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Foreword

Today, when thirty thousand people in China are becoming Christians every day – a number unprecedented in the history of the world – a growing number of people in the West are turning away from their Christian roots and becoming interested in ancient Chinese religion. Why is such a reversal taking place? Clearly, it is because many Chinese are now finding a true experience of Christ in the face of religious persecution by the communist government, while churches in the affluent, free West are losing an awareness of the essence of Christ and His teaching.

In modern Western society, many people turn away from the Christianity of their formative years because they find its truths smothered under an unreal kind of religiosity. They see that the people in the churches are not changing and becoming better, but rather are comforting themselves and each other in their unregenerate state. They find that the spirit of the Western churches is, at its core, little different from that of the world around them. Having removed from Christianity the Cross of inward purification, these churches have replaced a direct, intuitive apprehension of Reality and a true experience of God with intellectualism on the one hand and emotionalism on the other.

In the first case, Christianity becomes something that is acquired through rote learning, based on the idea that if you just get the words right – if you just memorize the key Scripture verses, intellectually grasp the concepts and repeat them, know how to act and to speak in the religious dialect of your particular sect – you will be saved. Christianity then becomes a dry word-based religion, a legalistic system, a set of ideas and behaviors, and a political institution that operates on the same principles as the institutions of this world. In the second case, the Western churches add the element of emotionalism and enthusiasm in order to add life to their systems, but this becomes just as grossly material as religious legalism. People become hypnotized by their self-induced emotional states, seeing a mirage of spiritual ascent while remaining bound to the material world.

This is not direct perception of Reality; it is not the Ultimate. It is no wonder, then, that Western spiritual seekers, even if they have been raised in Christian homes, begin to look elsewhere, into Eastern religions. It is also not surprising that so many are turning to the profound and enigmatic work of pre-Christian China, the Tao Teh Ching. In reading Lao Tzu, they sense a spirit similar to that of Jesus Christ. They see a poetic glimpse of Christ in Lao Tzu – a reflection that is faint, but somehow still pure. And to them, this faint but pure image is better than the more vivid but tarnished image of Him that they

encounter in much of what now passes for Christianity.

In the traditions of ancient China, the Western spiritual seeker can learn the basics of spiritual life which the churches failed to teach him: how to be free of compulsive thinking and acquire stillness of thoughts, how to cut off desires and addictions, and how to conquer negative emotions.

Some are satisfied to stay on this path. In others of us, however, a strange thing occurs. In one sense, we are making more spiritual progress than ever before, but at the same time we are inexplicably unfulfilled. In our new-found apprehension that there is something more than the realm of the ego and the passions, we become aware that there must be something even more – more than even the authentic Chinese tradition supplies. And we find that although we have left behind the Western Christian confessions, we cannot leave Christ behind.

Why is this? Some would say that, as Westerners, we have Christianity in our genes, as it were. But we would say more: that, even though we were exposed to an attenuated form of Christianity, still we were exposed to «the Christ Ideal» – as the great transmitter of Native American religion, Ohiyesa, called it. The very seed of the idea of Jesus Christ – God Who became flesh, Who emptied Himself into the creation, Who spoke the words that He spoke, Who died on the Cross to restore mankind to its original nature and thus to Paradise – is so powerful in itself that the tales and teachings of all the world's religions pale in comparison. But if Christ is so much greater as to be in a class by Himself, why is the Western religion based on Him in such a sorry condition? Why is it so externalized, materialistic and worldly? Surely, we believe, there must be more to Christ than that.

But it is more than just the idea of Christ that works in our souls. Christ Himself is at work in them. Having heard the revelation of Christ, we are now responsible for it, and now He helps us fulfill that responsibility. He helps us come to Him.

Our path to a true experience of Christ is often long and arduous. We in the modern West have become too sophisticated, too complex. When people talk to us of Christianity, we've heard it all before: we've already become conditioned to react in certain ways to Christian words and concepts. The reflexes they evoke in us are sometimes connected with an emotional trauma from the past that causes us to either cling to them or rebel against them. Clinging and rebellion are only two sides of the same coin: both are predicated on emotional involvement in words and concepts which claim to be Reality itself, but are not.

Moreover, these Christian words and concepts we have learned must vie with thousands of others from all the world's religions and philosophies, which have now become available to us sophisticated moderns. This presents us with

a paradox. Knowing that differing religions and philosophies cannot all be true at the same time, we tend to relativize truth. That is what our logical minds tell us to do. But, in the final sense, we are always wrong when we trust our logical minds.

How do we get past this? How do we become uncomplicated and unsophisticated? Can we simply unlearn all that we have learned?

No, we cannot, but what we can do is to separate ourselves from it in order to look at it with new eyes. For us Westerners to truly enter into the ancient Christian transmission and catch the essence of Christ's teaching, it is necessary for us to crucify our rationalizing minds and rise above the level of thought and emotion. For a society founded on Descartes' proposition «I think, therefore I am», this of course means a kind of suicide; and it is to precisely such an ego-death that Christ calls us. Contemporary Western Christianity trains us how to think and what to think; whereas Christ Himself, as did Lao Tzu before Him, taught us how not to need to think.

The only way to get past a merely external apprehension of religious words and concepts is to seek, without compromise and self-pity, the Reality behind them. If our rapidly diminishing Western Christendom has become too jaded by intellectualized or emotionalized religion to see the essence of Christianity, then we must, as it were, start over.

In this book we will look at Christ and his message as would Lao Tzu, who, although he lived five hundred years before Christ, intuitively sensed the presence of Christ in creation. We will seek to become like Lao Tzu's image of «the infant that has not yet smiled», who has not yet learned to react to words and ideas, who knows without knowing how it knows. And then, from the point of Lao Tzu's simplicity, innocence and direct intuition, we will receive the message of Christ from a new source: not from the modern West – which has distorted it into thousands of conflicting sects and philosophies – but from the ancient Christian East, which has transmitted to modern times the essence of Christ's teaching in a way that resonates with the teaching of Lao Tzu, not denying Lao Tzu's intuitive realizations but bringing them to a new dimension. In the Chinese tradition, the direct transmission of wisdom from teacher to disciple is of vital importance. The Eastern Christian Church has that transmission all the way back to Christ Himself: an unbroken historical line of development with no fundamental shift in viewpoint such as happened in the West after the Schism of a.d. 1054.

In the Christian East, we find clear guidance on acquiring stillness, overcoming the passions, dealing with thoughts, and cultivating the virtues, as well as precise teachings on spiritual deception which guide us more safely and surely on the path to God. Most important of all, we find the Undistorted Image of Christ which we had not beheld in other churches. In Him, Whom the

ancient Akathist hymn calls the «Sunrise of the East»,¹ we find the Beginning and End of our soul's desire, and the door to eternal life.²

In the mystical and contemplative tradition of Eastern Christianity – which we will discuss in Part III of this book – we are able to go beyond any realizations we may have had in the Eastern religions. The end of this is deification, total illumination, perfect communion with our Creator, and the birth of Christ Himself within us. In Christ is the fulfillment of the expectation of the ancients. Christ does not abolish what came before Him; instead, He brings it to fulfillment by disintegrating the false and upholding the true in the Light of His ultimate revelation. The truths in all ancient religions and philosophies shine forth in this Light, but they are not this Light, nor are they equal to it. If seen with the eyes of faith, they can bear witness to the Light of revelation, just as can the souls of today's seekers when, through the eyes of Lao Tzu, they find and behold the Undistorted Image of Christ, shining with all His brilliance in the ancient Christian East. Let us now look through those eyes. To the people who lived before Christ, Lao Tzu showed how to rise above thoughts and emotions so that they could know of the Mind Who is beyond thought, hear the Word Who makes no sound, and follow the Tao Who leaves no footprints. To us who have come after Christ, Lao Tzu can do the same so as to help us begin the path to a true, nonconceptual experience of Jesus Christ, of Him Who is the incarnation of the Logos of the Greeks, the Wakan Tanka of the Native Americans, and the Tao of the God-seeking ancient Chinese.

¹Akathist to Our Sweetest Lord Jesus Christ, Kontakion 10.

²Cf. Revelation 1 and John 10:9.

Introduction: Lao Tzu and the Ancient Greeks

My teachings are very easy to understand and to practice; yet there is no one in the world who is able either to understand or to practice them. This is because my teachings have an originating principle and arise from an integrated system. This is not understood, so I am unknown.

– Lao Tzu (Gi-ming Shien, trans.)

Of the Logos, which is as I describe it, people always prove to be uncomprehending, both before and after they have heard of it. For although all things happen according to this Logos, people behave as if they have no experience, even when they experience such words and deeds as I explain, when I distinguish each thing according to its constitution and declare how it is. The rest of humanity fails to notice what they do after they wake up just as they forget what they do when asleep.

– Heraclitus

1. The Tao/Logos

Christ the Eternal Tao was inspired by the life of the Chinese scholar Hieromonk Seraphim Rose (then known as Eugene Rose), and by his teacher, the philosopher Gi-ming Shien. In Gi-ming's transmission of the ancient Chinese tradition, one is struck by how closely it resembles the ancient Greek tradition; and Gi-ming in fact taught that the early Chinese and Greek philosophers were basically alike in their view of the universe.

«In the history of ancient China», Fr. Seraphim said, «there are moments when it is absolutely incredible how the same things happened in Chinese life as happened in the West, even though there was no outward connection between the two civilizations. The first of the Greek philosophers – Thales and so forth – lived about the sixth century B.C., just about the time Confucius was in China and Buddha was in India. It is as though there really was a spirit of the times».

Heraclitus, born in the middle of the sixth century B.C., was one of these first Greek philosophers. For the riddling character of his writings, he was surnamed «the Obscure» even in antiquity. He based his philosophy on the «Logos» – a word which itself means «Word», but which bears the connotations of measure, proportion, and pattern. The Logos of Heraclitus, according to one textbook of Greek philosophy, «is the first principle of knowledge: understanding of the world involves understanding of the structure or pattern of the world, a pattern concealed from the eyes of ordinary men. The Logos is also the first principle of existence, that unity of the world process which sus-

tains it as a process. This unity lies beneath the surface, for it is a unity of diverse and conflicting opposites, in whose strife the Logos maintains a continual balance.... The Logos maintains the equilibrium of the universe at every moment». ³Although Heraclitus taught that «all things change, and nothing remains at rest», he knew the Logos to be itself stable, the measured pattern of flow.

At about the same time that Heraclitus lived in Greece, there lived in China the philosopher Lao Tzu («Old Master»). Lao Tzu wrote of the same universal Pattern or Ordering Principle that Heraclitus styled the Logos. «I do not know its name», he said, «but characterize it as the Way (Tao)»⁴ – the Tao being a symbol basic to Chinese thought,⁵ as the Logos was to ancient Greek thought. For Lao Tzu, the Way was precisely what its adopted name signified, in its full metaphysical sense: the Way, Path or Pattern of Heaven, the Course that all things follow. The Way is the Uncreated Cause of all things. It is the Way that creates, and it is the Way that «nourishes, develops, cares for, shelters, comforts, and protects»⁶ the creation, balancing the strife of opposites by itself not contending.

Of the writings of Heraclitus, only a handful of fragments have come down to us; but from Lao Tzu we have a full eighty-one chapters of the Tao Teh Ching. Of all the ancient philosophers, Lao Tzu came the closest to assimilating the essence of reality and describing the Tao or Logos. His Tao Teh Ching represents the epitome of what a human being can know through intuition, through the apprehension of the universal Principle and Pattern manifested in the created order.

Six centuries after Heraclitus and Lao Tzu, there lived on the Greek island of Patmos an old, white-haired hermit named John. While exiled in a cave on the island, he dictated to his disciple Prochorus what he had received from direct revelation from the heavenly realm, from Divine vision, and thus spoke to the world words that it never thought to hear:

In the beginning was the Logos,
And the Logos was with God,
And the Logos was God.
The same was in the beginning with God.
All things were made by Him;
And without Him was not anything made that was made.
In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.
And the light shines in darkness,
And the darkness comprehended it not....
He was in the world, and the world was made by Him,
And the world knew Him not....

And the Logos became flesh,
And dwelt among us,
And we beheld His glory.⁷

This was that very Logos of which Heraclitus had said the people «always prove to be uncomprehending»; this was the very Tao that Lao Tzu had said «no one in the world is able to understand». It is not without reason that sensitive Chinese translators of St. John's Gospel, knowing that «Tao» meant to the Chinese what «Logos» meant to the Greeks, have rendered the first line of the Gospel to read: «In the beginning was the Tao». ⁸

When the Apostle John wrote his Gospel, he was no doubt aware of the common Greek philosophical symbol of the Logos. But – as can be clearly seen by a comparison of that Gospel with the riddles of Heraclitus or the writings of other philosophers – when he spoke from revelation he was not merely borrowing an old term; rather, he was transforming it, bringing it into the light of the fullness of mystical knowledge. When he spoke of the Logos, it was now no longer in riddles, as from one who had only glimpsed its traces in nature. For now the Logos – the Creator, Sustainer, Pattern and Ordering Principle of nature – was made flesh, and dwelt among us, for the only time in history. And John, His disciple, had seen Him; he had beheld His glory and heard the words which proceeded from His mouth. Being offered the ultimate closeness to Him Who had only been dimly seen before, he had even lain on His breast and, in the greatest of mysteries, had received Him into himself at the Last Supper.

Thus, while Lao Tzus Tao Teh Ching represents the highest that a person can know through intuition, St. John's Gospel represents the highest that a person can know through revelation, that is, through God making Himself known and experienced in the most tangible way possible.

2. Hieromonk Seraphim and Gi-ming Shien

Growing up in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the aforementioned Fr. Seraphim rejected the modern American Christianity in which he had been raised, finding it to be boring, sterile and empty. In quest of a true apprehension of reality, he undertook an extensive study of the ancient Chinese tradition, first under Alan Watts and then under a more authentic transmitter of this tradition, the humble and virtuous Gi-ming Shien. Gi-ming had studied under sages in China (among whom were Ou-yang Ching-wu and Ma Yei-fu), as well as with some of the greatest Chinese thinkers of the twentieth century. Under his tutelage, Fr. Seraphim learned ancient Chinese in order to study the Tao Teh Ching in the original language. He helped Gi-ming to translate the Tao Teh Ching into English, and Gi-ming opened to him the deeper meaning of its contents. It was Gi-ming who first told Fr. Seraphim that the Logos of the ancient Greeks is the same as the Tao of Lao Tzu.

From the writings of the French metaphysician René Guénon, Fr. Seraphim had learned the necessity of adhering to the traditional, orthodox form of a religion. This enabled him to value Gi-ming as an orthodox representative of the Chinese tradition; and then led him finally – unexpectedly – back to the ancient, orthodox form of the religion he had rejected in his younger days. Just as the ancient Greeks had once seen the fulfillment of their philosophy in the revelation of Christ, so Fr. Seraphim recognized the fulfillment of the philosophy of Lao Tzu in the ancient Orthodox Christianity that the Greeks (and, by extension, the Russians) had preserved.

Gi-ming Shien later disappeared mysteriously, to the great sadness of Fr. Seraphim, who to the end of his days remembered him with the deepest admiration and gratitude. Fr. Seraphim went on to become an Orthodox Christian monk and writer in the mountains of northern California, and since his death in 1982 he has unexpectedly become one of the best-loved spiritual writers in Russia. It was through him that the writer of the present book discovered the depth of ancient, unadulterated Christianity, and along with Fr. Seraphim found it to be the fullness of what he had been probing for in Lao Tzu. This book is an offering to those of like mind, who have found much of contemporary American Christianity to be trivial and cliché, and yet who still have a longing for Christ. Through the wisdom of ancient, God-illuminated Christian teachers, whom we have quoted extensively, we will show that Christ's revelation is indeed the consummation of what had been glimpsed by the great pre-Christian sages.

3. Modern Syncretism vs. Ancient Apologetics

This book's comparison of the Tao Teh Ching with Christian Scriptures opens it up to the accusation of being merely another attempt at religious syncretism. A serious reading of the text, however, will bear out that this is not the case. Religious syncretism, in its modern form, regards all paths as possessing equal truth simultaneously, and in so doing is forced to overlook certain basic distinctions, or to offer complicated explanations in order to rationalize these distinctions away. The ancient Christian teachers, on the other hand, took a more honest and discerning approach, which in the end proved to be more simple, natural, and organic. Rather than mixing all the religions together like the moderns do, these ancients understood that there was an unfolding of wisdom throughout the ages. They saw foreshadowings, glimpses and prophecies of Christ not only among the ancient Hebrews, but also among other peoples who lived before Him, and they saw the writings of pre-Christian sages as a preparation for Christ as the apogee of revelation. This is explained most clearly in the quote by St. Seraphim which begins this book.⁹ If we concede that the pre-Christian philosophers did seek the truth, and that they did catch glimpses of it, it only stands to reason that their teachings should bear some similarities, like a broken reflection of the moon in water, to the fullness of Truth in Jesus Christ. Therefore, these similarities need not appear as a threat to Christianity; instead, they offer one more proof of Christ as universal Truth.

Christ the Eternal Tao, then, should be seen as following not in the modern syncretic tradition, but rather in the ancient apologetic tradition. The latter began less than a century after Christ, with St. Justin Martyr (a.d. 110–165), Clement of Alexandria (a.d. 153–217), and Lactantius (a.d. 260–330).

In speaking to the Greek polytheists of his time, St. Justin called upon the testimony of the pre-Christian Greek philosophers and poets who, like Lao Tzu, taught that there are not many gods, but only one God: the Uncreated Cause and Creator of the universe, omnipotent, eternal, and infinite.¹⁰ Each of these writers, Justin affirmed, «spoke well in proportion to the share he had of the Logos disseminated among people, seeing what was related to it... For all the writers were able to see realities darkly through the sowing of the implanted Logos that was in them».¹¹ Elsewhere Justin went so far as to call the pre-Christian sages by the name of Christian: «Those who lived in accordance with the Logos are Christians, even though they were called godless, such as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus and others like them... So also those who lived before Christ and did not live by the Logos were ungracious and enemies of Christ, and murderers of those who lived by the Logos. But those who lived by the Logos, and those who so live now, are Christians, fearless and unperturbed».¹²

In the generations immediately after Justin, Clement and Lactantius continued in this tradition by pointing to ancient writers who believed in one God.¹³ Among the philosophers they cite is Hermes Trismegistus, who, like Lao Tzu, says that the Creator is «one, self-existent, and without a name».¹⁴

«The Greeks», says Lactantius, «speak of God as the Logos... for Logos signifies both speech and reason, inasmuch as He is both the voice and the wisdom of God. And of this Divine speech not even the philosophers were ignorant, since Zeno represents the Logos as the arranger of the established order of things, and the framer of the universe: whom he calls Fate, and the necessity of things, and God, and the soul of Jupiter, in accordance with the custom, indeed, by which they are wont to regard Jupiter as God. But the words are no obstacle, since the sentiment is in agreement with the truth».¹⁵

Justin and Lactantius praised Socrates because, again like Lao Tzu, he refrained from setting forth precise, defined teachings about those things which had not been shown to him through Divine revelation. In the spirit of Lao Tzu, Socrates had said: «It is neither easy to find the Father and Maker of all, nor, having found Him, is it possible to declare Him to all».¹⁶ They also extolled Socrates for not paying homage to the false gods whom the state recognized and all the people worshipped – and for even being killed for this. This was because, writes Justin, «Christ was partially known even by Socrates, for He was and is the Logos Who is in every person.»¹⁷

Over and above the sayings of the philosophers, the sayings of the ten virgin prophetesses known as Sibyls were cited by ancient Christian writers as pointing to belief in the one invisible God and offering clear prophecies of the coming of Christ. Virgil, who died nineteen years before the birth of Christ, used the prophecies of the Sibyl of Cumæ to predict (in his fourth Eclogue) that the Messiah would «come down from heaven», be born as an infant from a virgin, and bring in an age in which «all stains of our past wickedness would be cleansed»; and that all this would take place during the reign of Virgil's friend, the consul Pollio.¹⁸ This indeed occurred.

In quoting from sages who lived before Christ, Justin, Clement and Lactantius corrected their mistakes, which they attributed to the times in which these sages lived. «Whatever either lawgivers or philosophers uttered well», says Justin, «they elaborated by finding and contemplating some part of the Logos. But since they did not know the whole of the Logos, which is Christ, they often contradicted themselves».¹⁹ And Lactantius writes: «People of the highest genius touched upon the truth, and almost grasped it, had not custom, infatuated by false opinions, carried them back».²⁰ At the same time, both Justin and Lactantius embraced the truths uttered by the ancient sages as their own. «Whatever things were truly said among people», Justin affirms, «belong to us Christians.»²¹

Neither Justin, Clement nor Lactantius could have heard of Lao Tzu. From what has been said above, however, there can be no doubt that, had they lived in China rather than in the Greek and Roman world, they would have brought forth Lao Tzu as a pre-Christian witness of Christ the Logos.

In ancient Greek, Bulgarian and Romanian Orthodox monasteries and churches today, one can find wall-paintings of the ancient Greek philosophers, who are thus honored as seekers of Truth before the coming of Christ. Even the staunchest Christians in Greece refer to Socrates as «the Apostle to the pagans». The best-loved Greek saint of the twentieth century, St. Nektarios of Pentapolis, said that Socrates and «divine Plato» were at times «inspired by God».²² If the Greek philosophers can be honored in this way, cannot also Lao Tzu, who came even closer than they to describing the Logos, the Tao, before He was made flesh, and dwelt among us?

* * *

³ Reginald E. Allen, ed., *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle*, pp. 9–10.

⁴ *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 25 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).

⁵ See Thomas Cleary, *The Essential Tao*, p. 1.

⁶ *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 51 (Gia-fu Feng and Jane English, trans.).

⁷ John 1:1–5, 10, 14.

⁸ The identification of “Tao” with “Logos» has not only a philosophical but also a Scriptural basis. In St. John’s Gospel, Christ the incarnate Logos calls Himself “the Way (Tao)» (John 14:6); and in the Acts of the Apostles we read how the first followers of Christ referred to their new faith simply as “the Way» (sec Acts 19:9, 19:23, 22:4, 24:14, 24:22).

⁹ See p. above.

¹⁰ Among those whom Justin mentions are: Orpheus (in the work called *Dia-thecæ*), Sophocles, Pythagoras, Plato, Ammon, / Æschylus, Philemon, Euripides and Menander.

¹¹ St. Justin Martyr, “Second Apology,» in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, p. 193.

¹² *Ibid.*, “First Apology,» p. 272.

¹³ In addition to the writers cited by Justin, Clement and Lactantius cite Virgil, Ovid, Thales, Anaxagoras, Anisthenes, Cleanthes, Chryssipus, Zeno, Democritus, Xenophan the Athenian, Hesiod, Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca.

¹⁴ Lactantius, “The Divine Institutes,» in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, p. 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. below.

¹⁶ Plato, *Tirnaeus*. Quoted in St. Justin Martyr, “Second Apology,» p. 191, and in Clement of Alexandria, “Exhortation to the Greeks,» in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, p. 191. See also Lactantius, p. 91.

¹⁷ St. Justin Martyr, “Second Apology,» p. 191.

¹⁸ On the Sibyls, see St. Justin Martyr, «Hortatory Address to the Greeks,» in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, pp. 288–89; Clement of Alexandria, *op. cit.*, pp. 192, 194; and Lactantius, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–18, 26–27, 61, 105, 210, 215. For a discussion of the Sibylline prophecies of Christ contained in the fourth *Eclogue* of Virgil, see “The Oration of Constantine,» in *The Niene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, pp. 575–77.

¹⁹ St. Justin Martyr, “Second Apology,» p. 191.

²⁰ Lactantius, “Divine Institutes,» p.


²¹ St. Justin Martyr, “Second Apology,» p. 193.


²² St. Nektarios of Pentapolis, *Christologia*, pp. 14, 18, 20. Quoted in Constantine Cavarnos, *Meetings with Kontoglou*, p. 53.

A Note on the Chinese Seals


All the seals in this book (except for the signature seals) have been created by You Shan Tang in the ancient Da Zhuan style from the Shang-Yin and Chou dynasties, ca. 1766–221 b.c. The characters are written in the oldest form that has come down to us – in the way Lao Tzu would have written them in the sixth century b.c.

After 221 b.c., by order of the «First Emperor», Shih Huang Ti, the seal script was standardized throughout China, and its style was formalized. The earlier Da Zhuan style, by contrast, allows for much more creativity and freedom.

In the oldest form in which we find the character Tao 

it appears thus: 

comprised of three elements, representing respectively a road 

a human head 

and a human foot 

.The head is topped with the two plumes that were used in ancient days to signify the rank of general, and thus it means «the leader»; while the picture of the foot has the meaning «to follow». Thus, the ancient character for the Tao or Way can be deciphered as «to follow the leader on the road.»

Part I. Christ the eternal Tao

A Note on the Nine Enneads

The poems that follow are not a translation of the Tao Teh Ching, but rather comprise an entirely new work which is based on and quotes from the Tao Teh Ching. In these poems we will look at Christ through the innocent eyes and intuitive vision of Lao Tzu, and at the same time present Lao Tzu's teaching in the light of a new revelation. Therefore, what follows might be considered a «New Testament of the Tao Teh Ching». In keeping with the aim of this work, we have attempted to follow the form and style of the Tao Teh Ching, including its division into eighty-one chapters, based on multiples of three.

Here it should be noted that the ancient Chinese placed great significance on the number Three, seeing in it the primal principle of order; and in this way their teachings foreshadowed Christ's revelation of the mystical life of the Triadic Godhead (see p. 257). In chapter 42 of the Tao Teh Ching, Lao Tzu wrote: «The Three produced all things». The chapters of the Tao Teh Ching itself consist of the sum of nine groups of nine – or nine enneads – nine being three groups of three. In the following Part we have highlighted this pattern.

In order to unlock the mysteries of Lao Tzu, we have made use of the teachings and insights of Gi-ming Shien, as recorded in Fr. Seraphim's lecture notes on Gi-ming's classes on the Tao Teh Ching. Then, in bringing Lao Tzu's wisdom into a new dimension, we have drawn extensively from Eastern Christian writings spanning nearly two millennia. These sources are included in the notes at the end of this book, together with a commentary on the nine enneads.

In quoting from the Tao Teh Ching, we have relied primarily on the heretofore-unpublished, partial translation of it by Gi-ming and Fr. Seraphim, which we have found to be the most penetrating; but we have also referred to numerous other translations and to the original Chinese text.

The First Ennead: In the Beginning Was the Way

After Ma Yuan (early thirteenth century *a.d.*), Viewing the Moon under a Pine Tree.

Chapter 1

Before light was made
There was the Primal Light that was not made:
The Primal Essence,
Dwelling in the Darkness of incomprehensibility.
Of this the Ancient Prophet spoke, saying²⁵: 5
«He made Darkness His secret place» ²⁶
The formless and immaterial place of knowledge,²⁷
Whither our understanding or concepts gain no admittance.
And the Ancient Sage spoke too of this,
Calling it «the Darkness within darkness,²⁸ 10
I he gate to all mystery».²⁹
There is no name whereby the Primal Essence can be named,
Neither in this age nor in the age to come.³⁰
We call Him Essence,
For He is a sea of Essence, 15
Indeterminate and without bounds,
Spreading far and wide beyond all notion of time or nature.³¹
He is wholly Essence, and solely Essence,
Yet He is above essence,
Because He is not of the essence of anything that is.³² 20
We call Him Being,
For before all else was, He Is.³³
Yet He is above being,
Above all existing things,
Even above existence itself.³⁴ 25
We call Him the One,
For He alone is wholly Simple and without parts.
Yet He transcends the antinomy of the one and the many,
Being not limited to any concepts, even the concept of the One.
He is neither one nor unity, neither many nor multiplicity.³⁵ 30
Finally, we call Him Mind or Thought,
For He is Himself Mind by essence,
Wholly Mind and solely Mind.

Yet He is entirely above mind and thought, too,
For every thought expresses a duality: 35
The relationship of the thinker and the object thought of.
Neither of these two can return to complete Simplicity in itself,
For the thinker has need of the object
And the object has need of the thinker.
But the Primal Essence is neither of those who think nor what is thought
of,³⁶ 40
For He is beyond them:
Unlimited, self-existing, free and simple,
Standing in need of nothing.
To conceive or be conceived is proper to the nature of things secondary to the
Primal Essence.³⁷
Thus the essence that can be conceived of as essence is not the Primal Es-
sence.⁴⁵
The being that can be limited to existence is not the Primal Being.
The one that can be limited to the concept of oneness is not the Primal Unity.
And the mind that can be thought of is not the Primal Mind.³⁸
The one who still in some way possesses any thought has not yet left duality
and arrived at Simplicity.
But the one who has completely abandoned it has arrived in some fashion at
the Primal Mind, 50
Through having supremely relinquished the power of thinking.³⁹

Chapter 2

As our mind utters from itself a word,
So did the Primal Mind utter the Primal Word (Logos).
The Primal Mind-Essence is a Womb.
The Primal Mind-Essence is a Father.
Out of this Womb of the Mind, 5
The Word was begotten, outside time.
Of this birth the Ancient Prophet spoke, speaking as the Father-Mind:
«From the Womb (that is, from my Essence) before the morning star have I
begotten You».⁴⁰
And of this birth the Ancient Sage also spoke, saying:
«Something mysteriously formed, 10
Born before heaven and earth,
Tranquil, boundless.

Dependent on nothing and changing not». ⁴¹
Mind does not exist without word,
Nor word without mind. 15
A thought of the mind is a word hidden within,
A word is a thought which has come without.
Thought is transformed into word,
And word transmits thought to the hearers.
Mind, coming from itself, 20
Is thus the father of the word,
And the word is the son of the mind.
Before the mind, the word was impossible;
And the word does not come from anywhere outside.
But rather from the mind itself. 25
Thus also, the Father, the all-embracing Mind,
The Thought above and beyond thoughts,
Has a Son, begotten of His Essence:
The Word above and beyond words. ⁴²

Chapter 3

As our actions proceed from our mind,
So does the Primal Action proceed from the Primal Mind.
As the Primal Word is like a sound –
A still sound,
So is the Primal Action like a Breath – 5
A still Breath.
And as a breath rests in a word that is uttered,
So does the Primal Breath rest in the Primal Word.
In you there is breath,
Material and impersonal, 10
Diffusing itself while sustaining your separate and distinct life.
In the Primal Essence, as Life itself,
There is also Breath,
But a Breath that is purely Spiritual and Personal,
Not diffusing itself but sustaining the life of everything without distinction. 15
The Breath of the Primal Mind is like a wind. ⁴³
The wind blows where it wills:
You hear its sound,
But cannot tell whence it comes or whither it goes.

So is the Breath Who rests in the Word, 20
And so are those beings who rest in the Breath of Heaven.⁴⁴

Chapter 4

Before the world was made,
The Mind, Word and Breath were One,
Sharing in the One Essence, above all essences.
The Oneness of these Persons is a mystery
Whose vastness cannot be comprehended by even the highest spirits. ⁵⁴⁵
Nevertheless, we attempt to give a name to this mystery of oneness:
The name of love.
A name so great that, finding it impossible to give it due reverence,
People despair and treat it as commonplace.
The Mind, Word and Breath had this perfect love between 10 them.
Not only did They have this love,
They are this love.
Therefore, love existed before the world was made.
The love of the Maker of things cannot merely be extended outwardly, to the
universe made by Him.
In the Three this love is directed inwardly also, within the Primal Essence: 15
In the mystical inward life, hidden in the depths of the Divinity.
For the Three have always been One.
But the world did not know this love
Until the Word Himself came into it,
Sent by the Mind as the Messenger to the world 20
Of the Primal Love that had created it.

Chapter 5

The triangle is the first full form.⁴⁶
The Three is the principle of Order,
The Order that must exist before the multiplicity of things.
Therefore the Ancient Sage said:
«The Three produces all things».⁴⁷ 5
The Three acting as One,
One not acting without the Others.⁴⁸

The Triad contains itself in perfection,
For it is the first that surpasses the dyad.⁴⁹
It lies beyond the duality of matter, 10
Of subject and object,
Of self and other.
The Triad is beyond the distinction of the one and the many;
Its perfection goes beyond the multiplicity of which duality is the root.
Two is the number that separates, 15
Three the number that transcends all separation.^{50 51}
The one and the many find themselves gathered together in the Three,
For the Triad, being many, is also a Unity:
Not a unity of self-absorption, but of love.
For the Three have one nature, one will, one power, one operation. 20
As One, They do not blend or become confused,
But They cleave to each other, having their being in each other.⁵²
This is the perfect love, the original unity, the original harmony, the final
mystery
To which no human thought has ever succeeded in rising.

Chapter 6. The Word is begotten of the Mind,

The Breath proceeds from the Mind,
Yet there was never a time when the Mind existed without the Word and
Breath.
They dwelt in the Darkness that was before darkness, outside time,
Yet They made all things within time, 5
For time and darkness came into being only when movement and light were
made.
By Thinking which is beyond thought, the Primal Essence creates.
The Word brings forth and fulfills the command of the Mind,
The Action-Breath accomplishes and perfects,⁵³
And with these two hands of the Mind,⁵⁴ 10
Thought becomes deed.

Chapter 7

The Mind spoke through His child the Word,
And through the Word all things were made.
Thus did the Ancient Prophet say:
«The Mind spoke, and all things came to be,
He commanded, and they were created».⁵⁵ 5
And: «By the Word of the Mind were the heavens established».⁵⁶
Of this also did the Ancient Sage speak,
Calling the Pre-eternal Word «the Source of the ten thousand things».⁵⁷
All things, then, were made by the Word,
And without Him was not anything made that was made:⁵⁸ 10
All worlds, and worlds within worlds,
All matter, all life, all intelligences,
Of numbers so vast that if their names should be written every one,
Even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.⁵⁹
The Mind spoke through His child the Word, 15
And at His Breath there appeared the innumerable multitude of spirits.⁶⁰
Therefore did the Ancient Prophet say:
«The Mind spoke, and all the host of spirits were made by the
Breath of His mouth».⁶¹
The Mind spoke, calling upon the Pre-eternal Counsel – the Word and the
Breath –
Saying, «Let us make man».⁶² 20
And through the Breath of Heaven entering into man’s nostrils,
Man became a living soul.⁶³
The ten thousand things were created out of nothing,
Out of the Darkness that was before darkness.
And when this was accomplished, 25
The still, unchanging Word resounded through all that was made,
And the still, unchanging Breath blew through all that was made,
Moving upon the face of the silent deep,⁶⁴
And giving to all life and motion.

Chapter 8

«Once there was a time», said the Ancient Sage,
«When all things became harmonized through the One:
The heavens receiving the One became clear;

The earth receiving the One became calm;
Spirits receiving the One became divine; 5
All things receiving the One began to live.
Without the One to make clear, the heavens would be rent;
Without the One to give calm, the earth would dissolve;
Without the One to make full, the valleys would be exhausted;
Without the One to give life, all nature would suffer decease». ⁶⁵ 10
«The Three produces all things», said the Ancient Sage, ⁶⁶
Yet «all things became harmonized through the One».
The Three, being One in love, creates as One,
And thus it is Love that creates and sustains life.
This creation of the world by Love, in the Unity of the Three, 15
Is the mystery of the worlds Original Harmony.

Chapter 9

«I am the Way», said the Pre-eternal Word. ⁶⁷
As through the Word all things came into being from the Mind,
So through Him do all things return to the Mind.
Therefore the Ancient Sage said:
«The movement of the Way consists in returning, 5
Returning to the Source». ⁶⁸
The Word is the only Way by which they came,
And He is the only Way by which they can effect their return,
For «no one goes to the Mind except through the Word». ⁶⁹
He is the only Way which is natural for them to follow. 10
It is He Who fills,
It is He Who empties.
He empties Himself
That with Himself He might fill all things.
He allows Himself to be torn down ⁷⁰ 15
I liar through Him all things might be raised up.
Relinquishing His utter transcendence,
He goes forth from Himself in the abundance of His love,
That all things might go to Him, ⁷¹
Returning to the Source. 20

The Second Ennead: The Coming of the Way

Chapter 10. Before the Word came into the world

The sages sought Him out in every place.
They saw Him not, but sensed His presence everywhere.
They found Him in living beings, in mountain crags and flowing streams, in seas and winds.
He was not these things, 5
But He spoke in these things, guiding them.
All things followed His Course.
Therefore the sages called Him also by His other name: The Way (Tao),
The Course that all things are to follow. 10
The trees, the birds, the rivers and winds:
These had no choice but to follow the Way.
Man alone is given choice;
Man alone can follow or go his own way.
If he follows the Way, he will suffer with the pain of the world, 15
But He will find the Original Harmony.
If he follows his own way, he will suffer only with himself,
And within him will be chaos.

Chapter 11. Before He came into the world,

The sages tried to describe the Way:
The Way that all things must follow, and man if he chooses.
Not having seen Him, but only His traces,
The sages could only speak in dim verses and riddles. 5
Some things they did know, even from His traces
As He passed silently, invisibly through the canyons.
What was this Course that all things followed?
No thing existed for itself.
Each thing humbly, patiently fulfilled its designation, without thinking, 10
Without possessing, or rebelling, or complaining, or laying blame, or taking credit, or seeking honor.
In this way, the roaring ocean and mighty wind were as meek as the still pond.
One thing dies, without thinking, that others may live.
A seed falls to the ground and dies,

And from it comes a tree bearing fruit and more seeds beyond counting. 15
 If the seed is preserved whole, nothing will come from it.
 Only if it dies will it give life.⁷²
 This is the Way, the Pattern that all things follow,
 Knew the Ancient Sage.
 This is how we can describe the Way, 20
 For what the Way does, the Way is.
 Thus, said the Ancient Sage,
 «There must be an Original Principle of all things
 Which reveals the mother of all things.
 Having found the mother, we know the child; 25
 Knowing the child, we then observe the mother». ⁷³
 For does not the vessel, crafted harmoniously, speak of the artist?
 If all things that are made follow the Way,
 Does not the Maker of things follow it, also?
 If each thing that is made serves another, 30
 And all things serve the whole,
 Does not the Way serve, also?
 But whom does the Way serve?
 If ill created things (save man) humbly, patiently fulfill the designation of their
 existence on earth,
 Should not the Way do the same? 35
 But how can He, if He does not walk the earth as do created things?
 And if He did, what would be His designation?
 And if one thing must die that others may live,
 Should not the Way do the same?
 But how was the Way to die, 40
 And whom was He to die for?
 This was the mystery before His coming.
 The sages knew of His meekness, His lowliness, His selflessness and patience,
 His calmness in His mighty deeds, His gentleness in His strength.
 They knew that as each thing serves another, 45
 So does the Maker of things serve all things.
 They knew that as each thing dies for another,
 So it is for the Way to die for all things.
 This they knew.
 But of the greatest mystery, 50
 His perfect love, which existed before the world,
 They could not know
 Until He had walked among them,
 Held their head against His breast,⁷⁴

Spoken to them with living breath, 55
Entered into them through His flesh and blood⁷⁵
And vowed that He would never leave them.⁷⁶

Chapter 12. Before the Way came to earth,

He was known to have distinct qualities and properties
As does a person.
And yet the Ancient Sage, not having seen Him,
Could not know Him fully as Person. 5
To the Sage, He was, as it were, a Person without a face or name;
A Person Who spoke no words, left no report of His coming, no footprints;
A Person Who could not be touched.
Therefore the Sage could but call Him «the Uncertainty».
«Looked for», he said, «but invisible, 10
The Way may be called the indistinguishable.
Listened for, but inaudible,⁷⁷
It may be called the elusive.
Grasped at, but unattainable,
It may be called the subtle. 15
These three cannot be discovered by investigation,
For they blend into one.⁷⁸
This appears as darkness».⁷⁹
For the Sage, the Way dwelt in the Darkness of Incomprehensibility,
Yet He was not that Darkness; 20
The Way dwelt beyond all being,
Yet He was not non-being;
The Way emptied Himself,
Yet He was not emptiness.
He was not an eternal void, 25
For He existed in eternity.
Therefore, said the Sage,
«The Way considered as a reality is impalpable, indefinite.
But, within this impalpability there is form;
Within this indefiniteness there is Being. 30
Dark and dim, within is the Essence.
The essence being supremely true,
Within is the true evidence».⁸⁰
For the Sage, the Way could not yet be known wholly as Person,

But neither was He wholly impersonal, 35
 For He was known to care for the ten thousand things.
 Therefore, said the Sage,
 «All things arise from the Way,
 And by the power of the Way they are nourished,
 Developed, cared for, 40
 Sheltered, comforted,
 Grown, and protected». ⁸¹
 «Is the Way a Child of something else?» the Sage asked, ⁸²
 But could not answer.
 The Sage had not seen the Mind Who had given birth to the Word outside
 time, 45
 For «he who has seen the Word has seen the Father-Mind», ⁸³
 And the Word, the Minds first Interpreter and Herald, ⁸⁴
 Had not yet revealed His face,
 Had not yet revealed Himself as Person.

Chapter 13. In finding the traces of the Way in nature,

The Sage found the simple nature from which man had departed.
 «Return to the babe», he said, ⁸⁵
 «Return to the state of the uncarved block, the pristine simplicity. ⁸⁶
 The primitive origin of man: 5
 Here indeed is the main-thread of the Way». ⁸⁷
 In his infancy, his primitive origin,
 Mankind had been made to rejoice in the Way, his Source,
 To abide in Him, to cleave to Him, and never depart:
 Made to raise himself above the things of the senses, 10
 Above every bodily appearance,
 To become selfless like the Way,
 To go beyond himself in selfless love,
 To contemplate the Way extending into the universe,
 To know the inner essences of created things, 15
 And, moving even beyond these, to behold the Primal Word,
 Seeing in Him, in purity and stillness of thought,
 The image of the Primal Mind.
 Such was man's original nature,
 The state of the uncarved block, the pristine simplicity, 20
 In which the simple and undivided Way had made him,

In which he was ever to remain,
But from which he had departed.
For, not striving to go beyond himself,
He preferred to seek things nearer to himself: 25
The body and its senses.
Removing himself from the invisible Way,
He began to regard his own visible self.⁸⁸
Therefore the Ancient Sage,
Seeking to return to his original nature, 30
To the immaterial Source beyond the realm of sense,
Said: «One's perfect virtue lies in his conformity to the Way.⁸⁹
The Way may be styled 'the form of the formless,'
'The image of the imageless.'
Go out to meet it and you will discover no beginning; 35
Follow after and you will discover no end.
Lay hold of this ancient doctrine and apply it to the nourishment of your soul.
You will then understand the primitive origin of man,⁹⁰
The main-thread of the Way».

Chapter 14

«When my contemplation is complete», said the Ancient Sage,
«And quiescence is maintained unalloyed,
«Though the various forms are restless,
I am looking for the return to nature». ⁹¹
Before the Way came into the world, 5
The restless world groaned for His coming.⁹²
For the one being who had been given the choice of whether to follow the
Way,
Had departed from the Way,
Disturbing the Original Harmony.
The one who had been given governance over nature, 10
Had departed from his own Governor, and from nature,
Disturbing the Original Hierarchy.
Made to find pleasure in the Way,
He had instead found pleasure through his senses.
Made to desire the Way, 15
He had instead desired created things.
Made to remain in primal simplicity,

He had fragmented himself into many parts.
Going against his primitive origin,
Ancient man had entered into contention against himself.⁹³ 20
Contending with himself and others for the objects of desire,
He had spread contention throughout the earth.
Having corrupted his own nature,
He had brought all nature into corruption with him.
Therefore did the various forms that were made groan for their Maker 25
To restore the lost one to the Way,
To return him to his true nature,
To cleanse the filth of his corruption,
And thus regain the Original Harmony.
Though the various forms are restless, 30
I am looking for the return to nature.
Do you hear the restless-earth, its groaning,
O ancient Man, O lost one?
It is not the wind, for all things are still.
The lake is calm, the leaves do not rustle on the trees. 35
And yet the spirit hears that cry,
That never-ceasing moan that existed before your kingdoms.
You covered the earth with your kingdoms In order to stifle that cry,
But it would not be smothered under stones. 40
Your mind speaks incessantly with the voice of desire
In order to drown out that cry,
But the heart hears it beneath the mind's din.
To the ears it is a silent moan.
To the spirit it is louder than the mightiest tempest that the elements can make.
45
Will He come, then?
He will come.
How will He come?
It is man who disturbed the Great Harmony:
Therefore, as a man He will come to restore it. 50
Whither will He come?
The Way always seeks the lowest place.

Chapter 15

«The Valley and the Spirit do not die», said the Ancient Sage.
«They form what is called the Mystic Mother,
From whose gate comes the Origin of heaven and earth».⁹⁴
And «this gate shall be shut», said the Ancient Prophet.⁹⁵
«It shall not be opened, and no one shall pass through it; 5
For the Lord shall enter by it».⁹⁶
The Mind spoke, and through His Word
Answered the earth's elemental moan.
Above that roaring cry He answered with a still, small voice:⁹⁷ 10
I will come. Will you receive me, then?
But no man heard that voice.
Only a small young woman,
Who had lived, unknown, in silence and purity in the Great Temple
Was given to hear it. 15
And in a still, small voice She gave voice to the whole earth.
She answered for all those beings and created forms who could not speak;
She answered for all the people who could not hear.
And to the question of the Uncreated Mind,
She answered: Yes, 20
I will receive You.⁹⁸
Be it unto me according to Your Word.⁹⁹
In Her the Way had found the lowest place in the entire earth –
The nadir of the Valley,
The supreme humility, lowliness – 25
And there He came and made His abode.
He took flesh of Her whom He loved above all others who dwelled on the
earth.
Who was meek and humble like Himself.
And lowering Himself, emptying Himself, in His love, to the lowest place,¹⁰⁰
He became a tiny child within Her, the Mystic Mother.¹⁰¹ 30
Because of Her profound and intangible humility,
Her gate, opened by no man,
Through which no one had passed through,
Became the gate from which came the Origin of heaven and earth.
Because She had returned to the state of the uncarved block, the pristine simplicity, 35
She became the «mountain unhewn by the hand of man»,¹⁰²¹⁰³
Whom the Ancient Prophet had foretold.
And the Spirit, the Breath of Heaven,

Bested upon Her, the Valley of humility, as He had upon the first-formed world.

Chapter 16

«Water», said the Ancient Sage, «greatly benefits all things but does not compete with them.

It dwells in lowly places that all disdain, and so it is like the Way».¹⁰⁴

The Way came down and emptied Himself in a lowly cave:

Not amidst human dwellings, but in the home of lowly animals.

Born on a lowly bed, dirty straw strewn on the ground. 5

Happy, prosperous people slept in soft beds in the nearby inn.

But while other infants wept that night, He was silent.

And the sheep bleated like rippling water.

Chapter 17. «The Way continuously creates», said the Ancient Sage,

«And the Power of the Way nourishes, enlarges, feeds, completes, matures, cherishes and broods over all things.

The Way creates, but does not demand for itself;

Acts, but is not boastful;

Controls, but without compulsion. 5

This may be called the mystery of the Power of the Way.

The ten thousand things all honor the Way and respect its Power,

But without demand or orders».¹⁰⁵

When the Way came to earth, quietly, under the cloak of flesh,

He did not demand respect, 10

Nor was He wont to reveal His true Name,

A Name worthy of all honor.

He left it to those whom He had made to utter His Name:

Word of the Mind, Son of the Father, Son of the living God.¹⁰⁶

Hiding His glory in the deep pools of the Valley, 15

He called Himself rather «the least in the Kingdom of Heaven» and «the Son of Man».¹⁰⁷

For He had made Himself the son, the offspring of His own offspring,

Lowering Himself beneath man who had falsely exalted himself.

Thus He to Whom the ten thousand things give honor and respect

Gave honor to His one disobedient child, Man, 20
As a child gives honor to his parent.

Chapter 18

«The Great Way», said the Ancient Sage, «flows everywhere.
It may go left or right.
All things depend on it; none is refused.
It fulfills its purpose silently, and does not take possession».¹⁰⁸
He shall not cry, nor lift up», said the Ancient Prophet,¹⁰⁹ 5
«Nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.
A bruised reed shall he not break,
And the smoking flax shall he not quench».¹¹⁰
So did the Great Way come.
Ho Who shakes the earth and stirs the roaring winds and crashing seas, 10
Came softly, silently.
«The Great Way clothes and feeds all things», said the Ancient Sage,
«Yet does not claim them as its own.
All things return to it,
Yet it claims no leadership over them».¹¹¹ 15
When the Great Way came into the world,
He claimed no worldly leadership,
But said to those whom He had made:
«I am among you as he who serves».¹¹²
«He is oppressed», said the Ancient Prophet, 20
«And He is afflicted.
Yet He opens not His mouth.
He is brought as a lamb before the slaughter;
And as a sheep before her shearer is dumb,
So He opens not His mouth».¹¹³ 25
«For the Way is silent», said the Ancient Sage,
«Silent and boundless».¹¹⁴

The Third Ennead: The Opening of the Way

Ch'en Yüan-du (Luke Ch'en), The Miraculous Catch of Fish

Chapter 19. For thirty years of His life on earth,

The Word was silent before the people.
For fifty centuries the world had waited for the word that its Maker would speak.
And finally, with the people before Him
On a sloping meadow overlooking a lake, 5
The Word spoke His word,
The Way revealed His way.
And He Who had taken the lowest place
Spoke to His creatures of lowliness, saying:
«Blessed are the meek, 10
The poor in spirit,
Blessed are you who weep now. »¹¹⁵
He Who had come not seeking praise, said:
«Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you». ¹¹⁶
These were the first words that the Word spoke to mankind, 15
Being meek, being Himself reviled,
And weeping with those who weep.

Chapter 20

When the silent Way spoke,
He revealed Himself as the invisible One
Whose traces the Ancient Sage had glimpsed five centuries before,
In the groaning earth.
For the Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, had said: 5
«He who has little shall receive in abundance.
But he who has much shall be confused». ¹¹⁷
And the Way, when He became flesh, said:
«Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled. 10
But woe unto you who are rich! for you have received your consolation.

Woe unto you who are full! for you shall hunger».¹¹⁸

The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, had said:

«Superior virtue is unconscious of its virtue.

