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2009

## Gregory Palamas and Hesychasm

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GREGORY PALAMAS AND HESYCHASM

By

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A Paper Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Theology-Seminary of Saint John's  
University, Collegeville, Minnesota, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Monastic Studies

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY-SEMINARY  
Saint John's University  
Collegeville, Minnesota

April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009

This paper was written under the direction of



Fr. Columba Stewart, O.S.B.  
Director

## GREGORY PALAMAS AND HESYCHASM

Description: This paper discusses what Hesychasm is, how Palamas defines the hesychast method of prayer, what sources he used to support this method, how he used his sources, how hesychasts were particularly instructed to pray and what role the body played in prayer.

*This paper may be duplicated*

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April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009.

Gregory Congote, O.S.B.  
has successfully demonstrated the use of  
French  
in this paper.

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Fr. Columba Stewart, O.S.B.

April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009.

I started attending a contemplative prayer group once a week in my monastery in 2003. Some of my confreres could not understand how this group prayed because we were sitting still on mats and cushions for three twenty-minute periods. After each period we walked around the house in silence and finished with a reading preceded by a five-minute period of silence. When a member of my monastic community saw us, he could not figure out what this was about. This confrere simply said to me, “You guys look like chickens laying eggs.” Then, I explained to him that this was a contemplative prayer group who practiced with a specific method. He eventually understood and joined the group several times.

Between 1338 and 1341, Gregory Palamas wrote nine treatises entitled *For the Defense of Those Who Practice Sacred Quietude* against Barlaam who did not understand how the hesychasts prayed. Barlaam accused the Hesychasts and “branded them with the name of the condemned sect of the ‘Messalians’ who had held that we may ‘see’ God with our eyes.”<sup>1</sup> Unlike my confrere, Barlaam did not understand the hesychasts and “he denied the legitimacy of their spiritual methods and their claims to experience divine presence.”<sup>2</sup> This is known as the Hesychast Controversy.

In this paper I intend to discuss what Hesychasm is, how Palamas defines the hesychast method of prayer, what sources he used to support this method, how he used his sources, how hesychasts were particularly instructed to pray and what role the body played in prayer. In order to answer these questions, I will start with some background on the Jesus Prayer. After this, I will study the concept of Hesychasm. This will include a reflection on Saint Gregory Palamas and a brief description of Barlaam and the Hesychastic Controversy in the Christian East

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Dupré and James A. Wiseman, O.S.B., *Light from Light: An Anthology of Christian Mysticism* (Mahwah, NY: Paulist Press, 1988), 194.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, ed. John Meyendorff (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 1.

tradition. The emphasis will be placed on Bible and prayer. To serve this purpose I will examine Chapter C of *The Triads* by Gregory Palamas, entitled *The Hesychast Method of Prayer and the Transformation of the Body*. This examination will explain how Palamas used the Bible to support this practice; the definition of some key concepts needed to understand the hesychast method of prayer; and how he understood the concept of body. After this, there will be a description of the particular instructions to Hesychasts by Gregory of Sinai to see how he followed, added, complemented or subtracted to the teachings of Palamas.

### The Jesus Prayer.

It is very difficult to determine when this method of prayer started because Paul in his letters to the Philippians 2:10 was already inviting that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. According to Kallistos Ware, “Between the fifth and the eighth centuries a method of prayer emerged which has proved deeply influential in the Christian East: the remembrance or invocation of the name of Jesus, commonly termed the ‘Jesus Prayer’ or ‘Prayer of Jesus.’ This takes the basic form of a short sentence addressed to Jesus Christ and designed for frequent repetition.”<sup>3</sup> However, Irénée Hausherr claims that “the Jesus Prayer did not begin with the name of Jesus. It has its beginning in *penthos*, in mourning, in sorrow for sin”; he also affirms that “the truth is that the Jesus Prayer is not the result of a development but of an abbreviation. It condenses the whole monastic spirituality of *penthos* in one short formula suited to the needs of ‘meditation.’ And this formula was invented and propagated, as Cassian noted, as a means of attaining continual prayer.”<sup>4</sup> Hausherr emphasizes that “the important thing is not so much the

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<sup>3</sup> Kallistos Ware, “The Origins of the Jesus Prayer: Diadochus, Gaza, Sinai,” in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright and Edward Yarnold. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 176.

<sup>4</sup> Irénée Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus*, trans. Charles Cummings (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1978), 104.

name that is used but the intention behind the use of it or the goal that is sought by means of that name.”<sup>5</sup> However, Ware contradicts Hausherr’s position by affirming that from this prayer a “Jesus-centered spirituality has gradually developed.” He distinguishes the following four main elements: (1) “Devotion to the Holy Name ‘Jesus’, which is felt to act in a sacramental way as a source of power and grace; (2) The appeal for divine mercy, accompanied by a keen sense of compunction and inward grief (*penthos*); (3) The discipline of frequent repetition; (4) The quest for inner silence or stillness (*hēsuchia*). That is to say, for imageless, non-discursive prayer.”<sup>6</sup> In this section one could say that Ware is using different examples to not only explain the components of the Jesus pray, but also the part that the Trinity might play in this prayer. It seems that Divine mercy is given through God; the Spirit brings about tears and healing from the soul through compunction and inward grief. These tears might mean a purification of the soul; then the devotion to the Holy Name ‘Jesus’.

According to Ware, “The early Egyptian desert provides evidence for the second and third elements but not for the first.”<sup>7</sup> However, this writer affirms that “the last three of these elements can all be found in monastic sources from fourth-century Egypt. The *Apophthegmata* or *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* assign a central importance to the second element, *penthos*.” Then he adds that “the third element is also emphasized in the *Apophthegmata*. Mindful of Paul’s injunction to ‘pray without ceasing’ (1 Thes 5:17) the early monks strove at all times to preserve *mnēmē Theou*, the ‘remembrance of God’ or sense of the divine presence while performing manual labor, when eating, even when talking with others or resting.”<sup>8</sup> It is important to make clear that this is different from “to pray always.” Hausherr explains that “orthodox biblical

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>6</sup> Kallistos Ware, “The Origins of the Jesus Prayer, 176.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 176.



exegesis has never interpreted as mere hyperbole the commandment to pray always.”<sup>9</sup> According to Hausherr, “the heretical sect of the Messalians took the words in their most literal sense without any attempt to introduce distinctions. ‘To pray,’ they reasoned, meant to say prayers, either aloud or mentally. And ‘always’ meant never to do anything but pray. Hence their name, ‘the praying ones’ (Syriac: Mesalians; Greek: *Euchetai*; Latin: *Precatores*).”<sup>10</sup> Regarding the fourth element, Ware claims that “there is evidence in early monastic Egypt also for this element, non-discursive prayer, if not among the Coptic monks, then at any rate in the writings of Evagrius Ponticus.”<sup>11</sup> On his treatise *On Prayer*, Evagrius says.

When your mind gradually withdraws, as it were, from the flesh in great yearning for God, when it turns away all the thoughts that come from brooding or memory or bodily temperament, being filled with reverence and joy, then you should consider that it has drawn near to the borders of prayer (Chapter 62).<sup>12</sup>

Then in chapter 71 Evagrius adds, “You will not be able to pray purely if you are entangled in material things and tossed about by continual cares, because prayer is a putting away of thoughts.” Evagrius describes the need of inner silence for his imageless prayer. Father Columba Stewart’s lecture on Evagrius in his class of Early Sources of Christian Mysticism provided the following explanation. “‘The pure prayer,’ is beyond the use of words, images, and mental depictions. If prayer is the encounter of the person with God, God is not circumscribed or limited by any kind of form. God is beyond line, form and color.”<sup>13</sup> This includes the fourth element of the Jesus Prayer. However, Evagrius does not mention the use of the name of Jesus with any special significance.

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<sup>9</sup> Irénée Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus*, 126.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>12</sup> Evagrius Ponticus. *Praktikos & On Prayer*, trans. Simon Tugwell (Oxford, England: Faculty of Theology, 1987), 36.

<sup>13</sup> These are some notes taken in class with Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB., Professor of Theology at Saint John’s University in Collegeville, MN.

John Cassian is also a very important writer for the history of the Jesus Prayer since he emphasizes the idea of continuous prayer and unbroken communion with God. Cassian in his *Conference Ten, On Prayer* says, “This, I say, is the end of all perfection – that the mind purged of every carnal desire may daily be elevated to spiritual things, until one’s whole way of life and all the yearnings of one’s heart become a single and continuous prayer.”<sup>14</sup> He calls prayer the “most sublime discipline, which teaches us to cling constantly to God.”<sup>15</sup> Cassian provides the monks with a formula for prayer and explains its purpose as follows.

