

# Writers of the Philokalia

An Overview

By Marilyn Hughes

*The Out-of-Body Travel Foundation!*

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# St. Isaiah the Solitary

Refuter of Demonic Provocation (Around 431 - 491 A.D.)

Many Christians are aware of the voluminous writings of the Early Church Fathers of the Church which, although they began in the Early Christian Era at the time when only Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy had begun to emerge into existence, are shared by all Christian Denominations and Congregations around the world.

Few Christians, however, are aware of the profound importance of an entirely different set of writers which emerged about 300 A.D. due to the example of St. Antony of the Desert. The Early Desert Fathers took to a different field of research, that of the solitary. Venturing into the wilderness of the Egyptian Deserts, the desert fathers wrote some of the most profound works of Ascetical Theology in all of Christian and World Religious history.

St. Isaiah the Solitary is believed to have lived around the year 431 A.D. as historians are unsure as to which historical figure these writings date. His life began in Sketus, Egypt from whence it is known that he passed into Palestine and then further became a recluse and died at an old age in Gaza on August 11<sup>th</sup>, 491.

## **Authentic Spirituality of St. Isaiah the Solitary**

The translator of the few remaining words of St. Isaiah the Solitary, St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain, noted that St. Isaiah's works, although relatively short in stature were known to share powerful fruits on the importance of the soul attaining to attentiveness of conscience through the

rebuttal of demonic suggestions given to the mind while idle.

### **St. Isaiah the Solitary's Unique Approach to the Conflict with Sin - Anger**

In a unique approach to the battle against the evil inclinations within us, St. Isaiah stated with great confidence, "There is among the passions an anger of the intellect, and this anger is in accordance with nature. Without anger a man cannot attain purity." Going on to describe the nature of sin and purity and how a soul cannot attain to purity if it does not first generate a true and legitimate anger at sin, St. Isaiah states that "If your heart comes to feel a natural hatred for sin, it has defeated the causes of sin and freed itself from them. Keep hell's torments in mind; but know that your Helper is at hand. Do nothing that will grieve Him, but say to Him with tears: 'Be merciful and deliver me, O Lord, for without Thy help I cannot escape from the hands of my enemies.'"

In his later words, St. Isaiah speaks of the importance of regulating the evil desires of the heart by resisting the thoughts themselves with a stern realization of the presence of God watching over us in our temptation. And if we are to fall, we must quickly rise from our sin before the tempter can gain mastery over us. Quickly resort to prayer and fasting in temptation.

Further, St. Isaiah clarifies his profound desert doctrine when he states "If your intellect is freed from all hope in things visible, this is a sign that sin has died in you. If your intellect is freed, the breach between it and God is eliminated."

**St. Isaiah the Solitary's Remaining Written Work in the  
Philokalia**

*On Guarding the Intellect*

# Evagrius the Solitary

The Purest form of Ascetic Desert Spirituality (345 - 399 A.D.)

In 'The Way of a Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way,' *Translated by Helen Bacovcin*, a pious older man goes on a pilgrimage to discover how he can follow St. Paul's admonition in Scripture to 'Pray without Ceasing.' His journey begins with only a copy of the Philokalia and the Holy Scriptures.

His travels and studies of the Philokalia lead him to the practice of 'The Jesus Prayer' of Orthodox Tradition. "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have Mercy on Me a Sinner." In the Orthodox Tradition, through the writings of the Philokalia, the Jesus Prayer emerged as the perfect prayer that can be repeated almost like a mantra in one's mind throughout the day as one carries out their daily duties.

'The Jesus Prayer' is considered the perfect prayer in Orthodox tradition for three reasons. 1.) It acknowledges the Lordship of Jesus Christ, 2.) It acknowledges the Sonship of Jesus Christ, and 3.) It acknowledges man's sinful nature and implores God's mercy.

If prayed in a repetitive and contemplative manner, 'The Jesus Prayer' allows Christians to follow the admonition to "Pray without Ceasing" without interfering with the duly important daily duties of each individual.

It is in this silence of the heart from which prayer proceeds, that the entire essence of the writers of the Philokalia can be understood.

Evagrius the Solitary lived from 345 A.D. until 399 A.D. Having studied under the Cappadocian Fathers, Evagrius the Solitary learned from some of the greatest figures in Christian history such as St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory of Nazianzen. His association with St. Gregory of Nazianzen led to him attending the Second Ecumenical Council held in the year 381 A.D. in Constantinople.

### **The Spiritual Purity of the Writings of Evagrius the Solitary**

Although never ordained a priest, Evagrius the Solitary became a monk who was known for his ascetical writings which demonstrated the mystical way with great purity and clarity.

During the Fifth Ecumenical Council, his belief in the pre-existence of human souls and the ultimate restoration of all life to Jesus Christ were thrown out as incorrect doctrine.

Although these ideas were anathematized at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, his writings on the pure path to a holy life are still considered among the most important in the writings of the Early Desert Fathers.

Among the many pure and simple precepts he stated, he said "Do not let restless desire overcome your resolution," and "You should consider now other lessons which the way of stillness teaches, and do what I tell you. Sit in your cell, and concentrate on your intellect; remember the day of death, visualize the dying of your body, reflect on this calamity, experience the pain, reject the vanity of this world, its compromises and crazes, so that you may continue in the way of stillness and not weaken."

Evagrius admonishes all souls by saying, "Until a man is completely changed by repentance, he will be wise always to remember his sins with sorrow and to recall the eternal fire which they justly deserve."

### **Evagrius the Solitary's Unique Demonology**

Interestingly, Evagrius the Solitary had a unique perspective on demonology. In Catholic Demonology, the seven deadly sins (Gluttony, Lust, Greed, Pride, Sloth, Vanity, Avarice) and vices are said to begin with Pride, the great cause of the fall of man.

Evagrius places his demonological standard with ascetical practice on three primary vices which lead to all others. This demonology differs slightly from the biblical standard which states that "Pride goeth before disaster, and a haughty spirit before a fall. It is better to be humble with the meek than to share plunder with the proud." (Proverbs 16:18-19)

Evagrius states: "Of the demons opposing us in the practice of the ascetic life, there are three groups who fight in the front line: those in entrusted with appetites of gluttony, those who suggest avaricious thoughts, and those who incite us to seek the esteem of men. All the other demons who follow behind in their turn attack those already wounded by the first three groups. For one does not fall into the power of the demons of unchastity, unless one has first fallen because of gluttony; nor is one's anger aroused unless one is fighting for food or material possessions or the esteem of men. And one does not escape the demon of dejection, unless one no longer experiences suffering when deprived of these things. Nor will one escape pride, the first offspring of the devil, unless one has

banished avarice, the root of all evil, since poverty makes a man humble, according to Solomon (cf. Proverbs 10:4-LXX). In short, no one can fall into the power of any demon unless he has been wounded by those of the front line."

Evagrius summarizes his teachings by saying, "As sight is superior to all the other senses, so prayer is more divine than all the other virtues."

### **Evagrius the Solitary's Remaining Written Works in the Philokalia**

*On Discrimination in Respect of Passions and Thoughts, Texts on Watchfulness, On Prayer: One Hundred and Fifty Three Texts,*

# St. John Cassian

Solitary of the Eight Vices (360 - 435 A.D.)

Born in Roman Scythia, St. John Cassian has often been referred to in ancient writings as 'Cassian the Roman.' His solitary career began early in life when he entered a small monastery in Bethlehem, but he ended up in Egypt when he was about twenty five years old after traveling with a friend we know today only as Germanos.

Traveling a great deal as he gained his education, he went to Constantinople, Rome and Gaul. During this time he received ordination to the diaconate and later as a priest.

## **St. John Cassian Finds Monasteries**

John Cassian was a great supporter of the famous Church Father, St. John Chrysostom although he also studied under Evagrius the Solitary in his earlier years.

Somewhere around the year 415 A.D., he established two monasteries in Marseilles. Most famous for two works, the Institute and the Conferences, St. John Cassian's writings exuded more of the influence of the West than some of the other Desert Fathers.

St. John Cassian played a major role in the formation of monastic life, as his writings were utilized and recognized in the Rule of St. Benedict. Because St. Benedict was the first to create a rule of life for monastics, he is considered the Father of Monasticism.

St. John Cassian is considered a saint in the Orthodox Church.



## St. John Cassian on the Eight Vices and Discrimination

St. John Cassian's list of the eight vices includes gluttony, unchastity, avarice, anger, dejection, listlessness, self-esteem and pride. He had this to say about each one:

Gluttony - "A clear rule for self control handed down by the Fathers is this: stop eating while still hungry and do not continue until you are satisfied."

Unchastity - "Bodily fasting alone is not enough to bring about perfect self-restraint and true purity; it must be accompanied by contrition of heart, intense prayer to God, frequent meditation on the Scriptures, toil and manual labor. These are able to check the restless impulses of the soul and to recall it from its shameful fantasies."

Avarice - "Make it clear that avarice is a passion deriving, not from our nature, but solely from an evil and perverted use of our free will."

Anger - "No matter what provokes it, anger blinds the soul's eyes, preventing it from seeing the Sun of righteousness. Leaves, whether of gold or lead, placed over our eyes, obstruct the sight equally, for the value of

Dejection - "Just as a moth devours clothing and a worm devours wood, so dejection devours a man's soul. It persuades him to shun every helpful encounter and stops him accepting advice from his true friends or giving them a courteous and peaceful reply. Seizing the entire soul, it fills it with bitterness and listlessness. Then it suggests to the soul that we should go away from other people, since they are the cause of its agitation. It does not allow the soul to understand that its sickness does not come from without, but lies hidden within . . . A man can be harmed

by another only through the causes of the passions which lie within himself."

Listlessness - "This is a harsh, terrible demon, always attacking the monk, falling upon him at the sixth hour (mid-day), making him slack and full of fear, inspiring him with hatred for his monastery, his fellow monks, for work of any kind, and even for the reading of Holy Scripture. He suggests to the monk that he should go elsewhere and that, if he does not, all his effort and time will be wasted."

Self-Esteem - "When it cannot seduce a man with extravagant clothes, it tries to tempt him by means of shabby ones. When it cannot flatter him with honour, it inflates him by causing him to endure what seems to be dishonor. When it cannot persuade him to feel proud of his eloquence, it entices him through silence into thinking he has achieved stillness. When it cannot puff him up with the thought of his luxurious table, it lures him into fasting for the sake of praise."

Pride - "The passion of pride darkens the soul completely and leads to its utter downfall. In order to understand more fully what is meant by this, we should look at the problem in the following way. Gluttony tries to destroy self-control; unchastity, moderation; avarice, voluntary poverty; anger, gentleness; and the other forms of vice, their corresponding virtues. But when the vice of pride has become master of our wretched soul, it acts like some harsh tyrant who has gained control of a great city, and destroys it completely, razing it to its foundations."

### **St. John Cassian's Response - Discrimination**

St. John Cassian exhorted his readers to avoid these pitfalls by understanding the motivation behind them. "All virtues and all pursuits have a certain immediate purpose; and those who look to this purpose and adapt themselves accordingly will reach the ultimate goal to which they aspire."

And he then encourages us through the writings of Scripture to understand the necessity of guidance along the path of knowledge. "When Christ Himself spoke to Paul and called him, He could have opened his eyes at once and made known to him the way of perfection; instead He sent him to Ananias and told him to learn from him the way of truth . . . In this manner He teaches us to be guided by those who are advanced on the way."

### **St. John Cassian's Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*On the Eight Vices, On the Holy Fathers of Sketis and on Discrimination*

# St. Mark the Ascetic

Mark the Monk of Baptismal Grace (Early 5th Century  
A.D.)

Although not much is known about St. Mark the Ascetic, he is believed to have been a student of St. John Chrysostom. It's believed that St. Mark likely lived out his career as a solitary monk in either Palestine or Egypt, and before he left to be alone in the desert, he resided over a community of monks in Asia Minor.

Of the works that remain by St. Mark the Ascetic, only two are recorded in the Philokalia. But he is known to have written a minimum of six other important treatises on baptism, repentance and against a particular heretic of his time, Nestorios.

During his time, another heresy was also known to be on the horizon known as Messialism, and St. Mark the Ascetic wrote a great deal against it, as well.

His primary works focus on the grace conferred upon us in baptism and he is also known for his careful reflections on temptation and its nature.

