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TITLE

**THE PRAYER AND WATCHFULNESS OF
PHILOKALIC FATHERS**

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INTRODUCTORY SPECIFICATIONS

The following paper which stands for a Ph.D thesis depicts both an enchanting and a difficult topic because of many reasons. One would be: the wish to familiarize ourselves with the prayer and watchfulness, to deepen their understanding and even to persuade us to practice them constantly and seriously.

A second reason might be that the Philokalic Fathers sent us their spiritual and energetic way of holy life which we desire as they spent it in prayers and watchfulness from the bottom of their hearts. Sincerity is the feeling that pours from their writings, the longing for God and an authentic encouragement not only for all those who have not reached yet a higher degree of praying, a communion with God, of contemplation, but also for those who are incapable of desiring it.

The writings of the Philokalic Fathers show us what the prayer and watchfulness are, the manners and methods of praying up to perfection, afterwards how to do it, which are the difficulties and temptations which might appear during the prayer, what helps it, which is its great purpose and usage. The holy fathers teach us that the prayer is the soul's life. As the body breathes meaning it is alive and as it stops breathing meaning it ceases its existence, so is the prayer the key to the kingdom of God.

Thirdly, tackling the reasons for which we stopped at this topic may be relevant for the trial of finding solutions in a period in which the globalisation process is a reality that no one can deny as such, because it exists already and because everywhere and in all times there have been such concerns and tendencies towards globalisation. In a secularised and agitated world the people need more than ever prayers, watchfulness and inner peace. The eastern Christianity has this capacity to develop life through Christ, which represents the best remedy for the contemporary man's nervousness.

The times we are living in are difficult. It is as if all the values have been reversed and nobody knows what to do. The evil ones cannot be undone anymore and the missing ones cannot be counted. The panorama that is being offered by the consumption society makes us ponder on the Babylonian fortress from the Apocalypse in which everything is sold: "golden and silver

merchandise, precious stones and diamantes, furs and porphyry silk and reddish cloth, all sorts of scented wood and all sorts of ivory, wooden objects of great value and brass, iron and marble merchandise, cinnamon, balm and spices, chrism, incense, wine, oil and pure wheat flower and wheat and cattle , carriages and bodies and souls.”

Indeed, for our century, praying is uncomfortable, but its role cannot be decreased by the commodity of this life, as well as it is impossible to be substituted. The prayer is the unique way of our soul to participate at the cease of the falling and slipping into the abyss of life's pleasures and sins, to heal the soul in its depth. This defence, naturally, will constantly create the feeling of rejection towards the prayer. However, its purpose is the preparation of man to come closer to God, which confers another appearance to the human being. The motivation of the prayer does not lie in the separation from the sin, but in the union with God Almighty who lives for eternity. Even the beginning of the prayer means the remembrance of God.

Watchfulness represents our craft and work of our life, our apostolic calling, our birth and life, moreover we could say our breath. For instance, in the same way we stop breathing when the vital air ceases to enter our lungs and death occurs, so it happens that if we miss watchfulness, even for a minute, the Holy Spirit will stop entering our being. Not having the Holy Spirit we shall always find ourselves in a suffocating, unholy, joyless, restless and stressful atmosphere, we shall neither feel our life secure, nor shall God listen to our prayers. Thus, watchfulness confers us the possibility of having God.

We note briefly several reasons for which we have chosen this research theme :

- The deification of the man is possible and real, that is people become sons and gods through grace, in a personal relation with Christ, the Son of God
- The deified man realizes the union first inside him, between mind and heart, then the unity with the Holy Trinity through the energies of reciprocal love, a unity with people, whom he loves equally, and with nature, spreading also upon it this godly love
- The deification implies a transformation, a metamorphosis of our lifestyle in such a way that man communicates with God at another level of his being
- The experience of deification can be possible only through Church, participating at the Sacraments, especially at the Holy Communion

Regarding its purpose, the present research emphasises the fact that the Orthodox spirituality in general and the prayer especially tackle and express that the believer in Christ comes closer to

perfection as a limb of Christ's holy body, the Church. Moreover, this perfection cannot take place unless the believer participates at this human-divine life which is the purpose of the Orthodox spirituality, that is the redemption and perfection of the believer can only be realised through his union with Christ and moulding Christ's face inside him.