Every monk who longs for the continual awareness of God should be in the habit of meditating on it ceaselessly in his heart, after having driven out every kind of thought, because he will be unable to hold fast to it in any other way than by being freed from all bodily cares...This, then, is the devotional formula proposed to you as absolutely necessary for possessing the perpetual awareness of God: ‘O God, incline unto my aid; O Lord, make haste to help me’...This verse should be poured out in unceasing prayer so that we may be delivered in adversity and preserved and not puffed up in prosperity. You should, I say, meditate constantly on this verse in your heart. You should not stop repeating it when you are doing any kind of work or performing some service or are on a journey. Meditate on it while sleeping and eating and attending to the least needs of nature. This heart’s reflection, having become a saving formula for you will not only preserve you unharmed from every attack of the demons but will also purge you of every vice and earthly taint...let it accompany you at all times.<sup>16</sup>

Three of the four elements identified by Hausherr can be found in Cassian’s writings on prayer. Cassian also writes about a variety of religious experiences such as compunction, tears, and exaltation.

Like Cassian, St Diadochos of Photiki also plays a role of paramount importance for the history of the Jesus Prayer because he introduces the name of Jesus in his method. Diadochos claims that the senses are supposed to be used with moderation. He provides the example of Eve whose heart was distracted from its remembrance of God and “all her desire was now to enjoy

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<sup>14</sup> John Cassian, *John Cassian: The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (New York, NY: Newman Press, 1997), 376.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 379. 382-383.

what was immediately present to her senses, and through the pleasant appearance of the fruit she involved Adam in her fall. Thereafter it became hard for man's intellect to remember God or His commandments."<sup>17</sup> In order to solve this problem, Diadochos insists that "we must confine the mind within very narrow limits, devoting ourselves solely to the remembrance of God. Only in this way will the intellect be able to regain its original fervor and escape this senseless dissipation."<sup>18</sup> After this, Diadochos introduces the name of Jesus in his method of prayer as follows:

When we have blocked all its outlets by means of the remembrance of God, the intellect requires of us imperatively some task which will satisfy its need for activity. For the complete fulfillment of its purpose we should give it nothing but the prayer 'Lord Jesus' (1 Cor 12:3). Let the intellect continually concentrate on these words within its inner shrine with such intensity that it is not turned aside to any mental images. Those who mediate unceasingly upon this glorious and holy name in the depths of their heart can sometimes see the light of their own intellect. For when the mind is closely concentrated upon this name, then we grow fully conscious that the name is burning up all the filth which covers the surface of the soul; for it is written: 'Our God is consuming fire' (Deut 4:24). Then the Lord awakens in the soul a great love for His glory; for when the intellect with fervor of heart maintains persistently its remembrance of the precious name, then that name implants in us a constant love for its goodness., since there is nothing now that stands in the way. This is the pearl of great price which a man can acquire by selling all that he has, and so experience the inexpressible joy of making it his own (cf. Matt 13:46)...When the soul has attained freedom from these passions, then, even though the intellect is momentarily deprived by forgetfulness of the object of its longing, it at once resumes its proper activity. The soul now has grace itself to share its mediation and to repeat with it the words 'Lord Jesus,' just as a mother teacher her child to repeat with her the word 'father,' instead of prattling in his usual way, until she has formed in him the habit of calling for his father even in his sleep.<sup>19</sup>

Ware points out that even when the second element, *penthos*, is not particularly prominent in his teaching; Diadochos establishes an explicit connection between the other three elements. "He treats the constant repetition of the name of Jesus precisely as a means of entry

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<sup>17</sup> St. Diadochos of Photiki, "On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination: One Hundred Texts," in *The Philokalia*, trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 269.

<sup>18</sup> 270.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 270-271.

into non-discursive, imageless prayer.”<sup>20</sup> Ware affirms that for Diadochus the repetition *Lord Jesus* “needs to be unvarying, so as to bring the intellect from fragmentation to unity, from a diversity of thoughts and images to a state of single-pointed concentration.” Then he explains the advantage of this prayer: “While itself an invocation in words, by virtue of its brevity and simplicity the prayer *Lord Jesus* enables us to reach out beyond language into silence, beyond discursive thinking into intuitive awareness.”<sup>21</sup> Diadochus states that through habitual use this prayer becomes even more spontaneous and self-acting. It becomes part of us.

Ware notes that, “the standard form of the Jesus Prayer is first found in the *Life of Abba Philemon*. He was an Egyptian monk, living perhaps in the sixth century, but possibly one or two centuries later.”<sup>22</sup> An extract from *The Most Profitable Narrative of Abba Philemon*, where this standard form appears, is as follows:

Even when satisfying your most urgent needs, do not allow your mind to be idle, but compel it to continue secretly to learn and to pray. In this way, you will be able to understand the depths of the Divine Scriptures and the power concealed in them, and will give your mind a constant occupation in obedience to the word of the Apostle: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thes 5:17). Keep attention diligently in yourself and guard your heart from accepting bad thoughts, or thoughts that are idle and unprofitable. But always, whether you sleep or rise, eat or drink, or converse with someone, make your heart mentally and in secret either seek instruction in psalms, or pray: “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me!” In the same way, when you utter psalms with your tongue, pay attention lest your lips say one thing and your thought be diverted towards something else.<sup>23</sup>

It is interesting to note that Abba Philemon is recommending using the Jesus Prayer together with meditation on the Psalms. This is very similar to what Cassian says on *Conference Fourteen, On Spiritual Knowledge*. Cassian explains the use of Scripture as follows:

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<sup>20</sup> Kallistos Ware, “The Origins of the Jesus Prayer,” 178.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>23</sup> Abba Philemon, “The Most Profitable Narrative of Abba Philemon”, in *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, trans. E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer (London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1951), 406.

Then, having banished all worldly concerns and thoughts, strive in every way to devote yourself constantly to the sacred reading so that continuous meditation will seep into your soul and, as it were, will shape it to its image...The sequences of Scripture must be committed to memory and they must be pondered ceaselessly. Such meditation will profit us in two ways. First, when the thrust of the mind is occupied by the study and perusal of the readings it will, of necessity, avoid being taken over by the snares of dangerous thoughts. Second, as we strive with constant repetition to commit these readings to memory, we have not the time to understand them because our minds have been occupied...As our mind is increasingly renewed by this study, Scripture begins to take on a new face. A mysteriously deeper sense of it comes to us and somehow the beauty of it stands out more and more as we get farther into it.<sup>24</sup>

It seems that Bible and prayer always go together. Abba Philemon places strong emphasis on inward grief (*penthos*) and on stillness (*hēsuchia*). After mentioning that Philemon was the first person who used the standard form of the Jesus Prayer, Ware insists that “Climacus is the first Greek writer to use the actual phrase ‘Jesus Prayer’ (*Iēsou euchē*); he terms it ‘monologic’ (*monologistos*), and like Diadochus he advises its use as we drop off to sleep. He sees it as an effectual weapon against the demons.” Ware also affirms that “Climacus connects the prayer with stillness (*hēsuchia*): Stillness is the putting away of thoughts. Stillness is unceasingly to worship God and wait on him. Let the remembrance of Jesus be united with your breathing.”<sup>25</sup> St. John Climacus is one of the three writers associated with Sinai who recommended the Jesus Prayer. The other two are “St Hesychius (? eighth-ninth century) and St Philotheus (?ninth-tenth century).”<sup>26</sup> Philotheus sees “the Jesus Prayer as a means of ‘gathering together’ the fragmented self: ‘Through remembrance of Jesus Christ concentrate your scattered intellect’. This ‘remembrance’ leads to a vision of light in the heart: ‘Invoked in prayer, Jesus draws near and fills the heart with light.’”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> John Cassian, *Conferences* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 164-165.

<sup>25</sup> Kallistos Ware, “The Origins of the Jesus Prayer,” 182.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

In his presentation Ware summarizes that the Jesus Prayer “is an invocation addressed directly to the person of Jesus Christ, and it presupposes conscious, active faith in him as only-begotten Son of God and unique Savior.”<sup>28</sup> Hausherr says that “the Jesus Prayer remains simply a formula of words.”<sup>29</sup> By saying this, he might be ignoring the fact that this prayer seems simple because of the few words used; however, it entails a special disposition and an attitude that are not easy to reach. He offers a list of special characteristics that describe the Jesus Prayer as follows: “it is short; it is meant to be repeated frequently; it is addressed to Jesus Christ; it gives him several titles; it implores his mercy; it calls the suppliant a sinner; it constitutes a ‘secret occupation’, as it is called; and above all it is a means for attaining the goal of every interior life, communion with God in continual prayer.”<sup>30</sup>

Can we ever presume to attain a goal in interior prayer? In my opinion, communion with God is a grace only given by God and cannot be looked at as obtainable on our own. Could the Jesus prayer help to facilitate that grace? I believe yes it can.

