

# THE WORKS OF GREGORY THE SINAÏTE\*

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## C) *The Doctrine*

This subject has been fairly adequately dealt with by P. A. Syrku on p. 188-236 in his work already referred to above in n. 174. But his lengthy analysis, incorporated as it is in a volume of which the overall title has no apparent reference to our author<sup>175</sup> and in a chapter of it entitled «Blessed Theodosios of Trnovo»<sup>176</sup>, is easily overlooked. Also it consists of a long series of translated extracts, rather than of a critical attempt to elucidate whether the author is really presenting a consistently thought out and clearly co-ordinated system of doctrine.

It must be emphasised, of course, that Gregory's *kephalaia* («chapters») are not a treatise on Orthodox dogmatic and moral theology. They are a series of statements<sup>177</sup> about the ascetico-mystical life of the solitary, which aim to elucidate the essence of *hesychia* — the contemplative life, pursued through *νοερά προσευχή* — and to impart some practical advice to those engaged in it. In any case, it would be highly erroneous to argue that because some aspect of Christian dogma and practice is not mentioned in them (the Eucharist, for instance, or denial of the *Filioque*), the author is indifferent to it or is deliberately eliminating it from the attention of his reader, as of little or no significance. It is idle to imagine that the framework of Byzantine monasticism, even of the most extreme anachoretic type, was ever such as to allow any deviation from the strict path of Orthodox faith and Orthodox sacramental custom. Accusations of Messalianism based on the non-

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\* *Continued from Θεολογία 53,2 and 3.*

175. *Contribution to the history of the revision of (Church) books in Bulgaria in the 14th century* (St-Petersburg 1898) Vol. I, Part 1: *Times and Life of Patriarch Eftymios of Trnovo*. In Russian. Reproduced by *Variorum Reprints* (London 1972, S 10).

176. This is Chapter 2. Chapter 1, however, is entitled «Gregory the Sinaïte and the Hesychast», and constitutes an excellent Orthodox account of the Hesychast controversy, antedating J. Bois' biassed study serialised in *Échos d' Orient* 5 (1901-1902) and 6 (1903), and G. P a p a m i c h a i l' s well known book *Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς* (Alexandria 1911).

177. One might call them rather a collection of aphorisms, were it not that towards the end they get less and less succinct and pithy, till the penultimate one (on delusion, *πλάνη*) is about 1300 words long — a veritable treatise in itself!

inclusion of this or that in the writings of the «neptic» Fathers are quite out of place; the living tradition of their way of life, witnessed to by much positive data, far outweighs any apparent negative evidence of that kind.

Roughly speaking, the first three sets of *kephalaia*, amounting to an aggregate of 157, can be said to deal with the *theory* of the contemplative life (*hesychia*) and the remaining 23 with its *practice*. However, A', 99-102<sup>178</sup>, which give practical directions, constitute an exception within the first category. To that «theoretical» matter we may also assign the quotations from the Saint's oral teaching which I have already drawn attention to when summarising Patriarch Kallistos I's *Life* of Gregory<sup>179</sup> and also the newly edited text of his Discourse on the Transfiguration<sup>180</sup>. Let us deal first with this theoretical background material, leaving the prescriptions for its practical application, including A', 99-102, to a later section.

*i) Theoretical doctrine.*

As already noted above in section A, the 137 «most beneficial» κεφάλαια of the first series (A') correspond roughly, by their subject matter, to the enumeration of subjects presented by the acrostic. However, those subjects, clearly covered by a list of nouns (έντολαί etc.), only account for 68 out of the 137 *kephalaia*; in the text of the acrostic they are combined with a few other words and linking particles, which cover the remaining 69 *kephalaia*. It is advisable therefore to ascertain whether these other words also cannot be grouped in respect of subject matter. It turns out that the longer phrases by which this enumeration is strung together themselves form theme-groups, and that the conjunction καί (and) is on four occasions split between two contiguous groups. As a result, the whole acrostic can be said to cover roughly the following themes by the following *kephalaia*:

178. The reader is reminded that the five sets of κεφάλαια are designated here by the Greek capitals A' to E', followed by the number of the *kephalaion* quoted from each set. Series Γ' will be referred to as comprising not 10 but 13 chapters, in view of the additions edited by me in *Theologia*, Vol. 53, 3. *Kephalaion* numbers will be quoted for the paragraphs of series Ε', running from 1 to 8, of which the 6th is «On food».

179. *Theologia*, Vol. 53, p. 37-39.

180. *Theologia*, Vol. 52, p. 644-681. Will be quoted as «Discourse», followed by a line-reference.

<i>Elements of the acrostic</i>	<i>Chapters</i>	<i>Subject matter</i>
Λόγοι διάφοροι	1-13	ἀφθαρσία (incorruptibility)
περὶ ἐντολῶν	14-24	ἐντολαὶ (divine commandments)
δογμάτων	25-32	δόγματα (teachings)
ἀπειλῶν	33-39	ἀπειλαὶ (threats of punishment)
καὶ ἐπαγγελ(ε)ῶν, ἔτι δὲ κ	40-59	ἐπαγγελίαι (promises, heaven)
αὶ περὶ λογισμῶν	60-73	λογισμοὶ (undesirable thoughts)
καὶ παθῶν κ	74-82	πάθη (passions)
αὶ ἀρετῶν ἔ	83-92	ἀρεταὶ (virtues)
τι δὲ	93-96	λόγος διδασκαλίας (preaching)
κα	97-98	αἴσθησις νοερὰ (spiritual sense)
ὶ περὶ ἡσυχίας κ	99-110	ἡσυχία (contemplative life)
αὶ προσευχῆς	111-121	προσευχὴ (prayer)
ῶν ἢ ἀ	122-125	σάρξ, δαίμονες (the flesh, demons)
κροστ	126-130	ἀφώτιστοι ἀντιρρήσεις (unenlightened objections)
ιχὺς ἤδ ε	131-137	πλάνη καὶ σοφία (delusion and wisdom)