- The deification is a state of overcoming the limits and concrete conditions of the humane existence by the power of God. As a consequence, it implies a personal encounter with God
- The man's path towards God or deification always possesses a cosmic resonance because through nature, the man discovers God "hidden by it" and returns to its Creator

This thesis is a synchronic and diachronic analysis of the importance of the prayer and watchfulness during the centuries, of their role upon the perfection of the human being. I structured it in six chapters, having as a starting point the definition of the concept, continuing with the various typologies and classifying the steps that a believer can ascend; I have used in this respect the patristic and philokalic arguments regarding the prayer and watchfulness and I have tried to emphasise their importance in the contemporary life.

Chapter I –ABOUT THE PHILOKALIC LITERATURE

Philokalia is composed of two words: the Greek verb "fileo"-to love, from where the noun "filos"-love is derived and the adjective "kalos"-beautiful or kind and it signifies love for beauty, the spiritual, holy beauty and kindness. Saint Vasile the Great and Grigorie of Nazianz used this word for the first time for an anthology with Origen's writings with the theme: Love for the divine Beauty.

Philokalia is a collection of eastern patristic writings with patristic and mystical character elaborated by the Holy Fathers and ecclesiast writers between the 4th and 14th centuries. It is addressed to both the clergymen and layman because in the Orthodox Church there is no clear border between the clergyman's life and the Christian man's life in general and it implies the ascetic and mystical effort necessary to climb the three steps: purification, illumination and perfection. It does not exclude the Bible, on the contrary they are interconnected: the Bible is the book of the Kingdom of God's love, it is the alive heart of Philokalia, and Philokalia is the living of the Bible deep in our heart, says His Holiness Daniel, Romania's Patriarch.

Chapter II- THE PRAYER –THE STATE OF CONTEMPLATING GOD

Through the man's prayer there is accomplished and maintained a dialogue in freedom between man and God in the world. Saint Simeon The New Theologian says that "in relation with God we feel God's sons", but this relation is accomplished through the prayer in the name of The Holy Spirit (Rom. 8, 14-16, 26). On the other hand, he is the one who makes a tight connection between fear and pride, or freedom and humbleness/piety.

The purpose of Christianity is the deification of man. "God became man so that the man may become god". These are the words in which the Holy Fathers expressed countless times, the significance of the creation of the Logos. Uniting in His Person, without merging or separating the godly nature from the human one, Christ reinstated the human nature with its true value from the beginning bestowing perfection upon it as it was since the creation onwards, showing Himself as Adam the New one. The complete resemblance with God and the participation at the godly nature"(II Petru 1,4)

II.1 The definitions of "the prayer" in the writings of the Holy Fathers

If the Christian prayer is the breath of our godly nature, then it is only natural that we give it approximate definitions, taken from the human experience. Its profound nature and the possibility of its existence can only be discovered by the one who enters its realm/sanctuary. The definitions, which are the fruit of this experience, describe just a mere/partial aspect of the prayer.

All the scholars of the prayer and the Church theologues are far from giving fixed and final definitions to any spiritual notion, including the prayer. Why is that? Because the states of mind and the facts which are of spiritual nature cannot be locked within the elevating limits of a definition, within the limits of any words. To define means to set some boundaries, to fence a spiritual fact, a reality or state of mind and even a godly experience within logic limits.