The writers above mentioned emphasize different aspects of the Jesus Prayer identified by Ware such as the devotion to the Holy Name ‘Jesus’; the appeal for divine mercy, accompanied by a keen sense of compunction and inward grief; the discipline of frequent repetition; and the quest for inner silence or stillness, for imageless and non-discursive prayer. For the purpose of this research paper, I want to emphasize the following characteristics of the development of the Jesus Prayer presented in the aforementioned information: It is a method of prayer; it is designed for frequent repetition inspired by the idea of unceasing prayer; it is a formula suited to the needs of meditation; it requires inner silence or stillness; it can lead to

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>29</sup> Irénée Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus*, 325.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 121-122.

imageless/non-discursive prayer; it includes a sense of the divine presence; it includes the ideal of being able to put away thoughts; it aims at a state of single-pointed concentration; it is supposed to become spontaneous and self-acting, that is, an organic part of us; it has to do with our breathing, with gathering together as a whole; it is founded on Scripture and also includes meditation on the Psalms; and can lead to a vision of light in the heart. This word ‘heart’ has been mentioned several times. Abba Philemon insisted on ‘guarding one’s heart;’ Diadochos talked about ‘Eve’s heart going strayed,’ and the ‘fervor of the heart’ and the ‘depths of the heart;’ Philotheus talked about vision of ‘light in the heart,’ and Jesus ‘filling the heart’ with light. Before defining hesychasm, it is necessary to talk about the quest for purity of heart. Father Columba Stewart says by Cassian’s time “‘purity of heart’ came in Christian texts to focus on the avoidance of evil thoughts.”<sup>31</sup> Then he explains the concept of purity of heart as follows:

Evagrius had defined the goal of the “practical life” to be “the purified mind.” Following the Christian Platonist tradition, he read “heart” as the biblical equivalent to “mind” (Gk. *Nous*, Lat. *mens*), understood to be the superior and integrating faculty of the soul. Cassian’s understanding of *puritas cordis* as “tranquility” or “stability of heart points to another element of the Evagrian model of the monastic life, the controversial doctrine of *apatheia*, “passionlessness,” which Evagrius inherited from the Stoics and Clement of Alexandria and reinterpreted for his spiritual theology...The biblical anchor for Cassian’s doctrine of purity of heart is “blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8)...Cassian is faithful to Evagrius’ teaching on *apatheia* in considering purity of heart to be both a goal and a means to something greater. Sometimes Cassian emphasizes purity of heart as a goal in itself, while at other times he emphasizes the experiences that purity of heart makes possible, such as love, contemplation, spiritual knowledge, unceasing prayer, chastity, union with God, the beatitude of heaven.<sup>32</sup>

The history of the Jesus Prayer along with the contribution of the aforementioned writers gave rise to the hesychast prayer that will be defended by Gregory Palamas.

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<sup>31</sup> Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 42.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43.

Hesychasm.

According to William Johnston, “Hesychasm is the quiet prayer in which one recites the name of Jesus with faith and love.”<sup>33</sup> I do not think this definition is any different from that of the Jesus Prayer. However, Charles Healey explains that “in monastic literature going back to the fourth century, the term was used to designate the way of life chosen by hermits who devoted themselves to a life of constant prayer. The monks themselves were referred to as *Hesychasts*.” Healey goes on to claim that “later the term was used in a more restrictive sense to describe those whose spirituality centered on a systematic repetition of the Jesus Prayer accompanied by rhythmic breathing and certain bodily positions.”<sup>34</sup> Hausherr presents the following definition:

The term Hesychasm in Byzantine language refers to a system of spirituality having as a principle the excellence, even the need of *hēsychia*. *Hēsychia* means tranquility, silence and quietude. There are multiple types of quietude: from the lack of wars to the suspension of the faculties found in the mystic rest, going through inertia and laziness, silence of things and of people, the appeasement of the spirit and heart. As long as there are beings, totalities or parts of beings susceptible to agitation, there will also be other types of quietude all of them likely to be called *hēsychia*...

Thus, the word quietude (*hēsychia*) designates the complex of the Christian eremitical life, from the escape from entirely external flight from men, to the very mystical “elimination of thoughts.” This term also summarizes the doctrine practiced by the Hesychasts: their own name proclaimed that they considered impossible, without love of solitude and without the practice of silence, such interior quiet that is, in turn, a condition and a result of the union with God through prayer. It is important to emphasize, first of all, that this quietude is not the goal, like *apatheia* is for the Stoics or *ataraxia* for the Epicureans; instead, it is, like everything in Christianity, a means, perhaps the means par excellence, anyway it is an excellent way to reach the goal which is the union with God, the perpetual prayer; to say it in Cassian’s words: “*donec omnis volutatio cordis una et jugis efficiatur oratio*”, or “*ad perpetuam Dei memoriam possidendam*.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> William Johnston, *Mystical Theology: The Science of Love* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 55.

<sup>34</sup> Charles J. Healey, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction to the Heritage* (Staten Island, New York: St Pauls, 1999), 226.

<sup>35</sup> Irénée Hausherr, "Solitude et Vie Contemplative: D'Après L'Hésychasme." *Spiritualité Orientale* 3: Abbaye de Bellefontaine (1980), 9-10: « Le terme d'hésychasme, en langue byzantine, désigne un système de spiritualité ayant pour principe l'excellence, voire la nécessité, de l'*hēsychia*. *Hēsychia* veut dire tranquillité, silence, quiétude. Il y a de multiple



After the definition of Hausherr, it is not surprising why Ware asserts that the “word ‘Hesychast’ may be used in an exterior and spatial sense, to denote a hermit or solitary as contrasted with a monk in a cenobitic community.” Ware goes on to emphasize that this word is more commonly employed “in an interior sense, to indicate one who practices inner prayer and seeks silence of the heart. On the whole, however, the word is used more narrowly, to mean one who practices the Jesus Prayer, and who in particular adopts the so-called ‘physical technique’ connected with the Prayer.”<sup>36</sup> John Meyendorff emphasizes that for John Climacus “the end of the hesychast life consists in ‘circumscribing the Incorporeal in the body’ and in ‘linking the Name of Jesus to the breath.’” He goes on to argue that “the *Spiritual Homilies* of Pseudo-Macarius turned all hesychastic mysticism to consider body, soul and spirit as a single organism; sin alone breaks up this unity, making the body rebel against the spirit, handing over the spirit itself to wandering imagination, subjecting the body to the tyranny of passion.” Then he explains:

Christ came to establish the unity of the human composite; and by constantly recalling the Name of Jesus the hesychast makes the grace of redemption live within him. That this grace may be truly efficacious, he must make “his spirit return into his heart,” that is,

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genres de quiétude : depuis l'absence de guerres jusqu'à la suspension des facultés dans le repos mystique, en passant par l'inertie et la paresse, le silence des choses et des personnes, l'apaisement de l'esprit et du cœur. Autant il y a d'êtres, d'ensembles ou de parties d'êtres susceptibles d'agitation, autant il y a de variétés de quiétude, toutes dénommables *hēsychia*...Ainsi donc, le mot quiétude (*hēsychia*) désigne toute le complexe de la vie érémitique chrétienne, depuis la fuite des hommes tout extérieure jusqu'à la très mystique "élimination de pensées"; il résume la doctrine professée par les hésychastes : leur nom même proclame qu'ils n'estimaient pas possible, sans l'amour de la solitude et sans le pratique du silence, cette quiétude intérieure qui est à la fois une condition et un résultat de l'union à Dieu par l'oraison. Soulignons sans tarder que cette quiétude n'est pas le but, comme l'*apatheia* dans le stoïcisme ou l'ataraxie dans l'épicurisme. Elle est, comme tout dans le christianisme, un moyen, peut-être le moyen par excellence, en tout cas un moyen excellent pour arriver au but qui est l'union à Dieu, l'oraison perpétuelle; pour parler avec Cassien ; *'donec omnis volutatio cordis una et jugis efficiatur oratio,' or 'ad perpetuam Dei memoriam possidendam.'*”

<sup>36</sup> Kallistos Ware, “The Hesychasts: Gregory of Sinai, Gregory Palamas, Nicolas Cabasilas,” in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright and Edward Yarnold. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 243.

give it once more the place that was its own, the center of the psycho-physical organism, and thus reconstitute the original harmony between the parts of this organism.<sup>37</sup>

Johnston notes that “Hesychasm flourished, and continues to flourish, at the holy mountain in Northern Greece where monks from many parts of the world spend a life of prayer and fasting.”<sup>38</sup> According to Healey, “Mount Athos in Greece had a number of hermits living in its solitary regions as early as the ninth century (see *Illustrations*, Great Lavra - Mount Athos). In the tenth century the first cenobitic monastery was built, and soon the mountaneous peninsula was populated by a growing number of monasteries.”<sup>39</sup> Healey emphasizes that “in time Mount Athos became the most important center of Byzantine spirituality.” He also claims that “it was here on the ‘Holy Mountain,’ as it came to be called that the Jesus Prayer and the practice of Hesychasm took on more developed and systematic form.” Meyendorff notes: “The Byzantine Hesychasm of the fourteenth century was a spiritual revival which touched every aspect of the Christian life, inner perfection as well as the sacramental life and social witness.” He also relates that the “Byzantine religious life at that time was following a course not very unlike that of the West; parallel with the progress of a profane humanism a movement of spiritual revival putting the claims of Christianity at their highest is evident in monastic circles and exercises a great influence.”<sup>40</sup>

Ware, however, suggests that “more specifically, ‘Hesychasm’ may signify those who, during the middle of the fourteenth century, supported St Gregory Palamas.”<sup>41</sup> The above information presents some characteristics regarding Hesychasts that can be summarized as

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<sup>37</sup> John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, authorized trans. Adele Fiske (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1974), 58.

