

THE ART OF PRAYER

an orthodox anthology

compiled by

IGUMEN CHARITON OF VALAMO

translated by

E. KADLOUBOVSKY and E. M. PALMER

edited with an introduction by

TIMOTHY WARE

THE ART OF PRAYER

An Orthodox Anthology

*Compiled by Igumen Chariton of Valamo
Translated by E. Kadloubovsky and
E. M. Palmer, and edited with an
Introduction by Timothy Ware*

This is a collection of texts on prayer, drawn from Greek and Russian sources. The spiritual teaching of the Orthodox Church appears here in its classic and traditional form, but expressed in unusually direct and vivid language.

The Art of Prayer is concerned in particular with the most frequently used and best loved of all Orthodox prayers – the Jesus Prayer. It deals also with the general question ‘What is prayer?’, with the different degrees of prayer from ordinary oral prayer to unceasing prayer of the heart, with the dangers of illusion and discouragement, and the need for seclusion and inner peace.

Father Chariton, ‘Igumen’ or Abbot of the Russian monastery of Valamo, has taken his texts chiefly from the letters of Bishop Theophan the Recluse, one of the greatest spiritual guides in nineteenth-century Russia. But he uses many other writers, Greek as well as Russian, and concludes with the teaching given by monks of his own community of Valamo.

This anthology was first published in Russian in 1936. With a few exceptions, none of the passages have appeared before in English translation.

While this book will specially attract those who are interested in the Orthodox Church, it will also be appreciated by all concerned with the meaning and the practice of prayer.

translated by E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer

EARLY FATHERS FROM THE PHILOKALIA

UNSEEN WARFARE

being The Spiritual Combat and Path to Paradise of Lorenzo Scupoli

WRITINGS FROM THE PHILOKALIA

ON PRAYER OF THE HEART

THE ART OF PRAYER

An Orthodox Anthology

Compiled by
IGUMEN CHARITON
OF VALAMO

Translated by
E. KADLOUBOVSKY
and
E. M. PALMER

Edited with an Introduction by
TIMOTHY WARE

FABER AND FABER LIMITED
24 Russell Square
London

*First published in mcmlxvi
by Faber and Faber Limited
24 Russell Square London W.C.1
Made and printed in Great Britain by
William Clowes and Sons, Limited
London and Beccles
All rights reserved*

*This translation © by
Elizabeth M. Palmer, 1966*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	9
FOREWORD	39
I THE INNER CLOSET OF THE HEART	43
II WHAT IS PRAYER?	
(i) The Test of Everything	51
(ii) Degrees of Prayer	63
III THE JESUS PRAYER	
(i) Secret Meditation	75
(ii) Unceasing Prayer	80
(iii) The Jesus Prayer	88
(iv) Remembrance of God	118
IV THE FRUITS OF PRAYER	
(i) Attention and the Fear of God	124
(ii) Divine Grace and Human Effort	132
(iii) The Burning of the Spirit	149
V THE KINGDOM OF THE HEART	
(i) The Kingdom within us	164
(ii) The Union of Mind and Heart	181
VI WAR WITH PASSIONS	
(i) War with Passions	199
(ii) Know Yourself	222
(iii) Work, Inner and External	233
(iv) Solitude	250
(v) Times of Desolation	257
(vi) Illusion	264
(vii) Humility and Love	271

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VII TEACHINGS OF THE STARTSI OF VALAMO MONASTERY	page 275
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	280
INDEX	283

THE INNER CLOSET OF THE HEART

The duality of man and the two kinds of prayer

Man is dual: exterior and interior, flesh and spirit. The outer man is visible, of the flesh; but the inner man is invisible, spiritual—or what the Apostle Peter terms ‘ . . . the hidden man of the heart, which is not corruptible, . . . a meek and quiet spirit’ (1 Pet. iii. 4). And St. Paul refers to this duality when he says: ‘But though our outward man perish, yet the inward is renewed’ (2 Cor. iv. 16). Here the Apostle speaks clearly about the outer and inner man. The outer man is composed of many members, but the inner man comes to perfection through his mind—by attention to himself, by fear of the Lord, and by the grace of God. The works of the outer man are visible, but those of the inner man are invisible, according to the Psalmist: ‘the inner man and the heart are very deep’ (Ps. lxiii. 7: Septuagint).¹ And St. Paul the Apostle also says: ‘For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?’ (1 Cor. ii. 11). Only He who tests the innermost hearts and the inward parts knows all the secrets of the inner man.

Training, then, must also be twofold, outer and inner: outer in reading books, inner in thoughts of God; outer in love of wisdom, inner in love of God; outer in words, inner in prayer; outer in keenness of intellect, inner in warmth of spirit; outer in technique, inner in vision. The exterior mind is ‘puffed up’ (1 Cor. viii. 1), the inner humbles itself; the exterior is full of curiosity, desiring to know all, the inner pays attention to itself and desires nothing other than to know God, speaking to Him as David spoke when he said, ‘My heart hath talked with thee: “Seek ye my face”; “Thy face Lord will I seek”’ (Ps. xxvi. 8. Sept.).² And also ‘Like as the hart desireth the water brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O God’ (Ps. xli. 2. Sept.).³

Prayer is likewise twofold, exterior and inner. There is

¹ Ps. lxiv. 6 in the Book of Common Prayer.

² xxvii. 9 (B.C.P.).

³ xlii. 1 (B.C.P.).

CHAPTER II

WHAT IS PRAYER?

by Theophan the Recluse¹

(i) THE TEST OF EVERYTHING

Ultimate questions²

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

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

The test of everything

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

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

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

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Degrees of prayer

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHAT IS PRAYER?

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

Feeling and words

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

The gift of feeling

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

Body, soul and spirit

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

WHAT IS PRAYER?

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

Sounding and soundless prayer

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

The power is not in the words

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

A vigilant tension of the muscles

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

DEGREES OF PRAYER

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

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

Prayer from the heart

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

The principal thing

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

(ii) DEGREES OF PRAYER

Three degrees of prayer

We may distinguish three stages:

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

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

WHAT IS PRAYER?

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

Further distinctions

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

¹ Here Theophan apparently distinguishes five stages:

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

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

DEGREES OF PRAYER

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

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

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

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

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Desire and longing for God

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

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

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

Two kinds of inner prayer

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

DEGREES OF PRAYER

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

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

'Self-moving' prayers

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

Prayer of the Spirit

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

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

THE JESUS PRAYER

the spirit of zeal will be maintained in its true character—burning sometimes less and sometimes more brightly. Secret meditation sets our feet on the path of inner prayer, which is the most direct road to salvation. We may leave all else and turn only to this work, and all will be well. Conversely, if we fulfil all other duties and neglect this one task we shall bear no fruit.

He who does not turn within and look to this spiritual task, will make no progress. It would be true to say that this task is extremely difficult, especially at the beginning, but on the other hand it is direct and fruitful in result. A spiritual father should therefore introduce the practice of inner prayer among his children as early as possible, and confirm them in its use. It is even possible to start them in this before any exterior observances, or together with them; in any case it is essential not to leave it until too late. This is because the very seed of spiritual growth lies in this inner turning to God. All that is necessary is to make this clear, to emphasize its importance, and to explain the way to do it. When this pattern is woven into us then all exterior work will also be performed willingly, successfully and fruitfully: without it, outward activity will be like a rotten thread, always breaking. Note particularly that the practice must proceed step by step, slowly and with great restraint. Unless this way of life be adopted gradually it may lose its essential character and turn into nothing but an outward observance of rules. Therefore, although people do exist who proceed from outward rule to inner life, the unalterable principle must be this: to turn within as early as possible, and to kindle there the spirit of zeal.

It sounds on the face of it so simple, but unless you know about inner prayer you can sweat for a long while and produce no harvest. This is due to the nature of physical activity, which is easier and therefore attractive; inner activity is difficult and so it repels us. He who attaches himself to the first as essential, will himself gradually become material, and will accordingly cool down, his heart will be less moved, and he will go further and further away from inner work at the beginning, thinking to put it aside until the moment comes when he is ripe for it. Looking back later on he will realize that he has missed the moment. Instead of working

SECRET MEDITATION

gradually towards a full inner life he has all this while become incapable of so working. Not that we should abandon exterior work, which is, on the contrary, the support of that which goes on within: they should both be done together. Priority must go to inner worship, because one must serve God in spirit, must worship Him in spirit and truth. The two must be interdependent—bearing in mind their relative value. Let neither enforce claims upon the other, or be the cause of divided allegiance.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Dwell within and worship secretly

The most important thing that the Holy Fathers desired and recommended is the understanding of the spiritual state, and the art of maintaining it. There remains only one rule for whoever will attain this state: dwell within and worship secretly in the heart. Meditate on the thought of God, on the remembrance of death, and recollect your sins with self-reproach. Be conscious of these things and speak about them often to yourself—for example: Where am I going? or: I am a worm and no man. Secret meditation consists of pondering on such thoughts as these in our hearts, with due attention and feeling.

It is possible to sum up in this one short sentence the ways of warming and preserving the spirit of zeal: After waking, enter within yourself, stand enclosed in the heart, consider all the activity of the spiritual life, absorb yourself in a chosen part of it and there remain. Or, still more briefly: collect yourself and make secret prayer in your heart.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Avoiding numbness

Every day keep turning over in your mind some thought which has deeply impressed you and fallen into your heart. Unless you exercise your powers of thought, the soul becomes numb.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

THE JESUS PRAYER

(ii) UNCEASING PRAYER

The way to unceasing prayer

Some godly thoughts come nearer the heart than others. Should this be so, after you have finished your prayers, continue to dwell on such a thought and remain feeding on it. This is the way to unceasing prayer.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Unceasing prayer without words

To raise up the mind towards the Lord, and to say with contrition: 'Lord, have mercy! Lord, grant Thy blessing! Lord, help!'—this is to cry out in prayer to God. But if feeling towards God is born and lives in your heart, then you will possess unceasing prayer, even though your lips recite no words and your body is not outwardly in a posture of prayer.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Pray at all times and in all places

'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit' (Eph. vi. 18).

Speaking of the necessity of prayer, the Apostle indicates here how we must pray in order to be heard. Pray, he says, 'with all prayer and supplication', in other words, very ardently, with pain in the heart and a burning striving towards God. And pray, he says, 'always', at any time; by this he urges us to pray persistently and indefatigably. Prayer must not be simply an occupation for a certain time, but a permanent state of the spirit. Make sure, says St. John Chrysostom, that you do not limit your prayer merely to a particular part of the day. Turn to prayer at any time, as the Apostle says in another place: 'Pray without ceasing' (1 Thess. v. 17). Thirdly, Paul tells us to pray 'in the spirit': in other words prayer must be not only outward, but also inner, an activity of the

UNCEASING PRAYER

mind in the heart. In this lies the essence of prayer, which is the raising of the mind and heart towards God.

The Holy Fathers make a distinction, however, between prayer of the mind in the heart and prayer moved by the Spirit. The first is the conscious action of the praying man, but the second comes *to* a man; and although he is aware of it, it works by itself independently of his efforts. This second kind of prayer, moved by the Spirit, is not something that we can recommend people to practise, because it does not lie in our power to achieve it. We can desire it, seek it, and receive it gratefully, but we cannot arrive at it whenever we want to. But in those who are purified, prayer is most generally moved by the Spirit. Therefore we must suppose that the Apostle refers to prayer of the mind in the heart when he says: 'Pray in the spirit.' One can add, pray with the mind in the heart with the desire of attaining to prayer moved by the Spirit. Such a prayer holds the soul consciously before the face of the ever-present God. Attracting the divine ray towards itself, and reflecting this same ray from itself, it disperses the enemies. One can say with certainty that no devils can draw near to the soul in such a state. Only in this way can we pray at any time, in any place.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

The secret of unceasing prayer—love

'Pray without ceasing', St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. v. 17). And in other epistles, he commands: 'Praying always with all supplication in the spirit' (Eph. vi. 18), 'continue in prayer and watch in the same' (Col. iv. 2), 'continuing instant in prayer' (Rom. xii. 12). Also the Saviour Himself teaches the need for constancy and persistency in prayer, in the parable about the importunate widow, who won over the unrighteous judge by the persistency of her appeals (Luke xviii. 1-8). It is clear from this that unceasing prayer is not an accidental prescription, but the essential characteristic of the Christian spirit. The life of a Christian, according to the Apostle, 'is

UNCEASING PRAYER

The practice of the Apostles

I remember that St. Basil the Great¹ solved the question how the Apostles could pray without ceasing, in this way: in everything they did, he replied, they thought of God and lived in constant devotion to Him. This spiritual state was their unceasing prayer.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Unceasing prayer as an implicit attitude

You regret that the Jesus Prayer is not unceasing, that you do not recite it constantly. But constant repetition is not required. What is required is a constant aliveness to God—an aliveness present when you talk, read, watch, or examine something. But since you are already practising the Jesus Prayer in the correct manner, continue as you are doing now, and in due course the prayer will widen its scope.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Standing always before God with reverence

We can sometimes spend all the time set aside for prayer by the rule in reciting one psalm, composing our own prayer from each verse. Again, we can sometimes spend all the time allotted by the rule in reciting the Jesus Prayer with prostrations. We can also do a little of each of these things. What God asks for is the heart (Prov. xxiii. 26); and it is enough that it should stand before Him with reverence. Standing always before God with reverence is unceasing prayer: such is its exact description; and in this regard the rule of prayer is only fuel for the fire, or the throwing of wood into a stove.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

¹ St. Basil the Great (c. 330-79), Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (Asia Minor). Friend of St. Gregory the Theologian (see p. 87, n. 1), and elder brother of St. Gregory of Nyssa; these three are known collectively as the Cappadocian Fathers, and their writings have exercised a formative influence upon Orthodox theology.

