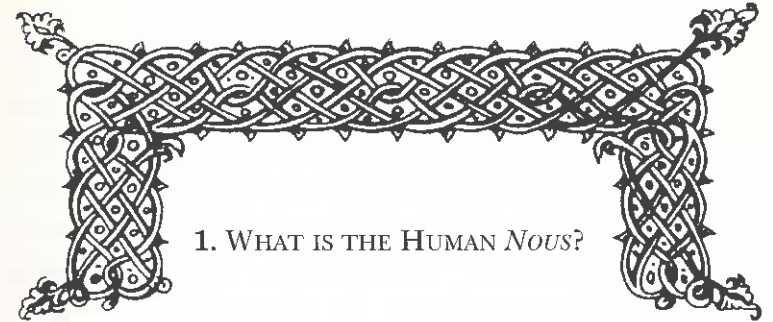




*Our Holy Father Gregory the Theologian,  
Archbishop of Constantinople*



## 1. WHAT IS THE HUMAN *Nous*?

The chief concern of the Orthodox Church is the healing of the human soul. The Church has always considered the soul as the part of the human being that needs healing because She has seen from Hebrew tradition, from Christ Himself, and from the Apostles that in the region of the physical heart there functions something that the Fathers called the *nous*. In other words, the Fathers took the traditional term *nous*, which means both intellect (*dianoia*) and speech or reason (*logos*), and gave it a different meaning. They used *nous* to refer to this noetic energy that functions in the heart of every spiritually healthy person. We do not know when this change in meaning took place, because we know that some Fathers used the same word *nous* to refer to reason as well as to this noetic energy that descends and functions in the region of the heart.

So from this perspective, noetic activity is an activity essential to the soul. It functions in the brain as the reason; it simultaneously functions in the heart as the *nous*. In other words, the same organ, the *nous*, prays ceaselessly in the heart and simultaneously thinks about mathematical problems, for example, or anything else in the brain.

We should point out that there is a difference in terminology between St. Paul and the Fathers. What St. Paul calls the *nous* is the same as what the Fathers call *dianoia*. When the

Apostle Paul says, "I will pray with the spirit,"<sup>1</sup> he means what the Fathers mean when they say, "I will pray with the *nous*." And when he says, "I will pray with the *nous*," he means "I will pray with the intellect (*dianoia*)."<sup>2</sup> When the Fathers use the word *nous*, the Apostle Paul uses the word 'spirit.' When he says "I will pray with the *nous*, I will pray with the spirit" or when he says "I will chant with the *nous*, I will chant with the spirit," and when he says "the Spirit of God bears witness to our spirit,"<sup>3</sup> he uses the word 'spirit' to mean what the Fathers refer to as the *nous*. And by the word *nous*, he means the intellect or reason.

In his phrase, "the Spirit of God bears witness to our spirit," St. Paul speaks about two spirits: the Spirit of God and the human spirit. By some strange turn of events, what St. Paul meant by the human spirit later reappeared during the time of St. Makarios the Egyptian with the name *nous*, and only the words *logos* and *dianoia* continued to refer to man's rational ability. This is how the *nous* came to be identified with spirit, that is, with the heart, since according to St. Paul, the heart is the place of man's spirit.<sup>3</sup>

1 *I Corinthians* 14:5.

2 *Romans* 8:16.

3 This means that the Spirit of God speaks to our spirit. In other words, God speaks within our heart by the grace of the Holy Spirit. St. Gregory Palamas in his second discourse from "In Behalf of the Sacred Hesychasts" notes that "the heart rules over the whole human organism.... For the *nous* and all the thoughts (*logismoi*) of the soul are located there." From the context of grace-filled prayer, it is clear that the term 'heart' does not refer to the physical heart, but to the deep heart, while the term *nous* does not refer to the intellect (*dianoia*), but to the energy/activity of the heart, the noetic activity which wells forth from the essence of the

Thus, for the Apostle Paul reasonable or logical worship takes place by means of the *nous* (i.e., the reason or the intellect) while noetic prayer occurs through the spirit and is spiritual prayer or prayer of the heart.<sup>4</sup> So when the Apostle Paul says, "I prefer to say five words with my *nous* in order to instruct others rather than a thousand with my tongue,"<sup>5</sup> he means that he prefers to say five words, in other words to speak a bit, for the instruction of others rather than pray noetically. Some monks interpret what St. Paul says here as a reference to the Prayer of Jesus, which consists of five words,<sup>6</sup> but at this point the Apostle is speaking here about the words he used in instructing others.<sup>7</sup> For

*nous* (i.e., the heart). For this reason, St. Gregory adds that it is necessary for the hesychasts "to bring their *nous* back and enclose it within their body and particularly within that innermost body, within the body that we call the heart." The term "spirit" is also identical with the terms *nous* and "heart." *Philokalia*, vol. IV (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), p. 334.