St Gregory touches on Trinitarian and Christological dogma in some of the texts referred to above, notably in his Discourse (189-198; 223-275; 280-418) and in some of his *κεφάλαια* (esp. 26, 27, 29, 30, 32). But as his mentions of such doctrine follow perfectly plain, traditional Orthodox lines and call for no particular comment, it would be superfluous to enlarge on them here. Rather should we concentrate on the central concept underlying his whole ascetico-mystical system, which is that of the Fall of Man in Adam and Man's restoration in Christ to his pristine condition as originally created.

The Fall and expulsion from Paradise are of course recounted in *Genesis* 3 and referred to in New Testament passages such as *Romans* 5 and 2 *Corinthians* 15, 22, but Gregory of Sinai goes beyond Scripture and, drawing on tradition and philosophy, has much to add to the biblical account. «If we do not know what God made us like», he says, «we shall not recognise what sin has made us like» (A', 50). Man was originally created λογικός. To be «logic» by nature (A', 1) and «divine» (θεῖος — A', 9), to have a soul which was created νοερὰ (A', 81), was his natural condition, his ἀρχαῖον ἀξίωμα (A', 18). He was «incorrupt» because «without moisture» (χωρὶς χυμοῦ — A', 8; cf. A', 81 — χωρὶς χυμῶν). His body was exempt from corruption (ἄφθαρτον — A', 82), his soul from passions (ἀπαθής — *ibid.*). Man's «body of incorruptibility»,

though «earthly» (γήινος — A', 45) was exempt from moisture and thickness (παχύτης — A', 46). The «incorruptibility of bodies» consists, in fact, principally in «the absence of liquids and solids» (A', 45).

The rest of creation too was originally exempt from flux and corruption (οὐ ρευστή, οὐ φθαρτή — A', 11). In a long passage (=A', 10) Gregory distinguishes the material (αἰσθητὸς) Eden from the νοητὸς παράδεισος τῆς χάριτος and describes the former in lyrical terms containing two adjectives and a verb which may be regarded as ἀπαξ λεγόμενα. Eden, according to it, is a «very high» place, reaching up «about one third of the way to heaven», planted by God with every sort of «most fragrant» plant. It is «neither completely incorrupt nor completely corrupt», but is «made half-way between corruption and incorruption». It is forever «bursting out into fruit» and «continually germinating flowers both unripe and ripe»; for when the trees moulder and the fruit becomes over-ripe and falls to the ground, they become fragrant soil, not smelling of rottenness as do the plants of this world, and «this comes about owing to the abundance and sanctity of the grace which forever prevails there». And our author goes on to say something of the complex of rivers as described in *Genesis* 2, 10-13; but he only mentions the rivers Gihon and Pison and gives to the great river from which they stem the non-biblical name of Okeanos. It pours down, he says, bringing with it «the earth and the leaves which have fallen» as a gift to the Indians and Ethiopians. It is interesting to note that, like the verses in *Genesis* just referred to, Gregory seems to imply that such a land of Eden still exists; and this would apply also to the details regarding the semi-incorrupt vegetation etc. Yet is it not rather the «Paradise of Grace» that represents the state of incorrupt creation before the fall of the world, corresponding to that of man? This sort of embellishment of an already problematic scriptural text does not enhance one's trust in the Sinaïte as an exegete. As already noted above in the introduction to his Discourse on the Transfiguration, he allows himself rather too much licence in his interpretation of the Bible. His genius lay elsewhere; in his capacity to describe states of soul and to teach and inspire other men.

The belief that Adam and Eve, though created «male and female» (*Gen.* 1,27), were originally, in some sense or other, in a state of well-nigh a-sexual innocence, exempt from the passions of the flesh, is based on *Gen.* 2,25 («they were both naked.. and were not ashamed») followed after the Fall by 3,7 («the eyes of them both were opened,

and they knew that they were naked»). It is solidly entrenched in Orthodox tradition and iconography, and cannot be dismissed as unsound theology. What carries less weight is the suggestion that their pristine innocence was due to «absence of moisture».

The notion that to be ρευστός (liquid, in a state of flux) or to contain χυμός (moisture, humidity), is an inferior or even evil state of being, derives ultimately from Greek philosophy, not from the Bible;<sup>181</sup> but once established in the Christian ascetic outlook, such an idea may by constant repetition become part of Orthodox tradition. Its application in the field of sexual ethics is obvious; the method of human procreation, shared with the animal world, is inseparably connected with ροή, χυμός, ρεῦσις, κάθυγρος ἡδύτης (Γ', 11; Δ', 10,11<sup>182</sup> κάθυγρος ἡδονή (Α', 65), ὑγρότης ἡδυπαθείας (Δ', 11) and such like, and this biological connection is seen as implying *in itself* some degree of sinfulness or danger of sin in sex, as in *all* wetness and flux. Even Christian marriage, though blessed by Christ, is seen as a concession; not the Creator's original will for mankind, but a result of the Fall, destined to be done away with at the final universal resurrection<sup>183</sup>. There are of course many other and more convincing factors

181. Syrkū is no doubt exaggerating when he suggests (op. cit., p. 190) that Gregory had been reading Thales of Miletos! Neo-Platonic and other Greek philosophical notions entered the Hesychast tradition by far more circuitous channels. As for the Bible, the Mosaic Law does enjoin sexual abstinence in some sacred contexts (cf. *Exod.* 20,15 and 1 *Samuel* 21,3-5) and it treats certain «issues» from the human body as requiring purification (see v.g. *Levit.* 12, esp. 7; 15, esp. 16-18; 20, 18; 22,4 and *Numbers* 5,1-2). But it simply declares, as a fact obvious to the primitive Semitic mind, that these things pollute and must not be allowed to defile the Lord's tabernacle; it offers no physical or metaphysical explanation.