UNCEASING PRAYER

I have set the Lord always before me

By the grace of God there comes a prayer of the heart alone, spiritual prayer, quickened in the heart by the Holy Spirit. He who prays is conscious of it, although it is not he who makes the prayer, for it goes on within him by itself. Such prayer is the attribute of the perfect. But the prayer which is accessible to everyone and which is required from all, is prayer in which thought and feeling are always united with the words.

There is also another kind of prayer, which is called standing before God, when he who prays is wholly concentrated within his heart and mentally contemplates God, present to him and within him. At the same time he experiences the feelings corresponding to such a state—fear of God and worshipful admiration of Him in all his greatness; faith and hope; love and surrender to His will; contrition and readiness for every sacrifice. Such a state comes to one deeply absorbed in ordinary prayer of word, mind, and heart. He who prays thus for a long time and in the proper way will enjoy such a state more and more frequently until it may finally become permanent: then it can be called walking before God, and it constitutes unceasing prayer. St. David was in this state when he testified of himself: 'I have set the Lord always before me; for he is on my right hand, therefore I shall not be shaken' (Ps. xv. 8. Sept.).¹

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Prayer that repeats itself

It often happens that no inner activity occupies a person during the fulfilment of outward duties, so that his life remains soulless. How can we avoid this? Into every duty a God-fearing heart must be put, a heart constantly permeated by the thought of God; and this will be the door through which the soul will enter into active life. All endeavour must be directed towards the ceaseless thought of God, towards the constant awareness of His presence:

¹ Ps. xvi. 9 (B.C.P.).

THE JESUS PRAYER

'Seek the Lord . . . Seek his face constantly' (Ps. civ. 4. Sept.).¹
It is on this basis that sobriety and inner prayer rest.

God is everywhere: see that your thoughts too are always with God. How can this be done? Thoughts jostle one another like swarming gnats, and emotions follow on the thoughts. In order to make their thought hold to one thing, the Fathers used to accustom themselves to the continual repetition of a short prayer, and from this habit of constant repetition this small prayer clung to the tongue in such a way that it repeated itself of its own accord. In this manner their thought clung to the prayer and, through the prayer, to the constant remembrance of God. Once this habit has been acquired, the prayer holds us in the remembrance of God, and the remembrance of God holds us in prayer; they mutually support each other. Here, then, is a way of walking before God.

Inner prayer begins when we establish our attention in the heart, and from the heart offer prayer to God. Spiritual activity starts when we stand with attention in the heart in recollection of the Lord, rejecting every other thought that tries to enter in.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

O my God, what severity is here

* ||| The principal monastic rule is to remain constantly with God in mind and heart, that is, to pray unceasingly. To keep this endeavour alight and warm, definite prayers are laid down—the cycle of daily services performed in church, and certain rules of prayer for the cell. But the chief thing is to possess a constant feeling for God. It is this feeling that gives us power in the spiritual life, keeping our heart warm. It is this feeling that constitutes our rule. So long as this feeling is there, all other rules are replaced by it. If it is absent, no amount of strenuous reading can take its place. Prayers are meant to feed this feeling, and if they fail to do so they are no use: they are only labour that bears no fruit—like an outer garment with no body inside or like a body

¹ Ps. cv. 4 (B.C.P.).

THE JESUS PRAYER

in this way our mind remains free from all worldly attachment, and by its secret and inward prayer is united with God our Father.

Attributed to ST. GREGORY PALAMAS¹

(iii) THE JESUS PRAYER

For laymen as well as monks

Every Christian must always remember that he should unite with the Lord our Saviour with all his being, letting Him come and dwell in his mind and in his heart; and the surest way to achieve such a union with the Lord, next to Communion of His Flesh and Blood, is the inner Jesus Prayer.

Is the Jesus Prayer obligatory for laymen too, and not only for monks? Indeed it is obligatory, for, as we said, *every* Christian should be united with the Lord in his heart, and the best means to achieve such a union is precisely the Jesus Prayer.

BISHOP JUSTIN²

The power of the Name

What shall we say of this divine prayer, in invocation of the Saviour, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me'?

It is a prayer and a vow and a confession of faith, conferring upon us the Holy Spirit and divine gifts, cleansing the heart, driving out devils. It is the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ within us, and a fountain of spiritual reflections and divine

¹ St. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), Archbishop of Thessalonica: the greatest theologian in the Hesychast movement. His doctrine of prayer and teaching concerning the Divine Light were sharply attacked in his life-time, but were confirmed by two Councils (Constantinople: 1341, 1351) and so came to be accepted by the Orthodox Church as a whole.

² Justin (Polyansky), a celebrated spiritual writer in Russia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Bishop first of Tobolsk and later of Ryazan.

THE JESUS PRAYER

thoughts. It is remission of sins, healing of soul and body, and shining of divine illumination; it is a well of God's mercy, bestowing upon the humble revelations and initiation into the mysteries of God. It is our only salvation, for it contains within itself the saving Name of our God, the only Name upon which we call, the Name of Jesus Christ the Son of God. 'For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved,' as the Apostle says (Acts iv. 12).

That is why all believers must continually confess this Name: both to preach the faith and as testimony to our love for the Lord Jesus Christ, from which nothing must ever separate us; and also because of the grace that comes to us from His name, and because of the remission of sins, the healing, sanctification, enlightenment, and, above all, the salvation which it confers. The Holy Gospel says: 'These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.' See, such is faith. And the Gospel adds, 'that believing ye might have life through his Name' (John xx. 31). See, such is salvation and life.

ST. SIMEON OF THESSALONICA¹

The simplicity of the Jesus Prayer

The practice of the Jesus Prayer is simple. Stand before the Lord with the attention in the heart, and call to Him: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!' The essential part of this is not in the words, but in faith, contrition, and self-surrender to the Lord. With these feelings one can stand before the Lord even without any words, and it will still be prayer.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Under God's eye

Work with the Jesus Prayer. May God bless you. But with the habit of reciting this prayer orally, unite remembrance of the

¹ St. Simeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica (died 1429): Byzantine theologian and liturgist.

THE JESUS PRAYER

Lord, accompanied by fear and piety. The principal thing is to walk before God, or under God's eye, aware that God is looking at you, searching your soul and your heart, seeing all that is there. This awareness is the most powerful lever in the mechanism of the inner spiritual life.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

A refuge for the indolent

From experience in the spiritual life, it can fairly be concluded that he who has zeal to pray needs no teaching how to perfect himself in prayer. Patiently continued, the effort of prayer itself will lead us to prayer's very summit.

But what are weak and indolent people to do, and especially those who, before they have understood the true nature of prayer, have become hardened by outward routine, and cooled by their formal reading of the appointed prayers? As a refuge and source of strength they can still use the technique for practising the Jesus Prayer. And is it not chiefly for them that this technique was invented, so as to graft true inner prayer into their hearts?

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

A remedy against drowsiness

It is written in books, that when the Jesus Prayer gains force and establishes itself in the heart, then it fills us with energy and dispels drowsiness. But for it to become habitual to the tongue is one thing, and for it to be established in the heart is another.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Delve deeply

Delve deeply into the Jesus Prayer, with all the power that you possess. It will draw you together, giving you a sense of strength in the Lord, and will result in your being with Him

THE JESUS PRAYER

constantly whether alone or with other people, when you do housework and when you read or pray. Only you must attribute the power of this prayer, not to the repetition of certain words, but to the turning of the mind and heart towards the Lord in these words—to the action accompanying the speech.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

A song sung with understanding

As the Apostle said: 'I had rather speak five words with my understanding . . . than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue' (1 Cor. xiv. 19). Before everything else it is necessary to purify the mind and the heart with these few words, repeating them unceasingly in the depth of the heart: 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me',¹ so that this prayer ascends as a song that is sung with understanding. Everyone who begins, filled though he may be with passions, can offer this prayer through the vigilance of his heart. It sings within him only when he is purified by spiritual prayer.

PAISSY VELICHKOVSKY

A lantern unto our feet

Learn to practise prayer of the mind in the heart; for the Jesus Prayer is a lantern unto our feet and a star leading us on the way to heaven, as the Holy Fathers teach in the *Philokalia*. The Jesus Prayer, shining ceaselessly in the mind and heart, is a sword against fleshly weakness and against the evil desires of gluttony and lust. After the opening words 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,' you may continue thus, 'by the Mother of God have mercy upon me, a sinner.'

¹ In Slavonic, the phrase 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me' contains exactly five words, not seven: hence the appropriateness of Paissy's quotation from 1 Cor.

THE JESUS PRAYER

Outward prayer alone is insufficient. God hearkens to the mind; and those monks who do not combine inner with exterior prayer are no monks, but are like firewood that is burnt out. The monk who does not know, or who has forgotten, the practice of the Jesus Prayer, has not the seal of Christ. Books cannot teach us inner prayer, they can only show us external methods for practising it. One must have persistence in performing it.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

The hands at work, the mind and heart with God

You have read about the Jesus Prayer, have you not? And you know what it is from practical experience. Only with the help of this prayer can the necessary order of the soul be firmly maintained; only through this prayer can we preserve our inner order undisturbed even when distracted by household cares. This prayer alone makes it possible to fulfil the injunction of the Fathers: the hands at work, the mind and heart with God. When this prayer becomes grafted in our heart, then there are no inner interruptions and it continues always in the same, evenly flowing way.

The path to achievement of a systematic interior order is very hard, but it *is* possible to preserve this (or a similar) state of mind during the various and inevitable duties you have to perform; and what makes it possible is the Jesus Prayer when it is grafted in the heart. How can it be so grafted? Who knows? But it does happen. He who strives is increasingly conscious of this engrafting, without knowing how it has been achieved. To strive for this inner order, we must walk always in the presence of God, repeating the Jesus Prayer as frequently as possible. As soon as there is a free moment, begin again at once, and the engrafting will be achieved.

One of the means of renewing the Jesus Prayer and bringing it to life is by reading, but it is best to read mainly about prayer.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

THE JESUS PRAYER

The Jesus Prayer, and the warmth which accompanies it

To pray is to stand spiritually before God in our heart in glorification, thanksgiving, supplication, and contrite penitence. Everything must be spiritual. The root of all prayer is devout fear of God; from this comes belief about God and faith in Him, submission of oneself to God, hope in God, and cleaving to Him with the feeling of love, in oblivion of all created things. When prayer is powerful, all these spiritual feelings and movements are present in the heart with corresponding vigour.

How does the Jesus Prayer help us in this?

Through the feeling of warmth which develops in and around the heart as the effect of this Prayer.

The habit of prayer is not formed suddenly, but requires long work and toil.

The Jesus Prayer, and the warmth which accompanies it, helps better than anything else in the formation of the habit of prayer.

Note that these are the means, and not the deed itself.

It is possible for both the Jesus Prayer and the feeling of warmth to be present without real prayer. This does indeed happen, however strange it may seem.

When we pray we must stand in our mind before God, and think of Him alone. Yet various thoughts keep jostling in the mind, and draw it away from God. In order to teach the mind to rest on one thing, the Holy Fathers used short prayers and acquired the habit of reciting them unceasingly. This unceasing repetition of a short prayer kept the mind on the thought of God and dispersed all irrelevant thoughts. They adopted various short prayers, but it is the Jesus Prayer which has become particularly established amongst us and is most generally employed: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner!'

So this is what the Jesus Prayer is. It is one among various short prayers, oral like all others. Its purpose is to keep the mind on the single thought of God.

Whoever has formed the habit of this Prayer and uses it properly, really does remember God incessantly.

THE JESUS PRAYER

Since the remembrance of God in a sincerely believing heart is naturally accompanied by a sense of piety, hope, thanksgiving, devotion to God's will, and by other spiritual feelings, the Jesus Prayer, which produces and preserves this remembrance of God, is called *spiritual* prayer. It is rightly so called only when it is accompanied by these spiritual feelings. But when not accompanied by them it remains oral like any other prayer of the same type.

This is how one should think of the Jesus Prayer. Now what is the meaning of this warmth which accompanies the practice of the Prayer?

In order to keep the mind on one thing by the use of a short prayer, it is necessary to preserve attention and so lead it into the heart: for so long as the mind remains in the head, where thoughts jostle one another, it has no time to concentrate on one thing. But when attention descends into the heart, it attracts all the powers of the soul and body into one point there. This concentration of all human life in one place is immediately reflected in the heart by a special sensation that is the beginning of future warmth. This sensation, faint at the beginning, becomes gradually stronger, firmer, deeper. At first only tepid, it grows into warm feeling and concentrates the attention upon itself. And so it comes about that, whereas in the initial stages the attention is kept in the heart by an effort of will, in due course this attention, by its own vigour, gives birth to warmth in the heart. This warmth then holds the attention without special effort. From this, the two go on supporting one another, and must remain inseparable; because dispersion of attention cools the warmth, and diminishing warmth weakens attention.

From this there follows a rule of the spiritual life: if you keep the heart alive towards God, you will always be in remembrance of God. This rule is laid down by St. John of the Ladder.

The question now arises whether this warmth is spiritual. No, it is *not* spiritual. It is ordinary physical warmth. But since it keeps the attention of the mind in the heart, and thus helps the development there of the spiritual movements described earlier, it is called spiritual—provided, however, that it is not

THE JESUS PRAYER

accompanied by sensual pleasure, however slight, but keeps the soul and body in sober mood.

From this it follows that when the warmth accompanying the Jesus Prayer does not include spiritual feelings, it should not be called spiritual, but simply warm-blooded. There is nothing in itself bad about this warm-blooded feeling, unless it is connected with sensual pleasure, however slight. If it is so connected, it is bad and must be suppressed.