Hence it is virtuous. 15

Inferior virtue is conscious of its virtue,

Hence it is not virtuous».¹¹⁹

And the Way, when He became flesh, said:

«When you do a merciful deed, let not your left hand know

What your right hand is doing».¹²⁰ 20

The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, had said:

«In order to be above the people,

The sage must serve them as if he were lower than them.

In order to guide them he must put himself behind them».¹²¹

And the Way, when He became flesh, said: 25

«If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all».¹²²

The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, had said:

«The Way of Heaven is to take from those who have too much

And give to those who do not have enough».¹²³

And the Way, when He became flesh, said to those who hoarded their spiritual riches:¹²⁴ 30

«My Kingdom shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof».¹²⁵

The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, had said:

«When gold and jade fill your hall,

You will not be able to keep them safe».¹²⁶ 35

And the Way, when He became flesh, said:

«Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth,

Where thieves break in and steal».¹²⁷

The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, had said:

«One's own self or material goods, 40

Which has more worth?»¹²⁸

And the Way, when He became flesh, said:

«For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?»¹²⁹

The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, had said:

«The flexible overcome the adamant, 45

The yielding overcome the forceful».¹³⁰

It is because the sage does not contend that no one in the world can contend against him».¹³¹

And the Way, when He became flesh, said:

«Resist not evil,

But whoever strikes you on your right cheek, 50
Turn to him the other also.
And if anyone wants to sue you at the law, and take away your tunic,
Let him have your cloak also». ¹³²
The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, had said:
«The violent man shall die a violent death. 55
I consider this as my chief teaching». ¹³³
And the Way, when He became flesh, said:
«All who take the sword shall perish by the sword». ¹³⁴
The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, had said:
«The most massive tree grows from a sprout; 60
The highest building rises from a pile of earth;
A journey of a thousand miles begins with a step». ¹³⁵
And the Way, when He became flesh, said:
«The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed,
Which a man took and sowed in his field: 65
Which indeed is the least of all seeds,
But when it is grown it is greater than the herbs,
And becomes a tree,
So that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches». ¹³⁶
The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, had said: 70
«Magnify the small, increase the few.
All great things under heaven start from the small». ¹³⁷
And the Way, when He became flesh, said:
«The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven,
Which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, 75
Till the whole was leavened». ¹³⁸
The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, had said:
«Heaven's net is broad, with big meshes». ¹³⁹
And the Way, when He became flesh, said:
«The Kingdom of Heaven is like a net, 80
That was cast into the sea, and gathered some of every kind». ¹⁴⁰
The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, had said:
«Heaven's net lets nothing slip through». ¹⁴¹
And the Way, when He became flesh, said:
«A sparrow shall not fall on the ground without your Father». ¹⁴² 85
The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, had said:
«The Way clothes and feeds the ten thousand things». ¹⁴³
And the Way, when He became flesh, said:
«Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow:
They toil not, neither do they spin; 90

And yet I say unto you,
That Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these». ¹⁴⁴
The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, had said:
«Returning is the movement of the Way,
But its function is weakness». ¹⁴⁵ 95
And the Way, when He became flesh, said:
«My strength is made perfect in weakness». ¹⁴⁶
The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, had said:
«There was something undefined yet complete in itself,
Born before heaven and earth. 100
I do not know its name». ¹⁴⁷
And the Way, when He became flesh, said:
«I Who speak unto you am He». ¹⁴⁸

Chapter 21. The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, said:

«The sage acts without boasting,
Completes his work without seeking merit.
Because he lays claim to no credit,
The credit cannot be taken from him. ¹⁴⁹ 5
He wants only things that are unwanted.
He restores the ten thousand things to their own nature». ¹⁵⁰
When the Way became flesh,
He came to the unwanted among people.
He came not to the good, but to the bad; 10
He came not to the right, but to the wrong;
He came not to the beautiful, but to the ugly;
He came not to the healthy, but to the sick;
He came not to the rich, but to the poor.
Therefore the good, the righteous, the beautiful, the healthy and the rich 15
Railed at Him, smote Him, and cast Him out as evil.
For He was a reproach to their seeming goodness,
Turning it on its head.
Only He was Good Who reached down to the evil
In order to raise them to the true goodness of their original nature. 20
Only He was worthy of glory Who sought no credit for Himself,
Saying, «Why do you call me good?
There is none good, save one»: ¹⁵¹
That is, His Father – the Mind –

Who existed with Him from pre-eternity. 25
The good, the righteous, the beautiful and the rich heard not the Word,
For to them the Word was not spoken.
To the poor the Word was spoken.¹⁵²
And when they heard it, their hearts burned within them,
For the Maker of the universe spoke as one who was poor like them. 30
And they said: «No man ever spoke like this man».¹⁵³

Chapter 22

He was condemned as a friend of harlots
And the harlots became virgins.
He was condemned as a friend of thieves
And the thieves restored their stolen goods fourfold.
He was condemned as a friend of poor fishermen 5
And the poor fishermen caught the universe in their nets.
He was condemned as a friend of outcasts
And the outcasts inherited His Kingdom.
He was condemned, and they were created anew.
He wept over what His creation had made of itself, 10
And by His tears was it remade,
Restored to its true nature, its primitive origin.
The first creation was of the dust of the ground;
The second, of Water and Spirit.¹⁵⁴

Chapter 23

«All things», said the Ancient Sage,
«Depend on the Great Way for life.
None is refused».¹⁵⁵
The people are fragile, crippled,
Their natures riddled with wounds. 5
With hopeful eyes they beg Him, the Great Way:
«Carry my load»,
And He takes it.
He seeks workers to help carry it.
The workers come, but they are few,

And they too are fragile, wounded, lame. 10
He carries their load, also,
For it is out of love that they have come,
And He cares for naught else.

Chapter 24

«Go out to meet the Way», said the Ancient Sage,
«And you will discover no beginning.
Follow after, and you will find no end».¹⁵⁶
The Way dwells outside time,
Yet He Who made time took up His abode within time, 5
In a single material body, in a single time and place.
Likewise the Way has no beginning or end,
Yet He Who made time, being in all things,
Abides in both the Beginning and the End of time.
I or He said: «I am the Beginning and the Ending».¹⁵⁷ 10
At the Beginning, says the Way, I knew you when you were not.
And I speak to you from the place of the End of time.
From there I can promise you, I can vow to you
And never break my word.
For I not only know the End, 15
I am the End.
And at the End, where I am,
I am all in all.¹⁵⁸
I have made you, says the Way,
And I sustain your every breath. 20
I am holding you.
You will not fall unless you depart from me.
You will be held up while you hold to my words.
For at the End, where I am,
Though heaven and earth will pass away, 25
My words will not pass away.¹⁵⁹

Chapter 25

«When you are at one with the Way», said the Ancient Sage,
«The Way welcomes you».¹⁶⁰
Be kind, says the Way,
And you will know me.
For I am very quiet 5
And you will only hear me
When you are kind and gentle to my lowly children.¹⁶¹
Don't think, says the Way,
And you will know me.
For you only think of what is outside of you, 10
And I am within you.
Don't fear, says the Way.
You have stepped away from me, that is all.
Return to the Feast, and lay your head on my breast at supper.¹⁶²
You were away, and now that you have returned, 15
I am in my final hour,
And I am about to be delivered to be killed.
For rejoice in this, too,
For when you see me hanging on the tree,
You will know me as you have never known me before. 20
And when you see me die,
You will have me forever.

Chapter 26

The Ancient Sage knew the sadness of following the Way of Heaven.
«The multitude are joyful and merry», he said,
«As if they were eating of the sacrificial offerings,
As if they were mounting the terrace in spring.
I alone am amid them like one unemployed, 5
Like a newborn babe that cannot yet smile.
I am alone, without a place to go, as though I belonged nowhere.
All men have enough and to spare:
I alone seem to have lost everything».¹⁶³
When the Way took flesh and came into the world, 10
He too belonged nowhere.¹⁶⁴
«Foxes have holes», He said,

«And birds of the air have nests,
But the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head».¹⁶⁵
Surrounded by those who guarded their rights and authority, 15
Who protected their wealth and property,
And sold their souls for the sake of public standing,
He alone had nothing.
He Who had created the world, had nothing in the world.
And, at the end, He was stripped even of His lone, tattered garment, 20
And died, naked and bleeding,
Before the world which He sustains in abundance.

Chapter 27

The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, said:
«He who takes upon himself the humiliation – the dirt – of the people
Is fit to be the master of the people».¹⁶⁶
And the Ancient Prophet, foretelling the coming of the Way, said:¹⁶⁷
«He bears our sins, and is pained for us. 5
He was wounded on account of our sins.
He was bruised because of our iniquities,
And by His stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray,
And the Lord gave Him up for our sins. 10
In His humiliation His judgment was taken away.
Therefore He shall inherit many,
And He shall divide the spoils of the mighty,
Because His soul was delivered to death,
And He was numbered among the transgressors, 15
And He bore the sins of many,
And was delivered because of their iniquities».¹⁶⁸
Why did the Ancients treasure the Way?» asked the Sage.
Was it not because the seeker finds what he seeks by it,
And by it the guilty are forgiven and relieved of punishment? 20
Therefore the Way is the treasure of the universe».¹⁶⁹
Again the Ancient Sage said:
«He who takes upon himself the sins of the world Is the king of the world».¹⁷⁰
And the Prophet, when the Way became flesh, said:¹⁷¹ 25
«Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world».¹⁷²

The Fourth Ennead: The Emptying of the Way

Chapter 28

The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, said:
«He who is conscious of honor and glory,
Yet keeps to disgrace,
Resembles the Valley of the World».¹⁷³
The Way entered the City,¹⁷⁴ 5
And the crowds stood on either side of the road,
Shouting praises and blessings upon Him.
The children laid clothes and branches under the hooves of the child-ass on
which He rode.¹⁷⁵
He was conscious of the honor and glory,
Yet He knew that He was going to His ultimate humiliation; 10
That some of those who now shouted His praises
Would soon be shouting for His death.
«For He is a man of sorrows»,
As foretold the Ancient Prophet,¹⁷⁶
«A man of sorrows,¹⁷⁷ 15
And acquainted with grief».

Chapter 29

The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, said:
«He who is conscious of honor and glory,
Yet keeps to disgrace,
Returns to pristine Simplicity».¹⁷⁸
The Way left the City and descended into the Valley of the World.¹⁷⁹ 5
Ascending again to the other side of the Valley,
He came to a Garden¹⁸⁰
Like unto the primordial Garden in which His love had once been betrayed.
And now the duplicitous one, pretending to return His love,
Betrays Him with a kiss. 10
Now the duplicitous one, pretending to do Him reverence,
Disgraces Him in front of all.
Love ushers in freedom,
But the duplicitous one puts Him in shackles.

The duplicitous one delivered the Simple One to death, 15
And the Simple One was brought back into the City.
Before, He had entered in honor, to be led to final disgrace.
Now He enters in disgrace, to be led to final honor:
He being Himself the Way on which He trod,
The Way of return to pristine Simplicity. 20

Chapter 30

«Behold», says the Way, «the hour is coming,
Yea, has now come,
That you shall be scattered,
Each to his own,
And shall leave me alone. 5
And yet I am not alone,
Because the Father is with me».¹⁸¹
The Way is alone in the Garden.
Long ago, in the beginning,
He had been abandoned by man in the Garden: 10
Man had turned away from Him,
Departing from the primal Simplicity,
Fragmenting his nature,¹⁸²
Scattering himself in thoughts, imaginations and desires.
Man had not been willing to stay with Him. 15
And now, in His darkest moment,
As He weeps in the Garden,
So that His sweat falls to the ground as great drops of blood,¹⁸³
Man has abandoned Him again, scattering himself,
Not willing to watch with Him one hour. 20
As a man the Way was left alone,
But as the Word He was never alone,
Dwelling eternally with the Mind and the Breath.
He willed to be alone as a man
So that man would no longer be alone. 25
He willed to stand watch as a man
So that man, who preferred to sleep,¹⁸⁴
Would at last awaken.

Chapter 31

They could have laid hands on Him before,
But He passed out of their hands many times.
Their hour had not yet come then.
But now the hour has come.
It has come,¹⁸⁵ 5
And the power of darkness.
The time has been fulfilled.
The work has been accomplished.
And now the Mind places His beloved Word into their hands.
The darkness has no power of itself 10
Except it be given it by the Father of the Word, in His own time,¹⁸⁶
That, out of the most horrible event in history –
The murder of the Creator of Life –
Might come forth the greatest event:
The rising of the Destroyer of Death. 15

Chapter 32

He became an outlaw In order to restore the law.
He took the sentence of death
In order to abolish the sentence of death.
Those who condemned Him according to the law 5
Were themselves condemned by the law,
For the only law He gave was love,¹⁸⁷
And that love condemned them.
They were judged by love;
And He Who is Love, and is therefore Judge, 10
Was judged by them as a transgressor
Of their transgression.

Chapter 33

The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, said:
«The sage does not reveal himself and is therefore luminous.
He does not justify himself and is therefore far-famed.

He does not boast of himself, and therefore people give him credit.
He does not contend, and therefore he is a ruler among men. 5
Since he does not contend,
No one in the world can contend against him». ¹⁸⁸
The Way, when brought before His accusers,
Did not reveal Himself, did not justify or boast of Himself,
Nor did He contend. 10
«If my Kingdom were of this world», He said,
«Then would my servants fight,
That I should not be delivered up.
But now is my Kingdom not from hence». ¹⁸⁹
When brought before the judge whose sentence was death, 15
He Who gives life to all things was silent.
When asked what He knew,
He the Omniscient One was silent. ¹⁹⁰
When asked, «What is truth?» ¹⁹¹
He Who is Himself the Truth was silent. 20
When told by the judge, «Do you not hear how many things they testify
against you?»
He Who is the eternal Word answered never a word. ¹⁹²
Nailed through His hands and feet,
He did not murmur.
Pierced in the side, 25
He did not murmur. ¹⁹³
Abandoned by all on earth,
He called only to His Father in heaven.
«The Way of Heaven», said the Ancient Sage, «does not show greatness,
And is therefore truly great. ¹⁹⁴ 30
It does not speak, and yet is answered.
It does not beckon, yet things come to it of themselves.
It does not contend, and yet it overcomes». ¹⁹⁵
And the Way of Heaven, when about to submit Himself meekly unto death,
said:
«In the world you shall have tribulation. 35
But be of good cheer:
I have overcome the world». ¹⁹⁶

Chapter 34

The band of soldiers stripped the King of the universe
And put on Him a scarlet robe.
They placed a crown of thorns on His head,
And a reed in His right hand.
They bowed the knee before Him, 5
And mocked Him, saying, «Hail, O King!»
And spat upon Him, and took the reed,
And smote Him on the head.
Then, taking the robe off Him,
They put His own tattered raiment on Him, 10
And led Him away to kill Him.¹⁹⁷
«If it were not laughed at», said the Ancient Sage,
«It would not be the Way».¹⁹⁸

Chapter 35

Again the Ancient Sage said:
«Lofry virtue is like an empty Valley».¹⁹⁹
Thus did the Way of Heaven empty Himself to the lowest place,
The nadir of the Valley.
But, in finding it, He was raised up. 5
Raised upon a Cross,
His hands outstretched before the world,
As if calling the people.
But His hands, pierced with nails, remained empty.
And He said: «I thirst».²⁰⁰ 10
I thirst for the one lost sheep
Who has departed from the Way,²⁰¹
For I have loved him.
He who had once been my friend,
With whom I had once held sweet converse in the Garden, 15
Has nailed me to a Tree,
Like unto the Tree of the Garden from which he plucked the fruit.
But greater love has no man than this:
That a man lay down his life for his friend.²⁰²
«He who loves the world as himself», said the Ancient Sage, 20
«may not the world well be entrusted to his care?»²⁰³

And the Way, in His love for the world, said:
«If I be lifted up from the earth,
I will draw all people unto me»²⁰⁴ –
Drawing together those who have scattered themselves, 25
Those who have left me alone,
Yea, even those who have hammered nails
Into the very hands that are drawing them.

Chapter 36

If thing is brought low, there must be a return.
If a thing is raised up, there must also be a return.
This is the Way of Heaven.²⁰⁵
Therefore the Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, said:
«The hard and mighty shall be laid low, 5
And the humble and weak shall be exalted».²⁰⁶
And the Way, when He took flesh, said:
«Everyone who exalts himself shall be abased,
And he who humbles himself shall be exalted».²⁰⁷
There must be a return. 10
Lower me to the lowest point, says the Way.
In this I shall be raised to the highest.
You, O Man, have exalted yourself,
And thus you have lowered yourself
To self-love, to things of the senses. 15
See, then, how you may be raised up once more
To your primitive origin, your true nature.
Behold in me the Way to follow:
I go the Way before you,
For I have loved you, and care nothing for myself. 20
Behold in me the Way to follow.
Take away my life:
In this I shall not only gain life,
But, like a seed that falls to the ground and dies,²⁰⁸
I shall give unending life to all. 25
Destroy me, mock me, humiliate me:
In this I shall overcome the world.
Tear down the temple of my body:
I shall raise it again in three days.

I will be the lowest, the most dishonored, sorrowful and tortured of all men,²⁰⁹ 30

That of all men I may be raised up –

Not for my own glory,

But for the glory of Him who sent me,

And that I may raise up the whole world

Which I fashioned with my hands,

Raising up even you who have cast me down.

There must be a return, says the Way,

There must be resurrection.

For how can incorruptible Love die with the body,

Or the Source of Life be sealed in a tomb?

The Fifth Ennead: The Way of Quenching Desire

Artist unknown, Stilling the Storm

Chapter 37

What does it mean to be lowered in self-exaltation?
When we hold to the body and the things of the senses,
We descend into the lust of ourselves:
We fall in love with our self.
This is what it means to be lowered in self-exaltation. 5
Regarding our temporal body rather than the eternal Way,
We lose our natural simplicity and peace.
We become unnatural, agitated,²¹⁰
Vexed and turbid with desire,
Afraid to be deprived of the objects of our lusts, 10
Afraid not to reach the goals of our ambitions,
Afraid of hunger, thirst,
Death and the separation of the body.²¹¹
Therefore, said the Ancient Sage:
«We have fears because we have a body. 15
When we do not regard that body as our self,
What have we to fear or be distressed about?»²¹²
And the Way, when He became flesh, said:
«Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat,
Neither for the body, what you shall put on. 20
If he Maker of things clothes the grass,
Which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven,
How much more will he clothe you?»²¹³
Turning our eye to desire for the things of the senses,
We become blind to their inner essences. 25
We see them not as words within the Primal Word,
Thoughts of the Primal Mind.
Therefore, said the Ancient Sage:
«The five colors blind men's eyes;
The five tones deafen men's ears; 30
The five flavors dull men's sense of taste.
Galloping and hunting derange men's minds.
Rare articles lead astray.
On this account the sage regards not the eye but the inner things.»²¹⁴

He dwells not in the flower, but in the fruit.²¹⁵ 35
He puts aside the one and takes the other».²¹⁶
Again the Ancient Sage said:
«Stop the aperture,
Close the door,
And one's whole life will be undisturbed. 40
Open the aperture and become urgent for business,
And one will never find completion».²¹⁷
And the Way, when He became flesh, said:
«When you pray, enter into your closet,
And when you have shut the door, 45
Pray to your Father Who is in the secret place».²¹⁸
The closet of the soul is the body;
The aperture of the door is the five bodily senses;
The secret place is the heart.
The soul enters the closet when the mind does not wander, 50
Does not scatter itself hither and thither,
Does not roam among things and affairs of the world.
The door is closed when the senses are not attached to created things.
The secret place is entered when the mind,
Disregarding all intrusive thoughts and images, 55
Descends into the secret place,
Imprisons itself there,
And in this imprisonment at last finds peace.²¹⁹
«Be not of doubtful mind», says the Way.²²⁰
«Take no thought for tomorrow, 60
For tomorrow shall take thought for its own things.²²¹
Rather seek first the Kingdom of Heaven,
For it is the Father's good pleasure to give it to you.²²²
The Kingdom comes not through observation,
For it is within you.²²³ 65
Enter into your closet,
And your Father, Who sees in secret,
Shall reward you openly».²²⁴

Chapter 38

«The great Way», said the Ancient Sage, «is ever without desire».²²⁵
Desire for created things disturbs the Original Harmony,

The primal oneness, perfect love.
Such desire derives from the two,
From separation. 5
It chases after its object,
Clings to its object,
Is anxious and disturbed.
Desire for created things equals torment,
Because such desire can never be fulfilled.²²⁶ 10
Torment begins
When the primal oneness, perfect love is broken.
Thus, said the Ancient Sage,
«Embrace simplicity, lessen selfishness, diminish desire.»²²⁷
The sage acts without desire, hence he never fails; 15
He never grasps, hence he never loses.²²⁸
He who keeps to the Way will not desire to be filled».²²⁹
When one is attached to oneself and to the senses
One strives to fill oneself through self-love and sensual pleasure.
But the more one strives, the more empty one becomes. 20
In order to become full,
One must empty oneself.
Thus, said the Ancient Sage,
«In pursuit of learning, every day something is acquired.
In pursuit of the Way, every day something is dropped. 25
Losing and losing,
Till you come to the state of acting without selfish desire.
When you act selflessly, nothing is left undone».²³⁰
Ever without desire,
The Great Way empties Himself into His creation 30
Out of love, in complete self-giving.
He empties Himself,
Yet, being the unchanging Cause of all things,
He remains ever full.
Quenching their desire for created things, 35
Followers of the Way likewise empty themselves
Out of love, in complete self-giving.
For in emptying themselves as He does,
They are ever filled with Him,
The Ever-full. 40

Chapter 39. «Cast off selfishness», said the Ancient Sage, «and curtail desire».²³¹

Self-denial is the way to perfection».²³²
When desire is quenched in the nadir of the Valley,
One sees all that is and moves beneath the surface.
Dead men see everything. 5
Therefore, said the Sage:
«Emptied of desire, one can see the mystery.
Filled with desire, one can see only the manifestations».²³³
Beneath the brittle surface,
The vain, self-interested, clinging love, 10
The maddening longing,
Which only obscures what lies below,
There is a silently flowing river:
A river of compassion, bowels of mercy,
A feeling of the others pain, 15
Flowing into a vast, vast ocean of sorrow.
It is the sorrow of a great funeral:
The death of sensual self-love.
Although it is a sorrow,
One enters it willingly, with joy, 20
For there is such tenderness in its pain.
And at last, in this sorrow,
There is perfect freedom.
This is the love that never dies, never fails:
A proof of immortality. 25
This is the pain that the everlasting Way
Embraced willingly, sharing our pain.
This is the cross that He asks us to bear.
This is the death that He asks us to die.
And at last, in this death, 30
There is perfect peace.

Chapter 40. The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, said:

«He who aims at life achieves death.
There are people whose every movement leads them to the land of death because they cling to life.»²³⁴

The holy man cares nothing for himself and yet he is preserved.
Is it not because he has no selfish desires that he is able to succeed?»²³⁵ 5
And the Way, when He became flesh, said:
«Whoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it.
And whoever shall lose his life shall preserve it».²³⁶
He who wants the things of this life
Craves for this life. 10
He who wants the things of this life, but cannot have them,
Craves for death.
But he who has quenched desire
Craves for neither life nor death.
The two are the same to him, 15
And he passes from one to the other
Without fear or agitation,
As from joy to joy.
He is like the Way of Heaven Himself,
Who «creates and nourishes life, 20
Yet creates without possessing».²³⁷
Because the follower of the Way does not take possession of life,
Death does not possess him.

Chapter 41

He Who bore the worlds burden upon Himself said:
«Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden,
And I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
For I am meek and lowly in heart: 5
And you shall find rest unto your souls.
For my yoke is easy,
And my burden is light».²³⁸
Follow me, says the Way,
Down into the deep pools of the Valley, 10
Where the water ever empties itself,
Is ever emptied, yet ever full.
Follow me, like the stream, unto the lowest place,
The place all people disdain,²³⁹
And there you will find rest. 15
Emptied, you will be ever full.

If you have not found rest.
That means you have not reached the lowest place.
You have not lost everything,
But are still on the slope of the Valley, 20
Clinging with fear and bloody hands to the rough, brittle crags.
Better, then, that you had not descended at all
Mur had remained on the surface.
Count the cost:²⁴⁰
If you descend, you must descend with me all the way down: 25
There to die, that you may be born.
«For the Way leads to eternity», said the Ancient Sage.
«And though your body ceases, you will not be destroyed».²⁴¹

Chapter 42. «There is no greater sin than desire», said the Ancient Sage,

«No greater curse than discontent.²⁴²
Not seeing desirable things prevents confusion of the heart.²⁴³
Hence the sage desires non-desire.²⁴⁴
By not wanting, there is calm».²⁴⁵ 5
At the nadir of the Valley,
There is no more thought.
There is only He Who is beyond thought,
Being Himself pure, incomplex, unique Thought,
Thought in which there is no duality arising from desire, 10
But only the Oneness of perfect love.
Within the perfect Oneness,
There is no more separation.
No more separation between joy and sorrow.
Joy and sorrow are united, 15
Forming the feeling which is beyond feelings,
And which is called dispassion.
The fullness of joy and the fullness of sorrow –
Their fullness abiding in a common emptiness,
Felt as a sweet contrition. 20
This is peace.
Peace that comes after the storm of desire has passed.
This is oneness.
Oneness that comes when the duality of contending no longer holds sway,

And when the desire to possess the object has been taken away. 25
At the nadir of the Valley,
Blessed are they who weep,
For they, possessing nothing,
Are the sole inheritors and possessors of joy.

Chapter 43

Come to me, says the Way.
The way seems long
Because you cannot see the end.
But when you reach the end and look back,
The way will seem so very short, 5
And you will see that you could never have known happiness
Unless you had known that sadness,
That sadness of following the way which seemed so long.
You will be thankful.
You will be glad that things happened just as they did, 10
That they are just as they are.
You will be thankful in the harbor,
If only you can endure to the end.²⁴⁶

Chapter 44

«To be empty is to be filled», said the Ancient Sage.
«To be tattered is to be renewed».²⁴⁷
Follow me, says the Way.
Descend into the Valley,
Enter the city, 5
And then be raised up with me in ignominy:
Torn and tattered,
Dragged down to the most abased place on earth,
Atop the highest tree
On the highest hill outside the city.²⁴⁸ 10
Follow me, says the Way,
Hollow, empty, selfless,
Resting in forsakenness.

There abide in me,
As I abide in you.²⁴⁹ 15
Follow me to where the lowly ones wait,
Abandoned in the bowels of the earth.
Then up the valley path:
We reach the flatland,
And their hearts burn when they see us. 20
Mounting the clouds of heaven,
We climb to where no man has yet climbed,
And come to a gate no man has yet entered.
I have shown you the Way, 25
And I leave myself with you.
The world laughs;²⁵⁰
It is wise and prudent,
But I am made foolish,
And I weep with sorrow.
But see, in this realm where no man has gone, 30
Which no man can glimpse,
I have opened the mysterious gate to you.
Enter into my joy.
You who have tasted my pain.
Abide in the highest, 35
You who have been abased in the depths with me.
Be filled with me,
You who have been emptied with me. 40
Be renewed,
You who have been tattered with me.
Taste incorruption,
You who have lain in the grave with me.
The Way has been opened, history has been renewed.
The Way of return has been effected.
The groaning earth waits for you to see 45
That you need to wait no longer.

Chapter 45

All, all the way down
To where you no longer calculate and think,
And care not what others think.

All, all the way down
To where you have nothing to lose, 5
Nowhere to go, nowhere to hide.
This is the point of emptiness.
«Emptiness penetrates the impenetrable», said the Ancient Sage,
«The softest things in the world overcome the hardest.
Through this I know the benefit of acting without desire».²⁵¹ 10
Acting without desire,
You will see a flash of the beauty you had forgotten
From when you were a little child.
A little child does not calculate.
Humble, he has not yet formed the desires which break the original unity and
harmony. 15
Soft and yielding like water, his mind is therefore boundless.
Spontaneous, he accepts without thought the Course that all things follow.²⁵²
Therefore the Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, said:
«One who possesses abundant virtue resembles an infant child.
This is the consummation of harmony».²⁵³ 20
And the Way, when He took flesh, said:
«Whoever shall humble himself as this little child,
The same is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven».²⁵⁴
Again the Ancient Sage said:
«Controlling the breath to make it gentle, 25
One can be as a little child,²⁵⁵
Then, when desires arise,
One can put them to death with the Way:
The Way of nameless Simplicity».²⁵⁶
Descending with the mind into the secret place of the heart, 30
And gently checking the breath,
Followers of the Way now call upon the Name of Him Who had once been
nameless.
And the Way, Who took flesh,
Puts to death all the passions of their flesh –
All pride, ambition, rancor and resentment – 35
Purifying their hearts,
Re-creating them in His image,
The image of a pure and innocent child,
The image of the nameless Simplicity.

The Sixth Ennead: The Way of Humility and Forgiveness

Chapter 46. Self-esteem, like desire for created things,

Breaks the Original Harmony, Primal Simplicity.
Making divisions in nature,
It treats some things as worthless.
Using things in nature in an unnatural way, 5
It corrupts them by misuse.²⁵⁷
As a person who desires created things is a slave to the senses,
So is a person who has conceit.
For the person of desire is attracted through his eyes and ears to others,
While the person of conceit tries to attract the eyes and ears of others to himself. 10
He charms and impresses only by what is visible and audible
Those who judge virtue only with their senses.²⁵⁸
Thus, said the Ancient Sage:
«On riptoe, none can stand firmly.
Scraddling, none can walk well. 15
One who justifies oneself has no glory.
One who boasts of one's abilities has no merits.
One who has conceit is not the chief among men.
Such, by the judgment of the Way, resemble the 'dregs and rumors' of virtue.
Those who possess the Way have no occasion for them».²⁵⁹ 20

Chapter 47

«The softest thing in the universe», said the Ancient Sage,
«Overcomes the hardest thing in the universe.»²⁶⁰
The stiff and unbending is the disciple of death,
The gentle and yielding is the disciple of life.
A tree that is unbending is easily broken. 5
The hard and the strong will fall.
The soft and weak will overcome».²⁶¹
If a painful experience comes upon a humble soul,
She bends and thus remains whole.
Straightway she goes against herself, 10
Straightway she accuses herself,
And she does not set about accusing anyone else.
Thus she goes on her way,

Untroubled, undepressed, in complete peace of mind,
Having no cause to be angry or to anger anyone.²⁶² 15
Therefore, said the Sage:
«Mix with all that is humble as dust.
This is called the Original Harmony.
It cannot be made intimate, nor can it be alienated.
It cannot be benefited, nor can it be harmed. 20
It cannot be exalted, nor can it be debased.
For this very reason it is the highest, most valuable thing in the world».²⁶³
The humble soul, at one with the dust of the earth,
Knows the power behind saying, «Forgive me».
She is among the strongest in the world, 25
In nothing is more powerful than lowliness.²⁶⁴

Chapter 48

«The Way», said the Ancient Sage, «covers its cutting edge.²⁶⁵
It transcends entanglement,
Softens its Light,
Merges with dust».
True humility cannot be defined in words,²⁶⁶ 5
For it is the raiment of the Primal Essence Himself.
The Way of Heaven clothed Himself in it.
Descending from His loftiness,
He used it to hide His splendor,
Lest His creation be consumed by the fiery vision. 10
Creation could not look directly upon His Uncreated Light,
Nor could it hear the voice of His thunders.
Therefore He descended not in an earthquake,
Nor in a fire, nor in a terrible and mighty sound,²⁶⁷
But, as said the Ancient Prophet²⁶⁸, 15
«Like rain upon a fleece,
Like raindrops falling upon the earth» softly,²⁶⁹
Concealing Himself in the veil of His flesh,
Speaking with us in the body
Wrought in the womb of the Maiden.²⁷⁰ 20
«Abasement», said the Ancient Sage, «is the foundation of exaltation.²⁷¹
Loftiness is based in lowliness.²⁷²
Hence the sage wears coarse garments

But embraces a jewel in his bosom».
Every one who puts on the coarse garment of humility 25
Is like unto the Way Who put it on before us,
When, through His wearing the coarse body of our lowliness,
Creation beheld His loftiness,
And at last received its jewel:
The vision of its Maker.²⁷³ 30

Chapter 49

«Why is the sea the king of a hundred streams?» asked the Ancient Sage.
«Because it lies below them.
Therefore it is the king of a hundred streams».²⁷⁴
The Master of the universe,
Showing us how to walk the way of humility, 5
Took a towel²⁷⁵
And, bending down below his disciples.
Washed their feet.²⁷⁶
Learn not from an angel, He said,
Nor from man, nor from a book, 10
But from me –
From my indwelling,
From my illumination and action within you;
For I am meek and humble in heart
And in thought and in spirit, 15
And your souls shall find rest from conflicts²⁷⁷
And relief from thoughts.²⁷⁸
For just as pride dissipates the soul through imaginings and distractions,
So humility collects the soul through stillness of the thoughts
And concentrates her within herself. 20
Thus the humble soul wishes to enter and dwell in stillness,
To forsake her former concepts together with the senses,
To become as something that does not exist in creation,
That has not come into being in this world,²⁷⁹
That is totally unknown, 25
Even to herself, even to the senses.
Thus hidden, she remains with the Master of the universe,
Descending ever toward Him, the infinite Sea of Essence,
The King of a hundred streams.²⁸⁰

Chapter 50

The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, said:
«The sage keeps his half of the bargain,
But does not exact his due.
A man of virtue performs his part,
But a man without virtue requires others to fulfill their obligations».²⁸¹ 5
And the Way, when He became flesh said:
«Give to everyone who asks you,
And of him who takes away your goods ask them not again.
Do good, and lend, hoping for nothing back».²⁸²
The Way, when He became flesh, 10
Gave His own life for those to whom He had given life,
Yet He did not exact His due.
Call Him not just,
For our frail nature would not be strong enough
If His justice were to rise up to make exaction.²⁸³ 15
Rather, call Him merciful,
For He came employing mercy in place of justice,
Since at all times we are held by debt.
There is a Bondsman for those who are bound by debt.
There is a Healer for those who have stumbled, 20
Who have bruised the simplicity of their original nature.
There is a Bondsman and a Healer:
Even He Who asked that mercy be shown to his murderers,
Who pardoned them even as He hung on the Tree.²⁸⁴
«The Breath of Heaven», He says, «is upon me 25
To preach good tidings to the poor,
To heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim forgiveness to the captives,
And to set free those who are bruised».²⁸⁵

Chapter 51

«By means of the Way», said the Ancient Sage,
«One is forgiven when one sins».²⁸⁶
When one loves, expecting nothing,
One has the power to forgive anyone anything.
Therefore the Way, Who is perfect love, and loves perfectly, 5

And Who came to earth out of love,
Came with the power to forgive all people all crimes.
This was a gift He offered up.
But it can be received only by him who himself loves,
And thus forgives. 10
For when one loves, expecting nothing,
One will not only forgive everything –
One will be forgiven everything.
Of those who love much, said the Way,
Much will be forgiven. 15
But of those who love little,
Little will be forgiven.²⁸⁷
This is the Way of Heaven.
The spirit of forgiveness is the spirit of the Way.
The heart of the follower of the Way is distinguished by its power to forgive.²⁰
But the heart cannot attain to perfect forgiveness
Until the Uncreated Breath enters into it.²⁸⁸
With the perfect love that He had with the Mind and the Word
From pre-eternity.

Chapter 52

When one blames others, there is contention;
When one finds one's own faults, there is peace.
When one demands restitution for a crime, there is contention;
When one forgives, there is peace.
When the Way took flesh, He took the blame on Himself 5
And He forgave everyone, even His own murderers:
Therefore did He come bringing peace.²⁸⁹
And yet this noncontention is in contention with the contention of this world:
Therefore did He come, bringing His peace with a sword.²⁹⁰

Chapter 53

«Those who are virtuous», said the Ancient Sage, «do not dispute.
Those who dispute are not virtuous».²⁹¹

A sign of a virtuous and compassionate soul is forgiveness of every debt.
A sign of an evil mind is bitter speech to one who has fallen.²⁹²
A virtuous soul, having been lowered into the Valley, 5
Into the broken wholeness of humility,
Does not know how to have enmity.
She forgives to the last, pardons to the last.
She does not exact her due, does not demand restitution.
Milt judges only herself, 10
Always searching endlessly for the crime within herself.
Like the Way Whom the soul follows,
She will forgive and pardon everyone,
Even her own torturer.
Asking for mercy in the secret place of the heart, 15
She is granted it from the Source of all mercy.
And from there, from the secret place,
She radiates mercy to all created things.
If the heart has forgiven and excused,
Offenses will not be remembered. 20
They are remembered only in the attic, the memory,
Without the hearts participation.
Thus it is necessary to distinguish between these two things:
The heart and the reason.
If the heart has forgiven, it will never remember, 25
For it has no memory.
The brain may remember,
But the heart will protest and compel the brain to be silent.²⁹³

Chapter 54

When you have descended into the Valley with Him,
And with Him have been raised upon the Tree;
When the tears of joyful, liberating pain flood your eyes,
And you taste the sweetness and perfect freedom of dying to this life,
Then you no longer feel anger or rage, 5
And you know what it means to forgive everyone and everything.
Then you see how He, when nailed to the Tree,
Could have forgiven everyone who has ever lived and ever will live.
Still you see the people around you,
And still you see their weaknesses and failings, 10

But now you feel such compassion for them,
As if they were small children.
And you yourself feel like a child.
In a sense, nothing has changed:
The good in you remains, 15
The evil in you remains, hut now you know,
You know that there is nothing more sublime, beautiful and profound than the
Cross.
Now you know what it means that He spilt His Blood for you in an agony of
pain,
Which even He was afraid and sorrowful to endure. 20
And when, at the supper before His final agony,
He asks you to drink His Blood and eat His Flesh
For the forgiveness of sins,
You too are ready to give up your flesh and shed your blood,
You too are ready to forgive,²⁹⁴ 25
That you may share in what He is,
In His ultimate, liberating love.
A love that is a pain,
But a pain that is a peace,
And a peace that passes all understanding.²⁹⁵ 30

The Seventh Ennead: The Way of Perfect Love

Chapter 55

«The man of the highest virtue», said the Ancient Sage,
«Is like water which dwells in lowly places.
In his dwelling he is like the earth, below everyone.
In giving, he is human-hearted.
His heart is immeasurable».²⁹⁶ 5
The humble soul is like water,
Water that softens the earth of the heart,
The place of her dwelling.
Through her humility in dealing with people,
Hardness and callousness are expelled from her, 10
Swept away like a heavy rock.
A new vista opens to the gaze of the mind:
The wounds with which her whole nature is riddled.
Then does the softened heart begin to assist the mind with mourning,²⁹⁷
And, as the soul begins to know herself for the first time, 15
She begins for the first time to know others.
Finding the one wounded nature common to all,
In her compassion she dwells, in the earth of the heart,
Beneath them.
Her heart has become immeasurable.
She has found the way to perfect love.

Chapter 56

Those who follow the Way
Are known by their love.
Every one that loves is born of the Way
And knows the Way.
He that loves not, knows not the Way, 5
For the Way is love.
He that abides in love, abides in the Way,
And the Way in him.
There is no fear in love,
But perfect love casts out fear.²⁹⁸ 10

Nothing is more cherished by the Way than perfect love.
For the Way is simple and undivided,
And love unites that which has been torn asunder.
Love creates a single identity of will and purpose,
Free from faction, 15
Among many and among all.²⁹⁹
The Word, Who had existed with the Mind and the Breath
In a union of perfect love, oneness of Essence,
From before the beginning of time:
This same pre-eternal Word, when He came to earth, Prayed to His Father, the
Mind, 20
That such perfect love, such oneness, might exist between those who followed
Him, the Way,
And between Him and them:
«Father, keep through Your own name those whom You have given me,
That they may be one, as we are. 25
That they may all be one,
As You, Father, are in me,
And I in You;
That they also may be one in us.
And them, and You in me, 30
That they may be made perfect in one.
And that the world may know that You have sent me,
And have loved them, as You have loved me.
For You loved me
Before the foundation of the world. »³⁰⁰ 35

Chapter 57

«The Great Way», said the Ancient Sage,
«Is unchanging, all-pervading, unfailing».³⁰¹
How, then, did the Way, when He took the form of flesh subject to death,
Show Himself to be unfailing?
How, if not by the eternal, immutable love that He shares with the Mind and
the Breath? 5
Love is not merely a feeling.
Feelings pass like clouds and may dissolve in tears.
Love is a vow.
An eternal vow that never passes away, never changes, never fails.³⁰²

A vow that, whether united or separated in the body, 10
One will always be with one's beloved.
Unchanging, unfailing,
It was with such a vow that the Way bade farewell to His beloved:
Those whom the Father had placed into His hands.
For He said to them in their sorrow, 15
I will not leave you orphans:
I will come to you.
I will come to you.
Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more,
But you will see me. 20
Because I live, you shall live also.
And that day you shall know that I am in my Father,
And you are in me, and I in you.³⁰³
«Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you.³⁰⁴
And lo, I am with you 25
Always, even to the end of the world».³⁰⁵

Chapter 58

«Treat well those who are good», said the Ancient Sage,
«Also treat well those who are not good;
Thus is goodness attained.
Be sincere to those who are sincere.
Also be sincere to those who are not sincere; 5
Thus is sincerity attained».³⁰⁶
And the Way, when He became flesh, said:
«If you love those who love you, what thanks do you have?
For sinners also love those who love them.
If you do good to those who do good to you, what thanks do you have? 10
For sinners also do even the same.
And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what thanks do you
have?
For sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again».³⁰⁷
On account of these five reasons do people love one another:
For the sake of the Way, as when the virtuous person loves everyone; 15
Or for natural reasons, as parents love their children and children love their
parents;
Or out of vainglory, as the one who is honored loves the one who honors him;

Or for avarice, as the one who loves a rich person for what he can get;
Or for pleasure, as the one who is enslaved to his fleshly desires.
The first of these is praiseworthy, 20
The second neutral,
And the rest belong to the passions.³⁰⁸

Chapter 59

«Return love for great hatred», said the Ancient Sage.³⁰⁹
«Reward bitterness with care.³¹⁰
Repay enmity with virtue.³¹¹
Requite injury with kindness».³¹²
And the Way, when He became flesh, said: 5
«Love your enemies.
Do good to those who hate you.
Bless those who curse you.
Pray for those who spitefully use you».³¹³
One who is still affected by human judgments does not yet have perfect
love, 10
Such as when one loves the good and hates the evil person.
Perfect love does not split up the one nature of people
According to their various dispositions,
But ever looking steadfastly at this one original nature,
Made in the image of the Way, 15
It loves all people equally.
It is good to them, and forbearing,
And puts up with what they do.
It does not think evil but rather suffers for them.
In this manner also did the Way, 20
Manifesting His love,
Suffer for all people equally,
His friends and His enemies,
Granting to all equally His gift –
His hope – 25
Which they may receive or reject
According to own determination.³¹⁴

Chapter 60

«Love your neighbor as yourself», said the Way.³¹⁵
Through love of neighbor do we enter into love of the Way:
For our neighbor is the image of the Way;
And thus the Way accepts what we do for our neighbor as if it were done for
Him.
When this realization is kept constantly in mind, 5
It becomes the source of the purest love for our neighbor.³¹⁶
«And who is my neighbor?» the Way was asked.³¹⁷
Our neighbor is whomever the Way puts before us:
Insider or outcast,
Faithful or unfaithful, 10
Friend or foe,
Help or burden,
Encourager or reviler,
Rescuer or murderer.
Therefore, said the Ancient Sage, 15
«Even if people be bad, why should they be rejected?»³¹⁸
The holy man takes care of all people,
And in consequence there is no rejected person».³¹⁹
Love for neighbor, then, is love for all equally,
And equally with ourselves. 20
Perfect love is the summit of detachment;
It knows no distinction between one's own and another's,
Between male and female,
Between black and white.³²⁰
Such single, simple love has a single cause: 25
The Way Who is honored and loved in every neighbor.³²¹
Through love of neighbor do we enter into love of the Way:
And as the former grows in us, so does the latter,
Until at last the Way is all in all,³²²
And we forget ourselves. 30
Then love becomes a depth of illumination,
A fountain of fire inflaming the thirsty soul.
Growth is added to growth.
Love is the progress of eternity.³²³

Chapter 61

«If I were possessed of the slightest knowledge», said the Ancient Sage,
«Traveling on the Great Way,
My only fear would be to go astray».³²⁴
There are two kinds of fear for those who follow the Way.
In the first, the soul follows the Way of the universe 5
Out of fear of universal retribution.
In the second, she follows the Way Out of love for the Way Himself.
Having known the sublimity of being with Him, and in Him,
She fears to fall away from Him, 10
To do anything apart from Him.
This is the perfect fear, born of perfect love,
That casts out the first fear.
For it is said, «Perfect love casts out fear».³²⁵
No longer does the soul act out of fear, 15
But she fears out of love.³²⁶
The soul who embarks on the Way must come to the first fear. Fearing, she is
humbled.
Humbled, she cuts off desire for created things.
Cutting off desire, she becomes gentle. 20
Becoming gentle, she is given power to follow the Way.
Following the Way, she is purified.
Purified, she is illumined.
Illumined, she is found worthy to enter the inner chamber of the mysteries.³²⁷
Entering the inner chamber, she is initiated into the essences of created
things.²⁵
Initiated into the essences, she passes beyond even these,
And at last rests in the Word-Spouse, her Bridegroom.^{328 329}
The Mystery beyond all mysteries,
The Limit of the limitless ascent,
The End of the endless Way.³³⁰ 30

Chapter 62. He who truly loves ever keeps in his imagination the face of his beloved,

And there embraces it tenderly.
Such a one can get no relief from his strong desire even in sleep;
Even then he holds converse with his loved one.

Therefore, one who was wounded with love said of himself: 5
«I sleep because my nature requires it,
But my heart is awake in the abundance of my love».³³¹
So it is with bodily things,
And so it is with the bodiless.³³²
For the Way of Heaven, 10
Going out from Himself in the abundance of His love,
Awakens in the pure soul an intense longing.
Drawn out of herself,
The soul will not rest until immersed in her Beloved.
Encompassed in the wholeness of His reality, 15
She will wish to be recognized not from herself,
But from that which embraces her,
Like air made luminous by light,
Like iron penetrated through and through by fire.³³³
If the face of a loved one clearly and completely changes us, 20
Making us cheerful, happy and carefree,
What will the Face of the Way of Heaven do When He makes His presence
felt invisibly.
Without imagination,
In a pure soul? 25
Even a babe does not cling to the breast of its mother
As a child of love clings to the Way of Heaven at all times.³³⁴

Chapter 63

The power of love is in hope,
For by it we await the reward of love.
The failing of hope is the disappearance of love.
Hope is a rest from labors in the midst of labors.
Toils depend on it. 5
Mercy encircles it.
Experience of the gifts of the Giver of Life engenders hope,
But he who is without experience remains in doubt.³³⁵

The Eighth Ennead: The Way of Suffering

Chapter 64

Desire for created things, combined with the senses,

Becomes pleasure.

The senses, stimulated by desire,

Take advantage of the sensible object.

Sensual pleasure is the mother of division, 5

Breaking the primal Oneness, perfect love.

Sensual pleasure is the mother of death,

And the death of such pleasure is suffering.³³⁶

In desiring to escape pain

We seek refuge in sensual pleasure, 10

Calling it by the name of happiness.

But in trying to blunt pain with pleasure,

We but increase our pain,

For pleasure and pain are intertwined.³³⁷

Therefore did the Ancient Sage cry: 15

«O Misery! Happiness lies by its side!

O Happiness! Misery lurks beneath it!»³³⁸

Wherever there is pleasure, there must be pain,

There must be pain:

For through pain we have not chosen, 20

The Way turns us from illusory pleasure we have chosen.³³⁹

Pain forces us to rise above the realm of the senses,

To live according to our true nature,

Our original designation.

There are two kinds of pain: 25

Pain of the senses –

An absence of the object of the body's desire;

And pain of the soul –

An absence of the object of the soul's desire.³⁴⁰

Pleasure of the senses is emptiness ever filling itself, 30

Yet remaining ever empty.

Pleasure of the soul is fullness ever emptying itself,

Yet remaining ever full.