<sup>38</sup> William Johnston, *Mystical Theology*, 55.

<sup>39</sup> Charles J. Healey, *Christian Spirituality*, 226.

<sup>40</sup> John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, trans. George Lawrence (London, The Faith Press, 1964), 25.

<sup>41</sup> Charles J. Healey, *Christian Spirituality*, 226-227.

follows: these are hermits who spend a lot of times in their cells (see *Illustrations*, Monk Cell). They are supposed to love solitude and silence of the heart; they practice the Jesus Prayer; they also fast and devote themselves to a life of constant inner prayer accompanied by rhythmic breathing and certain bodily positions or physical technique; they use interior quietude as a means to reach union with God. Although Hesychasm dates back to the fourth or fifth centuries, I will focus on Hesychasm practiced in the East in the fourteenth century because it was then that this “tradition was called into question, reexamined, and then reaffirmed by the Byzantine Church.”<sup>42</sup> Ware affirms that “the attack on Hesychasm was launched by a learned Greek from South Italy, Barlaam the Calabrian (c. 1290-1348), who was answered by a monk from the Holy Mountain, St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359).”<sup>43</sup>

Gregory Palamas was born in Constantinople. According to Meyendorff, “He was the first born of a large noble family close to the court of Emperor Andronicos II. Gregory lost his father at the age of seven, but continued his education at imperial expense. The usual Byzantine curriculum included a thorough study of the *Logics* of Aristotle.”<sup>44</sup> Meyendorff believes that “Gregory’s vocation to be a monk was prepared from infancy by the piety of his parents, who were in daily contact with monks, and entrusted their children to their spiritual direction from the time when they learnt to speak.”<sup>45</sup> This author also affirms that Gregory’s father had been clothed in the monastic habit before his death. It is interesting to read about Gregory’s problem-solving strategies. Meyendorff says that Gregory at the age of twenty, about 1316, decided to adopt the monastic life. However, he had a problem; he was responsible for his mother, two sisters, two brothers and a large number of servants. His solution was to persuade all of them to

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>43</sup> Kallistos Ware, “The Hesychasts, 249.

<sup>44</sup> John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 28.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

follow his example.<sup>46</sup> According to Meyendorff, “On Mount Athos, Gregory put himself under the spiritual direction of a hesychast who lived not far from Vatopedi, Nicodemus” (see *Illustrations*, The Monastery of Vatopedi and The Friends of Mount Athos). He also affirms that “the three years which Gregory passed under the direction of Nicodemus, ‘in fasting, sleeplessness, spiritual vigilance, and uninterrupted prayer’ were troubled by nothing but the premature death of his younger brother, Theodosius.”<sup>47</sup> Some other important information on Gregory Palamas is that he was ordained priest in 1326; became the abbot of the monastery of Esphigmenou in 1335 (see *Illustrations*, Esphigmenou Monastery Mount Athos) ; was appointed archbishop of Thessalonica in 1347; died in 1359; and was proclaimed saint in 1368.<sup>48</sup> There is extensive literature available on the life of Gregory Palamas. For the purpose of this paper, I find it relevant to emphasize the place of Saint Gregory Palamas in orthodox theology as presented by Papademetriou:

Saint Gregory Palamas stands firmly in the tradition and faith of the Holy Bible and of the Holy Fathers...The continuation of patristic thought is evident in Byzantium not as a theology of “repetition,” but as a living faith which found expression in the theological writings of the time. Orthodox theology grew vigorously through the Middle Ages, to the fall of Constantinople.. The contribution of Palamas to Orthodox theology lies in his bold formulation of the mystical element of Christianity, his participation in the Hesychastic controversy, and his defense of the traditional biblical interpretation of the Christian experience of truth.<sup>49</sup>

Papademetriou also quotes Father George Florovsky who states that “Gregory was not a speculative theologian. He was concerned solely with problems of Christian existence. As a

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<sup>46</sup> Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 33.

<sup>48</sup> Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, 5-8.

<sup>49</sup> George C. Papademetriou, *Introduction to Saint Gregory Palamas* (New York, New York: Philosophical Library, 1973), 17.

theologian, he was simply an interpreter of the spiritual experience of the Church. His theology is biblical and patristic. It is in complete conformity with the mind of the Church.”<sup>50</sup>

The controversy between Gregory Palamas and Barlaam the Calabrian is known as the *Hesychastic Controversy*. LaCugna provided the following overview:

Hesychasm was a method of contemplation whose aim was to behold the glory of God, the uncreated divine light, that appeared to the disciples on Mt. Tabor at the Transfiguration of Christ. The ‘Jesus prayer’, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner,” was recited over and over in a rhythm of breathing and meditation. The Hesychast believed that unmediated communion with God, *theologia*, in the strict sense, was possible in this life, as a foretaste of the final vision of God. The Hesychast regarded the body as a sacred vehicle of union with God, not an obstacle to be overcome; the body as well as the soul could be transfigured by the glory of God. Barlaam rejected the claim of the Hesychasts that the body as well as the mind could be transfigured by the divine light. He also concluded that the light must be created because the vision of uncreated light is reserved for us after death. Gregory wrote *The Triads* to defend the Hesychasm against Barlaam...In short Gregory claims that while the divine essence is utterly unknowable and imparticipable, the creature participates in the uncreated divine energies.<sup>51</sup>

At the end of her presentation LaCugna says, “The Orthodox claim that Palamism is the normative understanding of Christian faith and experience, the philosophical underpinnings of Gregory’s position must be submitted to careful scrutiny.”<sup>52</sup> It is not the purpose of this paper to evaluate Gregory’s theology, rather to describe his thought and reflect on his teachings concerning prayer.

Palamas talked about the essence and energies of God. According to Meyendorff, “the distinction in God between ‘essence’ and ‘energy’ is nothing but a way of saying that the transcendent God remains transcendent, as He also communicates Himself to humanity.”<sup>53</sup> For

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>51</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1993), 181-182.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>53</sup> Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, 20.

Palamas, the essence of God remains permanently inaccessible to created beings, even when we participate in the deifying energies. The divine light of God is *uncreated* because “this uncreated light is the very divinity of Christ, shining through his humanity. If Christ is truly God, this light is authentically divine.”<sup>54</sup> Healey explains that “basic to this dispute was the question of the possibility of a direct knowledge and experience of God in this life. Barlaam argued that our knowledge of God could only be indirect, and so he disavowed the claim of the Hesychasts of seeing uncreated light of the Godhead with their bodily eyes.”<sup>55</sup> Ware says: “The controversy between Barlaam and Palamas was essentially a conflict *within* the Greek tradition, involving two different ways of interpreting Dionysius the Areopagite.”<sup>56</sup> This author explains the controversy as follows:

For Barlaam, the Areopagite was a philosophical theologian, using negative apophatic language to affirm, on the level of reasoned argument, the radical transcendence of God. For Palamas, the Areopagite was above all a mystical theologian; the ‘unknowing’ of which the Dionysian writings speak is not merely a philosophical theory, for within and beyond the ‘unknowing’ they affirm a direct and personal experience of union with the divine. It is here, over the question whether or not direct experience of God is possible here and now, in this life, that the basic difference between Palamas and Barlaam should be situated...Palamas’ standpoint was upheld by a synod at Constantinople in 1341.<sup>57</sup>

The following table describes the main differences between Barlaam and Palamas as presented by Meyendorff<sup>58</sup> in his introduction to *The Triads*:

<b><i>Barlaam</i></b>	<b><i>Palamas</i></b>
They acknowledged the authority of the Christian revelation.	
They both agreed that ancient philosophers possessed a certain natural ability to reach not only created, but also divine truths. They also agree on the central role of the <i>via negativa</i> .	
Intellectually unqualified fanatics.	Vision of God cannot depend on human knowledge. The human body, and not only the mind, could be transfigured by divine light and

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>55</sup> Charles J. Healey, *Christian Spirituality*, 227-228.