Things begin to go wrong when the warmth moves about in parts of the body lower than the heart. And matters become still worse when, in enjoyment of this warmth, we imagine it to be all that matters, without bothering about spiritual feelings or even about remembrance of God; and so we set our heart only on having this warmth. This wrong course is occasionally possible, though not for all people, nor at all times. It must be noticed and corrected, for otherwise only physical warmth will remain, and we must not consider this warmth as spiritual or due to grace. This warmth is spiritual only when it is accompanied by the spiritual impetus of prayer. Anyone who calls it spiritual without this movement is mistaken. And anyone who imagines it to be due to grace is still more in error.

Warmth which is filled with grace is of a special nature and it is only this which is truly spiritual. It is distinct from the warmth of the flesh, and does not produce any noticeable changes in the body, but manifests itself by a subtle feeling of sweetness.

Everyone can easily identify and distinguish spiritual warmth by this particular feeling. Each must do it for himself: this is no business for an outsider.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

The easiest way to acquire unceasing prayer

To acquire the habit of the Jesus Prayer, so that it takes root in ourselves, is the easiest way of ascending into the region of unceasing prayer. Men of the greatest experience have found, through God's enlightenment, that this form of prayer is a simple yet most effective means of establishing and strengthening the

THE JESUS PRAYER

whole of the spiritual and ascetic life; and in their rules for prayer they have left detailed instructions about it.

In all our efforts and ascetic struggles, what we seek is purification of the heart and restoration of the spirit. There are two ways to this: the active way, the practice of the ascetic labours; and the contemplative way, the turning of the mind to God. By the first way the soul becomes purified and so receives God; by the second way the God of whom the soul becomes aware Himself burns away every impurity and thus comes to dwell in the purified soul. The whole of this second way is summed up in the one Jesus Prayer, as St. Gregory of Sinai says¹: 'God is gained either by activity and work, or by the art of invoking the Name of Jesus.' He adds that the first way is longer than the second, the second being quicker and more effective. For this reason some of the Holy Fathers have given prime importance, among all the different kinds of spiritual exercise, to the Jesus Prayer. It enlightens, strengthens, and animates; it defeats all enemies visible and invisible, and leads directly to God. See how powerful and effective it is! The Name of the Lord Jesus is the treasury of all good things, the treasury of strength and of life in the spirit.

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

The practice of prayer is called an 'art', and it is a very simple one. Standing with consciousness and attention in the heart, cry out unceasingly: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me,' without having in your mind any visual concept or image, believing that the Lord sees you and listens to you.

It is important to keep your consciousness in the heart, and

¹ See pp. 114-15.

THE JESUS PRAYER

as you do so to control your breathing a little so as to keep time with the words of the prayer. But the most important thing is to believe that God is near and hears. Say the prayer for God's ear alone.

At the beginning this prayer remains for a long time only an activity like any other, but in time it passes into the mind and finally takes root in the heart.

There are deviations from this right way of praying; therefore we must learn it from someone who knows all about it. Mistakes occur chiefly from the attention being in the head and not in the heart. He who keeps his attention in the heart is safe. Safer still is he who at all times clings to God in contrition, and prays to be delivered from illusion.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

One thought, or the thought of One only

This short prayer to Jesus has a higher purpose—to deepen your remembrance of God and your feeling towards Him. These callings out of the soul to God are all too easily disrupted by the first incoming impression; and besides, in spite of these callings, thoughts continue to jostle in your head like mosquitoes. To stop this jostling, you must bind the mind with one thought, or the thought of One only. An aid to this is a short prayer, which helps the mind to become simple and united: it develops feeling towards God and is engrafted with it. When this feeling arises within us, the consciousness of the soul becomes established in God, and the soul begins to do everything according to His will. Together with the short prayer, you must keep your thought and attention turned towards God. But if you limit your prayer to words only, you are as 'sounding brass'.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

'Techniques' and 'methods' do not matter: one thing alone is essential

The prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me' is an oral prayer like any other. There is nothing special

THE JESUS PRAYER

about it in itself, but it receives all its power from the state of mind in which it is made.

The various methods described by the Fathers (sitting down, making prostrations, and the other techniques used when performing this prayer) are not suitable for everyone: indeed without a personal director they are actually dangerous. It is better not to try them. There is just one method which is obligatory for all: *to stand with the attention in the heart*. All other things are beside the point, and do not lead to the crux of the matter.

It is said of the fruit of this prayer, that there is nothing higher in the world. This is wrong. As if it were some talisman! Nothing in the words of the prayer and their uttering can alone bring forth its fruit. All fruit can be received without this prayer, and even without any oral prayer, but merely by directing the mind and heart towards God.

The essence of the whole thing is *to be established in the remembrance of God, and to walk in His presence*. You can say to anyone: 'Follow whatever methods you like—recite the Jesus Prayer, perform bows and prostrations,¹ go to Church: do what you wish, only strive to be always in constant remembrance of God.' I remember meeting a man in Kiev who said: 'I did not use any methods at all, I did not know the Jesus Prayer, yet by God's mercy I walk always in His presence. But how this has come to pass, I myself do not know. God gave!'

It is most important to realize that prayer is always God-given: otherwise we may confuse the gift of grace with some achievement of our own.

People say: attain the Jesus Prayer, for that is inner prayer. This is not correct. The Jesus Prayer is a good means to arrive at inner prayer, but in itself it is not inner but outer prayer. Those who attain the habit of the Jesus Prayer do very well.

¹ In Orthodox practice it is common to bow or prostrate oneself after making the sign of the Cross. This bowing or prostration takes two main forms:

(i) a profound bow from the waist, touching the ground with fingers of the right hand

(ii) a full prostration, touching the ground with the forehead.

THE JESUS PRAYER

But if they stop only at this and go no further, they stop half way.

Even though we are reciting the Jesus Prayer, it is still necessary for us to keep the thought of God: otherwise the Prayer is dry food. It is good that the Name of Jesus should cleave to your tongue. But with this it is still possible not to remember God at all and even to harbour thoughts which are opposed to Him. Consequently everything depends on conscious and free turning to God, and on a balanced effort to hold oneself in this.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Why the Jesus Prayer is stronger than other prayers

The Jesus Prayer is like any other prayer. It is stronger than all other prayers only in virtue of the all-powerful Name of Jesus, Our Lord and Saviour. But it is necessary to invoke His Name with a full and unwavering faith—with a deep certainty that He is near, sees and hears, pays whole-hearted attention to our petition, and is ready to fulfil it and to grant what we seek. There is nothing to be ashamed of in such a hope. If fulfilment is sometimes delayed, this may be because the petitioner is still not yet ready to receive what he asks.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Not a talisman

The Jesus Prayer is not some talisman. Its power comes from faith in the Lord, and from a deep union of the mind and heart with Him. With such a disposition, the invocation of the Lord's Name becomes very effective in many ways. But a mere repetition of the words does not signify anything.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Mechanical repetition leads to nothing

Do not forget that you must not limit yourself to a mechanical repetition of the words of the Jesus Prayer. This will lead to

THE JESUS PRAYER

nothing except a habit of repeating the prayer automatically with the tongue, without even thinking about it. There is of course nothing wrong in this, but it constitutes only the extreme outer limit of the work.

The essential thing is to stand consciously in the presence of the Lord, with fear, faith and love.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Oral and inner prayer

One can recite the Jesus Prayer with the mind in the heart without movement of the tongue. This is better than oral prayer. Use oral prayer as a support to inner prayer. Sometimes it is required in order to strengthen inner prayer.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Avoid visual concepts

Hold no intermediate image between the mind and the Lord when practising the Jesus Prayer. The words pronounced are merely a help, and are not essential. The principal thing is to stand before the Lord with the mind in the heart. This, and not the words, is inner spiritual prayer. The words here are as much or as little the essential part of the prayer as the words of any other prayer. The essential part is to dwell in God, and this walking before God means that you live with the conviction ever before your consciousness that God is in you, as He is in everything: you live in the firm assurance that He sees all that is within you, knowing you better than you know yourself. This awareness of the eye of God looking at your inner being must not be accompanied by any visual concept, but must be confined to a simple conviction or feeling. A man in a warm room feels how the warmth envelops and penetrates him. The same must be the effect on our spiritual nature of the all-encompassing presence of God, who is the fire in the room of our being.

The words 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon

THE JESUS PRAYER

me' are only the instrument and not the essence of the work; but they are an instrument which is very strong and effective, for the Name of the Lord Jesus is fearful to the enemies of our salvation and a blessing to all who seek Him. Do not forget that this practice is simple, and must not have anything fanciful about it. Pray about everything to the Lord, to our most pure Lady, to your Guardian Angel; and they will teach you everything, either directly or through others.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Images and illusion

In order not to fall into illusion¹ while practising inner prayer, do not permit yourself any concepts, images, or visions. For vivid imaginings, darting to and fro, and flights of fancy do not cease even when the mind stands in the heart and recites prayer: and no one is able to rule over them, except those who have attained perfection by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and who have acquired stability of mind through Jesus Christ.

ST. NIL SORSKI²

Dispel all images from your mind

You ask about prayer. I find in the writings of the Holy Fathers, that when you pray you must dispel all images from your mind. That is what I also try to do, forcing myself to realize that God is everywhere—and so (among other places) here, where my thoughts and feelings are. I cannot succeed in freeing myself entirely from images, but gradually they evaporate more and more. There comes a point when they disappear completely.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

¹ The word used here in Russian is *prelest* (see p. 40, n. 2).

² St. Nil Sorski (Nilus of Sora, ?1433–1508), Russian ascetic writer; monk at a remote hermitage in the forest beyond the Volga, and leader of the 'Non-Possessors' (a movement in 15th and 16th century Russia which protested against the monastic ownership of land).

THE JESUS PRAYER

Cry out unceasingly: Lord Jesus Christ

A monk, whether he eats or drinks, whether he sits or serves, travels, or does anything else, must cry out unceasingly: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me.' In this way the Name of the Lord Jesus, descending into the depths of the heart, will tame the dragon that guards the pastures of the heart, and will save the soul and quicken it. Dwell unceasingly with the Name of the Lord Jesus, so that your heart may absorb the Lord, and the Lord absorb your heart, and the two be one. Do not sever your heart from God, but dwell with Him. Always guard your heart with the remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ, until the Name of the Lord is deeply rooted there and you cease to think of anything else: and so Christ will be glorified in you.

KALLISTOS AND IGNATIOS XANTHOPOULOS¹

If Jesus Christ is in us, all things are possible

Our illustrious guides and teachers, having the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, in their wisdom impart instruction to all of us, and especially to those who wish to cast themselves into the world of heaven-made silence and to consecrate their whole being to God, tearing themselves away from the world and wisely practising silence. They teach us to prefer prayer in the Lord above all other good works or activities, imploring His mercy with an undoubting trust, and having as our task and continual occupation the invocation of His most holy and sweet Name. We must bear it always in the heart and in the mind and on our lips, we must compel ourselves to breathe and live, to sleep and wake, to walk, eat and drink, and in general to do everything with Him and in Him. If He is absent, all that is harmful rushes towards us, leaving no room for anything that is profitable to us; but if He is present within us, all that opposes Him is driven

¹ Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos: Byzantine spiritual writers at the end of the 14th and beginning of the 15th century. Kallistos was Patriarch of Constantinople in 1397.

THE JESUS PRAYER

away. Then is there no lack of anything blessed, and nothing remains impossible, as our Lord Himself says: 'He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing' (John xv. 5).

KALLISTOS AND IGNATIOS XANTHOPOULOS

Let the Jesus Prayer cling to your breathing

If you truly wish to put your thoughts to shame, to be serenely silent, and to live in the effortless enjoyment of a sober and quiet heart, let the Jesus Prayer cleave to your breathing, and in a few days you will see all this realized.

ST. HESYCHIOS

A rosary or rhythmic breathing

There is a technique suggested by one of the early Fathers, rhythmic breathing in time with the Jesus Prayer in place of the use of a rosary.¹

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Breathing techniques, illusion and lust

To practise the Jesus Prayer, as we are all gaining the habit of doing, is an excellent thing. In monasteries it is being set as a task. Would they set it as a task if it were dangerous? What is dangerous is only the mechanical techniques which were added later and adjusted to fit the recitation of the prayer: and these are dangerous because they sometimes plunge us into a dream world of illusion, and sometimes—strange to say—into a constant state of lust. For this reason we should advise against such techniques and forbid them. But to call on the most sweet Name of the Lord in simplicity of heart is something we can suggest and recommend to anyone.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

¹ On the 'breathing technique' in the Jesus Prayer and the many dangers by which it is accompanied, see the Introduction, pp. 35-36.

THE JESUS PRAYER

attention, given by grace, comes when we make our heart dead to the world. Aids always remain no more than aids. The union of the mind with the heart is a union of the spiritual thoughts of the mind with the spiritual feelings of the heart.

BISHOP IGNATI

The place of breathing techniques (ii)

St. Simeon¹ and other writers in the *Philokalia* suggest physical methods to be used in conjunction with the Jesus Prayer. Some people are so much absorbed in these external methods that they forget about the proper work of prayer; in others, prayer itself is distorted because of using these methods. Since, then, for lack of instructors these physical techniques may be accompanied by harmful effects, we do not describe them. In any case they are nothing but an external aid to inner work and are in no way essential. What is essential is this: to acquire the habit of standing with the mind in the heart—of being within this physical heart of ours, although not physically.

It is necessary to bring the mind down from the head into the heart and to establish it there, or, as one of the Fathers put it, to join the mind with the heart. But how can this be achieved?

Seek and you will find. The easiest way to achieve it is by walking before God, and by the work of prayer, especially by going to church.