Therefore, said the Ancient Sage,

«What is most full seems to be empty, 35

But in its use cannot be exhausted».³⁴¹

Chapter 65

Pleasure of the senses is succeeded by pain of the soul,
While acceptance of pain of the senses is succeeded by pleasure of the soul.
This soul-pleasure we call joy:
The endless joy of binding oneself to the Way.
Thus the followers of the Way gladly accept suffering. 5
Patiently enduring involuntary afflictions,
They turn them into smooth, untroubled paths.
Through self-restraint, they do away with sensual pleasure,
Which is intricate, convoluted, wrapped around every sensible object.³⁴²
Therefore, said the Ancient Sage, 10
«The Way unravels tangles,
Submerges turmoil».³⁴³
Redirecting the impulses of their desire,
Followers of the Way act according to nature.
They no longer yearn for bodily pleasure, 15
Nor do they fear pain.
Overcoming such yearning and such fear,
Together with the sensual self-love that gave them birth,
They kill with a single blow all the passions.³⁴⁴
Therefore, said the Ancient Sage, 20
«Control of the passions by will is called strength».³⁴⁵
Free from desire for created things,
Followers of the Way pass from the outer to the inner.
Going beyond superficial aspects of these things,
They come to know their inner essences,³⁴⁶ 25
As words within the Primal Word,
Thoughts of the Primal Mind.
Therefore, said the Ancient Sage,
«The sage is always without desire,
In order to contemplate the mysteries of nature».³⁴⁷ 30
Offering themselves to Him Who is beyond all created things,
Sharing in His self-emptying,
Followers of the Way become wholly united with Him,
The true goal of love and longing,
The true End and fulfillment of Desire.³⁴⁸ 35

Chapter 66. It is easy to reconcile the existence of suffering in the world . Until one truly suffers.³⁴⁹

Then, when it seems impossible to reconcile the suffering in oneself,
It seems impossible to reconcile the suffering in the world.³⁵⁰
Instead of an explanation to reconcile suffering, 5
The Maker of things has offered Himself, and His life.
For He alone suffered as an absolute innocent.
He alone had nothing to learn, nothing to gain from suffering.
He alone, being born of a Virgin,³⁵¹
Was not born out of that pleasure which must be succeeded by pain.³⁵² 10
Yet he alone lived to the full all the pain and sorrow of which a human being is capable.
The suffering of the Way, then, was a purely gratuitous act.
In it He offered Himself no false consolation,
No easy escape in pleasure, such as we use every day.³⁵³
Sensual pleasure, born of desire, is the mother of death, 15
And the death of such pleasure is suffering.
In submitting to suffering and death without having been born out of pleasure,
The Way put pleasures child to death,
Thus giving birth to life without end,
To eternal rest and stillness, 20
For those who would share in His pain.³⁵⁴
This did the Ancient Sage foreglimpse and foretell, saying:
«The Way of nameless Simplicity is the death of the passions.
The death of the passions will lead to stillness,
And thus the world will naturally be at rest».³⁵⁵ 25

Chapter 67

«Although three-tenths of the people appear to live», said the Ancient Sage,
«They are moving in the realm of death.
Why is this?
Because of their excessive striving after life».³⁵⁶
Before the Way became flesh, 5
People tried to escape the suffering and death of the flesh.
Alter He came, people gladly accepted suffering and death in order to follow Him.
For them, to be with Him and suffer

Was far greater than to be without Him and not suffer.
For them there was only one way. 10
One must mourn in order to rejoice.
One must choose death to the passions in order to live.
But if one chooses happiness, one will reap sorrow.
And if one chooses one's own life, one will surely die.³⁵⁷
«Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad», said the Way, 15
«You who are poor in spirit,
You who mourn, and are meek,
Who hunger and thirst after righteousness,
Who are reviled and persecuted».³⁵⁸
Before the Way took flesh, 20
The world did not know the way to rejoice
In poverty, sorrow, helplessness, and persecution.
After He came, everything is reversed for those who follow Him.
Sorrow has lost its fatal poison.
Quiet hope lurks and grows in the inner recesses of despair. 25
The weight of suffering cannot burden one unto destruction
Because sweet fruit is lifted from its branches.
Sorrows are a furnace in which gold is purified.
Suffering is the hammer in the hand of the sculptor
Which perfects the statue.³⁵⁹ 30
Even this did the Ancient Sage foreglimpse and foretell, saying,
«In many things, advantages lurk in suffering,
And suffering lurks in advantages».³⁶⁰
For those who follow not the Way,
Sorrows are storms which ravage everything. 35
For those who follow the Way,
Tears of sorrow are a quiet rain which causes life to bloom.³⁶¹
To those who follow the Way, the Way Himself said:
«You shall weep and lament,
But the world shall rejoice;
And you shall be sorrowful, 40
But your sorrow shall be turned into joy.
And your joy no one can take from you».³⁶²

Chapter 68

Our fleshly self desires in a way that opposes our spiritual self,
Our spiritual self in a way that opposes our fleshly self.
This duality within us is called the «discord», the «twofold struggle».
So long as we are constrained by our fleshly self,
We are fragmented, cut off from the unity of the Way. 5
Hut when our fleshly self is constrained by our will,
It is swallowed up in the Way's unifying Power.³⁶³
When the Way became flesh and died as a man on the Tree,
His is Spirit was parted from His Body,
And the veil of the Temple was rent in twain.³⁶⁴ 10
When the follower of the Way dies to this life in going towards Him,
The temple of that persons being is likewise torn.
It is rent in two, becoming spiritual like the Way Himself,
Yet not ceasing to belong to the fleshly body in which it dwells.
It is torn, cutting off and tearing away the will of the fleshly self, 15
Which is sweet, but inclined to depart from the Way.
I he heart is ripped, tearing itself into pieces,
And these pieces it carries as a pure offering,
A gift to the Giver of life.³⁶⁵
Thus detached from the fleshly self, 20
The spiritual self is freed from discord and becomes a unity.
Embraced and enfolded in the One,
It is unified in pristine Simplicity,
Restored to its original state.
Duality is brought into subjection, 25
Swallowed up in the One.³⁶⁶
This the Sage called «the mysterious agreement», «primal union».³⁶⁷
The primal union, then, comes from pain of heart:
Tearing the poor heart,
Stripping it of desire for things created, 30
Out of desire for the Uncreated Way.
It is a union that comes from tearing in half.
Without inner war, there is no inner peace.

Chapter 69

The Way calls all people equally to follow Him.
The call is accepted if, when trouble or losses come,
The follower of the Way admits that he deserves them,
When he is thankful for them,
When he does not count his life dear to himself, 5
And completely surrenders himself to the Way.³⁶⁸
Therefore, said the Ancient Sage:
«When you are at one with loss,
The loss is experienced willingly».³⁶⁹
Suffering is a true sign that one is a follower of the Way, 10
A Real of His election.
He, the Creator of our spirits, re-creates and refashions our spirits through
trials.
An unutterable consolation appears in the heart,
And earthly sufferings become a source of delight.
A sorrowless earthly life, on the other hand, 15
Is a true sign that the Way has turned His face from a person,
Even though outwardly the person may appear reverent and virtuous.³⁷⁰

Chapter 70

Pain of heart, endured in devotion to the Way,³⁷¹
Is the way to perfection,³⁷²
The way to the perfect humility, perfect love.
Through it, the follower of the Way comes to full stature;
Through it, he becomes stronger. 5
Therefore, the Ancient Sage said:
«When opposing armies are evenly marched,
The one that is in grief over losses
Is the one that will be victorious».³⁷³
Without offenses, humility has not been tested. 10
Without adversities, true love has not been tested.
Without afflictions, virtue has not been tested.³⁷⁴
As soon as a follower of the Way allows self-exaltation to steal into his soul,
The Way permits afflictions to grow and prevail,
Until the follower returns to the weakness and humility which is the function
of the Way,

And thus becomes stronger.

The soul can never learn the power of the Way while abiding in comfort.

The soul can never value the love of the Way until she is in circumstances which cut off hope.

The Way reveals His Power by saving her

The Way reveals His love by giving hope where there is no hope. 20

The Way reveals Himself, but only in a region of stillness,³⁷⁵

When the soul is alone, imprisoned in the heart,

Seeking Him alone in her pain.

Chapter 71

I give you no formulas, says the Way,

I give you no equations.

But I will heal you in my own time,

In my own way,

Imperceptible to you. 5

Your mind races, seeking a solution;

But there is no solution that can be grasped by the mind.

Your mind tries every avenue,

Thinking that at least one will open up suddenly on the longed-for goal:

Freedom from pain. 10

But every avenue is a dead-end;

You are up against the wall,

The goal is not reached.

That is because the pain is there for a reason.

It is like a maddening fever that burns up and drives out disease. 15

By it alone do I heal you:

Without it you will die in your sickness.

By it alone do I change you unto perfection:

Without it you will be as a foreigner in my Kingdom.

Seek no formula. 20

Seek no equation.

Only be patient:

Wait on me

While I do my unseen work inside you.

When you are changed and fit for my Kingdom, 25

You will know that something happened,

And that is all you will know.

Hut there is no need for thought.
Enter, then, into my joy,³⁷⁶
Yon who have waited, in devotion, in my pain. 30

Chapter 72. His concern is not with the ideas of men;

Nor with their classes, or states, or nations, or warring factions;
Nor with what they call their rights.
These pass from day to day like clouds.
Many say that He wishes us to be happy. 5
They try to make Him what they want Him to be.
The truth is, He cares not for that happiness,
For that happiness is not real, but a dream.
It too is like clouds,
Clouds that change shape and vanish into air. 10
Who remembers yesterday s clouds?
Beneath the clouds is the ground we call sorrow.
This sorrow is our earth, the dust of the ground,
The very substance of life.
Unlike the clouds, it is solid and firm. 15
Beneath the earth are hidden reservoirs of water,
And this water we call joy,
A joy deeper than the happiness of the clouds.
But this water may not come to the surface of its own accord.
Therefore one must labor to dig the ground of sorrow
In order to tap it.

The Ninth Ennead: Following the Way of Truth

Chapter 73

The Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, said:

«The Way is like an empty vessel I hat may yet be drawn from
Without ever needing to be filled.

It is like a deep pool that never dries».³⁷⁷ 5

And the Way, when He became flesh, said to the woman at the well:

«Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst;

But the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water spring-
ing up into unending life».³⁷⁸

Before you can drink of the still pool,

Concealed under the ground of sorrow, 10

You must become like the pool,

Become like the water, which can only flow down.

The water has one law to follow,

And it never fails to follow it.

People, too, have laws to follow: 15

Laws of the universe, not invented by man.

Simple laws, yet unchanging, inexorable.

There can be no others,

There can be none better.

Not even the Maker of the universe will change you 20

Unless you change your mind.³⁷⁹

Unless you abandon the path of avarice, sensual pleasure, and self-exaltation.

Unless you collapse, fold in on yourself, and open out of yourself.

Unless you release everything, redirect all your energy,

Despoil yourself of all that is not of the Way, 25

Strip your heart of all created things,

Renounce your will, inclinations, whims, and fancies,³⁸⁰

And allow yourself to be carried by Him downstream,

Down to the still pool,

Drinking of which

You shall never thirst again. 30

Chapter 74

At the birth of love, there is no decision to be made:
Spontaneously it arises, as if it had always been there.
But for love to endure, a decision must be made:
The decision to sacrifice oneself for one's beloved.
So it is with the one who follows the Way out of love, 5
Who seeks to become one with Him.
The decision is not to love, but to sacrifice;
And sacrifice is the evidence and confirmation of love.

Chapter 75

«There are those», said the Ancient Sage,
«Who would conquer the world and make of it what they desire.
I see they will not succeed.
The world is like a hollow utensil
And cannot be manipulated.³⁸¹ 5
That which is not the Way soon fades away.³⁸²
Hence the sage assists the natural development of all things,
Even though he does not venture to interfere». ³⁸³
When something accords with the Way,
All creation aids it. 10
But when the Way rejects something,
Creation too opposes it.³⁸⁴
The stream flows gently
But its course is inexorable.
There are many directions, 15
But there is only one Way by which the stream flows.
The Way has given to the soul freedom of movement
And power over herself.
Exercising this freedom and this power,
She may think she is fulfilling her true nature, 20
Not knowing that her nature was made, not merely to move,
But to move in the right direction.³⁸⁵
As free of the Way, one can go in many directions,
But then one becomes a slave of those directions.
As a slave of the Way, one can follow naught but one Course, 25
But then one is free.

Universal freedom is a lie
Because there is only One Course in the universe, not many.
Yet universal freedom is true
Because, in following the One Universal Course, 30
One encompasses the cosmos.
Having the freedom of choice,
One chooses freedom from choice.

Chapter 76

«It is better to leave alone», said the Ancient Sage,
«Than to forcibly attempt to make full.
The hall that is filled with gold and jade is not easy to protect.
Pride in riches and honors must lead to calamity».³⁸⁶
Even if we have a great abundance of everything 5
It will always seem to us that we are deprived,
We will always be in fear,
Despondent, agitated, fainthearted,
Every hour full of cares, anxieties and vain sighing,
Until we turn again to the Way and raise ourselves to Him 10
As the sunflower ever turns and raises itself to the sun.³⁸⁷

Chapter 77

The Way is not found by those who seek after signs,³⁸⁸
Although He may give signs.
The Way is not found by those who seek after wonders,
Although He may manifest wonders.
The Way is not found among those who seek after communion with spirits, 5
Although He alone is pure Spirit, and is adored by spirits.
Those who seek after signs may behold false signs.
Those who seek after wonders may be deceived by lying wonders.³⁸⁹
Those who seek after communion with spirits may come into contact with dark
spirits, hiding under a guise of light.³⁹⁰
The Way is not found by these seekers, 10
But by those who, whether they seek or not,
Are irresistibly drawn

To what is wise and true,
To what is simple and pure,
To what is childlike, 15
To what is lowly,
And sadly, sadly beautiful.

Chapter 78

The Way of Heaven, being Himself simple and undivided,
Wants souls that come to Him to be simple and guileless,
Immune to crafty thinking,
Far removed from all ulterior motive,
With unmeddling thought, sincere character, 5
Frank and unpremeditated speech.³⁹¹
Even customary human knowledge,
With its many notions, deliberations and subtleties,
Hinders one from entering into primal, unified Simplicity,
The guilelessness of one's true nature.³⁹² 10
Therefore, said the Ancient Sage:
«Empty yourself of everything,³⁹³
Attain the utmost purity.³⁹⁴
Let the mind rest at peace».³⁹⁵
And the Way of Heaven, when he became flesh, said: 15
«Let not your heart be troubled,
Neither let it be afraid.³⁹⁶
Which of you by taking thought
Can add one cubit to his stature?
If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, 20
Why take thought for the rest?»³⁹⁷
The follower of the Way thus frees himself from worry, planning and calculation,
From slavery to human concepts,
Not allowing himself to be carried along by thoughts and images,
He establishes himself in a childlike state of mind. 25
Becoming an infant, he yet lacks the deficiencies of an infant.³⁹⁸
Being an adult, he yet lacks the complexities of an adult.
«Become as a little child once more», said the Ancient Sage.³⁹⁹
And the Way, when He became flesh, said:
«Unless you are converted, and become as little children, 30

You shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven»⁴⁰⁰ –
That is, into spiritual Divine vision⁴⁰¹
Wherein, as an innocent babe, one basks in the simple delight
Of the simple Truth that is above compounded knowledge.
For the secret things, said the Way, 35
«Have been hidden from the wise and prudent,
And have been revealed unto babes». ⁴⁰²
The pure in heart, and they alone, shall see Him as He is. ⁴⁰³

Chapter 79

«The essence of the Way», said the Ancient Sage,
«Is supremely true:
Within is the evidence.
From the beginning until now its name has remained,
And it contains all Truth». ⁴⁰⁴ 5
A two-faced person –
One who is one thing outwardly and another inwardly
Such a one not only lies, but makes his very life a lie.
Guile and duplicity sap one's power,
Engendering cowardice and fear. 10
But the honest and true person –
One who is the same outwardly and inwardly –
Remains unconfused
And thus has boldness without fear.
When the Way returns, 15
He will come with boldness and with power, ⁴⁰⁵
For there is no falsehood to be found in Him.
He has boldness because He is one.
He has power because He is not double.
He is unconquerable because He cannot be divided. 20
His eye is single,
And the Light of His eye fills the whole body of His unique, eternal Being. ⁴⁰⁶
Wholly single, simple and unconfused,
He is therefore wholly true.
And not only true, nor yet an embodiment of Truth, 25
Hut Truth Itself,
I am He said, «I am Truth». ⁴⁰⁷

Chapter 80

«The Way is hidden and without name», said the Ancient Sage,
«Yet it alone supports all things and brings them to fulfillment».⁴⁰⁸
When the Way comes to a child, hurting, afraid, unknowing,
The child becomes a man, deep, strong, and wise.
When the Way comes to a man, jaded and stained, 5
The man becomes a child, innocent and pure.
In the Way, there is a reversal,
A circle of return,
That each thing may become whole and complete in itself,
And each person, a universe. 10

Chapter 81

One who sees all ways as having equal truth Will find his life not long enough
to follow the Way to the end.
One cannot be simple and guileless, free of multiple deliberations.
One will be as a person having many lovers,
Occupied with each, yet given wholly to none. 5
One will not be married to the Way,
But will remain outside the Bridal Chamber.
To be married to the Way is to belong wholly to Him.
To belong wholly to Him is to have Him belong wholly to you.
It is only then that He can finish His work inside you. 10
It is only then that He can carry you to His end:
To His end, where there shall never be separation from Him,
The sole Bridegroom.

* * *

²³P. Ivanov, “Orthodox Translations of the New Testament into the Chinese Language.» *Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii* (Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate) (in Russian), no. 3 (1998), p. 62.

²⁴*The Life of Christ by Chinese Artists*, 3d cd. pp. 1–2.

²⁵Line 5. the Ancient Prophet: King David.

²⁶6. Psalm 17(Septuagint).

- ²⁷7. St. Maximus the Confessor, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 144.
- ²⁸Line 9. *the Ancient Sage: Lao Tzu*.
- ²⁹10–11. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 1 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ³⁰12–13. St. Gregory Palamas, “Theophanes.» Quoted in Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 37.
- ³¹15–17. St. Gregory Nazianzen, Oration 38. Quoted in Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 36.
- ³²18–20. St. Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, p. 144.
- ³³22. Cf. John 8:58.
- ³⁴23–25. St. John Damascene, “Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,” 1:4, in *Saint John of Damascus: Writings*, p. 172.
- ³⁵St. Dionysius the Areopagite, “The Mystical Theology,» ch. 5, and “The Divine Names,» 13:3, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, pp. 129–30, 141.
- ³⁶35–40. St. Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, pp. 143–44, 148.
- ³⁷*Ibid.*, 2:2, p. 148.
- ³⁸45–48. Cf. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 1.
- ³⁹49–51. St. Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, p. 144.
- ⁴⁰Psalm 109(Septuagint).
- ⁴¹13. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 25 (Gi-ming Shien, Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁴²14–29. St. Dionysius of Alexandria. Quoted in St. Athanasius the Great, “Defense of Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria,» p. 185.
- ⁴³16. St. John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ*, pp. 38–39.
- ⁴⁴17–21. Cf. John 3:8.
- ⁴⁵4–5. St. Gregory Nazianzen, “The Second Theological Oration,» in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2d series, vol. 7, p. 289.
- ⁴⁶1. The teaching of Pythagoras.
- ⁴⁷1–5. These lines are taken from Gi-ming Shien’s commentary on ch. 42 of the *Tao Teh Ching*, as recorded by Eugene (Fr. Seraphim) Rose.
- ⁴⁸7. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 42 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ⁴⁹8–9. St. Gregory Nazianzen, Oration 22. Quoted in Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p.
- ⁵⁰16. Protopresbyter Michael Po-mazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, p. 78.

- ⁵¹13–17. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 47.
- ⁵²20–22. St. John Damascene, “Ortho dox Faith,» 1:8, p. 187.
- ⁵³7–9. St. John Damascene, “Orthodox Faith,» 2:2, p. 205.
- ⁵⁴St. Ircnaeus of Lyons, “Against Heresies,» 5:6. Quoted in Pomazansky, p. 111.
- ⁵⁵4–5. Cf. Psalm 148(Septuagint).
- ⁵⁶6. Cf. Psalm 32(Septuagint).
- ⁵⁷8. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 4 (Gi-ming Slum Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁵⁸9–10. John 1:3.
- ⁵⁹13–14. John 21:25.
- ⁶⁰16. St. John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ*, pp. 38–39.
- ⁶¹18. Cf. Psalm 32(Septuagint).
- ⁶²Genesis 1:26.
- ⁶³21–22. Genesis 2:7.
- ⁶⁴27–28. Cf. Genesis 1:2.
- ⁶⁵1–10. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 39 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ⁶⁶Ibid., ch. 42 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ⁶⁷John 14:6.
- ⁶⁸5–6. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 40 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ⁶⁹9. Cf. John 14:6.
- ⁷⁰12. John 2:19–21.
- ⁷¹19. St. Maximus the Confessor, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 281.
- ⁷²14–17. John 12:24.
- ⁷³23–26. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 52 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ⁷⁴54. Cf. John 13:23.
- ⁷⁵56. Cf. John 6:53.
- ⁷⁶57. Cf. Matthew 28:20.
- ⁷⁷9. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 14 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ⁷⁸10–17. Ibid., ch. 35 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ⁷⁹18. Ibid., ch. 1 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁸⁰28–33. Ibid., ch. 21 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).

- ⁸¹38–42. Ibid., ch. 51 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁸²43. Ibid., ch. 4 (Arthur Waley, trans.).
- ⁸³Cf. John 14:9.
- ⁸⁴St. Dionysius of Alexandria. Quoted in Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, p. 88.
- ⁸⁵3. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 28 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ⁸⁶4. Ibid. (Gi-ming Shien, Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁸⁷5–6. Ibid., ch. 14 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ⁸⁸7–28. St. Athanasius the Great, “Against the Heathen,” p. 5.
- ⁸⁹32. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 21 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ⁹⁰33–38. Ibid., ch. 14 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ⁹¹1–4. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 16 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ⁹²Cf. Romans 8:22.
- ⁹³17–20. St. Maximus the Confessor, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 173.
- ⁹⁴1–3. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 6 (Ch’u Ta-kao, trans.).
- ⁹⁵the Ancient Prophet: Ezekiel.
- ⁹⁶4–6. Ezekiel 44(Septuagint).
- ⁹⁷10. Cf. 1 Kings 19:12.
- ⁹⁸16–21. This image is drawn from the teachings of St. Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow.
- ⁹⁹Luke 1:38.
- ¹⁰⁰29. Cf. Philippians 2:7.
- ¹⁰¹the Mystic Mother: the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.
- ¹⁰²36. Cf. Daniel 2:34–35.
- ¹⁰³the Ancient Prophet: Daniel.
- ¹⁰⁴1–2. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 8 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ¹⁰⁵1–8. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 51 (Gi-ming Shien, Waley, Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ¹⁰⁶14. Matthew 16:16.
- ¹⁰⁷16. Matthew 11:11; Luke 7:28.
- ¹⁰⁸1–4. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 34 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ¹⁰⁹the Ancient Prophet: Isaiah.

- ¹¹⁰5–8. Isaiah 42:2–3 and Matthew 12:19--20.
- ¹¹¹12–15. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 34 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ¹¹²19. Luke 22:27.
- ¹¹³20–25. Isaiah 53(Septuagint).
- ¹¹⁴26–27. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 25 (John C.Wu, trans.).
- ¹¹⁵10–12. Matthew 5:5, 3; Luke 6:21.
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- ¹¹⁷6–7. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 22 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ¹¹⁸9–12. Luke 6:20–21, 24–25.
- ¹¹⁹14–17. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 38 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ¹²⁰19–20. Matthew 6:3.
- ¹²¹22–24. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 66 (Waley, Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ¹²²26. Mark 9:35.
- ¹²³28–29. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 77 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ¹²⁴30. Cf. Matthew 23:13.
- ¹²⁵31. Matthew 21:43.
- ¹²⁶34–35. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 9 (Lin Yu-tang, trans.).
- ¹²⁷37–38. Matthew 6:19.
- ¹²⁸40–41. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 44 (Lin Yu- tang, trans.).
- ¹²⁹43. Matthew 16:26.
- ¹³⁰45–46. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 78 (Thomas Cleary, trans.).
- ¹³¹47. Ibid., ch. 22 (Lin Yutang, trans.).
- ¹³²49–53. Matthew 5:39–40.
- ¹³³55–56. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 42 (Gi-ming Shien and Lin Yutang, trans.).
- ¹³⁴58. Matthew 26:52.
- ¹³⁵60–62. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 64 (Cleary, trans.).
- ¹³⁶64–69. Matthew 13:31–32.
- ¹³⁷71–72. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 63 (Gia-In Feng, English, Ch'u Ta-kao and Ren Jiyu, trans.).
- ¹³⁸76. Matthew 13:33.
- ¹³⁹78. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 78 (Lin Yutang, trans.).

- ¹⁴⁰80–81. Matthew 13:47.
- ¹⁴¹83. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 78 (Lin Yutang, trans.).
- ¹⁴²85. Cf. Matthew 10:29.
- ¹⁴³87. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 34 (Lin Yutang, trans.).
- ¹⁴⁴89–92. Matthew 6:28–29.
- ¹⁴⁵94–95. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 40 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ¹⁴⁶97. 2Corinthians 12:9.
- ¹⁴⁷99–101. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 25 (Wu, trans.).
- ¹⁴⁸103. John 4:26.
- ¹⁴⁹2–5. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 2 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ¹⁵⁰6–7. *Ibid.*, ch. 64 (Waley, trans.).
- ¹⁵¹22–23. Luke 18:19.
- ¹⁵²28. Matthew 11:5.
- ¹⁵³31. John 7:46.
- ¹⁵⁴14. John 3:5.
- ¹⁵⁵1–3. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 34 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ¹⁵⁶3. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 14 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ¹⁵⁷10. Revelation 1:8, 1:11, 21:6, 22:13.
- ¹⁵⁸18. 1Corinthians 15:28.
- ¹⁵⁹25–26. Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33.
- ¹⁶⁰1–2. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 23 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ¹⁶¹7. Cf. Matthew 19:14.
- ¹⁶²14. Cf. John 21:20.
- ¹⁶³2–9. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 20 (Gi-ming Shien, Gia-fu Feng, English and Waley, trans.).
- ¹⁶⁴11. Cf. Luke 17:20–21.
- ¹⁶⁵12–14. Luke 9:58.
- ¹⁶⁶2–3. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 78 (Lin Yutang, Ch’u Ta-kao, Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ¹⁶⁷the Ancient Prophet: Isaiah.
- ¹⁶⁸15–17. Isaiah, ch. 53 (Septuagint).
- ¹⁶⁹18–21. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 62 (Wu, Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).

¹⁷⁰23–24. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 78 (Lin Yutang, Ch'u Ta-kao, Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).

¹⁷¹the Prophet: John the Baptist.

¹⁷²26. John 1:29.

¹⁷³2–4. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 28 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).

¹⁷⁴the City: Jerusalem.

¹⁷⁵6–8. Luke 19:35–36.

¹⁷⁶the Ancient Prophet: Isaiah.

¹⁷⁷13–15. Isaiah 53:3.

¹⁷⁸2–4. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 28 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).

¹⁷⁹the Valley: the Kedron Valley.

¹⁸⁰a Garden: the Garden of Gethsemane.

¹⁸¹1–7. John 16:32.

¹⁸²13. St. Maximus the Confessor, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 173.

¹⁸³18. Luke 22:44.

¹⁸⁴27. Cf. Matthew 26

¹⁸⁵1–5. Cf. Luke 22:53.

¹⁸⁶10–11. Cf. John 19:11.

¹⁸⁷7. Cf. John 13:34.

¹⁸⁸2–7. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 22 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).

¹⁸⁹11–14. John 18:36.

¹⁹⁰17–18. Cf. Matthew 27:12.

¹⁹¹19. John 18:38.

¹⁹²21–22. Matthew 27:13–14.

¹⁹³23–26. From the African American Spiritual «They Crucified My Lord (And He Never Said a Mumbalin Word)». Matthew 27:46.

¹⁹⁴29–30. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 34 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).

¹⁹⁵31–33. *Ibid.*, ch. 73 (Gia-fu Feng, English and Waley, trans.).

¹⁹⁶35–37. John 16:33.

¹⁹⁷1–11. Matthew 27:28–31.

¹⁹⁸12–13. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 41 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).

¹⁹⁹1–2. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 41 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).

- 200 10. John 19:28.
- 201 11–12. Cf. Matthew 18:12.
- 202 18–19. John 15:13.
- 203 20–21. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 13 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- 204 23–24. Cf. John 12:32.
- 205 1–3. Cf. John 3:13.
- 206 5–6. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 76 (Wu and Waley, trans.).
- 207 8–9. Luke 18:14.
- 208 24. Cf. John 12:24.
- 209 30. Cf. Matthew 26:38; Mark 14:34.
- 210 7–8. St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, *A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, pp. 73–74.
- 211 9–13. St. Athanasius the Great, “Against the Heathen,” p. 5.
- 212 15–17. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 13 (Gi-ming Shien and Ren Jiyu, trans.).
- 213 19–23. Luke 12:22,28.
- 214 29–34. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 12 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
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- 220 59. Luke 12:29.
- 221 60–61. Matthew 6:34.
- 222 62–63. Luke 12:31–32.
- 223 64–65. Luke 17:20–21.
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- 226 4–10. From Gi-ming Shien's commentary on ch. 55 of the *Tao Teh Ching*, recorded by Eugene (Fr. Seraphim) Rose.
- 227 14. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 19 (Ren Jiyu, trans.).
- 228 15–16. *Ibid.*, ch. 64 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- 229 17. *Ibid.*, ch. 15 (Gi-ming Shien and Eugene [Fr. Seraphim] Rose, trans.).

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- ²³²2. Ibid., ch. 22 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
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- ²³⁵4–5. Ibid., ch. 7 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ²³⁶7–8. Luke 17:33.
- ²³⁷20–21. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 10 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ²³⁸2–8. Matthew 11:28–30.
- ²³⁹14. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 8 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ²⁴⁰24. Luke 14:28.
- ²⁴¹27–28. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 16 (Gi-ming Shien and Waley, trans.).
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- ²⁴³3. Ibid., ch. 3 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
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- ²⁴⁵5. Ibid., ch. 37 (Cleary, trans.).
- ²⁴⁶13. Matthew 24:13.
- ²⁴⁷1–2. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 22 (Gi-ming Shien, Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ²⁴⁸the highest hill: Golgotha.
- ²⁴⁹14–15. John 15:4.
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- 268 the Ancient Prophet: King David.
- 269 16–17. Psalm 71(Septuagint).
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- 275 4–6. St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 25:58, p. 159.
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- 277 14. Cf. Matthew 11:29.
- 278 9–17. St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 25:3, p. 150. Cf. Matthew 11:29.
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- ³⁰³16–23. John 14:18–20.
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- [322](#) 29. Cf. Ephesians 1:23; 1Corinthian 15:28.
- [323](#) 31–34. St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 30:35, p. 228.
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- [328](#) 27. Cf. St. Maximus the Confessor, in *Selected Writings*, p. 131.
- [329](#) 25–27. St. Nicetas Stithatos, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, pp. 120–21.
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- ³⁷¹1. St. Mark the Ascetic, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 136.
- ³⁷²1–2. Cf. James 1:2–4.
- ³⁷³7–9. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 69 (Ren Jiyu, trans.).
- ³⁷⁴10–12. St. Mark the Ascetic, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 114.
- ³⁷⁵13–21. St. Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies*, homily 72, p. 355.
- ³⁷⁶29. Matthew 25:21.
- ³⁷⁷2–5. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 4 (Waley, trans.).

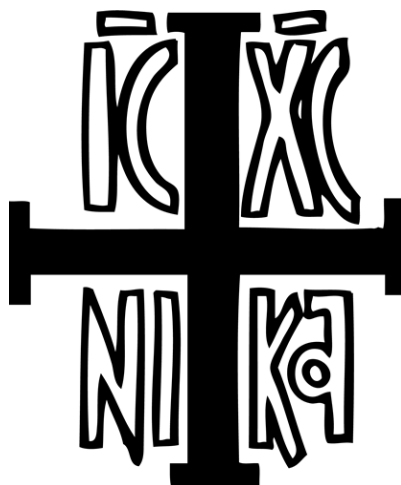
- 378 7–8. John 4:14.
- 379 21. Cf. Romans 12:2.
- 380 24–27. Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Quoted in Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God*, p. 48.
- 381 1–5. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 29 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- 382 6. Ibid., ch. 55 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- 383 7–8. Ibid., ch. 64 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- 384 9–12. St. Mark the Ascetic, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 142.
- 385 17–22. St. Athanasius the Great, “Against the Heathen,” p. 6.
- 386 1–4. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 9 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- 387 5–11. “Saint John Maximovitch of Tobolsk.» In *The Orthodox Word*, no. 11 (1966), pp. 162–63.
- 388 1. See Matthew 16:4.
- 389 7–8.2 Thessalonians 2:9.
- 390 9. See 2Corinthians 11:14.
- 391 1–6. St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 24:14, 17–18, 26, pp. 146–48.
- 392 7–10. St. Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies*, homily 37, p. 177; homily 72, p. 353.
- 393 12. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 16 (Gia-fu Fing and English, trans.).
- 394 13. Ibid. (Rose, trans.).
- 395 14. Ibid. (Gia-fu Feng and English trans.).
- 396 16–17. John 14:27.
- 397 18–21. Matthew 6:27; Luke 12:25–26.
- 398 23–26. See St. Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies*, homily 37, p. 177; homily 72, p. 353.
- 399 28. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 28 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- 400 30–31. Matthew 18:3.
- 401 32. St. Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies*, homily 72, p. 353.
- 402 36–37. Luke 10:21.
- 403 38. Matthew 5:8; 1 John 3:2–3.
- 404 1–5. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 21 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).

⁴⁰⁵15–16. Cf. Matthew 24:30; Luke 21:27.

⁴⁰⁶21–22. Cf. Matthew 6:22.

⁴⁰⁷27. John 14:6.

⁴⁰⁸1–2. *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 41 (Waley, trans.).



Part II. The unfolding revelation of the Tao in human history

Chapter One: Departure from the Way

1. Pristine Simplicity

In the beginning, man was created in a state of pristine simplicity, pure awareness. His thoughts and memories were not diversified and fragmented as they are today, but were simple and one-pointed.⁴⁰⁹ He knew no mental distraction. While being wiser than any human being today, he was in a state of innocence, like a child, and in this state he lived in deep personal communion with God the Tao/Logos and with the rest of creation, holding spiritual converse with them.

Being in such close communion with God, primordial man participated directly in God's Uncreated Energy, which he experienced as a Divine and ineffable Light which flooded his whole being. He was as it were clothed in this Light.⁴¹⁰

Primordial man possessed self-awareness; that is, he was aware of an «I», of being a unique creation, endowed with freedom of will. «Made in the image of God»,⁴¹¹ he had an immortal spirit that could draw eternally closer to his Creator. All of this gave him his special sense of personhood.

Unlike the people of today, however, he did not have a sense of individuality. By this we mean that he did not live under the illusion that, as a unique person, he was sufficient unto himself. While possessing freedom, he did not have the false sense that he existed free of anything else, that he was non-determined. He was nor conscious of being a separate, isolated self, but cleaved unto God in a communion of love and united all creation in love unto himself. Since he did not have diversified thoughts but only simple, pure awareness, he did not identify himself with such thoughts, as we do today. And since he was not distracted by and enslaved to his senses, he did not identify himself with his physical body, as we do. Thus, for all these reasons, we can say that, while being a person endowed with self-awareness, he was truly self-less.

When he was still in this state of pristine simplicity, man always acted in accordance with nature: both in accordance with his own human nature (or human essence), and with the common nature of all creation. This is the same as saying that he acted only in accordance with the ordering, directing Princi-

ple of all nature: the Tao/Logos. His will, created pure by God, followed the Tao in all things – not out of necessity, as did other creatures, but freely, out of love. His freedom of will made him unique among all creatures, though not separate from them. This quality of freedom not only made for the possibility of his unique human personhood; it was also part of what made him «in the image of God».

As God is free, so likewise man is free. But between God and man there remained a fundamental difference. God is entirely sufficient unto Himself: self-existing, non-determined, unconditioned, standing in need of nothing. He is absolute Possibility Man, on the other hand, is conditioned by the very fact that he was brought into being not by himself. His very minute-by-minute existence – not only his creation – is dependent on God. The character of his existence is determined by his own God-given human nature, and by the common nature of the created order of which he is a part. He has the ability to freely choose his actions within this determined, conditioned existence. If he chooses to act according to nature, and thus according to the Tao Who orders nature, all will go well. But if he does not act naturally, he gets out of harmony with both the Tao and with nature, and thus sets himself at odds with that which determines his very existence.

As long as man, in his self-awareness, remains humbly aware that he does not exist of himself, that of himself he is nothing at all, he will do what is natural to him. He will do it freely and at the same time automatically – that is, spontaneously, because his «free will» will naturally fall in line with nature without his having to stop and consider anything.

When man begins to harbor the illusion of self-sufficiency, however, he becomes a «self» in the modern sense of the word: an individual desiring things for himself and pitting himself against other individuals.

If such was the possible consequence of human freedom, why did God allow for it? It was in order to allow for love. Love must be freely given; it cannot exist without freedom. If God had not endowed the human essence with this quality, the world would be a cold, impersonal, entirely programmed environment.

2. The Primordial Departure

When man, in wrongly using his free will, first departed from the Way (Tao), he corrupted his primal simplicity and became fragmented. Divested of the primal glory, of the garment of Uncreated Light that had enveloped him, he now found himself «naked» (Genesis 3:7). His spiritual corruption and death made him subject to physical corruption and death.⁴¹²

«After his transgression», writes St. Macarius of Egypt († a.d. 390), «man's thoughts became base and material, and the simplicity and goodness of his mind were intertwined with evil worldly concerns».⁴¹³ His will became divided. Now his «natural will», which remained inclined to follow the Way in all things, was set against his «free will», which had now taken on itself an inclination to depart from the Way.

Before his primordial departure from the Way, man had experienced only that which was natural to him. Now, however, he also experienced what was unnatural to him. Thus he self-willfully usurped the «knowledge of good and evil», destroying the primal simplicity and bringing duality into the world.

Before, man had been spontaneous, like a child. At every step, he freely chose, without thinking, to act according to nature, according to the Way. Now, however, at every step he had to stop and think, to calculate: «Should I follow the Way or not?» Thus he became a complex being, inwardly divided, and always vacillating.

Only God is self-existent. When man began to fall under the illusion of being a self-existent individual, he was essentially making himself into a little god. This was the meaning of the primordial trap into which he fell: «Knowing good and evil, you will be as gods».⁴¹⁴

Man had been created to rise, in his simple and uncompounded nature, in noetic contemplation of the simple and uncompounded God. To rise in love, and to unite all of creation with himself in love, raising it also to the Creator. Instead of regarding the Way, however, he chose to regard what was easier and closer at hand: his own visible self. Instead of rising with God, he fell in love with himself.

Man had been meant to find pleasure in his limitless ascent to God and in loving communion with Him, the Source of all things. But, in falling in love with himself, he began rather to seek pleasure from what was closer to him: his body and his senses. All evil in the world can be traced to these two things: self-love and love of sensual pleasure.⁴¹⁵

Man had been created to desire God, the Uncreated Source of his joy. But, in falling in love with himself, he had instead begun to desire created things.

Because of all this, God allowed suffering to enter the world. He did this not out of vengeance, but out of love for man, so that through suffering arising from self-love, sensual pleasure, and the resulting desire for created things, man might see through the illusion of his self-sufficiency and return to his original designation: the state of pristine simplicity and communion with the Way.

3. Knowledge of God in the Earliest Historical Cultures

After his primordial departure from the Way, man as a whole was still more simple and innocent, closer to God and nature, than In is today. Thus, his knowledge of God was more pure. This is substantiated by records that have come down to us of the earliest periods of ancient civilizations. The religion of Egypt's first dynasty, for example, was much more pure than the forms of polytheism that arose in later dynasties. Mircea Eliade writes: «It is surprising that the earliest Egyptian cosmogony yet known is also the most philosophical. For [the Supreme God] Ptah creates by his mind (his 'heart') and his word (his 'tongue')... In short, the theogony and cosmogony are effected by the creative power of the thought and word of a single God. We here certainly have the highest expression of Egyptian metaphysical speculation.... It is at the beginning of Egyptian history that we find a doctrine that can be compared with the Christian theology of the Logos».⁴¹⁶

The same is true for the primal period of Chinese civilization. The oldest book of Chinese history, the *Shu Ching* (Book of Documents), relates that in China's first dynasty, the Hsia (ca. 2300–1700 B.C.), the people believed in one supreme God, Whom they called Shang Ti 上帝

– Shang meaning «above», «superior to», and Ti meaning «ruler» or «lord». «At this point», writes historian John Ross, «the very threshold of what the Chinese critics accept as the beginning of their authentic history, the name of God and other religious matters present themselves with the completeness of a Minerva. We are driven to infer that the name and the religious observances associated with it are coeval with the existence of the people of China.

«It is therefore evident that the belief in the existence of one Supreme Ruler is among the earliest beliefs of the Chinese known to us. Of an earlier date, when no such belief existed or when the belief in polytheism did exist, we find no trace. Nowhere is there a hint to confirm the materialistic theory that the idea of God is a later evolutionary product of a precedent belief in ghosts or departed ancestors, or that the belief had arisen indirectly from any other similar source».⁴¹⁷

During the next dynasty, the Shang (ca. 1700–1100 B.C.), the supreme Deity was more commonly called by the name T'ien 天 – meaning «Heaven» – though the name Shang Ti continued to be used interchangeably with it, sometimes side by side.⁴¹⁸ The Chinese Emperor had to possess what was called the «mandate of Heaven» or the «mandate of Shang Ti», which he earned by living and ruling virtuously. If ever he ceased to rule according to the Way of Heaven, he would lose the mandate and fall from power.⁴¹⁹ This

understanding of government remained intact in China until the early twentieth century.

In China's oldest book of literature, the Shih Ching (Book of Odes), which dates from the middle of the Chou dynasty, 800–600 B.C., we find such phrases as these:

«Great Heaven is all-intelligent and with you in every place, Great Heaven sees all and is with you in your wanderings».

«Because King Wen served Shang Ti with his whole understanding and received much blessing, he succeeded to the throne.... He exhibited a virtue so perfect that the blessings received from Shang Ti would for his sake descend to his successors».

«The founder of the Shang [dynasty] received the blessing of Heaven, and because of his virtue Heaven bestowed mercy upon him».

«The arrogant men are pleased, while the toiling men are anxious. Azure Heaven, azure Heaven, look at those arrogant men, pity these toiling men!»⁴²⁰

Of all the primordial peoples save the Hebrews, the Chinese- together with their racial cousins the native North Americans – retained the purest understanding of the one God, the supreme Being. Nevertheless, even at the time of the first and second dynasties in China, much of man's original knowledge of God had been lost due to the primordial departure. Heaven, although it guided and directed the affairs of men, was often seen as being painfully distant; in the Shih Ching it is often referred to as «remote Heaven». Only the Emperors had the right to offer sacrifices to Shang Ti/Heaven, and even they were frequently to lament that «Heaven is difficult to rely on». The Duke of Chou (eleventh century B.C.) went so far as to say, «Heaven cannot be trusted».⁴²¹

In ancient China as in other primal cultures, we see a gradual movement from simplicity to complexity, as the effects of the primordial fall from the pristine simplicity became more fully entrenched in man's nature. Man was no longer merely asking, Should I follow the Way of Heaven or not? Now he was asking, What is the Way?

In becoming more distant from the Creator, the ancient Chinese sought out inferior deities: the spirits of their ancestors, the gods of hunting and agriculture, the spirits of the sky, earth, sun, moon, wind, etc. To seek out the will of Heaven, they frequently resorted to divination: heating up a tortoise shell until it cracked, and then interpreting the message encoded in the cracks. Archeologists have uncovered thousands of such tortoise shells used in imperial divination, dating from the Shang dynasty. From the inscriptions on them, it appears that the Emperors never invoked the distant and awesome Shang

Ti/Heaven directly through the oracles, but only invoked the spirits of their ancestors as intermediaries.⁴²²

As centuries passed, the original monotheism of China continued to be obscured. Since the Chinese culture is so strongly based in tradition, however, the ancient religion could never disappear entirely. Above all, it was preserved in the state worship. The Emperor continued to offer the Great Sacrifice to Shang Ti twice a year, at the winter and summer solstices, according to ancient custom. This practice extended into modern times, and ended only with the fall of the Manchus in 1911.⁴²³

Even from the popular mind, the ancient monotheism could not be completely eradicated. To Westerners it is a little-known fact that, in China and Taiwan even today, vestiges of the original Chinese religion are found in the Taoist and Buddhist temples. When people come to these temples, they burn incense and pray to Slung Ti at a special place in the narthex, and only then do they enter the main temple area.

Still, it must be conceded that much of Chinese religion has (descended to polytheism through the centuries, and that the worship of the one God, Shang Ti, has been confused by pantheons of deities of various ranks.⁴²⁴

The same would have happened in ancient Hebrew culture as happened in China – and at many times in Jewish history it almost did happen – but God, through the Prophets, continually called this people back to the worship of Him alone. He intervened in this way because it was out of the Hebrew race that He was to one day take flesh and reveal the ultimate mystery of His Being to the world.

Chapter Two: Seeking the Way of Return

4. Lao Tzu and Confucius

When Lao Tzu and Confucius were born into the world in the sixth century B.C., the religion of China – although still essentially monotheistic and more elevated than the religions of other cultures such as the Greek and Roman – was considerably distanced from the pristine simplicity. Both Lao Tzu and Confucius harked back to a time when people were closer to Heaven and to nature. For, like most ancient cultures, the Chinese had preserved a memory of a time in dim antiquity, a «golden age», when man had been in a pure state. Lao Tzu wrote:

Immeasurable indeed were the ancients ...

Subtle, mysterious, fathomless, and penetrating.⁴²⁵

In order to return to the time when man was closer to Heaven, Confucius pored over the ancient Classics, attempting to unlock the knowledge of the ancients and to faithfully transmit their tradition to subsequent generations. He hoped that, by effecting a return to the ways and rites of previous times, he could bring about a radical reform in the corrupt government of the late Chou dynasty. At the end of his life, he felt that he had failed in his purpose.⁴²⁶ There was something that the ancients possessed that he could not retrieve by mere study. He saw that the Great Sacrifice to Heaven had been corrupted, and that its meaning had been lost. «At the Great Sacrifice», he said, «as for all that comes after the libation, I had far rather not witness it!» When someone asked him the meaning of the Great Sacrifice, he said, «I do not know. Anyone who knew its meaning could deal with all things under Heaven as easily as I lay this here» – and he laid his finger upon the palm of his hand.⁴²⁷

Lao Tzu, although he was also well versed in the Classics (tradition says that he was the keeper of the Royal Archives), chose a path very different from that of Confucius. In order to return to the state when man was nearer Heaven, he took the path of direct intuition.

Lao Tzu sought to return not merely to the primal period of Chinese history, for that was comparatively late in the history of mankind, dating from the time of the great Flood in the twenty-fourth century B.C.⁴²⁸ Ultimately, he was harking back to the state in which man was first created, before he first departed from the Way:

The primitive origin (of man):

Here indeed is the clue to the Way.⁴²⁹⁴³⁰

Lao Tzu knew that in his primitive origin, man was in a state of undifferentiated consciousness, of direct apprehension of Reality. He called this the «pristine simplicity», the «uncarved block», the «return to the babe».

There are indications in the Tao Teh Ching as to how Lao Tzu endeavored, to return to this state. In one place, for example, he says to «block the passages, shut the doors [of the senses]» and to «attain inmost emptiness, observe true quiet»,⁴³¹ meaning to close one's eyes, I allow one's spiritual awareness or «higher mind» to rise above the multiple deliberations, images and concepts in one's head. In this way, Lao Tzu could step back from his thoughts and look at them objectively, thereby realizing that his thoughts were not him.

Most people identify themselves with their thoughts. When thoughts appear, they assume that these thoughts are them, that the sum total of their thoughts, memories and corresponding feelings make up the sum total of their personalities. But thoughts, as Lao Tzu realized, are only fragments which flit through the mind. Of themselves they have no reality.

Getting wrapped up in their thoughts, people become the victims of compulsive thinking: habitual thought-patterns which attach themselves to certain feelings. Finding their very identity in these patterns, they forget who they really are, that they are immortal spirits. Having lost sight of the one, immortal human nature Which is common to all, they become trapped in their individuality and in the desires of their false identity.

Lao Tzu, in rising above compulsive thinking and desire for created things, was able to glimpse the common nature of all humanity. No longer did he feel the need to assert his individuality, or in strive against others for rights and privileges. Thus, while retaining an awareness of himself as an immortal spirit, he became selfless. This can be seen from several passages in the Tao Teh Ching:

The Sage has no fixed will.

He regards the people's will as his own.⁴³²

He who takes upon himself the humiliation – the dirt – of the people

Is fit to be the master of the people.⁴³³

The man of the highest virtue

Is like water which dwells in lowly places.

In his dwelling he is like the earth, below everyone.

In giving, he is human-hearted.

His heart is immeasurable.⁴³⁴

I have Three Treasures, which I prize and hold fast.

The first is gentle compassion;

The second is economy;

The third is not presuming to take precedence in the world.

With gentle compassion I can be brave.
With economy I can be generous.
Not presuming to take precedence in the world, I can make myself a vessel fit for the most distinguished services.⁴³⁵

In finding the one nature common to all people, Lao Tzu was able to regard all people equally:

Treat well those who are good,
Also treat well those who are not good;
Thus is goodness attained.
Be sincere to those who are sincere,
Also be sincere to those who are not sincere;
Thus is sincerity attained.⁴³⁶

But there is in the Tao Teh Ching something even higher and nobler than this. Lao Tzu attained to the realization of returning good for evil:

Act without acting,
Work without working,
Taste without tasting,
Exalt the low,
Multiply the few.
Requite injury with kindness.⁴³⁷

As the great Chinese scholar James Legge points out: «The sentiment about returning good for evil was new in China, and originated with Lao Tzu.... Someone of Confucius' school heard the maxim, and, being puzzled by it, consulted Confucius. The sage, I am sorry to say, was not able to take it in. He replied, 'What then will you return for good? Recompense injury with justice, and return good for good.'⁴³⁸»

To Confucius can be given the credit of being the first in China to enunciate the golden rule». «What you do not want done to yourself», he said, «do not do to others».⁴³⁹ This represents the perfection of natural human virtue, which Confucius admirably embodied. But the higher, Divine law of loving even ones enemies and persecutors could be arrived at only by finding the original image of mans nature, as Lao Tzu did. Hence it was Lao Tzu and not Confucius who discovered it.