4 Cf. Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, who notes: "Man has two centers of knowing: the *nous* which is the appropriate organ for receiving the revelation of God that is later put into words through the reason and the reason which knows the sensible world around us." *The Person in Orthodox Tradition*, trans. Effie Mavromichali (Levadia: Monastery of the Birth of the Theotokos, 1994), p. 24.

5 *I Corinthians* 14:19.

6 In Greek, the Prayer of Jesus consists of exactly five words in its simplest form, which in English is translated as "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me" -TRANS.

7 "Thus as Saint John of Damascus puts it, we are led as though up a ladder to the thinking of good thoughts.... Saint Paul also indicates this when he says: 'I had rather speak five words with my *nous*....'" St. Peter of Damascus, "The Third Stage of Contemplation," in *Philokalia*, 3, page 42 [my translation: cf. also English *Philokalia*, vol. XXX, p. 120] and St. Nikitas Sturthatos, as cited below.

how can catechism take place with noetic prayer, since noetic prayer is a person's inward prayer, and others around him do not hear anything? Catechism, however, takes place with teaching and worship that are cogent and reasonable. We teach and speak by using the reason, which is the usual way that people communicate with each other.<sup>8</sup>

Those who have noetic prayer in their hearts do, however, communicate with one another. In other words, they have the ability to sit together, and communicate with each other noetically, without speaking. That is, they are able to communicate spiritually. Of course, this also occurs even when such people are far apart. They also have the gifts of clairvoyance and foreknowledge. Through clairvoyance, they can sense both other people's sins and thoughts (*logismoi*), while foreknowledge enables them to see and talk about subjects, deeds, and events in the future. Such charismatic

8 With respect to this, Venerable Nikitas Sütthatos writes, "... If when you pray and psalmodize you speak in a tongue to God in private you edify yourself, as Saint Paul says. ... If it is not in order to edify his flock that the shepherd seeks to be richly endowed with the grace of teaching and the knowledge of the Spirit, he lacks fervor in his quest for God's gifts. By merely praying and psalmodizing inwardly with your tongue, that is, by praying in the soul - you edify yourself, but your *nous* is unproductive [cf. *I Corinthians* 14:14], for you do not prophesy with the language of sacred teaching or edify God's Church. If Paul, who of all men was the most closely united with God through prayer, would have rather spoken from his fertile *nous* five words in the church for the instruction of others than ten thousand words of psalmody in private with a tongue [cf. *I Corinthians* 14:19], surely those who have responsibility for others have strayed from the path of love if they limit the shepherd's ministry solely to psalmody and reading." St. Nikitas Sütthatos, "On Spiritual Knowledge," in *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, pp. 169-170.

people really do exist. If you go to them for confession, they know everything that you have done in your life before you open your mouth to tell them.

## 2. WHO IS MENTALLY ILL ACCORDING TO THE CHURCH FATHERS?

Everyone is mentally ill according to the Patristic meaning of mental illness. You do not have to be schizophrenic in order to be mentally ill. The definition of mental illness from a Patristic point of view is that people are mentally ill when the noetic energy they have inside them is not functioning properly. In other words, being mentally ill means your *nous* is full of thoughts<sup>9</sup>, not only bad thoughts, but good

9 The term used is *logismos* (plural *logismoi*), which is the technical term in ascetic literature for a thought combined with an image. According to St. Maximus, a *logismos* can be simple (dispassionate) or composite (passion-charged: e.g., a memory combined with a passion). (Bishop Hierotheos Vlachos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy: The Science of the Fathers*, trans. Esther Williams [Levadia: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1994] pp. 215-216). According to St. Isaac the Syrian, four causes generate *logismoi*: "Firstly, from the natural will of the flesh; secondly, from imagination of sensory objects in the world which a man hears and sees; thirdly, from mental predispositions and aberrations of the soul; and fourthly, from the assaults of demons who wage war with us in all the passions..." (ibid., p. 218). Although *logismoi* first appear on the horizon of the mind, they are immediately transmitted to the heart, so that we feel as though they arise from the heart (ibid., p. 221). The Lord Himself referred to this saying, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (*Matthew* 15:19) - TRANS.



of the Orthodox and why Orthodoxy has undergone this change and become so distorted. And as our researcher continues, he finds out that all this happened because hesychasm or traditional monasticism, the bearer of this tradition, was persecuted.