But we must remember that ours is only the labour; the object itself, that is, the union of mind and heart, is a gift of grace, which the Lord grants to us as and when He chooses. The best example is Maximos of Kapsokalyvia.²

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

¹ i.e. Nikephoros of Mount Athos.

² St. Maximos of Kapsokalyvia, monk of Mount Athos in the middle of the 14th century, contemporary and friend of St. Gregory of Sinai. For a long time he prayed to the Holy Virgin that he might be granted the gift of unceasing prayer: then one day, as he stood in fervent prayer before the icon of the Mother of God, he suddenly felt a particular warmth in his heart—what Theophan elsewhere terms the 'spark' of grace (p. 108)—and from that moment unceasing prayer never left him.

THE JESUS PRAYER

Children talking to their Father

Do not be led astray by external methods when practising the inner Jesus Prayer. For some people they are necessary, but not for you. In your case, the time for such methods has already passed. You must already know by experience the place of the heart about which they speak: do not bother about the rest. The work of God is simple: it is prayer—children talking to their Father, without any subtleties. May the Lord give you wisdom for your salvation.

For someone who has not yet found the way to enter within himself, pilgrimages to holy places are a help. But for him who has found it they are a dissipation of energy, for they force him to come out from the innermost part of himself. It is time for you now to learn more perfectly how to remain within. You should abandon your external plans.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Growth in prayer has no end

You read the *Philokalia*? Good. Do not let yourself be confused by the writings of Ignatios and Kallistos Xanthopoulos, Gregory of Sinai, and Nikephoros. Try to find whether someone has the life of the *staretz* Paisy Velichkovsky. It contains prefaces to certain texts in the *Philokalia*, composed by the *staretz* Basil, and these prefaces explain about the place of mechanical techniques when reciting the Jesus Prayer. They will help you, too, to understand everything correctly. I have already told you that in your case these mechanical techniques are not necessary. What they would produce you already possessed from the moment you felt the call to practise the Prayer. But do not come to the wrong conclusion that your journey on the path of prayer is already completed. Growth in prayer has no end. If this growth ceases it means that life ceases. May the Lord save you and have mercy on you! It is possible to lose the right state, and to accept the mere memory of it as being the state itself. God forbid that this should happen to you!

THE JESUS PRAYER

It is not the words that matter, but your love for God

If your heart grows warm through reading ordinary prayers, then kindle its inner warmth towards God in this way.

The Jesus Prayer, if said mechanically, is valueless: it is no more help than any other prayer spoken by the tongue and lips. As you recite the Jesus Prayer, try at the same time to quicken your realization that our Lord Himself is near, that He stands in your soul and listens to what is happening within it. Awaken in your soul the thirst for salvation, and the assurance that our Lord alone can bring it. And then cry out to Him whom in your thoughts you see before you: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me,' or: 'O merciful Lord, save me by the way that Thou knowest.' It is not the words that matter, but your feelings towards the Lord.

The spiritual burning of the heart for God springs from our love towards Him. It kindles from the Lord's touch on the heart. Because He is entirely love, His touch on the heart immediately kindles love for Him; and from love comes burning of the heart towards Him. It is this which must be the object of your search.

Let the Jesus Prayer be on your tongue; let God's presence be before your mind; and in your heart let there be the thirst for God, for communion with the Lord. When all this becomes permanent, then the Lord, seeing how you exert yourself, will give you what you ask.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

God's spark

What do we seek through the Jesus Prayer? We seek for the fire of grace to appear in our heart, and we seek for the beginning of unceasing prayer which manifests a state of grace. When God's spark falls into the heart, the Jesus Prayer fans it into flame. The prayer does not of itself produce the spark, but helps us to receive it. How does it help? By collecting our thoughts, by enabling the soul to stand before the Lord and to walk in His

THE JESUS PRAYER

presence. This is the most important part—to stand and walk before God, to call on Him out of our heart. This was what Maximos of Kapsokalyvia¹ did: and all those who seek the fire of grace should do the same. They should not worry about words and positions of the body, for God looks upon the heart.

I am telling you this because some people altogether forget about calling from the heart. Their whole concern is with the words and with the position of the body, and having recited the Jesus Prayer a certain number of times in their chosen position, with prostrations, they rest satisfied with this, not without self-esteem, not without criticism of those who go to church for the usual order of prayer. Some people live out their lives in this way and are devoid of grace.

If anyone should ask me how to carry out the task of prayer, I would say to him: Accustom yourself to walk in the presence of God, keep remembrance of Him, and be reverent. To preserve this remembrance, choose a few short prayers, or simply take the twenty-four short prayers of St. John Chrysostom,² and repeat them often with appropriate thoughts and feelings. As you accustom yourself to this, remembrance of God will bring light to your mind and warmth to your heart. And when you attain this state, God's spark, the ray of grace, will fall at last into your heart. There is no way in which you yourself can produce it: it comes forth direct from God. When it comes, dwell in the Jesus Prayer alone, and with this prayer blow the spark of grace into flame. This is the most direct way.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

A small spark

Later, when you notice that someone begins to go more deeply into prayer, you can suggest to him that he should use the Jesus Prayer unceasingly, always preserving the remembrance of God

¹ On Maximos of Kapsokalyvia and the 'spark' of grace, see p.105, n. 2.

² These twenty-four prayers of St. John Chrysostom occur among the daily prayers prescribed for use each evening by all Orthodox, whether clergy, monks, or laity. They are mainly penitential in character.

THE JESUS PRAYER

with fear and reverence. Prayer is the great essential. What we must chiefly seek in prayer is the reception of a small spark, such as was given to Maximos of Kapsokalyvia. This spark is not to be attracted by any artifice, but is given freely by the grace of God. For this the unwearied effort of prayer is necessary, as St. Makarios says: 'If you wish to acquire true prayer, persevere steadfastly in praying, and God, seeing how strenuously you seek, will give it to you.'

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

A murmuring stream

You ask what is needful in praying the Jesus Prayer. What you did was correct. Remember how you did it, and continue in the same way. I will remind you of only one thing: one must descend with the mind into the heart, and there stand before the face of the Lord, ever-present, all-seeing, within you. The prayer takes a firm and steadfast hold when a small fire begins to burn in the heart.

Try not to quench this fire, and it will become established in such a way that the prayer repeats itself: and then you will have within you a small murmuring stream, to use the expression of the *staretz* Parthenii of the Kiev Lavra.¹ And one of the early Fathers said: 'When thieves approach a house in order to creep up to it and steal, and hear someone inside talking, they do not dare to climb in; in the same way, when our enemies try to steal into the soul and take possession of it, they creep all round but fear to enter when they hear that short prayer welling out.'

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

¹ *Staretz* Parthenii (1790-1855), monk of the great habit, member of Pechersky Lavra at Kiev: spiritual father to a very wide circle, both monks and people in the world. He practised the Jesus Prayer and recommended its use to others. Theophan, while a student at the Kiev Academy (1837-41), used to visit *staretz* Parthenii, and was deeply influenced by him in his spiritual development. During the last seventeen years of his life, Father Parthenii celebrated the Liturgy daily; during the last year of all, although having no longer the strength to perform the Liturgy, he still received holy communion each day.

THE JESUS PRAYER

Human efforts and the grace of God

There are only a few words in the Jesus Prayer, but they contain everything. From of old it was recognized that this prayer, once acquired as a habit, could take the place of all other oral prayers. Is anyone who strives for salvation ignorant of this method? If used in the way described by the Holy Fathers, this prayer has great power; but among those who acquire the habit of reciting it, not all discover its power, not all taste of its fruits. Why should this be so? It is because they wish to grasp for themselves that which is a gift of God, coming only by His grace.

We do not need any special help from God in order to begin the work of repeating this prayer in the morning, in the evening, walking, sitting, lying down, working, or at leisure. By being always active in this way we can of ourselves train the tongue to repeat the Prayer even without conscious effort. A certain easement of thought may follow from this, even a kind of warmth of heart. But all of this, says the monk Nikephoros in the *Philokalia*, is only the action and fruit of our own efforts. To stop at this point is to remain satisfied merely with a parrot-like facility in reciting the words *Lord, have mercy*: it is to imagine that we have achieved something when in reality we have achieved nothing at all. This is what happens when we fall into the habit of repeating the words of this prayer mechanically without understanding what prayer really is. As a result we rest satisfied with the natural beginnings of its action, and cease to look any further. But whoever has truly understood the nature of prayer will continue to search. Realizing that no matter how diligently he follows the instructions of the elders the true rewards of prayer still elude him, he will cease to expect them from his own efforts and will lay all his hope on God. From this moment grace can flow into him; and at a moment known only to itself it will graft the prayer into his heart. Everything, as the elders teach us, will be outwardly the same: the difference will lie in our inner power.

What is true of this prayer is true of all forms of spiritual growth. A hot-tempered man may be filled with the desire to

THE JESUS PRAYER

stamp out irritability and acquire meekness. In the books on asceticism there are instructions how to discipline oneself into achieving this. A man can read these instructions and follow them; but how far will he get by his own efforts? No farther than outward silence during bouts of anger, with only such quelling of the rage itself as self-control can afford him. He will never himself attain the complete extinction of his anger and the establishment of meekness in his heart. This only happens when grace invades the heart and itself places meekness there.

This is true of every spiritual quality. Whatever you may be seeking, seek it with all your strength, but do not expect your own search and efforts to bear fruit of themselves. Put your trust in the Lord, ascribing nothing to yourself, and He will give you your heart's desire (Ps. xxxvi. 3-4 Sept.).¹

Pray thus: 'I desire and seek, quicken Thou me by Thy righteousness.' The Lord has said 'Without me ye can do nothing' (John xv. 5), and this law is fulfilled with exactitude in the spiritual life; it does not swerve by a hair's breadth. When people ask 'What must I do to acquire this or that virtue?' there is only one answer: 'Turn to the Lord and He will give it to you. There is no other way to find what you seek.'

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

A brook that murmurs in the heart

As you begin to accustom yourself to praying as you should with prayers written by others, your own prayers and cries to God will well up in you. Never neglect these aspirations to God that manifest themselves in your soul. Every time that they arise, be still, and pray with your own words; nor think that in so praying you do harm to prayer itself. No: it is just in this way that you pray as you should, and this prayer ascends more quickly to God than any other. For this reason there is a rule applying to everyone: whether in church or at home, if your soul wishes to pray in its own and not in other men's words, give it freedom;

¹ Ps. xxxvii. 3-4 (B.C.P.).

THE JESUS PRAYER

let it pray, even if it prays thus during the whole service, or leaves undone its own rule of prayer at home and has not time to fulfil it.

Both forms of prayer are pleasing to God—prayer recited attentively from prayer books and accompanied by suitable holy thoughts and feelings; and prayer without books and in your own words. Only perfunctory prayer is displeasing to Him, when someone reads the prayers at home or stands in church at the service without attending to the meaning of the words: the tongue reads or the ear listens, but the thoughts wander who knows where. There is no prayer here. But while both forms are pleasing to God, the prayer that is not read, but is your own, is nearer to the heart of the matter and much more fruitful.

It is not enough, however, just to wait for the desire to pray. To achieve spontaneous prayer, we must force ourselves to pray in a particular way—with the Jesus Prayer—not only during the church service and during prayer at home, but at all times. Men experienced in prayer have chosen this one prayer, addressed to the Lord and Saviour, and have established rules for its performance, so that with its help we can acquire the habit of self-impelled or spontaneous prayer. These rules are simple. Stand with the mind in the heart before the Lord and pray to Him: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me.' Do so at home before beginning prayers, in the intervals between prayers, and at the end of praying; do so in church, and all day long, so as to fill every moment of the day with prayer.

At first this saving prayer is usually a matter of strenuous effort and hard work. But if one concentrates on it with zeal, it will begin to flow of its own accord, like a brook that murmurs in the heart. This is a great blessing, and it is worth working hard to obtain it.

Those who with long endeavour have achieved success in this prayer prescribe a not very difficult exercise which will quickly enable us to master it. Before or after your rule of prayer, night and morning or during the day, consecrate a fixed period of time for the performance of this one prayer. Do it in this way. Sit down, or—better still—stand in a prayerful position, concentrate

THE JESUS PRAYER

your attention in the heart before the Lord, in complete certainty that He is there and is listening to you, and call out to Him: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me.' If you wish, accompany this with bows from the waist, or else with prostrations. Do this for a quarter or half hour—or more, or less—as it suits you. The more zealous your efforts, the more quickly will the prayer be grafted in your heart. It is best to begin this work with zeal, and not to cease until you have achieved what you wish; and this prayer starts to move of itself in your heart. After that you have only to maintain it in its course.

The warmth of heart or glow of spirit, about which we spoke before, is achieved in just this way. The more the Jesus Prayer penetrates into the heart, the warmer the heart becomes, and the more self-impelled becomes the prayer, so that the fire of spiritual life is kindled in the heart, and its burning becomes unceasing. At the same time the Jesus Prayer will fill the whole heart, and will never cease to move within it. That is why those in whom the perfect inner life is being brought to birth will pray almost exclusively with this prayer alone, making it comprise their entire rule of prayer.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

The buried treasure of baptismal grace

The gift which we have received from Jesus Christ in holy baptism is not destroyed, but is only buried as a treasure in the ground. And both common sense and gratitude demand that we should take good care to unearth this treasure and bring it to light. This can be done in two ways. The gift of baptism is revealed first of all by a painstaking fulfilment of the commandments; the more we carry these out, the more clearly the gift shines upon us in its true splendour and brilliance. Secondly, it comes to light and is revealed through the continual invocation of the Lord Jesus, or by unceasing remembrance of God, which is one and the same thing. The first method is powerful but the second is more so; so much so that even fidelity to the commandments receives

THE JESUS PRAYER

its full strength from prayer. For this reason, if we truly desire to bring to flower the seed of grace that is hidden within us, we should hasten to acquire the habit of this exercise of the heart, and always practise this prayer within it, without any image or form, until it warms our mind and inflames our soul with an inexpressible love towards God and men.