## **St. Mark the Ascetic's Deep Spiritual Teaching**

St. Mark the Ascetic in his solitary life expressed a deep understanding of the subtleties of temptation and the grave importance of intention when fielding the battles of the world against the flesh.

"There are acts which appear to be good, but the motive of the person who does them is not good; and there are other

acts which appear to be bad, while the motive of the doer is good. The same is true of some statements. This discrepancy is due sometimes to inexperience or ignorance, sometimes to evil intention, and sometimes to good intentions."

As an unusually calming response to the difficulties of trials in this life, St. Mark the Ascetic had such to say: "Afflictions bring blessing to man; self-esteem and sensual pleasure, evil." And especially insightful to those under persecution, St. Mark said, "By praying for those who wrong us we overthrow the devil; opposing them we are wounded by him."

In contrast, St. Mark the Ascetic adjures us to remember from whence any good works we may perform may come. "When you have done something good, remember the words 'without Me you can do nothing.' (John 15:5)"

St. Mark the Ascetic spoke with wisdom when he pointed out that the manner in which our sinful nature is made known to us, can deeply affect the outcome of this knowledge. "There is a breaking of the heart which is gentle and makes it deeply penitent, and there is a breaking which is violent and harmful, shattering it completely."

And another Christ like contribution to his thought included his awareness of the importance of ceasing to remember the past sins of ourselves and others when repentance has occurred. "Cease rebuking a man who has stopped sinning and who has repented. If you say that you are rebuking him in God's name, first reveal the evils in yourself."

## **St. Mark the Ascetic's Thoughts on Unprovoked Suffering and Our Response to it**

St. Mark the Ascetic pointed out that "Wisdom is not only to perceive the natural consequence of things, but also to accept as our due the malice of those who wrong us. People who go no further than the first kind of wisdom become proud, whereas those who attain the second become humble."

And he also taught that "Every affliction tests our will, showing whether it is inclined to good or evil. This is why an unforeseen affliction is called a test, because it enables a man to test his hidden desires."

But he encourages those under affliction with these profound words, "The fear of God compels us to fight against evil; and when we fight against evil, the grace of God destroys it."

## **St. Mark the Ascetic's Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*On the Spiritual Law: Two Hundred Texts, On Those who think they are Righteous by Works*

# St. Heyschios the Priest

Ascetic of Inner Attentiveness (Unknown, Probably 8<sup>th</sup>  
Or 9<sup>th</sup> Century)

From the Monastery of the Mother of God of the Burning Bush, Abbot St. Heyschios was best known for his devotion to the power of the name of Jesus. His ascetical works are considered to be of great value to those who wish to become more attentive to the movements of temptation and vice, and avoiding occasions of sin.

Many who practice 'The Jesus Prayer' enjoy St. Heyschios's writings because of his devotion to the name of Jesus. But very little is actually known about this great writer of the Philokalia.

## **St. Heyschios the Priest on Watchfulness**

St. Heyschios the Priest considered watchfulness a spiritual practice, which, if done correctly, could free the soul from impassioned thoughts and words and all forms of evil. But only with God's help, of course. The practice itself is begun by practicing attentiveness. "Attentiveness is the hearts stillness, unbroken by any thought."

St. Heyschios the Priest made it clear that the practice of watchfulness served the purpose of teaching the soul to continually stop and correct thoughts before they could reach the heart.

"Much water makes up the sea. But extreme watchfulness and the Prayer of Jesus Christ, undistracted by thoughts, are the necessary basis for inner vigilance and unfathomable stillness of soul, for the deeps of secret and

singular contemplation, for the humility that knows and assesses, for rectitude and love. This watchfulness and this Prayer must be intense, concentrated and unremitting.”

St. Heyschios the Priest states that for those who are adepts, they have no need to worry for they will understand the meaning of his words. As for those who may not yet understand, he encourages watchfulness, wherein the discovery of its meaning will be made known.

According to St. Heyschios the Priest, there are four kinds of watchfulness. 1.) “Closely scrutinizing every mental image or provocation. 2.) “Freeing the heart from all thoughts, keeping it profoundly silent and still and in praying.” 3.) “Continually and humbly calling upon the Lord Jesus Christ for help. And 4.) “Always to have the thought of death in one’s mind.”

### **St. Heyschios the Priest’s Teaching on Guarding the Intellect**

In an effort to discourage spiritual arrogance, St. Heyschios points out in his commentaries that too many men think that they can set out upon the spiritual way without training. Comparing the ludicrous nature of this to that of someone who might practice medicine without any training, St. Heyschios the Priest says that even St. Paul made clear that he did not know this spiritual way . . . it was a mystery to him, as well.

If so for St. Paul, how so much more for the rest of us?

St. Heyschios the priest was clear and fast to define that those who are haughty or prideful in their spiritual seeking will not find anything of value. It is only when we



are in “Fear, trembling and unworthiness” that the way may be ‘opened’ to us.

“The guarding of the intellect may appropriately be called ‘light-producing’, ‘lightning-producing’, ‘light-giving’ and ‘fire-bearing’, for truly it surpasses endless virtues, bodily and other. Because of this, and because of the glorious light to which it gives birth, one must honour this virtue with worthy epithets.”

St. Heyschios the Priest goes on to point out that “Those who are seized by love for this virtue, from being worthless sinners, ignorant, profane, uncomprehending and unjust, are enabled to become just, responsive, pure, holy, and wise through Jesus Christ.”

Finally, by following this practice, St. Heyschios says that the participant becomes able to contemplate mystically and eventually resides in a “sea of pure and infinite light.”

In a concise summary of his teachings, St. Heyschios says, “There is no greater evil than self-love.”

### **St. Hesychios the Priest’s Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*On Watchfulness and Holiness*

# St. Neilos the Ascetic

Ascetic of the Monastic Life (Birth Date Unknown, Died  
430 A.D.)

Very little remains known about St. Neilos the Ascetic except that he was an abbot of a monastery outside of Ankyra and eventually descended into the Sinai desert later in his life to become a hermit.

His works are known for two things, 1.) The instruction given to monks on the relationship between a spiritual director and those under his care, and 2.) The fact that he and St. Diadochos of Photiki are the first writers of the Philokalia known to mention specifically 'The Jesus Prayer.'

## **St. Neilos the Ascetic's Instruction to the Faithful and to Consecrated Brethren**

St. Neilos the Ascetic speaks primarily to the brotherhood of monks and those who live the consecrated religious life in his 'Ascetic Discourse.' But his words become relevant to us all as he reminds us in his words of the extreme sacrifices and austerities taken on by the first followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, most famously the twelve apostles themselves.

And in comparing our lives with them, he says, "But this strict and angelic way of life has suffered the fate of a portrait many times recopied by careless hands, until gradually all likeness to the original has been lost."

Speaking of the human tendency to accumulate more and more land, possessions and titles, he points out the futility

of such acts by saying, "Why, then, do we drag the monastic way of life down from heaven to earth, burying ourselves in material anxieties? Why do we who once were 'brought up in scarlet' now 'embrace dunghills,' as Jeremiah says in his Lamentations (Lam. 4:5)? For when we are refreshed with radiant and fiery thoughts, we are 'brought up in scarlet'; but when we leave this state and involve ourselves in material things, we 'embrace dunghills'. Why do we abandon hope in God and rely on the strength of our own arm, ascribing the gifts of God's providence to the work of our hands?"

### **St. Neilos the Ascetic's Instruction on Righteous Living**

Further, St. Neilos the Ascetic states that "Standing upright, then, is the characteristic of men who do not constantly indulge their lower impulses; it is also characteristic of the angelic powers, because they have no need of physical things and feel no longing for them. That is what Ezekiel meant when he said: 'Their legs were straight and their feet were winged.' (Ezek. 1:7 LXX)

In the 'Ascetic Discourse,' St. Neilos the Ascetic speaks specifically to the monastic life and the way the brothers should live, but he sums it up well for both monastic and laypeople when he states:

"Let us, then, bring joy to this heavenly tribunal, which rejoices in our acts of righteousness. We need not worry about men's opinions, for men can neither reward those who have lived well nor punish those who have lived otherwise. If because of envy or worldly attachment they seek to discredit the way of holiness, they are defaming with deluded blasphemies the life honoured by God and the angels. At the time of judgment those who have lived

rightly will be rewarded with eternal blessings, not on the basis of human opinion, but in accordance with the true nature of their life.”

**St. Neilos the Ascetic’s Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*Ascetic Discourse*

# St. Diadochos of Photiki

Ascetic of the Secrets of Prayer (400 – 486 A.D.)

St. Diadochos of Photiki's work 'On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination' is considered to be a basic text for those seeking to study Orthodox Mystical Theology. His words are considered by critics to be very 'subtle' and require deep contemplative listening to fully understand.

In a sense, he speaks from a mystical realm for which the reader must attain in order to comprehend the higher meaning of that which he shares.

St. Diadochos of Photiki wrote against heresies of his time including the Monophysites and Messalians and was supportive of the General Council of Chalcedon which occurred during his lifetime.

A humble man, many would be surprised to note that St. Diadochos of Photiki was a bishop in Northern Greece.

## **St. Diadochos of Photiki on Evil's Non-Existence Unless we Make it Existent**

"Evil does not exist by nature, nor is any man naturally evil, for God made nothing that was not good. When in the desire of his heart someone conceives and gives form to what in reality has no existence, then what he desires begins to exist. We should therefore turn our attention away from the inclination to evil and concentrate it on the remembrance of God; for good, which exists by nature, is more powerful than our inclination to evil. The one has existence while the other has not, except when we give it existence through our actions.

### **St. Diadochos of Photiki on Those Who Seek God's Image in their Humanity**

“All men are made in God's image; but to be in His likeness is granted only to those who through great love have brought their own freedom into subjection to God. For only when we do not belong to ourselves do we become like Him who through love has reconciled us to Himself. No one achieves this unless he persuades his soul not to be distracted by the false glitter of this life. ”

### **St. Diadochos of Photiki on a Pure Soul**

“The qualities of a pure soul are intelligence devoid of envy, ambition free from malice, and unceasing love for the Lord of glory. When the soul has these qualities, then the intellect can accurately assess how it will be judged, seeing itself appear before the most faultless of tribunals.”

### **St. Diadochos of Photiki on Faith and Works**

St. Diadochos of Photiki summarizes the debates between faith and works very well by saying, “Faith without works and works without faith will both alike be condemned, for he who has faith must offer to the Lord the faith which shows itself in actions.”

### **St. Diadochos of Photiki on Self-Control as Central to all Virtue**

St. Diadochus of Photiki points out the central nature of self-control in the practice of virtue by saying, “Self-control is common to all the virtues, and therefore whoever practices self-control must do so in all things. If any part, however small, of a man's body is removed, the whole

man is disfigured; likewise, he who disregards one single virtue destroys unwittingly the whole harmonious order of self-control."

### **St. Diadochos of Photiki on Dispassion as a Weapon of Spiritual Warfare**

St. Diadochos of Photiki's 100 texts are so thoroughly prosaic and deep, as is demonstrated in his teaching on dispassion. "Dispassion is not freedom from attack by the demons, for to be free from such attack we must, as the Apostle says, 'go out of the world' (1 Corinthians 5:10); but it is to remain undefeated when they do attack. Troops protected by armour, when attacked by adversaries with bows and arrows, hear the twang of the bow and actually see most of the missiles that are shot at them; yet they are not wounded, because of the strength of their armour. Just as they are undefeated because they are protected by iron, so we can break through the black ranks of the demons if, because of our good works, we are protected by the armour of divine light and the helmet of salvation. For it is not only to cease from evil that brings purity, but actively to destroy evil by pursuing what is good."

### **St. Diadochos of Photiki's Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination: 100 Texts, Watchfulness and Holiness*

# St. John of Karpathos

Ascetic of the Monastic Life (680?)

St. John of Karpathos is one of those desert fathers about whom little is known, and that which is believed to be known, is not certain information. He is believed to have lived on the island of Karpathos and that he may have actually been the same person as Bishop John of the Karpathon, a signer of the acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, but this is uncertain.

It is believed that the discourses he wrote to the monks in India, were living in Ethiopia, but again, this is conjecture and not for sure.

