence*, 1. 2. 10. 95.

<sup>180</sup> *Défence*, 1. 3. 52. 223.

<sup>181</sup> Palamas, *Περὶ Προσευχῆς*, 1, 157.

<sup>182</sup> See *Défence*, 2. 3. 66. 525; and *Περὶ Προσευχῆς*, 3. 159.

<sup>183</sup> See *Défence*, 3. 3. 15. 723

<sup>184</sup> *Défence*, 2. 2. 19. 361.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Rom. 12:1

<sup>186</sup> See Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 108.

<sup>187</sup> Mantzarides, *Παλαμικά*, 61.

<sup>188</sup> Louth, *The Wilderness of God*, 54

<sup>189</sup> Luke Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 28.

<sup>190</sup> Gal. 4:6

<sup>191</sup> *Défence*, 2. 3. 44. 477.

<sup>192</sup> II Cor. 3:2.

According to St Gregory Palamas the soul of man is a unified whole, 'For the soul is a single entity possessing many powers.'<sup>193</sup> However, Palamas does accept the classic tripartite division of the soul as formulated by Plato in his *Republic*. On the whole, this division is accepted by all the Greek Fathers. Thus, Palamas speaks about the soul's three powers.<sup>194</sup> He says, 'the soul is tripartite and is considered as having three powers: the intelligent (τὸ λογιστικόν), the incensive (τὸ θυμικόν), and the appetitive (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν).'<sup>195</sup>

In talking about the relation between the heart and the mind it is important to speak about the mind's location. When writing the *Triads* this was one of the arguments Palamas had to deal with. He states that the organ of the soul is the body, and then continues to ask, 'but which organs does the mind use?'<sup>196</sup> He tells us that all agree that this 'organ' is found inside man, but not all agree as to which of these organs it chiefly makes use of. Others have located it in the head (ἐγκέφαλος) as though in a sort of acropolis, whereas as others have located it in the heart. Referring to the λογιστικόν (the intelligent power of the soul), Palamas says:

We know very well that our intelligence (λογιστικόν) is neither within us as in a container – for it is incorporeal – nor yet outside us, for it is united to us; but it is located in the heart as in its own organ. And we know this because we are taught it not by men but by the Creator of man Himself when He says, 'it is not that which goes into a man's mouth that defiles him, but what comes out of it', adding, 'for thoughts come out of the heart' (Matt. 15:11).<sup>197</sup>

He thus calls the heart the shrine of the intelligence (τὸ τοῦ λογιστικοῦ ταμείον) and the chief intellectual organ of the body (πρώτον σαρκικὸν ὄργανον λογιστικόν).<sup>198</sup> Leaning heavily on *The Macarian Homilies* Palamas continues, 'for the mind and all the thoughts of the soul are located there' (in man's heart).<sup>199</sup> Here one must bear in mind the distinction between the mind's essence and its energy. In this instance, Palamas is referring to the essence of the mind, for as we know the energy is often dispersed outwards, without implying the essence is also dispersed. The heart is the abode of the mind (essence), and the mind's energy ought to abide there also. This is why Palamas argues that it is essential for the Hesychasts, 'to concentrate and enclose their mind in the body, and I might add, in the innermost body of the body, that which we call the heart'.<sup>200</sup>

'The Ladder of Divine Ascent' is a key text to understanding ἡσυχία, and Hesychasm. Written by St John of the Ladder (6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c.), abbot of the monastery at Mount Sinai, a whole chapter<sup>201</sup> is dedicated to it. The whole text is comprised of thirty steps, which guide the ascetic along the spiritual path. It has proved extremely influential within monastic circles, especially among the Hesychast writers of the fourteenth century.<sup>202</sup> To cement the above teaching on the Fathers Palamas makes explicit reference to this text.<sup>203</sup> 'Strange as it may seem', declares St John 'the Hesychast is he who fights to keep his incorporeal self shut-up in the house of the body'.<sup>204</sup> The incorporeal self refers to man's mind, that faculty of man that always seeks to 'travel' outward, that is dispersed upon creation. The house of the body in which he must contain it is the heart. The notion of the mind's energy abiding in the mind (essence), which in turn abides in the heart, Palamas expressed succinctly thus, 'but we, on the contrary (to those who believe that the mind must be extracted from the body), install our mind not only within the body and the heart, but also within itself'.<sup>205</sup>