182. This last expression stems from Diadochos of Photike (Vth cent.). See his *Λόγος ἀσκητικός*, κεφ. λγ' (*Φιλοκαλία Α'*, 244. *PG* provides only a Latin version; the Greek would have been in *PG* 162, but that last volume perished in a fire; For a critical Greek text see *Sources Chrétiennes* 5 ter, Paris 1966).

183. For an epitome of this traditional monastic teaching, one can hardly do better than quote St Symeon of Thessalonica, hesychast bishop of the early XVth century (†1429): Οὐ γὰρ ἐβούλετο ὁ Θεὸς τὴν ἄλογον ἐν ἡμῖν καὶ ἀπὸ ροῆς καὶ ρυπαρᾶν σύστασιν εἶναι· ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ ἀπεθάνομεν ἐκουσίως, ἀφῆκε τὴν διαδοχὴν οὕτω τοῦ γένους ἐνεργεῖν ὡς καὶ τοῖς ἀλόγοις, ἵνα γινῶμεν εἰς τί κατέστημεν (*Διάλογος*, Ch. 38 — *PG* 155, 180 A). And he explains that this regrettable state of affairs, which was οὐ μὴν Θεοῦ προηγούμενον θέλημα (*Ἐρωταποκρίσεις* 14-15 — *Ibid.* 865 B), will prevail only temporarily, ἕως τὸ πᾶν τότε μετὰ φθορᾶς ἴσταται (180 A), i.e. διὰ τὸν φθαρτὸν κόσμον συνίστασθαι (*Διάλογος*, Ch. 278 — *Ibid.* 508 D). Similarly, human birth is ὁ τῆς ἀμαρτίας καὶ ἐξ ἡδονῆς τόκος, ὃν δὴ τῆς φθορᾶς καὶ τοῦ θανάτου προσομιῶν

influencing Orthodox moral teaching in the sphere of sexuality, but this is one which cannot be overlooked. And lest it be thought by Western readers to be a mere «oriental» aberration, a peculiar outlook from which the Hesychasts would have been preserved if only they had been under Latin guidance and Papal tutelage<sup>184</sup>, it is worth noting that in the Patristic age it was prevalent not only in the East, but in the Latin Church too. The great Doctors of the West were particularly insistent that even lawful marital relations were not immune from the taint. Thus St. Augustine, in his two treatises *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, warns the married that there is «aliquid in carnali semine vitiosum»<sup>185</sup> as a result of the Fall; St Ambrose, commenting on *Ps.* 50 (51), 5, is concerned with the *contagia* inherent in conception and in childbirth<sup>186</sup>, and St Gregory the Great writes of «vitia libidinum in lubricis», calling on spouses to detach their minds from this evil pleasure during intercourse<sup>187</sup>, and in a long letter to St Augustine of Canterbury, he has much to say in the same spirit<sup>188</sup>. In fact the problem of how the married are to avoid

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τινές φασι και εστι (Διάλογος, Ch. 58 — Ibid. 208 D). It is notable that St Symeon only propounds this as an opinion held by some (τινές φασι). But the conclusion, obviously, is this: τέλειος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου σκοπός, ἡ παρθενία καὶ ἀφθαρσία (Διάλογος, Ch. 278 — Ibid. 508 D) and: κατὰ συγχώρησιν ἐστὶν ὁ γάμος, χάριν τῆς παιδοποιίας καὶ μόνον... (865 B).

184. This sort of general attitude towards the Hesychasts used to be prevalent among Catholics specialised in Eastern Church studies, such as L. Petit, M. Jugie and I. Hausherr, but in the last 40 years great progress has been made in overcoming such prejudices.

185. *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* i, 33 (PL 44, 434). Though marriage is good, we must distinguish, he says, «carnalis concupiscentiae malum... in bonitate nuptiarum» (i, 1-414). For had man not fallen, «fieret.. sine isto morbo seminatio filiorum in corpore vitae illius, sine quo nunc fieri non potest in corpore mortis hujus» (ibid.). The moral consequences are clear: «copulatio maris et feminae generandi causa bonum est naturale nuptiarum; sed iste bono male utitur, qui bestialiter utitur, ut sit ejus intentio in voluptate libidinis, non in voluntate propaginis» (i, 4-415). Sinful even among married people are «illi excessus concumbendi, qui non fiunt causa prolis voluntate dominante, sed causa voluptatis vincente libidine» (i, 24-428). «Munus piorum propagatio est fecunda filiorum, non commotio pudenda membrorum: quem non haberet in generandis filiis natura sana, nunc autem habet eam natura vitiata» (ii, 12-450).

186. «Antequam nascamur, maculamur contagio... Nec conceptus iniquitate exsors est... Sed et ipse partus habet contagia sua» (*Apol. David.* 11-PL 14, 875 C-D).