ST. GREGORY OF SINAI

Act always in great humility. The need for a spiritual director

This prayer is called the Jesus Prayer because it is addressed to the Lord Jesus, and like every other short prayer, in its outward form it is verbal. It becomes inner prayer, and must be so called, when it is offered not only in words but with the mind and heart, with feeling and with awareness of its content; and especially when through long and attentive practice, it is so fused with the movements of the spirit that these last alone are apparent and the words seem to vanish. Every short prayer may rise to this level. Preference belongs to the Jesus Prayer because it unites the soul with the Lord Jesus: and He is the only door to communion with God, which is the aim of all prayer. He himself said: 'No man cometh unto the Father but by me' (John xiv. 6). Whoever, therefore, has acquired this prayer wins for himself the whole riches of the divine husbandry of the Incarnation, wherein lies our salvation. Hearing this, you will not be astonished at those who in their zeal for salvation spared no effort to gain the habit of this prayer, and made its strength their own. Follow their example.

The habit of the Jesus Prayer is outwardly mastered when the words begin by themselves to move incessantly on the tongue. Its inward achievement involves the undivided attention of the mind in the heart and constant standing of the whole being before God, accompanied by varying degrees of warmth of heart, by the casting off of all other thoughts, and above all by contrite and humble cleaving to the Lord and Saviour. This

THE JESUS PRAYER

spiritual state is achieved by repeating the Prayer as frequently as possible, with our attention firmly established in the heart. By persevering in this continual repetition we unify the mind so that it stands in wholeness before God. The establishment of such an order within ourselves is accompanied by the warming of the heart, and it is followed by the driving away of all thoughts, ordinary and harmless as well as passionate. When the flame of our longing for God begins to burn unceasingly in the heart, it will be joined by a sense of inward peace in the soul, as the mind draws near to the Lord in humility and contrition.

Our own efforts (supported by God's grace) reach only thus far: any prayer higher than this will be the gift of grace alone. The Holy Fathers mention this with the sole purpose of showing those who have reached the stage I have just described, that they should not think that they have nothing more to wish for, nor imagine that they stand on the very summit of prayerful or spiritual perfection.

Do not rush one prayer after another, but say them with orderly deliberation, as one would normally address a great person from whom one asked a favour. Yet do not just pay attention to the words, but rather let the mind be in the heart, standing before the Lord in full awareness of His presence, in full consciousness of His greatness and grace and justice.

For the avoidance of errors, have someone to advise you—a spiritual father or confessor, a brother of like mind; and make known to him all that happens to you in the work of prayer. For yourself, act always in great humility and with the utmost simplicity, not ascribing any success to yourself. Know that true success is achieved within, unconsciously, and happens as imperceptibly as the growth of the human body. Therefore when you hear an inner voice saying 'Ah! Here it is!' you should realize that this is the voice of the enemy, showing you a mirage rather than the reality. This is the beginning of self-deception. Stifle this voice immediately, otherwise it will resound in you like a trumpet, inflating your self-esteem.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

THE JESUS PRAYER

No progress without suffering

It must be realized that the true sign of spiritual endeavour and the price of success in it is suffering. He who proceeds without suffering will bear no fruit. Pain of the heart and physical striving bring to light the gift of the Holy Spirit, bestowed in holy baptism upon every believer, buried in passions through our negligence in fulfilling the commandments, and brought once more to life by repentance, through the ineffable mercy of God. Do not, because of the suffering that accompanies them, cease to make painstaking efforts, lest you be condemned for fruitlessness and hear the words, 'Take the talent from him' (Matt. xxv. 28).

Every struggle in the soul's training, whether physical or mental, that is not accompanied by suffering, that does not require the utmost effort, will bear no fruit. 'The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force' (Matt. xi. 12). Many people have worked and continue to work without pain, but because of its absence they are strangers to purity and out of communion with the Holy Spirit, because they have turned aside from the severity of suffering. Those who work feebly and carelessly may go through the movements of making great efforts, but they harvest no fruit, because they undergo no suffering. According to the prophet, unless our loins are broken, weakened by the labour of fasting, unless we undergo an agony of contrition, unless we suffer like a woman in travail, we shall not succeed in bringing to birth the spirit of salvation in the ground of our heart.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

The other side of Jordan

The practice of the Jesus Prayer culminates in the attainment of pure prayer, which is crowned by passionlessness or Christian perfection—a gift of God, which He grants to such spiritual wrestlers as it pleases Him to choose.

St. Isaac the Syrian says: 'Not many are granted the gift of

THE JESUS PRAYER

pure prayer, but only the few. From one generation to another, there is scarcely a single person who attains to the mystery fulfilled in pure prayer and who, by the grace and love of God, reaches the other side of Jordan.'

BISHOP IGNATIUS

(iv) REMEMBRANCE OF GOD

Remembrance in the heart and in the head

When remembrance of God lives in the heart and there maintains the fear of Him, then all goes well; but when this remembrance grows weak or is kept only in the head, then all goes astray.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Be still and silent

I have often reminded you, my dear sister, about the remembrance of God, and now I tell you again: unless you work and sweat to impress on your heart and mind this awe-inspiring Name, you keep silence in vain, you sing in vain, you fast in vain, you watch in vain. In short, all a nun's work will be useless without this activity, without recollection of God. This is the beginning of silence for the Lord's sake, and it is also the end. This most desirable Name is the soul of stillness and silence. By calling it to mind we gain joy and gladness, forgiveness of sins and a wealth of virtues. Few have been able to find this most glorious Name, save only in stillness and silence. Man can attain it in no other way, even with great effort. Therefore, knowing the power of this advice, I entreat you for the love of Christ always to be still and silent, since these virtues enrich remembrance of God within us.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

THE JESUS PRAYER

Do you wish to enter this Paradise as quickly as possible? Here, then, is what you must do. When you pray, do not end your prayer without having aroused in your heart some feeling towards God, whether it be reverence, or devotion, or thanksgiving, or glorification, or humility and contrition, or hope and trust. Also when after prayer you begin to read, do not finish reading without having felt in your heart the truth of what you read. These two feelings—the one inspired by prayer, the other by reading—mutually warm one another; and if you pay attention to yourself, they will keep you under their influence during the whole day. Take pains to practise these two methods exactly and you will see for yourself what will happen.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Unceasing remembrance is a gift from God

Remembrance of God is something that God Himself grafts upon the soul. But the soul must also force itself to persevere and to toil. Work, making every effort to attain the unceasing remembrance of God. And God, seeing how fervently you desire it, will give you this constant recollection of Himself.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Frequent prostrations

All the time from waking to sleeping, walk in the remembrance of the omnipresence of God, having always in mind that the Lord sees you and assesses every movement of your thoughts and heart. For this purpose pray with the Jesus Prayer unceasingly, and, frequently approaching the icons, bow down or prostrate yourself according to the movement and demands of your heart. Thus during the whole day your time will be frequently interrupted by these prostrations, and will be passed in the unceasing thought of God and in performance of the Jesus Prayer, during every kind of occupation.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

THE JESUS PRAYER

Cast your care upon the Lord

Our whole object is to acquire the habit of keeping our attention always on the Lord, who is omnipresent and sees everything, who desires the salvation of all of us and is ready to help us towards it.

This habit will not allow you to grieve, whether your sorrow be within or without; for it fills the soul with a sense of perfect contentment, which leaves no room for any feeling of scarcity or need. It makes us entrust ourselves and all we have into the Lord's hands, and so gives birth to a sense of His permanent protection and help.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

The perils of forgetfulness

To pray does not only mean to stand in prayer. To keep the mind and heart turned towards God and directed to Him—this is already prayer, whatever the position in which one may be. Prayer according to the rule is one thing, and this state of prayer is another. The way to it is to attain the habit of constant remembrance of God, of the last hour and the judgement that follows it. Accustom yourself to this, and all will go well. Every step you take will be inwardly consecrated to God. You must direct your steps according to the commandments; and you know what the commandments are. That is all. It is possible to apply these commandments to every event, and to consecrate all your activities inwardly to God; and then all your life will be dedicated to Him. What more is necessary? Nothing. You see how simple it is.

You have zeal for salvation. When you have this zeal, it shows itself in a fervent care for salvation. It is absolutely necessary to avoid lukewarmness. This is how lukewarmness arises: it begins with forgetfulness. God's gifts are forgotten, and so are God Himself, and our salvation in Him, and the danger of being without God; and the remembrance of death disappears—in a word,

REMEMBRANCE OF GOD

the whole spiritual realm is closed to us. This is due to the enemy, or to the dispersion of thoughts by business cares and excessive social contacts. When all is forgotten the heart grows cool, and its sensitivity to spiritual things is interrupted: and so we fall into a state of indifference, and then into negligence and carelessness. As a result, spiritual occupations are postponed for a time, and afterwards abandoned completely. And then we begin again our old way of life, careless and negligent, forgetful of God, seeking only our own pleasure. Even if there is nothing disorderly in it, do not look for anything divine. It will be an empty life.

If you do not want to fall into this abyss, beware of the first step—that is, forgetfulness. Therefore walk always in godly recollections—in remembrance of God and divine things. This will keep you sensitive to such things, and these two together—recollection and sensitivity—will set you on fire with zeal. And here will be life indeed.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Fall down as dust before the face of God

With regard to spiritual prayer, take one precaution. Beware lest in ceaselessly remembering God you forget also to kindle fear, and awe, and the desire to fall down as dust before the face of God—our most merciful Father, but also our dread Judge. Frequent recollection of God without reverence blunts the feeling of the fear of God, and thereby deprives us of the saving influence which this sense of fear—and it alone—can produce in our spiritual life.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

THE FRUITS OF PRAYER

heart, and are not the fruit of grace. This fact must be kept well in mind, lest we boast to ourselves and to others and become proud.

Our prayer begins to be of value only when grace comes. As long as we have only the natural fruits of prayer, what we achieve is valueless, both in itself and in the judgement of God. For the coming of grace is the sign that God has looked on us in mercy.

I cannot tell you just how this action of grace will be made manifest, but it is certain that grace cannot come before these natural fruits of inner prayer have made their appearance.

The natural fruits are accessible to all

The fruit of prayer is the concentration of attention in the heart accompanied by a feeling of warmth. This is the natural effect. Everyone can achieve it. And everyone, not only monks but laymen as well, can perform prayer of such a kind.

This sort of work is simple, and not on a high level. The Jesus Prayer is not in itself miraculous, but like any other short prayer it is oral and consequently external. Yet it can become the prayer of mind-in-heart in a wholly natural way. As for what comes from grace, on the other hand, this we must simply await; no kind of technique can lay hold on it by force.

When concerned with high contemplative prayer, it is necessary in the first place to be cleansed of passions. But here we are concerned with simple prayer, although this may lead to higher prayer.

If the practice of prayer is to proceed successfully, it is always essential at the outset to lay everything else aside, so that the heart is completely free of distraction. Nothing should obtrude on the mind: neither face, nor activity, nor object. At such a time all is to be driven out. Keep to this rule and there will be no need to desist from such prayer, which is to be said at any time. As soon as you are free, return to it immediately.

During the service attention must be paid to the office, but when something is read or sung indistinctly, repeat the Jesus Prayer.

THE FRUITS OF PRAYER

cleave to God alone; and so the wandering of your thoughts will cease. From that moment, if our Lord grants it, the reintegration of all our inner being commences and we never cease to walk before Him.

Falling in love with spiritual sweetness

You say that you are afraid of falling in love with spiritual sweetness. But you surely cannot think of doing any such thing. It is not for its sweetness that prayer is practised, but because it is our duty to serve God in this way, although sweetness goes of necessity with true service. The most important thing in prayer is to stand before God in reverence and fear, with the mind in the heart; for this sobers and disperses every folly and plants contrition before God in the heart. These feelings of fear and sorrow in the sight of God, the broken and contrite heart, are the principal features of true inner prayer, and the test of every prayer, by which we can tell whether or not our prayer is performed as it should be. If they are present, prayer is in order. When they are absent, prayer is not in its true course and must be brought back to its proper condition. If we lack this sense of sorrow and contrition, then sweetness and warmth may breed self-conceit; and that is spiritual pride, and will lead to pernicious illusion. Then the sweetness and warmth will vanish, leaving only their memory, but the soul will still imagine that it has them. Of this you should be afraid, and so you must increasingly kindle in your heart the fear of God, lowliness, and contrite prostration before Him, walking always in His presence. This is the heart of the matter.

The instability of inner sweetness¹

Do not become attracted by inner sweetness: without the Cross it is unstable and dangerous.

¹ By the Nun Magdalina (1827-69), a member of the Convent of Our Lady of the Sign in Yeletsk, Russia.

DIVINE GRACE AND HUMAN EFFORT

the vision of another world, independently of whether we desire it or not. But afterwards this vision, together with the power to dwell constantly within, are left to man's free choice and we must work to attain them.

Nothing comes without effort

May the Lord give you the blessing of a strong desire to stand inwardly before God. Seek and you will find. *Seek God*: such is the unalterable rule for all spiritual advancement. Nothing comes without effort. The help of God is always ready and always near, but is only given to those who seek and work, and only to those seekers who, after putting all their own powers to the test, then cry out with all their heart: Lord, help us. So long as you hold on to even a little hope of achieving something by your own powers, the Lord does not interfere. It is as though He says: 'You hope to succeed by yourself—Very well, go on trying! But however long you try you will achieve nothing.' May the Lord give you a contrite spirit, a humble and a contrite heart.