In order to prevent the mind from being turned aside to distractive images St Gregory Palamas suggests the practice of νήψις:

When, therefore, we strive to scrutinize and amend our intelligence through rigorous watchfulness (νήψις), how could we do this if we did not collect our mind, outwardly dispersed through the senses, and bring it back within ourselves – back to the heart itself, the shrine of the thoughts?<sup>206</sup>

<sup>193</sup> *Περὶ Προσευχῆς*, 3. 159.

<sup>194</sup> When speaking about the heart, Palamas again uses the word power (δύναμις). These are not to be confused.

<sup>195</sup> Palamas, *Πρὸς τὴν Σεμνοτάτην ἐν Μοναζούσαις Ἑξήνην Περὶ Παθῶν καὶ Ἀρετῶν καὶ περὶ τῶν Τικτομένων ἐκ τῆς κατὰ Νοῦν Σχολῆς*, in Π. Χρήστου (ed.), *Συγγράμματα*, vol. V (Thessalonica: Βασιλικὸ Ἰδρυμα Ἐρευνῶν, 1992), 29. 208.

<sup>196</sup> *Défence*, 1. 2. 3. 79.

<sup>197</sup> *Défence*, 1. 2. 3. 79-81.

<sup>198</sup> *Défence*, 1. 2. 3. 81.

<sup>199</sup> *Défence*, 1. 2. 3. 81.

<sup>200</sup> *Défence*, 1. 2. 3. 81.

<sup>201</sup> Step 27.

<sup>202</sup> John Chryssavgis, 'Hesychasm', in William Johnston (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Monasticism* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000), vol. I, 586.

<sup>203</sup> See *Défence*, 1. 2. 3. 87.

<sup>204</sup> John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 27, 262.

<sup>205</sup> *Défence*, 1. 2. 4. 83.

<sup>206</sup> *Défence*, 1. 2. 3. 81.

As an aid in the practice of *νήψις*, the Hesychasts would recommend the repetition of the same short prayer. The prayer most commonly used for this is the Jesus Prayer. In the practice of this prayer the Hesychast is longing to unite his mind with the heart.<sup>207</sup> With time and by God's grace, this prayer of Jesus becomes prayer of the heart, that is to say the prayer of Jesus is repeated automatically and continually in the heart of man. This is how the Hesychasts interpreted Christ's words, 'behold, the kingdom of God is within you' (Lk. 17:21). The Jesus Prayer is not an end in itself but a means of acquiring this state of unceasing prayer of the heart, which is ultimately an experience of the kingdom of God here and now. Palamas says, 'in those devoted to prayer, and especially the single-phrased Jesus Prayer, the mind's activity is easily ordered'.<sup>208</sup> He also exhorts his reader, using the words of St John Climacus, 'Let the memory of Jesus cling to your breath, and then you will know the benefit of *ήσυχία*.<sup>209</sup> This practice is especially recommended for the inexperienced, who struggle to control the instability of the mind:<sup>210</sup>

Since the mind of those recently embarked on the spiritual path continually darts away again as soon as it has been concentrated, they must continually bring it back once more; for in their inexperience they are unaware that of all things it is the most difficult to observe and the most mobile.<sup>211</sup>

With time and the help of God, the ascetic reaches a higher state of concentration and is able to prevent his mind wandering outwards. In his treatise *to the Most Reverend Nun Xenia*, Palamas talks about the dispelling of shameful passions and the mind returning to itself.<sup>212</sup> When the mind has been freed from the distraction of the passions, the Hesychast is then in a position to bring back his scattered mind to its true abode: the heart:

When it (the mind) has got rid of that uncouth guise, and the soul no longer coarsely distracted by various cares and worries, then the mind withdraws untroubled into its true treasure-house and prays to the Father 'in secret' (Matt. 6:6). And the Father bestows upon it peace of thoughts, the gift which contains within it all other gifts.<sup>213</sup>

Only then is the Hesychast able to offer, from his heart, a purified mind to God. Only then is able to contemplate Him and come into direct communion with Him.