But why was hesychasm persecuted? It was persecuted because the countries in which it had flourished started to become Westernized politically as was the case in Russia after the reforms of Peter the Great and in Greece after the revolution of 1821. The modern historian Toynbee says that today Orthodox culture is gradually being absorbed by Western culture. He has written an entire book on this phenomenon. Of the twenty-six cultures that existed in the past, he finds only five still in existence today.<sup>14</sup> These are the Hindu culture, the culture of the Far East (China and Japan), European culture, Orthodox culture, and the primitive culture that still exists today in some regions of Australia and Africa. And Toynbee's theory is that today all the cultures of the world are becoming Westernized.

In the past, an effort was made for this Westernization

<sup>14</sup> Fr. John is likely referring to Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889-1975), *Civilization on Trial* (1948). Toynbee was an English historian best known for his 12-volume *A Study of History* (1934-61), a monumental synthetic work on civilization. "Unlike Spengler in his *The Decline of the West*, Toynbee did not regard the death of a civilization as inevitable, for it may or may not continue to respond to successive challenges. Unlike Karl Marx, he saw history as shaped by spiritual, not economic forces.... Many critics complained that the conclusions he reached were those of a Christian moralist rather than of a historian. His work, however, has been praised as a stimulating answer to the specializing tendency of modern historical research." (Encyclopaedia Britannica CD) -TRANS.

to take place through the work of Western missionaries. In the past, Europeans used to send out armies of missionaries – and they still do so today – whose purpose was not only to convert other nations to Christianity, but also to Westernize them. And that is why all of these heretical groups are present in Greece and still active. Toynbee notes, however, that this missionary activity failed in the idol-worshipping societies of Africa, as elsewhere, because missionaries created divisions among the people. In a single indigenous family, for example, one son would become Lutheran, his brother would become Anglican, a third brother Baptist, their cousin Methodist, another cousin Pentecostal, another cousin Evangelical, and so on, so that they not only shattered the nation into small fragments through religion, but they even shattered families. It has been established, therefore, that this kind of missionary work was a great failure in Westernizing peoples of the third world.

Therefore in 1948, Toynbee suggested a new solution – that Westernization should take place by means of technology and the economy.

#### 4. WHAT IS ORTHODOXY?

Nevertheless, in response to the process of Westernization, Orthodox people and Orthodox culture do fight back. But what is Orthodox culture? Is it a culture in the sense of Western culture? No, Orthodoxy is not a culture, even if Toynbee refers to it as "Orthodox culture." Why? Because Orthodoxy is a science. And according to today's criteria, it is a medical science. It is not a culture. Orthodoxy is

neither a culture nor a political system, because it is concerned with our personal salvation, with the salvation of our souls. Orthodoxy is based on two facts: "the Word became flesh"<sup>15</sup> and "in hell there is no repentance."<sup>16</sup> Of course, Orthodoxy contains within itself all that is necessary for the creation of a culture, but Orthodoxy is not a culture. Orthodoxy is not even a religion. Orthodoxy is not a religion like all the other religions. Orthodoxy is distinguished from the rest by a unique phenomenon that is not present in any other religion. This phenomenon concerns the origin, nature and destiny of human beings, as well as how human beings can be cured. It makes Orthodoxy different from the rest of the religions. Orthodoxy is a therapeutic course of treatment that heals the human personality.

A genuine doctor concerns himself with the treatment of anyone who is sick, without exception and without discrimination. He does not single out only certain people from the rest for treatment. He is not interested in people's social standing, their educational level, their economic situation, their religion, or their ethical conduct. A genuine doctor only notices whether or not the people who come to him are sick. And if they are sick, he takes an interest, tries to treat them, and to heal their infirmities. He is obligated to treat them. In the Orthodox tradition we have something similar to this, but even more so. And it is precisely this something more that constitutes our way of fighting back against westernization.

<sup>15</sup> *John* 1:14.

<sup>16</sup> St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book II, Chapter IV.