## **St. John of Karpathos Encourages Strong Faith in the Forgiving Might of Christ during Temptation**

“When the soul leaves the body, the enemy advances to attack it, fiercely reviling it and accusing it of its sins in a harsh and terrifying manner. But if a soul enjoys the love of God and has faith in Him, even though in the past it has often been wounded by sin, it is not frightened by the enemy's attacks and threats. Strengthened by the Lord, winged by joy, filled with courage by the holy angels that guide it, encircled and protected by the light of faith, it answers the malicious devil with great boldness: 'Enemy of God, fugitive from heaven, wicked slave, what have I to do with you? You have no authority over me; Christ the Son of God has authority over me and over all things. Against Him have I sinned, before Him shall I stand on trial, having His precious Cross as a sure pledge of His saving love towards me. Flee far from me, destroyer! You have nothing to do with the servants of Christ.' When the souls



says all this fearlessly, the devil turns his back, howling aloud and unable to withstand the name of Christ."

### **St. John of Karpathos Points out the Way Satan will Attack a Soul Seeking Perfection with a Small Temptation**

"There is a tiny fish called a tremora, which is supposed to have the power to stop a large ship simply by attaching itself to the keel. In a similar manner, by God's permission a person advancing on the spiritual way is sometimes hindered by a small temptation. Remember how even the great Apostle said: 'We wanted to come to you - I, Paul - more than once, but Satan prevented us.' (1 Thessalonians 2:8.) Such a hindrance, however, should not upset you: resist firmly, with patient endurance, and you will receive God's grace."

### **St. John of Karpathos on an Intelligent Man**

"Men are often called intelligent wrongly. Intelligent men are not those who are erudite in the saying and books of the wise men of old, but those who have an intelligent soul and can discriminate between good and evil. They avoid what is sinful and harms the soul; and with deep gratitude to God they resolutely adhere by dint of practice to what is good and benefits the soul. These men alone should truly be called intelligent."

### **St. John of Karpathos on the Choice of Good and Evil, Mortality and Immortality**

St. John of Karpathos pulls no punches when he clearly states, "God, being eternally good and bounteous, gave man power over good and evil. He made him the gift of spiritual knowledge, so that, through contemplating the

world and what is in it, he might come to know Him who created all things for man's sake. But the impious are free to choose not to know. They are free to disbelieve, to make mistakes and to conceive ideas which are contrary to the truth. Such is the degree to which man has power over good and evil . . . Mortal creatures know in advance that they must die, and they resent the fact. The saintly soul is granted immortality because of her holiness, but mortality befalls the foolish and unhappy soul because of her sins."

### **St. John of Karpathos on Gratitude to God**

"When you go to bed with a contented mind, recall the blessings and generous providence of God; be filled with holy thoughts and great joy. Then, while your body sleeps, your souls keep watch; the closing of your eyes will bring you a true vision of God; your silence will be pregnant with sanctity, and in your sleep you will continue consciously to glorify the God of all."

### **St. John of Karpathos' Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*For the Encouragement of the Monks in India: One Hundred Texts, Ascetic Discourse Sent at Request of Monks in India, On the Character of Men and on the Virtuous Life: One Hundred and Seventy Texts, Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination: 100 Texts, Watchfulness and Holiness*

# St. Theodoros the Great

## Ascetic

Evacuator of Self-Love (9<sup>th</sup> Century?)

A priest explained to me that the writers of the Philokalia who came from the Eastern Orthodoxy traditions were supreme ascetics who sought to live a spiritual life which was so separate from the bodily functions that it became almost impossible to live in a material world and practice the severe asceticism they sought. In their view, the flesh and all its desires were the root of all evil, and therefore, had to be conquered and overcome, so to speak.

But in the Roman Catholic Tradition, the goal is to save body, mind and soul – to redeem the flesh along with the soul, so to speak; an entirely different focus.

But in the writings of St. Theodoros the Ascetic, both traditions are touched upon as the works speak of the importance of addressing our own self-love in the conscious assessment of the spiritual path upon which we tread.

Not much is known about St. Theodoros the Ascetic's life except that he was a monk at the monastery of St. Sabas close to Jerusalem and became a Bishop of Edessa, Syria.

Many scholars do not believe that St. Theodoros the Ascetic wrote the 'Theoretikon' although it is ascribed to him in the Philokalia because it is apparently clear that the dating on the manuscript would have to have been much later than the first, 'A Century of Spiritual Texts.'

'A Century of Spiritual Texts' can be roughly dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> Century A.D., whereas the 'Theoretikon' is more likely between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. If it does date to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, than it would be one of the most recent texts written in the entire Philokalia.

### **St. Theodoros the Ascetic Outlines the Principle Passions**

"There are three principal passions, through which all the rest arise: love of sensual pleasure, love of riches, and love of praise. Close in their wake follow five other evil spirits, and from these five arise a great swarm of passions and all manner of evil." St. Theodoros says later that in order to fight these principal passions a soul must achieve perfect obedience to the will of God. "The struggle to achieve obedience is won by means of renunciation, as have learned. He who seeks to be obedient must arm himself with three weapons: faith, hope, and divine and holy love (1 Corinthians 13:13)."

### **St. Theodoros the Ascetic On Natural and Supranatural Knowledge**

St. Theodoros the Ascetic outlines the difference between earthly and mystical knowledge by explaining it thus, "A distinction should be made between different kinds of knowledge. Knowledge here on earth is of two kinds: natural and supranatural . . . Natural knowledge is that which the soul can acquire through the use of its natural faculties and powers when investigating creation and the cause of creation - in so far, of course, as this is possible for a soul bound to matter . . . Supranatural knowledge, on the other hand, is that which enters the intellect in a manner transcending its own means and power . . . such knowledge is infused by God alone when He finds an

intellect purified of all material attachment and inspired by divine love.”

### **St. Theodoros on the Obstacles and Means of Acquiring Virtue on the Path of Removing Self-Love**

“There appear to be four obstacles which hinder the intellect in the acquisition of virtue; and this, operative over a long period, exerts a pressure which drags the intellect down towards earthly things. Secondly, there is the action of the senses, stimulated by sensible beauty and drawing the intellect after it. Thirdly, there is the dulling of noetic energy due to the intellect’s connection with the body . . . The fourth of the obstacles impeding the intellect in its acquisition of virtue is the pernicious influence of unclean and hostile demons.”

St. Theodoros goes on to say that there are three things necessary in overcoming these obstacles. “The first and most important thing is to look to God with our whole soul, to ask for help from His hand, and to put all our trust in Him . . . The second – which I regard as an overture of the first – is constantly to nourish the intellect with knowledge. By knowledge I mean of all created things, sensible and intelligible . . . The third way by which we can overcome the obstacles already mentioned is to mortify our partner, the body; for otherwise we cannot attain a clear and distinct vision of the intelligible world.”

Concluding, St. Theodoros notes that “When these three holy ways are established in mutual harmony, they beget in the soul the choir of blessed virtues.”

His teachings are summed up in these words. “An

intelligent soul, while in the body, has but one task: to realize its own purpose.”

**St. Theodoros the Ascetic's Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*A Century of Spiritual Texts, Theoretikon (It is not historically likely that Theodoros could have written the Theoretikon, but it ascribed to him in the Philokalia.)*

# St. Maximos the Confessor

Definer of the Messianic Function of Human Will and  
Divine Will (580 – 662 A.D.)

St. Maximos the Confessor is distinguished in the Philokalia by being given more space than any other of the ascetical writers. This is interesting since St. Maximos the Confessor was born an aristocrat and educated as such. He spent his early life serving the Emperor before deciding to become a monk and join the monastery of Philippikos in Chrysopolis.

During the Persian invasions, St. Maximos the Confessor fled to Africa and lived there for a very long time criticizing several heretical groups and defending the faith against them. But his activities against heresies landed him in hot water when he eventually was captured by authorities who opposed his actions and sent into exile.

But his difficulties didn't end there; he was further exiled at later times and was sentenced to a flogging, having his tongue taken out and his right hand cut off. He died shortly after this final punishment.

## **St. Maximos the Confessor's Role in the Doctrine of Jesus Christ as Being Both Fully Human and Fully Divine**

St. Maximos the Confessor got involved in the popular argument of the day regarding the will of Jesus Christ. Some said that Jesus Christ had a fully human will. Others said that it was fully divine. Others said that the operation of both the human and divine will worked together in Jesus Christ.

But St. Maximos the Confessor had the foresight to point out that Jesus Christ's sacrifice would be null and void if not for the human AND divine aspect. In order for the sacrifice of a fully human incarnation to be valid, St. Maximos the Confessor stated, he had to make that sacrifice from a fully human will. But in Jesus Christ, St. Maximos further indicated, that human will was in total conformity with the divine will which existed in Him, as well. In essence, Jesus Christ chose to make the sacrifice on behalf of humanity from a fully human will which was then subjected to total submission to the will of the divine.

### **St. Maximos the Confessor's Insights on Love**

St. Maximos the Confessor beautifully stated the intrinsic value of love by stating, "Love is a holy state of the soul, disposing it to value knowledge of God above all created things." He further exemplifies love in these words, "Since the light of spiritual knowledge is the intellect's life, and since this light is engendered by love for God, it is rightly said that nothing is greater than divine love. (1 Corinthians 13:13)

St. Maximos the Confessor expresses the redemption of mankind through the love of God thusly, "God, who is by nature good and dispassionate, loves all men equally as His handiwork. But He glorifies the virtuous man because in his will he is united to God. At the same time, in His goodness He is merciful to the sinner and by chastising him in this life brings him back to the path of virtue. Similarly, a man of good and dispassionate judgment also loves all men equally. He loves the virtuous man because of his nature and the probity of his intention; and he loves the sinner, too, because of his nature and the probity of his



intention; and he loves the sinner, too, because of his nature and because in his compassion he pities him for foolishly stumbling in darkness.

Explaining in an unusual way the manner in which a soul trapped by the passions may disassociate with those passions, St. Maximos the Confessor says, "An impassioned conceptual image is a thought compounded of passion and a conceptual image. If we separate the passion from the conceptual image, what remains is the passion-free thought. We can make this separation by means of spiritual love and self-control, if only we have the will."

In an interesting show of the loyalty required of each of us to truly love one another in both good times and bad, St. Maximos the Confessor states, "Only those who scrupulously keep the commandments, and are true initiates into divine judgments, do not abandon their friends when God permits these friends to be put to the test. Those who scorn the commandments and who are ignorant about divine judgments rejoice with their friend in the times of his prosperity; but when in times of trial he suffers hardships, they abandon him and sometimes even side with those who attack him . . . The friends of Christ persevere in love to the end."

### **St. Maximos the Confessor's Words on the Nature of True Theology**

"Every contemplative intellect that has 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God' (Ephesians 6:17), and that has cut off in itself the activity of the visible world, has attained virtue. When it has excised from itself the image of sensible appearances it finds the truth existing in the

inner essences of created beings, which is the foundation of natural contemplation. And when it has transcended the being of created things, it will receive the illumination of the divine and unoriginate Unit who is the foundation of the mystery of true theology. God reveals Himself to each person according to each person's mode of conceiving Him. To those whose aspiration transcends the complex structure of matter, and whose psychic-powers are fully integrated in a single unceasing gyration around God, He reveals Himself as Unity and Trinity. In this way He both shows forth His own existence and mystically makes known the mode in which that existence subsists. To those whose aspiration is limited to the complex structure of matter, and whose psychic powers are not integrated, He reveals Himself not as He is but as they are, showing that they are completely caught in the material dualism whereby the physical world is conceived as composed of matter and form."

### **St. Maximos the Confessor's Distinctive Thoughts on the Providential Divine Standard**

"Providence has implanted a divine standard or law in created beings, and in accordance with this law when we are ungrateful for spiritual blessings we are schooled in gratitude by adversity, and brought to recognize through this experience that all such blessings are produced through the workings of divine power. This is to prevent us from becoming irrepressibly conceited, and from thinking in our arrogance that we possess virtue and spiritual knowledge by nature and not by grace. If we did this we would be using what is good to produce what is evil: the very things which should establish knowledge of God unshaken within us will instead be making us ignorant of Him."

“We know that the providence which sustains created beings exists in them as a divine rule and law. In accordance with God’s justice, when those rich in blessings are ungrateful to Him who bestows them, they are schooled in gratitude by this richness being drastically curtailed; and through this adversity they are led to recognize the true source of the blessings they receive. For when conceit about one’s virtue is left undisciplined it naturally generates arrogance, and this induces a sense of hostility to God.”