187. «In carne quidem esse debent ut bona per carnem agant, sed sic debent a carnis voluptate per mentis sublimitatem discedere, ut contumelias de carne non tolerant» (*In Primum Regum Expositiones* VI, 1-PL 79, 412 D - 413 D).

188. «Oportet itaque legitima carnis copula ut causa prolis sit, non voluptas;

*pollutio in lubricis* became a particularly Latin one, which, though not the subject of formal doctrinal pronouncements (any more than it was in the East), never ceased exercising certain Roman Catholic casuists almost down to our day.

Involved in the Fall through «forgetfulness of commandments» (A', 17), the human soul, created λογική και νοερά in the image of God, became bestial (κτηνώδης), without feeling and almost without mind ἀναίσθητος και σχεδόν ἄνους) owing to its taking pleasure in material things and ignoring God (A', 123). It became subject to corruption and to the «solidity of animals» — which παχύτης is itself a result of the Fall. Being no longer «exempt from humours», as a necessary result passion and concupiscence grew up in it; the qualities of the flesh and those of the spirit merged, and man became an animal (A', 81). Both soul and body were corrupted, and through a very natural process of intercommunication they were blended together; the powers of both were merged into one (εἰς ἓν) and they formed a single beast, which became ἄλογον και ἄνους in its passion and its concupiscence (A', 81). Man's single-mindedness (ἐνοειδής ἀπλή μνήμη) was split; it lost its mindfulness of God and changed from simple to complex and from uniform to multifiform. Disobedience corrupted all the soul's powers by spoiling all its natural appetites for virtue.

This was the origin and cause of the ΛΟΓΙΣΜΟΙ (undesirable and obsessive thoughts). The principal cure for them, therefore, is *mindfulness of God through prayer* (ἡ θεία διὰ προσευχῆς μνήμη), consolidated and stable, «mixed again in the spirit (to convert it) from the natural to the supernatural» (A', 60-61).

By their nature, thoughts are «plain» (ψιλοί), but diabolical temptation builds them up into wicked thoughts (A', 68). These are the λογισμοί, of which so much has been written by exponents of the Orthodox ascetico-mystical tradition. Hidden demonic powers work secretly on our imagination and our passions (A', 70). But sometimes they take on a form (μορφοῦνται, εἰδωλοποιοῦνται) corresponding to the passion predominant in the tempted soul; Gregory enumerates their various shapes, animal (pigs, asses, wolves, stallions, snakes etc.), human (Jews, Idumaeans, Turks, etc.) or physical (fire, darkness etc.) (A',

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et carnis commistio creandorum liberorum sit gratia, non satisfactio vitiorum... Cum vero non amor procreandae sobolis, sed voluptas dominatur in opere commisionis, habent conjuges etiam de sua commistione quod defleant» (*Epist.* XI, 64, 11-PL 77, 1197 B-C).

71); and he analyses the rôle of three demonic princes (ἄρχοντες), those of the air, the abyss and the world (A', 122). Our author describes in various ways the resultant state of mental and moral disorder. As can be seen from his Discourse, he is fond of enumerations and is given to analysing everything by division and sub-division. He provides lists of vices and explains their interdependence and how they give rise to each other (A', 74-79, 104-110, 121, 135; B', 4). It would take too long to reproduce all that here in English. The two vices most difficult to combat, he holds, are lust (πορνεία) and indifference (ἀκηδία) (A', 110).

St Gregory insists that man has fallen to the level of the beasts (κτῆνος ἐκ λογικοῦ καὶ θηρίον ἐξ ἀνθρώπου γενόμενος — A', 81)<sup>189</sup>. However, his soul is still «perfect» even here below (τελεία ἀπ' ἐντεῦθεν) and its natural appetite for good and its «manliness of love» (ἀνδρεία ἔρωτος), if it emancipates itself from corruption and the flesh, will enable it to submit again to what is «logical» (λογικόν). For the human body too, which since the Fall exerts so baleful an influence, was originally created incorrupt, and it will rise again as such (A', 81-82). From this it will be seen that the Sinaïte, though anti-Pelagian, was not exaggeratedly so.

Passing now to virtues (A', 83-91), they spring, writes Gregory, from the desire for good, which begins with faith in Christ, the pearl of great price (A', 83). For descriptions of how one virtue gives birth to another, see B', 5, Δ', 13 and A', 120. The principal virtues, each comprising several others, are love of God, humility and patience (A', 84). But the practice of the virtues does not of itself provide perfect vigour of soul; they must be consolidated «essentially» (οὐσιωδῶς) in the soul's inclination *by grace*. One can be attracted by God to a given virtue even against one's will; the grace of the Spirit acts «like a living soul» within the members, whereas without grace the virtues are dead (A', 36). Thus it is infused wisdom which produces prudence, fortitude, temperance and justice (A', 35). St Gregory, as is his wont, enumerates, sub-divides and classifies the virtues (A', 37, 91, 107; B', 8). His most noteworthy distinction is between «natural» virtues, which can be achieved by ascetic effort, and the «divine and supernatural, which are granted in the kindness of the Spirit» (A', 37, 38). To know the power, action

189. This fall (φθορὰ σαρκός) has as its symptoms not only «birth» (γένεσις), but «eating, excretion and sleeping» (ἐσθλιν, περιττωματεῖν, γαυριᾶν καὶ κοιμᾶσθαι). For these are «natural peculiarities of animals» (A', 9) and by acquiring them we have changed «from divine to bestial» (θηριώδεις ἐκ θείων).