God loves not only saints but all people, without exception, including sinners, people in hell, and even the devil. And He desires to save and heal every one of them. He wants to heal them all, but He cannot, because they do not all want to be healed. We know this – that God is love and that He desires to heal everyone and loves everyone – because it has been verified and continues to be verified by the experience of those who have attained to *theosis*, in which God is seen and they have seen God.

Nevertheless, God cannot heal everyone, because He does not violate the human will. God holds man in high regard and loves him. He cannot, however, heal someone by force. He heals only those who want to be healed and who request that He heal them. Normally, someone who is physically ill, or even mentally ill, goes to the doctor on his own accord and not by force in order to get well – that is, if he is still thinking rationally. The same thing happens in the Orthodox therapeutic course of treatment. We must go to the Church freely on our own accord, without being forced or pressured. We must go to competent people who have reached illumination, are experienced, and possess the curative method of the Orthodox tradition. And then we must be obedient to them in order to find healing.

## 5. THE SOCIAL AIMS OF ORTHODOXY

Now what is the social aspect of our present subject?

Take any human being, any person whatsoever, who lives in society and must function as a healthy social entity.

## 11. WHO ARE THE THEOLOGIAN OF THE CHURCH?

Now who are the Church's theologians? The theologians of the Church are only those people who have arrived at a state of *theoria*, which consists in illumination and *theosis*. Illumination is an unceasing state, active day and night, even during sleep.<sup>31</sup> *Theosis* is the state in which someone beholds the glory of God, and it lasts as long as God sees fit.

Someone who is in a state of illumination may never reach *theosis*. God grants *theosis* and decides whether the illumined need to be led to *theosis*. If God does not lead someone to *theosis*, it could mean that this person's soul will be better off without this experience, because an experience of *theosis* could harm him, for example, by leading him into pride. In other words, God leads someone to *theosis* if that person will not be put in any danger spiritually and if that person needs this experience, whether for support or strength, or as preparation for some mission.

Thus, the experience of *theosis* is not automatic. Someone who is in a state of illumination cannot acquire it, simply because he wants to do so. On the contrary, a person in a state of illumination avoids asking God for the experience of *theosis*. But when someone needs it, God condescends and grants it, revealing His glory and uncreated Light. An ascetic, for example, lives in the desert depriving himself of many things and isolated from other people, all for the love of God. Since he has already been purified, the Holy Spirit then comes to comfort him and grant him experiences of *theosis*.

<sup>31</sup> "I sleep and my heart keeps vigil...." *Song of Songs* 5:2.

A true ascetic is never alone. At the very least, he has the Holy Spirit in his heart. Who prays ceaselessly within him and Who keeps him company in his apparent solitude. This is what is meant by the state of illumination. When the Holy Spirit Himself deems it necessary, He occasionally also grants the experience of *theosis* when an ascetic has need of it, provided that it will help him, for example, to strengthen him after a demonic attack. These events are clearly seen in the lives of the saints. In these two stages of *theoria*, illumination and *theosis*, knowledge of God is clearly experiential. This knowledge is not metaphysical or the result of philosophical speculation.

## 12. ON NOETIC PRAYER

Noetic prayer is a very interesting subject. It is clearly an empirical state. There is no doubt that noetic prayer is a matter of experience. Even a psychiatrist cannot deny the fact – noetic prayer is clearly an experience. We would disagree with the psychiatrists, however, about what sets noetic prayer in motion. If the subject of noetic prayer were considered to be a phenomenon worthy of observation and study by scientists from the hard sciences, then these psychologists, psychiatrists, pathologists, biologists, and the rest would be duty-bound to apply the scientific method and formulate an hypothesis.

Naturally, the Church has her own records that document how someone with inner noetic prayer experiences this phenomenon. It is a spiritual state, with a tradition spanning hundreds of years, in which the person praying hears the

as well as distinctions between the divine *hypostases*.<sup>116</sup> But are the Fathers making philosophical distinctions? Are the distinctions between essence and energy as well as the distinctions between the three divine *hypostases* metaphysical constructions, or are they the fruit that is produced by the experience of *theosis*?

The answer to this question is that these distinctions in the Patristic tradition are not the result of philosophical speculation. They are derived in their entirety from the experience of *theosis*. But the answer to these questions in Western theology is that these distinctions not only result from the use of principles documented in tradition, they are also the result of philosophical speculation. This is precisely why the West fell into heresy. Their theologians made distinctions that relied on metaphysics rather than experience.