### **St. Maximos the Confessor’s Final Thoughts on Christ**

“When we pray, let our aim be this mystery of deification, which shows us what we were once like and what the self-emptying of the only-begotten Son through the flesh has now made us; which shows us, that is, the depths to which we were dragged down by the weight of sin, and the heights to which we have been raised by His compassionate hand.”

### **St. Maximos the Confessor’s Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*Four Hundred Texts on Love, Two Hundred Texts on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation of the Son of God, Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice, Various Texts*

# St. Thalassios the Libyan

Teacher of Life in Accordance with the Intellect (7<sup>th</sup>  
Century A.D.)

St. Thalassios the Libyan was a personal friend of St. Maximos the Confessor and there are extant many letters written by St. Maximos the Confessor to St. Thalassios the Libyan. In fact, the largest work known to have been written by St. Maximos the Confessor was dedicated to Thalassios the Libyan, 'To Thalassios: On Various Questions Relating to Holy Scripture.'

History shows that St. Maximos the Confessor was deeply affected by St. Thalassios the Libyan, but it is still indistinct as to whom was the elder disciple to the other. Some historical records indicate that St. Thalassios may have been a spiritual teacher to St. Maximos, but others indicate that St. Thalassios may have been a disciple to St. Maximos.

This is an unusual aspect of this story in that it is usually known who was the elder and younger in such situations. Perhaps the truth lies in the mutual help given to both by the other, and that they both acted as disciple and teacher to one another as circumstances warranted.

## **St. Thalassios the Libyan's Aphorisms**

St. Thalassios the Libyan's great work, 'On Love, Self-Control and Life in Accordance with the Intellect,' is separated into four sections entitled centuries and consists of short aphorisms of wisdom. Most of these aphorisms are about virtue, vice and the illuminated life.

“Love and self-control purify the soul, while pure prayer illumines the intellect.”

“Perfume is not to be found in mud, nor the fragrance of love in the soul of a rancorous man.”

“Seal your senses with stillness and sit in judgment upon the thoughts that attack your heart.”

“The person who is unaffected by the things of this world loves stillness; and he who loves no human thing loves all men.”

“He who does not envy the spiritually mature and is merciful to the wicked has attained an equal love for all.”

“If you wish to be in control of your soul and body, forestall the passions by rooting out their causes.”

“The intellect falls from the realm of spiritual knowledge when the soul’s passible aspect abandons its own virtues.”

### **St. Thalassios the Libyan’s Words on the Trinity**

“The Father is the sole origin of all things. He is the origin of the Son and the Spirit as Their Begetter and source, coeternal, coinfinite, limitless, coessential and undivided. He is the origin of created things, as the one who produces, provides for, and judges them through the Son in the Holy Spirit. ‘For all things are from Him and through Him, and have Him as their goal. To Him be glory throughout the ages. Amen’ (Romans 11:36)

“We confess that in Christ there is a single hypostatis, or subject, in two indivisibly united natures. We glorify the

one indivisible hypostasis of Christ and confess the union without confusion of the two natures. We venerate the one essence of the Divinity in three Persons, or hypostases, and confess the coessential Trinity. Particular to the three Persons are fatherhood, sonship and procession. Common to them are essence, nature, divinity and goodness.”

**St. Thalassios the Libyan’s Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*On Love, Self-Control and Life in Accordance with the Intellect:  
Four Centuries*

# St. John of Damaskos

Discriminator of the Virtues and Vices (675 – 749 A.D.)

Little to nothing is known about St. John of Damaskos life. And there are so many attributions to other Philokalian writers in the work 'On the Virtues and Vices' that it remains uncertain if St. John of Damaskos is actually the writer of it. References to works done by St. Athanasios of Alexandria, St. Ephrem the Syrian, St. Mark the Ascetic, St. John Klimakos, St. Evagrius the Solitary, St. Maximos the Confessor, St. Ephrem and St. John the Solitary are scattered throughout the short work.

In the words of St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain, the translator of the work, this treatise is a "touchstone, discriminating with exactness between the tried and tested gold of the virtues and the copper alloy of the vices," and it appears that the writer's use of the teachings of the many ascetics who came before him is given credit, in part, for this great achievement.

## **St. John of Damaskos Classification of the Eight Passions**

St. John of Damaskos utilized St. Evagrius the Solitary's classification of the eight evil thoughts in his own assessment of virtue and vice. He states, "You should also learn to distinguish the impassioned thoughts that promote every sin. The thoughts that encompass all evil are eight in number: those of gluttony, unchastity, avarice, anger, dejection, listlessness, self-esteem and pride. It does not lie within our power to decide whether or not these eight thoughts are going to arise and disturb us. But to dwell on them or not to dwell on them, to excite the passions or not to excite them, does lie within our power.

In this connection, we should distinguish between seven different terms: provocation, coupling, wrestling, passion, assent (which comes very close to performance), actualization and captivity.”

### **St. John of Damaskos Method of Distinguishing the Eight Passions**

“These eight passions should be destroyed as follows: gluttony by self-control; unchastity by desire for God and longing for the blessings held in store; avarice by compassion for the poor; anger by goodwill and love for all men; worldly dejection by spiritual joy; listlessness by patience, perseverance and offering thanks to God; self-esteem by doing good in secret and by praying constantly with a contrite heart; and pride by not judging or despising anyone in the manner of the boastful Pharisee (cf. Luke 18: 11-12), and by considering oneself the least of all men. When the intellect has been freed in this way from the passions we have described and been raised up to God, it will henceforth live the life of blessedness, receiving the pledge of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:22). And when it departs this life, dispassionate and full of true knowledge, it will stand before the light of the Holy Trinity and with the divine angels will shine in glory through all eternity.

### **St. John of Damaskos on the Effort Required to Attain Virtue**

“Virtue, however, can only be attained by unremitting effort. This means that we struggle all our life to pay close practical attention to such things as acts of compassion, self-control, prayer, love and the other general degree.”



### **St. John of Damaskos Unique Words on the Importance of Understanding the Seriousness of the Passions of the Soul vs. the Passions of the Body**

“There is something else you must know if you really want to attain virtue and avoid sin. Just as the soul is incomparably better than the body and in many major respects altogether more excellent and precious, so the virtues of the soul are infinitely superior to the virtues of the body. This is especially true of those virtues which imitate God and bear His name. Conversely, the vices of the soul are much worse than the passions of the body, both in the actions they produce and in the punishments they incur. I do not know why, but most people overlook this fact. They treat drunkenness, unchastity, adultery, theft and all such vices with great concern, avoiding them or punishing them as something whose very appearance is loathsome to most men. But the passions of the soul are much worse and much more serious than bodily passions. For they degrade men to the level of demons and lead them, insensible as they are, to the eternal punishment reserved for all who obstinately cling to such vices. These passions of the soul are envy, rancor, malice, insensitivity, avarice – which according to the apostle is the root of all evil (cf. 1 Timothy 6:20) – and all vices of a similar nature.”

### **St. John of Damaskos Conclusions Explaining the True Nature of Man Being Made in the Image and Likeness of God**

“As a golden seal to this plain homily, we will add a brief account of the way in which what is most precious of all that God has created – the noetic and intelligent creature, man – has been made, along among created beings, in God’s image and likeness (cf. Genesis 1:26). First every man is said to be made in the image of God as regards the

dignity of his intellect and soul – as regards, that is to say, the quality in man that cannot be scrutinized or observed, is immortal and endowed with free will, and in virtue of which he rules, begets and instructs . . . Every man possesses that which is according to the image of God, ‘for the gifts of God are irrevocable.’ (cf. Romans 11:29) But only a few – those who are virtuous and holy, and have imitated the goodness of God to the limit of human powers – possess that which is according to the likeness of God. May we too be found worthy of His sublime compassion, having conformed ourselves to Him through good actions and become imitators of all who have ever been faithful servants of Christ.”

### **St. John of Damaskos Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*On the Virtues and the Vices*

# Abba Philimon

The Mysterious Abbott (7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.)

Abba Philimon has two distinctions made about him in the Philokalia. Firstly, the only work attributed to him is a discourse on his life and teachings which were included primarily because of the importance of the guidance given on meditation and inner watchfulness. Secondly, it is in 'The Discourse on Abba Philimon' wherein the first mention appears to be made regarding the traditional form of the Jesus Prayer as it has since been passed down through the ages: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have Mercy on us Sinners."

Abba Philimon was an Anchorite who is known to have lived in a cave close to a place called 'the Lavra' in the Roman Empire. He was known for his absolute insistence on the fact that no one should come near or approach him for it would disturb his constant concentration.

Abba Philimon, in a teaching given to a disciple named Paulinos said that it was impossible "to conform to God without complete stillness; how stillness gives birth to ascetic effort, ascetic effort to tears, tears to awe, awe to humility, humility to foresight, foresight to love; and how love restores the soul to health and makes it dispassionate." It is in this state of dispassion, according to Abba Philimon that a soul can find itself intensely close to God.

## **Abba Philimon as a Profound Ascetic**

Abba Philimon reprimanded his disciples harshly in his ascetic discipline stating that even idle words or frivolous

speech can be the cause of a soul forgetting God. Abba Philimon instructed, "Great struggle and awe are needed to guard the soul. You have to divorce yourself from the whole world and sunder your soul's affection for the body. You have to become citiless, homeless, possessionless, free from avarice, from worldly concerns and society, humble, compassionate, good, gentle, still, ready to receive in your heart the stamp of divine knowledge. You cannot write on wax unless you have first expunged the letters written on it."

### **Abba Philimon on the Indwelling Mystical Knowledge Given to a Soul Enraptured by Stillness**

"It is only after we have guarded ourselves rigorously, endured bodily suffering and purified the soul, that God comes to dwell in our hearts, making it possible for us to fulfil His commandments without going astray. He Himself will then teach us how to hold fast to His laws, sending forth His own energies, like rays of the sun, through the grace of the Spirit implanted in us. By way of trials and sufferings we must purify the divine image in us in accordance with which we possess intelligence and are able to receive understanding and the likeness to God; for it is by reconfiguring our senses in the furnace of our trials that we free them from all defilement and assume our royal dignity. God created human nature a partaker of every divine blessing, able to contemplate spiritually the angelic choirs, the splendor of the dominions, the spiritual powers, principalities and authorities, the unapproachable light, and the refulgent glory.

Abba Philimon goes on to state the importance of being constantly aware of the danger of pride in the spiritual path. When a virtue is attained, a soul must be careful

about becoming prideful in that achievement or thinking itself above others who have not achieved this of yet. Because pride can seep back in and take away the very gifts given in the holy contemplation by a simple loss of humility as the soul moves closer to each new virtue.

Another of his great admonishments concerns the abstaining from idle talk or frivolous speech, which Abba Philimon considers to be among the most important distractions to avoid in seeking to anchor the soul “in the harbor of dispassion.”

In conclusion, Abba Philimon said, “For what longing of the soul is as unbearably strong as that which God promotes in it when it is purged of every vice and sincerely declares: ‘I am wounded by love,’ (Song of Songs 5:8 LXX). The radiance of divine beauty is wholly inexpressible: words cannot describe it nor the ear grasp it. To compare the true light to the rays of the morning star or the brightness of the moon or the light of the sun is to fail totally to do justice to its glory and is as inadequate as comparing a pitch-black moonless night to the clearest of noons.”

### **Abba Philimon’s Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*Discourse on Abba Philimon*

# St. Theognostos

The Mysterious Abbott (8<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.)

Very little is known about St. Theognostos except that he was a priest and included the practice of the daily Divine Liturgy in his one remaining piece of writing.

## **St. Theognostos on Maintaining Inner Virtue**

“‘Watch yourself attentively,’ it is said (cf. Exodus 23:21). Always offer the sacrifice first of all on behalf of your own sins: then if, because of your weakness, some defilement exists in you already or now enters into you, it will be consumed by the divine fire. In this way, as a chosen vessel, serviceable, pure and worthy of such a sacrifice, you will have power to change wooden or clay vessels into silver or gold, provided that you have intimate communion with God and He hears your prayers. For where God hears and responds there is nothing to hinder a change from one thing to another.”