II.2 The importance and the manner of prayer distinction

Connected with life, the prayer follows its countless shapes and manifestations. As a consequence, it is defined with various terms, which the ecclesiastical authors use with great spontaneity. For example, Martyrius Sahdona enumerates randomly: " the state of the sermons, the chants of the praising, the ascendance of the mind towards God, the sighs before Him, the

kneeling, the imploring, the spiritual rise of the heart, the shed of tears, the ardour of the spirits, the flame of love, the diligence of the thinking, the unrequited contemplation of God”.

II.3 The prayer, the step towards a spiritual rise to perfection

The prayer is in fact a creation of the mind, that is why it has an endless variety of forms; we can still distinguish in it a certain amount of prayer types according to the tendency or the inner attitude of the main spiritual power of the man.

These types correspond to the stages of the normal development of the human spirit, which are:

- The outer movement of the mind
- The return in itself
- Its ascendance towards God through the inner man

This order was the core of the Holy Fathers’ definition of the three stages of the prayer. The first one is characterized by imagination, the mind being still unable to rise directly towards pure contemplation; the second one is characterized by meditation, and the third one by the absorption in contemplation. Only the third one is correct and fruitful in the eyes of the Holy Fathers, but , having been aware of the incapability of man to master a pure prayer even from the beginning of the journey to God, they also considered the first and second step natural and useful. However, they mention that if the man does not limit himself to the first step and continues to cultivate it, his prayer will not only stop being barren, but it could also give birth to a profound spiritual movement. This step of the prayer does not allow the man to escape his inherent wandering but it keeps his mind in an illusory world, similar to the poetic creation.

Chapter III- THE WRITTEN FUNDAMENTALS OF THE CONTINUOUS PRAYING AND GOOD DEEDS

The prayer is a together-conversation with God, it is the spiritual weapon against the devil, it is the stairs towards heaven, pouring from the undying virtue of love to God and our fellow men. The prayer is the heart of the Christian religion, it the most suitable occasion to meet with God, in the cult of our Church, it has a special place. Everything that means religious sermon, means first and foremost prayer.

When we pray let us have the conviction that God is with us, that He, with His Providence, is coming to meet our good requests. This is the reason that makes the real prayer express the feeling of worshipping God, of loving our fellow men and of piety.

However, as a well-known Orthodox hierarch used to say “ the contemporary world lost to a great extent the spirit of praying, and the discipline of the body became a secondary issue in the imagination of men. We forget that we are not the soul that lives in our body, but man- formed of body and soul- and, in The Apostle Pavel’s words we are being called to worship God in our body and soul.

In the Holy Bible we have numerous examples of heard and fulfilled prayers.

III.1 The Godly prayer as a state of the communion between man and God. Written and patristic proof of the believer’s communion with God

It is already a known and admitted truth by all Christians- not only by the Orthodox- that the most important and all-comprising prayer is Our Father, due to the fact that it was inherited directly from God- The Saviour, as a request from the Holy Apostles and also due to the richness of its contained knowledge – in essence, everything that is useful for our bodily and spiritual life.

III.2 The prayer of the heart as the communion between man and God. Patristic proof/evidence

The human mind thrives for knowledge, for wholly knowledge. Nothing can destroy our thirst to understand, and naturally our final desire is the knowledge of The Primordial Being, of The One or What exists in reality. During all historical epoques, the man respected instinctively this principle. Our fathers and forefathers worshipped Him in various ways because they did not know Him “as He is”.

God is our only means of access to know Him, if He discloses Himself. The issue of knowing God sends our searching mind back through centuries, to the moments in which God let Himself known to the man in various ways.

III.3 The prayer of the heart as living within and with Christ.

The path to reach this state is the short prayer: “Our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner”. It is repeated loudly or silently, slowly, quietly, with great care, with the mind released from all that do not belong into the prayer. Not only should the daily worries be far away from it, but also so should the preoccupation or trust that an answer shall be received, or any inner vision, the thought that there was a feeling, the curious questions or the mind games.