If one were to distill Lao Tzu's teaching on human conduct, it would be simply that one should do what is natural. To be natural, however, one must first find the original nature of man. Acting in accordance with this nature, one acts in accordance with the Tao. Thus one no longer has to be choosing all the time, but can be wholly spontaneous. Being spontaneous, one can forget oneself and give oneself over for the good of others. One will do what is right, not only without having to think about it, but without even knowing it! Such is the

state of primal simplicity, before man usurped the knowledge of good and evil». Lao Tzu said:

Superior virtue is unconscious of its virtue,
Hence it is virtuous.
Inferior virtue is conscious of its virtue,
Hence it is not virtuous.⁴⁴⁰

5. The Tao

From the testimony of the Tao Teh Ching, it is clear that Lao Tzu was, to some measure, able to return to the state of the uncarved block in which man had lived before his departure from the Tao. Through the cultivation of objective awareness, he attained to intuitive perception analogous to that of primordial man. «Use your light» (kuang 光), he said, «to return to the light of insight (ming 明).»⁴⁴¹ That is, using the natural light of the human spirit, return to the undifferentiated consciousness, direct apprehension of Reality. Elsewhere he speaks of «following the light of insight».⁴⁴²

«He who completely knows his own nature», said Mencius, «knows Heaven».⁴⁴³ Such was the case with Lao Tzu. By realizing the human nature common to all, he rose to intuitive knowledge of the Divine. Having intuited the presence of the original ordering Principle behind all creation, he also realized the inner principles of created things: the «ideas» of things which must exist prior to the things themselves.⁴⁴⁴ «He who apprehends the mother», he wrote, «thereby knows the sons».⁴⁴⁵

Gi-ming Shien explains further:

«Order is natural and necessarily requires a directing principle, for it is unimaginable that order is produced by the ordered individuals themselves. If there were no directing principle, how could there be proportion, symmetry, and the adaptation of one thing to another? There must, therefore, be an organizing power which orders – as, for example, in the seasons. The principle of seasons, from which the seasons proceed in an orderly and never-failing fashion, must exist before the seasons themselves. The ultimate principle is, therefore, of prime importance, and it is this that Lao Tzu calls the Tao....

«According to Chinese Taoist philosophy, the Tao or the One in prior to all things, and from the Tao or One all things derive their order. We may say, therefore, that the Tao or the One ... produces all things».⁴⁴⁶

The realization of this Creator-Principle was, of course, not new with Lao Tzu. Chinese sages before him, as well as the philosophers of Greece and

other cultures, had spoken of the same first Cause. No one, however, had actually described it in human terms as well as did Lao Tzu in the Tao Teh Ching. The greatest achievement of this man who so valued non-achievement, was that he came closer than any person in human history to defining the Indefinable Tao without the aid of special revelation.

6. Mysterious Teh

Lao Tzu did not know, nor could he have attained purely through intuition, the state of intimate personal union with the Tao that the first man had enjoyed, when he had been wholly infused with Uncreated Energy and clothed in it as in a garment of Light. However, Lao Tzu did partake of and experience this Energy/Light acting on him and in the world. He called it the «Mysterious Power» (Teh 德) of the Tao.⁴⁴⁷

All things arise from Tao.

They are nourished by Teh.

Thus the ten thousand things all respect Tao and honor Teh.

Respect of Tao and honor of Teh are not demanded,

But they are in the nature of things.

Deep and far-reaching is Mysterious Teh!

It leads all things to return,

Till they come back to the Great Harmony!⁴⁴⁸

Teh, says Gi-ming Shien, is the «realizing principle» and «principle of manifestation» of the Tao. The Primal Essence of the Tao cannot be fathomed, but the Tao can be experienced through the manifestation of its Power or Teh.⁴⁴⁹ Gi-ming's teaching concerning Teh is in keeping with that of other Chinese commentators on the Tao Teh Ching. Classical scholar Yen Ling-feng writes: «Teh is the manifestation of the Way. The Tao is what Teh contains. Without the Tao, Teh would have no power. Without Teh, the Tao would have no appearance». The thirteenth-century writer Wu Cheng, commenting on chapter 51 of Lao Tzu's book, asserts that Teh is Divine and Uncreated as is the Tao itself: «The Tao and Teh is mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, but only the Tao is mentioned later. This is because Teh is also the Tao».⁴⁵⁰

The word Teh – in those places where Lao Tzu employs it to speak of the Uncreated Power of the Tao – corresponds to the English word «Grace». As the great Russian saint, Seraphim of Sarov, affirms, pre-Christian God-seekers such as Lao Tzu knew what it meant to cultivate this Grace in themselves. They had, he says, «a clear and rational comprehension of how our Lord God the Holy Spirit acts in man, and by means of what inner and outer

feelings one can be sure that this is really the action of our Lord God the Holy Spirit and not a delusion of the enemy».⁴⁵¹ This understanding is found in several places in the Tao Teh Ching. Here we have translated Teh as «Grace».

Cultivate Grace in your own person,
And it becomes a genuine part of you.
He who follows the Way
Is at one with the Way.
He who cultivates Grace
Is at one with Grace.
When you become the valley of the world.
Eternal Grace will never depart.
Such is the return to the babe.⁴⁵²

7. The Oneness of the Tao

The first quality of the Tao that Lao Tzu discerned was its oneness. He wrote:

Once there was a time when all things became harmonized through the One:

The heavens receiving the One became clear;
The earth receiving the One became calm;
Spirits receiving the One became divine;
All things receiving the One began to live.⁴⁵³

The realization of the Tao's oneness arises from the fact that it is and must be without peer, beyond any limitation. Gi-ming Shieh explains:

«Let us now look into the real existence of eternal and infinite Being, which transcends space and time and is unlimited in its nature. What can the nature of such existence be? Regarded from the standpoint of its lack of limitation, it is completely independent, that is, absolute. 'Absolute' means that it is relative to nothing and is self-sufficient».⁴⁵⁴

Lao Tzu was not the first to arrive at the realization of the Absolute One. We find the same understanding, for example, in the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Parmenides. What was new with Lao Tzu – or at least more developed than in any philosopher before him – was the metaphysical insight that the Tao, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, was utterly selfless.

8. «Nothingness»

Many times in the Tao Teh Ching, Lao Tzu speaks of «nothingness» or «emptiness» (wu 無) in connection with the Tao. Modern Western interpreters, and some Chinese as well, have made the mistake of thereby assuming that the Tao is nothingness or non being. This misconception has been furthered by mystics and metaphysicians who, through meditation (or even, in the modern West, through hallucinogenic drugs), have had a glimpse of the non-being out of which they were called into existence by their Creator. Because this non-being is eternal, people have concluded that it itself is the Tao, the Absolute, or God. As Gi-ming Shien makes clear, however, non-being is not to be equated with the Tao.

«The interpretation of ‘nothingness’ in the philosophy of Lao Tzu by modern Chinese scholars is often one of two extremes. Some have taken it as nihilism, and some have interpreted it in terms of being... Fung Yu-lan is an example of the latter. In his book *The History of Chinese Philosophy*, he regards the particulars or individuals as being, and the universal, the metaphysical One, or Lao, as non-being... This interpretation, however, is far from the real meaning of nothingness in Lao Tzu. For, although Tao is infinite and indefinable ... it remains in the realm of existence with particular things. We may say that Tao or the metaphysical One is the infinite or the all-embracing principle. However, despite the fact that we cannot give it a definite particular name, the all-embracing principle does exist, and, therefore, is not the meaning of nothingness».⁴⁵⁵

Gi-ming observes that, while nothingness is not the Tao, it is in its nature or essence of the Tao:

«The nature of Being is said to be nothingness because Being is absolutely complete, in need of nothing, conscious of no wants. This is why the principle of nothingness in the philosophy of Lao Tzu is nameless.»⁴⁵⁶

«The real meaning of ‘nothingness’ or non-being is based on *spontaneity*... Spontaneity is the nature of being; the full development of spontaneity results in forgetfulness; forgetfulness results in a feeling of nothingness».⁴⁵⁷

In other words, because the Tao is self-existent, self-sufficient, and conscious of no wants, it can create, give and sustain life and at the same time seek nothing of its own. As Gi-Ming Shien says, the Tao «forgets itself and its own existence»⁴⁵⁸, «being totally spontaneous and selfless. In chapter 34 of the Tao Teh Ching, we read:

The great Tao follows everywhere....

All things depend on it for life; none is refused.

When its work is accomplished, it does not take possession.
It clothes and feeds all things, yet does not claim them as its own.
Ever without desire, it may be named small.
Yet when all things return to it,
Even though it claims no leadership It may be named the great.⁴⁵⁹

Did Lao Tzu first become aware of the selflessness of the Tao, and then undertake to model his own life after the Way of Heaven? Or did he first reach a certain level of selflessness which enabled him to see Reality objectively, and from this clarity of insight begin to speak of the selflessness of the Tao? This we cannot say, but from the Tao Teh Ching one thing is certain: Lao Tzu saw the selflessness, self-forgetfulness and spontaneity of primordial man as an image and a reflection of the Creator-Tao itself. In this sense as in others, man had been made in the image of God.

9. The Benevolence of the Tao

Lao Tzu, then, had arrived at two great affirmations concerning Absolute Being: its oneness and its selflessness. From these realizations alone, however, he could not fully realize the other primary ontological fact of the Tao: the fact that the Tao is a Person.

It is true that Lao Tzu approached this realization, for as he observed the Tao at work in nature, he saw actions that were benevolent, like those of a person:

All things arise from the Tao.
By the Power of the Tao (Teh) they are nourished,
Developed, cared for,
Sheltered, comforted,
Grown, and protected.⁴⁶⁰

Elsewhere Lao Tzu wrote of the Taos benevolence:

The Tao of Heaven is to benefit, not to harm.⁴⁶¹

He also said that the Tao, while not being a «respector of persons» (i.e., paying no attention to distinctions of class, race, creed, Wealth, etc.), aligns itself to those who are good:

The Tao of Heaven makes no distinctions of persons.

It always helps the virtuous.⁴⁶²

Here, as in several other places, Lao Tzu speaks of the «Tao of Haven» in the same way his contemporaries like Confucius spoke of Heaven», the supreme Deity of the ancient Chinese.⁴⁶³ In fact, the above quotation from the Tao Teh Ching is found in another Chinese work, the Tso Chuan, which is

based on texts written centuries before Lao Tzu. The original version says «Great Heaven», in which Lao Tzu substituted the «Tao of Heaven».⁴⁶⁴

The phrase «Tao of Heaven» appears in several other places in the Tao Teh Ching, as in:

Without peeping through your window

You can see the Tao of Heaven.

The Tao of Heaven does not strive, and yet it overcomes.

It does not speak, and yet is answered.

It does not ask, yet things come to it of themselves.⁴⁶⁵

Elsewhere in the Tao Teh Ching, Lao Tzu employs the word «Heaven» by itself, and it is clear from the context that he considers it synonymous with the Tao.⁴⁶⁶ The Shih Ching, whose passages on Heaven we have quoted above, says, «Heaven has let down its net to enclose all».⁴⁶⁷ Lao Tzu made use of this same image and expanded upon it:

Vast is Heavens net;

Sparse-meshed it is, and yet

Nothing can slip through it.⁴⁶⁸

Further, the Tao Teh Ching speaks of serving, following, and being united with Heaven:

In governing a people and serving Heaven,

There is nothing like using restraint.

Mercy alone can help you win a war.

Mercy alone can help you defend your state.

For Heaven will come to the rescue of the merciful,

And protect him with its Mercy.

This is known as the virtue of not striving....

This since ancient times has been known as the ultimate unity with Heaven.

In another place, Lao Tzu says:

Some things are not favored by Heaven.⁴⁶⁹

For Lao Tzu, then, the Tao – which he also called the Tao of Heaven or simply Heaven – was not entirely impersonal, as some recent scholars have claimed. Lao Tzu could even be said to have had a «relationship» with the Tao, just as Confucius had a relationship with Heaven. This «relationship» was expressed in constant observation of the workings of the Tao of Heaven, and in constant care to live virtuously, in accordance with it, catching and realigning oneself if ever a deviation occurred.

10. The Mystery of «I AM»

Nevertheless, although Lao Tzu knew the Tao to be a benevolent Being, the full meaning of the Tao as a Personal Absolute – as a Being with Whom one could hold person-to-Person communion – remained outside the scope of his metaphysical insight. Again, such a unique revelation could not be attained even by the intuition of people of the most virtuous lives and purified minds; rather, it had to be given, and God was providentially preparing humanity to receive it. He had been unfolding the secret life of His Divine Being gradually, at certain key moments in history, for humanity could not receive it all at once.

God first revealed the fullness of His Personhood to an oft-oppressed nomadic people, the ancient Hebrews. He chose them for this because it was out of their race that He was to become intimate many centuries later.

The contemporary Russian mystical writer, Archimandrite Sophrony († 1993), writes:

«The problem of the knowledge of God sends the mind searching back through the centuries for instances of God appearing to in man through one or other of the prophets. There can be no doubt that, for us, one of the most important happenings recorded in the chronicles of time was God's manifestation on Mount Sinai where Moses received new knowledge of Divine Being: 'I AM THAT I AM' – Jehovah.⁴⁷⁰ From that moment vast horizons opened out before mankind, and history took a new turn.

«Moses, possessed of the supreme culture of Egypt, did not question that the revelation that he was so miraculously given came from Him Who had indeed created the whole universe. In the Name of this God, I AM, he persuaded the Jewish people to follow him. Invested with extraordinary power from Above, he performed many wonders. To Moses belongs the undying glory of having brought mankind nearer to Eternal Truth. Convinced of the authenticity of his vision, he issued his injunctions as precepts from on High. All things were effected in the Name and by the Name of the I AM Who had revealed Himself. Mighty is this Name in its strength and holiness – it is action proceeding from God. This Name was the first ingress into the living eternity; the dayspring of knowledge of the unoriginate Absolute as I AM».⁴⁷¹



Icon of the Prophet Moses before the burning bush on Mount Sinai, where God tells Moses, «Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground». In the book of Exodus we read that «the bush burned with fire, yet it was not consumed» (Exodus 3:2, 5). This fire was the Energy (Teh) of God, which Moses was given to behold with spiritual eyes as Uncreated Light. From out of this Light God spoke to Moses, revealing to Him the mystery of His Personhood in the holy name I AM. This early thirteenth-century icon is from the ancient Eastern Orthodox monastery of St. Catherine, located near to where Moses received the revelation on Mount Sinai.

Having received this new revelation of the Personal Absolute, Moses received into his mortal body – albeit temporarily – the «clothing of Light» that primordial man possessed. For it is recorded that «the skin of Moses' face shone», such that he had to put a veil over his face when speaking to the children of Israel.⁴⁷² This revelation of the Uncreated Energy (Teh) of God, writes St. Macarius of Egypt, was a «prefiguring of the true glory» which would later descend upon followers of the incarnate God.⁴⁷³

11. The Paradox of Personhood and Selflessness

Now it may be asked why Lao Tzu, without the special revelation accorded to Moses, could not have fully realized the primary fact of the Absolute as Person. The answer to this question might be discovered in the unique com-

bination of facts with which Lao Tzu was already working: the oneness of the Absolute and its selflessness («nothingness»). This combination prevented him from seeing even the possibility of the Creator being a Person such as Moses knew Him to be. For if the Tao or the One were simply a Monad, dwelling in eternal metaphysical solitude, it could not be wholly selfless and intimately personal at the same time.

In order to explain this, let us draw an analogy from the human prison. A human being's personhood is that indefinable essence which makes him uniquely that person and not someone else.⁴⁷⁴ But behind his personhood, as it were, is the one human essence common to all persons.⁴⁷⁵ By going beyond attachment to his senses, his thoughts, and his visible self, Lao Tzu was able to find this shared human essence or nature; and in finding it, he was able to be a self-aware person and still be selfless, caring for all persons without distinction.⁴⁷⁶

As far as Lao Tzu knew, however, the Tao was alone, without peer, sharing its Primal Essence or Nature with no one and nothing, either created or uncreated. Being such, it could not be selfless and a Person at the same time. If the Absolute were metaphysically alone and also a Person, it would have to be a great cosmic Egotist and Despot – which was certainly not what Lao Tzu perceived of the Tao.

In other words, Lao Tzu could say «I am» and still be selfless because he shared his created nature with other co-equal persons. From his point of reference, however, he could not see how the Tao could say «I AM» and also be selfless, unless the Tao shared its Uncreated Essence with other Persons equal to itself. But for the Tao to share its Essence was impossible in Lao Tzu's view, given the primary truth that the Absolute is one and without peer.

12. The Consequences of an Incomplete Understanding of God

In the time of Lao Tzu, the primary facts which mankind as a whole knew about God made for an incomplete understanding of Him. If we take the oneness and the selflessness of God together, we end up with an impersonal Absolute. This is precisely what happened in China. By the time of the Warring States (475–221 b.c.), even those personal qualities which Lao Tzu had ascribed to the Absolute were no longer being acknowledged by the philosophers. As Taoist historian Eva Wong observes: «The Taoism of the Warring States came up with a different conception of the Tao. In the Tao Teh Ching, the Tao ... had a benevolent nature. This quality disappeared in the Chuang Tzu and the Lieh Tzu. The Taoist philosophers of the Warring States saw the

Tao as a neutral force. It was still the underlying reality of all things, but it was no longer a benevolent force. Moreover, the Tao had no control over the course of events: what would happen would happen, and nothing could be done to facilitate it or prevent it». ⁴⁷⁷

This total depersonalization of the Tao had direct consequences on the spiritual life of the people. When Taoism came into being as a religion some seven centuries after Lao Tzu, it relied first of all on the cultivation of natural (created) energy by impersonal, mechanical means in order to bring about salvation, inner transformation, and physical immortality. As a result, by the eighteenth century a.d. the Taoist master Liu I-ming was to lament: «There are seventy-two schools of material alchemy, and three thousand six hundred aberrant practices. Since the blind lead the blind, they lose sight of the right road; they block students and lead them into a pen.... The reason the spiritual treasure does not appear to seekers is that they themselves will not allow it to do so – what a pity! If false people spend their lives madly in sidetracks». ⁴⁷⁸

Here Liu I-Ming was reflecting the teaching of Lao Tzu himself, who wrote:

If I have even just a little sense,
I will walk on the main road and my only fear will be straying from it.
Keeping to the main road is easy,
But people love sidetracks. ⁴⁷⁹

Such are the possible deviations arising from an understanding of God or the One as being wholly impersonal. On the other hand, if we take the oneness and the personhood of God together, we end up with a God dwelling in metaphysical solitude, making way for a distorted view of Him as a stern, demanding Judge, a petulant Egotist, and a severe Lord of vengeance. This view manifested itself at some early stages of Chinese history, many centuries before Lao Tzu, such as when the Duke of Chou told the soldiers of the Yin dynasty which he had conquered, «The merciless and severe Heaven has greatly sent down destruction on the Yin. You, many officers of Yin: now our Chou King has grandly and excellently taken over God's affairs. There was the heavenly charge: destroy Yin». ⁴⁸⁰ This view of God prevailed to a much greater extent, however, in the development of Judaism – and later of Islam – as we shall see.

13. The Mystery of the Triad

To the Hebrews was given the revelation of the One Personal Absolute; to Lao Tzu was given the realization of the One Selfless Absolute. Both of these were true, yet each one seemed to cancel out the other. To effect a rec-

conciliation, and to overcome the distortions arising from each opposing view, a missing piece had to be uncovered in the Nature of the Absolute. God would have to reveal the ultimate mystery of His Being: the mystery of the Triadic One.

When this mystery was revealed, the oneness of God was shown to contain three Persons: not three Gods (as in polytheism), but three Persons in one God. Here it could be seen that the Tao in fact did share its unknowable, formless Essence with other Persons equal to itself. These Persons share a common Divine Essence, just as human beings share a common human nature or essence.

We have spoken of the selflessness which humans lost after they departed from the Way, and of how Lao Tzu undertook to return to this state of self-forgetting by finding the single human essence, the original nature of primordial man. Now, with the revelation of the Triadic One, it could be seen how man's original and potential selflessness is precisely an image of the selflessness which exists in the three Persons of the Absolute Who share a single Divine Essence.

Since man's departure from the Way, the one human nature has become divided, and human persons have become isolated from each other; not so with the three Divine Persons, for They dwell in one another. The works of human persons are distinct; not so those of the Divine Persons, for the Three have a single will, a single power, a single operation. They cleave to each other, having their being in one another.

This perfect, indwelling love between the Persons of the Godhead is ultimately what is meant by the words, «God is love» (I John 4:8). God's love is not merely extended to the universe created by Him, for God was Love even before the foundation of the world. As Fr. Dumitru Staniloae of Romania († 1993) writes:

«Love must exist in God prior to all those acts of His which are directed outside Himself. Love must be bound up with His eternal existence. Love is the 'being of God'». ⁴⁸¹

Each Person of the one God, having His being in the Others, is therefore wholly selfless, possessing the quality of spontaneity, selfemptying or self-forgetting («nothingness») that Lao Tzu intuited in the Tao. Each Person (each «I») forgets Himself before the Others, emptying Himself in perfect love; and in this ineffable love lies the secret of Gods oneness. Fr. Dumitru explains:

«Each Divine 'I' puts a 'Thou' in place of Himself... The Father sees Himself only as the subject of the Son's love, forgetting Himself in every other aspect. He sees Himself only in relation with the Son. But the T of the Father is not lost because of this, for it is affirmed by the Son Who in His turn knows Himself only as He Who loves the Father, forgetting Himself...

«This is the circular movement of each Divine T around the other as center. They are Three, yet each regards the Others and experiences only the Others. The Father beholds only the Son, the Son only the Father, reducing [emptying] themselves reciprocally by love to the other «I», to a single «I». But each pair of Persons in the Trinity, reduced in this manner to One, beholds only the third Person, and thus all three Persons are reduced to One.... Whether individually or in pairs, the Persons place the other T in the forefront, hiding themselves (as it were) beneath Him».⁴⁸²

Thus it can be seen how the revelation of the Triadic Oneness of God reconciles the seemingly contradictory truths about Him which had formerly been known to mankind. It now becomes possible to see how God can be one, personal, and selfless (self forgetting) at the same time.

But why, it may be asked, are there precisely three Persons? Could there not be only two Persons in order for God to be both personal and selfless? To this Fr. Dumitru answers that perfect, objective Love could not exist if there were only two Divine Persons, for exclusive love between two persons, like self-love, can be self-absorbed and subjective – as can be observed in human experience. Perfect Love must pass on to a Third, whose existence represents the transcendence of self-absorbed duality. Fr. Dumitru writes:

«If one ‘I’ closed in on itself remains in a dreamlike subjectivity, the absorption of two ‘Is’ into a mutual love which is indifferent towards the presence of any other also preserves, to a certain extent, this same character of dreamlike subjectivity and uncertainty of existence. This incomplete unity and lack of certainty fosters a greediness for the other in each of the Two which transforms him into an object of passion, and this is beneath the level of true love. Complete unity and the full assurance of existence are possessed by the two ‘Is’ when they meet in a Third by virtue of their mutual love for the Third. In this way they transcend that particular subjectivity which is fraught with the danger of illusion».⁴⁸³

14. The Incomprehensibility of the Triad

The mystery of the Triadic One, since it has to do with the Essence of God, is ultimately incomprehensible not only to discursive reasoning, but to pure intuition as well. That is why even Lao Tzu could not come to the realization of it. Strange to say, with the mystery of the Triad revealed, man knows more about God than he ever knew before, but also realizes more fully the utter unknowability of God’s Essence.

Both Lao Tzu and the ancient Greeks spoke of the incomprehensibility of the Absolute, of its «namelessness» – which, as Gi-ming Shien observes, is also bound up with Lao Tzus concept of nothingness». But while the Absolute Being of these philosophies is beyond discursive reasoning, it is not by nature incomprehensible to pure human intellection, and can be positively defined as the One. With the mystery of the Triad, the incomprehensibility of God is shown to be more radical, more absolute than either Lao Tzu or the Greeks could have known. In *Of the Divine Names* – a mystical work of the fifth century a.d., written in the tradition of St. Dionysius the Areopagite – the author examines the name of the One, which can be applied to God, and then compares it with another «most sublime name» – that of the Triad, which teaches us that God is ultimately neither one nor many, and is both at the same time, being unknowable in what He is.

«God is identically Monad and Triad», writes St. Maximus the Confessor († a.d. 662).⁴⁸⁴ The highest point of revelation is thus an antinomy, a paradox that cannot be resolved through human powers. Archimandrite Sophrony writes: «Our rationally functioning mind is gripped in a vice, unable to incline to one side or the other, like a figure crucified on a cross».⁴⁸⁵

What Lao Tzu called the «namelessness» of the Absolute thus finds its fulfillment in the revelation of the Triadic Oneness as primordial fact. It is ultimate reality, first datum which cannot be deduced, explained or discovered by way of any other truth; for there is nothing which is prior to it. Human thought, renouncing every support, finds its support in God. Here thought gains a stability which cannot be shaken; ignorance passes into knowledge.⁴⁸⁶

St. Gregory Nazianzen († a.d. 390), who has been called «the minstrel of the Holy Trinity», beautifully describes his contemplation of this suprarational antinomy: «No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendor of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three, I think of Him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that One no as to attribute a greater greatness to the rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided Light».⁴⁸⁷

15. Foreshadowings of the Triadic Mystery

If the mystery of the Triadic One cannot be deduced through human powers, why did not God reveal it to Moses when He revealed the mystery of «I AM»? Archimandrite Sophrony answers as follows:

«God revealed Himself insofar as Moses could apprehend, for Moses could not contain the whole revelation: ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you ... and while my glory passes by, I will cover you with my hand.... And I will take away my hand, and you shall see my luck parts: but my face shall not be seen’». ⁴⁸⁸

«Centuries passed before the true content of the amazing Name I AM was understood. For all the fervor of their faith neither Moses nor the prophets who were his heirs appreciated to the full the blessing bestowed on them. They experienced God mainly through historical events. If they turned to Him in spirit, they contemplated in darkness. When we, sons of the New Testament, load the Old Testament we notice how God tried to suggest to our precursors that this I AM is One Being and at the same time Three Persons. On occasions He would even speak of Himself as We. ‘And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’⁴⁸⁹ ‘And the Lord God said, Behold, man is become as one of us’⁴⁹⁰. An even more remarkable instance occurs with Abraham: three men appeared to him yet he addressed them as if they were but one». ⁴⁹¹

Here, in speaking of glimpses of the Triadic Oneness in the Old Testament, we cannot neglect to mention the startling phrase in chapter 42 of the Tao Teh Ching, in which Lao Tzu writes, «The Three produced all things». Commenting on this passage, Gi-ming Slum says that the Three represents «the reconciliation of opposites» – which is not far from St. Gregory Nazianzen’s explanation of the meaning of the Triad: «The Triad contains itself in perfection, for it is the first which surpasses the composition of the dyad». ⁴⁹² Gi-ming Shien further stated that «the Three is the principle of order», and thus it is that it «produces all things». ⁴⁹³ Here it can be seen that Lao Tzu, although he was not given to know the full meaning of the Triad, nevertheless realized it to be a creative Principle.



Icon of the One Triadic God appearing to Abraham in the form of three angelic visitors. The Father/Mind is represented by the angel at left, since He is the Originating Principle of the Godhead, both the Son/Word (center) and the Spirit/Breath (right) are turned towards Him. In this mystically symbolic composition, the bodies of the Father and the Spirit form the contours of a chalice between them, with the Son in the middle of it. The chalice represents the cup of Christ's Body and Blood, shed for the world. Thus, while the Son and the Spirit are bearing witness to the Father, the Father and the Spirit, by their very positions, are bearing witness to the Son in self-forgetting love. Russian icon painted by St. Andrew Rublev, first half of the fifteenth century.

16. The Expectation of the Ancient Hebrews

«The fact that the revelation received by Moses was incomplete», continues Archimandrite Sophrony, «is shown in his testimony to the people that 'the Lord your God will raise up unto you a Prophet from the midst of you ... unto him you shall hearken.' Also: 'And the Lord said unto me ... I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto you, and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command

him.⁴⁹⁴ According to the Old Testament all Israel lived in expectation of the coming of the Prophet of whom ‘Moses wrote,⁴⁹⁵ THAT prophet.⁴⁹⁶ The Jewish people looked for the coming of the Messiah who when he was come would tell them all things.⁴⁹⁷ Come and live among us, that we may know You, was the constant cry of the ancient Hebrews. Hence the name ‘Emmanuel, which being Interpreted is, God with us.’⁴⁹⁸

«The focal point of the universe and the ultimate meaning of the entire history of the world is the coming of Jesus Christ, Who did not repudiate the archetypes of the Old Testament but vindicated them, unfolding to us their real significance and bringing new dimensions to all things – infinite, eternal dimensions.

«It was given to Moses to know that Absolute Primordial Being is not some general entity, some impersonal cosmic process. It was proved to him that this Being had a personal character and was a living and life-giving God. Moses, however, did not receive a clear vision: he did not see God in Light as the Apostles saw Him on Mount Tabor – ‘Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.’⁴⁹⁹... Having reached the frontier of the Promised Land, Moses died».⁵⁰⁰

Three ancient Chinese names for the Divine Being: Shang Ti («Supreme Ruler»), Tao («the Way»), and Ling («Spirit»).

Created in the Da Zhuan style of 1766–221 B.C., this seal represents the Triadic mystery by means of the archaic Chinese pictographs. Here Shang Ti corresponds to the Father/Mind (the Originating Principle of the Godhead); Tao corresponds to the Son/Word (the Operating Cause of the creation); and Ling corresponds to the Spirit/Breath (the Perfecting Cause).

Today in China, followers of Christ commonly refer to God as Shang Ti – and also as Shen 神 another word for «Spirit». They refer to the Holy Spirit as Sheng Ling, a combination of two ancient characters, «holy» 聖 and «spirit» 靈 the latter being an exact duplication of the ancient written form 靈 and, as we have seen, they refer to the «Word» of God (as found in the Bible) as Tao. In this way they remain tied to the most primeval roots of Chinese religion even while embracing the new revelation of the incarnate Tao.

Chapter three. When the way became flesh

«The Tao was made flesh» (John 1:14)

17. Christ as «I AM»

And so He appeared, He to Whom the world owed its creation. The Tao/Logos of the ancient Chinese and Greeks had now, in a way surpassing nature, taken the form of a man. The Messiah had come Whom the ancient Hebrews had awaited to lead them Into all truth. «Christ's new covenant», writes Fr. Sophrony, «announces the beginning of a fresh period in the history of mankind. Now the Divine sphere was reflected in the searchless grandeur of the love and humility of God, our Father. With the coming of Christ all was changed: the new revelation affected the destiny of the whole created world».⁵⁰¹

When the Tao became man in Jesus Christ, He revealed Himself as the very I AM Who had spoken to Moses on Mount Sinai. To the Jews He said, «Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad». Uncomprehending, the people asked Him, «You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?» Christ said to them, «Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM».⁵⁰² When He uttered this – the most sacred name for God in the Hebrew religion – the Jews knew exact I what he was saying.⁵⁰³

18. The Teh of Christ

In taking flesh, the Tao united human energy with Divine Energy in one person. Divine Energy did not act upon Him, as it had upon Moses and to a lesser extent upon Lao Tzu. Rather, this was Christ's own Energy: the Uncreated Power (Teh) of the Tao. It was by this Teh – the same Teh that Lao Tzu said nourished all creation – that Christ performed His miracles. The Gospels record that «the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for Power (Teh) went out of Him and healed them all».⁵⁰⁴ When a woman touched Him and was instantly healed, Christ Himself said, «Somebody has touched me, for I perceive that Power has gone out of me».⁵⁰⁵

The people around Christ could not see this Energy. On the mountain of Tabor, however, Christ opened the spiritual eyes of His Apostles to let them see it – and they beheld it as Light: «And He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his garments became as white as the

Light». ⁵⁰⁶ Commenting on this supernatural event, the Romanian Orthodox priest George Calciu says, «Don't imagine that Jesus Christ took from His Father the Uncreated Light just for that moment. He was surrounded by this Light all the time, and He only opened the eyes of the Apostles to see His Light on the Mountain of Tabor in order to make them understand that He was truly God. The Apostles were not prepared to see the Light of Jesus Christ, and because of this they fell to earth». ⁵⁰⁷

19. The Christ of Lao Tzu

It is a strange yet incontrovertible fact that, when God did take flesh, He in many ways (though certainly not all) revealed Himself to be closer in spirit to the Tao of Lao Tzu than to God as conceived by the Hebrews at that time, even though the Hebrews had the revelation of Moses. This might be difficult to accept by those who are accustomed to thinking of Christ as the fulfillment of the expectation specifically of the Hebrews. Ancient Christian tradition, however, holds that Christ satisfied the longings of all the nations. ⁵⁰⁸

Since they viewed God as dwelling in solitude, many of the Hebrew religious leaders of Christ's time had come to regard Him as an inexorable cosmic Judge. He was the Supreme Authority who had set up a system of law and punished offenders out of personal indignation. His justice was exact. For the religious leaders, then, the law was everything and had to be followed to the letter. This idea led in later centuries to an endless codification and interpretation of religious laws.

When the Tao became flesh, He did not at all resemble this idea of God. He was, as Lao Tzu had said of Him, «like water, which greatly benefits all things but does not compete with them, dwelling in lowly places that all disdain» ⁵⁰⁹. Archimandrite Sophrony writes:

«He came in utter meekness, the poorest of the poor with nowhere to lay His head. He had no authority, neither in the Stair nor even in the Synagogue founded on revelation from on High, He did not fight those who spurned Him. And it has been given to us to identify Him as the Pantocrator (All-powerful) precisely because He 'made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant,' ⁵¹⁰ submitting finally to duress and execution. As the Creator and true Master of all that exists, He had no need of force, no need to display the power to punish opposition». ⁵¹¹

Christ said of Himself: «The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them ... but I am among you as he who serves» ⁵¹². Likewise, Lao Tzu had written of Him before His coming:

The Great Tao clothes and feeds all things,
Yet does not claim them as its own.
All things return to it,
Yet it claims no leadership over them.⁵¹³

The ancient Hebrews knew that their Messiah would come in the form of a man. When He did come, «the common people heard Him gladly,»⁵¹⁴ and some said, «No man ever spoke like this man.»⁵¹⁵ Others, however, especially among the leaders, rejected Him because He did not fit their preconceived image of Him. In spite of the testimony of the Prophet Isaiah who foretold that the Messiah would not so much as «break a bruised reed»,⁵¹⁶ they expected Him to be a worldly authority figure who would raise an army and mercilessly rout their Roman oppressors. On the contrary, they saw that Christ was (in His own words) «meek and lowly in heart.»⁵¹⁷ Of Him, Lao Tzu had «prophesied»:

The Tao does not show greatness,
And is therefore truly great.

It does not contend, and yet it overcomes.⁵¹⁸

«For the Son of man», said Christ of Himself, «is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them».⁵¹⁹

Unlike the Hebrews, Lao Tzu did not live in expectation of a Messiah. And yet, as Fr. Seraphim Rose believed, he would have followed Christ if he had seen Him, for he would have recognized in Him the humble Tao which he had intuited in purity of mind.

20. Christ's Revelation of the Triad

In revealing in His Person the selflessness of the Absolute, Christ opened to mankind the «secret» behind it – the mystery of the Triad.

If God had revealed Himself to Moses not only as «I AM» but also as «I AM THREE IN ONE», this would have meant nothing to Moses and his people. Only God Himself could contain the fullness of this mystery; therefore, only God Himself could bring the knowledge of it to mankind. By walking among us in the likeness of our flesh, He revealed the Triadic One not as a verbal or written formula, but as a living, personal Reality. Due to the awesomeness of the mystery, however, He did this only gradually.

«The acquisition of knowledge of God is a slow process», explains Fr. Sophrony, «not to be achieved in all its plenitude from the outset, though God is always and in His every manifestation in variably One and indivisible. Christ used simple language intelligible to the most ignorant, but what He said was above the head# even of the wisest of His listeners. 'Before Abraham was,

I AM.’ ‘I and my Father are one.’ ‘My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.’ ‘I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever.’ (So now a Third Person is introduced.) ‘The Spirit of truth, Who proceeds from the Father, He shall testify of me.’⁵²⁰

«We note that Christ only gradually began to speak of the Father, and it was not until towards the end of His earthly life that He spoke of the Holy Spirit. Right to the end the disciples failed to understand Him, and He made no attempt to explain to them the image age of Divine Being. ‘I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now.’ Instead, He indicated how we might attain perfect knowledge: ‘If you continue in my word ... you shall know the Truth.’ ‘The Holy Spirit... shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said unto you’. ‘When He, the Spirit of Truth, has come, He will guide you into all Truth».⁵²¹

21. Christ’s Revelation of the God of Love

With Christ’s revelation of the Triad, mankind realizes for the first time that, truly, «God is love». Now it is seen how, if God well mono-Hypostatic (that is, one Person), He would not be love. Archimandrite Sophrony writes:

«Moses, who interpreted the revelation of I AM as meaning a single Person, gave his people the Law. But ‘Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.’⁵²² The Trinity is the God of love.... Jesus, knowing ‘that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.’⁵²³ This is our God. And there is none other save Him. The man who by the gift of the Holy Spirit has experienced the breath of His love knows with his whole being that such love is peculiar to the Triune Godhead revealed to us as the perfect mode of Absolute Being. The mono-Hypostatic God of the Old Testament and (long after the New Testament) of the Koran does not know love.

«To love is to live for and in the beloved whose life becomes our life. Love leads to singleness of being. Thus it is within the Trinity. ‘The Father loves the Son.’⁵²⁴ He lives in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. The Son ‘abides in the love of the Father’⁵²⁵ and in the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit we know as love all-perfect. The Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and lives in Him and abides in the Son. This love makes the sum total of Divine Being a tingle eternal Act. After the pattern of this unity, mankind must also become one man».⁵²⁶

Christ said, «I and my Father are one». And for His disciples He prayed, «That they all may be one; as You, Father, are in me, and I in You, that they also may be one in us».⁵²⁷ Christ's commandment to love is thus a projection of heavenly love on the earthly plane. Realized in its true content, it makes the life of mankind similar to that of the Divine Triadic One.

22. Christ's Law of Love

God, in telling the Prophet Jeremiah of the new covenant that the Messiah would bring, had said, «After those days I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts».⁵²⁸ When Christ came revealing the love of the Triad, he reminded man of the true purpose of the law, and raised it to a new dimension. The law was not an end in itself, nor was it for the purpose of meeting the exact requirements of an angry Judge-God. «The [law of keeping] the Sabbath was made for man», Christ explained, «and not man for the Sabbath».⁵²⁹

As Christ showed, the law had been given to man by the God of love, in order that man would in turn love God and his neighbor, Quoting from the very words of the law, Christ said, «You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets».⁵³⁰

Ultimately, the only law that Christ gave to man was the law of love. Having this law «in their inward parts», His followers would obey God's law naturally, spontaneously, without always having to think, to choose, and to worry over legalistic formulas.

Just as Lao Tzu's «superior virtue ... unconscious of its virtue» In rooted in the «nothingness» of spontaneity and self-forgetting, so too is the love of which Christ spoke: «When you do a merciful deed, let not your left hand know what your right hand is doing».⁵³¹

The love that Christ taught was not merely the commonplace love for ones friends, family and kinsmen. He spoke of Perfect Love – the reflection of the Divine life of the Triadic God – in which a person finds the one human nature and is thus able to love all people equally.

Having taken human form, the Tao/Logos made the Person hood of God far more tangible than ever before. In so doing, He also brought the meaning of human personhood into sharper focus than had been previously known. Just as He had brought new dimensions to the archetypes of the Old Testament, so He did to the teachings of Lao Tzu. He gave a personal dimension to Lao Tzus

nothingness»; and this personal dimension of self-emptying is what we call Perfect Love.

Lao Tzu understood that a person who asserts himself as an individual, far from realizing himself fully, becomes impoverished. It is only in renouncing its possessiveness, giving itself freely and ceasing to exist for itself (i.e., being reduced to «nothingness») that the person finds full expression in the one nature common to all. In giving up its own particular advantage, it expands infinitely, and is enriched by everything which belongs to all.⁵³² Of such a person Lao Tzu said, «His heart is immeasurable».⁵³³

Christ, in revealing the mystery of love between the Persons of the Triad, at the same time revealed the mystery of what Lao Tzu had intuited on a human level. He showed that, by acquiring the perfection of the common human nature, each person actually acquires the image of the common Divine Nature. Man has been made in God's image. Thus, when a person experiences spiritual oneness with all people, he is in the likeness of the Triadic One: the Essence of Perfect Love.

The touchstone of this Perfect Love is love for one's enemies. When the Tao/Logos became flesh, He brought out the full meaning of Lao Tzu's precept, «Requite injury with kindness», speaking of it in terms of love. «Love your enemies», He taught, «do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. Give to everyone who asks you; and of him who takes away your goods ask them not again. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom».⁵³⁴

23. Christ's Revelation of the Selflessness of the Tao

Christ's selflessness or «nothingness», as we have said, was based in His Divine life within the Triad. During His life on earth, this was seen first of all in His total self-renunciation before the Father. He renounced His will in order to accomplish the will of the Father by being obedient to Him.

In speaking of Christ's obedience to the Father, we must be careful not to think too much in human terms. For Christ, the renunciation of His own will was not a choice or an act; it was spontaneous, for renunciation is the very being of the Triad, Who have only one will proper to their common nature. The Divine will in Christ was the will common to the Three. That is why Christ could say, «He who has seen me has seen the Father».⁵³⁵

Self-emptying is the very mode of existence of the Tao Who was sent into the world. Christ's saying, «My Father is greater than I»,⁵³⁶ expresses this emptying of His own will. «My Father has been working until now», He said, «and I have been working.... The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do: for whatever He does, the Son also does likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does.... For as the Father raises up the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son given life to whom He will.»⁵³⁷ Here it is seen that the work accomplished on earth by Christ is the common work of the Triad, for He shares the same Essence with the Father and the Spirit. The outpouring, self-emptying of Christ only produces the greater manifestation of His Divinity to all those who are able to recognize greatness in abasement, wealth in spoliation, and liberty in obedience.⁵³⁸

The very fact that Christ the Tao/Logos was «sent into the world»⁵³⁹ by the Father shows His obedience to Him, when He emptied Himself into His own creation by taking on human flesh subject to death. In doing His Father's will throughout His earthly life. He endured mockery, opposition, and persecution at every turn. This culminated in the ultimate self-emptying of undergoing the most humiliating and painful death known at the time: being scourged, stripped naked, and crucified in public view.

The Apostle Paul sums up the whole act of the Tao's self-emptying in Christ: «He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross».⁵⁴⁰

If Lao Tzu had known that the Tao, «which dwells in lowly places that all disdain», would one day take the form of a man, he could have conceived of no greater self-emptying, no greater lowliness, no greater «nothingness» than the incarnate Tao being nailed in a Cross and dying in a body that would rise again.

Fr. Seraphim Rose once wrote that «nothingness», in the meaning that Lao Tzu gives it, is the «point of convergence» or axis of the universe.⁵⁴¹ This recalls Lao Tzu's words:

Thirty spokes join in a single hub;

It is the center hole (the space where there is nothing) that makes the wheel useful.⁵⁴²

If nothingness or self-emptying is the axis of the universe, then the Cross of Christ, the greatest sign to man of the self-emptying of God, now becomes that axis. Christ the Tao/Logos stands at the axis; and there, in the «space where there is nothing», we find not an impersonal void, but the personal heart of the selfless, self-forgetting God.

Part III. Uniting oneself to the incarnate Tao. Through watchfulness and prayer.

Chapter One: Changing the Eye of the Soul

1. New Possibilities

In the foregoing we have discussed what has been realized and revealed of the Tao in human history, culminating in the incarnation of the Tao and in the revelation of the Triad. By itself, knowledge of these revelations is useless. They cannot be separated from I lie, but call for a radical transformation of our whole being.

Christ did much more than reveal who God is. Through His coming, man not only achieves the self-emptying that Lao Tzu valued so much; now, in a way unknown before, his immortal spirit becomes wholly *filled* with the Divinizing, Uncreated Energy – Grace or Teh – of God. With Christ, man not only returns to the primordial state which Lao Tzu sought; now he rises beyond even this in die mystical union with the Personal Absolute that was originally Intended for man. Through Christ's self-emptying on the Cross, the way to heaven becomes open to man, and man experiences the Tao of Heaven in the plenitude of His Being.

The following chapters will be devoted to these new possibilities in the spiritual life of man. Here the experience of Lao Tzu will continue to provide us with a springboard from which to show what has been opened to humanity through the coming of Christ.

2. The Soul and the Spirit (Shih-Shen and Yüan-Shen)

In discussing the spiritual life of man, it is first necessary to speak of man's spirit itself. An understanding of the human spirit is not dependent on Divine revelation: it can be arrived at, at least in part, by silently observing one's inward being. Therefore, it is to be expected that the teachings of ancient Christians concerning tin spirit of man would find exact parallels in the followers of Lao Tzu's teaching in China.

Our spirit is not a portion or particle of the Creator's Spirit, but it is an image of it. It is the most personal part of man, the principle of his conscience and freedom. It might be said to be the seat of the human person, which contains in itself the whole of man's nature.

It is our spirit that constitutes the «image of God» in us. All God is Light, so also our spirit is light. Having been breathed into us by God, it seeks God, knows God, and in Him alone finds rest.⁵⁴³

As the creation originally came into being through the Word – the Tao/Logos – so now is it guided and sustained by being informed, as it were, by the Word. Our spirit is the faculty that can actually «hear» the wordless voice of the Word speaking in us.

Both Christ and Lao Tzu called man's spirit the «light».⁵⁴⁴ Followers of Lao Tzu teaching in China came to call it the «original spirit» (yüan-shen

元神), while the ancient Christian ascetics called it the nous, a Greek word which may be translated as «spirit» or «higher mind.»⁵⁴⁵

In the life of fallen, unregenerate man, the spirit is hidden behind the lower consciousness of thoughts, fantasies and emotions. In traditional Christian terminology, this lower consciousness is said to be of the lower aspect of the «soul». Followers of Lao Tzu in China called it the «conscious spirit» or

«knowledge spirit» (sbih-sben 識神)⁵⁴⁶

Potentially, the spirit (nous or yüan-shen) is pure, formless, imageless awareness, unconditioned and uncompounded. Its aim and designation is to draw ever closer and unite itself to its Creator. Provided it is purified, it knows God and the inner essences of created things through direct intuitive perception. Among the visible creation, man alone possesses such a spirit.

The lower soul (shih-shen), on the other hand, is shaped by personal and cultural conditioning. It reacts to its environment based on this conditioning, just as an animal does. Its concerns rest in man's temporal, earthly needs. Since man's departure from the Way, it has become a mass of emotions, memories and compound thoughts, and seeks to know things through imagination and abstract deduction. In its lowest part, the lower soul resembles the soul of an animal, since animals also possess emotion, memory and imagination.⁵⁴⁷



St. Theophan the Recluse (1802–1894) *was the most popular spiritual writer in nineteenth century Russia. Writing from his own experience of the inner world of the spirit, he made the wisdom of the ancient Eastern Christian mystics accessible to the modern mind. His works are now being presented in the English language and used by serious seekers of the Way as a primary guide to the inner life.*

Ultimately, the distinction between the spirit and the lower soul must be seen as an analogy. It is not that there are two beings inside of us; rather, the spirit and the lower soul are different aspects of our one inward being. The spirit might be said to be the hidden side of our inward being and the purest part of the soul.⁵⁴⁸ The ancient Christian teachers call the spirit «the eye of the soul», since it is the «organ» which perceives Divinity.

The great mystic writer Maximus the Confessor († a.d. 662) puts it this way: «The soul has three powers: first, the power of nourishment and growth; second, that of imagination and instinct the third, that of the higher intelligence (logikos) and the spirit (*nous*). Plants share only in the first of these powers; animals share in the first and second; men share in all three. The first two powers are perishable; the third is clearly imperishable and immortal».⁵⁴⁹

Man, therefore, is composed of body and soul, and the spirit is the highest part of the soul. We may even call the spirit the «higher soul». Lao Tzu did this in chapter 10 of the Tao Teh Ching, where he spoke of the «superior soul» and the «inferior» or «animal soul».⁵⁵⁰

3. The Spirit as Master

In the inner life of man, the spirit is meant to be the master, and the lower soul is to be the servant, while the body is to be the servant of both. «The true ruler», writes St. Maximus, «is he who rules over himself and has subjected the soul and the body to the spirit».⁵⁵¹

St. Theophan the Recluse (f 1894), a modern teacher of ancient wisdom, likewise states: «According to natural purpose, man must live in the spirit, subordinate everything to the spirit, be penetrated by the spirit in all that is of the soul, and even more so in all that is physical – and beyond these, in the outward things, too, that is, family and social life. This is the norm!»⁵⁵²

When this hierarchy is maintained, we will no longer trust our thoughts, fantasies and reasoning powers. Even amidst our daily activities, conditioned by our culture and environment, our soul will continually return to the direct intuitive knowing of our spirit. As Lao Tzu put it: «Use your light to return to the light of insight».⁵⁵³ The soul knows the Truth by its unbroken connection with and Mibordination to the spirit, while the spirit knows through its connection with and subordination to its Creator, the Tao/Logos.

St. Theophan writes further: «When the spiritual reigns supreme in someone, then although this is his exclusive character and attitude, he does not err. This is because, in the first place, spiritually is the norm of human life, and so as a result, being spiritual, he is a real person, whereas the intellectual or carnal man is not a real person. Secondly, no matter how spiritual someone is, he cannot help but give the intellectual and carnal their rightful place; he maintains just a little of them, in subordination to the spirit. Let intellectuality be not too broad within him (in scientific knowledge, arts and other subjects), and let carnality be firmly restrained – then he is a real, whole person. But the man of intellect (the expert, the connoisseur, the shrewd man) – and even more so the carnal man – is not a real person, no matter how appealing he seems outwardly».⁵⁵⁴

With mankind's departure from the Way, the natural hierarchy has been reversed. The body and the lower aspect of the soul are now the masters. They have taken over the human being, who is now carried about by thoughts, imagination, emotions and bodily concerns.

As we have shown in the previous part, the soul of fallen man has come under the illusion of its self-sufficiency. Therefore it is not satisfied with concerning itself with a man's temporal needs (food, clothing, shelter), but seeks also means toward a man's ascendancy and sensual pleasure. Such a soul has become (or, better to say, has attached itself to) what is today called an «ego». While the spirit in our true self – the true seat of our personhood – the ego is our false self, an illusory self-sufficient entity. Because it thinks to achieve it s

ends and overcome obstacles through its own unaided powers, the ego can also be called our false «problem-solver».