## **St. Theognostos on Divine Vocation**

St. Theognostos said the following words apparently in reference to those called to the Holy Priesthood, but they pertain to any of us called to a unique vocation in serving the Lord and we would do well to heed his words. “Ponder deeply on the angelic honour of which you have been found worthy and, whatever the rank to which you have been called, strive through virtue and purity to keep yourself unsullied. For you know from what height Lucifer fell on account of his pride. Do not dream up great ideas about yourself and suffer the same fate. Regard yourself as dust and ashes (cf. Genesis 18:27), or as refuse, or as some

cur-like creature; and lament continuously, for it is only on account of God's inexpressible compassion and kindness that you are permitted to handle the holy things at the celebration of the dread mysteries, and so are called to communion and kinship with Him."

### **St. Theognostos Tells the Story of a False Monk/Priest**

"There was once a monk-priest who had a reputation for piety and was held in honour by many on account of his outward behavior, though within he was licentious and defiled. One day he was celebrating the Divine Liturgy and, on reaching the cherubic hymn, he had bent his head as usual before the holy table and was reading the prayer, 'No one is worthy . . . ,' when he suddenly died, his soul having left him in that position."

### **St. Theognostos on Dispassion**

"Even though you have successfully practiced all the virtues, do not assume that you have attained dispassion and can dwell in the world without anxiety; for your soul may still bear within it the imprint of the passions, and so you will have difficulties when you die. But, guided always by fear, keep careful watch over your mutable and ever-changing nature, and shun the causes of passion. For changeless dispassion in its highest form is found only in those who have attained perfect love, have been lifted above sensory things through unceasing contemplating, and have transcended the body through humility. The flame of the passions no longer touches them: it has been cut off by the Lord (cf. Psalm 29:7), since the nature of such people has already been transmuted into incorruptibility."

### **St. Theognostos on the Mystery and Secret of God**

“Once more, I shall tell you something strange at which you are not to be startled. A mystery is accomplished secretly between the soul and God in the higher reaches of perfect purity, love and faith. When a man is completely reconciled to God he is united with Him through unceasing prayer and contemplation. Such was Elijah’s state when he closed the heavens . . . In such a state Moses divided the sea . . . In such a state Jonah was saved from the whale and the deep. For the person found worthy of this mystery compels our most compassionate God to do whatever he wants. Even when still in the flesh, he has passed beyond the limits of corruption and mortality, and he awaits death as if it were an everyday sleep that pleausurably brings him to the fulfillment of his hopes.”

**St. Theognostos’s Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*On the Practice of the Virtues, Contemplation and the Priesthood*



# St. Philotheos of Sinai

Saint of Spiritual Sobriety (9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.)

A monk of Mount Sinai, St. Philotheos of Sinai's life has faded into history as the river fades into the sea. Little is known about him sans the one remaining work associated with his name, 'Forty Texts on Watchfulness.'

Commentators on this work state that they are useful for the simplistic representation and definition given of vital concepts in ascetical theology. In St. Philotheos of Sinai's writing, he clearly delineates his view that Spiritual Sobriety can only be achieved if a soul guards the intellect and practices inner attentiveness.

## **St. Philotheos of Sinai on Spiritual or Noetic Warfare**

"When engaged in noetic warfare we should therefore do all we can to choose some spiritual practice from divine Scripture and apply it to our intellect like a healing ointment. From dawn we should stand bravely and unflinchingly at the gate of the heart, with true remembrance of God and unceasing prayer of Jesus Christ in the soul; and, keeping watch with the intellect, we should . . . destroy hostile thoughts at their first appearance."

## **St. Philotheos of Sinai on Still Intelligence**

"It is very rare indeed to find people whose intelligence is in a state of stillness. Indeed, such a state is only to be found in those who through their whole manner of life strive to attract divine grace and blessing to themselves. If, then, we seek - by guarding our intellect and by inner

watchfulness – to engage in the noetic work that is the true philosophy in Christ, we must begin by exercising self-control with regard to our food, eating and drinking as little as possible. Watchfulness may fittingly be called a path leading both to the kingdom within us and to that which is to be; while noetic work, which trains and purifies the intellect and changes it from an impassioned state to a state of dispassion, is like a window full of light through which God looks, revealing Himself to the intellect.”

### **St. Philotheos of Sinai on Jesus Christ**

“The blessed remembrance of God – which is the very presence of Jesus – with a heart full of wrath and a saving animosity against the demons, dissolves all trickeries of thought, plots, argumentation, fantasies, obscure conjectures and, in short, everything with which the destroyer arms himself and which he insolently deploys in his attempt to swallow our souls. When Jesus is invoked, He promptly burns up everything. For our salvation lies in Christ Jesus alone. The Saviour Himself made this clear when He said: ‘Without Me you can do nothing’ (John 15:5).”

### **St. Philotheos of Sinai on the Remembrance of Death**

Finally, St. Philotheos of Sinai makes clear that watchfulness can be maintained by a remembrance of death, as can many virtues. “Vivid mindfulness of death embraces many virtues. It begets grief; it promotes the exercise of self-control in all things; it is a reminder of hell; it is the mother of prayer and tears; it induces guarding of the heart and detachment from material things; it is a

source of attentiveness and discrimination. These in their turn produce the twofold fear of God.”

**St. Philotheos of Sinai’s Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*Forty Texts on Watchfulness*

# Ilias the Presbyter

Also Called 'Ekdikos' (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.)

Ilias the Presbyter was also called 'Ekdikos' which is a designation given to a judge attached to the ecclesiastical court. It is assumed that Ilias the Presbyter was a lawyer before becoming a monk and subsequently a priest.

There are four parts to the 'Gnostic Anthology' consisting of these subjects: 1.) Moral Teaching, 2.) Prayer, 3.) Spiritual Contemplation and 4.) Practice of the Virtues. Commentators on Ilias the Presbyter's work have stated that his work is "highly concentrated" and that the deeply meant words can only be fathomed if read with great focus.

"Few other authors have been able," St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain says of Ilias the Presbyter's great work, "in so short a space, to provide such a comprehensive guide to the spiritual way."

## **Ilias the Presbyter on Moral Teaching**

"Although moral judgment is by nature indivisible, there are none the less different degrees of it. One person may be given more of it, another less, so that practical virtue, having grown with the help of the principal virtues, may bring to fruition in each person the goodness of which he is capable. But most people fail to a greater or lesser degree to practice the virtues, and the degree of moral judgment granted to them varies accordingly."

## **Ilias the Presbyter on Prayer**

“Prayer deserts you if you give attention to thoughts within and to conversations without. But if you largely ignore both in order to concentrate on it, it will return to you.”

“He who is distracted during prayer stands outside the first veil. He who undistractedly offers the single-phrased Jesus Prayer is within the veil. But he alone has glimpsed the holy of holies who, with his natural thoughts at rest, contemplates that which transcends every intellect, and who has in this way been granted to some extent a vision of the divine light.”

### **Ilias the Presbyter on Spiritual Contemplation**

“When the ship of sinfulness is overwhelmed by the flood of tears, evil thoughts will react like people drowning in the waves and trying to grasp hold of something so as to keep afloat. Thoughts gather about the soul according to its underlying quality: either they are like pirates and try to sink it, or they are like oarsmen and try to help it when it is in danger. The first tow it out into the open sea of sinful thoughts; the second steer it back to the nearest calm shore they can find.”

“The quality of the grain is usually evident in the ear of corn; similarly, the purity of contemplation is usually evident in prayer. The grain is surrounded by a spear-like sheath in order to prevent the birds from eating it; contemplation is armed with spiritual thoughts through which to destroy the temptations that attack it. Through the practice of the virtues the outward aspects of the soul become like the silver-coated wings of a dove. Through contemplation its inward and intelligible aspects become golden. But the soul that has not in this way regained its

beauty cannot soar aloft and come to rest in the abode of the blessed.”

### **Ilias the Presbyter on the Practice of the Virtues**

“Ascetic practice consists not merely in managing to do what is right, but also in doing it rightly: the doer must concern himself with timelines and congruity. To contemplate is to perceive not only the existing state of corporeal realities but also the ultimate goal of their inner principles. Ascetic practice cannot be consolidated without contemplation, and contemplation cannot be genuine without ascetic practice. For practice must be based on intelligence, and contemplation on practice. In this way evil will be powerless to disrupt practice, and contemplation will be prolific in acts of goodness.”

### **A Summary of Ilias the Presbyter’s Teachings**

“When through continuous prayer the words of the psalms are brought down into the heart, then the heart like good soil begins to produce by itself various flowers: roses, the vision of incorporeal realities; lilies, the luminosity of corporeal realities; and violets, the many judgments of God, hard to understand. A flame gives light so long as it is wedded to matter. But the soul becomes God’s shrine only when free from matter. The flame rises up so long as it has something to burn on; the soul is raised upward until it is consummated in divine love.”

### **Ilias the Presbyter’s Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*Gnomic Anthology*

# Theophanis the Monk

The Ascetic Poet of Prosaic Wisdom (Unknown)

There are no records of anything regarding the life of Theophanis the Monk except for the beautiful work which remains in his name, 'The Ladder of Divine Graces, (which experience has made known to those inspired by God).'

A prosaic incursion into the depths of the spiritual life, 'The Ladder of Divine Graces' clearly states the most simplistic and yet deeply felt aspects of the spiritual life in just a very few words.

## **Theophanis the Monk's 'Ladder of Divine Graces'**

"The first step is that of purest prayer.  
 From this there comes a warmth of heart,  
 And then a strange, holy energy,  
 Then tears wrung from the heart, God-given.  
 Then peace from thoughts of every kind.  
 From this arises purging of the intellect,  
 And next the vision of heavenly mysteries.  
 Unheard-of light is born from this ineffably,  
 And thence, beyond all telling, the heart's illumination.  
 Last comes - a step that has no limit  
 Though compassed in a single line-  
 Perfection that is endless.  
 The ladder's lowest step  
 Prescribes pure prayer alone.  
 But prayer has many forms:  
 My discourse would be long  
 Were I now to speak of them:  
 And, friends, know that always  
 Experience teaches one, not words.

A ladder rising wondrously to heaven's vault:  
 Ten steps that strangely vivify the soul.  
 Ten steps that herald the soul's life.  
 A saint inspired by God has said:  
 Do not deceive yourself with idle hopes  
 That in the world to come you will find life  
 If you have not tried to find it in this present world.  
 Ten steps: a wisdom born of God.  
 Ten steps: fruit of all the books.  
 Ten steps that point towards perfection.  
 Ten steps that lead one up to heaven.  
 Ten steps through which a man knows God.  
 The ladder may seem short indeed,  
 But if your heart can inwardly experience it  
 You will find a wealth the world cannot contain,  
 A god-like fountain flowing with unheard-of-life.  
 This ten-graced ladder is the best of masters,  
 Clearly teaching each to know its stages.  
 If when you behold it  
 You think you stand securely on it,  
 Ask yourself on which step you stand,  
 So that we, the indolent, may also profit.  
 My friend, if you want to learn about all this,  
 Detach yourself from everything,  
 From what is senseless, from what seems intelligent.  
 Without detachment nothing can be learnt.  
 Experience alone can teach these things, not talk.  
 Even if these words once said  
 By one of God's elect strike harshly,  
 I repeat them to remind you:  
 He who has no foothold on this ladder,  
 Who does not ponder always on these things,  
 When he comes to die will know  
 Terrible fear, terrible dread,  
 Will be full of boundless panic.



My lines end on a note of terror.  
 Yet it is good that this is so:  
 Those who are hard of heart – myself the first –  
 Are led to repentance, led to a holy life,  
 Less by the lure of blessings promised  
 Than by fearful warnings that inspire dread.  
 ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear.’  
 You who have written this, hear, then, and take note:  
 Void of all these graces,  
 How have you dared to write such things?  
 How do you not shudder to expound them?  
 Have you not heard what Uzzah suffered  
 When he tried to stop God’s ark from falling?  
 Do not think that I speak as one who teaches:  
 I speak as one whose words condemn himself,  
 Knowing the rewards awaiting those who strive,  
 Knowing my utter fruitlessness.”

**Theophanis the Monk’s Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*The Ladder of Divine Graces*

# St. Peter of Damaskos

Monk of the Monastic Vocation (12<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.)

St. Peter of Damaskos is the second most prolific writer of the *Philokalia*, second to St. Maximos the Confessor. His writings are much more systematic than others of the *Philokalia*, categorizing his words of guidance very carefully under many headings and titles.

His readers considered him eloquent in practical advice regarding the spiritual life and although his works were obviously somewhat directed towards monks, St. Peter of Damaskos makes it very clear that he believes that the spiritual life is available to people from all walks of life.