<sup>56</sup> Kallistos Ware, “The Hesychasts,” 249.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>58</sup> Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, 6 – 8.

	contribute to the knowledge of God.
The monks were “people-whose-soul-is-in-their-navel.”	The hesychasts disciplined their attention by lowering their eyes “towards the center of their bodies” and thus, concentrated on prayer.
“Acquisition of wisdom” was a condition for a true knowledge of God.	If “knowledge” identified with secular education, is necessary to know God, what is the meaning of Matthew 11:25 (You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes)
He accused the Byzantine hesychasts of being Messalians. He attacked the hesychast monks for their claim to possess a real experience and vision of God. He followed Pseudo Dionysius the Areopagite who viewed God-man relationships as a scale of mediations- the “celestial” and the “ecclesiastical” hierarchies.	Man is capable of transcending his own nature. Being created according to the image of God, he possesses “an organ of vision” that is neither the senses, nor the intellect. He is admitted to true vision when “he ceases to see.”Capacity to love God and to know him in love. God used to speak only “through angels” After the coming of Christ God enters into immediate communion with humanity.
He believes in an illumination of the mind, which leads to a vision of the divine Being. Certain “knowledge of beings” is a <i>condition</i> for illumination.	Illumination in Christ implies that the mind, transfigured by grace, opens up also to knowledge of creatures.
God is only knowable through the mediation of His creatures.	Salvation itself begins by a divine act providing direct knowledge of God, which restores “nature” to its original state and also allows for a truly “natural” contemplation of God through His creatures.
All human knowledge is based on perception by the senses.	The nature of Christian experience itself is “beyond nature” God is not only beyond knowledge, but also beyond unknowing.

Ware summarizes the whole controversy in three main points: the knowledge of God, the vision of God, and the physical technique of the Hesychasts.<sup>59</sup> According to Ware, “Barlaam argues that our knowledge of God during the present life is indirect, through Scripture and church tradition, through signs and symbols...Direct experience of God is not possible in this life...the Hesychasts are those who locate the soul in the navel.”<sup>60</sup> Barlaam says this because in the method of prayer the monk is supposed to fix his eyes on his breast or on his navel, as a point

<sup>59</sup> Kallistos Ware, “The Hesychasts,” 250.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 250.

of concentration.<sup>61</sup> By fixing attention on this “lower half,” the contemplative as it were descends to do battle in the area where evil is centered. They thought that the seductive powers were concentrated in the belly.<sup>62</sup>

Chapter C. *The Hesychast Method of Prayer and the Transformation of the Body.*

The above brief information related to the Hesychastic Controversy is important to understand the time and the ideas of Gregory Palamas. One of the main purposes of this paper is to talk about Bible and prayer. However, the connection between prayer and Bible will be evident in the analysis of this Chapter C of *The Triads*. As Florovsky noted, Palamas’ theology is biblical and patristic. Even a quick perusal of this chapter reveals that the heart of Palamas’ spirituality is the Bible. This short chapter has two parts and includes 55 different biblical citations, allusions, and themes. The purpose of the following tables is to describe and provide a few insights from this study of the relationship of scripture and the Hesychast method of prayer as presented by Palamas. For the biblical citations I will use the New American Bible.

**Section 1**

<b>Biblical Source</b>	<b>Formula of Introduction / personifications/descriptions of Scripture</b>	<b>Quotation, allusion or exemplar</b>
1 Cor 6:19	My brother, do you not hear the words of the Apostle	“Our Bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in us.”
Heb 3:6	And again	“We are the house of God.”
2 Cor 6:16	For God Himself Says	“I will dwell in them and will walk in them and I shall be their God.”
Rom 7:24	If the Apostle calls the body “death” saying	“Who will deliver me from the body of this death?”
Rom 7:14	...he says.	“I am sold to sin,”
Rom 7:18	And again:	“I well know that what is good does not dwell in me, that is, in the flesh.”

<sup>61</sup> Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, 46.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-128.



<b>Biblical Source</b>	<b>Formula of Introduction / personifications/descriptions of Scripture</b>	<b>Quotation, allusion or exemplar</b>
1 Cor 6:19	My brother, do you not hear the words of the Apostle	“Our Bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in us.”
Rom 7:23	What is evil is...	“the law which is in our members, which fights against the law of the mind.”

Palamas makes use of a friendly tone “my brother” to introduce the teaching from Scripture. The authority figure is Paul who in the original passage is talking about sexual immorality. The original source uses “you.” Because Palamas is using a persuasive tone he changed it to the first person plural. The scriptural text has been placed at the beginning of the section together with a series of biblical phrases to form a strong tapestry of reflection concerning the “body” as the place where God dwells.<sup>63</sup>

Jesus is presented as the founder of a house who has more “honor” than the house itself. We are Christ’s house. Palamas shows that the body is not an evil thing, a fabrication of the Wicked One.<sup>64</sup> He uses these different biblical quotations to justify his idea of the body as the place where the Godhead dwells, which is the Trinity. Meyendorff says, “For Palamas Jesus made us a temple of the undivided Divinity, for in the body of Christ dwelled the fullness of the Godhead bodily, how should he not illuminate those who commune worthily with the divine ray of His Body which is within us, lightening their souls, as He illumined the very bodies of the disciples on Mount Tabor?”<sup>65</sup> The he adds, “The body assumed by Christ in becoming man, is inherently good, but liable to corruption as a result of the perversion of the will away from

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<sup>63</sup>Mary Forman, “Benedict’s Use of Scripture in the Rule: Introductory Understandings,” *American Benedictine Review* 52 (September 2001): 333.

<sup>64</sup> Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, 124.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

God.”<sup>66</sup> Palamas explains that we are not slaves by nature. There is sinful desire that entered in it because of the Fall. There is nothing bad in the body. According to Palamas what is evil is what inhabits the flesh.<sup>67</sup> Palamas seems to be very interested in illustrating how the body is not evil.

## Section 2

<b>Biblical Source</b>	<b>Formula of Introduction / personifications/descriptions of Scripture</b>	<b>Quotation, allusion or exemplar</b>
Rom 7:2	This is why we set ourselves against this...	“law of sin.”
2 Cor 4:6	He can then say with Paul:	“God, who has ordered light to shine from darkness, has made His light to shine in our hearts, in order that we may be enlightened by the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.”
2 Cor 4:7	But he adds...	“We carry this treasure in earthen vessels,”

Palamas explains.

Through ‘temperance’ we ordain the object and limit of the scope of our senses. Through it we purify the body. This is a work of the law. In the affective part of the soul we need to bring about ‘love’ which is the best state. For this we need *nēpsis*, which means vigilance, watch over the heart and mind. By watchfulness which is part of the law, we improve the rational part by rejecting all what impedes the mind from elevating itself towards God.”<sup>68</sup>

These texts are used to support Palamas’ teaching on temperance, he who practices temperance would be able to recite this biblical verse with Paul. According to Palamas the role of prayer is also to purify. He says, “He who has presented to God a mind purified by prayer, acquires and sees in himself the grace promised to those whose hearts have been purified.”<sup>69</sup> The topic of ‘light’ is very important in the theology of Palamas. He says,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 42.

“On that day of the Transfiguration, that Body, source of the light of grace, was not yet united with our bodies; it illuminated from outside those who worthily approached it, and sent the illumination into the soul by the intermediary of the physical eyes; but now, since it is mingled with us and exists in us, it illuminates the soul from within.”<sup>70</sup>

Could Palamas by alluding to the fact that even though God was present in us before the resurrection we were not yet, because of sin, able to recognize this? So at this point we were only able to see the illumination, the Transfiguration, with our physical eyes? But after Christ died and was raised we were free from the original sin; can now our soul be illuminated from within?

According to Meyendorff, for Palamas, “Christ’s Body is the source of divine light and deification. It is “theurgic,” that is, it communicates divine life to those who are ‘in Christ’ and participate in the uncreated energies active in it. If Christ is truly God, this light is authentically divine.”<sup>71</sup> Palamas explains that earthen vessels mean our bodies. Our soul uses the body as an instrument. This is why “the praying mind should not get distracted by errant thoughts.”<sup>72</sup> The body is carrying a treasure.

### Section 3

<b>Biblical Source</b>	<b>Formula of Introduction / personifications/descriptions of Scripture</b>	<b>Quotation, allusion or exemplar</b>
Mt 15:11	We did not learn this from any man, but from Him who molded man, who shows that	“it is not what goes into a man that defiles a man, but what goes out by the mouth.”
Mt 15:19	Adding	“for it is from the heart that evil thoughts come.”