#### 40. PATRISTIC DISTINCTIONS AND THE HOLY TRINITY

The Patristic distinction between essence and energy as well as the distinction between the three divine *hypostases* is based exclusively on the experience of *theosis*. In the Old Testament, the experience of the prophets is the source of

<sup>116</sup> The word *hypostasis* (pl: *hypostases*) is derived from the verb *hypostimi* (to stand under) and means the underlying foundation. In antiquity, it was synonymous with *ousia* or essence. The Fathers gave new meaning to the word *hypostasis* during the Arian controversy. According to St. Basil the Great, "the distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis* is the same as the distinction between the general and the particular." ("Letter 236 to Amphilochios") – TRANS.

the distinction between God, the Angel, and the Spirit. In the New Testament, the experience of *theosis* in connection with the Incarnation gives rise to the distinction between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Since the Apostles and the Fathers had the same experience that the prophets did, the Apostles and the Fathers were able to verify the truth of the expression, "the Light in the Light through the Light."

In the New Testament, the Father is not incarnate, and the Holy Spirit is not incarnate. The experience of *theosis* confirms that only one Light is incarnate and that Light is the Word. So there is a union between Christ's human nature and the uncreated, a union that is unique. It does not include all three Lights, but only involves one Light. The Fathers teach that the *Hypostasis* characterized by the phrase "in the Light" is not incarnate. Only the *Hypostasis* characterized by the phrase "through the Light" is incarnate. After the Incarnation, the phrase "through the Light" becomes synonymous with the phrase "through Christ's human nature." Through the Light (of Christ), we see the fount of Light (the Father) in the Light (of the Holy Spirit). At this point the phrase "through the Light" is directly linked to the phrase "in Christ's human nature." Through Christ's human nature, through the Incarnate Word, we see the Father in the Holy Spirit.

The experience of *theosis* enables someone to interpret correctly what is portrayed in the Bible. Of course, this does not mean that there are no other interpretations of the Bible, because other interpretations of the Bible do exist. There are the interpretations by heretics like the Arians, the Eunomians, the modalistic Monarchians, the dynamic



Monarchians, the Tropici, the Nestorians, and others. But why are all these other interpretations wrong and why is the Orthodox interpretation the only right interpretation? Why should a scholar come to the conclusion that only Orthodox Christians correctly interpret Scripture? What compels me to conclude that a heretic does not correctly interpret Scripture if I approach this question scientifically?

Naturally, modern Orthodox theologians are in absolutely no position to enter this discussion when they start talking about the Church's bishops gathering together at an ecumenical council and passing judgment infallibly, because these bishops are members of an ecumenical council, and because they have received from God the Holy Spirit and a canonical ordination. Such theology has no place in this discussion, because the Holy Spirit does not come and illumine some bishop in this way, merely because his consecration was canonical or because he joins other bishops in a council, even an ecumenical council. The Holy Spirit does not provide illumination merely because the Church has a need, or because all the members of the Council say a prayer together. There are other substantial preconditions that must also be met. In other words, the bishop must already be in a state of illumination.

Next, the Roman Catholics come along and harp on their favorite theme, saying, "if the Pope passes judgment on an issue, his decision is infallible." It is as though the Holy Spirit's presence in the Church turns the Church into a place for settling disputes with the Holy Spirit playing the role of arbitrator between theologians, so that the Church can decide which theologian is right or which theology is correct by means of some kind of arbitration. But is this the

work of the Holy Spirit? Is this the way the Church determines what is true?

#### 41. THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE ESSENCE AND THE ENERGY OF GOD<sup>117</sup>

In Orthodox tradition, we talk about the theological distinction between essence and energy. And although we contrast God's energy with His essence, it is understood that the energy is the natural energy of the essence. But this natural energy of God's essence does not differ from God's essence and is not separate from it. The essence and the energy of the essence are **not** divergent realities.

<sup>117</sup> The Orthodox theological term 'energy' [*energia*] should not be confused with the standard meaning of the word as 'power' or 'capacity for doing work,' (e.g., electrical or nuclear energy). It also has no relation to the use of the word 'energy' by those in the New Age movement when they speak about energy contained in crystals that can transform and heal the human consciousness. *Energia* is a term used by Aristotle to mean action, operation and energy. In the New Testament, the term meant exclusively activity and action. During the Patristic period, the term was used to describe God's activity, working, influence, and active force. St. John of Damascus dedicates a chapter to the subject of the many connotations suggested by the term *energia* in his *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*. He notes that every nature has a corresponding force and activity that are called energy. The term *energia* includes natural responses arising from nature (e.g., hunger and thirst are natural *energies* of human nature), activities appropriate to a nature (e.g., eating and drinking are natural *energies* of human nature), and the result of the force or activity. An energy reveals that a life is voluntary, rational, and independent. – TRANS.