St. Peter of Damaskos prescribes as his preferred method of prayer that which he called imageless prayer which involves quieting the mind and clearing it of all ideas, thoughts and illusions. By so doing, the soul creates fertile ground for God to fill with truths rather than imaginative meanderings of the mind.

## **St. Peter of Damaskos on Humility for the Sake of God**

“Nothing done in humility for the sake of God is bad. But things and pursuits differ. Everything not strictly necessary is a hindrance to salvation - everything, that is to say, that does not contribute to the soul’s salvation or to the body’s life. For it is not food, but gluttony, that is bad; not money, but attachment to it; not speech, but idle talk; not the world’s delights, but dissipation; not love of one’s family, but the neglect of God that such love may produce; not the clothes worn only for covering and protection from cold and heat, but those that are excessive and costly; not

the houses that also protect us from heat and cold, as well as from anything human or animal that might harm us, but houses with two or three floors, large and expensive; not owning something, but owning it when it has no vital use for us; not the possession of books for some purpose other than spiritual reading; not friendship, but the having of friends who are of no benefit to one's soul; not woman, but unchastity; not wealth, but avarice; not wine, but drunkenness; not anger used in accordance with nature for the chastisement of sin, but its use against one's fellow men."

### **St. Peter of Damaskos on Spiritual Joy**

"Slowly the man emerges from the tears of distress and from the passions, and enters fully into the state of spiritual joy. Through the things that bring him pleasure, he is made humble and grateful; through trials and temptations his hope in the world to come is consolidated; in both he rejoices, and naturally and spontaneously he loves God and all men as his benefactors. He finds nothing in the whole of creation that can harm him. Illumined by the knowledge of God he rejoices in the Lord on account of all the thing that He has created, marveling at the care He shows for His creatures. The person who has attained spiritual knowledge not only marvels at visible things, but also is astounded by his perception of many essential things invisible to those who lack experience of this knowledge. Thus he looks with wonder not only on the light of day, but also at the night. For the night is a benediction to all."

### **St. Peter of Damaskos on Repentance**

“As you lie in bed, repent of what you say in your heart’ (Psalm 4: 4 LXX), that is, repent in the stillness of the night, remembering the lapses that occurred in the confusion of the day and disciplining yourself in hymns and spiritual songs (cf. Colossians 3:16) – in other words, teaching yourself to persist in prayer and psalmody through attentive meditation on what you read. . For the practice of the moral virtues is effectuated by meditating on what has happened during the day, so that during the stillness of the night we can become aware of the sins we have committed and can grieve over them.”

### **St. Peter of Damaskos on the Prophets, Saints, Mystics and Sages**

“Such, then, were the souls of the prophets. They loved God and because of their knowledge of God, they were eager to suffer for the sake of His will. This is natural; for he who is familiar with a certain path or a certain skill pursues it readily and easily, with assurance explaining to others the direction of the path or the secrets and finer points of the craft; and he often does this even though he is young in years and lacks formal training, while those to whom he is explaining things may be advanced in years and wise in other matters. For the prophets, apostles and martyrs did not gain their knowledge of God and their wisdom at second hand, as we have gained ours. On the contrary, they poured out their blood and received the Spirit, exemplifying the words of the fathers: ‘Spill your blood and receive the Spirit’ (*Apophthegmata*, Longinus). Thus the fathers suffered martyrdom, not in an outward sense, but in their conscience: instead of undergoing physical death they showed themselves willing to die, and in this way their intellect proved victorious over all earthly desires and reigns in Christ Jesus our Lord. To Him be

glory and dominion, honour and worship, now and always throughout the ages. Amen.”

### **St. Peter of Damaskos on Sin**

Who cannot relate to these words of St. Peter of Damaskos on sin? “How many tears would I like to shed whenever I gain even a partial glimpse of myself! If I do not sin, I become elated with pride; while if I sin and am able to realize it, in my dismay I lose heart and begin to despair. If I take refuge in hope, again I become arrogant. If I weep, it feeds my presumption; If I do not weep, the passions visit me again. My life is death, yet death seems even worse because of my fear of punishment. My prayer proves a source of temptation to me, and my inattention a cause of disaster. ‘He that increases knowledge increases sorrow,’ says Solomon (Ecclesiasticus 1:18). I am at a loss, beside myself, and do not know what to do. And should I know, and then not do it, my knowledge would contribute to my condemnation. Alas, what shall I choose? In my ignorance all things seem contradictory and I cannot reconcile them. I do not find the virtue and wisdom hidden in my trials, since I do not endure these trials with patience. I flee from stillness because of my evil thoughts, and so I find myself beset by the passions that tempt me through the senses. I want to fast and to keep vigil, but am impeded by presumption and laxity. I eat and sleep lavishly, and sin without knowing it. I withdraw myself from everything and flee out of fear of sin, but listlessness is again my undoing.” St. Peter of Damaskos acknowledges, however, that despite the serious fallen nature of man, there is redemption. “Yet I realize that many, because they had a firm faith, received crowns of victory after going through battles and trials like these. It was because of their faith

that they were granted fear of God; and through this fear they were enabled to practice the other virtues.”

**St. Peter of Damaskos's Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*A Treasury of Divine Knowledge, Twenty Four Discourses*

# St. Symeon Metaphrastis

Expounder of the Makarian Homilies Regarding the  
Unseen Warfare (11<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.)

Commentaries of the work of St. Symeon Metaphrastis in expounding on the Makarian Homilies indicate that his work really sheds light upon the contrasts in the spiritual life; for instance, Satan and grace, or, the Holy Spirit and the spirit of evil. And taking this contrast further; the desire for direct experience of God versus a 'full and conscious assurance.'

## **St. Symeon Metaphrastis on Spiritual Perfection and the fall of those on the Spiritual Path**

“Love bears with all things, patiently accepts all things; love never fails’ (1 Corinthians 13:7-8). This phrase ‘never fails’ makes it clear that, unless they have been granted total deliverance from the passions through the most complete and active love of the Spirit, even those who have received spiritual gifts are still liable to falter: they are still in danger, and must struggle in fear against the attacks launched on them by the spirits of evil. St. Paul shows that not to be in danger of falling or liable to passion is such a lofty state that the tongues of angels, prophecy, all knowledge and gifts of healing are as nothing compared to it (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1-8).

## **St. Symeon Metaphrastis on the Process of Purification**

“We receive salvation by grace and as a divine gift of the Spirit. But to attain the full measure of virtue we need also to possess faith and love, and to struggle to exercise our free will with integrity. In this manner, we inherit eternal

life as a consequence of both grace and justice. We do not reach the final stage of spiritual maturity through divine power and grace alone, without ourselves making any effort; but neither on the other hand do we attain the final measure of freedom and purity as a result of our own diligence and strength alone, apart from any divine assistance. If the Lord does not build the house, it is said, and protect the city, in vain does the watchman keep awake, and in vain do the labourer and the builder work (cf. Psalm 127:1-4).

### **St. Symeon Metaphrastis Explains Christ's Desire to Vindicate our Sinful Souls**

“Let us draw near eagerly to Christ who summons us, surrendering our hearts to Him, and let us not despair of our salvation, deliberately giving ourselves over to evil. For it is a trick of the devil to lead us to despair by reminding us of our past sins. We must realize that if Christ when on earth healed and restored the blind, the paralysed and the dumb, and raised the dead that were already in a state of decomposition, how much more will He heal blindness of mind, paralysis of soul, and numbness of the dissolute heart. For He who created the body also created the soul. And if He was so bounteous and merciful to what is mortal and disintegrates, how much more compassionate and healing will He not be to the immortal soul, overpowered by the sickness of evil and ignorance, when it turn to Him and asks Him for help? For it is He who said: ‘Will not My heavenly Father vindicate those who call to Him night and day? Yes, I assure you, He will vindicate them swiftly’ (cf. Luke 18:7-8). And ‘Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you’ (Matthew 7:7); and again: ‘If he will not give to him out of friendship, yet on account of his



persistence he will get up and give him what he needs' (cf. Luke 11:8). Moreover, He came so that sinners should turn back to Him (cf. Matthew 9:13). Only let us devote ourselves to the Lord, rejecting in so far as we can our evil prepossessions; and He will not overlook us, but will be ready to offer us His help."

### **St. Symeon Metaphrastis Final Words from the Makarian Homilies on the Road to Christ**

"What is the purpose of Christ's advent? The restoration and reintegration of human nature in Him. For He restored to human nature the original dignity of Adam, and in addition bestowed on it the unutterable grace of the heavenly inheritance of the Holy Spirit. Leading it out of the prison of darkness, He showed it the way and the door to life. By traversing this way and knocking on this door we can enter the kingdom of heaven."

### **St. Symeon Metaphrastis Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*Paraphrase of the Homilies of St. Makarios of Egypt*

# St. Symeon the New Theologian

The Well Known Theologian (949 – 1022 A.D.)

St. Symeon the New Theologian is said to illustrate within his own life the finer points of spiritual fatherhood within Eastern Mystical Theology.

St. Symeon was born of the lower nobility in Asia Minor. When he was a young man of fourteen years, he was sent to live with an Uncle in Constantinople. Up until that time, it was expected that he might join the Imperial Service as his life's work. But it was after he met a monk of the same name; St. Symeon known as the Devout and Pious, that his path in life completely changed.

Entering the monastery at Studios, St. Symeon the Theologian was quickly put under the tutelage of a monk ironically named St. Symeon the Studite, whose memorable phrase 'Love is greater than prayer' became the hallmark of his teaching to the young St. Symeon the Theologian.

## **St. Symeon the Theologian's Teachings on Faith**

St. Symeon the Theologian expressed his understanding of faith very simply, "I did no more than believe and the Lord accepted me (cf. Psalm 116:6, 10; 27:10). Many things stand in the way of our acquiring humility, but there is nothing that prevents us from having faith."

## **St. Symeon the Theologian on Proper Humility**

“When the demons have done all they can to shake our resolve to live a spiritual life and to hinder us from carrying it out, and have failed in their efforts, they enter pious hypocrites and through them try to obstruct us. First, as if moved by love and compassion, they exhort us to give our bodies some relaxation, on the grounds that otherwise we will become physically exhausted and listless. Then they invite us to join in useless discussions, making us waste whole days in them. If we pay attention to these hypocrites and model ourselves on them, the demons change tactics, mocking us for falling in this way; but if we take no notice of their suggestions, and hold ourselves aloof from all, recollected and reserved, they are consumed with jealousy and do everything they can until they have drive us from the monastery. Arrogance cannot bear to see itself scorned and humility held in honour.”

### **St. Symeon the Theologian on Repentance**

“Through repentance the filth of our foul actions is washed away. After this, we participate in the Holy Spirit, not automatically, but according to the faith, humility and inner disposition of repentance in which our whole soul is engaged . . . For this reason it is good to repent each day, in accordance with the commandment that tells us to do this; for the words, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near.’ (Matthew 3:3), indicate that the act of repentance is unending.”

### **St. Symeon the Theologian on the Proper Good of Suffering**

“You should be ready each day to receive all kinds of afflictions regarding them as your release from many sins; and you should thank God for them. Through them you

may acquire a close and unimpeachable communion with God, in accordance with St. Paul's words 'Afflictions produce patient endurance; patient endurance, strength of character; and strength of character, hope; and hope does not disappoint' (Romans 5:3-5). For the things that 'the eye has not seen and the ear has not hear, and man's heart has not grasped' (1 Corinthians 2:9) - these things belong, according to the infallible promise, to those who, with the help of God's grace, patiently endure affliction. Without God's grace we can of course do nothing."

### **St. Symeon the Theologian on the Three Methods of Prayer**

St. Symeon the Theologian on the First Method, "When a person stands at prayer, he raises hands, eyes and intellect heavenwards, and fills his intellect with divine thoughts, with images of celestial beauty, of the angelic hosts, of the abodes of the righteous. In brief, at the time of prayer he assembles in his intellect all that he has heard from Holy Scripture and so rouses his soul to divine longing as he gazes towards heaven, and sometimes he sheds tears."

St. Symeon the Theologian on the Second Method, "A person withdraws his intellect from sensory things and concentrates it in himself, guards his senses, and collects all his thoughts; and he advances oblivious of the vanities of this world. Sometimes he examines his thoughts, sometimes pays attention to the words of the prayer he is addressing to God, and sometimes drags back his thoughts when they have been taken captive."