III.4 The steps of Christ’s prayer. Generalities

This prayer has different stages, as such: the spoken prayer, the mind prayer, the mind prayer with a working heart, the prayer of the moving heart, the prayer of the pure heart and the far-sighted prayer. Due to God’s inner work, He ordains our redemption, giving to the man through prayer, at the right time, through His grace, everything that is needed. The one who starts such a spiritual work needs a spiritual guide who has already overcome the beginning stages of the prayer as well as the contemplative stage (insightful) and who can help his apprentice to overcome all the temptations.

1. The spoken prayer- the first step of Christ’s prayer

Christ’s prayer, as other virtues, requires experience, so that the man must impose himself the time spent in prayers. During this time the man receives help from the godly grace and praying becomes a habit, and as a consequence the man strengthens himself in the unwillingness that the prayer implies. The habit of working the prayer comes from the continuous pronounciation of the words in the prayer. The spoken prayer needs quantity because, along the way, not all of a sudden, the quantity will gradually increase connected closely with the attention and perseverance of the praying mind. During the work of the spoken prayer, the devil, the body and the world act against it inside and outside, trying to turn our mind from it”.

2. The working prayer of the mind

Christ’s prayer of the mind has this specific terminology because it is told silently (of the mind) and also because in the moment of complete surrender to God (working) it is done by the man intentionally and not moved by itself.

3. The prayer of the mind from the working heart

This stage of the prayer is entitled “of the mind from the heart” because during its process both mind and heart unite and pray together, that is the whole inner man. And working is another term because, in its case, the will of the man continues to work in himself manifesting itself through advice and deeds. The prayer has not yet entered the whole fulfillment of God’s will ; he only fulfils it partially, however he still fulfils his work and being.

4. The prayer of the mind from the self-moving hear

Step by step, the worker reaches total devotion towards God’s will. Now, the mind together with the prayer is brought down by God into the heart for the next stage, the prayer of the mind from the self-moving heart. Being at this level, the prayer begins to come near to the real knowledge and total fulfillment of God’s will, he enters the real spiritual life, and his mind is awarded a whole knowledge, thus penetrating, not entirely, but one of the mind’s dwellings.

5. The prayer of the mind within pure heart

After a complete surrender to God’s will, the first stage of the spiritual prayer is called “of the mind from the self-moving heart”. Then, another, more profound stage follows, that of the pure and unrequited prayer. This prayer of the mind from the heart is done with the mind and the heart, both cleansed entirely from the darkness and passions. The heart, being dis-passioned, can pray purely and through this kind of heart there are no more sinful thoughts and desires.

III.5 The prayer and contemplation –steps which lead to heaven

Saint Grigorie Palama knows as a superior stage of the negative theology a more profound and existential apophatism, accomplished through the pure heart, it is an ecstasy of the inner silence, a total cease of the thinking in front of the divine mystery before descending, inside the stopped mind in awe, the godly light from above.

Therefore, before we begin tackling the superior steps of knowing God through complete silence and seeing the godly light, we need to ponder upon the pure prayer. The prayer itself has many more stages, each corresponding to one of the steps of the man’s spiritual ascent. Thus, the prayer constantly needs to accompany the man in his ascendance.

Chapter IV- WATCHFULNESS – THE WAY WHICH LEADS TO THE ENHANCEMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

The cleanliness and enlightenment of the soul by following the confessors' advice, by reading the holy books, by following the commandments, by guarding the canons and living the moral and religious virtues, all the above are not enough for any spiritual progress without watchfulness, sustained by meditation.