The tree of life

The essential mood of the penitent is this: 'In the way Thou knowest, O Lord, save me. For my part I will labour without hypocrisy, without deviation and misinterpretation, but according to a pure conscience, doing everything that I understand and that lies in my power.' Whoever can truly feel this in his heart, is accepted by the Lord, who then comes to rule as king within him.

God is his teacher, God it is who prays in him, God it is who wills and acts in him, God it is who bears fruit in him. God is his ruler. Such a state is the seed and the heart of the heavenly tree of life within him.

DIVINE GRACE AND HUMAN EFFORT

spirit: but it only does this when man by his own desire opens the door for it, or opens his mouth to receive it. Grace is ready to help, if man desires. By himself man cannot do or establish within himself that which is good, but he longs and strives for it. Because of this longing, grace consolidates within him the good for which he yearns. And so it goes on, until man acquires final mastery over himself, and thus is able to fulfil that which is good and pleasing to God.

*Human endeavours and grace-given prayer*¹

In response to his asking, a man is sometimes granted grace-given prayer, together with a partial repose and joy in the Spirit, even though in his own lack of prayer he has forced himself to pray with this end only in view, and without acquiring meekness, humility, and love, or fulfilling the other commandments of the Lord. But in character he will remain as he was before. For he has not meekness, since he has made no effort to gain this virtue and has not prepared himself to receive it. He has no humility, because he has not asked for it nor forced himself to be humble. He has no love for mankind, for he has not made this his concern nor has he strenuously prayed to be granted this love. For each man who compels and forces himself to pray, even against his own heart's desire, has also to compel himself to love, to be humble, meek, innocent, and generous. So also must he force himself to self-belittlement, regarding himself as poor and the lowest of all men; he must refrain from idle talk, always studying the words of the Lord and keeping them on his lips and in his heart. He should also force himself to avoid irritation and angry speech, as it is written: 'Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice' (Ephes. iv. 31).

In response to all this the Lord, who thus sees the man's eagerness and purpose, will give him the power to achieve without toil or coercion all the things which previously he found

¹ By St. Makarios of Egypt.

THE FRUITS OF PRAYER

difficulty in preserving, even with strong coercion, because of the sin dwelling in him. And all these virtuous practices will become second nature within him, for at last the Lord comes to the man and dwells in him, and he in the Lord; and the Lord Himself effortlessly works His own commandments within him, filling him with the fruit of the Spirit.

Poor, naked, blind, and worthless

There is no need to be afraid of illusion.¹ It overtakes those who become vain, who begin to think that as soon as warmth has come into the heart they are already at the summit of perfection. In fact this warmth is only the beginning and may not prove stable. For this warmth and peace in the heart may just be something natural—the fruit of concentrated attention. We have to labour and labour, to wait and wait, until the natural is replaced by the grace-given. It is best never to think of yourself as having attained anything, but always to see yourself as poor, naked, blind, and worthless.

Fellow-workers with God

The Lord sees your need and your efforts, and will give you a helping hand. He will support and establish you as a soldier, fully armed and ready to go into battle. No support can be better than His. The greatest danger lies in the soul thinking that it can find this help within itself; then it will lose everything. Evil will dominate it again, eclipsing the light that as yet flickers but weakly in the soul, and it will extinguish the small flame which is still scarcely burning. The soul should realize how powerless it is alone; therefore, expecting nothing of itself, let it fall down in humility before God, and in its own heart recognize itself to be nothing. Then grace—which is all-powerful—will, out of this nothing, create in it everything. He who in total humility puts himself in the hand of the merciful God, attracts the Lord to himself, and becomes strong in His strength.

¹ In Russian, *prelest* (see p. 40, n. 2).

DIVINE GRACE AND HUMAN EFFORT

Although expecting everything from God and nothing from ourselves, we must nevertheless force ourselves to action, exerting all our strength, so as to create something to which the divine help may come, and which the divine power may encompass. Grace is already present within us, but it will only act after man has himself acted, filling his powerlessness with its own power. Establish yourself, therefore, firmly in the humble sacrifice of your will to God, and then take action without any irresolution or half-heartedness.

The spirit of grace and the spirit of a Pharisee

When you undertake some special endeavour, do not concentrate your attention and heart on it, but look upon it as something secondary; and by entire surrender to God open yourself up to God's grace, like a vessel laid out ready to receive it. Whoever finds grace finds it by means of faith and zeal, says St. Gregory of Sinai, and not by zeal alone. However painstaking our work, so long as we omit to surrender ourselves to God while performing it, we fail to attract God's grace, and our efforts build up within us not so much a true spirit of grace but the spirit of a Pharisee. Grace is the soul of the struggle. Our efforts will be rightly directed so long as we preserve self-abasement, contrition, fear of God, devotion to Him, and the realisation of our dependence on divine help. If we are self-satisfied and contented with our efforts, it is a sign that they are not performed in the right way, or that we lack wisdom.

True Christian life is the life of grace

Life is the strength to act. Spiritual life is the strength to act spiritually, according to the will of God. Man has lost this strength; therefore until it is restored to him, he cannot live spiritually, no matter how much he intends to. That is why the flow of grace into the soul of a believer is essential for a true Christian life. True Christian life is the life of grace. A man makes some religious resolution: but in order to be able to act according to it,

DIVINE GRACE AND HUMAN EFFORT

the life of grace within the spirit to burn more and more brightly. According to the zeal and efforts of the man who gives himself to God, grace will enter and penetrate him increasingly with its power, sanctifying him and making him its own. But one cannot and should not stop at this stage. This is still only a seed, a starting point. It is necessary that this light of life should go further, and permeating the entire substance of the soul and body should in this way sanctify them, claiming them for itself; uprooting the alien and unnatural passionateness which now dominates us, it should raise the soul and body to their pure and natural state. The light should not remain enclosed within itself but should spread over our whole being with all its powers.

But since these powers are all infected with what is unnatural, the pure spirit of grace, coming into the heart, is unable to enter directly and immediately into them, being barred out by their impurity.

Therefore we must establish some channel between the spirit of grace living within us and our own powers, so that the spirit may flow into them and heal them, just as dressings heal the sore places to which they are applied.

It is evident that, to act effectively as a channel, all these means must on the one hand bear the character and qualities of a divine and heavenly origin, and on the other be perfectly adapted to our own powers in their natural arrangement and purpose. Otherwise they will not act as an effective channel of grace, nor will our powers be enabled to draw healing from them. Such, then, must necessarily be the origin and inner qualities of these means of healing. As to their outward form, they cannot be anything other than activities, exercises, labour; for they are applied to human powers and faculties whose distinctive quality is action.

These, then, are the activities and exercises which are the means of healing our powers and bringing them back to their lost purity and wholeness: fasting, labour, vigil, solitude, withdrawal from the world, control of the senses, reading of the scriptures and the Holy Fathers, attendance at church, frequent confession and communion.

THE FRUITS OF PRAYER

The two movements of free will

When we are quickened by grace, it is impossible not to be conscious of the fact, but it is possible not to pay due attention to it; and so, after living in this quickened state for a while, we descend again into the usual round of activities of the soul and body. The quickening does not complete the act of the sinner's conversion, but only begins it, and there still remains work on oneself; and this work is very complicated. But all that relates to this work may be accomplished in two movements of free will—the turning from the outside world to one's inner self, and the subsequent turning from self towards God. In the first movement, man regains the power over himself which he had lost, and in the second he brings himself as an offering to God—the free will offering of burnt sacrifice. In the first he decides to abandon sin, and in the second, drawing near to God, he vows to belong to Him alone all the days of his life.

The grace of God cleaves a man in two

God's grace, coming first at a man's initial awakening, and afterwards visiting him during the whole period of his conversion, cleaves him in two. It makes him aware of a duality within himself, and enables him to distinguish between what is unnatural and what should be natural; and thus it makes him resolve to sift or winnow all that is unnatural, so that his God-like nature should be brought fully to light. But obviously such a decision is only the beginning of the undertaking. At this stage it is only with his will and intention that he has left the domain of alien unnaturalness, rejecting it, and aiming at the naturalness which he expects and desires. But in fact his whole structure remains as before—that is, saturated with sin; and passions dominate his soul in all its faculties and his body in all its functions, just as they did before—with only this difference, that formerly he chose and embraced all this with desire and pleasure, but now it is not desired or chosen, but is hated, trampled on, rejected. In this state a man has emerged from himself as from a putrefying

DIVINE GRACE AND HUMAN EFFORT

corpse: he sees how the reek of passion flows from different parts of himself against his will, and sometimes he experiences the stench given off by himself so strongly that it stifles his mind.

Thus the true life of grace in man is in its beginning only a seed, a spark; but a seed sown amongst tares, a spark constantly smothered by ashes. It is still only a feeble candle glimmering in the densest fog. Man by his consciousness and will has attached himself to God, and God has accepted him, has united with him in this self-awareness and point of free choice, within his mind—what is termed the spirit, in St. Antony of Egypt¹ and St. Makarios the Great. And this is the only part of him which is healthy, agreeable to God, and saved. All the other parts are still held prisoner and do not want and cannot be obedient to the demands of the new life: the mind as a whole does not yet know how to think in the new way but thinks as before; the will does not yet know how to desire in the new way, but desires as before; the heart does not know how to feel in the new way, but feels as before. It is the same in the body in all its functions. Consequently man is as yet wholly impure except at one point which is the conscious power of free choice within his mind—what we termed the spirit. God, being wholly pure, enters into union only with this one part; but all the other parts, being impure, remain outside Him and estranged from Him. He is ready to fill the entire man, but does not do so because man is impure. Afterwards, as soon as he is cleansed, God makes known His full dwelling in him.

The all-embracing action of grace

Before the birth of inner life—before the palpable manifestation of the action of grace and union with God—it frequently happens that a man still acts on his own initiative, up to the limit

¹ St. Antony of Egypt (251–356), the father of Christian monasticism, lived the greater part of his life as a hermit. The earliest and most celebrated of the monastic *startsi*, he became (as his biographer, St. Athanasius of Alexandria, put it) ‘a physician to all Egypt’. He was without education, and was never ordained priest. A few of his Letters survive.

THE FRUITS OF PRAYER

of his powers. But when he is exhausted by the failure of his efforts he at last casts aside his own activity, and whole-heartedly gives himself up to the all-embracing action of grace. Then the Lord visits him with His mercy, and kindles the fire of inner spiritual life in him, and he knows from experience that it is not his own former efforts which have effected this great transformation. Afterwards, the more or less frequent withdrawals of divine grace teach him by experience that the sustaining of this fire of life is likewise not dependent on his own efforts.

The frequent appearance of good thoughts and intentions, his frequent infusion by the spirit of prayer—coming he knows not whence or how—similarly convince him by experience that all this good is possible for him only through the action of divine grace, which is always present in him, by the mercy of the Lord, who saves all who are striving for salvation. He gives himself to the Lord, and the Lord alone acts in him. Experience shows that he only succeeds in everything when he entrusts himself wholly to God. So he never turns back, but guards this grace in every way possible.

Theorists are greatly occupied by the question of the relationship between grace and free will. For anyone who has grace within him, this question is resolved by practical experience. He who bears grace in his heart, surrenders himself wholly to the action of grace, and it is grace that acts in him. For him this truth is more evident, not only than any mathematical truth, but even than any experience of his exterior life, because he has already ceased to live outside himself and is wholly concentrated within. He has now only one care, always to be faithful to the grace present within him. Unfaithfulness offends grace, causing it either to retreat, or to reduce its action. Man testifies his faithfulness to grace or to the Lord, by not permitting—either in thoughts, feelings, actions, or words—anything which he knows to be contrary to the will of the Lord. Conversely, he does not leave undone any work or undertaking, as soon as he knows that it is God's will that it should be done, judging from the run of circumstances, and from the indications provided by his inner longings and impulses. This sometimes requires much work,

DIVINE GRACE AND HUMAN EFFORT

painful self-coercion, and resistance to self, but he is glad to sacrifice everything to the Lord, because after every such sacrifice, he receives inner rewards: peace, joy, and a special boldness in prayer.

These acts of faithful devotion to grace, combined with prayer (which at this stage is already continual) cause the gift of grace to increase in fervour and warmth. When a fire is kindled, movement of air is necessary to keep the flame alight and to strengthen it: in exactly the same way, when the fire of grace is kindled in the heart, prayer is necessary, for it acts as a kind of current of spiritual air in the heart. What is this prayer? It is the mind's ceaseless turning to the Lord in the heart, it is the continual standing before God with the mind in the heart, accompanied or not by appeals to Him, but with feelings only of devotion and contrite surrender to Him in the heart. In this activity, or rather in this frame of mind, lies the principal means of sustaining inner warmth and the whole of the inner order, of dispersing evil or empty thoughts, and of confirming good thoughts and undertakings. Good thoughts and intentions come; man goes deeper into prayer, and according to whether they become stronger during prayer or disappear, he knows whether these thoughts and enterprises are pleasing to God or not. When evil thoughts come, or something begins to trouble the soul, he again goes deeper into prayer without paying attention to what is happening within, and the troublous thoughts vanish. In this way, inner prayer is established in him as the principal driving force and ruler of his spiritual life. No wonder then, that all instructions in the writings of the Fathers are directed pre-eminently towards teaching us how to pray inwardly to the Lord in the right way.

*Two stages of prayer. Inward martyrdom*¹

To begin with, during the first stage on the path of prayer, we are left to pray solely by our own efforts. Without doubt, the grace of God helps anyone who prays in sincerity, but it does

¹ By Bishop Ignatii.

THE FRUITS OF PRAYER

not reveal its presence. During this period, passions hidden in the heart come into play, and lead the man who prays to a martyrdom in which defeats and victories alternate ceaselessly, and man's free will and weakness are clearly exposed.