Palamas sees in the heart a role of paramount importance. He says, “The heart reigns over all the thoughts and all the members; for it is there, in the heart, that the mind and all the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 125.

thoughts of the soul have their seat.”<sup>73</sup> In this section 3, Palamas is using a chiasm in which the biblical verses are used to support the important role of the “heart.” Scripture comes from one important source. It has authority; this is why it lies at the heart of the chiasm highlighting the importance of the heart. I would say this chiasm can be summarized as A B A’. The A represents the idea of the rational part being the heart. The B represents the biblical text saying that it is from the heart that evil thoughts come; and the A’ represents this idea reinforced by Macarius saying that the heart directs the entire organism. It seems that Palamas has placed the verses from Matthew “squarely in the middle of this section to highlight it as a hermeneutical key around which this teaching revolves.”<sup>74</sup> Palamas quotes Pseudo-Macarius because the hesychast spirituality has been influenced by his writings. He says, “It is in the heart, that the mind and all the thoughts of the soul have their seat.”<sup>75</sup> This is related to the method of prayer. In Macarius, the goal of prayer “is not the disincarnation of the mind, but a transfiguration of the entire person, soul and body, through the presence of the incarnated God, accessible to the conscious “certitude of the heart.”<sup>76</sup>

Palamas by using a question at the end of this section is emphasizing the importance of the ‘heart:’ “Can you not see, then, how essential it is that those who have determined to pay attention to themselves in inner quiet should gather together the mind and enclose it in the body, and especially in that “body” most interior to the body, which we call the heart?”<sup>77</sup> Meyendorff explains, “Heart in the Greek tradition is not just the physical organ, or the affections and

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>74</sup> Mary Forman, “Benedict’s Use of Scripture in the Rule,” 336.

<sup>75</sup> Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, 43.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 43.

emotions, but the spiritual center of man’s being, his inmost self, where the encounter with God takes place.”<sup>78</sup>

#### Section 4

<b>Biblical Source</b>	<b>Formula of Introduction / personifications/descriptions of Scripture</b>	<b>Quotation, allusion or exemplar</b>
Ps 44:14	For if, as the Psalmist says	“all the glory of the king’s daughter is within,”
Gal 4:6	According to the Apostle	“God has given His Spirit to cry in our hearts, Abba, Father,”
Lk 17:21	If, as the Lord of the prophets and apostles teaches	“the Kingdom of God is within us,”
Prv 27:21	Solomon says	“seeks that sense.”
Prv 2:5	Which he elsewhere calls	“spiritual and divine.”
2 Cor 1:22, 5:5; Eph 1:4	According to the footnotes, Palamas is making indirect reference to these quotations. <sup>79</sup> The first one reads, “He has also put his seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.” The second, “As he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before him.”	

This section starts with a biblical citation of verse from Psalm 44. Meyendorff explains, “The application of this verse to the interior life goes back to Origen, Basil and Diadochus.”<sup>80</sup> I think this explains the placement of this direct quotation at the very beginning of this section because Palamas refers to practices that come from Origen and Diadochos.

Palamas makes use of the authority of Paul who is talking about God’s free children in Christ. According to Palamas, “True knowledge of God implies a transfiguration of man by the Spirit of God.”<sup>81</sup> It seems that by placing the quotation of Luke at the heart of this group of biblical citations Palamas wants to “highlight its importance as the core element around which all

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 14.

the rest revolves.”<sup>82</sup> The two previous citations correspond to Paul and the Old Testament; the next two correspond to Solomon and Paul; and this one is a quotation of Jesus. This idea is very important because it justifies the practice of the hesychastic prayer. Palamas is defending the justification of the practice of Hesychasm. He states, “We recollect the mind not only within the body and heart, but also within itself.”<sup>83</sup> At the end of this section Palamas is talking about the greatest of the Hellenistic errors. Meyendorff explains, “In a truly incarnational spirituality, the body is never regarded as alien to the soul in its spiritual progress, for the whole man, body as well as soul, must be transformed and divinized. This is the fundamental Christian correction of the dualism of much Greek thought, especially, Platonism.”<sup>84</sup>

Palamas teaches that recollection and awareness are essential prerequisites of the spiritual way; it is through distraction that the Devil turns us aside from the path. This comes from Origen. Palamas explains, “We recollect the mind not only within the body and heart, but also within itself.”<sup>85</sup> Meyendorff offers an explanation of this by quoting Kallistos Ware who argues that “because the mind is ever active, it must be given some work to do, even at the time of prayer. Thus, most typically, the hesychastic masters recommend invocation of the Name of Jesus as a focus of concentration upon God.” He goes on to insist that “the repetition of the Name should be regulated by the inhalation and exhalation of the breath.”<sup>86</sup> This is very important for the hesychasts, Palamas says, “It is not out of place to teach people, especially

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<sup>82</sup> Mary Forman, “Benedict’s Use of Scripture in the Rule,” 336.

<sup>83</sup> Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, 44.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

beginners, that they should look at themselves, and introduce their own mind within themselves through control of breathing.”<sup>87</sup>

### Section 8

Biblical Source	Formula of Introduction / personifications/descriptions of Scripture	Quotation, allusion or exemplar
1 Cor 13:7	But with beginners.	“for love bears all”
Rom 6:23	Why should we not place there	“the law of the mind which combats”
Ti 3:5	so that the evil spirit who has been driven away thanks to the	“bath of regeneration”
Lk 11:26		“may not return to install himself there with seven other spirits even more evil, so that the latter state becomes worse than the first?”

In this Section 8 Palamas only uses allusions to Scripture. For instance, he accommodates this text to encourage patience in this method of prayer. According to Meyendorff, “The hesychasts are supposed to exercise persistence and real effort, and force the lips to repeat the Jesus Prayer; but in time the prayer becomes gradually internalized, and finally self-activating as an unceasing rhythm within the heart, even during sleep.”<sup>88</sup> So the one who perseveres and prays will attain love, and “love bears all.” Patience is a fruit of love. Patience is important to follow the method of prayer. Palamas talks about the power of baptism. He says, “The *theosis* or deification of man in Christ is not reserved to isolated “mystics,” it is offered to all the members of the Church, in virtue of their baptism.”<sup>89</sup>

### Section 9

Biblical Source	Formula of Introduction / personifications/descriptions of Scripture	Quotation, allusion or exemplar
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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 8.

Dt. 15:9	Moses says	“pay attention to yourself.”
Eccles 10:4	Says Scripture	“on no account shift your ground.”
Ps 7:10 Rev 1:23	And you will be able to present yourself with boldness to	“Him who searches the reins and the heart.”
1 Cor 11:41	Paul tells us	“If we judge ourselves, we will not be judged.”
Ps 138:12-13	You will address yourself to God, saying	“The shadows are no longer darkness thanks to you, and the night will be for me as clear as the day, for it is you who have taken possession of my reins.”
Gen 6:2	(as Scripture says)	“the Spirit of God cannot dwell in them.”

This Section 9 is so important that includes six biblical citations. The topic is discernment. At the very start the direct quotation from the book of Deuteronomy is related to the topic of “being on your guard” against entertaining thoughts. It emphasizes the great power of the mind as being able to “deliver from the evil passions of the body and soul...To make the disobedient flesh subject to the Spirit.”<sup>90</sup> The use of “you” shows Palamas as a teacher instructing people on this hesychastic practice. “The integration of the whole man through interior prayer has the effect of cleansing and transforming all the natural faculties,” explains Meyendorff.<sup>91</sup>

These thoughts are from a monastic vocational viewpoint. Can this point of cleansing evil passions of the body be viewed in a more positive way to include the vocation of marriage today? The passions of the body for the vocation of marriage can be considered, in my opinion as a part of the co-creative aspect with God. In this sense these passions can be viewed in a very positive sense.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 128.



In the second part of Chapter C, Palamas mentions some teachings related to the body. He believes that ascetical combat “is of greatest benefit to those who practice inner prayer.”<sup>92</sup> Meyendorff makes clear that “this is related to the beneficial suffering occasioned by fasting, vigils and ascetic practices.”<sup>93</sup> Palamas thinks that “we need physical suffering if we are to apply ourselves to prayer. Prayer without compunction has no quality”<sup>94</sup> Then, he also notes that “this body, which is united to us, has been attached to us as a fellow-worker by God, or rather placed under our control.”<sup>95</sup> For this writer, the carnal pleasures infect the soul, but the vision of God transforms the body. The body is included in the process of divinization.<sup>96</sup> To illustrate this idea Palamas talks about the first Martyr Stephen whose face shone like the face of an angel when he was living. He argues that “such are the realities or mysterious energies brought about in the bodies of those who during their entire life have devoutly embraced holy hesychasm.”<sup>97</sup> Palamas, quoting Paul, claims that the body is a vehicle of Grace. He says, “Certain charisms operate through the body...The same is true of the word of instruction, the gift of healing, the performing of miracles, and Paul’s laying-on of hands by which he communicated the Holy Spirit.”<sup>98</sup>

According to Ware, Hesychast teaching was propagated throughout Bulgaria, Serbia and Russia by the disciples of Gregory of Sinai.<sup>99</sup> Ware notes, “This is an important link between the Greek and Slav worlds.”<sup>100</sup> Because Gregory of Sinai was such an important teacher in the early years of the fourteenth century, I think it is relevant to have a description of his particular instructions to Hesychasts to see how he followed, added, complemented or subtracted from the

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>99</sup> Kallistos Ware, “The Hesychasts,” 247.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 247.

teachings of Palamas. It is also interesting to see how all this theory is put into practice in a specific method of prayer.