The mind (mens) is the light of the soul, the torch that leads the body, the fortress above the mountain (Mt. 5,14), which shows the man's power and greatness. By enhancing it through religion, philosophy, science and art, we have the churches and schools with all their pulpits, staff and bookcases and for its correction when it no longer serves the truth and becomes dangerous, we have the community homes and the asylums. The mind through its work and powers (reason, skillfulness, intelligence, memory, thinking, imagination) creates the culture and civilization, the technology and arts; the mind is also able to destroy them, when it does not have a sense of responsibility for what is being thought and done. When it is healthy the mind is humble, wise, with a sight, pure, faithful, angelic, **awake**; when it is ill, it is proud, mad, dark, rotten, foul, passionate, beastly, devilish, unfaithful. When it is awake- light and honest; one mind is as one people, one nation, a whole world. When it is rebellious, lying, murderous, one mind puts in danger one people, one nation, a whole world. How many sufferings did people have to bear, did the Christianity and the whole world have to bear from Godless men with a foul and devilish mind? How many rivers of tears and blood, done by wars, how many waves of lies poured from the same poisoning spring which is the Godless mind without any moral responsibility?!

IV.1 Watchfulness- a vigil and protective state of the mind

“Those in need must keep their thinking always untroubled so that the mind, filtering the thoughts that go through it, could place the good ones sent by God in the memory chambers, and throw the dark and devilish ones in the jails of our being. Only when the sea is calm, the fishermen can see in its depths and catch all the moving shoals of fish. When it is troubled by the waves, it hides in its darkened turmoil the things that we can easily see when it is calm and clear.

The skillfulness of the ones that are using the fishermen's sly tricks has in this case no longer power. This also happens to the contemplative mind, especially when due to an unjust anger the depths of the soul are troubled."

Watchfulness represents our work, our entire life's work, our apostolic call, our creation and life, moreover, we could say our breath. It is as when we stop breathing and the vital air ceases to enter our body and death occurs, the same thing happens when we forget about watchfulness, even for a minute, and it will cease the entering our being of the divine spirit of the Holy Ghost.

IV.2 Methods of preserving and enhancing the state of watchfulness

Watchfulness is a continuous work; it is a "spiritual art, which, by a long lasting and perseverant practice with God's help, sets the man free from all bad deeds, all passionate words and thoughts. It rewards the practitioner with a complete knowledge of the unknown God, as much as He can be known, and with an answer regarding all the hidden mysteries of God. It fulfills all the godly commandments of The Old and New Testament. It offers us the goodness for the next century. It is truly the purity of the heart".

IV.3 The rewards and effects of watchfulness

Watchfulness brings all goodness, it comprises all the goodness of the next century and it gives it to us not only in the future life but also in the present one. The same as when you enter a storehouse and find everything you need only because you want to go inside, the same it suffices to follow the path of watchfulness and find even the eternal rewards.

As we have observed, the typology of the virtues belongs to the Greek philosophy before Christ, but it was also embraced by the church fathers. The fathers sometimes talk about the mother of virtues, the prayer, which is the centre, the power, the foundation of watchfulness, the content of the pure heart, our own work, and other times, under the influence of old typologies, regarding the work, the everyday life they talk about the four general virtues. These types of categorizations are numerous surely, but it ponders upon the one that comprises the following virtues: wisdom, resoluteness, wholly reflection and justice.

CHAPTER V- PHILOKALIC ARGUMENTS REGARDING THE PRAYER AND WATCHFULNESS

V.1 Knowing God through prayers

In Saint Ioan Scararul's book The Ladder it is mentioned: "The prayer is the strengthening of the world", therefore the people who pray are keeping in a way in balance this world. They make God merciful to this world. Naturally, God, if he created this world, wants to be merciful towards it and strengthen it, but we also contribute to this process with our prayers, praying being not only a means of personal enrichment, but also a method to better the society we live in.

The prayer has a profound meaning for the people in general, especially for the lonely persons, but also for the healthy and fortunate ones, or for the sick and suffering. However, we must not limit ourselves only to prayers when it is much more needed.

V.2 The prayer and watchfulness- essential for the man's restoration

a) The prayer

"When the mind undressed itself from the old man and dressed in the man with grace, it can see his state during the praying time, resembling the sapphire or the blue of the sky, state that the Holy Scripture calls it 'a place of God', seen by the elderly on the Mount Sinai.(Is.24, 10)

b) Watchfulness

"After a rightful praying, wait for the unrightful ones and stand bravely guarding your crop. Because this was your first good order in the beginnings, to work and preserve. Thus, after you have worked, do not let your crop unguarded. Or else, your praying was in vain."