and quality of each virtue or vice is only given to those who have learnt by experience and have received from the Spirit the charisms of understanding and discernment (A', 91). There is an important difference between acquired virtues and infused virtues: the latter «act in us, dwelling within us when necessary», choosing the extent and modality of their action, which is applied «essentially» (οὐσιωδῶς). But such essential participation in τὰ νοητὰ before entering the future life of incorruption is only granted to very few (ὀλίγοις λίαν) (A', 92). In the same way, there is teaching through lessons, through reading and through practice; but there is also teaching through grace, which inebriates the soul and brings it unspeakable joy (A', 95). The Saints utter words impregnated with the Spirit's «most sweet thought» (γλυκυτάτη ἐπίπνοια); but this is granted only to the worthy. Those who here below rejoice manifestly in the Spirit are «very few» (ὀλίγοι λίαν); most men must be content with mere memorised formulae (τύποι): they have not yet partaken of the true bread of heaven, which is granted then to the worthy for their full and sufficient pleasure, being «neither eaten, nor consumed or ever sacrificed» (A', 96)<sup>190</sup>.

Though, according to our author, so very few attain their ultimate spiritual goal in this life, it is none the less «impossible to become one body and spirit in Christ» unless the Holy Spirit preserves human nature immaculate or purifies it; the Spirit's power cannot patch the new coat of grace with the old material of the passions (A', 41). The soul must «go through all the ages (μεθελικιώσεις) in Christ — His conception, birth, baptism, transfiguration, crucifixion, burial, resurrection and ascension — through receiving *by grace* the earnest of the Spirit, the influence of joy, the vision of Divine Light, death to all the world, divine love in the heart, vital uprising of the soul, ecstasy in God and rapture of the mind. And «he who neither finds nor feels

190. Lest these words be taken as perhaps implying unorthodox depreciation of the Eucharist, it is worth mentioning that they partly echo the pronouncement made at the Breaking of Bread in the Byzantine Liturgies of St John Chrysostom and St. Basil: μελίζεται καὶ διαμερίζεται ὁ ἄμνος τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Πατρὸς, ὁ μελιζόμενος καὶ μὴ διαιρούμενος, ὁ πάντοτε ἐσθιόμενος καὶ μηδέποτε δαπανώμενος, ἀλλὰ τοὺς μετέχοντας ἀγιάζων. But only partly; for μήτε ἐσθιόμενος contradicts πάντοτε ἐσθιόμενος, while ἢ θυόμενος πώποτε is admittedly rather strange. The meaning would seem to be that Christ, the true Word, is partaken of in heaven in a more immaterial and exalted way than on earth. However, θυόμενος πώποτε — unless one can stretch a point and translate it «no more sacrificed» instead of «not yet sacrificed» — is indeed an unusual way of expressing that.

these things is an infant in body and in spirit, though all may esteem him a venerable old ascetic» (B', 1); for the soul must voluntarily suffer the sufferings of Christ (B', 2-3). He who freely receives the newness of the Spirit and keeps it, «will have the same privileges [as Christ] in respect of formation in Christ<sup>191</sup> ... and will ineffably experience the marvellous divinisation», becoming participant in grace already in this life and bearing within himself the «formation of truth and knowledge» (A', 42). The kingdom of heaven is like the Mosaic tabernacle, in two tents. The first is entered by all who are «priests of grace»; the second, which is νοητή, is only accessible to those who, here and now, have celebrated the rites of the Trinity hierarchically to perfection in the «darkness of theology» (ἐν τῷ τῆς θεολογίας γνόφῳ), having Jesus as founder of their mysteries and their first hierarch vis-à-vis the Trinity. Entering the inner tent, they receive a more manifest illumination in His effulgence (A', 43). The spiritual activity of the mind (ἡ νοερά τοῦ νοῦς ἐνέργεια) is a sanctuary in which it mystically consecrates the Lamb on the altar of the soul and partakes of Him. To consume the Lamb on it is not merely to perceive and participate, but to resemble the Lamb by future conformity with His «shape» (A', 122).

The Sinaite insists on the importance of «spiritual sense» or perception (αἴσθησις νοερά). Like the body, the soul has senses — «natural powers of the soul» — which, if they are damaged by passions, become incapable of their normal function, which is «participation in the mysteries of the Spirit» (A', 97). When the soul is in a state of health the natural senses and the spiritual, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, merge into a single perception, and then they «know divine and human things directly and essentially, as they are by nature». Their λόγοι (*raisons d' être*) are clearly perceived; and then, in so far as possible, one cause of all things, the Trinity, is purely contemplated (A', 98). This passage reminds us of the description of his own state of soul given by Gregory to his disciple Kallistos, which the latter has incorporated into the 8th chapter of his *Life of the Saint*<sup>192</sup>: «The mind, immersed in Light, expands resplendantly into a state of contemplation, and... sees more clearly and purely the nature of each being, in its proportion and order... The soul... no longer feels this humble, earthly and material

191. Cf. *Gal.* 4,19, where St Paul describes himself as suffering again the pains of childbirth till the Galatians are brought into conformity with Christ as their model.

192. See *Θεολογία* 53 (1982) 37-39, including note 40.

body; ...it definitely shows itself as intelligible (νοερά) by nature, just as Adam, before his fall, was covered by the energy and grace of that infinite Light». Divine intervention has overcome the effects of the Fall, and in particular the human soul «sees its natural thoughts brought once and for all to a stop». Such a man has been restored to the paradisiac condition. He is already in the heavenly life of deification, as described in the *Discourse*<sup>193</sup>.