*Gregory of Sinai.*

In his *Instructions to Hesychast* Gregory of Sinai teaches: “How to sit in the cell; how to say the prayer; how to hold the mind; how to drive away thoughts; how to psalmodise; how to partake of food; and of other subjects.”<sup>101</sup>

He starts with the invitation to sit in the cell. He says, “Sitting in your cell, remain patiently in prayer, according to the precepts of the Apostle Paul.”<sup>102</sup> He quotes Paul when he is asking the Romans to endure in affliction and persevere in prayer; and the Colossians when he is also asking them to persevere in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. Then Gregory instructs by using a key phrase for the hesychasts: “Collect your mind into your heart and send out thence your mental cry to our Lord Jesus calling for His help and saying: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me’.”<sup>103</sup> The cell has usually been known as the place where the transformation of the monk takes place. In the privacy of his cell in silence and in meditation, the monk can pray and face huge battles. According to Cassian, the cell is the place where one must stay in order to work out one’s salvation, “concentrating on God and seeking to avoid distractions.”<sup>104</sup>

Ware explains that “Gregory recommends the physical technique, as found in Nicephorus.”<sup>105</sup> This is who Nicephorus the Solitary was:

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<sup>101</sup> St. Gregory of Sinai, “Instructions to the Hesychasts,” in *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, trans. E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer. (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1951), 74.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>104</sup> John Cassian, *John Cassian: The Conferences*, 820.

<sup>105</sup> Kallistos Ware, “The Hesychasts, 247.

Nicephorus lived a life of spiritual endeavor on the holy Mount Athos and died a little before the year A.D. 1340. He was teacher a guide to Gregory of Salonika (Palamas) in the study of the way of training in the higher love of wisdom, as his pupil himself testifies. In silence, undisturbed by worldly cares, he kept attention within himself alone and, reaching indescribable inner union with God Eternal, he received in his heart the blessed illumination of Divine grace. Himself enriched by this Divine gift, he is like a father guiding us by his writings towards the same goal. He collected from the books and lives of the holy fathers passages on sobriety, attention and prayer, and finally added advice derived from his own experience. Therein he invites all to ascend to the most perfect communion with the Lord through prayer of mind and heart.<sup>106</sup>

His technique is as follows:

Sit down on a low stool...compress your intellect, forcing it down from your brain into your heart, and retain it there within the heart. Laboriously bow yourself down, feeling sharp pain in your chest, shoulders, and neck...Control the drawing-in of your breath...So far as possible hold back its expulsion, enclosing your intellect in the heart.<sup>107</sup>

It seems that the method is to produce some pain. I wonder if this is only at the beginning. Ware notes that Gregory insists that “the purely physical aspect is not to be unduly emphasized. The aim is always the concentration of the mind: ‘Closing the mouth a little, control the respiration of the intellect and not that of the nostrils, as the uninstructed do.’”<sup>108</sup> This might be the patience Palamas was talking about because the position of the body does not seem to be comfortable. This could also be examined as discomfort of the body for the common good. It could also be viewed in my opinion as my resistance to letting go and letting the Spirit heal my ego. Gregory follows the teachings of the fathers regarding how to say the Jesus Prayer. He explains:

The prayer should be said in full and sometimes in a shorter form. Yet it is not advisable to pander to laziness by changing the words of the prayer too often, but to persist in a certain time as a test of patience. Again, some teach the saying of the prayer with the lips,

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<sup>106</sup> E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer, “Nicephorus The Solitary: Short Biographical Note,” in *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1951), 21.

<sup>107</sup> Kallistos Ware, “The Hesychasts,” 247.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

others with and in the mind. In my opinion both are advisable. But one should appeal to the Lord quietly and without agitation.”<sup>109</sup>

Concerning how to hold the mind, Gregory argues that “no one can hold the mind himself, if it be not held by the Spirit.” He explains that “through neglect it has acquired the habit of turning and wandering hither and thither. There is no way of regaining its stability except by repenting to God and uniting with Him by frequent and patient prayers, and by mentally confessing our sins to Him each day.”<sup>110</sup> Here is where the above mentioned concept of purity can be applied, for Cassian purity is primarily a question of single-minded focus. The person with a pure heart is concerned with God alone; all else is secondary or non-existent. To pray with purity means to devote one’s attention fully toward God, who is the object of all true prayer.

Gregory believes that “no beginner can ever drive away a thought if God does not drive it away.” He notes, “When thoughts come, call to our Lord Jesus, often and patiently, and they will retreat; for they cannot bear the warmth of the heart produced by prayer and flee as if scorched by fire. The Lord is quick to help and will speedily revenge those who wholeheartedly call to Him day and night.”<sup>111</sup> It is interesting that Gregory talks about the person who does not possess the action of prayer. He argues that this person “can conquer thoughts in another manner, by imitating Moses. For if he rises up and lifts his eyes and hands to heaven, God will drive thoughts away. After this he should again sit down and patiently resume his prayer.”<sup>112</sup> Then, he says that this technique could also be used when bodily passions attack a person who already possesses the action of prayer.

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<sup>109</sup> St. Gregory of Sinai, “Instructions to the Hesychasts,” 74-75.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

In relation to psalmodising Gregory believes that one should neither “psalmodise so frequently as to cause unrest, nor to leave it off altogether, lest a person falls into weakness and negligence, but to follow the example of those who psalmodise infrequently. To psalmodise much is good for those who follow an active life, since they are ignorant of mental occupations and lead a life of labor.”<sup>113</sup> After this, Gregory claims that to psalmodise “is not good for those who practice silence, for whom it is more fitting to abide in God alone, praying in the heart and refraining from thought.”<sup>114</sup> Finally, Gregory makes a clear distinction by stating, “The work of silence is one thing and that of a cenobite another; but each, abiding in that to which he has been called, shall be saved.”<sup>115</sup> Here I disagree with Gregory of Sinai. The work of silence cannot be separated from the work of the cenobite. The work of personal silence only increases the ability of the cenobite to foster love in his community. It is only through the eremitical aspect of our heart that we can then be of loving service to our community.

John Cassian in his Fifth Book of *The Institutes*, following Evagrius, on “gluttony as front-line passion,” talks about the spirit of gluttony. It makes sense that Gregory considers the belly the queen of the passions. He says, “Through it we fall, and through it we rise again, when it behaves itself.” However, he remarks, “The practiser of silence should always be starved, never allowing himself to eat his fill.”<sup>116</sup> After this Gregory notes, “The partaking of food has three degrees: abstinence, adequacy and satiety. To abstain means to remain a little hungry after eating; to eat adequately, means neither to be hungry, nor weighed down; to be satiated, means to

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 78.

be slightly weighed down. But eating beyond satiety is the door to belly-madness, through which lust comes in.”<sup>117</sup>

Finally, Gregory argues that “a man striving to attain pure prayer in silence must proceed towards it with great trepidation, lamenting and begging the guidance of the experienced, constantly shedding tears for his sins, in sorrowful contrition and with a fearful apprehension of being cast into hell or falling away from God and being separated from Him now or in time to come.”<sup>118</sup> Gregory also states, “There are three virtues we should practice strictly and verify each hour whether we constantly abide in them. They are abstinence, not talking, and self-belittlement.”<sup>119</sup> This whole method seems to be quite complicated and the assistance of a teacher must be a must. From the aforementioned information I think it would be impossible to say that Hesychasm developed overnight. This Hesychast method of prayer especially includes hermits, the Jesus Prayer, rhythmic breathing, certain bodily positions, and psalmodies. It was practiced by the early monks in the monastic context. It was adequate to the time and appropriate to the monastic tradition. From its beginnings there is a connection between Bible and prayer. It started with the Jesus Prayer, which in turn was inspired from the idea of unceasing prayer and the invocation and devotion to the name of Jesus found in the Letters of Paul (1 Thes 5:17 and Phil 2:10). This Jesus-centered spirituality was gradually developed and influenced by different writers, such as Plato, Aristotle, John Cassian, Evagrius, Pseudo-Macarius, Diadochus, Dionysius the Areopagite, Abba Philemon, John Climacus, Hesychius, Philotheus, Gregory of Sinai, Barlaam the Calabrian, and Gregory Palamas.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 83.