St. Symeon the Theologian on the Third Method, "The third method of prayer . . . is truly astonishing and hard to explain. For those ignorant of it, it is not only difficult to

understand but virtually incredible, and there are very few to be found who practice it. It seems to me that it has deserted us along with the virtue of obedience. For it is the love of obedience that delivers us from entanglement with this evil world . . . You must first practice exact obedience . . . and so act always with a pure conscience; for without obedience it is impossible for your conscience to be pure. And you must keep your conscience pure in three respects; first, with respect to God; second, with respect to your spiritual father; and third, with respect to other people and to material things . . . Having cleared the ground and indicated in a preliminary way the true character of attentiveness, let us now speak clearly and concisely about its characteristics. True and unerring attentiveness and prayer mean that the intellect keeps watch over the heart while it prays; I should always be on patrol within the heart, and from within – from the depths of the heart – it should offer up its prayers to God. Once it has tasted within the heart that the Lord is bountiful (cf. Psalms 34:8. LXX), then the intellect will have no desire to leave the heart, and it will repeat the words of the Apostle Peter, ‘It is good for us to be here’ (Matthew 17:4).”

**St. Symeon the Theologian’s Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*On Faith, One Hundred and Fifty-Three Practical and Theological Texts, The Three Methods of Prayer*

# Nikitas Stithatos

Stithatos the Courageous (11<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.)

Nikitas Stithatos gained his courageous reputation when he spoke openly and vigorously against the affairs of Emperor Constantine IX who had a mistress and this was well-known and had caused an open scandal.

Nikitas Stithatos's writings are filled with images of divine light and divine darkness. In a falling away from some of the other Philokalian writers, Nikitas Stithatos writes that human nature and the material world are both goods which bring us into the presence of God. He considers the flesh a path to achieve higher states of spirituality and a divine ascent to the heavenly realms.

This is an interesting contrast to the total ascetical view of the remaining writers of the Philokalia. In their writings, they stress the importance of overcoming the flesh in order to attain the divine. Not so, Nikitas Stithatos.

## **Nikitas Stithatos on the Divine Life**

“Through the intellect, beholder of the light of divine life, we receive knowledge of God’s hidden mysteries. Through the soul’s faculty of judgment we winnow in the light of this knowledge the thoughts that arise within the heart, distinguishing the good from the bad. Through the discrimination of the intelligence we savour our conceptual images. Those that spring from a bitter root we transform into sweet nourishment for the soul, or welse we reject them entirely; those that spring from a virtuous and vigorous stock we accept. In this way we take every thought captive and make it obey Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians

10:5). Through the understanding of the intellect we smell the spiritual unguent of the grace of the Holy Spirit, our hearts filled with joy and gladness. Through the watchfulness of the heart we consciously perceive the Spirit, who refreshes the flame of our desire for supernal blessings and warms our spiritual powers, numbed as they have been by the frost of the passions.”

### **Nikitas Stithatos on the Five Senses of the Soul**

“Just as in the body there are five senses – sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch – so in the soul there are five senses: intellect, reason, noetic perception, intuitive knowledge, and cognitive insight. These are united in three psychic activities: intellection, ratiocination, and noetic perception. By means of intellection we apprehend spiritual intentions, by means of ratiocination we interpret them, and through noetic perception we grasp the images of divine insight and spiritual knowledge.”

### **Nikitas Stithatos on Intention and Purity of Thoughts**

“If your intellect clearly distinguishes the intentions of the thoughts and in its purity gives its assent only to those that are divine; if your reason can interpret the physical movements of the whole of visible creation – that is to say, can clearly elucidate the inner essences of things; if noetically you can perceive heavenly wisdom and spiritual knowledge; then through the light of the Sun of righteousness you have transcended all sense-perception and have attained what lies beyond it, and you savour the delight of things unseen.”

### **Nikitas Stithatos on the Vehemence of Our Trials and Tribulations**

“The Vehemence of our trials and temptations depends upon the degree to which we are debilitated by the passions and infected by sin; and the bitter cup of God’s judgment varies accordingly. If the nature of the sin within us is such that it is easily treated and cured – if, that is to say, it consists of thoughts that are self-indulgent or worldly – then the Healer of our souls in His compassion adds but a mild dose of wormwood to the cup of trial and temptation He administers, since these are merely human ailments by which we are afflicted. But if the sin is deep seated and hard to cure – a letal infection of pretentious arrogant thoughts – then in the keenness of His wrath He gives us the cup undiluted, so that, dissolved and refined in the fire of successive trials and the humility they induce, the sickness may be removed from our soul and we may wash away our brackish thoughts with tears, thus presenting ourselves pure in the light of humility to our Healer.”

### **Nikitas Stithatos on the Practice of the Virtues**

“Blessed in my eyes is the man who, changed through the practice of the virtues, transcends the encompassing walls of the passion-embroiled state and rises on the wings of dispassion – wings silver-toned with divine knowledge (cf. Psalm 68:13)- to the spiritual sphere in which he contemplates the essences of created things, and who from there enters the divine darkness of theology where in the life of blessedness he ceases from all outward labours and reposes in God. For he has become a terrestrial angel and a celestial man; he has glorified God in himself, and God will glorify him (cf. John 13:31-32).”

### **Nikitas Stithatos’ Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**



*On the Practice of the Virtues: One Hundred Texts, On the Inner Nature of Things and on the Purification of the Intellect: One Hundred Texts, On Spiritual Knowledge, Love and the Perfection of Living: One Hundred Texts*

# Theoliptos, Metropolitan of Philadelphia

Visionary of the Truth of God's Mysteries (1250 - 1322  
A.D.)

Theoliptos was a prolific writer despite the very small amount of writing attributed to him in the Philokalia. One of the unique things about Theoliptos, as a writer of the Philokalia, is that he was originally married at an early age, but later separated and became a monk.

His life was filled with major ups and downs, including imprisonment because of his open opposition during the Council of Lyons as 1274 A.D. to the unification of the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic fold. Ironically, years later he was not only exonerated but promoted to the see of Philadelphia. It was in 1284 A.D. that he became the Metropolitan under which title he served for almost forty years.

Theoliptos was not only venerated as a wise and prudent spiritual father, but a heroic leader in the battle against the Turks. Theoliptos taught a great deal in his writings about the invocation of the name of Jesus Christ in prayer, and the need to overcome excessive imagery in prayer.

## **Theoliptos, Metropolitan of Philadelphia on Monasticism**

“The monastic profession is a lofty and fruitful tree whose root is detachment from all corporeal things, whose branches are freedom from passionate craving and total alienation from what you have renounced, and whose fruit

is the acquisition of virtue, a deifying love, and the uninterrupted joy that results from these two things; for, as St. Paul says, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace and the other things he mentions (cf. Galatians 5:22)."

### **Theoliptos, Metropolitan of Philadelphia on the Senses**

"To give free reign to the senses is to shackle the soul, to hackle the senses is to liberate it. When the sun sets, night comes; when Christ leaves the soul, the darkness of the passions envelops it and incorporeal predators tear it asunder. When the visible sun rises, animals retreat into their lairs; when Christ rises in the heaven of the praying mind, worldly preoccupations and proclivities abscond, and the intellect goes forth to its labour - that is, to meditate on the divine - until the evening (cf. Psalms 104: 19-23). Not that the intellect limits its fulfillment of the spiritual law to any period of time or performs it according to some measure; on the contrary, it continues to fulfil it until it reaches the term of this present life and the soul departs from the body. That is what is meant in the Psalms when it is said, 'How I have loved Thy law, O Lord; it is my meditation all the day long' (Psalms 119:97) - where 'day' means the whole course of one's present life. Suspend, then, your gossip with the outer world and fight against the thoughts within until you find the abode of pure prayer and Christ's dwelling-place. Thus you will be illumined and mellowed by His knowledge and His presence, enabled to experience tribulation for His sake as Joy and to shun worldly pleasure as you would bitter poison."

### **Theoliptos, Metropolitan of Philadelphia on Mindfulness of God**

“In order to clarify the nature of the vision born in the intellect as a result of the mindfulness of God and the status of the mind during pure prayer, I shall use the analogy of the bodily eye and tongue. What the pupil is to the eye and utterance is to the tongue, mindfulness is to the intellect and prayer is to the mind. Just as the eye, when it receives the visual impression of an object, makes no sound, but acquires knowledge of what is seen through the experience of sight, so it is with the intellect: when through its mindfulness of God it is lovingly assimilated to Him, cleaving to Him experientially and in the silence of direct and unalloyed intellection, it is illumined by divine light and receives a pledge of the radiance in store for it. Or again, as the tongue when it speaks reveals to the hearer the hidden disposition of the intellect, so the mind, when it repeats frequently and ardently the brief words of the prayer, reveals the soul’s petition to the all-knowing God. Persistence in prayer and unceasing contrition of heart enkindle God’s compassion for man and call down the riches of salvation; for ‘God will not despise a broken and contrite heart’ (Psalms 51:17).

**Theoliptos, Metropolitan of Philadelphia on How Continued Perseverance to the Commandments is a Weapon against Impurity**

“If you struggle to keep the commandments, persisting in the paradise of prayer and cleaving to God through continuous recollection of Him, then God will release you from the self-indulgent proclivities of the flesh, from all sensory impulsion and from all forms engraved upon your thought; and rendering you dead to the passions and to sin He will make you a participant in divine life. A sleeping person looks like one dead so far as his bodily activity is concerned, and yet he is alive thanks to the co-operation of

his soul. Similarly is you abide in the Spirit you are dead to the world and the flesh, but you live according to the spontaneity of the Spirit.”

**Theoliptos, Metropolitan of Philadelphia’s Remaining  
Written Work in the Philokalia**

*On Inner Work in Christ and the Monastic Profession, Texts*

# Nikiphoros the Monk

The Heyschast or the Antonite (1250 A.D.)

Heyschasm is a form of prayer which seeks stillness, quiet and rest while the Antonite tradition was one of peace. The ultimate goal of each of these paths was, of course, inner silence. Nikiphoros the Monk was especially known for these qualities in his life.

Interestingly, Nikiphoros the Monk began his religious journey in the Roman Catholic Church. Born in Italy, this would be a natural beginning for such a humble man. His biographer notes that he left the Roman Catholic Fold to what he felt was a lack of Orthodoxy in the faith, an unusual number of heresies running rampant. And it was then that he traveled to the Holy Mountain of Athos and became an Orthodox monk.

The monastic community in which he originally lived was not fully organized and eventually he withdrew further into the mountains becoming a truly isolated desert father. He suffered imprisonment and exile for defending his Orthodox views for two years and is believed to have died around the year 1300 A.D.

Nikiphoros the Monk focused a great deal in his writings on relieving the intellectual pursuit of religious intentions by bringing faith down into the heart. He taught techniques which used bodily functions and faculties to harness prayer and bring it to a more intensive and meaningful level.

**Nikiphoros the Monk on Attaining the Divine Illumination**

"If you ardently long to attain the wondrous divine illumination of our Saviour Jesus Christ; to experience in your heart the supracelestial fire and to be consciously reconciled with God; to dispossess yourself of worldly things in order to find and possess the treasure hidden in the field of your heart (cf. Matthew 13:44); to enkindle here and now your soul's flame and to renounce all that is only here and now; and spiritually to know and experience the kingdom of heaven within you (cf. Luke 17:21): then I will impart to you the science of eternal or heavenly life or , rather a method that will lead you , if you apply it, painlessly and without toil to the harbor of dispassion, without the danger of being deceived."

### **Nikiphoros the Monk Outlines his Methods through the Examples of the Saints**

Nikiphoros the Monk continues by entering the examples of many of the saints to demonstrate his technique.

In the life of St. Antony, he points out that through watchfulness of the heart he was able to attain clairvoyance.

In the life of St. Theodosios the Cenobiarch, he exalts his special gift of concentrating the senses which made him equally comfortable alone or in the company of crowds and of a gentle and tender disposition to all who inquired of him.

In the life of St. Arsenios, he notes his strict watchfulness and turning inward of the intellect so that he could easily rise closer to God.

In the life of St. Paul of Mount Latros, he speaks of a method that he taught to his disciples which "could expunge ingrained passion-imbued dispositions" by practicing intensive watchfulness and discipline.

In the life of St. Savvas, he points out that he taught his monks watchfulness in part by requiring them to practice aloneness in their cells.