Here below, no one has perfect virtue, nor can he eliminate vices at a stroke; but as virtue increases somewhat, vice gradually is reduced to nothing (B', 5). The initial stage of hesychia is σχολή (leisure, i.e. abstention from all other pursuits); its intermediary stage is «enlightening power and contemplation»; its final stage is ecstasy and rapture (A', 121). The ascetic prepares himself for this state, which is a gift of divine grace, by hesychia (A', 99-110) and mental prayer (A', 111-121). The principal virtues to be cultivated are silence, continence, vigil, humility and patience (A', 91). Faith<sup>194</sup>, hope and love too are of supreme importance (A', 103) and the mind must be completely detached from love of possessions and pleasures (A', 105) and from all self-regard (A', 106). The hesychast must never depart from an attitude of πένθος (grief for sin, repentance) (A', 108). St Gregory describes at length the state of perfect humility; this is granted to «very few», as «a grace and gift from above» (A', 115). For an elaborate analysis of the background and ramifications of humility, see A', 117. The highest form of humility is «God-given» (θεόδοτος, θεοδώρητος). It comes after the soul has been driven almost to despair (μικροῦ δεῖν καὶ εἰς ἀπελπισμὸν) by a feeling of divine abandonment and utter defeat (=οἰκονομικὴ τῆς προνοίας ταπεινώσις); then the «high» humility is infused by God, as a divine power acting and accomplishing everything, so that man perceives himself to be simply the instrument of God in all things.

The beginning and basis (ἀρχή) of νοερά προσευχή (mental, contemplative prayer) is ἡ ἐνέργεια (the «action», the influence of grace),

193. *Θεολογία* 52 (1981) p. 644-681; see especially lines 364-377 and 487-494.

194. Not only faith, but prayer welling up in the soul is a grace. For prayer directed by the Spirit through love «displays a true faith which manifests the life of Jesus». Thus he who is not conscious of faith, alive and active in himself, has faith which is «contrary and dead and lifeless». Nor can one properly call a believer one whose faith is only in mere words, not applied in the commandments or in the Spirit. Accordingly, he must manifest it by his progress in good deeds: he must show it by his works to be faith activated in Light and must display it as shining (A', 119).

«that is, the purifying power of the Spirit and mystical sacred rite of the mind» (A', 111). It is therefore not something which man can produce; he can only prepare himself for the grant of it. Pure «angelic» prayer is «wisdom infused by the Spirit» and its characteristic is formlessness: the mind must perceive neither itself nor anything else as endowed with solidity (ἐν παχύτητι). Even the activity of the senses is often reduced under the influence of the Divine Light<sup>195</sup>; for then «the mind becomes immaterial and light-like, being ineffably attached to God (so as to act) as a single spirit (εἰς ἐν πνεῦμα)» (A', 116).

In his κεφ. A', 113 St Gregory gives a lyrical description of prayer which is so rich in meaning as to deserve full translation:

«Prayer is, among beginners, like a fire of festivity welling up from the heart; and among the perfect, like a fragrant light in action. Or again, prayer is the preaching of Apostles, an act of faith or rather unmediated faith itself, the substance of things hoped for, active love, angelic movement, power of the bodiless<sup>196</sup>, their occupation and delight, God's good tidings, heartfelt fulfilment, hope of salvation, sign of sanctification, symbol of sanctity, knowledge of God, manifestation of baptism, purification by bathing, earnest of the Holy Ghost, the exultation of Jesus, festivity of soul, mercy of God, sign of reconciliation, seal of Christ, ray of the spiritual sun, morning-star of hearts, confirmation of Christianity, decree of reconciliation with God, grace of God, wisdom of God or rather the very principle of self-subsistent wisdom, manifestation of God, work of the monastic, way of life of contemplatives, occasion for hesychia, pledge of angelic conduct. What need is there to say much? Prayer is God, who worketh all in all, since there is one energy common to the Father, Son and Holy Ghost<sup>197</sup>, working all things in Christ Jesus».

So formidable is the programme of physical and above all spiritual discipline laid down by St Gregory, that not surprisingly he has repeatedly to emphasise how «very few» can be expected to reach the heights of contemplation for which such ascetic prowess is a necessary preliminary. Thus again in ch. A', 118 he mentions «hypostatic spiritual contemplation of the Light» and a whole series of other sublime

195. For the merging of sense-data in ecstasy, cf. *Discourse* 179-184.

196. The «bodiless» (ἀσώματα) are the angelic choirs.

197. Note the use, before the Palamite controversy, of this «Palamite» formula.

spiritual gifts, only to declare them «unfindable in our generation» (ἐν τῇ καθ' ἡμᾶς γενεᾷ εὐρεῖν ἀμύχανον), because we are now tyrannised by passions. There is nothing in the Sinaïte's writings that could lead one to suppose that there can be an easy, psycho-technical method of prayer, based principally on bodily posture and breath-control, which will elevate souls almost mechanically to contemplation of the Divine Light. The propagators of the hesychast method — and Gregory of Sinai was a leading one — can only be interpreted as implying that, if their words are taken out of context and unfairly treated<sup>198</sup>. These rare, almost unattainable spiritual achievements are:

«Hypostatic spiritual contemplation of the Light, a mind devoid of phantasy and vain imagination, true activity of prayer flowing perpetually from the centre of the heart, resurrection and intensity of the soul, divine amazement and exaltation of the universe, total ecstasy of thought and senses in the Spirit, rapture of the mind from its own powers, angelic movement of the soul under divine impulsion moving upwards towards infinity».