Having become the master of the man through the illusion of its autonomy, the ego does what it can to conceal the existence of the spirit. In this way the spirit is not allowed to fulfill its designation of rising to God, and thus its light becomes darkened. Its light has not been put out; it is still light, but because it stands apart from the Creator, this light is darkness. That is why Christ s.ml. «Take heed that the light which is in you be not darkness.»⁵⁵⁵

Since the spirit is now held captive by the ego in the realm of i lie senses, it has also become sick. The only cure for this sickness is to give the spirit its rightful mastery by stripping the soul of the form of the ego. When the lower soul is refined in this way, says St. Theophan, «the soul grows into the spirit and blends with it».⁵⁵⁶⁵⁵⁷

Lao Tzu describes this as follows:

When the superior soul and the inferior soul are held together in one embrace, they can be kept from separating.⁵⁵⁸

When the soul takes the position of servant and aligns itself with the spirit, then the spirit returns to itself and naturally fulfills its true purpose, rising to the Creator. St. Basil the Great († a.d. 379) describes this spiritual process as follows: «When the spirit [nous] is not engaged by external affairs nor diffused through the senses over the whole world, it retires within itself. Then it ascends spontaneously to the consideration of God».⁵⁵⁹

Lao Tzu, in concentrating his spirit and not scattering it in the unusual realm, was able to partake of this experience. He wrote:

The five colors blind men's eyes;
The five tones deafen men's ears;
The five flavors dull men's sense of taste.
Galloping and hunting derange men's mind.
Rare articles conduct astray.

On this account the sage regards not the eye but the inner things.⁵⁶⁰

And on this account Lao Tzu's spirit was able to rise in contemplation of the qualities of the Tao, aligning itself with the Way of Heaven.

Now that the Tao has become flesh, a much closer connection is possible between man's spirit – the seat of His true personhood – and the Person of the Tao. It is a connection that passes into union, into the very deification of man's spirit by a special action of Uncreated Teh. Before describing this lofty condition of the human spirit, however, it is necessary to speak in greater detail about our present, unregenerate condition, so as to show what it is we must transcend and overcome.

4. The Life of the Ego

At the moment of man's first act of disobedience to the Way there suddenly appeared in him a sense that he had become wrong, This fundamental sense of wrongness («the knowledge of good and evil») marked the birth of his ego and thus of his *self*-consciousness, As we saw in the previous Part, he lost the garment of Uncreated Light in which he had been clothed, and thus became aware that he was naked (Genesis 3:10).

Since man's ego was born through his trying to become a god unto himself (Genesis 3:5), it is in the very nature of the ego to try to become autonomous. Hence the ego shirks from admitting it is wrong; to admit this would be to admit that it is not a god, and that there is a standard higher than itself. This fear of admission was first seen in the ego's attempt to «hide from the presence of God among the trees of the garden» (Genesis 3:8).

But the ego not only attempts to hide from God; as we have seen, it also attempts to hide from the spirit, for the spirit too convicts the ego of its wrongness. Since the spirit, and not the ego, is supposed to be the master of the person, its very presence exposes the ego as a false usurper and destroys the very basis for the ego's existence.

How can the human ego, immersed in its own gratification, hide from the ever-present reality of God and the spirit? How else than by a constant state of distraction into sensual pleasures, thoughts, memories and fantasies? Thus, man's fall into disobedience was at once a fall into distraction, and that was how his consciousness started to become as compounded and fragmented as it is to day.

To distract himself from facing his wrongness, man seeks out the very things that made him wrong in the first place: self-love and sensual pleasure. Gratifying himself in this way, he feels «right» again – but only temporarily. Actually, he has only become more wrong, so that now he needs even greater distractions, and even greater shocks, to make him feel that he is right. In this way he progresses further along the path of self-destruction, trying to overcome his predicament by its very cause.

Our ego seeks any reassurance that, in fact, we are all right, that we did not make a mistake, and that we are God after all. Our conscious selves may not admit that this is happening, but that is the actual underlying aim of our ego-life: to find anything that will enable us to forget our true selves and our hideous condition, and will make us feel, if only for a brief moment of ecstasy, that we are God, that we are in control, on top of things, and sufficient unto ourselves. Such is the principle behind man's constant desire to escape into the sensual pleasures of food, sex, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, entertainment, etc.; his desire for «love», popularity, recognition, glory, power, group status, ac-

ceptance, and admiration for his physical appearance; and his desire to puff himself up through hatred, judgment, and condemnation of others.

The ego or problem-solver works toward its aims through two powers: 1) the calculating machine of the human brain, with its faculties of analysis, contrivance, planning and fantasy; and 2) resentment. With the former, man tries to get something, and thus gives himself the illusion that he is on top of everything. With the latter, In tries – automatically, through habit, without even thinking – to get on top of something by resenting or judging (condemning) it. When it initially enters, resentment is not yet an emotion or even a thought. It is a kind of mechanism which the ego uses in order to immediately exalt itself over something or someone (especially someone who makes the person feel less like a god), and only later do thoughts and emotions attach themselves to it.

When we are truly humble and in submission to God, it is possible to discern right from wrong without judging or condemning. But when we are playing God, we cannot discern; we can only judge. Even if our judgment is technically correct, it is still essentially wrong, because we have made it in order to feel more right than the person whom we have judged. This is judgment on the level of the ego, blocking us from God, rather than discernment on the level of the spirit, which comes from God. «Judge not according to the appearance», said Christ, «but judge righteous judgment».⁵⁶¹ Unfortunately, the prideful person will not be able to differentiate between these two, but will judge according to appearances when he thinks he is discerning. The only factor that distinguishes them is humility.

When an injustice occurs to a humble person, he will not react inwardly; he will discern the injustice without resenting it. When the same injustice happens to a person with an ego, he will immediately react with resentment. In both cases, this occurs at first without thought. When resentment passes into thought, it becomes what we call judgment.

If a person's will is subconsciously inclined to the desire to get on top and play God, his consciousness attracts to itself all kinds of thoughts through which he can cherish, relish and hopefully fulfill his desire: thoughts of being accepted and admired, judgment.il thoughts, sensual and materialistic thoughts, etc. If he continues to play around with these thoughts, then emotions attach to them «Emotion» literally means «to move away from»; through it a person moves away from his true self, his spirit.

Once emotions attach themselves to thoughts, they arouse more and more thoughts. The person loses himself in his thoughts and feelings as in a kind of virtual reality, unaware that he can stand back from them. His thinking has become compulsive, fed by the powerful combination of thought-desire-

emotion which we call «passion». Such is the life of the ego. Man's spirit is directed solely by the passions, and moves further and further from its Creator.

5. Metanoia

Even if we stray far from the Way and lose all awareness of our spirit, still that spirit longs to fulfill its purpose, and still the wordless Word speaks to it, calling it back to Himself. This longing and His calling is felt by the soul as an internal conflict, a gnawing, unnamed suffering.

The Way, however, may not only use internal, moral suffering to call us back. He may also work through physical pain, or through emotional pain arising from the loss of a loved one or any other of our earthly attachments. At the time, we may find this to be terribly and unnecessarily cruel; but later, if we are able to look at it objectively, we will see that, considering the seriousness of our previous condition, the Word in fact acted as gently as possible in effecting the cure.

Through suffering we are stopped short in our self-worship and pursuit of earthly gratification. We find that our old distractions no longer work as they did before – they no longer stop the pain. Finally we are forced to face what we had been running from all our lives: we are forced to face ourselves as we really are, and it is a gruesome sight. The ego cries out that, if we truly face our sickness, the end is at hand; and this is true, for it will mean the end of the ego's tyranny. For our true selves, however, it marks the beginning of a new life. As Lao Tzu put it:

If one is sick of sickness, then one is not sick.

The sage is not sick because he is sick of sickness.

Therefore he is not sick.⁵⁶²

The full wretchedness of our condition is not seen all at once, for our spiritual eyes have only opened partway; but enough of it is seen to make us realize the need to change. Then begins the slow and painful process of what Christ called «repentance». Repentance means much more than regret. In its original Greek form – metanoia – it literally means to change the spirit (nous), to purify the eye of the soul.

Metanoia begins with the realignment of all our powers away from our former loves – for ourselves and for created things – and toward the Tao, the Way of the universe, the wordless Word from Whom we have been fleeing. With this occurs, in the words of Lao Tzu, a reversal or return. We are no longer giving the lower soul mastery, for we are starving to death the ego or

false identity that has made a home in it. Now the spirit is allowed to get out from under the ego and resume its rightful place.

Our human action is the beginning of metanoia; but the completion of it lies in the Divine action of the wordless Word within us. This occurs in the following way.

Now that our spirit has begun to regain mastery, we experience the yearning that is natural to it – the yearning for our Maker. Along with this comes the yearning for that which separates us from Him to be removed: we yearn to be cleansed from our corruption. And so the spirit in man calls out – perhaps not with words, perhaps without knowing the name of Him to Whom it calls – and the wordless Word, having come out to meet man’s spirit, it responds. He completes what man has begun in the process of metanoia, for it is He Who renews and purifies man’s spirit through the same Power by which He created it in the first place. The Apostle Paul called this «being transformed by the renewing of your mind [nous]!» Christ called it being «born again».⁵⁶³

We know that our metanoia is genuine – that is, that a Divine impulse has really occurred in us – when we have a revulsion for what before appeared sweet to us. This is what Lao Tzu meant by being «sick of sickness». In the words of St. Isaiah the Solitary († a.d. 490): «When a man severs himself from evil, he gains an exit 1 understanding of all the sins he has committed against God; for he does not see his sins unless he severs himself from them with a hiding of revulsion. Those who have reached this level pray to God with tears, and are filled with shame when they recall their evil love of the passions».⁵⁶⁴

6. Forgiveness

When the purification of our spirit occurs, we experience it as forgiveness. We know that we were corrupted, and that we were not capable of purifying ourselves. Moreover, we sense intuitively that we had corrupted ourselves of our own volition, and hence were not deserving of being purified by some power outside ourselves. And yet, in a manner surpassing nature, we have been cleansed, and so this comes to us as a kind of wondrous mystery.

When we experience this mystery, another mystery occurs. Having felt that we have received forgiveness undeservedly, we now become ready to forgive everyone everything – to shed all the hidden resentments that had separated us from the Way. These resentments are like chains which bind us to the objects of our bitterness, and now we are free of them. Thus, in forgiving, we are no longer bound to this earth, and are at last free to love the wordless Word Who has forgiven us.

Even before the coming of the Word in the flesh, His forgiveness was felt by those who initiated the process of metanoia in themselves. Thus, the Prophet David († 973 b.c.) wrote in the Psalms:

You have broken my bonds asunder;
I shall offer a sacrifice of praise unto You.

And again,

You rent my sackcloth and girded me with gladness,

That my glory may chant unto You,

And that I may not be pierced with sorrow.⁵⁶⁵

According to the mystic writer St. Symeon the New Theologian († a.d. 1022), David's joy in being loosed from the bonds of spiritual corruption came from Divine Grace or Teh acting on his spirit from the outside.⁵⁶⁶

Lao Tzu experienced the same action of the Grace of the Tao/Logos. He wrote:

Why did the ancients prize the Tao?

Is it not because by virtue of it he who seeks finds,

And the guilty are forgiven?

That is why it is such a treasure to the world.⁵⁶⁷

When the Tao became man, His forgiveness too became known and witnessed in human history. Those who did not know the Tao/Logos, and thus did not see Him in the man Jesus, were baffled when Christ went around forgiving people of their situ, «Who is this who speaks blasphemies?» they asked. «Who can lot give sins, but God alone?»⁵⁶⁸

With the incarnation, then, the act of forgiveness is seen in its true light as a *personal* act. It is face to face. Now we call out for forgiveness to the Word as He has become known to us in His human incarnation, just as the blind men in the Scriptures called out to him, «Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me», and, «Have mercy oil us, O Lord, Son of David».⁵⁶⁹

In the same way, the process of metanoia is now seen to be enacted, as it were, in human history, in its fully personal dimension, before the Way became flesh, His followers such as Lao Tzu continually put to death the false, corrupted identities of their egos because they knew that this was necessary in order to live according to the Way. With the coming of the Way, this death is now seen in a personal light, in the form of a Divine-human Person hanging on a Cross. They ascend the Cross with Him in order to put their false selves to death. They continue to suffer in this world just as I le did; but whereas the suffering of their former selves had been suffering without God – and was in fact due to their separation from Him – now their suffering is with Him, and is altogether different, even sweet. As Fr. George Calciu, a priest who endured twenty-two years in communist prisons, points out; «Christ did not come to

explain human suffering, or to eliminate it. Rather, He came to fill human suffering with His presence.»⁵⁷⁰

Dying with Christ on the Cross is the beginning of metanoia, but its culmination lies in being resurrected with Him. Just as Christ arose from the grave with a renewed body (so that even his closest disciples failed to recognize Him), so does our spirit arise in a renewed form through metanoia. Archimandrite Sophrony writes:

«When a man weeps with his whole being from the pain caused by the knowledge of his vileness, his torment far exceeds any outside suffering, and he sees himself as the worst of men.... Prayer in ilits holy pain can sweep mans spirit into another world. Everyday life is forgotten and the body no longer makes itself felt. The desert ascetics termed this the hell of repentance that likens us to Christ descending into His hell of love. However acute the Adamitic torment, however profound the suffering, it is accompanied by the joy of the Divine summons and the light of new life».⁵⁷¹

Chapter Two: Nurturing the Seed of Uncreated Teh

7. The Open Path to Perfect Union

The incarnation of the Tao brought more than just a personal, visible manifestation of forgiveness. Along with it came a new level of forgiveness, infinite, eternal – a kind of all-encompassing, «cosmic» forgiveness, not just of individual human beings but of the whole of human nature.

As we have seen, with man's primordial departure from the Way, all of human nature had fallen into corruption. Man, having cut himself off from God, had been barred from entering the eternal blessedness of union with Him, for an impure human nature was not worthy of that union. A sentence of death and separation thus lay on all of human nature, even on the most virtuous souls who lived before Christ's coming, such as the Hebrew prophets, 'nu rates and Lao Tzu. That is why the books of the Old Testament are filled with dark thoughts concerning existence beyond the grave: «For in death there is none that is mindful of You, and in hades who will confess You?» (Psalm 6:4). For the ancient Hebrews, such awareness and sorrow were eased only by the hope of future deliverance through the coming of Christ: «You will not abandon my soul in hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One [i.e., Christ] to see corruption» (Psalm 15:10). For the more virtuous, hades was not a place of torment but of waiting: waiting in the promise of unmerited union with Divinity.

By coming in the flesh and dying on the Cross, the Tao took on Himself the sentence of physical death that man had incurred at his departure from the Way. And yet the Tao, having never in the slightest departed from the Way (for how could the Way depart from Himself?), was wholly undeserving of the sentence; and being the Author of life, He could not be held by death. The Holy One could not see corruption. Thus, in dying as a man and then rising from the dead, the Tao abolished the sentence of spiritual and bodily death that had lain on human nature, offering man freedom from all the consequences of the primordial departure.

Through His bodily death the Tao first of all abolished the sentence of eternal separation from God – i.e., spiritual death – opening to man the possibility of eternal union with Him in the Kingdom of Heaven, in spite of man's unworthiness. In this was the Tao's ultimate act of forgiveness. On the Cross He prayed, «Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do».⁵⁷² Then, to the repentant thief who was crucified beside Him, He said, «Today you will be with me in Paradise», thus indicating that even a criminal, if he underwent the process of metanoia, could receive that which no human being (after the pri-

mordial departure) was worthy of receiving.⁵⁷³ In fact, it was that very thief who was the first in human history to receive it.

While Christ's body lay in the tomb, He descended spiritually into hades and released the spirits of those who had followed Him before His coming, bringing them out of their state of waiting and into that eternal union for which they had longed.⁵⁷⁴ We cannot but believe that Lao Tzu was among them.

Finally, when Christ arose from the tomb in an incorruptible body, He freed mankind even from the chains of physical death, making human nature subject to future bodily resurrection.⁵⁷⁵

8. Implements of Teh

We today are given much more than those who were born before Christ, for while the pre-Christian prophets and sages were united with the Tao after their death and His descent into hades, we have the potential of experiencing a foretaste of that eternal blessedness even during our earthly life. Our union with the Tao in the Kingdom of Heaven can begin in this life, only to continue forever in the life to come. During His time on earth, Christ spoke of special means – physical «implements» of immaterial, Uncreated Teh – by which He would effect this union.

The first of these means is baptism, which Christ called «being born of water and the Spirit»;⁵⁷⁶ the second is the mystical transformation of bread and wine into His Body and Blood, into Flesh which has been united with Divinity. These two mysteries give man the power and the potential of being re-created into the likeness of the incarnate Tao Himself.

St. Symeon the New Theologian expresses in a few words the whole sum of this new dispensation. After the coming of Christ, «people are baptized in water, are immersed in it and taken out from it three times, in the image of the three-day burial of the Lord, and after they die in it to this whole evil world, in the third bringing out from it they are already alive, as if resurrected from the dead, that is, their souls are brought to life and again receive the Grace of the Holy Spirit as Adam had it before the transgression. Then they are anointed with Holy Myrrh, and by means of it are anointed with Jesus Christ, and are fragrant in a way above nature. Having become in this way worthy of being associates of God, they taste His Flesh and drink His Blood, and by means of the sand I Bread and wine become of one Body and Blood with God Who was incarnate and offered Himself as a sacrifice».⁵⁷⁷



St. Symeon the New Theologian (a.d. 949–1022) *is one of the Lord exalted mystical writers of all time. Having been granted visions of God and the first-created world, he was raised to the heights of deification and total illumination through tin action of Uncreated Energy (The), See his own account of this on pp. 395, 402–3.*

In the baptism that Christ instituted, His forgiveness and our metanoia are sealed and perfected. We seal our realignment toward Him by vowing to wholly unite ourselves to Him,⁵⁷⁸ and He in mm seals His forgiveness of us by washing away all our former wrongs in the purifying waters. Then, when we partake of His deified Body and Blood, we receive into ourselves His Energy, which continues to cleanse the spiritual corruption inside us as by fire. Like the bush which Moses saw on Mount Sinai enveloped in Uncreated Light, we are not scorched by the Fire. Only sin is burned up in us, as the Light invisibly perfects us. In the prayer of St. Symeon before the reception of this mystery, we say: «Rejoicing and trembling at once, I who am straw partake of fire, and, strange wonder! I am ineffably bedewed, like the bush of old, which burnt without being consumed».⁵⁷⁹

9. The Seed of Divine Energy

From the moment one is truly baptized into Christ, Divine Energy or Grace no longer acts on one from the outside-in, as it did on Moses, Lao Tzu and other righteous people before the coming of Christ. Now it works from the

inside-out. This was the experience of Christ's Apostles, and it became the common inheritance of all followers of the incarnate Tao.

When Christ breathed on His Apostles after His resurrection and sent down the Holy Spirit upon them at Pentecost, they experienced an Uncreated Energy (Teh) that was of a wholly different order than the created energy (in Chinese, ch'I 氣) of their bodies and of the universe. Subsequently, the acquisition of this Uncreated Energy became the overriding aim of the Christian life.

What the early followers of Christ discovered was that the Grace of Gods Spirit was like a seed which had been implanted in du n spirits at baptism. «From the instant we are baptized», says St. Diadochus of Photiki († a.d. 486), «Grace is hidden in the depths of the spirit». Likewise, St. Gregory of Sinai teaches: «For when we Were cleansed through baptism, we received in seed-like form the Inn taste of the Spirit, and what St. James calls the 'implanted Logos' (James 1:21).⁵⁸⁰

Moreover, Christ's followers found they could nurture and cultivate this seed through self-denial, through the practice of the virtues and good deeds done in Christ's name, and most of all through watchfulness and spiritual prayer. In this way the seed would grow within them, gradually developing into a great tree.

According to the teaching of St. Seraphim of Sarov († 1833), when Christ said, «The Kingdom of Heaven is within you», He was referring precisely to this seed of the Grace of the Holy Spirit implanted in the human soul. And «the Kingdom of Heaven», said Christ, «is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field – which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches».⁵⁸¹



St. Gregory of Sinai (1265–1346) was a master of watchfulness and inner prayer. He wrote about the true signs

of the action of Uncreated Energy and described the «eight primary visions» of the state of perfect prayer, which he said «are dearly beheld and known by those who have attained by Grace complete purity of mind». His writings are found in the fourth volume of the anthology of ancient writings known as The Philokalia.

Christ also said that the Grace of the Spirit «is like treasure hidden in a field»⁵⁸². In order to acquire it, one must sell all that one has, buy the field, and then patiently and diligently dig.

10. Cultivating the Seed

St. Gregory of Sinai speaks of the signs of the action of Divine Energy in one's inward being:

«There are several signs that the Energy of the Holy Spirit is beginning to be active in those who genuinely aspire for this to happen and are not just putting God to the test.... In some it appears as awe arising in the heart, in others as a tremulous sense of jubilation, in others as joy, in others as joy mingled with awe, or as tremulousness mingled with joy, and sometimes it manifests itself as rears and awe. For the soul is joyous at Gods visitation and mercy, but at the same time is in awe and trepidation at His presence because it is guilty of so many sins. Again, in some the soul at the outset experiences an unutterable sense of contrition and an indescribable pain, like the woman in Scripture who labors to give Firth. For the living and active Logos – that is to say, Jesus – penetrates, as the Apostle says, to the point at which soul separates from body, joints from marrow (Hebrews 4:12), so as to expel by force every trace of passion from both soul and body. In others it is manifest as an unconquerable love and peace, shown towards all, or as joyousness that the fathers have often called exultation – a spiritual li tree and an impulsion of the living heart that is also described as a vibration and sighing of the Spirit Who makes wordless intercession for us to God» (Romans 8:26)».⁵⁸³

In the Eastern Christian tradition, all baptized souls can experience this action of Divine Energy, and indeed they do experience it according to how much they nurture the seed of the implanted Logos within them. The Grace does not save them automatically – for there is no such thing as automatic salvation – but it is ready to save at the moment the soul turns to God and begins to cultivate it. St. Seraphim explains the matter this way:

«The Grace of the Holy Spirit which is granted at baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in spite of people's falls into sin, in spite of the darkness surrounding our soul, nevertheless shines in the heart with the Divine Light (which has existed from time immemorial) of the inestimable Grace of Christ. In the event of the sinners impenitence, this Light of Christ cries to the Father: Abba, Father! Be not angry with this impenitence to the end (of his life).' And then, at the sinner's conversion to the way of repentance, it effaces completely all trace of past sin and clothes the former sinner once more in a robe of incorruption woven from the Grace of the Holy Spirit».⁵⁸⁴

11. The Created and the Uncreated

That this Uncreated Energy descends into the soul at baptism and transforms one, manifesting its special signs; that this seal can be buried under layers of ego and desire and then be uncovered by the spiritual labor of «digging»; that it can grow in one through following Christ's commandments, through partaking of His Body and Blood, and through prayer – all this we know through personal experience. When Divine Energy is acquired and works from within, it transforms one's vital powers, refines one's energies, and purifies one's spirit, burning away all dross as with fire. But infinitely greater than this is the intimate personal union that it brings about between the soul and the Creator. No human energy can do this – only Divine Energy can do it, because it in fact is the Creator.

«This is the aim», says Elder Paisius of Mount Athos († 1994), «to submit the mind fully to Divine Grace. Christ asks of us only humility. All other things will afterwards be done by Divine Grace».

Chapter Three: Watchfulness

12. Continuous Metanoia

Even after being washed clean in water mingled with Spirit in holy baptism, we still carry within ourselves the inclination and habit to return to our former condition.⁵⁸⁵ If we do not preserve, guard and cultivate the seed of Grace given to us, we will be deprived of its vivifying power. Then, as Christ warned us, we will be worse off than we were before.⁵⁸⁶ In order to preserve the Grace and not return to our former delusions, we must continuously, day by day, minute by minute, unite ourselves with the Way in metanoia.

Metanoia – realigning ourselves to the Way, calling on Him, yearning to be cleansed in spirit, being forgiven by Him and then forgiving everyone and everything – this is the very essence and Inundation of the life of His followers. But metanoia is more than Just an act. It is first and foremost a state or condition.

As long as we remain in the condition of metanoia, ever deeper levels of our corruption will be revealed to us, and we will be continually purified and re-created by the wordless Word in our hearts. The end of this is total illumination. As Archimandrite Sophrony explains: «Whoever tries to follow Christ ‘wherever He goes’ (Revelation 14:4) will inevitably be rent again and again – at every rise from a lesser to a wider cognition, from a small measure of love to a greater».⁵⁸⁷

In our fast-paced society based on instant gratification, people want spirituality instantly. Caught in a morass of refined sensuality, they seek spirituality in a sensual way. Hypnotized in their false identities, they seek spirituality which only gets them deeper into hypnosis – now with a spiritual veneer. They expect to be comforted in their filth. They cannot go deeper, because they will do anything except face their filth.

For us to advance in the spiritual life, we must realize that we are among these people, that we too have been conditioned to seek instant gratification. Facing this is the first step in rising above our environment. We must understand that, contrary to what our conditioning leads us to expect, inward purification is a lifelong process. Continuous metanoia is the only way. «A miracle» – says Fr. Sophrony, «the more I ‘see’ God, the more ardent does my repentance become, since I the more clearly recognize my unworthiness in His sight».⁵⁸⁸

13. Watchfulness and Metanoia

For our metanoia to be constant, it must be linked with what the ancient Christian ascetics called «watchfulness» (nipsis in Greek): a state of inner vigilance, attention and sobriety.

Lao Tzu knew well this virtue. Speaking of the ancients who followed the Tao, Lao Tzu called them

Watchful, like men crossing a winter stream.

Alert, like men aware of danger.⁵⁸⁹

When the Tao/Logos became flesh, He spoke much concerning watchfulness, as much as His listeners could understand. «Take heed to yourselves», He said, «lest at any time your hearts be weighed down with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life».⁵⁹⁰

To further impress upon the people the need for watchfulness, I de told parables about it, such as the story of the five wise virgins who trimmed and guarded their lamps, or the tale of the unwise steward who fell asleep when his master was away.⁵⁹¹ «Let your waist be girded about», Christ said, «and your lamp burning; and you yourselves like men who wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the lord, when he comes, shall find watching. Verily I say to you, that he shall gird himself and have them to sit down to eat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants».⁵⁹²

If continuous metanoia is the foundation of the life of the follower of the Way, then watchfulness is the foundation of continuous metanoia. For this reason, the writers of the greatest collection of ancient Christian manuscripts on the spiritual life, The Philokalia, repeatedly underline the necessity of inward attention. In the words of the Philokalic writer St. Hesychius (eighth century a.d.): We will travel the road of metanoia correctly if, as we begin to give attention to the spirit [nous], we combine humility with watchfulness, and prayer with the power to rebut evil thoughts».⁵⁹³

Likewise, St. Nicephorus the Monk (thirteenth century a.d.) writes: «Watchfulness is the sign of true repentance [metanoia].... It is the unreserved assurance that our sins are forgiven. It is the beginning of contemplation or, rather, its presupposition, for through it God, describing its presence in us, reveals Himself to the spirit. It is serenity of the spirit 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».⁵⁹⁴

14. Watchfulness and Prayer

Being in a continuous state of watchfulness, Lao Tzu communed with the Tao through intuitive knowing in the higher mini! (spirit). He did not address or invoke the Tao, for as we have seen, the mystery of the Personal Absolute was not revealed to him.

Now that, with the coming of the Tao/Logos in the flesh, our communion with Him becomes a person-to-Person connection, the knowing of the higher mind passes also into the heart. This we call «prayer». Nevertheless, even with the intimately personal communion with the Tao that has been made possible for all peoples through Christ, the basis for that communion remains the same .it it was for Lao Tzu, since prayer, like metanoia, has its foundation in watchfulness.

When the Tao/Logos took human form, He did not only tell us to pray. Instead, He said, «Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak»⁵⁹⁵. First watch, He tells us, then pray while watching.

Lao Tzu sat and watched in preparation, as it were, for Christ's coming. Now that the Tao has been made flesh, His followers still must sit and watch in preparation for His coming, for He comes into their hearts in order to purify their spirits, at a moment when He Himself chooses. «For the Son of man», said Christ, «is like 1 man going out of the country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each one his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch, therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming – at evening, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning – lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch».⁵⁹⁶

Prayer cannot be pure if the mind is actively engaged in following thoughts. For prayer to be pure, it must arise from a pure spit 11, and this can only occur when one first stands watch and thus rises above thoughts and images. That is why Christ said, «Watch and pi ay»: prayer and watchfulness are inseparably bound. As St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, a nineteenth-century Russian ascetic in the Philokalic tradition, writes: «The essential, indispensable property of prayer is attention. Without attention there is no prayer».⁵⁹⁷

The Tao is Spirit; in Jesus Christ that Spirit enters into flesh. So too with the inward life of His followers. Before His coming, followers of the Tao like Lao Tzu sat in open, objective awareness; liter His coming, that spiritual awareness «takes flesh» in the form of prayer, bringing it to a new dimension. That is why attention (corresponding, in connection with Lao Tzu, to the pre-Christian era) and prayer (corresponding to the Christian era) are inseparably linked. Prayer cannot exist without the attention that must mine before it and

must work along with it. At the same time, however, attention is not enough in itself, now that the Tao has taken flesh.

St. Symeon the New Theologian, in the fourth volume of *The Philokalia*, provides one of the best explanations we have found for the relationship between attention and prayer:

«Watchfulness and prayer should be as closely linked together in the body to the soul, for the one cannot stand without the other. Watchfulness first goes on ahead like a scout and engages sin in combat. Prayer then follows afterwards, and instantly destroys and exterminates all the evil thoughts with which watchfulness has already been battling, for attentiveness alone cannot exterminate them. This, then, is the gate of life and death. If by means of watchfulness we keep prayer pure, we make progress; but if we leave prayer unguarded and permit it to be defiled, our efforts are null and void».⁵⁹⁸



St. John Climacus (sixth-seventh centuries a.d.) was the abbot of the ancient Monastery of St. Catherine at the base of Mount Sinai, where the Prophet Moses received his revelation. His work on inner purification, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, has for centuries been considered a spiritual classic of the first magnitude, and won one of the first books to be printed in the Western hemisphere. Icon by Photios Kontoglou.

One of the best descriptions of exactly how to do this is found in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by St. John Climacus of Mount Sinai, a God-inspired spiritual physician of the sixth century a.d. This passage provides the key to understanding our present discussion.

St. John writes: «Close the door of your cell to the body, the door of your tongue to speech, and your inner gate to evil spirits. Ascend into a watchtower – if you know how to – and observe how and when and whence, and in what numbers and what form, the robbers try to break in and steal your grapes.

When the watch man grows weary he stands up and prays; then he sits down again and manfully resumes the same task. Guarding against evil thoughts is one thing, keeping watch over the spirit [nous] is another. The latter differs from the former as much as east from west, and is far more difficult to attain. Where thieves see royal weapons at the ready they do not attack the place lightly. Similarly, spiritual robbers do not lightly try to plunder the person who has enshrined prayer within his heart.»⁵⁹⁹

What was St. John Climacus doing when he was sitting and watching? In essence he was doing what Lao Tzu was doing before the incarnation of the Tao. He was pulling his awareness back into an objective state of observant mind, thus keeping watch over his spirit or «higher mind». Again, the difference between Lao Tzu and those who follow Christ after His coming is that the latter bring into this condition of observant mind a personal communion with the Tao/Logos, usually with the aid of direct invocation. Lao Tzu said he did not know the name of the Tao. Now we do know it, and so we invoke it – «Lord Jesus Christ» – all the while remembering that in order to pray it truly we must pray it in the spirit, and so must first do what Lao Tzu did.

The vast majority of people never reach deep levels of interior, noetic prayer simply because they have not followed the first half of Christ's injunction: «Watch and pray». For this reason, before speaking specifically about prayer, we will set forth at some length the principles of watchfulness.

15. Going Within and Separating from Thoughts

To explain the absolute necessity of watchfulness, let us go back to our previous discussion of the primordial fall of man. When man fell, he fell into a state of distraction. His «eye», to use Christ's words, was no longer «single».⁶⁰⁰ To return to our original Mate, therefore, means to return to singleness of perception, to reverse our fall into distraction by achieving its opposite, which is the condition of attention.

Through attention we continually rise above all sensory forms And images, all conditioned thoughts and emotions; we continually submit our soul to the pure knowing of the spirit; we continually allow our spirit to rise in its yearning to receive purification and thus to be united to its Creator, to hear the voiceless voice of the Word; we continually stand guard with the spirit so as not to let in Any thoughts or images that will pull it down to the realm of the senses; we continually burn away in the light of understanding all forms and images of desire, together with all the resentments hiding in the recesses of our

souls; and in this way we continually stand watch, waiting for the coming of our Master, the Tao/Logos.

Through watchfulness in the mind, we begin to grasp the analogy of the spirit and the «lower» soul. The spirit is immortal being and thus partakes of time-transcendence; while the lower soul is tied to earthly time. The spirit, in experiencing eternity, abides in stillness; while the lower soul is involved in action that is bound to time.

As we repeatedly catch ourselves descending to the level of thought (the realm of action in time), we can call ourselves back to the level of the spirit (the realm of stillness in eternity). Lain, through continual practice, we will be able to watch the thought s coming, trying to gain admittance into our minds by stealing out attention.

This is one of the abilities that sets us apart from the animal world. An animal may have mental images and feel emotions, but it cannot catch and observe itself doing this. Thus all its actions – if they are not simply instinctual – must ultimately be conditioned by environmental pressures and the images and feelings that these engender. A human being, while still living on an animal level, also acts according to outward conditioning; but still he has the unique ability, if he will use it, to observe his mind and thus rise above bin conditioning. In so doing, he ceases to react to environmental pressures, but acts instead according to the inward pressure of his spirit as it is guided by God.

In order to gain attention and transcend conditioning, we must, as the ascetics of The Philokalia teach, go within ourselves. St. Nicephorus the Monk writes: «We cannot be reconciled with God and assimilated to Him unless we first return or, rather, enter mm ourselves, insofar as this lies within our power. For the miracle con nixes in rearing ourselves away from the distraction and vain concerns of the world and in this way relentlessly seizing hold of the Kingdom of Heaven within us.»⁶⁰¹

Let us recall Lao Tzu's words on going within:

Block the passages, shut the doors [of the senses]....

Observe true quiet.⁶⁰²

Shutting our eyes and not focusing on outward sensory impressions, we stand or sit at attention before God. Almost immediately we find our ego-consciousness trying to steal away our attention as it is wont to do, filling our head with thoughts, images and memories. But as we continue to realign our will to the Way, yearning to rise above the life of the lower soul, gradually our awareness will begin to separate itself from our thoughts. St. Theophan the Recluse writes: «Little by little you will separate from your thoughts.... You will find that you have strayed far away from your first-created image.»⁶⁰³

As we continue the practice of going within and separating from thoughts, gradually we come to know what St. John Climacus meant by «ascending the watchtower» above the lower mind, where We can «observe the robbers stealing our grapes»: that is, the thoughts that are trying to steal our attention away from the intuitive awareness of our spirit, in which we know God.

16. Wrong Struggle and Right Struggle

Above all, says St. Theophan, our inward attention should be directed at thoughts, for «the passions and desires rarely attack by themselves – they are most often born of thoughts. From this we can make a rule: cut off thoughts and you will cut off everything».⁶⁰⁴



Archimandrite Sophrony (1896–1993), as a young artist in Russia and France, delved deeply into Hindu and Buddhist practice. Finding that pure intellection could advance one only so far in the search for reality, he returned to his childhood faith. Eastern Orthodoxy, wherein he found illumination through communion with the Personal God. For many years he lived as a hermit on Mount Arhus, Greece, under the spiritual direction of the holy Elder Silouan, whose life and teachings he made known to the world. See the account of his illumination by the Uncreated Energy (Teh) of Christ on pp. 392–95.

When thoughts come, we should not attempt to get involved or argue with them, for such struggle only binds us to them. As Fr. Sophrony's Elder, Sr. Silouan, affirms: «The experience of the Holy Fathers shows various ways of combating intrusive thoughts but it is best of all not to argue with them. The spirit that debates with such a thought will be faced with its steady development, and, bemused by the exchange, will be distracted from remembrance of God, which is exactly what the demons are after – having diverted the spirit from God, they confuse it, and it will not emerge 'clean.'»⁶⁰⁵

Struggle against thoughts is vain and futile. It is enough simply to observe the thoughts as they arise, as St. John Climacus teaches, then let them go without reacting to them or following them.

«When someone is in the beginning of his spiritual life», says Elder Paisius of Mount Athos, «he should not study a lot, but instead watch himself and observe his thoughts».⁶⁰⁶

A thought cannot exist for long under the light of direct, objective observation. If we do not align our will with it, it naturally disappears. As the fifth-century ascetic Abba Pimen teaches: «If we do not do anything about thoughts, in time they are spoiled, that is to say, they disintegrate».⁶⁰⁷

Many ancient Christian teachers speak of the struggle with thoughts. It is vital that we understand what they mean by this. Our struggle is not against the thoughts, for as Christ said, «Resist not evil».⁶⁰⁸ Rather, our struggle should be to rise toward our source of knowing, the Tao/Logos Who is beyond thought. In other words, we do not engage the thoughts, but instead struggle to keep our attention lifted above them, in the stillness of the higher mind.

Each time we catch ourselves in a thought, we just return our attention to what is above it: to our spirit and to God. We do not validate the thought by giving it any more attention. This is already to repulse or cut off the thought without directly struggling against it. It is active, not passive; but the action does not involve movement towards the distracting thought. Rather, it is like a train that I have been switched to a sidetrack and must simply be switched back onto the main track, which alone leads to one's destination.

If, in struggling with thoughts and emotions, we rely on our own power rather than God's power, then we will have to take our power from the very emotions that we should be conquering. In other words, the emotional energy that we employ in the struggle against negative thoughts and emotions will connect us to the very things that we are trying to struggle against. We will only wear ourselves out.

Thus, if we have the wrong idea of struggle, we will be struggling in vain against thoughts, until at last we give up. With the right idea of struggle, we struggle in a constructive rather than a destructive way, and this gives us strength and incentive to persevere.

To raise our attention to the Creator is simply to humbly yearn for Him: to look not to our false wisdom but to what is above it. It is as if we are looking up towards Him with the eye of our soul, even as we are yearning for Him with our hearts. «Never allow your mind to be dragged down», says St. Macarius of Egypt († a.d. 390), «but always raise it on high, and God will help you».⁶⁰⁹

Raising our minds to God does not mean rolling up the pupils of our eyes in our heads and trying to «see» something. Neither does it mean thinking about or imagining God, for that is already a descent to the level of the active consciousness. To deliberately err at images in the mind is only to create more distraction.

17. Defocusing from Thoughts

In observing thoughts, we should not focus on them, but rather defocus from them. We should not try to analyze them, for analysis involves us in the very thing from which we are seeking to separate ourselves. Once again, it means we are trusting in our own powers rather than in God's power. Therefore, we should be simple: just watch the thoughts disappear under the light of observation, as if we were an objective, disinterested spectator; they will pass one by one.

Above all, we should not be agitated by the appearance of thoughts, for this also enables them to «steal our grapes». As Abba Barsanuphius (sixth century a.d.) says: «If a thought comes, do not be alarmed.... The bad thing is not that a thief enters the house, but that he takes what he finds in the house».⁶¹⁰

In catching ourselves in thoughts and emotions, already we .in- severing ourselves from them. What is it that is doing this? It is our true self, our true person – our spirit. In becoming aware of this, we are breaking away from the false identity that has enslaved us. We have begun to return to our true nature, to make our «eye single», or to use Lao Tzu's phrase, to return to the «un-carved block».

We should not try to force our mind to be empty of thoughts. Instead, as stated above, we are to watch the thoughts arise and disappear under observation; and each time we do this we will «switch» to the level of the spirit. When Lao Tzu spoke of «emptying the mind»⁶¹¹, he was not saying that we should try to force ourselves to have no thoughts, but rather that we should raise our awareness to the level above thought. Then, if thoughts do enter to pull us into the «lower mind», we will not fasten our attention to them but will return to

the «higher mind». We will recognize that the thoughts are not who we are, and are not even our own, but are a foreign element, as it were. Further, since this foreign element is trying to steal our attention away from our center in the spirit – the place in which we know God – we will immediately recognize it to be our enemy. St. Theophan the Recluse writes: «Having noticed the enemy approach – the beginning of a stimulus, thought, passion, or tendency – first of all hasten to realize that it is the enemy. It is a great mistake, and a common one, to honor everything that comes up in us as the property of our own blood, for which we take a stand as for our own selves».⁶¹²

18. Thoughts and Evil Spirits

Although it is wrong to try to determine the source of every thought, we should realize that the primordial enemy of man – the devil – is constantly at work to divert us from the Way, and that he does this by making suggestions to us in the form of thoughts. St. Theophan writes: «The enemy has a law – not to begin suddenly with a passion but with a thought, and to repeat the thought often.... Continual thoughts are onerous and murderous. To them more than others belongs the name tempting. Concerning them it is necessary to know that they are not from nature – although they are similar to it in character – but are always from the enemy.... These are temptations such as blasphemy, despair and unbelief. The main thing is to never incline towards them, never adopt them, and to keep the heart free from them, separating them from yourself.»⁶¹³

It is also crucial to remember that the fallen spirits – the demons – have no power over us, unless we give it to them by consenting to their suggestions. As Lao Tzu wrote:

Approach the universe with the Tao,

And demons (kuei 鬼)⁶¹⁴ will display no powers.

Not that they are not powerful,

But their power will not be used to harm others.⁶¹⁵

St. Theophan explains it this way: «When the soul is bright, they [the demons] are unable to look at it, like bats who fear the light. They look at it only when it begins to darken. They run in packs everywhere, and as soon as they notice a darkened soul, they immediately fall upon it, and begin to twist it to and fro with thoughts, passionate desires and disturbance of feelings.... They even attempt to creep up to bright souls, but are parried and struck down by rays of light, as if by an arrow».⁶¹⁶

19. «Deal with It Before It Happens»

In objectively observing thoughts, we will be able to cut them off before they develop into passions. In *The Philokalia*, the growth from a thought into a passion is described with scientific precision, First comes the provocation of the thought, then the conjunction of the thought with emotion or resentment, then the joining or agreement of the will with the thought. If the soul does not pull back at this point, the thought becomes a habit and the mind is constantly preoccupied with the object of the passionate urge. Finally the person falls into the captivity of the urge, and rushes gladly and violently to satisfy it.⁶¹⁷

As Lao Tzu writes, the way to stop this process is to «deal with it before it happens. Set things in order before there is confusion».⁶¹⁸ Sr. Hesychius explains: «If the spirit is attentive and watchful, and at once repulses the provocation ... its consequences remain inoperative».

It is not only obviously evil thoughts that should be passed over during times of watchfulness and prayer; even seemingly good thoughts should be left behind. «Impassioned thoughts», says St. Hesychius, «follow hard upon thoughts that appear to be innocent and dispassionate: the latter open the way for the former. This we have found through years of experience and observation».⁶¹⁹

20. Facing Oneself

Continuing this practice of going within and standing apart from thoughts, we will continue to shed layers of conditioning together with our compulsive thought patterns. At unexpected moments of the day, we will suddenly become aware of aspects of our corrupted condition that had previously been hidden from us. Buried resentments will come to the surface, where we can at last repent and be free of them. Above all, we will begin to realize our secret rebellion against God, which we reveal each time we condemn another person or feel dissatisfaction.

As we become aware of our wretchedness, tears will come to our eyes, cleansing our inward filth. We know not whence these tears come, for they are related not to anything in particular, but rather to who we really are. As Nice-tas Stithatos (eleventh century a.d.)⁶²⁰ writes: «Once you come to know yourself, a kind of suprarational Divine humility suddenly descends upon the soul, bringing contrition and tears of fervent compunction of heart».⁶²¹

Our aim should not be to have spiritual experiences or to feel «peaceful», for that aim is only another egotistic ambition and another way of escaping from ourselves. Nor should our aim be to be enlightened by profound in-

sights. Watchfulness is not a means of getting what we want; it is a means of knowing what is right. It is not in order to feel better; it is order to be better. We must approach it with a spirit of humble inquiry, prayerful yearning and a burning desire to know the truth.⁶²²

Knowing the truth comes first of all from knowing the truth about ourselves. Therefore, our aim is to know ourselves, to see and face our own sin: sin not just as our past actions but as our condition.

«To know yourself», writes Nicetas Stithatos, «means that you must guard yourself diligently from everything external to you; it means respite from worldly concerns and cross-examination of the conscience. This is true humility, the humility that teaches us to hr inwardly humble and makes our heart contrite. If you do not know yourself you cannot know what humility is. To know oneself is the goal of the practice of the virtues».⁶²³

To know ourselves, we must see ourselves in all our wretchedness. We must finally face the light of understanding which we had been running from; and having faced it, we must not squint. We must simply sit there silently before God, and desire to change. That is the whole meaning of repentance. It does not matter whether or not powerful emotions are felt; we may even shed tears without such emotions. All that matters is the sincere longing to change, which automatically replaces the sin-condition with the new condition of metanoia.

21. Distrusting Thoughts

When we go within ourselves and truly begin to stand apart from thought, we begin to distrust the calculating machine of the lower soul and its problem-solver, the ego. We begin to grow sick of our stupid judgments and our well-fed egos, and begin to trust rather the intuitive knowing of our spirit insofar as it knows the Creator.

Throughout the life of our ego, we have become habituated to trusting our problem-solver and its thoughts and feelings. To practice watchfulness is essentially to practice distrusting them.

Once we have become aware of our spirit through entering within ourselves, the very act of remembering the possibility of «switching» to a higher source of knowing already places distance between the spirit and the thought-stuff of the lower mind. And once we have returned enough times to the true knowing of the spirit as it rises to God, then we realize how ineffective and faulty is our own means of knowing – through abstract concepts, deduction, information, etc. We will realize what a weak tool is the calculating machine of the human brain, how low its form of knowledge. When left to its own de-

vices, it only seems to solve problems temporarily; often it makes them worse, and it never solves the real problems.

For us who have been conditioned by the modern Western mentality, it is especially difficult to begin to distrust our thoughts, since our society has been built precisely on reliance on human reason. If we regard ourselves as intelligent and well-educated, having come to believe that outward learning will lead us to real knowledge, we face a further handicap. That is why, as Lao Tzu put it, the truly wise person «learns to be unlearned».⁶²⁴ He wrote:

Learning consists in adding to one's stock day by day.

Following the Tao consists in subtracting day by day».⁶²⁵

Romanian pastor Richard Wurmbrand⁶²⁶ relates that, when he was in communist prisons, those of the educated class were the first to break under torture and betray their friends, and the seminarians were the first to deny the existence of God, simply because they trusted their thoughts. In view of this, one can well appreciate Lao Tzu's words:

In days of old

Those who practiced the Tao with success did not,

By means of it, enlighten the people,

But on the contrary sought to make them unsophisticated.⁶²⁷

The aforementioned Elder Paisius of Mount Athos, a beautiful, innocent soul and a much-loved spiritual father of our times, gives this advice: «The devil does not hunt after those who are lost. he hunts after those who are aware, those who are close to God. He takes from them trust in God and begins to afflict them with self assurance, logic, thinking, criticism. Therefore we should not trust our logical minds. Never believe your thoughts.

«Live simply and without thinking too much, like a child with his father. Faith without too much thinking works wonders. The logical mind hinders the Grace of God and miracles. Practice patience without judging with the logical mind».

Often the logical mind will say, «If I just think about this problem long enough, or think enough about what I should say to that person, eventually the answer will come and the problem will be revived». Thus untold mental energy is wasted on compulsive thinking. If an answer does come, it cannot be a true answer, for it comes from a false self and a false god – the ego – laboring under the illusion of its self-sufficiency.



Elder Paisius the New of Mount Athos (1924–1994) *was one of the greatest Eastern Christian elders of recent times. Overflowing with self-forgetting love and blessed with childlike simplicity, he consoled thousands and worked miracles for them through his unceasing prayers. His counsels bear the marks of true spiritual genius, being entirely traditional and at the same time totally unique. See his account of illumination by Uncreated Energy on pp. 391–92.*

The practice of going within reverses this, for the soul begins to refer to the spirit not for conceptual answers, but for the place of true knowing, wherein it is informed by the Tao/Logos. If man's spirit humbly «listens» and remains above the realm of plans and calculations, the answer will come not when the ego wants it, but spontaneously, at the very moment when it is needed.

Whenever we are deliberating over something, we should know that we are groping, not in the realm of truth, but in the realm of opinion. Whatever ideas we arrive at, no matter how «reasonable», will not be from God.

A spiritual son of Elder Paisius of Mount Athos recalls: «The Elder always tried to have good thoughts. He said to us, however, that it is not necessary to make this our final aim, namely having good thoughts, because our soul should be purified even of them, and be left naked, clothed only in the Divine Grace which we received for free in holy baptism».

Elder Paisius counseled: «We ought always to be careful and be in constant hesitation about whether things are really as we think For when someone

is constantly occupied with his thoughts and trusts in them, the devil will manage things in such a way that he will make the man evil, even if by nature he was good.

The ancient fathers did not trust their thoughts at all, but even in the smallest things, when they had to give an answer, they addressed the matter in their prayer, joining to it fasting, in order in some way to 'force' Divine Grace to inform them what was the right answer according to God. And when they received the 'information,' they gave the answer.

Today I observe that even with great matters, when someone asks, before he has even had the time to complete his question, we interrupt him and answer him. This shows that not only do we not seek enlightenment from the Grace of God, but we do not even judge with the reason God gave us. On the contrary, whatever our thoughts suggest to us, immediately, without hesitation, we trust it and consent to it, often with disastrous results.

Almost all of us view thoughts as being something simple and natural, and that is why we naively trust them. However, we should neither trust them nor accept them.

«Thoughts are like airplanes flying in the air. If you ignore them, there is no problem. If you pay attention to them, you create an airport inside your head and permit them to land!»⁶²⁸

22. Judgmental Thoughts

Above all, judgmental thoughts block us from God, since in the very act of harboring them we are arrogating the place of God, Who alone is Judge. We may feel an exhilaration by seeming to get on top of someone through judgment, but sooner or later this will lead to inward conflict. If the source of the conflict – the soul playing God – is not eradicated, then it can lead to depression, despair, sickness, and the whole gamut of spiritual and physical maladies.