During the second period, the grace of God makes its presence and action felt tangibly, uniting the mind with the heart, and making it possible to pray without dreaming or distraction, but with a heart that weeps and has warmth. At this point sinful thoughts lose their power to overcome the mind.

The first state in the life of prayer can be likened to the bare trees during winter; the second, to the same trees covered with leaves and blossoms brought out by the spring warmth. In both states repentance must be the soul and aim of the prayer. As a reward for the repentance which a man offers while still proceeding by his own endeavours, God grants, in His own good time, a repentance that comes full of grace; and the Holy Spirit, having entered the man, 'maketh intercession' for him 'with groanings which cannot be uttered . . . He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God', which He alone knows (Rom. viii. 26-27).

It is thus quite clear that the beginner's search for the place of the heart, that is, his untimely and premature attempts to kindle the manifest action of grace, is a most mistaken undertaking, perverting the due order and system of the science of prayer. Such an undertaking is one of pride and foolishness. In the same way it is not right for a beginner to use the practices recommended by the Holy Fathers for advanced monks and hesychasts.

The quickening power of grace

Work, exert yourself, seek and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Do not relax and do not despair. But at the same time remember that these efforts are no more than attempts on our part to attract grace; they are not grace itself, which we still have to go on seeking. The principal thing we lack is the quickening power of grace. It is very noticeable that when

DIVINE GRACE AND HUMAN EFFORT

we reason, or pray, or do something else of this nature, it is as though we are forcing into our heart something foreign from outside. This is what sometimes happens: our thoughts or prayers make an impression on us, and their effects descend into the heart to a certain depth, depending on the strength of the efforts which we make; but then, after a while, this impression is cast out again—as a stick which is thrust vertically into water is forced up once more—because of a kind of resistance in the heart which is disobedient and unaccustomed to such things. Immediately following this, coolness and coarseness begin again to take hold of the soul: a sure sign that it was not the action of grace that we experienced there, but only the effects of our own work and effort. Therefore do not be content with these efforts alone; do not rest on them as if they were what you have to find. This is a dangerous illusion. It is equally dangerous to think that in these labours there is merit, which grace is bound to reward. Not at all: these efforts are only the preparation for receiving grace; but the gift itself depends entirely on the will of the Giver. Therefore, with careful use of all the means already mentioned, he who seeks must still walk in the expectation of divine visitation, which gives no warning of its coming, and arrives from whence no one knows.

Only when this quickening power of grace comes will the inner work of the transformation of our life and character really begin. Without it, we cannot expect success; there will only be unsuccessful attempts. Blessed Augustine¹ testifies to this, for he worked on himself long and hard, but mastered himself only when he was filled with grace. Work, with confident expectation. Grace will come and set everything in order.

Grace draws all things into unity

So long as the strivings of the spirit burst through spasmodically, first one and then the other, now on this side and now on that, there is no life in them. But when the higher power of divine

¹ St. Augustine (354-430), Bishop of Hippo in North Africa: author of the *Confessions* and the *City of God*.

THE FRUITS OF PRAYER

grace, flowing into the spirit, draws all these strands of effort in one and holds them in unity, then comes the fire of spiritual life.

Serpents and dark clouds

When grace does not dwell in man, demons curl like serpents in the depths of his heart, completely preventing the soul from desiring good; but when grace enters the soul, then these demons are blown about like dark clouds from one part of the heart to another, transforming themselves into sinful passions or distractions, in order to eclipse the remembrance of God and draw the mind away from discourse with grace.

The illusions of the devil and the grace of God: how they are distinguished¹

Let no one, hearing great tidings about the action of the Spirit from the lips of a sinner, hesitate in unbelief and be troubled in thought, considering that the action he hears about is the work of devils and an illusion. He must cast aside any such blasphemous thought. No! No! Not such is the action of illusion, nor its attributes. Tell me: is it possible for the devil, the enemy and murderer of man, to become his physician? Is it possible for the devil to unite in one the parts and powers of man which were severed by sin, to liberate them from the domination of sin, to lead them out from the state of contradiction and civil war into the state of holy peace in the Lord? Is it possible for the devil to deliver a man from the deep abyss of his ignorance of God, and to give him living knowledge of God, based on experience, which no longer needs any proofs from outside? Is it possible for the devil to preach and explain in detail about the Saviour—to preach and explain how we can draw near to Him through repentance? Is it possible for the devil to restore the lost image in man, to set the distorted likeness in order? Is it possible for him to impart the savour of spiritual poverty, and along with it,

¹ By Bishop Ignatii.

DIVINE GRACE AND HUMAN EFFORT

the savour of resurrection, of renewal and union with God? Is it possible for the devil to raise man to the height of communion with God, a communion in which man becomes as nothing, without thoughts, without desires, entirely immersed in wondrous silence? This silence is the absorption of all the powers of a human being: they are all drawn towards God, and as it were disappear before His endless majesty.

Illusion acts in one way, and God in another—God the illimitable Master of man, who was and is now their Creator. He who created and re-creates, does He not remain always the Creator? Therefore, beloved brother, listen how the action of illusion differs from divine action. Illusion, when it approaches man in thought or in dream, in some subtle idea, by some apparition which can be seen with the physical eyes, or by a voice from on high heard by the physical ears, never approaches as an absolute master, but comes as a charmer who seeks acceptance by man, and from his acceptance gains power over him. The action of illusion inside or outside man is always action from without; it is open to man to repel it. Illusion is always met at first by a certain doubt in the heart: only those whom it has conquered decisively accept it without question. Illusion never unites a man who is divided by sin, it does not stop the upsurge of blood, does not lead the ascetic to repentance, does not make him small in his own eyes; on the contrary it fires his imagination, encourages the rush of blood, brings him a certain tasteless, poisonous enjoyment, and flatters him insidiously, inspiring him with self-conceit and establishing in his soul an idol—'I'.

*The union of mind and heart and their immersion in God*¹

Divine action is not something material: it is invisible, inaudible, unexpected, unimaginable, and inexplicable by any analogy taken from this world. Its advent and its working within us are a mystery. First it shows man his sin, magnifying it in his eyes, and keeping the horror of sin constantly before his sight.

¹ By Bishop Ignatii.

THE FRUITS OF PRAYER

Leading his soul to self-condemnation, divine action shows him our Fall—this terrible, dark, deep abyss of destruction into which man fell through the sin of our first father. Afterwards, little by little, divine action grants to man increased attention and contrition of the heart in prayer. Having prepared the vessel in this manner, it touches the severed parts suddenly, unexpectedly, immaterially, and they become united in one. Who touched it? I cannot explain: I see nothing, I hear nothing; but I know and feel a sudden change in myself, due to an all-powerful action. The Creator has acted now in renewal, as He acted once in creation. Tell me: could Adam's body, formed of dust, still lying before the Creator and not yet animated by the soul, have any conception of life or any sensation of it? When it was suddenly quickened by the breath of life, could it have considered whether to accept or reject it? The created Adam felt himself suddenly alive, thinking, desiring. Re-creation is accomplished with the same suddenness. The Creator was and is the absolute Ruler: He acts autocratically, in a supernatural manner, far above any thought or conception, with infinite subtlety. He acts spiritually, and not materially.

By the touch of His hand on my entire being, my mind, heart, and body were united, composing a single and unified whole. They became immersed in God, and in God they remain as long as the invisible, incomprehensible, all-powerful Hand holds them there.

Three kinds of desire: mental, compassionate, active

He who has sought the help of grace and now feels its presence must be firmly resolved, not only to correct himself but also to begin to do this *at once*. This desire to correct himself has already directed him in all his previous efforts, but there is still something to be added to its composition or to its perfecting. For there are various kinds of desire. There is mental desire: the mind demands something and the man makes the effort; such a desire directs the preparatory labour. There is compassionate desire: this is born under the influence of the affections and feelings

THE BURNING OF THE SPIRIT

Inner disorder and inner light

The problem which concerns the seeker more than anything is the inner disorder in his thoughts and desires; all his eagerness is bent on finding some way to eliminate this disorder. There is only one way to achieve this—acquire spiritual feeling or warmth of heart, together with the remembrance of God.

As soon as this warmth is kindled, your thoughts will settle, the inner atmosphere will become clear, the first emergence of both good and bad movements in the soul will become plainly apparent to you, and you will acquire power to drive away the bad. This inner light also extends to outside things and makes clear the distinction between right and wrong, giving you the strength to establish yourself in what is right, despite any kind of obstacles. In a word, you now begin true, active spiritual life, for which hitherto you were still searching; and if it appeared, it appeared in you only fitfully.

Those longings for God of which I spoke earlier will also bring warmth, but it is a temporary warmth, ceasing when the longings cease. But the warmth now conceived in the heart remains permanently within, and holds the attention of the mind always fixed upon it.

When the mind is in the heart, this is in fact that union of mind and heart which represents the reintegration of our spiritual organism.

Ceaseless burning within, and the Lord's advent in the heart

The Lord will come to shed His light on your understanding, to purify your emotions, to guide your actions. You will feel in yourself forces which until now were unknown to you. This light will come: not apparent to the sight and senses, but arriving invisibly and spiritually—yet none the less effectively. The symptom of its advent is the engendering at this point of a constant burning of the heart: as the mind stands in the heart, this ceaseless burning infuses it with the remembrance of God, you acquire the power to dwell inwardly, and consequently all your inner

THE FRUITS OF PRAYER

potentialities are realized. You accept what is pleasing to God, while all that is sinful you reject. All your actions are conducted with a precise awareness of God's will regarding them; strength is given you to govern the whole course of your life, both within and without, and you acquire mastery over yourself. In this state man is usually more acted upon than active. When the coming of God is consciously experienced in his heart, he achieves freedom of action. Then is fulfilled the promise, 'If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed' (John viii. 36). It is this and not something wholly unknown that the Lord brings to you.

Do not try to measure your progress

Warmth of heart, about which you write, is a good condition, which should be guarded and maintained. When it weakens, you must continue to kindle it, gathering yourself together inwardly with all your strength and calling upon God. To prevent it leaving you, you must avoid distraction of thought and impressions coming through the senses, which are incompatible with this state. Avoid the attachment of your heart to anything visible, or the absorption of your attention by any worldly care. Let your attention toward God be unwavering, and the tautness of your body unslackened, like a bowstring, or a soldier on parade. But the most important thing is to pray to God and ask Him to prolong this mercy of warmth in the heart.

When the query arises 'Is this it?', make it your rule once and for all mercilessly to drive away all such questions as soon as they appear. They originate from the enemy. If you linger over this question the enemy will pronounce the decision without delay, 'Oh yes, certainly it is—you have done very well!' From then on you stand on stilts and begin to harbour illusions about yourself and to think that others are good for nothing. Grace will vanish: but the enemy will make you think that grace is still with you. This will mean that you think you possess something, when really you have nothing at all. The Holy Fathers wrote, 'Do not measure yourself.' If you think you can decide any question about your

THE FRUITS OF PRAYER

lies the mystery. Only at the moment of coming to ourselves do we find 'Lord have mercy' again in our thoughts.

The words of this prayer are 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me' or 'Jesus, Son of God, have mercy upon me'. The flame of which we spoke does not kindle immediately, but only after visible labours, when there arises in the heart a certain warmth, constantly increasing and burning ever more brightly during inner prayer. Prayer to the Lord, offered from the depths of our being, arouses spiritual warmth. Experienced Fathers make a strict distinction between the three kinds of warmth: physical warmth, which is straightforward and comes as a result of concentrating our powers in the region of the heart by attention and exertion; lustful bodily warmth, which is sometimes produced in us by the enemy; and spiritual warmth, which is sober and pure. This last is of two kinds: natural—the result of combining the mind with the heart—and grace-given. Experience teaches how to distinguish each kind. This warmth is full of sweetness and so we long to keep it, both for the sake of the sweetness itself, and because it brings right harmony to everything within. But whoever strives to maintain and increase this warmth for the sake of its sweetness alone, will develop in himself a kind of spiritual hedonism. Therefore those who practise sobriety pay no attention to this sweetness, but try simply to stand firmly rooted before the Lord in complete surrender to Him, giving themselves up into His hands. They do not lean on the sweetness coming from this warmth, nor fasten their attention upon it. It is possible, on the other hand, to attach our whole attention to this feeling of sweetness and warmth, taking pleasure in it as in a warm room or garment, and to stop at this point, without trying to climb any higher. Some mystics go no further than this, but regard such a state as the highest that man can attain: it immerses them in a kind of nothingness, in a complete suspension of all thought. This is the 'state of contemplation' attained by some mystics.

THE KINGDOM OF THE HEART

Mind, heart, and feeling

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

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Look inward: what do you find?

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

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

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

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

THE KINGDOM WITHIN US

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

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

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

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

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

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

THE KINGDOM WITHIN US

Finding the place of the heart

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

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

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

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

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

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

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

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

THE KINGDOM WITHIN US

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

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

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

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

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Communion with God should be our constant state

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

THE KINGDOM WITHIN US

to be maintained in building a way of life pleasing to God. By it we should test the straightness or crookedness of the rules and the ascetic feats which we may have in mind and undertake.