Such are the effects of grace. But alas, the carnality and self-love of some makes them envious: they calumniate these good things, calling them evil, produced by illusion. They neither acknowledge nor believe in the things of the Spirit, nor are they able, being men of little faith, to see or know God (A', 126). St Gregory caps his complaint of this with a long explanation (A', 127) as to what is a true rhetorician and a true philosopher: they teach not only from exterior sources, but draw too on their experience of the divine. «Those who write and speak without the Spirit and wish to edify the Church are ψυχικοί, having no spirit». For «those who speak from their own thoughts, without previous purification, are led away by the spirit of self-conceit;... their words are distasteful and unenlightened...» (A', 128)<sup>199</sup>. This error leading men

198. One cannot but subscribe to the judgment of Vladimir Lossky when he writes (*In the image and likeness of God*, London 1975, 48, n. 4): «Fr. Irénée Hausherr's article 'La méthode d'oraison hésychaste', *Orientalia Christiana* 9 (1927) 102-210, despite the incontestable erudition of the author, can in no way serve as a guide to the study of hesychasm: the polemical goal of the author lends the character of an impassioned pamphlet to a work which ought to have been an historical study. Unfortunately the same thing must be said of Fr. Jugie's article 'Les origines de la méthode d'oraison des hésychastes', *Échos d'Orient* 30 (1931)».

199. Perhaps Gregory of Sinai has in mind Varlaam, the Calabrian philosopher,

astray «to-day» and implanting «ignorance of darkness in the souls of the supine and alienating them from God» consists in not knowing God as restorer of life and illuminator; or in treating Him as an object of faith and knowledge in mere word, not deed, or as revealed only to the ancients, not to us; or in misinterpreting Scripture in a bodily and Jewish sense, denying that the soul can be resurrected here and now (ἐντεῦθεν) (A', 135). True wisdom, on the contrary, according to St Gregory, is based on the fact that the Logos, as self-subsistent Wisdom of God, imprints the characters of the archetypes on beings here below. He who realises that, speaks wisdom through the living Word which is active in him. Illuminated in his heart by the power of «transforming intelligence», he becomes capable of enlightening others (A', 134). For all men should be θεοδιδάκτοι (Γ', 1).

However, it is not only the outsider who mistakes truth for error; the initiate himself very easily mistakes delusion (πλάνη, *prelest*<sup>200</sup>) for truth. Our author has many passages on this subject of delusion. He attributes it principally to the malevolent activity of demons, but also writes of it as if it were a self-subsistent entity pursuing a purpose of its own<sup>201</sup>. «It is in the nature of delusion, especially at the beginning, to deceive the mind of the inexperienced with lying phantasms»; the contemplative must keep his mind exempt from all forms and shapes

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whose criticism of the Hesychasts began some years before the Saint's death. He may be thinking too of the celebrated scholar Nikephoros Gregoras, though he entered the fray only in 1347; for as we have seen (note 69, final paragraph), if the Sinaïte is identical with «Gregory the Sharp», he will have had an encounter with that anti-Hesychast philosopher at an early stage.

200. Those familiar with Russian should be warned not to read too much into the standard Church Slavonic translation of πλάνη, which is *prelest'*. In modern Russian this word has come to mean «enchancing beauty», with the result that those unfamiliar with Slavonic tend to think that only one form of delusion is meant: that which presents itself in the guise of deceptive loveliness. This Russian use of the term is perfectly natural and legitimate, but it is wrong to project it into Church Slavonic, which derives from a more primitive state of the language. The Slavonic word *prelest'* simply served as an exact counterpart of the Greek word πλάνη, which means «wandering; going or leading astray; illusion, error; deceit» in a very general way, without focusing attention on the notion of allurements by fascination. Far from consisting exclusively in wallowing in seductive beauty, delusion, according to St Gregory, often takes on disgusting and horrific forms.

201. This is particularly true of Γ', 10 to 13, the newly edited final κεφάλαια of the third series, for which see *Θεολογία* 53 (1982). Unfortunately, owing to an oversight, they were wrongly described there, on p. 700-701, as an addition to the fourth series.

and reject imaginary figures of sacred personages or visions of light (Γ', 3). But no one should be astonished at beginners' tendency to fall victim to delusion; this has happened so very often, even after great labours; for contemplative prayer is the highest and most arduous form of spiritual activity and the fount of all virtue (E', 7).

Though *πλάνη* is declared by the Sinaïte to be so insidious and multifarious that most minds have difficulty in discerning and comprehending it (A', 131), and although the various passages in which he analyses the many phenomena of delusion and examines their causes are none of them easy to understand, by collating them we can see that he distinguishes two principal types. The first originates basically in suppressed sexuality: demonic incitement inflames the flesh and the imagination, and a strange mixture of sensuality, insolence and sullenness results, which Gregory has graphically described in his *κεφ. Γ'*, 11. This is the state of *πλάνη κατ' ἐνέργειαν*, in which the crisis of concupiscence, mixed with overtones of religious exaltation, can, according to *κεφ. Α'*, 131, develop into one of psychic folly. Lasciviousness spills over and inflames the whole man; his *ἡγεμονικὸν* (the authoritative, reasonable principle of the human soul) is troubled, his mind is dislocated and burning inebriation maddens it, so that he indulges in false prophecy, sees and hears «certain saints» and ends up possessed by demons, who enslave and terrorise him (A', 131). Yet at the beginning «this wolf, deceitfully instilling irrational joy and tears and consolation»<sup>202</sup>, had seemed to him to be grace (Γ', 10).