Nevertheless, some of our theologians talk about the energy of God as though it were different from the essence of God. They say that the essence of God is one thing, but that the energy of the essence is something else altogether.

When you read the Fathers, you really can get the impression that the essence and the energy of God are two different things. But the Fathers express themselves in this way only in order to stress the distinction in God between essence and energy. But what these theologians fail to notice is that the Fathers teach that the energy of God is the natural energy of God's essence. In other words, this energy is an essential energy. The essence of God has a natural energy whose existence arises from the existence of the essence. The Fathers do speak about this natural energy of the essence.

The other point that the Fathers stress is that this natural energy of God's essence is utterly simple, even as God's essence is utterly simple. Nevertheless, this simple energy "is indivisibly divided among individual creatures." But what does this mean? If we apply Aristotle's law of contradiction, it is nonsense. After all, does it make any sense to say that something is "indivisibly divided among individual creatures?" What does it mean for an energy to be separated into parts without being parted? How can a thing be plural and singular at the same time? Yet this simple energy really "is indivisibly divided among individual creatures." The Fathers do make this statement. St. Gregory the Theologian says it. In fact, this very expression can also be found in the writings of St. John of Damascus and St. Gregory Palamas. They all maintain that this simple energy is multiplied. How? Without being multiplied. Where? Throughout many creatures.

But what does this mean? It means that when a prophet is in a state of *theosis*, he is in contact with God and can see that this simple energy of God is present throughout all of creation. God's energy is one, but it has many resultant energies. And this one energy is in each distinct energy. And within each of these energies, all of God is present.

When God created the world, He did not create the world through His essence, but through His energy and at will. So there is a union between God's uncreated energy and creation.

Although this energy of God is quite simple, we can perceive differences between God's creative energy. His providential (preserving) energy, His purifying energy, His illumining energy and His glorifying energy. These distinct forms of the one selfsame energy of God are not identical. If they were identical, then all of creation would partake, for example, of God's glorifying energy. But what would that mean? It would mean that all of creation would see God. But how do we know that these energies are not identical? The Church knows full well on the basis of Her experience of divine grace that God's illumining energy and His glorifying energy are not the same. How do we know that they are not the same? We know this from the fact that some people, the saints, have reached a state of *theosis*, while others have not.

So being "indivisibly divided among individual creatures" does not mean that something big is divided and becomes small. It does not mean that God is diminished.

course. This is why Frankish monasticism is not a continuation of the ancient spirituality and ascetic life of the Church, but a mutation into a different tradition.

Of course, this tradition is not altogether new, since it is also Augustine's tradition. This connection results from the fact that the first Frankish theologians and spiritual fathers read a great deal of Augustine, but almost none of the other Church Fathers. Given this context, it is really quite absurd for those in the West to claim that they are the only ones who understand Patristic tradition and that we have deviated from it. In fact, they contend that starting with the age of St. John of Damascus we became an idolatrous form of Christianity.<sup>183</sup>

This is the background for the debate in the West over different categories in Patristic theology. For some reason, those in the West assumed that God's essence and energy are one and the same. In other words, they identify God's essence with His energy. Furthermore, there are strong indications in Augustine's own writings that he also identified God's essence with His energy. At least in his early writings this clearly appears to be the case. Apparently, he identified God's essence with His energy by employing a clearly philosophical approach. He also repeatedly contended that God is *una substantia* (one essence or substance) and that whatever exists in God is identical with this *una substantia*. Augustine does not make this statement just once. He repeats it many times.

So apparently the Germanic tribes adopted this teaching during the Middle Ages. This identification between God's

essence and His energy became the central axis of the Scholastic tradition. Along this axis, however, there are certain variations on the theme. Some Scholastics make a distinction between God's essence and attributes (*attributa*). In this Western development, the most prevailing tendencies are represented by Thomas Aquinas on the one hand, Duns Scotus on the other, and William of Ockham representing yet a third position. Duns Scotus, whose followers are called 'Scotists,' makes a distinction between God's essence and attributes that is somewhat similar to the Orthodox distinction between the essence and energy of God. It is similar, but not identical, because his distinction is clearly philosophical, while the Orthodox distinction is clearly empirical. This is the reason why his distinction is also called 'the ontological distinction,' or 'the metaphysical distinction.'