In the life of Abba Agathon, he exalts his teaching on the guarding of the inner state as being the fruit of all ascetic practice.

In the life of Abba Mark, he notes these words from a letter he wrote to a disciple, "When, through the action of grace, zeal for true knowledge, for mindfulness of God's words and for genuine concord is diligently planted and cultivated in the heart, then the last traces of forgetfulness, ignorance and sloth are expunged from it."

In the life of St. John Klimakos, he speaks of his remarkable inner work that kept him solidly planted on the path of the spirit.

In the life of St. Isaiah the Solitary, he points out that his teachings speak to the weak man, instructing him that even if he has as yet been unable to guard his thoughts, to at least keep his body free from sin.

In the life of St. Makarios the Great, he exalts what appears to be a contradictory teaching to that of St. Isaiah, but truly is not. He exhorts his disciples to keep the body pure, but to also strive to keep the soul equally so.



In the life of St. Diadochos, he notes his instruction to dwell continually within your own heart.

In the life of St. Isaac the Syrian, he speaks to the importance of ascending the shrine within.

In the life of St. John of Karpathos, he points out the great diligence and strenuous efforts required in prayer before a soul may achieve some sense of peace in the spiritual life. The path is difficult, and it requires profound effort and discipline.

In the life of St. Symeon the New Theologian, he exalts the profound realization that attentiveness of soul cannot be achieved without fully comprehending the scriptural words, 'Without me you can do nothing' (John 15:5)."

### **Nikiphoros the Monk Brings the Examples from the Lives of the Saints Together into a Manageable Method of Prayer**

"Some of the saints have called attentiveness the guarding of the intellect; others have called it custody of the heart, or watchfulness, or noetic stillness, and others something else. All these expressions indicate one and the same thing."

"Attentiveness is a sign of true repentance. It is the soul's restoration, hatred of the world, and return to God. It is rejection of sin and recovery of virtue. It is the unreserved assurance that our sins are forgiven. It is the beginning of contemplation or, rather, its presupposition, for through it, God, desiring its presence in us, reveals Himself to the intellect. It is serenity of intellect or, rather, the repose bestowed on the soul through God's mercy. It is the

subjection of our thoughts, the palace of the mindfulness of God, the stronghold that enables us patiently to accept all that befalls. It is the ground of faith, hope and love."

"Seat yourself, then, concentrate your intellect, and lead it into the respiratory passage through which your breath passes into your heart. Put pressure on your intellect and compel it to descend with your inhaled breath into your heart . . . the intellect, once it is united with the soul, is filled with indescribable delight."

**Nikiphoros the Monk's Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart*

# St. Gregory of Sinai

The Monk of Baptism Made Manifest (Mid Fourteenth Century A.D.)

Born on the western coast of Asia Minor, St. Gregory of Sinai was taken as a prisoner by Turkish soldiers who attacked his hometown. Eventually, a ransom was paid for his release. He entered the first level of monastic life in Cyprus and transferred eventually to Sinai where he entered the fullness of the monastic profession.

Initiated into the tradition of the Jesus Prayer and Inner Watchfulness by a monk named Arsenios, St. Gregory of Sinai lived in a hermitage on Mount Athos for quite some time. Eventually, however, due to the constant onslaught of Turkish raids, he settled in Sinai.

St. Gregory of Sinai had many disciples and enjoyed the support of some powerful people including the Tsar of Bulgaria, John Alexander.

## **St. Gregory of Sinai on the Dangers of Spiritual Assumption**

“Many who practice the commandments think they are following the spiritual path. But they have not yet reached the city, and in fact remain outside it. For they travel foolishly, deviating unawares from the straight highway into side roads, not realizing how close the vices are to the path of virtue. For the true fulfillment of the commandments demands that we do neither too little nor too much but simply pursue a course acceptable to God and in accordance with His will. Otherwise we labour in vain and do not make straight the paths of the Lord (cf.

Isaiah 40:3). For in everything we do we must be clear about the goal we are pursuing.”

### **St. Gregory of Sinai on Spiritual Warfare**

“Those engaged in spiritual warfare regain their original state by practicing two commandments – obedience and fasting; for evil has infiltrated our human condition by means of their opposites. Those who keep the commandments out of obedience return to God more quickly. Others who keep them by means of fasting and prayer return more slowly. Obedience befits beginners, fasting those in the middle way, who have attained a state of spiritual enlightenment and self-mastery. To observe genuine obedience to God when practicing the commandments is something only very few can do, and proves difficult even for those who have attained a state of self-mastery.”

### **St. Gregory of Sinai on the Study of the Commandments**

“To try to discover the meaning of the commandments through study and reading without actually living in accordance with them is like mistaking the shadow of something for its reality. It is only by participating in the truth that you can share in the meaning of truth. If you search for the meaning without participating in the truth and without having been initiated into it, you will find only a besotted kind of wisdom (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:20). You will be among those whom St. Jude categorized as ‘psychic’ or worldly because they lack the Spirit (cf. Jude 19), boast as they may of their knowledge of the truth.”

### **St. Gregory of Sinai on Humility**

“Those who say or do anything without humility are like people who build in winter or without bricks and mortar. Very few acquire humility and know it through experience; and those who try to talk about it are like people measuring a bottomless pit. And I who in my blindness have formed a faint image of this great light am rash enough to say this about it: true humility does not consist in speaking humbly, or in looking humble. The humble person does not have to force himself to think humbly, nor does he keep finding fault with himself. Such conduct may provide us with an occasion for humility or constitute its outward form, but humility itself is a grace and a divine gift. The holy fathers teach that there are two kinds of humility: to regard oneself as lower than everyone else, and to ascribe all one’s achievement to God. The first is the beginning, the second the consummation.”

### **St. Gregory of Sinai on the Short Ladder of Spiritual Progress**

“The short ladder of spiritual progress – which is at the same time both small and great – has five rungs leading to perfection. The first is renunciation, the second submission to a religious way of life, the third obedience to spiritual direction, the fourth humility, and the fifth God-imbued love. Renunciation raises the prisoner from hell and sets him free from enslavement to material things. Submission is the discovery of Christ and the decision to serve Him. As Christ Himself said, ‘He who serves Me, follows Me; and where I am he who serves Me will also be’ (cf. John 12:26). And where is Christ? In heaven, enthroned at the right hand of the Father. Thus he who serves Christ must be in heaven as well, his foot placed ready to climb up; indeed, must be in heaven as well, his foot placed ready to climb up; indeed, must be in heaven as well, his foot

placed ready to climb up; indeed, must be in heaven, as well, his foot placed ready to climb up; indeed, before he even begins to ascend by his own efforts he is already raised up and ascending with Christ. Obedience, put into action through the practice of the commandments, builds a ladder out of various virtues and places them in the soul as rungs by which to ascend (cf. Psalms 84:5 - LXX). Thence the spiritual aspirant is embraced by humility, the great exalter, and is borne heavenwards and delivered over to love, the queen o the virtues. By love he is led to Christ and brought into His presence. Thus by this short ladder he who is truly obedient swiftly ascends to heaven."

### **St. Gregory of Sinai's Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*On Commandments and Doctrines, Warnings and Promises; On Thoughts, Passions and Virtues, and also on Stillness and Prayer: One Hundred Thirty Seven Texts, On the Signs of Grace and Delusion: Ten Texts, On Stillness: Fifteen Texts, On Prayer: Seven Texts*

# St. Gregory Palamas

The Triumph of Orthodoxy (1296 – 1359 A.D.)

St. Gregory Palamas has two feast days celebrated in his name on the Orthodox calendar. He was born in Constantinople to a family close to the Imperial Emperor. Like a few other Philokalian writers, he entered into a secular career before deciding to leave it all and go to Mount Athos.

Similarly to St. Gregory of Sinai, he also had to leave the Mount of Athos due to Turkish attacks. He settled finally in a cave somewhere near Veroia. He was known for refuting several heretical movements of the time. Near the end of his life in 1347 A.D., he became the Metropolitan of Thessaloniki.

His sermons were known to be filled with exhortations on ‘social righteousness.’ St. Gregory Palamas was a great defender of the poor and oppressed.

## **St. Gregory of Palamas on Grief**

“Just as this darkness derives its existence from all our various sins, so – as you will find if you examine it closely – worldly sorrowfulness is born of and dominated by all of the passions. Such sorrowfulness is thus an image and a kind of first fruit, prelude to and foretaste of the future endless grief that overwhelms those who do not choose for themselves the grief that the Lord called blessed. This grief not only brings spiritual solace and provides a foretaste of eternal joy, but it also stabilizes virtue and takes from the soul its disposition to fall into a lower state. For although you may become poor and humble yourself and strive to

live with godlike simplicity, yet if you do not acquire grief as you advance along the spiritual path you can easily be changed and readily return in thought to that which you have abandoned . . . but if you persist in your intention . . . you will give birth to this grief in yourself and will lose all tendency to regress, and will not wrongly want to return to what you have so well abandoned. For as St. Paul says, 'Godly sorrow produces in the soul a saving repentance which is not to be regretted (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10). Hence one of the fathers has said that 'grief both acts and protects.'"

"This is not the only gain that comes of grief, namely, that you virtually lose all disposition towards evil and do not regress to your former sins; it also makes former sins as though they never existed. For once you begin to grieve over them, God reckons them as unintentional, and there is no guilt in actions performed unintentionally."

### **St. Gregory of Palamas on Having Been Created in God's Image**

"To know that we have been created in God's image prevents us from deifying even the noetic world. 'Image' here refers not to the intellect, for if there were then it would constitute the divine image. Since, therefore, the intellect is what is best in us and this, even though it is in the divine image, is none the less created by God, why, then, is it difficult to understand or, rather, how is it not self-evident that the Creator of that which is noetic in us is also the Creator of everything noetic? Thus every noetic being, since it is likewise created in the image of God, is our fellow-servant, even if certain noetic beings are more honourable than us in that they possess no body and so



more closely resemble the utterly bodiless and uncreated Nature.”

### **St. Gregory of Palamas on the Attributes of God**

“An accident is that which comes into existence and passes out of existence, and in this way we can conceive of inseparable attributes as well. From one point of view, a natural attribute is also an accident, since it increases and decreases, as, for instance, knowledge in the soul endowed with intelligence. But there is no such thing in God because He remains entirely changeless. For this reason nothing can be attributed to Him that is an accident. Yet not all things said of God betoken His essence. For what belongs to the category of relation is also predicated of Him, and this is relative and refers to relationship with something else, and does not signify essence. Such is the divine energy in God. For it is not essence, nor an accident, even though it is called a kind of accident by some theologians, who mean to say simply this, that it is in God and that it is not essence.”

### **St. Gregory of Palamas on the Lights in the Soul**

“The intellect perceives one light, and the senses another. The senses perceive sensible light, which manifests sensory things as sensory. The light of the intellect is the spiritual knowledge inherent in intellection. Thus sight and intellect do not perceive the same light, but each operates to the limit of its nature in what is natural to it. When saintly people become the happy possessors of spiritual and supernatural grace and power, they see both with the sense of sight and with the intellect that which surpasses both sense and intellect in the manner that – to use the expression of St. Gregory of Nazianzos – ‘God alone

knows and those in whom these things are brought to pass.”

**St. Gregory of Palamas Remaining Written Work in the Philokalia**

*To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia, A New Testament Decalogue, In defense of Those who Devoutly Practice Life of Stillness, Three Texts on Prayer and Purity of Heart, Topics of Natural and Theological Science and on the Moral Ascetical Life: One Hundred and Fifty Text, The Declaration of the Holy Mountain in Defence of Those who Devoutly Practice a Life of Stillness*

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# Writers of the Philokalia

An Overview

By Marilyn Hughes

*The Out-of-Body Travel Foundation!*

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*The Early Church Fathers of the Western Christian Tradition are widely known, but the Early Desert Fathers of the Orthodox Church (The Writers of the Philokalia) are not as widely known or understood. What makes them unique is their unusual asceticism. Most of them became hermits and lived in the caves of Egypt to uncover the deepest secrets of the inner soul of man. It was in this profound aloneness and heightened dispassion, that these Early Desert Fathers found God. And it was in this utter silence, that they expounded the deep truths which they discovered and wrote down for generations to come. 'Writers of the Philokalia' seeks to simplify the four to six volume collection of the Philokalia by introducing the lives and teachings of these Desert Fathers in an Overview fashion.*

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