According to Meyendorff, “Gregory Palamas played a key role in the dogmatic definition of an objective vision of God granted to man in his whole being. Only the whole man can receive grace, not any one part of the human composite - imagination, soul, or body - taken separately. Hence the constant warnings of hesychast masters against corporeal visions (corporeal only!) or imaginary ones (imaginary only!).”<sup>120</sup> I have been taught that these visions must not be taken out of the context of everyday life. These visions can only be validated to be real according to their applications in daily life. The hesychast prayer is not isolated but must be an integrated part of one’s daily life. This is a result of integration of the whole person body, mind and soul. If they have no practical applications to one’s everyday life then they are to be discarded. In the beginning of the practice of the prayer of silence you need an experienced guide for this discernment.

Meyendorff notes:

The tradition of “pure prayer” in the Christian East has shown an amazing continuity from the fourth to the twentieth century. Different masters have shaped it in different forms but the essential principle of unceasing prayer focused on the name of the Incarnate God has never been questioned, once the intellectualism of Evagrius had been definitely absorbed by Christocentric and sacramental mysticism. This piety, intimate and personal, never isolated man from the ecclesial community but supernaturally bound him to it permanently. For the Christ whom this prayer seeks in a man’s own heart, the Divine Name that it invokes, can be found within his heart only in the measure in which he is ingrafted into the Body of the Church by baptism and the eucharist. The Prayer of Jesus, as the Fathers understood it, never replaces the redemptive grace of the sacrament but rather it is its fullest realization.<sup>121</sup>

It seems that almost every sacrament could be connected with this type of prayer. This type of prayer has certainly stood the test of time.

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<sup>120</sup> John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, 173.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 172

According to Papademetriou, “Hesychasm is a mysticism in which through spiritual exercises and in quietness the mystic attains the vision of the divine light and the glory of God. It is the vision not of the ‘essence’ of God, but of His presence and activity, His ‘energies’.”<sup>122</sup> This hesychastic method seemed to be very complicated. The people who did not understand what this hesychasm was about started saying that the hesychasts claimed they had direct knowledge and experience of God in this life. Palamas used the authority of the Bible and the Fathers and the actual experience of the practice of hesychasm as sources to develop a theology to support his position regarding hesychasm. This is how Gregory Palamas defended this hesychasm by introducing the concepts of uncreated energies and the transcendent essence of God to say that God remains transcendent as God but also communicates Himself to humanity. This kind of prayer has not been put into question after Gregory Palamas though controversial in Roman Catholic circles.

St Gregory of Sinai says that not everyone travels the same road or follows the same rule to the end.<sup>123</sup> I agree because nobody has the last word regarding prayer practices. Thomas Keating in the present day says, “Divine union is the goal for all Christians. We have been baptized, we receive the Eucharist; we have all the necessary means of growing as human beings and as children of God. It is a mistake to think that a special state of life is the only way of doing it.”<sup>124</sup> Keating talks about the method of centering prayer. He says, “It is a method of refining one’s intuitive faculties so that one can enter more easily into contemplative prayer.”<sup>125</sup> It would be interesting to write a research paper that makes a connection between hesychasm and

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<sup>122</sup> George C. Papademetriou, *Introduction to Saint Gregory Palamas*, 22.

<sup>123</sup> St. Gregory of Sinai, “Instructions to the Hesychasts,” 77.

<sup>124</sup> Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart* (Amity, NY: Amity House, 1986), 33.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.



centering prayer as understood by Keating, who invites everybody to practice this method of prayer and provides direction as follows:

This method is designed to withdraw our attention from the ordinary flow of our thoughts...Take a relatively comfortable position so that you won't be thinking about your body...Choose a place that is relatively quiet...Pick a suitable time and place and a chair or a posture that is relatively comfortable..The sacred word is not a means of going where you want to go. It only directs your attention towards God...It is a way of reducing the ordinary number of one's casual thoughts and of warding off the more interesting ones that come down the stream of consciousness...You may be familiar with the gesture of folding your hands together with the fingers pointing upward. This is a symbol of gathering all your faculties together and directing them toward God...Twenty or thirty minutes is the minimum amount of time necessary for most people to establish interior silence and to get beyond their superficial thoughts...The fundamental disposition in centering prayer is opening to God. Christian practice can be summed up by the word *patience*.<sup>126</sup>

As can be seen this is closely related to Hesychasm. There are several similarities and various differences. I wonder how the differences can be explained. However, this would be a topic for further examination.

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 34-37.

## Illustrations

### Great Lavra - Mount Athos.<sup>127</sup>

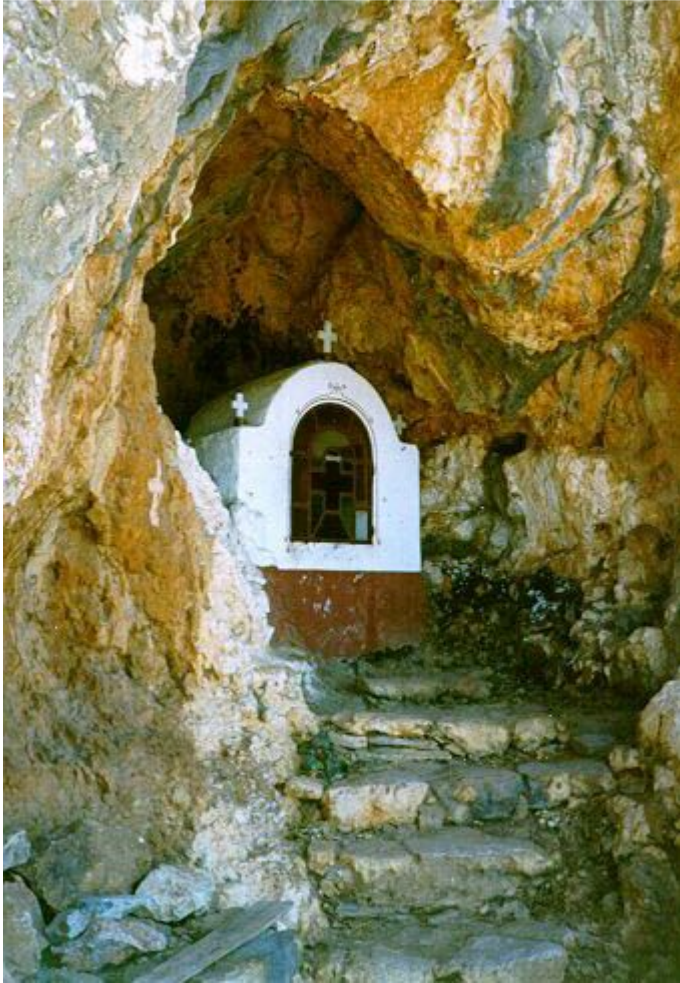


The Great Lavra is first in the hierarchy of monasteries and dedicated to the Dormition of hosios Athanasios, the wise monk and friend of the emperor Nikephoros II Phokas, who in A.D. 963 founded the first lavra (small group of hermits with a common superior and a central house of prayer) on Mount Athos at a site probably previously occupied by the ancient township of Akrothooi.

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<sup>127</sup> Chaldiki, "Chaldiki.com" [http://www.chalkidiki.com/athos/great\\_lavra.html](http://www.chalkidiki.com/athos/great_lavra.html) (accessed December 10, 2008).

## Monk cell.<sup>128</sup>



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<sup>128</sup> OrthodoxPhotos.com Web Photo Gallery  
[http://www.orthodoxphotos.com/Athonite\\_Hermits](http://www.orthodoxphotos.com/Athonite_Hermits)  
(accessed on December 10, 2008).

## St Gregory Palamas, Thessaloniki

The cathedral where the relics of St. Gregory Palamas lie.<sup>129</sup>



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<sup>129</sup> Flickr. <http://flickr.com/photos/43995692@N00/3617275> (accessed December 10, 2008).



# The Monastery of Vatopedi<sup>130</sup>

External View



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<sup>130</sup> Macedonia Heritage. <http://www.macedonian-heritage.gr/Athos/Monastery/vatopedi.html> (accessed December 10, 2008).

Arsanas (sea port) of the Monastery of Vatopedi.



The entrance of the Monastery of Vatopedi.





Bell tower and Phiale at the Monastery of Vatopedi.



Church at the Monastery of Vatopedi



Refectory (dining hall) of the Monastery of Vatopedi





## The Friends of Mount Athos

*Photo: Costas Anastasakis / Bloomberg News*

*Monks head off to their daily chores after the morning meal at Moni Vatopediou, one of 20 monasteries on the isolated Greek peninsula of Mount Athos. Global leaders make pilgrimages here before going on to the annual World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.<sup>131</sup>*



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<sup>131</sup> The Friends of Mount Athos.

<http://abacus.bates.edu/~rallison/friends/news/DavosMen.html> (accessed December 10, 2008).

Esphimenou Monastery – Mount Athos<sup>132</sup>



<sup>132</sup> Esphigmenou Monastery <http://www.esphigmenou.com/> (accessed December 10, 2008).





**The interior of the main  
Esphigmenou Monastery Church.**

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