CHAPTER VI- THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRAYER AND WATCHFULNESS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

VI.1 Contemporary Theological Studies regarding the prayer

To worship God means to admit that all our being is created by God and it belongs to Him. Our obedience we owe to God only, as we are His creation and we must fulfill the mission that we have been entrusted with. Any other purpose that we might want from life, besides God's will, will only bring to us bodily and spiritual destruction. We were created with a very well defined purpose and He made all the means to achieve it available. For our redemption he gave away everything to us, even His own Son, Jesus Christ, as a model of life and discoverer of His will.

VI.2 The updating and progress of the prayer and watchfulness in the contemporary world.

The need to pray of the believer is beyond any doubt. The more the faith is, the more one's need to pray. On the other hand, the faith of a person is helped and assisted by other people's faith. Along with this, there is also the importance of the Liturgy and all public cults.

However, in the nowadays society we notice a weakening of the faith. As a consequence, a sort of indifference towards praying. Maybe the term of secularized society does not indicate an entire unfaithful society, but one in which the majority of the members practice praying rarely, only in exceptional moments.

VI.3 The way in which we should pray

Evranghie Potnicul shows us that we must pray in fear and shudder and carefully because we stand in front of God Almighty, The Emperor of the Emperors and the Lord of the Lords. "If you come near a human emperor with fear and shudder and listen carefully, the more we should do the same in front of God, Creator of everything and of Christ, the emperor of the emperors and the lord of the lords saying the prayer in the same manner because He is served and obeyed in fear and shudder by the whole heavenly mass and army of angels who praise Him with shudder and everlasting singing."

VI.4 The prayer and watchfulness in the monk's life

The first of the Philokalic Fathers who spoke about monachism was Evagrie Ponticul. Referring to the monachism he stated: "The monk is the one who separated himself from everybody and who is at peace with all". Moreover, he adds the following statement regarding monachism: "The monk is the one who considers himself one with all, because he seems to see himself ceaselessly in each one of us."

Therefore, he considers the prayer as a major responsibility of the monachism. He also reflected regarding the final departure from this world and the necessity of the monk to cut all his connections with his relatives: "Do you want, brother, to take upon yourself the lonely life and march to the rewards of the greatest conquering, silence? Leave, then, all the worries of the world with their masters, be inhuman, dispassionate, without any desires, because without their company you can finally acquire peace. Moreover, if you do not pull yourself from the midst of these, you shall not have that conquer".

VI.5 Perils and remedies

The fact that if one takes a medicine to heal a sickness without following the instructions and ways of usage, can not only be totally ineffective, but it can also aggravate the disease. A similar effect can be noticed in connection with the practice of praying: if this medicine to heal the passions, which are true diseases of the soul is taken without the specific instructions, we will not only fail to practice it, but we will also have to suffer the negative consequence. The Philokalic Fathers teach us, that when we turn our mind in itself, we should work praying ceaselessly. That is to continually repeat in our mind "Our Jesus Christ..."

CONCLUSIONS

The present thesis sketches the path from death to rebirth that is followed by “the condemned to immortality” that is the man: the path of the pray and watchfulness as it was seen and understood by the Philokalic Fathers.

In the act of his faith, through praying the man realizes his banishment, the insurmountable wall between himself and God and also his pain. Advancing in the work of the holy pray, he finds the cause of his exile in his nakedness. Like Adam, he sees himself undressed by the cloth woven by God. It is a critical moment. He can be in this state either hiding himself from himself, covering his real self “with the leaves of the justification fig”, or assuming his nakedness and advancing.

Wanting to be healed by the wound of his nakedness, the man feels the need of God. Because of this, he spiritually estranges himself and seeks for God for the entire ascendance.

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