At the time of the early Church, heretics would systematically make such ontological or metaphysical distinctions between God's essence and energy. In response to these philosophical distinctions, believers in the early Church would also make a distinction, but their distinction was clearly empirical, since it was based on the experience of illumination and *theosis*.

### 63. HOW DID THE FATHERS THEOLOGIZE?

But how do the Fathers theologize in the Orthodox tradition? First of all, the Fathers invoke Holy Scripture in order to support the teaching of the Church. But when a heresy appears, they likewise invoke the experience of those who have reached *theosis* and are still alive. When the Arian

<sup>183</sup> In fact, the very opposite is true.

heresy appeared, the Fathers invoked the experience of those who had reached *theosis* and were alive during the age of the Arian conflict. So there are two ways that a theologian can build his argument. Nevertheless in order for a statement to be Orthodox, the two kinds of reasoning must be reconcilable. The arguments should be identical or complementary. They must not contradict each other. While reasons are formed and conclusions are drawn mainly from Holy Scripture, the argumentation is always sealed and confirmed as sound on the basis of the documented experience of the Church Fathers, including both the saints who have fallen asleep and those saints who are alive at the time of the heresy's appearance.

But this is precisely what takes place in every science. If we look at Chinese manuscripts on astronomy, for example, we will read about an immense explosion that occurred in the universe on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1054, and that the Chinese astronomers were able to record. For two weeks, they could see the light from this explosion. In other words, we possess a Chinese manuscript that refers to this incident. Now when we read this manuscript today, we might call it a bunch of nonsense, but contemporary astronomers have verified that this explosion or supernova really did happen at that time and resulted in a cloud that they have since called 'the Crab Nebula.' In other words, we have before us recorded written evidence for a phenomenon that is confirmed by the experience of contemporary astronomers.

In like manner, the Bible documents the experience of the prophets and the Apostles. But how can we verify their experience of *theosis* today? How can we confirm that the Bible's descriptions of God and Christ are reliable? From

a Patristic point of view, the saints living in every age who reached the stage of seeing Christ in glory provide us with this verification and confirmation through their personal experience. They can assure their contemporaries that what is mentioned in the Bible is true. So we not only possess the personal experience of the Church Fathers, which is the same as the experience of the prophets and the Apostles, but we also have the experience of the saints living in every age. And we can see that this tradition of the experience of *theosis* was vigorous and flourishing until the end of the Turkish yoke and still looms large in the consciousness of Orthodox Christians.<sup>184</sup> So some Church Fathers in their struggle against the heretics would also invoke their own experience of *theosis*. For example, St. Gregory the Theologian invoked his personal experience in his struggle against the Eunomians.

But the question is whether or not we understand the relationship between the written text of the Bible and the experience of *theosis* that exists today. Naturally, whether or not a contemporary experience is genuine is another matter, but we will examine that topic separately. For the time being, we can see the very same issue of documentation and experience also at work in astronomy. On the one hand, there are texts about astronomy. On the other hand, there is empirical or observational astronomy. The relationship between what is documented in astronomical texts and what is observed astronomically through a modern telescope forms a perfect analogy to the relationship between the

184 This tradition continues through the saints of the Church who are alive today.



prophets' and Apostles' experience of glorification documented in the Bible, as well as the experience of *theosis* documented in Patristic literature and the contemporary experience of saints who are alive today.

If we ignore the contemporary experience of saints who are alive today, it is like ignoring telescopic astronomy of the observatory and being satisfied merely with what is documented in books on astronomy. If for some reason contemporary astronomers one day would be content to merely read the descriptions in astronomy books, and if they were not able to confirm by observation through a telescope what these books mention, would we consider this astronomy to be orthodox or heretical? We would assuredly consider such astronomy to be heretical or not genuine. After all, how could it possibly be genuine, since it would not be able to be confirmed empirically by observation? Besides, a description can never fully do justice to a lived experience and living reality.

We encounter this same relationship between written descriptions and empirical verification in all the exact sciences. We also encounter it in theology. Lived experience tests the absence or presence of authenticity in the documented descriptions of written or oral tradition.