This necessity of being turned inwardly towards God must be fully recognized, because all the errors in the active life seem to come from ignorance of this principle. Not seeing its significance, some people stop short at the exterior stage of devout exercises and ascetic efforts, others stop short at the habitual practice of good deeds, without rising any higher. Others again attempt to pass directly to contemplation. All these things are required of us but everything must be done in its own time. At the beginning there is only a seed, which afterwards develops—not exclusively, but in its general tendency—into one form of life or another. Gradualness is necessary—the orderly ascent from exterior to interior deeds, and then from both to contemplation. Such is always the sequence—never vice versa.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

The parable of the leaven

Remember the Lord's parable about the leaven hidden in the three measures of meal. The leaven does not become noticeable at once, but remains hidden for a certain time, then later on its action becomes manifest, and finally it penetrates all the dough. So also the Kingdom within us is first kept secret, later it reveals itself, and finally opens out and appears in its full strength. It reveals itself, as we saw earlier, by the involuntary longing to withdraw within and stand before God. Here the soul has no power of its own, but is moved by an outside influence. Someone takes it and leads it within. It is God, the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Saviour: no matter which you say, the meaning is one and the same. God shows by this that He accepts the soul and wishes to be master of it, and at the same time He makes the soul accustomed to His mastery, revealing its true nature. Until this longing appears—and it does not appear at once—man seems to act apparently by himself; and though he is in fact being helped by grace, its action remains hidden from him. He

THE KINGDOM OF THE HEART

arouses his attention and forms good intentions to be within himself, to remember God, to drive away vain and evil thoughts, and to fulfil all tasks in a way that is pleasing to God; he exerts himself and strives until he is tired, but has no success at all in this undertaking. His thoughts are distracted, movements of passion overwhelm him, there is disorder and error in his work. All this is because God has not yet revealed His mastery over the soul. But as soon as this happens (and it happens when we are overcome by this same involuntary longing to withdraw within and stand before God), immediately everything within comes into order—a sign that the King is present there.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

The indwelling of Christ and the death of carnal passion

St. John Chrysostom writes, 'You will ask, "What will happen if Christ is within us?" "If Christ is in you, your body is dead to sin, but your spirit lives unto righteousness" (Rom. viii. 10).¹ You see how much evil comes from not having the Holy Spirit within you: death, enmity towards God, the impossibility of pleasing Him by submission to His Law, or of belonging to Christ and having Him dwelling in you. Look also how good it is to have the Spirit within you: really to belong to Christ, to have Christ Himself within you, to compete with the angels! For to have a body that is dead to sin, means to begin to live in eternal life, to carry within you—even here on earth—the pledge of the resurrection and the reassuring power to advance upon the path of virtue. Note that the Apostle said not only, "the body is dead", but added, "to sin", so that you should understand that it is the sins of the flesh, and not the body itself, that is mortified. It is not of the body as such that the Apostle speaks; on the contrary he wants the body, although dead, still to remain alive. When our bodies, in so far as carnal reactions are concerned,

¹ In the Authorised Version, this sentence runs, 'If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness'. Chrysostom's argument implies a somewhat different translation, reading 'to' instead of 'because of'.

THE UNION OF MIND AND HEART

extraneous should enter the heart. Here is the whole secret mystery of the spiritual life.

The most important ascetic undertaking is to keep the heart from passionate movements, and the mind from passionate thoughts. You should look into the heart and drive away from it all that is wrong. Do everything that is prescribed, and then you will be almost a nun, and perhaps completely a nun.¹ Even outside a convent, one can be a nun if one lives as a nun, while even in a convent a nun may be a lawwoman.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

The hermitage of the heart. Different kinds of feelings in prayer

You dream of a hermitage. But you already have your hermitage, here and now! Sit still, and call out: 'Lord, have mercy!' When you are isolated from the rest of the world, how will you fulfil the will of God? Simply by preserving within yourself the right inner state. And what is this? It is a state of unceasing remembrance of God in fear and piety, together with the remembrance of death. The habit of walking before God and keeping Him in remembrance—such is the air we breathe in the spiritual life. Created as we are in the image of God, this habit should exist in our spirit naturally: if it is absent, that is because we have fallen away from God. As a result of this fall, we have to fight to acquire the habit of walking before God. Our ascetic struggle consists essentially in the effort to stand consciously before the face of the ever-present God; but there are also various secondary activities, which likewise form part of the spiritual life. Here too, there is work to be done, in order to direct these activities to their true aim. Reading, meditation, prayer, all our occupations and contacts, must be conducted in such a way as not to blot out or disturb the remembrance of God. The seat of our consciousness and attention must also be concentrated on this remembrance of God.

The mind is in the head, and intellectuals live always in the

¹ Theophan's correspondent is still living in the world.

THE UNION OF MIND AND HEART

Our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee

Maybe in your case God asks for a final surrender of your heart, and your heart longs for God. For without God it can never be content but remains for ever unsatisfied. Examine yourself from this point of view. Perhaps you will find here the door to God's dwelling place.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

The Lord's reception room

You seek the Lord? Seek, but only within yourself. He is not far from anyone. The Lord is near all those who truly call on Him. Find a place in your heart, and speak there with the Lord. It is the Lord's reception room. Everyone who meets the Lord, meets Him there; He has fixed no other place for meeting souls.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Inner attention and solitude in the heart

You preserve inner attention and solitude in the heart. May the Lord help you always to remain thus. This is the most important thing in our spiritual life. When consciousness is within the heart, there too is the Lord; and so the two become united and the work of salvation progresses successfully. The entry is barred to evil thoughts, and still more to emotions and moods. The Name of the Lord by itself disperses everything alien to it and attracts everything akin.

What have you to fear above all else? Self-satisfaction, self-appreciation, self-conceit, and all other things beginning with *self*.

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Kindle and maintain a contrite spirit, a humble and a contrite heart.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

THE KINGDOM OF THE HEART

A feeling of warm tenderness

During prayer, it is essential that the spirit should be united with the mind, and that they should recite the prayer together; but whereas the mind works with words, uttered either mentally or aloud, the spirit acts through the feeling of warm tenderness¹ or tears. Union of the two is given in due course by divine grace; but for the beginner, it is enough if the spirit sympathises and co-operates with the mind. If attention is kept by the mind, the spirit is bound to feel true warmth and tenderness. The spirit is sometimes called the heart, just as the mind is sometimes termed the head.

BISHOP IGNATIUS

Prayer of the mind, of the heart, and of the soul

Prayer is called 'of the mind', when it is recited by the mind with profound attention, and with the sympathy of the heart. Prayer is called 'of the heart', when it is recited by the mind united with the heart, when the mind descends as it were into the heart, and sends up the prayer from its depths. Prayer is called 'of the soul', when it comes from the whole soul, with the participation of the body itself—when it is offered by the whole being, which becomes so to speak the mouthpiece of the prayer.

The Holy Fathers in their writings often include under the term 'prayer of the mind' or 'mental prayer', both prayer of the heart and prayer of the soul. But sometimes they distinguish them. Thus St. Gregory of Sinai said: 'Cry out unceasingly with the mind, or with the soul.' But nowadays, when oral teaching on this subject has greatly diminished, it is very useful to know the distinctions between definitions. In some people prayer of the mind is more active, in others prayer of the heart, in yet others prayer of the soul: it all depends how each is gifted, either naturally or through grace, by the Giver of all good. But sometimes in the same ascetic struggler first one prayer and then

¹ In Russian, *umilenie* (see above, p. 124, n. 2).

THE UNION OF MIND AND HEART

another may be active. Very often, indeed in most cases, such prayer is accompanied by tears.

BISHOP IGNATI

How to achieve discernment of thoughts

For you, the path of salvation is still dark. Read the first paragraphs of Philotheos of Sinai in the *Philokalia*, and see what is said there.¹ One act is required—and that is all: for this one act pulls everything together, and keeps everything in order. Try to organize yourself as Philotheos directs, and you will receive the right order within, as you will clearly realize. This one act is to stand with attention in your heart, and to remain there before God in worship. This is the beginning of spiritual wisdom.

You wish to grow wise in discernment of thoughts. Descend from the head into the heart. Then you will see all thoughts clearly, as they move before the eye of your sharp-sighted mind. But until you descend into the heart, do not expect to have due discrimination of thoughts.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

What it means to be with the mind in the heart

You ask what it means, to be with the mind in the heart? It means this. You know where the heart is? How can you help knowing it having once learnt? Then stand there with attention and remain steadfastly within, and you will have your mind in your heart. The mind is inseparable from attention; where one is there will be the other.

You have written that you often feel a fire in your heart when you read the Akathist to our sweetest Lord Jesus. Let your attention, then, be in the place where you feel this fire; and remain there, not only during prayer but at all other times. It is not enough just to stand at prayer: you must stand with awareness that you are facing the Lord, before His all-seeing eye, which

¹ St. Philotheos of Sinai: Greek spiritual writer of 7th–8th century, much influenced by St. John Climacus.

THE KINGDOM OF THE HEART

penetrates the secret depths of the heart; and in order to stand thus, endeavour to have some warm feeling towards God, of fear, love, hope, devotion, grief-laden contrition, or something akin to these. This is the basic principle of inner order. Watch, and as soon as you see that this order is disturbed, hasten to restore it.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Finding the place of the heart

When we read in the writings of the Fathers about the place of the heart which the mind finds by prayer, we must understand by this the spiritual faculty that exists in the heart. Placed by the Creator in the upper part of the heart, this spiritual faculty distinguishes the human heart from the heart of animals: for animals have the faculty of will or desire, and the faculty of jealousy or fury, in the same measure as man. The spiritual faculty in the heart manifests itself—independently of the intellect—in the conscience or consciousness of our spirit, in the fear of God, in spiritual love towards God and our neighbour, in feelings of repentance, humility, or meekness, in contrition of the spirit or deep sadness for our sins, and in other spiritual feelings; all of which are foreign to animals. The intellectual faculty in man's soul, though spiritual, dwells in the brain, that is to say in the head: in the same way the spiritual faculty which we term the spirit of man, though spiritual, dwells in the upper part of the heart, close to the left nipple of the chest and a little above it. Thus the union of the mind with the heart is the union of the spiritual thoughts of the mind with the spiritual feelings of the heart.

BISHOP IGNATII

The heart is the innermost man

The heart is the innermost man, or spirit. Here are located self-awareness, the conscience, the idea of God and of one's complete dependence on Him, and all the eternal treasures of the spiritual life.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

THE UNION OF MIND AND HEART

Do not ask how

Where is the heart? Where sadness, joy, anger, and other emotions are felt, here is the heart. Stand there with attention. The physical heart is a piece of muscular flesh, but it is not the flesh that feels, but the soul; the carnal heart serves as an instrument for these feelings, just as the brain serves as an instrument for the mind. Stand in the heart, with the faith that God is also there, but *how* He is there do not speculate. Pray and entreat that in due time love for God may stir within you by His grace.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

The hidden man of the heart

The spirit of wisdom and revelation, and a heart that is cleansed, are two different matters; the former is from on high, from God, the latter is from ourselves. But in the process of acquiring Christian understanding they are inseparably united, and this understanding cannot be gained unless both of them are present together. The heart alone, despite all purification—if purification is possible without grace—will not give us wisdom; but the spirit of wisdom will not come to us unless we have prepared a pure heart to be its dwelling-place.

The heart is to be understood here, not in its ordinary meaning, but in the sense of 'inner man'. We have within us an inner man, according to the Apostle Paul, or a hidden man of the heart, according to the Apostle Peter. It is the God-like spirit that was breathed into the first man, and it remains with us continuously, even after the Fall. It shows itself in the fear of God, which is founded on the certainty of God's existence, and in the awareness of our complete dependence on Him, in the stirrings of conscience and in our lack of contentment with all that is material.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

THE KINGDOM OF THE HEART

The lever which controls everything

The lever which controls all our activities is the heart. Here are formed the convictions and sympathies which determine the will and give it strength.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

The life of the heart

No one has power to command the heart. It lives its own special life. It rejoices of itself, it is sad of itself; and no one can do anything about this. Only the Master of all, holding all in His right hand, has power to enter the heart, to put feelings into it independently of its naturally changing currents.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

At home in the heart

Congratulations on your safe return! Your own home is paradise after an absence. Everyone feels alike about this. Exactly the same feeling comes to us when, after distraction, we return to attention and to inner life. When we are in the heart, we are at home; when we are not in the heart, we are homeless. And it is about this above all that we must take trouble.

THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

The purpose for which man was created

One must not be without work for a single moment. But there is work performed by the body, visibly, and there is work which is done mentally, invisibly. And it is this second kind that constitutes real work. It consists primarily in the unceasing remembrance of God, with the prayer of the mind in the heart. Nobody sees it, yet those who are in this state work with ceaseless vigour. This is the one thing necessary. Once it is there, do not worry about any other work.

Translated by
E. KADLOUBOVSKY
and G. E. H. PALMER

UNSEEN WARFARE

being the *Spiritual Combat* and *Path to Paradise* of Lorenzo Scupoli as edited by Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and revised by Theophan the Recluse
Translated into English from Theophan's Russian text

With an introduction by

H. A. Hodges, M.A., D.Phil.
Professor of Philosophy in the University of Reading

First published in Venice in 1589, the *Spiritual Combat* of the Theatine director of souls Lorenzo Scupoli has ever since been recognized as a masterpiece of Christian spiritual literature. St Francis de Sales placed it above the *Imitation of Christ*, and even within the author's lifetime the book went through over thirty editions in Italian and was translated into Latin, English, French, Spanish, German, and two Asiatic languages.

'The introduction, which almost forms a book in itself, is especially valuable, giving the history of the teaching of prayer both in the East and West from the Desert Fathers to the present day.' *Catholic Herald*

'... of great interest to all who seek to understand the teaching and practice of the Orthodox Church on this subject, and may well help to restore in the Western Church some deeper knowledge of the Fathers and their teaching on prayer.' *Church Times*

'... Not the least valuable part of the volume is Dr Hodges's admirable introduction, which deals clearly and accurately, not only with the history of the book and its makers, but also with the essential points of hesychasm, little known in the West, and the patristic tradition which underlies it.'

Journal of Theological Studies

36s net

Please write to Faber & Faber Ltd.,
24 Russell Square, London, W.C.1.
for a list of Books on Religion and Philosophy