The person who is truly following the Way will immediately recognize that the indulgence of a single judgment separates him from God. Therefore, when judgmental thoughts intrude upon his mind, begging to be attended to and promising the exultation of pride, he immediately cuts them off and lets them pass into oblivion. It does not matter how sagacious, how compelling, how profoundly psychological such judgments appear to him. He wants God above all else, and these thoughts deprive him of God, and so he rejects them.

The nineteenth-century Russian Elder, St. Ambrose of Optina, gave this practical advice to his spiritual daughter: «Look at everything simply. Living simply means not judging. Do not judge anyone. For example, here comes

Elikonida. She passed by, and that is all. This is what thinking simply means.⁶²⁹ Otherwise, at seeing Elikonida passing by, you could think about her bad side: she is mi h and such, her character is thus and so. That is not simple». ⁶³⁰

It is not only people that we can judge. We can pass judgment on our surrounding circumstances, or even on life itself. In doing so, we are, at heart, judging God Himself – often without even knowing it. Clearly, nothing can separate us from our Creator more than this. Therefore, observed Lao Tzu, «There is no greater curse than discontent». ⁶³¹

23. «Take No Thought»

The lower soul or shih-shen, as we have seen, is concerned with all of our temporal affairs: with the needs of the body and – once the ego has made a home in the soul – with the demands of human pride. When the Word was made flesh, He told us to drop all these concerns and submit ourselves entirely to the Creator.

«If any man come to me, and hate not... his own life, he cannot be my disciple». And again: «Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought⁶³² for your life, what you shall eat; neither for the body, what you shall put on. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why take thought for the rest?»⁶³³

Here Christ is telling us to not trust our thoughts to take care of anything at all – not only of our egos need for ascendancy, but even of the most basic needs of our bodies. This radical message, setting forth an utter lack of self-reliance, corresponds to the emptiness or spontaneity about which Lao Tzu wrote. When we «switch» and return to our spirit in order to «hear» the wordless Word, we will know what to do at the moment we need to know it, and we will see the utter futility of worrying about the future.

For this reason, we should not plan our conversations, deliberating over what we will say and what others might say back. Such planning is evidence of our failing, of our separation from God. Christ said, «Take no thought how or what you will answer, or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in the same hour what you ought to say». ⁶³⁴

Mulling over the past and future, imagining scenarios of what might have been or what could be – all this is illusion. The truth is in the present

moment. There alone do we meet our Maker, Who is Himself Truth, and lies outside our vain imaginings.

We take refuge in our thoughts, fantasies and emotions because they give us a deceptive sense of security. But Christ tells us to abandon that security and make ourselves vulnerable, relying wholly on our Creator. Both Christ and Lao Tzu likened this state «I self-abandonment to the mind of a little child who has not yet developed a mature ego, who has not yet become accustomed to hunting his problem-solver. «Become as little children», they said⁶³⁵. A child, although also touched by the primordial fall, is closer to the true Source of knowing than an adult. Simple and spontaneous, he knows without knowing how he knows. He can be happy without knowing he is happy. What adults often consider happiness is in reality the emotional excitement of the ego; while a little child's happiness consists in the simple, selfless joy of being alive.

When Christ told each person to «deny himself» and «lose his life»,⁶³⁶ he was not saying to obliterate the conscious mind. Rather, he was saying to purify it by casting off the ego that has grown on it like a parasite. Thinking, imagining, dreaming and emotion are not destroyed in the follower of the Way; rather they are wholly submitted to a higher Source.

24. Non-Action

This state of selflessness and self-abandonment is closely linked to Lao Tzus teaching of non-action (wu-wei 無為). Some have wrongly interpreted Lao Tzus wu-wei to mean «doing nothing at all «but this is far from his intended meaning. As Gi-ming Shim writes: «Non-action means that one does not act from his own selfish passion or desire but follows a pattern of objective truth. In the objective order of all things, one is not limited to his own self. When he follows that order which is already inherent in the structure of the universe he will succeed, where orders of his own creation will be limited by the boundaries of self and must find their failure beyond these limits.

«So, Lao Tzu said: 'The Tao is absolute and without action, yet it is the cause of all action. When princes and kings are able to keep it, all things will be transformed naturally.' If we do not follow the objective truth, then we will act by selfish opinion and end in failure. So, Lao Tzu said: 'There are those who would conquer till world and make of it what they desire. I see they will not succeed. The world is like a hollow utensil and cannot be manipulated.' On the other hand, if one avoids action by selfish desire then success will most

certainly come. So, Lao Tzu said: 'To make is to mar, in grasp is to lose. The sage practices non-action, hence he never fails; he never grasps, hence he never loses.... The sage desires nondesire; in this way he assists the natural development of all things even though he does not venture to interfere'.⁶³⁷

The «selfish opinion» of which Gi-ming speaks arises from trusting our thoughts, imagination and emotions. Our thought, as we have said, lie in the realm of action and are bound to earthly time. Our immortal spirit, however, transcends earthly time and abides not in action but in stillness. Therefore, when we raise our awareness to the level of our spirit, and there seek the Divine Spirit, we begin to find the still Source of the non-action of which Lao Tzu speaks.

What Gi-ming calls «awareness of objective truth» comes when we abandon our erroneous trust in our thoughts and feelings and instead trust the Divine Source of truth. When this awareness informs our actions, we will be practicing what Lao Tzu called nonunion, for our actions will not really be ours at all.

For Lao Tzu, non-action meant following the Tao, which itself follows the course of non-action. For followers of Christ the incarnate Tao, non-action is raised to a personal dimension called «faith».

Practically speaking, this means that when we catch ourselves trying to solve our personal problems with our minds, we realize the futility of this enterprise and give up the problems to the Personal Absolute. We cease trying to be our own savior, and we commend ourselves to the mercies of our true Savior.

The main reason why people fail in the spiritual life is that they have not learned the secret of non-action: deep down, they are still trusting and relying on themselves. «I know of no fall», says the desert father Abba Dorotheus, «(that does not come from trusting one's own judgment)». ⁶³⁸ Even if a self-opinionated person calls upon Christ to save him, he is still seeking salvation on his own terms and in his own time (which usually means immediately). He makes his petitions or demands in order to feel better and make his *Í uh* easier, rather than to know objective truth and be united with *Ins Creator*, which is the very purpose of his existence.

In order to practice personal non-action (i.e., true faith), we must come before our Creator and Savior without any preconceived opinions. We must seek salvation on His terms and in His time, even if it requires that we endure worse suffering than we knew before! Having understood on an existential level that of ourselves we can do nothing at all, we cease trying, grasping, contriving – for «in make is to mar, to grasp is to lose». We merely acknowledge our sickness and our problem, bring it before our Savior the Tao/Logon, and blindly trust that He will save us in ways that only He knows.

We do not expect Him to save us immediately and once-for-all time, but rather we trust that He will continually save us – change ill and perfect us – through His Uncreated Energy, as long as we continue to give up our free will to Him and abandon ourselves to I In will, which is the Way of the universe.

In our ego-state, we constantly try to protect ourselves by taking refuge in judgmental thoughts. When we have learned the secret of non-action, however, we no longer feel the need to protect ourselves from people or circumstances. Surrendering ourselves to the Way, we not only trust Him to protect us, but we are no longer even conscious of a «self» (ego) that needs protecting.

When we are in a prideful condition, our actions are fueled by emotion, which is often based in resentment following on the heels of frustration. Through the personal non-action of faith, we cease to exert such emotional effort. In letting go of our will to prevail through ambitious striving, we find that the will of our Creator is accomplished naturally and spontaneously through us.

Spontaneity, as we have seen, is in the nature of the Tao/Logon, Since He is supremely selfless and without ambition, His continuous action of creating and upholding the universe is the supreme Non-Action – spontaneous, effortless. Thus, when we do His will instead of our own, good appears of its own accord, flowing effortlessly into our life. There is no frustration, no dissatisfaction.⁶³⁹

25. Healing through Non-Action

Lao Tzu understood that the true healing of our spirits comes not as a result of outside pressures, that is, of being constantly told to be kind, good, generous, etc. Rather, it comes from within – from returning to our true nature by ever returning to our Creator, Therefore he wrote:

When the great Tao is forgotten,

Kindness and morality arise....

When there is no peace within the family,

Filial piety and devotion arise....

These are outward forms alone; they are not sufficient in themselves.

It is more important

To see simplicity,

To realize one's true nature,

To cast off selfishness

And temper desire.⁶⁴⁰

In practicing non-action, we do not try to heal ourselves; rather, we allow ourselves to be healed by the Way. We do not ambitiously strive to get rid of our problems, for when we return to our original nature by connecting with the Way, we find that our problems find their own solution, spontaneously.

In this way we can also lead others to their original nature – to where they have fallen from. And we will do so without having to apply pressure; we will allow them to find on their own the true Source of the spirits healing. As Lao Tzu stated:

The sage brings people back to what they have lost.
He helps the ten thousand things find their own nature,
But does not venture to lead them by the nose.⁶⁴¹

26. The True Source of Knowing

Non-action naturally entails no-thought. But just as non-action does not strictly mean doing no action, so also no-thought does not mean having no thoughts. As we have seen, it is a vain contrivance to attempt to stop thinking. All that is necessary is to observe our thoughts arising from selfishness and desire, and in so serving end them.

In telling us emphatically to «take no thought», then, Christ is not relegating us to a mental vacuum; instead, He is directing us in another means of understanding. Using this means, we find the spirit; and it is there, not in the thought-stuff of the lower soul, that the wordless Word speaks to us. When we are caught up in a thought or idea, we cannot hear Him. So He says to us: Stop losing yourself in thoughts, so that you can hear me.

Here it is important to mention that, in finding our immortal spirit, we must be careful not to rely on that either, for it too is created and thus can become an idol to replace God. Our spirit is a true source of knowing only insofar as it is allowed to fulfill its natural designation of yearning for, connecting with, and worshipping the true God. The spirit is the only faculty of true knowing, not because it is more «spiritual» than the lower soul, but precisely because it is the only faculty that can know God.

It is not enough, therefore, for the soul to place itself under the spirit, its master; the spirit must also be under its Master, the Spirit of God. When one seeks to find the spirit with a prideful motive, one continues as before to prevent the spirit from worshipping God. But when one's motive is pure, the spirit makes its Divine connection.

27. The Spirit as Light

When Christ and Lao Tzu called man's spirit «the light», they were speaking literally, for it can be experienced in the mind as light. «The light of the body is the eye», said Christ. «If therefore your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness».⁶⁴²

Archimandrite Sophrony describes how, as a young man, he beheld the light of his spirit. «The world of mental contemplation n, essentially a radiant one», he explains. «Our mind is created in the image and after the likeness of the Primal Mind – God. Light is natural to it since it was made in the image of Him Who is Light unoriginate».⁶⁴³

28. The Misuse of Watchfulness

Here we are treading on dangerous ground, so it is necessary to step lightly. This is where many who have practiced watchfulness have fallen into delusion over the centuries. Everything depends on the purity of one's intention in going within. If one's intention (conscious or unconscious) is not to face one's sin-condition, repent and thus be reconciled to God, but instead to «be spiritual» while continuing to worship oneself, then one can – upon becoming aware of the light of one's spirit – begin to worship it as God. This is the ultimate delusion.

Archimandrite Sophrony writes: «Attaining the bounds where day and night come to an end», man contemplates the beauty of his own spirit which many identify with Divine Being. They do see a light but it is not the True Light in which there 'is no darkness at all'. It is the natural light peculiar to the mind of man created in God's image.

«The mental light, which excels every other light of empirical Knowledge, might still just as well be called darkness, since it is the darkness of divestiture and God is not in it. And perhaps in this instance more than any other we should listen to the Lord's warning, Take heed therefore that the light which is in you be not darkness.' The first prehistoric, cosmic catastrophe – the fall of Lucifer, son of the morning, who became the prince of darkness – was due to his enamored contemplation of his own beauty, which ended up in his self-deification».⁶⁴⁴

The darkness of divestiture of which Fr. Sophrony speaks is the state of having risen above all thoughts and thought processes, which we have described earlier. If a person's motive is prideful, he will stop at this point, ad-

miring his own brilliance; but that brilliance will still be darkness. He will think he has found God, but God will not be there. He will find a kind of peace, but it will be a peace apart from God.

To go beyond thought is not yet to attain true knowledge. Such knowledge comes from the Word speaking wordlessly in the spirit that is yearning for Him; it does not come from the spirit itself. The Word will come and make His abode with the spirit only if the person approaches Him in absolute humility, for He Himself is humility, and like attracts like.

Fr. Sophrony writes further on those who go within themselves without humility: «Since those who enter for the first time into the sphere of the ‘silence of the mind’ experience a certain mystic awe, they mistake their contemplation for mystical communion with the Divine, whereas in reality they are still within the confines of created human nature. The mind, it is true, here passes beyond the frontiers of time and space, and it is this that gives it a sense of grasping eternal wisdom. This is as far as human intelligence can go along the path of natural development and self-contemplation....

«Dwelling in the darkness of divestiture, the mind knows a peculiar delight and sense of peace.... Clearing the frontiers of time, such contemplation approaches the mind to knowledge of the intransitory, thereby possessing man of new but still abstract cognition. Woe to him who mistakes this wisdom for knowledge of the true God, and this contemplation for a communion in Divine being. Woe to him because the darkness of divestiture on the borders of true vision becomes an impenetrable pass and a stronger barrier between himself and God than the darkness due to the uprising of gross passion, or the darkness of obviously demonic instigations, or the darkness which results from loss of Grace and abandonment by God. Woe to him, for he will have gone astray and fallen into delusion, since God is not in the darkness of divestiture.⁶⁴⁵

To experience the darkness of divestiture and the light of the mind, says Fr. Sophrony, «is naturally accessible to man», but to experience the Uncreated Light of the Divinity is given to man by a special action of God. These two experiences differ qualitatively from each other. Fr. Sophrony writes: «It has been granted to me to contemplate different kinds of light and lights – the light the artist knows when elated by the beauty of the visible world; the light of philosophical contemplation that develops into a mystical experience. Let us even include the light’ of scientific knowledge which is always and inevitably of very relative value. I have been tempted by manifestations of light from hostile spirits. But in my adult years, when I returned to Christ as perfect God, the unoriginate Light shone on me. This wondrous Light, even in the measure vouchsafed to me from on High, eclipsed all else, just as the rising sun eclipses the brightest star».⁶⁴⁶

The greatness of Lao Tzu lies in the fact that, in «using the light» of his spirit,⁶⁴⁷ he did not mistake it for a Divine manifestation – he did not identify it with the Tao itself. He went as far as pure human intuition could take him, he reached what Fr. Sophrony called «the border of Divine vision», yet he did not presume to have reached his final destination; hence the very tentative nature of his writings.

With the coming of the Tao in the flesh, we His followers are now able to cross that border, as Fr. Sophrony did. But in order to cross it, we have to reach that border along with Lao Tzu. We too must enter the darkness of divestiture, in humility and repentance, so that God will meet us there.

29. Hearing the Wordless Word

We do not practice watchfulness so that we can become silent and peaceful. Rather, we become silent so that we can know the unpleasant truth about ourselves, and so that we «hear» the Tao/Logos speaking directly to our inward being. He does not speak in an audible voice; His voice makes no noise even in the mind. «We listen for it», says Lao Tzu, «but cannot hear it».⁶⁴⁸ Scripture calls His voice still and small.⁶⁴⁹ We cannot hear it unless we tune in to it by separating from all the static noise in our heads.

As we practice watchfulness and rise to the level of our spirit, the Word of God begins to acclimatize us to the silent voice that leads us through all the circumstances of life. It is the same voice that immortal spirits use in the dimension beyond this one, as they commune with the Word without words. As the seventh-century visionary St. Isaac the Syrian said: «Silence is the mystery of the future age, while words are only implements of this world».

«Everyone who is of the truth», says Christ, «hears my voiced»⁶⁵⁰. If we cannot hear that silent voice speaking to our spirit, we will never develop a relationship with Him. In this regard we would do well to recall Christ's sobering words: «Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father Who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonderful works in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you: depart from me, you who work iniquity'».⁶⁵¹

As the Creator of the universe, the Word of God of course knows everything; therefore, when He says. «I never knew you», He is clearly implying more than that. In effect, He is saying: «You never knew me. You and I never developed a relationship because you were always listening to your thoughts,

emotions and desires rather than to me. You did not learn to distinguish my wordless voice from all the other voices in your head».

Through watchfulness we begin to understand, even in the minute details of our daily lives, how the Word is informing, guiding and helping us. We hear His silent voice directing us. We begin to discern His will and follow it naturally. We understand, and He knows we understand, and in that mutual recognition we make a connection with Him. One such connection is then linked to other ones, and thus we form a relationship with a Being we have never seen. Then He will not say to us, «I never knew you» – for He did know us, and we knew Him.⁶⁵²

Chapter Four: Prayer to the Tao

«Lord Jesus Christ,
Son of God,
have mercy on me, a sinner».

30. Personal Communion

Lao Tzu, it may be said, had a relationship with this Absolute Being even before He revealed Himself to the world in Jesus Christ. Because of his spirit of humble yearning, Lao Tzu was given to intuit the presence of the Tao as he sat at attention. He heard the Taos silent voice, but he did not know Who it was that spoke. «I do not know its name», he said. «‘Way’ is the byname that we give it».⁶⁵³

Now, with the coming of the Tao in the flesh to all the peoples of the earth, we do know Who it is that speaks in our spirits. «We beheld His glory», says the Apostle John, «the glory as of the only begotten of the Father».⁶⁵⁴ Thus our relationship with Him, even as we sit silently and watch, becomes a personal one. It passes into a communion of love.

Earlier we defined prayer as personal communion with the bio. Now that, in Christ, we know the Tao as Person, the watchfulness that Lao Tzu practiced can itself be a form of prayer: a silent, humble yearning for Him Whom we know. Further, we are able to do what Lao Tzu was not: we can directly invoke the Tao.

In *The Philokalia*, St. Hesychius identifies the different kinds of watchfulness that can be practiced by followers of the incarnate Tao. «I shall now tell you», he says, «in plain, straightforward language what I consider to be the types of watchfulness which gradually cleanse the spirit from impassioned thoughts. In these times of spiritual warfare I have no wish to conceal beneath words whatever in this treatise may be of use, especially to more simple people....

One type of watchfulness consists in closely observing every mental image or provocation; for only by means of a mental image can satan fabricate an evil thought and insinuate this into the spirit in order to lead it astray.

A second type of watchfulness consists in freeing the heart from all thoughts, keeping it profoundly silent and still, and in praying.

«A third type consists in continually and humbly calling upon the Lord Jesus Christ for help».⁶⁵⁵

We have already described the first of these types in detail. The others – which entail prayer to the Tao – will be discussed in the pages that follow.

31. Words Are Only a Support

Addressing the Creator with words is what is commonly known as prayer. However, it is important to understand that true prayer is beyond words, since, ultimately, God does not commune with us on the level of language. As St. Theophan the Recluse teaches, words are only used to help support and deepen the real prayer that should be occurring on the level of the spirit.

When we pray in our own words, it is not good to make long, carefully constructed speeches, which only involve us in our logical minds and thus cause us to remain on the level of the lower soul. God has no need of such speeches, for He beholds our spirit and knows everything. Our prayers should arise spontaneously from our hearts. «For out of the abundance of the heart», says Christ, the mouth speaks». ⁶⁵⁶

«Do not try to use many words», St. John Climacus counsels, «lest your mind become distracted by the search for words. An excessive multitude of words in prayer disperses the mind in dreams, while one word or a short sentence helps to collect the mind». ⁶⁵⁷

St. Theophan tells us how such short prayers should be said frequently as a means of raising mind and heart to God: «We should turn to God not only when we are standing at prayer, but as far as possible throughout the day. There should be an unceasing offering of ourselves to Him.

«To achieve this, it is necessary to begin – as often as possible during the day – by calling out to God from the heart in short words, according to our needs and in ways appropriate to the events around us». ⁶⁵⁸

Likewise, St. Ignatius Brianchaninov writes: «Before every undertaking, that is to say, before beginning a conversation or starting any work, we should raise our mind to God and ask Him for enlightenment and help». ⁶⁵⁹

32. Confessing Lapses

«You cannot become passionless all at once», says Elder Ambrose of Optina, «But every time you feel your sinfulness say: ‘Lord, forgive me!’ Only the Lord is able to put love into a person’s heart». ⁶⁶⁰



St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (1807–1867) was, along with St. Theophan the Recluse, the nineteenth century’s foremost interpreter of the ancient wisdom of The Philokalia. His rare insights into the psychology of modern man and refined teachings against demonic deception make him a sure *guide of spiritual sober-mindedness* for our times.

In the spirit of metanoia, it is especially important that we conic v; to God our wrongs as soon as we recognize them through the practice of watchfulness, and that we frequently call upon Him to grant us the inward purification known as forgiveness. St. Gregory of Sinai teaches: «The mind is led captive everywhere; and it cannot regain its stability unless it submits to God and is stilled by Him, joyfully uniting with Him through unceasing and diligent prayer and through mentally confessing all our lapses to Him each day. God immediately forgives everything to those who ask forgiveness in a spirit of humility and contrition and who ceaselessly invoke His holy name».⁶⁶¹

St. Hesychius writes: «When under the pressure of stupid thoughts, we will find relief and joy by rebuking ourselves truthfully and unemotionally, or by confessing everything to the Lord as to a human being. In both these ways we will always find tranquillity, whatever troubles us».⁶⁶²

St. Ignatius gives similar advice: «If from weakness or, more correctly, on account of your fallen nature, you happen to be distracted by alluring thoughts and fancies, do not get despondent and do not grow slack. Repent before God of your levity and frivolity, confess your fallen nature and your distraction, fall down mentally before His mercy, and take precautionary measures against seductive dreams and seductive thoughts».⁶⁶³

When we are troubled in mind, having through neglect allowed a passion or resentment to grow in us, we should stop thinking about it, stop trusting

our «problem-solver» to put things right, and simply call upon our Creator, laying everything before Him. If our prayer is from the heart, we will not be hindered by trying to think up words. Even as we speak with our tongue or in our minds, our spirit will be calling upon God silently. The very act of humbling ourselves by calling upon our Creator already places us in submission, and strikes a blow to the proud ego that got us into double in the first place.

33. «Self-forgetting» in Prayer

The virtue of self-forgetting, which Lao Tzu discerned as a quality of Divinity and which Christ manifested in Himself, can be cultivated by us through heartfelt prayer for others. «We must pray for others with contrition and pain of soul», says Elder Paisius of Mount Athos. «When someone has cancer or some other big problem, and in spite of this is not concerned about himself, but supplicates God for others, then God is ‘moved.’ Then, in some manner,

I lie man has a certain ‘weight.’ He says to Christ, ‘I am not concerned for myself and do not ask for anything, but I beg You, help I In others.’ And so God helps».

Elder Paisius said that one can pray for others with contrition «only if one considers, from humble-mindedness, that one is the cause of everything that befalls ones neighbor».

At this the Elder was asked, «But how can you consider yourself at fault if, for example, someone in Athens separates from his wife?»

The Elder answered, «Well, I say within myself: ‘If I were a saint, like the ancient fathers, I would ask God to grant that they would agree and love each other, and God, Who has promised to hear the saints, would help them. Therefore because I am not a saint, God does not hear me. In consequence, I am at fault that this family is being broken and for whatever evil happens.’ And so lit this way I do not judge anyone, but accuse only myself for even thing. Then God helps».⁶⁶⁴

Above all, we should pray for those who hate or wrong us. A» we have seen, it was Lao Tzu who first taught the doctrine of returning good for evil. Christ later enunciated this in the commandment, «Love your enemies», and then told us how we are to love them: by blessing, doing good to, and praying for them. He said, «Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father Who is in heaven; for He makes I lit sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust».⁶⁶⁵

Through such prayer we purge our heart of the venom of hatred. Whenever we catch ourselves judging and condemning someone, we should, following Christ's command, immediately pray for that person. We will find that the constant practice of this rule is a most effective means against the spirit of resentment. In the words of Elder Paisius, God is «moved» by such prayer, and through His Grace He transforms our anger into love that transcends the human and touches the Divine.

34. «Non-Action» in Prayer

In keeping with the principle of «non-action», we should not call upon God from selfish desire or with preconceived opinions, but rather we should trust His wisdom and timing in meeting our true needs. This spiritual attitude of surrender and trust is beautifully expressed in a prayer of St. Philaret of Moscow († 1867):

«Lord, I do not know what to beg of You; You alone know what is needed for me. You love me more than I know how to love You. O Father, give to Your slave that for which I do not even know how to beg. I do not dare to ask for either a cross or for consolation; I dill only standing before You with my heart open to You. You see my needs which I do not even know; see and deal with me according to Your mercy. Purge and heal me, humble me and raise me; I am in awe before You and I am silent before Your will and Your unfathomable ways for me. I am bringing myself as a sacrifice to You; teach me to pray. Pray Yourself within me. Amen».

Elder Michael of Valaam († 1962), a great mystic of the twentieth century, instructed his spiritual children to read this prayer every day, as an aid to bringing them into a proper attitude before their Creator.⁶⁶⁶

35. The Power of Direct Appeal

As we have seen, it is futile to try to struggle against thoughts by our own willpower; rather, our struggle should be to raise our minds and hearts to the help of the Most High. This we can do simply and instantaneously though direct appeal to Christ the incarnate Tao/Logos. St. Hesychius teaches: «The spirit cannot conquer a demonic fantasy by its own unaided powers, and should never attempt to do so. The demons are a sly lot: they pretend to be overcome and then trip us up by filling us with self-esteem. But when we call

upon Jesus Christ, they do not dare to play their tricks with us even for a second».⁶⁶⁷

St. Theophan explains further the power of direct appeal in the practice of watchfulness: «Whenever we appeal directly to the Lord with fear, reverence, hope and faith in His complete activity without entering into a verbal battle with the passionate thought, the passionate thought then moves away from the mind's eye, which is fixed on the Lord. When it is cut off from the mind through such attention, the passionate thought departs of its own accord, if it has been naturally stimulated. If the enemy is involved, however, then a discerning ray of light that comes from contemplation of the Lord strikes him. It happens that the mind immediately calms down from passionate violations as soon as it turns to the Lord and calls upon Him.

«To make this clearer to you, I will tell you a legend. An elder lived in the desert of silence. The demons visibly attacked him, and began dragging him out of his cell so as to completely drive him out of the desert. The elder himself began fighting back at them, but they moved him and had already dragged him right up to very door. Just a bit more, and they would have turned him out. Seeing his extreme danger, the elder called out, 'Lord Jesus Christ! Why have you abandoned me? Help me, Lord!' As soon as he called out, the Lord appeared immediately and chased away the demons, and said to the elder, 'I did not abandon you, but because you did not call on me and thought you could cope with the demons yourself, I did not come to your help. Call on me, and you will always receive ready help.' After saying this, the Lord disappeared. This incident is a lesson not just to the elder, but to all of us: Do not struggle with passionate thoughts through your own spiritual altercations with them, but turn immediately to the Lord with prayers against them».⁶⁶⁸

There are times – such as after a passion or demonic temptation has begun to get a hold on us – when an especially fervent appeal is in order. St. John Climacus advises: «For those who have not yet obtained true prayer of the heart, violence in bodily prayer is a great help – I mean stretching out the hands, beating the breast, sincere raising of the eyes to heaven, deep sighing, frequent prostrations....

«If possible, go apart for a brief space. Hide for a while in some secret place. Raise on high the eyes of your soul, if you can; but if not, your bodily eyes. Hold your arms motionless in the form of a cross, in order to shame and conquer the unclean spirit by this sign. Cry to Him Who is mighty to save, not with cleverly spun phrases, but in humble words, preferably making this your prelude: 'Have mercy on me, for I am weak.'⁶⁶⁹ Then you will know by experience the power of the Most High, and with invisible help you will invisibly drive away the invisible ones (the demons)».⁶⁷⁰

36. The Jesus Prayer

In the tradition of The Philokalia – the Eastern Orthodox tradition – there is an especially powerful prayer by which to call upon the incarnate Tao. It is called the Jesus Prayer. When done with pure intention, the Jesus Prayer encompasses all that we have spoken of thus far: metanoia, being forgiven and forgiving, and cultivating Grace through watchfulness and prayer.

The Jesus Prayer is a short, simple prayer, based on the prayer of the blind men in the Scriptures (Matthew 20:30–31; Luke 18:38) and of the publican in Christ's parable (Luke 18:13). The full prayer is: «Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner». Sometimes it is done in shortened form in order to better maintain attention on the words: «Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me».

In the first half of the prayer, we confess that Christ is indeed the incarnation of the Word by Whom all things were made, and We invoke Him, the Tao made flesh. Because Jesus is the name that the Logos took when putting on the raiment of abasement and humility (i.e., human flesh), there is no more powerful name on earth to oppose the proud fallen spirits. In the words of the Apostle Peter, «there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved».⁶⁷¹

In the second half of the prayer, we confess our sin-condition and with every breath we call upon the Word to forgive us, to purify our spirits. Thus in the Jesus Prayer is contained the whole mystery of continuous metanoia.

According to St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, «the essential properties of this prayer should be: attention, the enclosure of the mind in the words of the prayer, extreme unhurriedness in pronouncing it, and contrition of spirit. Although these conditions are necessary for all prayer, they are more easily observed and more needed in which practice of the Jesus Prayer. In psalmody the diversity of thought in which prayer is clothed involuntarily attracts the attention of the mind and causes it some diversion. But in the case of the Jesus Prayer, the mind is concentrated on a single thought: the thought of the sinners forgiveness by Jesus. Outwardly this activity is the most dry, but in practice it proves to be the most fruitful of all the soul's activities. Its power and value derive from the all-powerful, all-holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ».⁶⁷²

«The action of this prayer», says St. Barsanuphius of Optina († 1913), «is always hidden by the greatest mysteries. It does not consist merely in speaking the words, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,' but reaches the heart and mysteriously settles there. Through this prayer we enter into relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, we become accustomed to Him, we merge with Him into one whole. This prayer fills the soul with

calm and joy amidst the most difficult trials, in the midst of every oppression and human vanity».⁶⁷³

The Jesus Prayer represents the barest essence of the direct invocation of the Tao/Logos that Christ made possible through His coming in the flesh. As St. Ignatius teaches, this prayer was indicated by Christ Himself shortly before His crucifixion:

«The use of the all-holy, Divine name Jesus in prayer, and prayer in His name, was appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. We can be convinced of this from the most sublime and profound conversation recorded in the Gospel of St. John which the Lord had with the holy Apostles after the Mystical Supper, in that momentous hour which preceded the Lords voluntary departure to the place of His betrayal and agony, for the salvation of mankind. The teaching given by the Lord in that hour has the character of a final, deathbed instruction in which He gathered and expounded before His disciples, and in their persons before the whole of Christendom, the most soul-saving and final commandments, sure and infallible pledges of eternal life.

«Among other pledges and spiritual gifts, there is given and ratified the command and permission to pray by the name of Jesus. And whatsoever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask anything in my name, I will do it So far you have asked for nothing in my name. Ask and you will receive, that your joy may overflow».

«What is it that will be given to a person who prays in the name of the Lord Jesus that can fill him to overflowing with joy? He will be given – we reply in the words of our Lord – the Holy Spirit ‘Whom the Father will send in my name’».⁶⁷⁴

St. Gregory of Sinai affirms that the Jesus Prayer is one of the primary ways by which one can cultivate the seed of Grace given at baptism: «The Energy of the Holy Spirit is manifested to those under spiritual guidance through the continuous invocation of the Lord Jesus, repeated with conscious awareness, that is, through mindfulness of God». St. Gregory says that this means can be more effective than others «if one diligently and persistently learns how to dig the ground and locate the gold. Thus if we want to realize and know the truth ... let our aim be to make the energy of prayer alone active in our hearts, for it brings warmth and joy to the spirit, and sets the heart alight with an ineffable love for God and man. It is on account of this that humility and contrition flow richly from prayer. For prayer in beginners is the unceasing noetic activity of the Holy Spirit. To start with it rises like a fire of joy from the heart; in the end it is like light made fragrant by Divine Energy».⁶⁷⁵

37. Precautions in Doing the Jesus Prayer

Since the Jesus Prayer is such a powerful means toward union with the Creator Logos, it is also dangerous when practiced prematurely or with the wrong intention. Therefore some warnings are in order.

From ancient times unto today, those who have reached advanced levels of prayer are unanimous in affirming that the Jesus Prayer should only be practiced by those who have been illumined in the waters of Orthodox baptism, or are at least preparing themselves for it. The Jesus Prayer comes from a certain context – the Eastern Orthodox transmission – and it should be kept in that context. Otherwise it loses its effectiveness, and the traditional safeguards against error and delusion are absent.

Those who take up the Jesus Prayer as in a vacuum often find themselves in a serious predicament. One non-Orthodox man, for example, recently wrote about a frightening experience he had right after doing the Jesus Prayer: he entered an icy void, he said, and had «a feeling that could only be described as arctic». J. D. Salinger's book *Franny and Zooey*, which helped to popularize the Jesus Prayer in the West, provides an accurate description of what can happen to a person as a result of continuously saying the Jesus Prayer while being outside the Orthodox tradition. Unaccountably, Franny found herself having hysterical weeping fits.

The Eastern Christian transmission, going back in an unbroken lineage to Christ Himself, has taught some form of the Jesus Prayer for nearly two millennia. To do it freelance, avoiding the discipline from which it came, can be an act of pride. This defeats the very purpose of the Jesus Prayer, for it is a prayer of repentance.

Being linked to the transmission, however, is not a guarantee in itself. As with everything else in the spiritual life, one must come to the Jesus Prayer with love, humility and rigorous self-honesty. One can be Orthodox and practice the Jesus Prayer, and yet, rather than bearing the marks of inward purification, one can bear the marks of spiritual pride, haughtiness, coldness, knowing better, judgment of others, and lack of concern for people's true needs and problems.

38. The Wrong Use and the Right Use of the Jesus Prayer

The misuse of the Jesus Prayer results not so much from doing it wrongly – because one can be doing everything correctly, according to the tradition – as it does from doing it for the wrong reason. Again, as with watchfulness,

ones aim must be metanoia: facing one's self and shedding the ego out of a higher love for God. If one is not repenting while saying the Jesus Prayer, then one is not praying.

In the prideful use of the Jesus Prayer, the following often occurs: A person hears about how he can become holy by doing it, so he does it with this in mind. Not truly desiring to face himself as he is, he repeats the words of the prayer in order to buttress a false lineage of himself: the image of one who is becoming «spiritual». Meanwhile, the passions remain active in him, but he will not be able to see them unless someone comes and disturbs him.

When doing the Jesus Prayer as it should be done, one does not merely say the words; one actually prays them from the depths of one's being, speaking person to Person, always returning to the awareness that one is addressing Someone. «The Name of Christ», says Fr. Sophrony, «must not be detached from the Person of God, lest prayer be reduced to a technical exercise and so contravene the commandment, 'You shall not take the name of the Lord Your God in vain'⁶⁷⁶... Invocation of the Name of God the Savior, uttered in the fear of God, together with a constant effort to live in accordance with the commandments, little by little leads to a blessed fusion of all our powers».⁶⁷⁷

«You have to turn to the Lord with your mind», says Elder Nikodim of Karoulia, a practitioner of the Jesus Prayer who died recently on Mount Athos. «Don't just pronounce the words. You have to see the Lord Himself in the prayer. It is our designation in be like angels. Angels gaze unceasingly upon the Lord, and we have to strive for this, to see the Lord in the words with our mind, to look upon Him. But if with our mind we only say the words, then we will not look upon the Lord, and this is not enough for prayer.

«But this seeing is without images. It is with the spirit. God is a Spirit. As He explained to the Samaritan woman, 'You will worship in spirit.'⁶⁷⁸ We pray in spirit to the Lord Himself. How is this? When I turn to the Lord and right then believe and feel that I am looking upon the Lord and the Lord is looking upon me. The Lord is ceaselessly looking upon me. There's one good little statement in The Philokalia – 'God always sees us, but a man sees only when he sees nothing besides the Lord. Then he can even hear Him.' This a little expression from Elias the Presbyter in The Philokalia.

«You have to look upon the Lord with faith. Look upon the Lord and believe that the Lord is looking upon you. In spirit, pray in spirit! God demands worshippers who worship Him in spirit, God is a Spirit and one must worship Him in spirit. We, with our spirit, pray to God the Spirit. Our spirit is united with God. When we turn to God the Spirit with faith, then the Lord will look upon us and the human spirit will be united with the Spirit of the Lord as the time of prayer.

«You have to practice this. As always, when you pray, immediately turn to the Lord. Your spirit must address the Lord, and sense the Lord. Then there will be an echo; you'll receive a response. Mercy will come to you. This is all by faith – it's accomplished by faith – by faith and compulsion. That's what it is! 'Lo-o-ord Jesus Christ, have me-e-rcy on me!' This is a very good prayer. From one utterance of the prayer you already sense the taste of God's mercy. And the further you go, the greater it gets. If it's with attention. And at the time of prayer, if you go through the whole prayer rope, then tears will begin to flow ... contrition will come, and then warmth of heart will set in».⁶⁷⁹

39. The Jesus Prayer and Intrusive Thoughts

While doing the Jesus Prayer, we are to stand guard against a mental takeover by thoughts. As Fr. Sophrony writes, a person faces thoughts and then exterminates them by «shutting the doors of his heart and stationing his mind on guard like a sentinel, unfettered by imagination and cogitation but armed with prayer and the name of Jesus Christ».⁶⁸⁰

When one is truly praying with attention, one can cut short the growth of the passions at the outset with the aid of the words of the Jesus Prayer itself. The Philokalic writers, quoting a phrase from the Psalms of David, call this «dashing the infants against a rock».⁶⁸¹ As Elder Nikodim of Karoulia explains: «Thoughts begin with suggestions. There are even sinless suggestions.... When you pray, 'Lord Jesus Christ...', suggestions are like the 'infants' that you kill against 'the rock', Jesus Christ. As soon as thoughts/suggestions appear in the mind, you kill these 'infants'. If you allow them to enter in further, and are not attentive to the words of the prayer, but will ponder on them [the thoughts], then this is already conversing with them. After this is conjunction, joining, and then captivity, and they are now passions».

40. The Jesus Prayer as Repentance

Doing the Jesus Prayer in order to feel spiritual and distract ourselves from our sin-condition is of course a contradiction in terms. It works against the very aim of asking Christ, «Have mercy on me». Unless we have faced the private demons in our mind. It. how can we know how much we need Christ's mercy? Unless we know that we are truly perishing, how can we have Christ as our Savior?

The Jesus Prayer, as we have seen, is a prayer of repentance, while watchfulness is the foundation of repentance, since through it we begin to realize all the subtle, hidden passions and resentments of which we have to repent.

When we have seen our sin-condition through watchfulness, we are able to bring this condition immediately to mind when saying the Jesus Prayer, especially the marks of it that we have recently noticed. Then when we say, «Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, we can say it and really mean it. It will not just be saying words. Our inward being, which lies beyond words, will feel it.

Each time we say the Jesus Prayer with feeling, we are humiliating the proud ego and are placing ourselves under everything, under the Way of the universe. In this way we are, breath by breath, reversing in ourselves the effects of the primordial fall, when man tried to become God.

The marks of true watchfulness and prayer are effortless spontaneity, guilelessness, childlikeness, overflowing inward joy, tenderness of heart, unfeigned humility, courage (lack of doubt), forthrightness, abundant love, a nonjudgmental nature, and genuine, active care for people. Even in Russia today, these are regarded as the signs of a true elder or eldress. If a person's «spirituality» is calculated and forced, then one can be sure that he has not faced himself and become free of himself, no matter how humble he may act.

41. No Idols

As Elder Nikodim states, the Jesus Prayer – and all other kinds of prayer, for that matter – should be entirely without the deliberate formation of mental images: pictures of Jesus coming, etc. This pulls one down to the level of the lower soul and the realm of the fallen imagination, and is one of the fastest and surest routes to delusion. Since the awareness of the spirit is formless, one cannot be praying in the spirit while harboring images in one's head. Such an image is an idol.

Also, when saying the Jesus Prayer, one should be careful not to idolize the prayer itself, as if one can be saved by words rather than by the incarnate Logos Himself. St. Theophan warns:

«Hold no intermediate image between the mind and the Lord when practicing the Jesus Prayer. The words pronounced are merely a help, and are not essential. The principal thing is to stand before the Lord with the mind in the heart. This, and not the words, is inner spiritual prayer. The words here are as much or as little the essential part of the prayer as the words of any other prayer. The essential part is to dwell in God, and this walking before God

means that you live with the conviction ever before your consciousness that God is in you, as He is in everything: you live in the firm assurance that He sees all that is within you, knowing you better than you know yourself. This awareness of the eye of God looking at your inner being must not be accompanied by any visual concept, but must be confined to a simple conviction or feeling. A man in a warm room feels how the warmth envelops and penetrates him. The same must be the effect on our spiritual nature of the all-encompassing presence of God, Who is the fire in the room of our being.

«The words ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me’ are only the instrument and not the essence of the work; but they are an instrument which is very strong and effective, for the Name of the Lord Jesus is fearful to the enemies of our salvation and a blessing to all who seek Him. Do not forget that this practice is simple, and must not have anything fanciful about it».⁶⁸²

42. Levels of the Jesus Prayer

Archimandrite Sophrony indicates a certain sequence in the development of the Jesus Prayer. «First», he says, «it is a verbal matter: we say the prayer with our lips while trying to concentrate our attention on the Name and the words. Next, we no longer move our lips but pronounce the Name of Jesus Christ, and what follows after, in our minds, mentally. In the third stage mind and heart combine to act together: the attention of the mind is centered in the heart and the prayer is said there. Fourthly, the prayer becomes self-propelling. This happens when the prayer is confirmed in the heart and, with no especial effort on our part, continues there, where the mind is concentrated. Finally, the prayer, so full of blessing, starts to act like a gentle flame within us, as inspiration from on High, rejoicing the heart with a sensation of Divine love and delighting the mind in spiritual contemplation. This last state is sometimes accompanied by a vision of Light».⁶⁸³

Chapter Five: Laying a Foundation

43. Count the Cost

In order to reach these deeper levels of watchfulness and prayer, we must pay a heavy price. Christ tells us to «count the cost».⁶⁸⁴ We will not find success in the spiritual life until we are first ready to deny ourselves everything in this temporal life in order to be united with the incarnate Word. «If any one desires to come after me», said Christ, «let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me».⁶⁸⁵

Once we have taken up the cross, we cannot turn back. We must be one hundred percent committed. Christ tells us: «No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God».⁶⁸⁶ We cannot betray or doubt Him Whom we have chosen to follow. We must hold fast; otherwise, as Christ warns us, «the last state of the man [will be] worse than the first».⁶⁸⁷

Lao Tzu understood this even in his time, for he wrote:

If I have even just a little sense,
I will go along the Great Way,
And my only fear will be of turning from it.⁶⁸⁸

It is not enough to just «love God». Christ commands us to «love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind».⁶⁸⁹ When practiced aright, watchfulness and prayer help us to do precisely this, for they unite heart, soul and mind in ceaselessly yearning for and calling to the Creator Logos. To love God in this way means to love Him above everything else, to the point of hating our own egos which are attached to the things of this world. Christ said, «He who loves his life shall lose it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal».⁶⁹⁰

Likewise, Christ calls us to hate our earthly attachments. He said, «If any one comes to me and hates not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple».⁶⁹¹ This means to hate not the people themselves, but our fleshly dependence on them, which replaces our dependence on God. Clinging to others prevents us from loving not only God, but also the very people to whom we are clinging.

When we deny ourselves upon entering the life of watchfulness and prayer, we cut off our former routes of escape into sensual pleasure. We root out the most subtle manifestations of pride: all longing for «love», popularity, recognition, acceptance. Through going within ourselves, we identify our fa-

vorite passions, and then we begin to quench them, one by one. At every turn we cut off our own whims, doing instead the will of our Creator.

To do God's will means to follow the commandments which He revealed to the world through Jesus Christ. «Let Jesus alone act within you by His most holy commandments», says St. Ignatius. «If you live in this way, the Jesus Prayer will certainly blossom within you, quite independently of whether you dwell in the deepest solitude or amidst the noise of a community.... Life according to the commandments of the Gospel is the one true source of spiritual progress, accessible to everyone who sincerely desires to succeed in whatever outward situation he may be placed by the inscrutable providence of God».⁶⁹²

Christ's commandments are not mere rules, but rather existential indications of the Way of Heaven. When He said, «Love your enemies», or «Whoever would be first among you, let him be your servant»,⁶⁹³ He was revealing to us something of His own nature, so that we could be like Him and in harmony with the pattern of the universe. In cutting off our will and our resentments, we will naturally follow this pattern by lowering ourselves beneath everyone, by serving them and sacrificing ourselves for them.

Serving people does not mean giving them whatever they want. Through the inner knowing of our spirits, as they are informed by our Creator, we can distinguish peoples demands from their true needs, and then we fulfill the true needs, whatever the cost. Such is the Way of Heaven, and such the true meaning of love for others.

Without such self-sacrificing love manifested in actions, genuine prayer cannot exist. «None of you should think», writes St. Theophan the Recluse, «that simply because you labor in prayer, that is enough. It is not. We must be eager to care for all things – to perfect ourselves in every good work».⁶⁹⁴ «As the Apostle John states: «He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God Whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from Him: that he who loves God love his brother also».⁶⁹⁵

If our hearts are sincere, we will shun the isolated «spirituality» of self-pleasing and self-opinion. We will see that God provides us constant opportunities to cut off our will before other people. No longer wanting to do our own will, we will seek out a life that is accountable to others. In the context of marriage, this means vowed accountability and dedication to ones wife or husband; in a monastic context this means the same to ones spiritual father or mother, and to ones brothers and sisters. We must persevere in this especially when it runs contrary to our own desires and opinions. All of the ancient spiritual writers say this is essential if we are to progress in the life of prayer, because, without cutting off our will before others, we can think we are doing God's will (according to our own opinion) while we are really doing our own.

Furthermore, it is imperative that we give up – or at least bit willing to give up – all our resentments before we begin to pray. Christ said, «When you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, that your Father also Who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father Who is in heaven forgive your trespasses».⁶⁹⁶ Likewise St. John Climacus writes: «When you are going to stand before the Lord, let the garment of your soul be woven throughout with the thread of obliviousness to wrongs. Otherwise, prayer will bring you no benefit».⁶⁹⁷

44. Cutting off Distractions

Lastly, we must cut off external distractions. These begin with the very first distraction – indulgence in food – out of which are born all other sensual distractions, from love of comfort to sexual lust to tobacco smoking to drug and alcohol abuse. Among these, the use of marijuana is perhaps the most sinister, for it gives the illusion of being «spiritual» while making one unable to concentrate and thus to practice watchfulness and face oneself.

Having cut off the grosser forms of sensual distraction, we still face subtler distractions – this time coming from the hypnotic use of entertainment and information – which also dull the mind and hinder sobriety. Struck by a constant barrage of sounds, words and images in the modern Western world, our conscious minds are much more disjointed and fragmented than those of former times; our thoughts are more disorderly. However, as we continue to watch and pray, we will naturally begin to avoid these distractions as well. Activities which before seemed permissible will now conflict with our prayerful awareness. At first we may recognize television as a distraction, then music (particularly the crude modern forms of it), then newspapers and worldly magazines, then gossip and idle conversations, and so on.

«With all your strength», advises St. Hesychius, «pursue the virtue of watchfulness – that guard and watch of the spirit, that perfect stillness of heart and blessed state of the soul when free from Images, which is all too rarely found in man. This is the path of true spiritual wisdom. In great watchfulness and fervent desire travel along it with the Jesus Prayer, with humility and concentration, keeping both the senses and the spirit silent, self-controlled in food and drink and in all things of a seductive nature; travel along it with a mind trained in understanding, and with God’s help it will teach you things you had not hoped for; it will give you knowledge, enlightenment and instruction of a kind to which your spirit was impervious while you were still walking in the

murk of passions and dark deeds, sunk in forgetfulness and in the confusion of chaos».⁶⁹⁸

Fr. Sophrony speaks further on the need to guard against being caught by worldly impressions: «The pressure exerted by intrusive thoughts is extraordinarily strong, and to subdue it the monk must all day long force himself to avoid every single 'interested' look, not allowing himself to become attached to anything. His constant battle is to reduce outside impressions to a strict minimum. Otherwise, when the hour comes for interior noetic prayer everything that has made an impression will descend on the heart, causing great contusion».⁶⁹⁹

45. Putting to Death the Ego

From all of the above, it can be seen that nothing less than the slow, painful, merciless death of the ego is required of those who would enter into watchfulness and prayer in the right spirit. Cut off from its accustomed food, the ego retreats famished into a corner, where it cries out until at last it has no more energy, and it expires. With this, true life begins.

St. Theophan puts it this way: «The act of cleansing must be conducted by one's own self, without any self-pity. The motivator of this act is efficacious, living zeal. It is both chopper and knife, which always works extremely well when it is sharpened by Grace and guided by its suggestions. It is ruthless when it establishes itself in the heart. It cuts, ignoring the cries of its victim. It is for this reason that the work goes on successfully, and soon achieves its purpose. But the cutting is not the only thing. Once everything has been cut off, then zeal is present, but does not function as a knife. It acts as a guard, and turns all its fierceness on the enemies of salvation, on those annoyances from which no one is free and the shamelessness from which no one is ever left in peace».⁷⁰⁰

«Rise up from love of the world and love of pleasure», says St. John Climacus, «lay aside cares, strip your mind, renounce your body; because prayer is nothing other than estrangement from the world. What have I desired on earth beside You? Nothing, but to cling continually to You in prayer without distraction. To some, wealth is pleasant; to others, glory; to others, possessions; but my wish is to cling to God, and to put the hope of my dispassion in Him».⁷⁰¹

Chapter Six: The Union of Mind and Heart

46. The Heart (Hsin)

As prayer grows and deepens in us, it descends into the heart. In The Philokalia, as in the passage of St. John Climacus quoted above, this is called «prayer of the heart» or «noetic prayer» – the latter term being derived from the word nous.