*Question from a student:* Is the testimony of Holy Scripture not sufficient? Why is the experience of 'theosis' necessary for the verification of Biblical truth?

*Answer:* It is necessary because of the rise of modern Greek theology that has caused modern Orthodox Christians in Greece to sit around and busy themselves with the Bible, irrespective of the prerequisites for such. Moreover, as far as they are concerned, the Bible is a book separate from

the experience of the prophets and the Apostles. Even though the Bible itself speaks about the prophets' and the Apostles' experience of *theosis*, modern Greek theology is not aware of this and could care less for what Holy Scripture has to say on this subject.

If you want proof, check out some modern theological writings. You will not find a single passage where they talk about the *theosis* and glorification of the Apostles and the prophets. In other words, this Patristic interpretation of the Old and New Testament has disappeared from Biblical hermeneutics in contemporary Greece.<sup>185</sup> Why? Because the Russians, Protestants, and Roman Catholics have strongly biased our own Biblical interpreters against taking into consideration the Patristic method of biblical interpretation. We have the Old Testament, we have the New Testament, we have the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils, and we have the Patristic tradition. Nevertheless, in Greece today there are people who claim that they are conservative, but who in fact accept tradition out of a blind devotion to tradition. In other words, their acceptance really does not go beyond external forms.

If someone does not know what the foundation of the prophetic, apostolic, and Patristic experience is – which is the foundation of doctrine – how will he be able to defend Orthodox doctrine without referring to the experiences of the Fathers? Will he be able to do so only on the basis of what the Bible mentions? If he only refers to the Bible, and does not refer to Patristic experiences, he will not be able to explain how the Fathers formulated doctrine. And so he

will be forced to agree with the heterodox who maintain that when the Fathers formulated doctrine they were in fact philosophizing on the basis of what is mentioned in Holy Scripture. But the truth of the matter is that the Fathers formed dogmas on the basis of their experience of *theosis*, and not after philosophical reflection on what is mentioned in the Bible.

Thus, when modern Greek theology deviated from the hesychastic tradition – which was preserved until the end of the Turkish yoke – an absurd tradition emerged in which modern Greek theology was forced unwittingly to follow the path of those Church Fathers who did philosophize (such as Augustine and his followers). That is, Modern Greek theology was forced to portray the Fathers as philosophers in the spirit of Greek antiquity who formulated doctrine by means of philosophical reflection. But this is not a description of Patristic tradition. It is an outright caricature.

So from a purely scientific perspective, it is imperative for us Orthodox Christians to spell out how Orthodox theology has progressed through history on the basis of Patristic methodology so that we will be able to understand our present situation. If we do not do this, Orthodoxy won't be able to stand its ground, because, from a scientific point of view, Orthodoxy cut off from the Patristic method is sheer nonsense. Anyone who is well acquainted with modern philosophical methodology, the scientific method, the history of philosophy, and the history of theology (*à la* the heterodox) will be able to see that this kind of Orthodoxy can stand its ground only with the backing of the armed forces. No serious-minded person will be convinced of the truth and validity of Orthodox doctrine in this way.

And for starters, I certainly would not be convinced. If Orthodoxy were in fact what is described in modern Greek textbooks, I would be an atheist today. When Orthodox teaching is cut off from its roots, it becomes utterly ridiculous. And this includes the teachings about the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, and everything else. For instance, what does the phrase “one essence and three hypostases” mean, if this formulation is cut off from the experience of *theosis*, the Transfiguration, and Pentecost? Logically speaking, it is absolutely meaningless. And in that case, what would be the aim of theology? Perhaps the purpose of having a sacred dogma is for me to be able to put it on my dresser and worship it? Or maybe I need to have a dogma, so that I will be able to make moralistic speeches?

The crux of the matter from the Patristic point of view is that every human being is sick. There is not a single human being who functions normally, apart from the saints. Today, everyone has his own criteria for what functioning normally means. But who is really normal? Who is insane and who is not? There are some people who are so very abnormal that they are locked up in mental institutions because they are either dangerous to themselves or to society. But there are also many others who are equally dangerous, but who are not locked up in mental institutions. So how can we determine who is normal and who is abnormal?

Then, Patristic theology comes along and says that no one is normal. And it explains how God gave man noetic energy which is a physiological component of human nature, but which unfortunately does not function at all in the average human being, or merely functions in an underdeveloped way. In order to make this noetic energy