## CONCLUSION

The writings of St Gregory Palamas on the heart are scriptural and in accordance with the teaching of the Fathers, especially Evagrius, Macarius, and Diadochus. The hesychasts' understanding of the heart is seen as a synthesis of two 'currents' of spirituality: that of the heart and that of the mind; both currents being represented, respectively and conventionally, by Macarius and Evagrius. These two currents of theology were first brought into a whole by Diadochus and later by the fourteenth-century Hesychasts.

Hesychasm is a way of life in which the monk engages in spiritual warfare in order to cleanse himself from the passions and acquire inner stillness (*ήσυχία*), thus re-uniting himself to God. Hesychasm is synonymous to Eastern monasticism. It pays great attention to *νήψις* (inner sobriety and spiritual watchfulness) and the practice of the Jesus Prayer. There is nothing mechanical about it. Man must approach on his own free will and with conviction of heart.

In the Bible, the heart plays an essential role. It is portrayed as the deep content of man and his innermost being. Great emphasis is given to purity of heart, especially in the Psalms and the teaching of Jesus: 'blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'<sup>214</sup> For Palamas this purity of heart was the prerequisite to communion with God.

The heart, according to Palamas is the inner man, the centre of the soul, and its pre-eminent power. The heart is the place of prayer par-excellence and the abode of true faith. It is not through knowledge that God is *known* but through faith in the heart.

In relation to the heart, the mind (*νοῦς*) plays a very important role. The *νοῦς* (an intuitive tool of perception) is juxtaposed to the *διάνοια* (an instrument for discursive thinking). One of Palamas's main contributions to the hesychast teaching is the distinction he draws between the mind's essence and its energies. The essence of the mind is found in the heart. According to Palamas, the heart is the shrine of the mind and the chief intellectual organ of the body. In the heart are found the mind and the thoughts. However, due to man's fallen nature, the energy of the mind is extremely unstable and continually dispersed outwards upon creation.

In order to rectify this state, Palamas recommends the practice of *νήψις* and the use of prayer, especially the Jesus Prayer. Palamas says that the Hesychast must, 'concentrate and enclose his mind in the body,' and he adds, 'in the innermost body of the body, that which we call the heart'.<sup>215</sup> With time and the grace of God, man's mind is purified and led to a state of concentration. Only then is the mind ready to return into itself, into its true abode.

<sup>207</sup> Zacharou, *Αναφορά*, 218.

<sup>208</sup> *Περὶ Προσευχῆς*, 3. 159.

<sup>209</sup> *Défence*, 2. 2. 25. 373.

<sup>210</sup> *Défence*, 2. 2. 2. 323.

<sup>211</sup> *Défence*, 1. 2. 7. 87.

<sup>212</sup> See Palamas, *Πρὸς τὴν Σεμνοτάτην ἐν Μοναζούσαις Ξένην*, 58. 223.

<sup>213</sup> See Palamas, *Πρὸς τὴν Σεμνοτάτην ἐν Μοναζούσαις Ξένην*, 54. 221.

<sup>214</sup> Math. 5:8.

<sup>215</sup> *Défence*, 1. 2. 4. 83.

To return to the incident at the beginning of this paper, the above teaching of Palamas is precisely what that Russian confessor was trying to tell the lady in a practical and direct way: to descend with the mind into the heart and there pray to God in silence, and thus find rest.

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