The heart, say the Philokalic writers, is the «secret place» or «inner chamber» of the spirit. This was understood also by the Chinese in Lao Tzus time. «In Chinese», explains historian Mai-mai Sze, «the ‘mind’ is denoted by the character hsin 心 (heart), and in Chinese thought the heart was regarded as the seat of spiritual and moral intelligence and perception, its function being to control the emotions.... Here an early Greek concept offers an illuminating parallel, for the Chinese idea of the heart and its function was similar to Socrates’ concept of the ‘spirit,’ the work and function of which was ‘to know, to apprehend things as they really are and consequently, in particular, to know good and evil, and to direct and govern man’s acts.’ The form of the Chinese character ssu 思 (to think; also, thought), which is composed of a pictograph of ‘head’ in the form of a skull placed above that of ‘heart,’ suggests that thinking is guided by the heart and originates from it and is more important intuitively than intellectually».⁷⁰²

«Empty the heart» (Tao Teh Ching, ch. 3; The Philokalia, vol. 1, P.177).

Thus, for both the ancient Chinese and the ancient Greeks, the function of the heart was the same as that of the mind – and ultimately of the spirit, for the heart was known to be the spirit’s center. That is why, when Lao Tzu spoke of «emptying the heart/mind (hsin)», he was actually referring to separating ones spirit from thoughts that had intruded upon the heart.

In many places of the Gospels, Christ spoke of the heart as a center of spiritual awareness: «Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks»; «... And [the people] should understand with their heart»; «Those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart»; etc.⁷⁰³

This ancient understanding of the heart was passed on the Greek fathers of The Philokalia, who would at times use the words «heart» and «spirit» (nous) interchangeably.⁷⁰⁴ They taught that the spirit resides in the head and at

the same time is active in the heart. The spirit is united to the body, but it is not entirely within or without the body, for it is bodiless.⁷⁰⁵

In *The Philokalia*, the «heart» refers to the physical organ (or more specifically to the upper part of it), but it also refers to the spiritual center of man's being. In watchfulness and prayer, the spirit first finds the physical heart and then the metaphysical, spiritual heart.

«The ascetic», says Fr. Sophrony, «learns the great mysteries of the spirit through pure prayer. He descends into his inmost heart, into his natural heart first, and thence to those depths that are no longer of the flesh. He finds his deep heart – reaches the profound spiritual, metaphysical core of his being; and looking into it sees that the existence of mankind is not something alien and extraneous to him but is inextricably bound up with his own being».

47. Spiritual Feeling in the Heart

What we have called the «descent into the heart» is at the same time a unifying of mind and heart. The spirit, separated from thought-forms and images, becomes concentrated within itself, and in this way the head and the heart in which the spirit resides are brought together into one.

In the union of mind and heart, we again see the close connection between watchfulness and prayer. The mark of watchfulness is pure awareness in the mind. The mark of prayer is spiritual feeling in the heart. In noetic prayer, the feeling of the spirit praying in the heart gives flesh to the awareness of the spirit watching in the mind. Thus mind and heart are united just as soul is united to body.

By spiritual feeling in the heart we do not mean emotion. It is as far from emotion as watchfulness is from thoughts and logic. For just as emotion in the heart corresponds to thoughts and logic in the lower soul, so does spiritual feeling in the heart correspond to watchfulness in the spirit.

In Russian, spiritual feeling is called *umilenie*. This word is untranslatable. Literally it means reception of mercy (*milost*) by the *nous* (in Russian, *ume*). It refers at once to a tender contrition or brokenness of heart, a depth of humility and abasement mixed with quiet exultation, and spiritual sadness mixed with unearthly joy and thanksgiving.

Noetic prayer is prayer of a watchful mind within a heart broken by *umilenie*. Watchfulness must begin in the mind. Through prayer, it descends into the heart, where it becomes feeling. St. Theophan the Recluse writes: «The end of apprenticeship in prayer can be said to come when in our prayer

we move only from feeling to feeling. In this, deliberate thought may cease; let there be only a dwelling in feeling with specific marks of prayer.

«When the feeling of prayer reaches the point where it becomes continuous, then noetic prayer may be said to begin. This is the gift of the Holy Spirit praying for us, the last degree of prayer which our minds can grasp». ⁷⁰⁶

48. Awareness in the Heart

From his long experience of praying in the heart, Elder Nikodim speaks on the heart as a center of spiritual awareness:

«We pray with the heart. We are aware through the heart. But with the mind we only know that we're praying. If I'm praying, then I realize, I sense that I'm praying. I bring myself to an awareness. Then the feelings become manifest. And when the feelings appear, then tears flow. Without consciousness, without feeling, not one little tear will roll out.

If you only know (in the mind) that you're praying to the Lord, that's one thing. But when it's with the heart, then you sense that it's the Lord Himself Whom you are addressing.

When a person appeals with his heart, he is praying and has prayer of the heart. But if he does not have the awareness that he is addressing the Lord, then he's only praying with his head. He knows that there's a God, and remembers that he's addressing God, but he doesn't realize it. But awareness leads a man to feeling. When feeling comes, then he begins to weep. True repentance is then revealed. He becomes aware of his sins and begins to repent sincerely – 'Forgive me, forgive me, have mercy on me!' Everything concludes in the heart. That's how the Lord created us. He gave us a heart – 'our life'.

«That which you pronounce (in prayer) – be aware of with your heart. It's not only with my mind that I hear and understand that I'm pronouncing the words. No! With the awareness. Our awareness is located in the heart. This is the feeling of the heart. When you pronounce the words, be aware – as if you felt them. You have to practice this».

49. The Mind as Sentinel Over the Heart

When one fails to practice watchfulness, the heart becomes polluted by the continual influence of thoughts issuing from the mind. These thoughts

enter into the heart, as it were, and darken our spirits. It is not the temptations coming to us from without that can defile us, but rather our inward reactions to them, which take the form of thoughts and then make a lair in our heart. «All these evil things come from within», said Christ, «and defile a man».⁷⁰⁷

St. Theophan elucidates this teaching: «The mind's thoughts are all directed toward this earth, and there is no way to raise them to heaven. Their object is vain, sensual, sinful. You have seen how fog drifts along the valley. This is a precise picture of our thoughts. They all crawl and drift along the earth. In addition to this downward drifting, they constantly seethe, not standing still in a single place; they jostle each other, like a swarm of mosquitoes in the summer. In addition, they are always in motion.

«Beneath these there lies the heart. It is from the thoughts that I 'lows are continually struck in the heart and corresponding actions are produced. Whatever the thought, there is a corresponding action of the heart. From this is joy, anger, envy, fear, hope, pride, despair – they arise in the heart one after the other. There is no stopping them; just as with the thoughts, there is no order whatsoever. The heart continually trembles from the emotions like an aspen leaf».⁷⁰⁸

It follows from this, of course, that if we learn to cut off thoughts in our mind, they will not be able to enter into our heart. «The heart and mind are bound together», says Elder Nikodim. «When the mind is pure, then the heart will be pure. And when the heart is pure, then the mind will also be pure».



The joyful and childlike countenance of a true master of watchfulness and prayer: Elder Nikodim, schemamonk and hermit of Karoulia, Mount Athos († 1984). *Fr. Nikodim was an elder of the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood; his teach-*

ings on the Jesus Prayer are to appear in a forthcoming book of the Brotherhood, Praying in the Heart.

Thus, it is only when we are standing watch with our spirit in our mind that we can be truly praying with our spirit in our heart. For it is only then that we can pray with a pure heart; and «the pure in heart», says Christ, «shall see God».⁷⁰⁹ Here again it is seen why true prayer cannot exist without attention.

Speaking of how the mind is to stand guard over the heart, St. John Climacus writes: «It is one thing frequently to keep watch over the heart, and another to supervise the heart by means of the mind, that ruler and high-priest that offers spiritual sacrifices to Christ».⁷¹⁰

«Watchfulness», says St. Hesychius, «is a firm control of the mind and posting it at the door of the heart, so that it sees marauding thoughts as they come, hear's what they say, and knows what these robbers are doing, and what images are being projected and set up by the demons, so as to seduce the mind by fantasy».⁷¹¹

Fr. Sophrony also speaks of what occurs when the mind is stationed at the door of the heart in prayerful attention: «The mind becomes all ears and eyes, and sees and hears every extrinsic thought approaching from without, before it can invade the heart. Praying the while, the mind not only refuses to admit extraneous thoughts into the heart but positively thrusts them aside and preserves itself from association with them».⁷¹²

50. The Union of Mind and Heart through Grace

The separation of the mind from the heart, and their opposition to one another, have resulted from man's departure from the Way. This separation is overcome when our spirit, distributed throughout our being, unites its power in drawing closer to its Creator. Then we can truly love God with all our heart, mind and soul as with a single, unified force. In this as in everything else, however, we must realize that we are helpless to do it by our own unaided powers. We must rely wholly on the Power (Grace or *Teh*) of God. St. Ignatius explains: «It is natural for Divine Grace, when it stretches out its finger to heal a man, crushed and broken to pieces by his fall, to join together his severed parts and to unite the mind not only with the heart and soul but even with the body, and to give it a single, true ardor for God.

«With the union of the mind and heart the ascetic receives the power to resist all passionate thoughts and passionate feelings. Can this be the result of any technique? No! It is the result of Grace; it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit

Who overshadows the unseen labor of the Christian ascetic; and it is incomprehensible to carnal and natural people». ⁷¹³

51. Finding and Living from One's Center

It is only when the mind and heart are united in watchfulness and prayer that we can find our spiritual center: what Archimandrite Sophrony calls our «deep» or «metaphysical» heart. Our center cannot be adequately described in words. We experience it as a mysterious union of mind and heart, but at the same time it is neither the physical brain nor the heart. Although united to flesh, it is not in itself fleshly. Although not fleshly, it is not wholly immaterial, for only God is such. It is like an inner temple, uncircumscribed, with no walls, whose holy of holies is in the region of the heart. «Strive to enter the temple within yourself», says St. Isaac the Syrian, «and you will see the heavenly temple» ⁷¹⁴.

St. Theophan speaks of how this center is actually formed in tin through Grace. In a letter to his spiritual daughter he writes:

«Inner regulation begins only when you choose the side of Grace, and make the ways of life in the spirit of Grace the inviolable rule of your life. From that moment, as the decision is forming inside you, a center will also form within you, a powerful center, which will begin more and more forcefully to draw you toward itself. In this center will be Grace, which has taken hold of your consciousness and free will (or, your consciousness and free will, combined with Grace). This is the same thing which was previously called the resurrection or restoration of the spirit. Then the Grace of God will begin to draw toward this center all of the other forces of your nature, both intellectual and spiritual, and govern their entire action, retaining within them that which is good, and destroying that which is bad. This drawing of everything to one center and directing of all to one goal is the inner rebirth you have so fervently desired. Once this rebirth has been accomplished, then everything both great and small will proceed from this one center, and within you will be established the most perfect harmony, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will overshadow the inner temple of your nature». ⁷¹⁵

Finding and living from our center is the same as finding and living from our spirit. When we are living from our center, we are no longer reacting to outside pressures and temptations. Not reacting to pressures, we are free from the thoughts, emotions and desires that these reactions engender. We are internally rather than externally motivated, and thus we do not have to be con-

stantly filling ourselves with that which is outside of us: attention from other people, material things, etc.

Living from our spirit, we see ourselves and people and things around us as they really are. «The gathered one», says St. Theophan, «sees everything within himself. Someone in the center of a circle sees what is along every radius. He sees everything around him almost at the same time, while one who steps out of the center sees only that which is along one radius. It is the same for one who is gathered within – he sees all the movements of his powers and is able to govern them».⁷¹⁶

When we enter into our center, our spirit enters within itself, as it were. This is not self-absorption, however, since the spirit, when separated from outside impressions, will naturally seek out what is above and beyond itself: its Creator. Engaged in noetic prayer, it will hold wordless conversation with the Word Who made it.

52. Lao Tzu and Christ on the «Center»

Personal communion with Christ in our spiritual center is (to refer to our earlier analogy) the taking flesh of Lao Tzus intuitive observation of the Tao in this same center.

Lao Tzu referred to man's spiritual center as the «middle» or «belly» (腹), which Gi-ming Shien translates as «inner things» and Chinese commentator Liu Qi interprets as «inner spaciousness». In chapter 12 of the Tao Teh Ching we read:

The sage regards not the eye (i.e., viewing and living from externals), but the belly (i.e., finding and living from one's center).

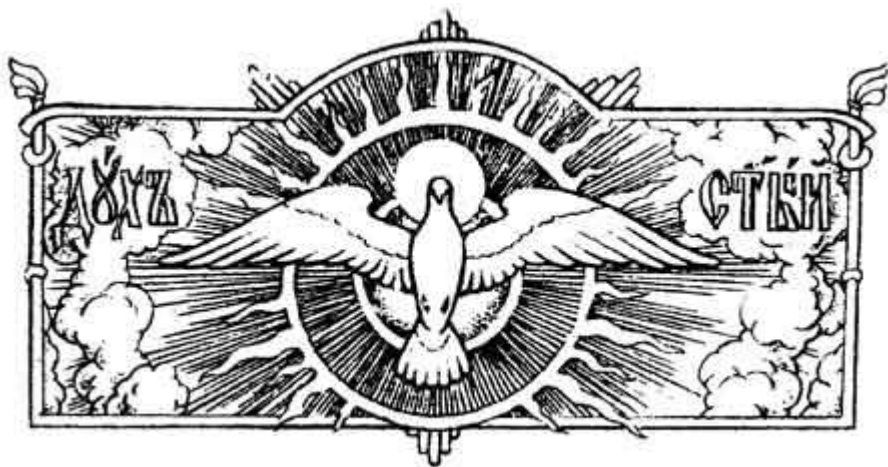
Therefore, he puts aside the one and takes the other.⁷¹⁷

Interestingly, Christ used the same metaphor when speaking of man's spiritual center: «He that believes on me, as the Scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water».⁷¹⁸

Here Christ not only spoke of the same reality that Lao Tzu had alluded to five centuries before, but He also revealed a new reality that His followers were to experience. For the «living water» that was to flow out of their center was the Grace of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel passage continues: «This He spoke concerning the Spirit, Whom those who believe in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified».⁷¹⁹

When Christ sent down the Grace of the Holy Spirit on His disciples after His death and resurrection, this Grace no longer acted upon followers of the

Tao/Logos from the outside, as it had in past ages, but now it could fill and flow out from their very center, their spiritual «belly» or «deep heart». To this subject we will return later.



Chapter Seven: Praying from One's Center

53. Persistence

In order to have a center formed in oneself, and to be able to pray from that secret place, it is imperative that one put one's time in before God, every day without fail. Specific periods of watchfulness and prayer must be set aside each day, especially in the morning and evening.

In the morning it is especially important to establish a foundation of watchfulness in the mind. Evenings and nights are generally more conducive to contrition of heart, wherein an inward purging occurs. «Night prayer», says Elder Nikodim, «prepares you for prayer during the day.... Humility, awareness, repentance. 'Forgive, O Lord, me who live in the world, who bear a body, and who am enticed by the devil.' Do this unceasingly. And, whatever little thing you do, turn to God's mercy with humility. Ask forgiveness of the Lord: 'Infirm am I.'»

Of course, besides the periods set aside for this purpose, one should strive to remain in a watchful, prayerful state at all times during the day.

«Make this your rule»: says St. Theophan, «Always be with the Lord in mind and heart, never allow the thoughts to wander, but when they do, call them back again and force them to stay at home in the house of the heart and speak with the most sweet Lord....

«These are the conditions for success: 1) Uninterrupted continuity of such undertaking – persistence in it. Do not keep starting and putting it aside over and over; rather, once you have begun, keep at it until success comes. In any case, success depends on the persistence of labor. 2) To bring this about, you need to arm yourself with patience and self-discipline. Uncertainty will come, desire will weaken, and even doubt will arise; you must drive all this away, and force yourself to continue in your labors. 3) To make this happen, be inspired with the hope that the Lord, seeing your labor over prayer and the diligence with which you seek to make it habitual, will at last grant you this prayer, and that once it has become consolidated in the heart, it will flow on its own like a fountain from it. This most blessed fruit is the fruit of prayerful labor! The expectation of it has inspired all those who pray, and the receiving of it has been for them a source of continual spiritual bliss, joy, and a peaceful heart in God. *мая* the Lord bestow this fruit on you! But without persistent, self-disciplined, patient, and hopeful labor, He will not bestow it. Have courage!»⁷²⁰

Wordless Prayer of the Mind and Heart

We have seen how words, although they give form to prayer and are an aid to it, do not in themselves constitute prayer. «Do not ever forget», St. Theophan says, «that the essence of prayer is the raising of the heart and mind to God.... If the mind becomes exhausted by saying the words of the prayer, then pray without words, bowing down before the Lord inwardly in your heart and giving yourself to Him. This is true prayer. Words are only prayers expression and are always weaker in God's eyes than prayer itself».⁷²¹

There is a time for words and a time for wordlessness. When your mind is stationed at attention and your heart is aware in spiritual prayer, you will know when to speak (either mentally or vocally) and when to be silent. Again St. Theophan writes: «Prayer may consist only in a standing before God, in an opening of the heart to Him in reverence and love. It is a state of being irresistibly drawn within to stand before God in prayer; or it is a visitation of the spirit in prayer.... In purely contemplative prayer, words and thoughts disappear, not by our own wish, but of their own accord.... Feeling towards God – even without words – is a prayer».⁷²²

Fr. George Calciu, in speaking about the long years of torture, isolation and deprivation he endured in communist prisons, often says that he was sustained through «prayer and contemplation». When he was once asked to explain the difference between these two, he said that by «prayer» he meant prayer with words, and by «contemplation» he meant wordless prayer.

«I was praying prayers that I had learned during my life», he said, «or I was making my own prayers because I had some need: I was oppressed or alone, or I was tempted by desperation, and so on. But when I was contemplating – this was to forget the words.

«Even when we are thinking, we are using words. Linguists say that in thinking we are miming words, because we are not able to think without words. But in contemplation, you don't use words. To contemplate is to be submerged in the presence of God. Then the spirit is free.

«During my contemplation, I didn't need words. I cannot explain it. It was like a dialogue without words between me and God, or between me and the Mother of God. Contemplating, I left this world. I was in a world without the presence of material things, in the world of the spirit. I kept my eyes closed. I was in the spirit, and it gave me spiritual satisfaction.

«The true meaning of contemplation is to be in touch with someone – to communicate with someone – without words. I was communicating with God or with the angels without any words.



Fr. George Calciu (1925–2006) was a Romanian Orthodox priest who endured twenty-two years in the communist prison system in his country. After his second imprisonment ended in 1984, he came to the United States, where he served at a church in Virginia until his repose. For more about his life and an account of his illumination by Uncreated Energy, see the Epilogue.

So, based on this experience I make a distinction between prayer and contemplation».⁷²³

In order to help bring the mind into sympathy with the heart, Fr. George Calciu, St. Theophan and others say that, during times of contemplation and prayer (especially the Jesus Prayer), one can place one's right hand over the upper left part of the heart.⁷²⁴ This practice is beneficial only when humbly undertaken in a spirit of «non-action» and non-contrivance. It should not involve any attempt to force the mind into union with the heart, the dangers of which will be discussed later.

55. On Natural Thoughts Which Arise During Prayer

We have shown how all thoughts, even seemingly good ones, should be passed over when practicing watchfulness of mind; this is equally important when praying with the mind in the heart. In the words of St. Ignatius: «Not only does every sinful emotion and every sinful thought disrupt the union of the mind with the heart; even all natural thoughts and feelings, however subtle

and disguised by an appearance of righteousness, destroy this union, and set the mind and heart in opposition to one another».⁷²⁵

Likewise, Fr. Sophrony writes: «By prayerfully fixing his attention in his heart, the ascetic strives to preserve his spirit from all thought. Thoughts may be natural in everyday life but they can also be consequent on Satanic influence. In prayer, the ascetic renounces for the time being, to the degree that he finds possible (which differs from man to man), the needs of his nature. Thoughts of demonic origin, he excludes altogether. This means that the mind at prayer rejects all thought, both natural and demonic....

«Sometimes something occurs in deep-set prayer that is difficult to explain. Lights appear around the mind, trying to attract the mind's attention to themselves, and if the mind refuses to pay attention, they, as it were, say to the mind, 'We bring you wisdom and understanding, and if you refuse us now, maybe you will never see us again.' But the experienced mind pays no attention whatever and they depart, not only unaccepted but even unacknowledged. The mind does not know for sure if it was an evil enemy or a good angel; but it does know by experience that if it stops to consider the brilliant thought, it loses prayer, and with great pains must seek it again. Experience shows that in the hour of prayer we must not listen even to good thoughts because if we do, other ideas will occur and, as Elder Silouan said, 'You will not continue undistracted.' Nothing can compensate for the loss of pure prayer».⁷²⁶

Once again, these writers are saying not that we should try to have no thoughts, but rather that we should not accept and follow after the thoughts that do come. If we do get caught in a thought, we should immediately raise our mind and heart to God again and, if we are doing the Jesus Prayer, should return our attention to the words of the prayer.

56. Breathing During Prayer

In the levels of the Jesus Prayer outlined earlier, verbal prayer is followed by prayer pronounced in the mind. The latter practice is often associated with the hesychastic ⁷²⁷ method of timing the prayer with one's breathing. This method can serve as a further aid to concentration, but it should not be undertaken rashly or pridefully lest it become another device of the self-justifying ego. «A gradual ascent into prayer is the most trustworthy», advises Fr. Sophrony. «The beginner who would embark on the struggle is usually recommended to start with the first step, verbal prayer, until body, tongue, brain and heart assimilate it. The time that this takes varies. The more earnest the repentance, the shorter the road».⁷²⁸

Like the verbal practice of the Jesus Prayer, the mental practice of timing the Jesus Prayer with the breathing should never be separated from the spirit of true prayer. The latter practice, writes Fr. Sophrony, «can be genuinely helpful if one does not lose sight of the fact that every invocation of the Name of Christ must be inseparably coupled with a consciousness of Christ Himself».

Some of the ascetic fathers of The Philokalia also speak of how one is to breathe during prayer: that is, that the breath should be controlled so as to be gentle and unhurried. One finds the same counsel in the Tao Teh Ching:

Can you, while controlling (or concentrating) your breath,
Make it soft like that of a little child?⁷²⁹

Since people over the centuries have been harmed both psychologically and physically by misapplying such counsels, a word of explanation should be given here. It is first necessary to point out that «controlling» the breathing does not mean forcing it.

Once someone, referring to the Philokalic teachings on breathing, asked the modern-day ascetic, Elder Nikodim, «Is your breathing inhibited that way?»

«No», replied Fr. Nikodim. «You have to do it smoothly, quietly and calmly, so that your breathing doesn't excite your nerves.... In The Philokalia Elder Ignatius writes, 'Inhale softly and exhale softly.' Otherwise, if you irritate your nerves, your prayer will be hotblooded, as Ignatius Brianchaninov says».

The questioner then asked Fr. Nikodim, «In so doing, don't you feel a kind of restriction in the chest?»

«No. It has to proceed freely. If you breathe forcibly, by this you'll also excite your nerves. It has to be calmly and gently. This is what Gregory of Sinai and our Russian Nilus of Sora indicate: as much as possible, restrain your breathing. What is the meaning here? Not to restrain the breathing so as not to breathe, or to draw in a breath and hold it in. No! Breathe freely, softly and calmly. This is what restraining the breath is.... The way we do it is through the nostrils, to the larynx and the lungs».

This, of course, is also very much in the spirit of Lao Tzu, who taught that «those who contrive (i.e., force things through ambition) mess things up».⁷³⁰

Secondly, we should mention that, when one's mind is at watch, one's breathing will naturally and spontaneously become soft and silent. St. Gregory Palamas († a.d. 1359) explains:

«This control of the breathing may, indeed, be regarded as a spontaneous consequence of paying attention to the spirit; for the breath is always quietly inhaled and exhaled at moments of intense concentration, especially in the

case of those who practice stillness both bodily and mentally. Such people keep the Sabbath in a spiritual fashion and, so far as is possible, they rest from all personal activities; they strip their soul's powers free from every transient, fleeting and compounded form of knowledge, from every type of sense-perception and, in general, from every bodily act that is under our sway, and, so far as they can, even from those not entirely under our sway, such as breathing»⁷³¹.

57. Reliance on Techniques

In The Philokalia one will also find instruction on how, while mentally saying the Jesus Prayer, one can lead the mind into rite heart with the aid of one's breathing. Archimandrite Sophrony writes of this method:

«The monk, having suitably settled his body, pronounces tin prayer with his head inclined on his chest, breathing in at the words 'Lord Jesus Christ (Son of God),' and breathing out at the words 'have mercy on me (a sinner).' During inhalation the attention at first follows the movement of the air breathed in as far as the upper part of the heart. In this manner concentration can soon be preserved without wandering, and the mind stands side by side with the heart, or even enters within it. This method eventually enables the mind the see, not the physical heart but that which is happening within it – the feelings that creep in and the mental images that approach from without. With this experience, the monk acquires the ability to feel his heart, and to continue with his attention centered in the heart without further recourse to any psychosomatic technique».⁷³²

Because the misapplication of this method, without proper guidance from an Orthodox spiritual father, can also lead to bad consequences, ascetic elders of recent centuries have generally steered people (especially lay people) away from the technique and towards a safer and simpler practice. Thus, Fr. Sophrony writes:

«This procedure [of following one's breath to the upper region of the heart] can assist the beginner to understand where his inner attention should be stayed during prayer and, as a rule, at all other limes, too. Nevertheless, true prayer is not to be achieved thus. True prayer comes exclusively through faith and repentance accepted as the only foundation. The danger of psychotechnics is that not a few attribute too great significance to method qua method. In order to avoid such deformation the beginner should follow another practice which, though considerably slower, is incomparably better and more wholesome – to fix the attention on the Name of Christ and on the words of the [Je-

sus] Prayer. When contrition for sin reaches a certain level the mind naturally heeds me heart».⁷³³

Likewise, St. Ignatius Brianchaninov teaches: «The essence of the matter consists in the union of the mind with the heart during prayer, and this is achieved by the Grace of God in its own time, determined by God. The above mechanism is fully replaced by the unhurried enunciation of the prayer, by a short rest or pause after each prayer, by gentle and unhurried breathing, and by the enclosure of the mind in the words of the prayer. By means of these aids we can easily attain to a certain degree of attention. The attention of the mind at prayer very soon begins to attract the sympathy of the heart. Sympathy of the heart and mind little by little begins to pass into a union of mind with the heart, and then the mechanism offered by the Fathers appears of its own accord. All the mechanical means having a material character are offered by the Fathers solely as aids to the attainment of attention in prayer as easily and quickly as possible, and not as something essential. The essential, indispensable property of prayer is attention.... True Grace-given attention comes from the mortification of our heart to the world Aids always remain merely aids».⁷³⁴

58. Premature Descent into the Heart

Until we know what it is to have a spirit that stands apart from thought, we will not truly know what it means to pray with the spirit in the heart. Therefore, we need to be humble, patient. We must take it slowly, and not try to force it. Following the counsel of the elders, we should practice keeping our attention on the words of the Jesus Prayer, with an abiding awareness of Him Whom we are invoking. As we have seen, it is not we who ultimately cause the union of the mind and the heart. Only God can do it, so we must trust in Him and in His timing, and not become ambitious about it. In everything concerning the spiritual life and prayer, the key is to not trust in and depend on ourselves. We cannot even depend on our own powers to separate our spirit from our ego. We will fill unless at all times we depend on God.

As St. Ignatius teaches, in time our heart will enter into closer sympathy with our praying mind. At first this is felt as contrition, tears come to our eyes. In our heart we feel a certain soreness – a pain which is not unpleasant, and which helps to draw the mind’s attention to the heart. About this pain St. Theophan writes: «Constant effort will achieve this quickly. There is nothing peculiar in this: the appearance of this pain is a natural effect. It will help you to collect yourself better. But the chief thing is that the Lord, Who sees your ef-

fort, will give you help and Grace in prayer. A different order will then be established in the heart».⁷³⁵

When the mind, with God's help, naturally establishes itself in the heart, we may also feel at times a certain spiritual warmth in the heart. This is a gift of God, which facilitates the unceasing remembrance of Him.

59. Do Not Try to Measure Your Progress

When such gifts come, we should not think much of them, or rather should not think much of ourselves. The ascetic writers tell us not to try to measure our spiritual state while at prayer. Thus St. Theophan writes: «When the query arises 'Is this it?', make it your rule once and for all mercilessly to drive away all such questions as soon as they appear. They originate from the enemy. If you linger over this question the enemy will pronounce the decision without delay, 'Oh yes, certainly it is – you have done very well!' From then on you stand on stilts and begin to harbor illusions about yourself and to think that others are good for nothing. Grace will vanish: but the enemy will make you think that Grace is still with you. This will mean that you think you possess something, when really you have nothing at all. The Holy Fathers wrote: 'Do not measure yourself.' If you think you can decide any question about your progress, it means you are beginning to measure yourself to see how much you have grown. Please avoid this as you would avoid fire».⁷³⁶

Conversely, we should not grow discouraged when we do not seem to reach profound prayerful states. Our aim is not to attain to certain states, but to continually raise our minds and hearts to God out of our love for Him. Even if we have not been able to do this undistractedly, God honors our effort. As St. John Climacus writes: «Do not say, after spending a long time at prayer, that nothing has been gained; for you have already gained something. And what higher good is there than to cling to the Lord and persevere in unceasing union with Him?»⁷³⁷

60. At the End of Prayer Times

If at the end of prayer times we continue to stand watch, we will see two things: 1) how our mind has been clarified and illumined by prayer established in the heart; and 2) how this clarity of mind is now being threatened by more intrusive thoughts. Our being aware of this can help us, as we rise from prayer,

to guard what we have gained. St. John Climacus teaches: «When prayer is finished wait soberly, and you will see that swarms of demons, as if challenged by us, try to invade us after prayer with absurd fantasies. Sit and watch; you will see those who are in the habit of snatching away the first fruits of the soul».⁷³⁸

On rising from prayer, says St. Theophan, «the warriors of Christ should keep watchful guard over two things in particular: sobriety and discernment. The first is directed within, the second outward. With sobriety we observe movements which come out of the heart itself; with discernment we foresee movements which are about to be roused in it under the impulse of external influences. The rule for sobriety is: after every thought has been banished from the soul by the memory of God's presence, stand at the door of the heart and watch carefully everything that enters or goes out from there. Especially do not let your actions be prejudiced by emotion and desire, for all evil comes from there»⁷³⁹.

In order to maintain this state of watchfulness, it is necessary to realize that we are perishing every minute. Realizing this, we will continually call out to Him Who saves us. «Let the remembrance of Jesus be present with each breath», says St. John Climacus, «and then you will know the value of stillness».⁷⁴⁰

Chapter 8: Emptiness

61. Self-Forgetting Love

According to St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, the effects of true prayer are twofold: illumination of the mind (through attention), and contrition of heart (through the mind's descent into it and the heart's awareness of God's presence). When contrition seizes the heart through the action of the wordless Word within it, then man's spirit begins to experience, in some small measure, the life of the Word Himself.

The overarching characteristic of the Word, as Lao Tzu saw even in his time, is a depth of humility which is impossible to express in human language. The Way, said Lao Tzu, is like water, which always seeks the lowest place. So too, our spirit, when renewed by the Word in the process of metanoia, has an all-consuming yearning to get under everything. Before, in our unregenerate state, we had always been striving to get above everything, through pride, judgment and power. Now the opposite occurs. We are inexpressibly sorry for everything, for now we realize that, all along, we had been striving to get above, not only our fellow man, but God Himself. We weep, realizing the full depth of our fall. How we seek to get under God again, but we find that we cannot – and that is the beauty of it, for the Word Himself is the Supreme Humility which always lies beneath all things. Still our spirit yearns for this lowering, this ultimate abasement, and in the intensity of this yearning we at last realize what it truly means to love our Maker.

The spirit, praying within the heart, seeks to close itself off from everything outside, and to cut off from itself our false identity the «problem-solver». It seeks to go ever deeper, ever lower, and to hide in the wordless Word Who speaks in it.

«The truly humble man», says St. Isaac the Syrian, «wishes to enter and dwell in stillness, to forsake totally his former conceptions together with his senses, and to become as something that does not exist in creation, that has not come into being in this world, that is totally unknown even to his soul and his senses. And so long as such a man is hidden, locked away and withdrawn from the world, he remains wholly with his Lord».⁷⁴¹

This is the perfect self-emptying and self-forgetting which Lao Tzu foreshadowed and Christ revealed to the world. Paradoxically, now that the Tao has taken flesh, the emptiness that Lao Tzu described can be experienced in its fullness. As we have seen in the previous Part, the full, personal dimension of self-emptying/selfforgetting is known to man's spirit as love, love be-

tween God and man, and between man and man – just as it is between the three Persons of the Divinity.

In loving his Creator, the follower of the incarnate Tao finds that his «I» has become uninteresting to him. He wishes to grow into the likeness of Christ, as a son to his father, to become bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. When he partakes of the mystery of Christ's Body and Blood, he wishes to no longer be an «I»; rather, he wishes to be a «He».

In seeking to «become as something that does not exist in creation», the follower of the Way does not lose his usefulness and effectiveness in the world. On the contrary, it is in this that he finally becomes useful, for he is no longer acting from himself but from the Tao/Logos. Lao Tzu wrote:

Clay is molded into a vessel,

But the ultimate use of the vessel depends upon the part where nothing exists.

Doors and windows are cut out of the wall of a house,

But the ultimate use of the house depends upon the parts where nothing exists.⁷⁴²

The follower of Christ the incarnate Tao seeks to become just such a useful nothing.⁷⁴³

62. The Abyss of Humility

Having cut itself away from all visible things, and having even become «totally unknown even to his soul and his senses», the spirit of the follower of the Way becomes – in the words of St. Basil – «forgetful of its own nature».⁷⁴⁴ Having been lowered to the abyss of humility and thus become like the Tao/Logos Himself, it begins to see things as God sees them, and begins to overflow with love for all creation.

«Humility», writes Nicetas Stithatos, «is the greatest of the virtues. If as a result of sincere repentance it is implanted in you, you will also be given the gift of prayer and self-control, and will be freed from servitude to the passions. Peace will suffuse your powers, tears will cleanse your heart, and through the abiding presence «I the Holy Spirit you will be filled with tranquillity. When you have attained this state, your consciousness of the knowledge of God will grow lucid and you will begin to contemplate the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven and the inner essences of created filings. The more you descend into the depths of the Spirit, the more you plumb the abyss of humility. Correspondingly you gain greater knowledge of your own limitations and recognize the weakness of human character; at the same time your love for God and your

fellow beings waxes until you think that sanctification flows simply from a greeting or from the proximity of those with whom you live....

«Once you have achieved this lofty state you cannot be constrained by sensory attachment to things. You are not distracted by any of the delectations of this life, nor do you regard some people as holy and others as unholy; but just as God makes the ram fall and sun shine equally on the just and on the unjust, on the evil and on the good, so you irradiate love and diffuse its rays to all people. Pregnant though you are with love for everything, yet your heart feels no distress or, rather, you are distressed and straitened because you cannot help others as much as you would wish. As from Eden, from you flows another spring of compunction, divided into the four streams of humility, chastity, dispassion and undistracted prayer; and it waters the face of God's entire spiritual creation.⁷⁴⁵

63. The Birth of the Logos

When man's spirit reaches the supreme point of abasement, God at last sees fit to make His dwelling place there. The Apostle Paul calls this having Christ «formed» in us (Galatians 4:19). Nicetas Stithatos calls it «the birth of Christ» or «the birth of the Logos» within us. He writes:

«Once [Christ] the Bridegroom has led the soul into the sanctuary of His hidden mysteries, He will initiate it with wisdom into the contemplation of the inner essences of created things.... Thru while standing outside all things you will dwell within all things and know their origins and ends; for you will have attained a spiritual union with the Father through the Logos and will have been perfected in the Spirit».⁷⁴⁶

It is the Tao/Logos Who leads us to the Father, the Mind of God. Man's spirit, writes St. Nicetas, «consorts with Christ the Logos, rising with Him from the earth to heaven, and reigning with Him in the Kingdom of God the Father, all its desires quenched».⁷⁴⁷

The Tao/Logos comes and abides in us just as the Father's Divine Essence abides in Him. About His followers Christ prayed to the Father: «That they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and You in me, that they may be made perfect in one.... I have declared unto them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You have loved me may be in them, and I in them».⁷⁴⁸

64. The Darkness of Divestiture

When the Divine Logos comes to abide in us, we may behold Him as Light: the Light of His Uncreated Energy (Teh). «God is Light», says St. Symeon, «and those to whom it has been granted to see Him have all beheld Him as Light. Those who have received Him have received Him as Light, because the Light of His glory goes before Him, and it is impossible for Him to appear without Light.... Those who have received Grace have received the Light of God and have received God, even as Christ Himself, Who is the Light, has said, ‘I will live in them and move among them.’»⁷⁴⁹

The Light of Christ is approached through darkness. As Archimandrite Sophrony explains: «God, being ‘Light in which there is no darkness at all,’ always appears in Light and as Light. However, in performing prayer in the hesychast manner the soul of the ascetic meets with darkness of an especial nature, any description of which will also be contradictory and paradoxical....

«It is this obscurity into which the ascetic’s soul is plunged when, voluntarily, employing special ascetic methods, he strips himself of all notions and fancies concerning visible matters – when he ‘stays’ his mind and his imagination. This is why it can be termed the ‘darkness of divestiture,’ and the prayer labeled ‘methodical,’ since it follows the method especially established to this end».⁷⁵⁰

The Tao Teh Ching, as we have seen, says that one is to «empty the heart (hsin)» by separating from images and concepts. The ancient writers of The Philokalia give the same teaching in speaking of how to prepare the heart to receive the Light of Christ. St. Hesychius says: «Because every thought enters the heart in the form of a mental image of some sensible object, the blessed Light of the Divinity will illumine the heart only when the heart is completely empty of everything and so free from all form. Indeed, this Light reveals itself to the pure spirit in the measure to which the spirit is purged of all concepts».⁷⁵¹

65. The Agony of Repentance

Speaking further on the darkness of divestiture, Fr. Sophrony writes: «If we would situate’ the spiritual whereabouts of this darkness we could say that it is to be found on the outskirts of Uncreated Light. But when hesychastic prayer is practiced without due repentance, and without the prayer being wholly directed up to God, the soul, denuded of all imaginings may abide for a brief

while in this ‘darkness of divestiture’ without having beheld God, for God ipso facto is not yet in this darkness».⁷⁵²

It is not enough, then, to have entered the darkness of divestiture. For followers of Christ the incarnate Tao, there must also be a radical, personal act of self-emptying within the darkness. Invariably this takes the form of the contrition of heart described earlier, which grows into a searing repentance, seizing and ripping the heart, burning away all pride and impurity. When we read the writings of those who have beheld and been wholly filled with the Light of the Tao/Logos, we find that this experience has at some point been preceded by such a hell of repentance. Thus Archimandrite Sophrony writes:

«My anguish of soul continued unceasing, day and night. The torment swelled into the same uninterrupted prayer even in sleep or when other people were about, although then something kept me from giving any outward sign. But as soon as I was back in my room, almost before I could shut the door, the tears would overwhelm me. There were moments when the pain of being separated from God cast me to the floor, and in the silence of the night I would weep for hours over my dreadful loss. The whole of me – mind, heart, even my body – contracted into a single tight knot. And when the weeping exceeded a certain limit, the earth – the whole visible world – disappeared from my consciousness and I was alone before God. The intangible Light, proceeding from the Unoriginate, let me see myself, not as I appeared outwardly, not in my everyday circumstances, but in some strange fashion which I cannot describe, standing before my Creator, naked to the bone. And there was nothing in me hid from His eyes....

«It is presumptuous of me, but I think that St. Paul never forgot how he had ‘persecuted the church of God’ and been a blasphemer and a wrongdoer, and in his agony of repentance he was ‘caught up to the third heaven.’ I remember that I felt my apostasy from Christ to have been a vile crime against His love. I had known His love in my early childhood: He had vouchsafed me to live it. When I repented of my madness, prayer swept me into another world. So it is when we recognize our benightedness – when the infernal essence of our sin is revealed to us, then we become receptive to the action of Grace, be it as illumination by Uncreated Light or some other form of being caught up,’ of knowledge or revelation....

«At first repentance is all bitter taste but soon we feel the Energy of new life producing a marvelous change in our mind. The very movement towards repentance appears like a discovery of the God of love. The inexpressibly splendid image of Primordial Man is revealed to us more and more. Beholding this beauty, we begin to realize how terribly distorted the Creator's primary idea for us has become. The Light proceeding from the Father gives us the ‘light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’ He

Himself said of this: 'No man can come to me, except the Father... draw Him.' The Grace of repentance reveals in us the image of the Son of the Father. Oh, how painful the process is! Our heart is pierced as with a white-hot sword. How portray the horror that grips us? And how relate the act of God's re-creation in us? The image of the only begotten Son of one Essence with the Father, the Logos, kindles a strong desire in us to become like Him in all things. And once again we find ourselves in a paradoxical situation: we suffer but in a hitherto-unknown way. This suffering inspires us. It does not destroy. There is uncreated strength in it. We are cast into Divine infinity. We are amazed at what is happening to us, surpassed by the majesty of it. We shrink into ourselves, knowing ourselves for what we are, while at the same time God comes forth to embrace us like the father of the prodigal son. Fear and trembling depart from us, giving place to wonder at God. He clothes us in rich garments. He adorns us with great gifts, the noblest of which is all-embracing love. Our initial suffering of repentance is transformed into the joy and sweetness of love which now takes a new form – compassion for every creature deprived of Divine Light.

«The age-old experience of Christianity has shown that no sooner does one realize with bitterness and sorrow the vileness of one's demoniac pretensions to excel – no sooner does one begin to loathe the dark spirit within – than the heart is led into the hitherto-unknown sphere of freedom, where the Divine Light dazzles and all is contemplation of the goodness of God. Within – silence: the mind can no longer think, nor the heart breathe a sigh of thanksgiving....

«Sometimes the upsurge of repentance is overpowering. To the exclusion of aught else mind and heart are filled with the agonizing sensation of being held fast in evil darkness. And then, unforeseen, the Light of the Uncreated Sun penetrates the dungeon of the soul: the Light which fills the whole cosmic expanse. It lovingly embraces us. We see Him and dwell in Him, though we are not yet able to believe in this marvel of the Goodness of our Father».⁷⁵³



St. Seraphim of Sarov (1759–1833) is the best-loved Russian saint of recent centuries. In this painting he is appearing in Uncreated Light to N. A. Motovilov, having just explained to him that the main aim of the follower of Christ should be to acquire the Uncreated Grace of the Holy Spirit. Motovilov, in his own account of this, writes: «Imagine, in the center of the sun, in the dazzling light of its midday rays, the face of a man talking to you. You see the movement of his lips and the changing expression of his eyes, you hear his voice, you feel someone holding your shoulders; yet you do not see his hands, you do not even see yourself or his figure, but only a blinding Light spreading far around for several yards and illumining with its glaring sheen both the snow blanket which covered the forest glade and the snowflakes which besprinkled me and the great Elder». See the complete account in Little Russian Philokalia, vol. 1, pp. 71–111.

Chapter Nine: Illumination

66. The Vision of Uncreated Light

True recipients of visions of Uncreated Light are very reticent to speak of them, much less to write about them. Nevertheless, even in our own times, such accounts do exist. The above-mentioned Elder Paisius of Mount Athos, who reposed in 1994, recounted the following experience to a monk who came to his hermitage:

«When I was in Katounakia, one night while I was keeping vigil in my cell saying the Jesus Prayer, at about three o'clock [in the morning] I began to be possessed by a heavenly joy. At the same time my dark cell, lit only by the flickering light of a candle, began slowly to be filled by a beautiful blue-white light. At first the light was very intense. I understood, however, that my eyes were also being strengthened to endure this brightness. It was the Uncreated Light. I remained there for many hours, losing awareness of earthly filings and experiencing the other, spiritual world, very different from this one here, the carnal one.

«Thus, being in this state and receiving various heavenly experiences within this Uncreated Light, the hours passed without my coming to myself».

«At some point the Uncreated Light began gradually to fade, and I returned to my former state. I began to be hungry; I went and ate a piece of dried bread. I was thirsty; I drank a little water. I was tired and sat down a little to rest. I felt like an animal and deplored myself that I am totally likened to the beasts. This humility was born naturally from the alteration of my condition. From a spiritual state I was immediately reduced to the other one, and seeing the difference, nothing remained for me but to condemn and loathe myself».

«A little below me, another brother lived in a cell. It looked to me like it was night outside, with a full moon. So I went and asked the brother, 'Eh, Brother, what happened? It seems as if dawn is late today. What time is it?'

«He was confused and asked me, 'Fr. Paisius, what are you saying? I don't understand.'

«Only then did I realize what had happened. It was ten o'clock in the morning and the 'full moon' was the sun. The Uncreated Light had been so strong (my eyes had received special strength to endure it) that the light of day and the sun appeared to me as night with a full moon. The sunlight was to the Uncreated Light as the night to the day».⁷⁵⁴

In 1988 Archimandrite Sophrony, then ninety-two years old, wrote some of his own experiences of Uncreated Light in his last book, *We Shall See Him as He Is*. «Now at the close of my life», he writes, «I have decided to talk

to my brethren of things I would not have ventured to utter earlier, counting it unseemly....

«At the beginning of my monastic life on Mount Athos, the Lord granted me unceasing prayer.... I will relate what I remember well enough, since we are talking of the prayers which marked me indelibly.

«This is how it often used to be – towards evening, at sunset, I would shut the window and draw three curtains over it to make my cell as quiet and dark as possible. With my forehead bent to the floor I would slowly repeat words of prayer, one after the other. I had no feeling of being cooped up, and my mind, oblivious of the body, lived in the light of the Gospel word. Concentrated on the fathomless wisdom of Christ's word, my spirit, freed from all material concerns, would feel flooded, as it were, with Light from the Celestial Sun. At the same time a gentle peace would fill my soul, unconscious of all the needs and cares of this earth....»

«The Lord gave me to live this state, and my spirit yearned to cling to His feet in gratitude for this gift. This same experience was repeated at intervals for months, perhaps years....»

«Early in the 1930s – I was a deacon then – for two weeks God's tender mercy rested on me. At dusk, when the sun was sinking behind the mountains of Olympia, I would sit on the balcony near my cell, face turned to the dying light. In those days I contemplated the evening light of the sun and at the same time another Light which softly enveloped me and gently invaded my heart, in some curious fashion making me feel compassionate and loving towards people who treated me harshly. I would also feel a quiet sympathy for all creatures in general. When the sun had set I would retire to my cell as usual to perform the devotions preparatory to celebrating the Liturgy, and the Light did not leave me while I prayed.

«Under the influence of this Light prayer for mankind in travail possessed my whole being. It was clear that the inescapable, countless sufferings of the entire universe are the consequence of man's billing away from God, our Creator, Who revealed Himself to us. If the world loved Christ and His commandments, everything would be radically transformed and the earth would become a wonderful paradise».⁷⁵⁵

Elsewhere, Fr. Sophrony attempts to describe the Indescribable: «The soul feels apprehensive at approaching the subject of the Light which visits the man who craves to behold the Face of the Eternal. Its nature is mysterious – in what terms can it be described? Incomprehensible, invisible, yet it may sometimes be seen by the physical eye. Quiet and gentle, it draws heart and mind to itself, until the earth is forgotten, ones spirit caught up into another sphere. It can happen in broad daylight as in the blackness of night, It is a soft Light, yet more powerful than all around. In strange fashion it embraces from without.

You see it, but your attention is drawn deep within the inner man, into the heart burning with a love now compassionate, now grateful. It may happen that one is not aware of the material world, of external circumstances, and one sees oneself as Light. Aches and pains disappear. Earthly cares fade away. Anxieties are absorbed into a sweet peace. The Light used at first to appear like a thin flame, healing and cleansing, consuming both within and without everything not in harmony with it, but calmly, hardly making itself felt.

«This holy Light, coming in strength, brings humble love, banishes all doubt and fear, obliterates every earthly consideration – the whole pyramid of secular grades and hierarchies. The repentant man becomes a nobody, as it were: he no longer stands in the way of his brothers, seeks no place for himself in the world. This Light is in itself life imperishable, suffused by the peace of love. It brings to our spirit knowledge of another, indescribable Being. The mind is stayed, above reflection by the very fact of its entry into a new form of life. Weightless, more finely attuned than anything the earth knows, the Light conveys to the soul invulnerability, making her safe from everything that hitherto weighed her down. Death flees from this Light...

«Our spirit exults: this Light is God – God Almighty and at the same time indescribably gentle. Oh, how discreet its approach! It will heal the heart broken by despair. The soul bruised by sin, it will inspire with the hope of victory».⁷⁵⁶

67. Total Illumination

When the Light of the Tao/Logos comes upon a person, that person's spirit may not only behold it in a vision. The spirit, having completely emptied itself and forgotten itself, may be actually infused with the Light. While retaining its own created light, it is filled with the Uncreated Light to such an extent that it in some sense actually becomes it. St. Symeon writes of this, speaking of himself in the third person:

«One day, as he stood and recited, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner,' uttering it with his mind rather than his mouth, suddenly a flood of Divine radiance appeared from above and filled all the room... He was wholly in the presence of immaterial Light and seemed to himself to have turned into light».⁷⁵⁷

«This Light», says Fr. Sophrony, «penetrates us with the power of God, and we become 'without beginning – not through our origin but by the gift of Grace: life without beginning is communicated to us. And there is no limit to the outpouring of the Fathers' love: man becomes identical with God – the

same by content, not by primordial Self-Being. God will eternally be GOD for the reasonable being».⁷⁵⁸

In participating to such an extent in the Light of the Divinity, man himself becomes a god: a god not by essence or nature, but by Grace and adoption. This – the state of deification or divinization – is the closest union with the Tao/Logos that man can attain. It is the final end of man. «Deification», writes St. Maximus the Confessor, «is an enhypostatic and direct illumination which has no beginning but appears in those worthy as something exceeding their comprehension. It is indeed a mystical union with God, beyond mind and reason in the age when creatures will no longer know corruption».⁷⁵⁹

The Divine Essence can never be beheld, known or directly experienced by man. What man experiences of God when he is filled with Divine Light is not God's Essence, but His Uncreated Energies.