The other type of delusion arises in the mind rather than in the body. It is caused by pride and self-conceit. With great subtlety and insight, Gregory of Sinai explains that:

He who wishes to intrude on God irreverently and overboldly and confess Him purely and is in a hurry to possess Him within himself, is easily put to death by the demons, if access is allowed him; for by seeking audaciously and presumptuously what is beyond his own status, he is pretentiously aiming to score an achievement before his due time» (E', 74<sup>203</sup>).

Such a one should know that the devil bars his way and only the strong

202. Phrase quoted by Gregory of Sinai from St John of the Ladder (Γ', 13).

203. *Φιλοκαλία*, Δ', p. 85, 13-18.

and perfect are capable of continual single combat with demons<sup>204</sup>, whereas the one salvation for weaklings and beginners is to renounce such war, not daring to engage in it prematurely, and have recourse to flight. The Lord who pities them often enables beginners to realise their presumption in time and turn back, especially if they listen to the advice of those more experienced than they. But if they do not do so, they will be mocked by demons and laughed or wept over by men<sup>205</sup>. For they will be swept up into *πλάνη κατὰ φαντασίαν*: having grasped at God, they will be led on to «imagine the divine as some sort of shape», and this will be followed by a state of illusion giving rise to blasphemy and then to monstrous, frightening visions, so that they are terrorised and go out of their natural minds (*ἔκστασις τῶν κατὰ φύσιν φρενῶν*) (A', 131).

The remedy for these dangers is pure prayer, in which the mind is kept «devoid of colour, of form, of shape,... of imagination, and stripped of notions and of thoughts»<sup>206</sup> — i.e., it lies in *hesychia*. But how to achieve this form of prayer and enter this condition of the soul is a matter of practical, not theoretical doctrine, and reserved, as such, for the next and final section of this study.

Meanwhile, we are left with an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, the contemplative must reject everything visible; on the other, he must know that contemplation of the Divine Light is his ultimate aim. The solution of this dilemma would seem to lie in three considerations:

1) Everything seen «in thought or in sense» must be rejected *by beginners* until such time as, after mature reflexion, experienced spiritual advisers — and particularly the chosen adviser who is their spiritual father — approve its acceptance. For not everything is from a tainted source; sometimes it may be from God himself. Yet even so, it is better to ignore it «until such time as the passions have quietened down» (*ἕως καιροῦ εἰρήνης παθῶν* — E', 7<sup>207</sup>). In particular, the disposition of repentance (*πένθος*) must first become deeply embedded in the soul (E', 7) and the contemplative must become habituated to much pain and labour (*πόνος καὶ κόπος*) (Δ', 14-15).

204. τῶν γὰρ δυνατῶν καὶ τελείων ἐστὶ μονομαχεῖν αἰεὶ μετὰ τῶν δαιμόνων (*ibid.*, 25-26).

205. *Ibid.*, 18-24.

206. ἄχρους, ἀνείδεος, ἀσχημάτιστος, ... ἀφάνταστος καὶ γυμνὸς νοημάτων καὶ λογισμῶν (*ibid.*, p. 85, 40 to 86, 1, and p. 87, 2-3).

207. *Φιλοκαλία* Δ', p. 86, 7.



2) The mind, the consciousness, must be «standing in the heart» (ἐν καρδίᾳ), not in the brain<sup>208</sup>. This reduces the tendency to visual imagination and places body and soul in the right disposition to receive the graces of the Spirit. Visual perception and spiritual vision are of a very different order, operating with quite different spheres of being as their object and through different centres of physical consciousness in so far as the body is involved.

3) Grace and delusion are distinguishable by a kind of «taste». «Time and experience and perception enable those who are not ignorant of its wiles to sense the presence of delusion. As the throat distinguishes different foods, so does spiritual taste learn to indicate without error what is the quality of every thing» (Δ', 10). «It is possible to discern by its mode of action (ἐκ τῆς ἐνεργείας<sup>209</sup>) whether the light which has shone in thy soul is from God or from Satan. Lettuce looks like chicory and vinegar resembles wine in appearance, but by taste the throat knows and distinguishes the difference between each. Likewise the soul, if endowed with discernment, recognises by immaterial perception the charisms of the Holy Spirit and the phantasms of Satan» (E', 8).

Such are the main lines only of the Sinaïte's theoretical doctrine on hesychia. Partly owing to his idiosyncrasy as a writer and partly because such is the nature of indoctrination by kephalaia, much secondary detail is poured out in that author's works in a rather uncoordinated manner. Nor is it all of equal interest and importance. To include the sum total of what St Gregory says would imply presenting a full translation rather than a résumé. It is hoped that the above summary omits nothing essential and may be of use to those not in a position to embark on a more detailed study.

*(To be continued)*

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208. "Ἀγξον τὸν νοῦν ἐκ τοῦ ἡγεμονικοῦ ἐν καρδίᾳ καὶ κράτει αὐτὸν ἐν αὐτῇ (Δ', 2). That the ἡγεμονικὸν is seated in the brain (ἐν τῷ ἐγκεφάλῳ) is stated at the end of Δ', 11.

209. Note that τῇ καρδιακῇ ἐνεργείᾳ προσέχειν (observation of the activity in the heart) is declared to be exempt from delusion and a safe practice for novices (Φιλοκαλία, Δ', p. 86, 5-6).