Christ, the incarnate Tao/Logos, had the Divine Essence within Him. Thus He is God by nature, and He is the Son of God by Divine begetting from the Fathers Essence. Man, on the other hand, does not contain this Essence within himself, yet he can participate in God through His Energies. Hence he is a god by Grace, and is a son of God not through birth but through adoption.

68. «God Became Man That Man Might Become God»

St. Symeon says that deification became possible to mankind only after the coming of Christ. As we have seen, from man's primordial departure from the Way until Christ's coming, the Divine Energy (Grace or Teh) acted on man only from the outside, producing created effects in the soul. Holy people who lived helm. Christ, such as Lao Tzu and the Old Testament prophets, were the instruments of Grace. Grace acted upon them, but did not Income their own, as their personal strength⁷⁶⁰. They did not know perfect union with the Tao through Grace.

When the Tao/Logos became flesh, He assumed our human nature. In assuming human nature, He, being God, deified u Í uniting the human essence with the Divine Essence at His incarnation, He gave to all of human nature the potential for deification. Then, by His death-destroying death on the Cross, which broke down the final wall of separation between man and God, He enabled mankind to actualize that potential. Now, through Him, man can receive the gift of total Divine illumination. In the words of St. Irenaeus and other early Christian teachers: «God became man in order that man might become god».⁷⁶¹



St. Gregory Palamas (a.d. 1296–1359) lived for twenty years as a hermit on Mount Athos, then left his seclusion in order to defend the Eastern Orthodox hesychast teaching on Uncreated Light. Against rationalist Westernizing theologians who claimed that the Light seen by hesychasts in prayer was simply a created and physical radiance, St. Gregory showed that God Himself was experienced as Light. Following from the age-old teaching of Eastern Christian mystics, he taught that Grace is not a creation of God, hut God’s own Energy or Power.

Speaking of those who have received the gift of deification, St. Symeon asks: «Indeed, who has been such in all the ages? I mean among the sons of Adam till the Master of the heavenly and earthly beings came down from heaven? It is He Who assumed flesh, our flesh, and gave us the Divine Spirit.... This Spirit, being God, grants us every blessing».⁷⁶²

69. Re-creation of the Spirit through Christ

As St. Gregory Palamas explains, the deified spirit is not only infused with Grace, it is actually re-created by it: «The spirit becomes simple matter in God’s hands and is unresistingly re-created in the most sublime way, for nothing alien intrudes on it. Inner Grace translates it to a better state and, in an

altogether marvelous fashion, illumines it with ineffable Light, thus perfecting our inner being. And when in this manner ‘the day breaks and the morning star rises in our hearts’ (2 Peter 1:19), then ‘the true man’ – the spirit – ‘will go out to his true work’ (Psalm 104:23), ascending in the Light the Way that leads to the eternal mountains».⁷⁶³

Again, this re-creation of the spirit by illumining Grace was made possible only by the coming of the Tao/Logos in the flesh, by His death and resurrection, and by His sending down of the Holy Spirit upon His followers. Even Moses – who beheld Uncreated Light in the Burning Bush and whose face was seen to shine with it – did not experience the immortal spiritual re-creation that followers of the incarnate God were later to experience. His illumination, though glorious, was a transitory miracle. The Apostle Paul discusses this in detail in his second letter to the Corinthians. Comparing the time of the Old Testament with that of the New, he writes:

«If the ministry of death, engraved in letters of stone, was accompanied by such glory that the sons of Israel could not bear to gaze at the face of Moses because of the glory, transitory though it was, that shone from it, then how much greater must the glory be that accompanies the ministry of the Spirit? If the ministry of condemnation is glorious, the ministry of righteousness must greatly excel it in glory. Indeed, what once seemed full of glory now seems to have no glory at all, because it is outshone by a glory that is so much greater. If what was transitory came with glory, what endures will be far more glorious.... Having such hope as this, we can proceed with great confidence....»



Sc. Macarius of Egypt (ca. a.d. 300–390), *one of the great Desert Fathers at the dawn of monasticism, was known for his Grace-filled wisdom as well as his many miracles.*

His Fifty Spiritual Homilies are a basic textbook of spiritual and ascetical principles.

St. Macarius of Egypt, commenting on this letter of the Apostle Paul, writes: «St. Paul affirms that the everlasting and immortal glory of the Spirit shines even now with immortal and indestructible power in the immortal inner being of the saints: ‘With unveiled lace we all’ – all, that is to say, who through perfect faith are born in the Spirit – ‘reflect as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, and are transfigured into the same image from glory to glory, through the Lord Who is the Spirit’ (2Corinthians 3:18). The words ‘with unveiled face’ indicate the [unveiled] soul; St. Paul adds that when one turns back to the Lord the veil is taken off, and that the Lord is the Spirit. By this he clearly shows that from the time of Adam’s transgression a veil of darkness has encroached upon mankind and has covered the soul. But we believe that through the illumination of the Spirit this veil is now removed from truly faithful and saintly souls. It was for this reason that Christ came; and to those who truly believe in Him God has given the Grace to attain to this measure of holiness».⁷⁶⁴

70. Prerequisites for Deification

As the above passage indicates, deification is contingent on belief that Christ is incarnate God. Fr. Sophrony affirms this from his own experience:

«When I accepted belief without the faintest shadow of doubt in the Divinity of Christ, I was irradiated by Light not of thin world. And to a certain extent, like Paul, in His Light I knew Him. At first I believed with a lively faith. Afterwards Light appeared to me. Was it not the same with the Apostles Peter, James and John? When they confessed His Divinity, through Peter .n their mouthpiece, He replied, ‘Verily I say unto you: there are some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom’ – a prediction shortly to be fulfilled on Mount Tabor. Paul, likewise, bore Christ in his heart Whom he had persecuted, and therefore the Light of the Godhead appeared to him in strength. And I make bold to say that the vision of Uncreated Light is indissolubly bound up with belief in the Divinity of Christ – bound up with, though in a curious manner one depends on the other. In one Light both Christ and the Holy Spirit appear. This witnesses to the Divinity of Christ, since it is impossible not to recognize God in this Light of which we are speaking. Its action is indescribable. In it lies eternity; in it, the inexpressible goodness of love. In it our spirit contemplates immeasurable

horizons and – not all at once but gradually – discovers more and more that is new in this luminous breakthrough into heaven»⁷⁶⁵.

St. Symeon speaks of baptism as also giving us the possibility of deification, of becoming God by Grace and adoption: «If the Lord became the son of man indeed, then He truly makes of you a son of God. If He became a body only in appearance, then we become spirit only in thought. But being baptized, I have put on Christ, not in a sensory but in a spiritual manner. And how shall the one who has put on the Son of God not become God by Grace and adoption, in awareness, in knowledge and contemplation?»⁷⁶⁶

71. Personal Union

Deification can never be an «absorption» into the Divine Essence. He who thinks he has experienced such an absorption is deluded, having succumbed to the primordial temptation: «You shall be as gods» (Genesis 3:5). He imagines he has erased the distinction between creature and Creator.

The proud ascetic divests himself of all that is relative in order to become God; while the humble one does the same in order to be with God. The latter, seared by repentance, wholly empty, is filled by God, yet remains who he is.

«Divine absorption» is impersonal; while true deification is a personal communion with God, face to Face.

Lao Tzu, humble as he was, rejected the temptation to think he had been absorbed into the Absolute. Living as he did before Christ, he could not know the personal union with the Tao known as deification. He knew self-emptying, but he could not know the personal act of self-emptying – the searing repentance (that must always precede true deification. «Through repentance is our divinization accomplished», says Fr. Sophrony, « – an indescribably momentous event».⁷⁶⁷

As Fr. Sophrony makes clear, beholding Uncreated Light does not in itself necessarily mean deification; beyond this there must be personal union with Him Who appears as Light: «In the early days of repentance for one's sins this holy Light tells of Divine mercy and love, but there is still no encounter face to Face. This only happens when man is really in God and God in him; when the prayerful spirit knows that He Who has appeared to him is indeed the Eternal Master of all that is, the First and the Last; searchless and so near; invisible and at the same time tangible, even physically; filling the heart with the fire of love, illumining the mind with the Light of understanding – the Light of knowledge inexpressible in words».⁷⁶⁸

In his Hymns of Divine Love, St. Symeon writes of his face to Face encounter with the personal God: «I am sitting on my couch, all the while beyond the world. Being in the middle of my cell, I see Him present, the One Who is beyond the world. I see Him and I speak with Him. I – dare I say it? – I love Him and He, in turn, loves me. I nourish myself with this contemplation alone. Forming one with Him, I transcend the heavens. That is true, I know, and yet where my body is I do not know. I know that the One Who remains unmoved descends. I know that the One Who remains in visible appears to me. I know that the One Who is separated from all creatures takes me inside Himself and hides me in His anno, and then I find myself outside the whole world. Yet in turn, I who am so insignificant in this world, I contemplate in myself completely the Creator of the world. I know that I will not die situ c I am inside of life: all of life surges within me. He is in my heart, yet He remains in heaven. Here and there, equally dazzling, He reveals Himself to me. How can all of this come about? How can I accurately understand it? How would I be able to express all that I understand and see? In truth, these are indescribable things, utterly ineffable».

Similarly, but with even stronger expressions, St. Symeon speaks of this in another hymn: «He Himself is discovered within me, resplendent inside my wretched heart, enlightening me from all sides with His immortal splendor, shining on all of my members with His rays. Entirely intertwined with me, He embraces me entirely. He gives Himself totally to me, the unworthy one, and I am filled with His love and beauty. I am sated with pleasure and Divine tenderness. I share in the Light. I participate also in the glory. My face shines like that of my beloved and all my members become bearers of the Light».⁷⁶⁹

72. The Progression of Eternity

The illumination that Christ offers us does not end with this life, nor is it static in the life to come. It is only the beginning of a progress that will never end. «Indeed», says St. Symeon, «over the ages the progress will be endless, for a cessation of this growing toward the end without ending would be nothing but a grasping at the ungraspable. The One on Whom no one can be sated would then become an object of satiety. By contrast, to be filled with Him and to be glorified in His Light will cause unfathomable progress, an undefined beginning. Just as those, possessing Christ Who took form in them, stand near the One Who shines in the inaccessible Light, so does the end become a principle of glory in them or – to explain my thought more clearly – in the end they will have the beginning, and in the beginning the end».⁷⁷⁰

This eternal progress was originally intended for man, who was to ever rise in the vision of God; but man lost that possibility when he departed from the Way. Through Christ, Who is called the new Adam, this possibility is once more opened to mankind.

In a previous chapter we showed how Christ opened the way to heaven which before had been closed, raising there all His followers who had died before His coming, from Abraham to Socrates to Lao Tzu. In heaven all true followers of the Tao eternally rise in contemplation of Him, paradoxically rising through the same movement that compels them to get under, in the sweetness of selfforgetting love. «Love», says John Climacus, «is the progression of eternity»⁷⁷¹.

In his youth, the nineteenth-century Russian elder, St. Ambrose of Optina, had a glimpse of this eternal progress of love in heaven, which he recorded in a manuscript published after his death:

«I am outside the forest, somewhere far away, in another world, quite unknown to me, never seen by me, never imagined by me.... Around me there is bright white Light! Its transcendence is so pure and enticing that I am submerged, along with my perception, into limitless depths and cannot satisfy myself with my admiration for this realm, cannot completely fill myself with its lofty spirituality. Everything is so full of beauty all around. So endearing this life ... so endless the way. I am being swept across this limitless, clear space. My sight is directed upwards, does not descend anymore, does not see anything earthly. The whole of the heavenly firmament has transformed itself before me into my general bright Light, pleasing to the sight.... But I do not see the sun. I can see only its endless shining and bright Light. The whole space in which I glide without hindrance, without end, without fatigue, is filled with white, just as are its light and beautiful benign, transparent as a ray of sun. And through them I am admiring this limitless world. The images of all these be-

ings unknown to me are infinitely diverse and full of beauty.... I also am white and bright as they are. Over me, as over them, there reigns eternal rest. Not a single thought of mine is any longer enticed by anything earthly; not a single beat of my heart is any longer moving with human cares or earthly passion. I am all peace and rapture. But I am still moving in this infinite Light, which surrounds me without change. There is nothing else in the world except for the white, bright Light and these equally radiant numberless beings. But all these beings do not resemble me, nor are similar to each other; they are all endlessly varied, and compellingly attractive. Amidst them, I feel incredibly peaceful. They evoke in me neither fear, nor amazement, nor trepidation. All that we see here does not agitate us, does not amaze us. All of us here are as if we have belonged to each other for a long time, are used to each other and are not strangers at all. We do not ask questions, we do not speak to each other about anything. We all feel and understand that there is nothing novel for us here. All our questions are solved with one glance, which sees everything and everyone. There is no trace of the wars of passions in anyone. All move in different directions, opposite to each other, not feeling any limitation, any inequality, or envy, or sorrow, or sadness. One peace reigns in all the images of entities. One Light is endless for all. Oneness of life is comprehensible to all....»⁷⁷²



St. Ambrose (1812–1891) was the pinnacle of the long line of clairvoyant ciders at Optina Monastery in Russia. Because he had attained the depths of self-emptying, he was granted the gift of healing suffering souls. He could read human hearts, know the past and future of people, and speak to them the direct, revealed word of God. Fyodor Dostoyevsky

was among those who came to him for counsel, and later used him as the model for the well-known character of Elder Zosima in The Brothers Karamazov.

In this vision is contained a clear image of the goal of our life, Here is what Lao Tzu longed for; here is what Christ opened to us.

In his last talk with His disciples before His crucifixion, Christ told them: «In my Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know».

When Christ said this, His disciple Thomas asked Him, «Lord, we do not know where You are going. And how can we know the way?»

Christ replied, «I am the Way».⁷⁷³ And thus the Way of Heaven, as He had been called by Lao Tzu, now became the Way to Heaven.

The very purpose for which the Tao came to earth was to open heaven to us. He became man so that we could forever dwell in Him, and He in us; so that we could experience throughout eternity the total infusion of His Light, His Uncreated Energy, sharing in His Being.

In this Light Lao Tzu now shines, together with innumerable other immortal spirits. According to ancient Christian tradition, even after the coming of Christ those followers of the Tao who never heard of Him and His pure, unadulterated message still have a chance to know Him after they die. Unlike them and Lao Tzu, however, we have already been given our chance in this life; we have already been shown the Way to heaven. Much more has been given us; therefore much more will be required of us if we are to be found, with Lao Tzu, ever rising on the endless Way.

Epilogue: Re-creation of the Spirit by Teh

1. A Contemporary Account of Deification

In 1997 one of our monasteries in northern California was visited by a remarkable man, Fr. George Calciu, who brought home to us the closeness, not only of God's Uncreated Energy (Teh), but also of the ultimate manifestation of this Energy: the deification of man. Fr. George was a Romanian Orthodox priest, then in his seventies. At the age of twenty, he had been incarcerated in a Romanian communist prison, where he stayed for sixteen years. During that time he underwent the scientific experiment of Pitesti: the most diabolical system of torture ever devised, which attempted to dismantle the human personality and replace it with the communist «new man». As he later recalled, «There was no torture, moral and physical, that was not used».

«For Teh went out from Him, and healed them all» (Luke 6:19).

Having had the very foundation of his soul defiled, Fr. George underwent a long and painful process of metanoia, wherein he found the inward strength to turn to Christ and received the superhuman power to forgive and love his torturers. When he was released from prison at the age of thirty-six, he was aflame with love for God and all creation, his spirit having been cleansed, healed and re-created by the Divine Fire in the midst of unimaginable suffering. He became a priest, and soon thereafter began calling the youth of Romania, raised on the lie of materialism, back to the true purpose of life. Despite constant harassment and death-threats from the communist authorities, he continued to preach publicly. Finally he was arrested again and thrown into prison for another six years. Those years were the most profound of his life, for in them he experienced the Divine Energy of China as never before.

While he stayed at our monastery, Fr. George radiated a sense of otherworldly serenity and childlike joy. He even looked young, which was remarkable not only because of his age but also because he had lived in damp, disease-infested underground prisons, on tiny rations of bread for twenty-two years. Truly, he had done what both Christ and Lao Tzu taught: he had «become as a little child». Whenever he spoke of the tortures he had undergone, he smiled and even laughed. He had no hatred or resentment; he had forgiven, and was free.

On the last night he was with us, Fr. George spoke of his visitations of Divine Energy. Before coming to us, he had not planned to speak of this, for he had never spoken of it publicly before. But when he heard someone at our

monastery speak of Uncreated Light during a lecture, Fr. George was moved to tell us what it was like for him to be enveloped in this Energy.

2. What Is Uncreated Light?

«God is one in Essence», Fr. George told us, «but in Him there are three Persons. God is not a closed entity – He is in touch with us, with the universe. How is He in connection with the universe? By His Uncreated Energy. From God there is continuous Uncreated Energy going out, reaching all of creation, and coming back towards Him».

«Dionysius the Areopagite, a very mystical writer of the fifth century, wrote of the Divine realms and of the Heavenly Hierarchies. He said that up and down exist only for man, while for God there is no space, no time – nothing. In the center is the Holy Trinity. The Holy Trinity spreads the Light – the Uncreated Energy – around».

«In the spiritual creation there are three triads of orders of heavenly beings. The most near to the Holy Trinity are the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones; next are Authorities, Dominions and Powers; and finally there are the Angels, Archangels and Principalities. Between God and the spiritual creation there is the Mother of God. She takes of the Energy and distributes the Energy to the Chief Commander of the Seraphim. This is passed to (he first member of the Cherubim, and so on. The Light goes from step to step through the Heavenly Hierarchies and reaches afterwards the visible universe. Everyone can be perfected by it. No one reaches the absolute perfection of God because God is infinite, but each being can be continuously perfected by the Light by means of aspiration towards the Trinity. This Light, which has its source in the Holy Trinity, can be seen by some people who have undergone special exercises and have been especially perfected. If God wants to, however, He can reveal this Light to anyone, without any merit on their part. I can prove this by my own experience...»

3. Hesychasm

«The Christian monks in the East – they knew this Light. They were prepared to receive this Light because they had started a special movement called hesychasm. Hesychasm means peace, silence. The hesychastic monks prayed in their cells, alone in absolute quietness; and the prayer they uttered was, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,' or 'Jesus, have mer-

cy; Jesus, have mercy.’ They uttered the prayer while looking in their heart – not just in their heart but above the heart – trying to put their mind in connection with their heart, to submit the mind to the heart.

«The monks submitted prayer of the mind to prayer of the heart, and with time they realized the rhythm of the prayer. Although it is not absolutely necessary, they sometimes timed the prayer with their breathing, saying ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God’ as they breathed in, and ‘have mercy on me’ as they breathed out. By this they inhaled the name of God into their bodies, and the name of God inspired them, entering through the lungs and spreading all over the organism. The last cell was touched by the name of God, by the name of Jesus. Thus, little by little even the body was sanctified by the name of Jesus Christ, and the body became the true temple of God.

«This practice was very common in Orthodox monasteries, especially on Mount Athos. With time the mind submitted to the heart. The saints were all the time saying, ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.’ A monk could be accomplishing his obediences; he could be preaching or teaching his disciples, but all this time his heart (and part of his mind which was connected with his heart) would be repeating, ‘Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.’ I tell you this not from my experience, but because I met many monks who told me what I read in books. It is absolutely real; it is not an invention. This practice is so common in Orthodoxy that the monks consider it as nothing special....

«You’ve read, I believe, *The Way of the Pilgrim*, about the man who was looking for perpetual prayer. When this book entered Romania in the nineteenth century, it created a true spiritual revolution in the life of the monks. The monks and other people who practiced this prayer were, after long exercises, able to see Uncreated Light. This Light is not visible to the physical eyes – only tin spiritual eyes can see it. However, in receiving this Uncreated Light the body can start to shine.

4. Fr. Benedict Ghius

«I will tell you of my experience. Before I was arrested, I always liked the monasteries. So every time I had the possibility to go to a monastery, I was there. Very near to Bucharest is a very important monastery called Cernica. The prayer of the heart to Join Christ was taken by George, a disciple of Paisius Velichkovsky,⁷⁷⁴ and brought to Cernica. From then until now – nearly two centuries – in Cernica every monk performs this prayer. Even during the persecution by Ceausescu, nothing could stop them from praying.

«One Sunday I was there in the church of Cernica officiating at the Holy Liturgy with some monks. At the beginning of the Liturgy Fr. Benedict Ghius was there, a very spiritual monk. He had been the spiritual leader of the Burning Bush movement in the Antim Monastery, which was a group dedicated to prayer, formed by monks for the sake of the most important intellectuals in Bucharest during the communist regime. People from the Burning Bush were arrested until the group was exterminated, and many of them died in prison. Fr. Ghius was arrested, too, but he was set free at the same time I was – 1965. And he gave up everything and entered the monastery Cernica, where he practiced the Prayer of Jesus. He was perhaps the most loved by God. I never saw him sad or angry.

«Because he was very old, he didn't serve.⁷⁷⁵ As we started our Liturgy, he was sitting in a chair in the altar, without moving. At a certain moment I felt something strange in the altar. I looked to my left and saw that in the corner where Fr. Ghius was – a Light started to shine. The Light covered Fr. Ghius completely, but it did not spread through the altar. It was just around his body. I am sure Fr. Ghius was not aware what happened to him. The other monks saw what I was seeing, but they paid no attention because they were accustomed to this. They had seen it many times; it was something very normal to them. I was very shocked. And this Light persisted until the Liturgy was finished. When Fr. Ghius came to take Communion, his hands were hands of Light. I bowed in front of him, and he felt very, very ashamed – I think because he felt he was unworthy of such respect. He left the altar without looking at anybody. As he went out, I saw how the Light disappeared and he became a normal person, a normal man.

«He was sitting on a chair in the altar, without moving. But if you looked at him, knowing nothing about the Light of Jesuit Christ, about Uncreated Light, you could see his face full of Light».

5. A Childhood Experience

Fr. George went on to tell of other experiences he had had of Uncreated Light. He recalled how once, as a child of eight years old, he was standing before his parents' land contemplating how God had created the world, when all at once he realized the field was filled with Light. «I could not understand what it was», he told us. «This Light had no shadow and no perspective. Perhaps because I was accustomed to the image of natural light on the land, I could see all the details, but only in light, not in shadow. I was as if petrified. I don't know how long I was like that; and when I recovered the field was nor-

mal. I told nothing about it to my sister or my brother. But, later, when I was a student in high school, I told my mother about it. She was not astonished. I suppose she knew something about it, but she only made the sign of the Cross on me. Then to my surprise she kissed my hand. I did not understand this at that time; later I understood that she was kissing not my hand but the body of this child who had seen the Light of God».

6. The First Experience in Prison

During Fr. George's second prison term, he had two other experiences of this Light. The first was in 1980, when he was in Aiud Prison in the north of Transylvania. It was an old prison with very bad conditions, and he was isolated in a cell for seven months. He saw no one except the guards, who were instructed to beat him and insult him all the time. There was one guard whom Fr. George said was the most sadistic man he had ever met in his life; he could not accomplish his eight-hour shift without beating and torturing the inmates.

It was the night of Pascha, the radiant Feast of Christ's Resurrection.⁷⁷⁶ At midnight the bells in the nearby churches started to ring. «The sound of the bells arrived very lightly in my cell», Fr. George recalled. «It was so beautiful – it was like in Paradise. Being alone in the cell, I realized for the first time how beautiful is the sound of bells. That night I did not sleep. I was lying on my bed and remembering Paschas in the past: a Pascha when I was a child, a Pascha when I was a student, a previous Pascha in prison. All the time I was singing, 'Christ is Risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.' I was so happy!

«At seven o'clock, the shift changed. Coming into the corridor, the new guards opened the doors. We were obliged to turn our backs to them, to be against the wall and to not look at them until we heard the door close. It was a tradition. But on this day of the joy of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ I did not turn to face the wall. The young, especially cruel guard came in – and I looked at him directly into his eyes and said, 'Christ is Risen!' He looked at me, not with anger, and then he looked at the others guards, because it was forbidden not to face the wall. Then he turned to me and said, «In Truth He is Risen!»⁷⁷⁷ I was very shocked. I was not able to move. How could he say to me, «In Truth He is Risen?» I understood that it was not him – it was his angel.

«He shut the door and I was petrified because of what he had said. And little by little, I saw myself full of Light. The board against the wall was shining like the sun; everything in my cell was full of shine. I cannot explain in words the happiness that invaded me then. I can explain nothing. It simply

happened. I have no merit. I was perhaps the biggest sinner in that section, but nevertheless God gave me this Light. Perhaps when I was a child He gave it to me because I was innocent then, but why did God choose me for this and not another one? In my village there were a hundred children, perhaps more innocent than I was. So don't ask me why God chose me and not another one.

«In a short time this Light disappeared, but the happiness lasted many hours».

7. The Second Experience in Prison

«The next experience I had with Uncreated Light was a year and a half later.

Ceausescu was very angry with me, and he wanted to kill me in prison. He could not sentence me to death because my case was well known all over the world, so he ordered that I be put in cell with sadistic criminals. Therefore, I was placed together with two such criminals. One of them had killed his own mother. He did not just kill her; he tortured her – days and days, cutting her fingers and her body. The other one had killed two young men in the same sadistic manner....

Right away my two cell-mates began to persecute me, but not so badly. There was something human in them, you know. I noticed that all these people without anything in their soul – criminals and thieves and so on – they had something very, very dear and even holy in them.

Every day these two men were called by the administration. I think they were scolded because they had done nothing to me. I think that they asked them to kill me. One day, after three months, they were called again to the administration. They were very upset when they came back. Two times a week we were allowed to go outside into a small courtyard, fifteen by twenty feet. We went outside and they said to me, 'Stay there.' They went into the other corner and they talked together. I was sure it was time for me to be killed. I stood there facing the wall. I was praying, making confession to God for my sins. After ten minutes – we had only ten minutes to walk – they came to me and said, 'Father' – this was the first time that they called me Father – 'Father, we decided not to kill you. Let the guards kill you.' I started to cry. I had thought for sure I was going to die. We came into the cell and now we talked together. I told them about myself and everything. They told me about their experience, and that they now noticed that I was a good man. The next day I got their permission to celebrate the Holy Liturgy in the cell.

They were very curious to see what was meant by the Liturgy. For them, the priest was a kind of man who exploited and got money from the people. Or

perhaps they saw a priest as a magician. They knew nothing about faith. maybe they knew a few things about religion and church, but I am sure that they knew nothing about the Liturgy.

So, on Sunday I began to prepare my bread, my water, my napkin. They were looking at me. This Sunday, they stopped working, so we had a Church holy day. They were looking very fiercely at me, thinking perhaps that they were the instruments of my magic work. I started my prayers in a very low voice because the guards did not permit to celebrate with a loud voice. My cellmates approached unjust to hear what I was saying. With time, with the advance of the Liturgy, the fire of my faith and the transporting of my soul touched them – I am sure. There was no movement. They didn't move. They didn't talk. They were with me to the end. I didn't even turn to them, but after the transformation of the Holy Gifts, after taking Communion, I turned to them and I was astonished. I saw them on their knees, praying with me, and surrounded by the Light. They were in this Light, visible Light, Uncreated Light but visible.... God just opened my eyes to see this Light, and they were surrounded by it. I noticed that the whole cell was full of Light. I didn't know then and I don't know now when this Light appeared. Perhaps when I started the Liturgy the Light was around us, but I was concentrating only on the holy service. Perhaps the Light appeared at the moment when I uttered the epiclesis ⁷⁷⁸ – and from the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ the Light spread into the cell. Or perhaps the Light appeared just at the moment when I turned to them, or perhaps they had been surrounded by this Light all the time.

This Light transformed their souls! Not my prayers nor my officiating at the Holy Liturgy. God transformed their souls by pouring this Uncreated Light upon them. By this Light we were able to love one another, to pray and to feel that we had something in common. It was the presence of God, of Jesus Christ.

The rest of the day passed in friendship and love, talking about Christ. For the first time I was allowed to tell them about Christ, about faith, about love. One of them asked me, 'Can Christ love me? I killed my mother. How can Christ love me?' The other said, 'Can Jesus Christ love me after I killed two young men? Perhaps I will go out and kill other ones. Can Jesus Christ pardon me for the crime I did?' I said, 'He can. Perhaps human justice cannot pardon you, but Jesus will pardon you, if you repent. He will give you His Body and His Blood, if you repent and if you decide not to do other crimes.' They believed and didn't believe. It was very difficult for them to understand, because all their lives they were in continuous conflict with the society. They tried to kill, to steal, to deceive the society, and the society tried to catch them. It was a continual fight, and in this fight there was no space for love. The first one did not love his mother – he killed his mother. The other one did not love his friends – he killed them. They didn't have a moment of love. Perhaps as

children they were loved by their mother and father, but as they grew up their life left no space for love. But I realized, they were fascinated by love. They did not understand exactly what the meaning of love was – Jesus’ love – but love was a fascinating word for them. On that day I insisted on love and told them, Jesus said, «Love one another ... by this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another... Love your enemies. Bless those who curse you. Do good to those who persecute you”’. They said, ‘This is impossible; it is not human!’ ‘You are right’: I said, ‘it is not human. But such love exists in this world – I am a living example for you.’ The next day we were separated. The administration realized that it could do nothing with me and that these men refused to kill me, so they left me alone in my cell.

«I do not know if those two men realized the presence of the Light that I saw in the cell, but this Light operated in their souls and transformed them into my brothers. The Energy of Jesus Christ made them from criminals into perhaps saints. I cannot believe that after that they became criminals again. I am convinced that they were saved, and I pray for them all the time; even today I am praying for them. Never in my prayers do I see them as criminals. I am sure they were saved».

8. The Gift of Light

«What I wanted to say to you is that God gives His Light not only as He does to certain monks after they have made long exercises, sitting in the loneliness of their cells in concentration, uniting the mind with the heart, submitting the mind to the heart. He also gives His Light as a present to someone without merit, without asking anything from that person. He gave me this Light without any merit from me, without asking me to do something for Him.

«The gifts of God are not a reward for us. We receive gifts from God just out of His love for us. As I said, I was the biggest sinner in that corridor; nevertheless, God chose me. Why? There’s no explanation. Those two guys were criminals, and yet God loved them in the Light. Why? Because He wanted to transform thru souls – and I am sure He did transform them».

9. The True Meaning of Salvation

In concluding his talk to us, Fr. George reminded us that, although we may not be given by God to perceive His Grace with spiritual eyes, neverthe-

less this Grace – this Divine Energy – is with us. «I assure you», he said, «that in every good thought and every good intention there is the love of God for you. And I assure you that, even if you cannot see it, you are surrounded by the Light of God. The blessing of God is on this place, and the Light of God is above this place, and He will jealously preserve this place against any devilish matter. I am so sure of this. I don't prophesy but it is my ultimate conviction that this place is blessed and you are under the blessing of Jesus Christ. It's obvious».⁷⁷⁹

We need not behold Uncreated Light or experience deification in order for our spirits to be re-created by the Uncreated Light of Christ. Re-creation begins in baptism when the seed of Grace is planted in our spirit; and then, if we cultivate the seed, re-creation continues, step by step. It is a process of dying and being reborn, dying and being reborn. With each step, painful for the ego, we are re-created in part. Our spirits are transformed by the Light; they become chalices to receive the Energy of God.

God is not a Being Whom we can only contemplate and converse with. With the coming of the Tao in the flesh, we can participate in His very life through His Energies. For God does not exist apart from His Energies, nor His Energies apart from Him. Where His Energies are, there is His Person.

For the follower of Christ the incarnate Tao, God's indwelling is not merely mental. It is living and enlivening. Through God's Energy abiding in us as our personal strength and power, we are made truly alive. Now we possess a life not our own. It is His life that we live, for it is His Energy that enlivens us.

As we have seen, Christ called His Grace «living water». He said, «Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life».⁷⁸⁰ When it is Christ's Energy that enlivens us, our life must be everlasting, for that Grace, being uncreated, can never die.

In order to dwell forever in the Kingdom of Heaven that Christ speaks of, we must – spiritually speaking – be in the likeness of Christ. And in order to be in that likeness, we must be filled with His Spirit, His Grace. We must be already living His everlasting life.

In His parable of the wedding feast, Christ makes it clear that we shall not enter into eternal union with Him if we have not acquired for ourselves a «wedding garment».⁷⁸¹ This wedding garment is precisely the indwelling Grace that we have made ourselves fit to receive and called down into our spirits.

Modern, man-made versions of Christian doctrine give the impression that, in order to be «saved», it is necessary only to come to the wedding feast; but this is not true. Salvation is not automatic. Christ's invitation to the wedding feast is free, and the gift of His Grace is free, but we must be made fit to

enter in and receive it. If we have made the chalice of our soul dirty, the pure Grace of God will not abide there, and we will be found without a wedding garment. Thus, although we have come to the feast, we will not be able to remain there. We will not be «saved».

True salvation is a process: a process of being re-created over and over again, growing ever closer into the likeness of Christ, acquiring more and more of His Grace. It is a process of being prepared to dwell forever in the Light of God's Energy, which will infuse our spirits as we rise ever higher in the vision of Him.

Christ has told us that the way to life – His life – is a narrow way, and few there are who find it.⁷⁸² It is hoped that this book will find those who want to find it: those who are not satisfied with tin false promises of automatic salvation, but who, when they tangibly experience the seed of Divine Energy planted in their souls at baptism, will nurture it with single-minded sincerity and purity of intention; who will «dig for the gold» and uncover the pearl of great price, knowing that, in Lao Tzus words, «The Tao is the great cm treasure of the universe».

мая this book find all true followers of the Tao. Through it may they discover, if they did not know it already, that at the deepest level they are longing for Christ, in Whom we live and have out being.

Appendix One: Eastern Orthodoxy in China

1. The First Orthodox Mission

Eastern Orthodox Christianity was first brought into China via China's neighbor, Russia. In 1685 the Chinese conquered Albazin, which lay in Russia on the northern Chinese border, and took captive a large number of Cossacks and Orthodox Albazians. Forty-five of these entered the service of the Chinese Emperor and were taken to Beijing together with their priest, Fr. Maximus. The Emperor K'ang-hsi graciously received them, and granted Fr. Maximus an old Buddhist temple to convert into a Christian church for the spiritual needs of his people. Houses for priests were built, and the church, dedicated to the Holy Wisdom of God, was consecrated in 1698.

In 1712 Fr. Maximus reposed, and Emperor K'ang-hsi gave permission for another priest to come from Russia to Beijing in order to replace him. In Beijing the Orthodox priests were called lamas, and an Orthodox archimandrite was called ta lama (great lama).

As time went on the Albazians intermarried with the Chinese, and their descendants soon became indistinguishable from the Chinese populace. These descendants remained firm in their Orthodoxy.

In succeeding decades the Orthodox mission in China was hindered owing to political problems which arose between Russia and China. Preaching to the Chinese was restricted. Nevertheless, from ten to forty Chinese converted to Orthodoxy each year in Beijing. Some of these early converts became iconographers, adorning the church in Beijing with Orthodox icons painted in Chinese style.

In 1858 the political climate changed. With the treaty of Tientsin the right of residence was granted to Christian missionaries. This began a new period for the Chinese Orthodox mission. Archimandrites and priests who came from Russia translated and printed the New Testament, Psalter and Orthodox services in Chinese, thus laying the foundations for a native Chinese Orthodoxy. Preaching of the Gospel extended beyond Beijing, to Tung-tingan, where a church was built and many Chinese villagers became fervent Orthodox Christians. Churches were also opened in Hankow and Kalgan.⁷⁸³

2. Priest Mitrofan Chang

In 1880 the first native Chinese Orthodox priest, Fr. Mitrofan Chang (Chang Tzi-tzung), was ordained by St. Nicholas Kasatkin, Bishop of Tokyo. Fr. Mitrofan's acceptance of the priesthood was an act of heroism, for at that time it was more dangerous and difficult to be a Christian than at any time in Chinese history. Anti-foreign and anti-Christian sentiments had grown strong in China in reaction to the colonial expansionism of European powers during the second half of the nineteenth century. Outbreaks of violence would occur, resulting in the deaths of foreigners and Chinese Christian converts.

When he became a priest, Fr. Mitrofan said that he knew his end «would not be pleasant». He and his people were being constantly put to the test, being branded «devils second class», better only than the «foreign devils». Though he was regarded as having betrayed his Chinese culture by becoming a Christian, he knew that he had embraced a faith that transcended culture, and that the revelation of Christ was as much the property of China as it was of any other country. Looking above all political and cultural concerns, he perceived in his spirit that he was training his Chinese Orthodox flock to join the ranks of the martyrs in heaven.

In 1897 the Chinese Orthodox Church received a great blessing with the arrival in Beijing of Archimandrite Innocent Figorovksy (later bishop), who proved to be the most far-sighted Russian priest to have ever come to China. Among other things he established a monastery, ensured that daily services were conducted in the Chinese language, sent out people from Beijing to spread the message of Christ, and established works of charity. This helped to strengthen the Chinese Church and prepare her for the severest trial of her existence.

3. The First Chinese Orthodox Martyrs

In 1900 there occurred the infamous outbreak known as the Boxer Rebellion. The rebellion was carried out by a secret society of martial artists/occultists called the «Spirit Boxers», who vowed to rid China of foreigners and Christians. On being initiated into the sect, they claimed to be inhabited by a god who endowed them with superhuman powers. When they began laying siege on Beijing, they hunted down Chinese Christians and ordered them to worship their gods or be tortured and killed. Thousands of Christians were slain through butchery, beheading and immolation.

During the Boxer Rebellion, the Orthodox churches in Beijing, Tungting-an and Kalgan were destroyed, together with the Orthodox printshop with its unpublished translations and immense collection of movable type in Chinese characters.

On the night of June 11, 1900, the Boxers attacked the church in Beijing. According to the testimony of eyewitnesses, the Chinese Orthodox Christians there met death with tremendous courage. Paul Wan, an Orthodox teacher, died with prayer on his lips. Ia Wen, another teacher, was tortured twice. The first time, the Boxers hacked at her and cast her to the ground half dead. When she regained consciousness, the Boxers again laid hold of her and this time tortured her to death. Both times Ia Wen confessed Christ joyfully before her tormentors.

The Boxers burned down the buildings of the Beijing Orthodox mission on the evening of June 14. Many of the believers, hiding themselves from the perils, gathered at Fr. Mitrofan's home. Among these were several who had formerly been ill-disposed towards the priest, and yet he did not turn them away. Perceiving that some were fainthearted, he encouraged them.

At ten o'clock in the evening on June 23, soldiers and Boxers surrounded Fr. Mitrofan's residence. At that time there were more than seventy Christians there. The stronger fled, while Fr. Mitrofan and many others, mostly women and children, remained and were slaughtered. Fr. Mitrofan sat in the yard before his home, and the Boxers stabbed his chest repeatedly; he fell beneath a date tree.

Fr. Mitrofan's wife and three sons were at the site of the murder. After the Boxers had killed Fr. Mitrofan, they grabbed his seven-year-old son John and severed his arms at the shoulder and cut off his toes, nose and ears. Deep gashes were cut into his chest. The next morning he sat naked and unshod in the doorway. Street urchins mocked him, calling him a «follower of devils», but the boy retorted, «I am a believer in God, and not a follower of devils' When people asked him if he was in pain, he said that he was not. With a smile the little boy said, «It is not hard to suffer for Christ

Later that day the Boxers returned and took away Fr. Mitrofan's wife Tatiana and his sons John and Isaiah, together with Isaiah's nineteen-year-old fiancée Maria and fifteen other believers. Protasy Chan and Rodion Hsiu, who had not yet been baptized, bore witness that little John, still feeling no pain from the mutilation, went quietly with the Boxers and showed not a trace of fear.

All of the prisoners were beheaded. Of Fr. Mitrofan's family, only his second son, Sergei, survived. He later became an archpriest.

The Boxers killed 30,000 Chinese Christians in the summer of 1900, 222 of whom were Chinese Orthodox Christians. Among the Chinese Orthodox

martyrs were descendants of the original Albazinian Orthodox in Beijing; Clement Kui Kin, Matthew Hai Tsuan, his brother Vit, Anna Chui, and many others.

The Church in Russia immediately proclaimed the Chinese Orthodox martyrs as saints, and instituted special church services in their honor to be performed every year on June 11, the day their martyrdom began.⁷⁸⁴

4. The Chinese Orthodox Church after 1900

In the second century a.d., during the first era of Christian martyrdom, the Christian writer Tertullian wrote that «the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church». Such was the case with the Chinese Orthodox Church. After the martyrdoms in 1900, the Church began to flourish as never before. With indemnities paid by the Chinese government, the mission in Beijing was restored. On the site where the martyrs had been slain, a new church was built in their honor in 1903, called «The Church of All the Holy Martyrs», in which were placed the relics of many of them, including St. Mitrofan.

Between 1900 and 1915 the number of Chinese Christians in general grew more than threefold. During the same period the number of Chinese Orthodox Christians increased fivefold, reaching 5/587 baptized Chinese.

Centers for preaching the Orthodox Gospel of Christ were opened throughout much of China. In Chihli (later known as Hebei) province, in central Yung-ping-fu, a church and school were erected, and a native Chinese priest opened about twenty new places for preaching the Gospel. In Henan province, a Chinese official gave land in the city of Wei-hui, where he built a church and a school. This became a center for missionary work throughout Henan.

By 1916 the Chinese Orthodox mission included:

the Monastery of the Dormition in Beijing;

the Hermitage of the Exaltation of the Cross in the hills west of Beijing;

a convent in Beijing;

nineteen churches, including four in Beijing;

thirty-two mission churches, including fourteen in Chihli province, twelve in Hubei, four in Henan, one in Tsian-fu, and one in Mongolia; seventeen schools for boys and three for girls;

thirty-eight teachers, nearly all of whom were native Chinese;

680 Chinese boys and girls enrolled in school;

a theological seminary in Beijing;

a meteorological station, library, printing house (which published one hundred Chinese Orthodox books), painting studio, carpenters shop, flour mill, candle factory, soap factory, weavers workshop, beehives, sewing house and brickyard.⁷⁸⁵

Until the communists gained control of China in 1949, such cities as Beijing, Harbin and Shanghai were centers for Russian refugees of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. From 1934 to 1949 there lived in Shanghai one of the greatest Orthodox saints of the twentieth century, the miracle-worker Archbishop John Maximovitch, now known as St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco. He ordained Chinese priests and deacons, and established an orphanage for both Russian and Chinese children whom he rescued from poverty, neglect and abandonment. Even the non-Christian Chinese venerated him as a holy man. Also in China were St. Jonah of Manchuria, another miracle-working bishop; Abbess Rufina, a clairvoyant eldress; and Elder Ignatius of Harbin, a great man of prayer who after the Bolshevik Revolution prophesied: «What began in Russia will end in America».

With the communist takeover of China, many Orthodox believers left the country under the leadership of Archbishop John. However, many remained: at that time there were 25,000 believers in the Chinese Orthodox Church, and 103 churches.

In 1950, a righteous native Chinese priest, Symeon Du (Du Run-chen), was consecrated as the new bishop of Shanghai. In 1957 another native Chinese, Basil Yao (Yao Fu-an'), was made the Bishop of Beijing, and the Chinese Orthodox Church was proclaimed completely autonomous (self-governing) by the Orthodox Church in Russia.

5. The Church under Persecution

Under the communist government, a wave of religious persecution began. All the Orthodox monasteries in China were closed, their monastics exiled or driven out; and many Orthodox churches were closed or destroyed. During the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976 the persecution was greatly intensified, causing Orthodox Christianity in China to go underground. Orthodox believers and clergy began to be martyred for their faith.⁷⁸⁶ Among them was the Chinese priest Fr. Stefan Wu (Wu Zhi-quan), who on мая 17, 1970, was beaten to death by the Red Guards in an Orthodox church in Harbin.

By the end of the Cultural Revolution, most of the Orthodox churches in China were destroyed, and those that remained standing had been confiscated

by the government to be used for other purposes. A small number of Orthodox clergymen remained alive, and no bishops remained to ordain new clergy.

Beginning in the 1980s, the last Chinese clergymen asked the government to give back the remaining Orthodox churches. In 1985, the government allowed only one church to be reopened: the Holy Protection Orthodox Church in Harbin. Its priest, Fr. Gregory Zhu (Zhu Shi-pu), reopened there in September of 2000. The church building remains tightly controlled by the government.

In 1998, something unexpected happened in Harbin. The citizens of the city, most of them non-Christians, petitioned the government to restore the great Orthodox Church of the Holy Wisdom of God (Hagia Sophia), which had been closed in the 1960s. There were so many requests that the government listened, and the church was restored largely through donations from Harbin citizens. To this day, however, the church has not been allowed to reopen for public worship.

The last active Orthodox priest in China, Fr. Alexander Du (Du Li-fu), reopened in Beijing in December of 2003. His cousin had been among those martyred for their Orthodox faith during the Cultural Revolution. A direct descendant of the Albazini, Fr. Alexander pastored a group of believers in the capital and secretly baptized their children and grandchildren. He had repeatedly applied to the authorities to open a church in Beijing, but had always been refused.

6. Hope for the Future

A few weeks before his repose, Fr. Alexander Du sent his greetings to Orthodox Christians all over the world, especially those who care for the Chinese Orthodox Church, and asked them to «beseech God for a good future for our Church in China». According to his niece, Wang Lin-ru, Fr. Alexander believed that the Orthodox Church would be resurrected in China, although he had lost hope that this would happen during his lifetime.⁷⁸⁷ There are indeed signs that the tide will change.

In the autonomous regions of Xinjiang Uygur and Inner Mongolia, Chinese Orthodox Christians have been given more freedom. Today there are 3,000 Chinese Orthodox in Xinjiang Uygur and 8,000 in Inner Mongolia. During the last decade, Orthodox churches have been built in the cities of Ürümqi and Yining in Xinjiang Uygur, and in the year 2000 a large and beautiful Orthodox church was built in the town of Erguna (formerly Labdarin) in Inner Mongolia.⁷⁸⁸

Since 1996 a Greek Orthodox Metropolitanate (bishops see) has been centered in Hong Kong, which in turn has led to the establishment of Orthodox

missions in Taiwan and Singapore. Through the work of the Metropolitanate, more Chinese are now discovering and embracing the Orthodox faith.

The Russian Orthodox Church has also made its presence known in China after a long forced absence. Russian bishops and clergy have made several visits to cities in mainland China during the last decade, baptizing people in their homes and giving Holy Communion to Orthodox believers.

But the greatest hope for Orthodoxy in mainland China lies in the fact that, at the present time, native Chinese Orthodox Christians are preparing for the priesthood. Some of these have been raised in the clandestine Orthodox communities in China, while others have newly converted to the Orthodox faith, having discovered it on their own through a study of Church history. They are now studying in Greece, Russia and America in preparation for ordination.⁷⁸⁹ The future of the Chinese Orthodox Church is literally in their hands, since, according to current law, only native Chinese clergymen can serve the Divine Liturgy for Chinese citizens on their own soil.

7. Toward a New Phase of Chinese Orthodoxy

The communist government, while actively trying to stamp out the free expression of Christian faith in China, has at the same time, in a reverse manner, done a service to the faith. Since «the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church», the very persecution of Christians has caused a phenomenal number of people in China to seek out the faith of Christ. When the communists came to power in 1949, there was in China a total of one million Christians of various confessions. Today, there are eighty to a hundred million. About 15 percent of these Christians belong to the state-controlled churches; the rest belong to underground house churches. A great number of the latter – especially the leaders – have endured persecution from the communist government: loss of public standing, fines, beatings, imprisonment and death,

For now, the Orthodox faith is all but unknown to the people – including the Christians – of China. However, the millions of fervent believers throughout China, who follow Christ often at the cost of great personal sacrifice, can provide a foundation for a new phase of Orthodox Christianity in China. This can occur when Chinese Christians discover the most ancient, traditional and Orthodox expression of the faith of Christ. One Chinese convert to Orthodoxy, who is now preparing for the priesthood, has recently observed: «It's good that many people in China have heard of the Lord Jesus Christ already, but I am sorry that not many people have heard of Orthodox Christianity. Orthodoxy and Jesus Christ are not two separate things. Jesus Christ is

Orthodoxy. The word of God, the Scripture, is Orthodoxy. I feel that if someone deeply believes in Jesus Christ, this belief will bring him to Orthodoxy».

There are two reasons why an embracing of Eastern Orthodoxy can be a natural development in the providential unfolding of Chinese Christianity. First of all, Chinese civilization and culture is built upon a love for orthodoxy and adherence to tradition stemming from ancient times. As Fr. Seraphim Rose has pointed out: «There is a very strong idea in the Chinese mind of orthodoxy, with a small ‘o’: that there is a right teaching, and that the whole of society depends upon that right teaching.... The Chinese are one of the most tradition-conscious peoples. Up until the coming of communism, the Chinese were doing things that they had been doing all the way back to Confucius; and Confucius said they were doing these things all the way back to the third millennium B.C. The whole outlook on life remained basically the same, and whenever there was a dispute, they would appeal to antiquity. This is the way it was done in ancient times; we can’t change it.»⁷⁹⁰ Eastern Orthodoxy, with its uncompromising adherence to the original, unadulterated Christian path and its unbroken, unchanged transmission of Christ’s teaching from apostolic times, thus resonates with the Chinese mind.

Secondly, Eastern Orthodoxy’s depth of teachings on the inner spiritual life, drawn from two millennia of mystical experience of the saints, can meet the ancient Chinese spiritual teachings on their own ground. Modern Western Christianity cannot do this. Orthodox Christianity alone can understand, appreciate and embrace the profound realizations of the genuine Chinese sages of the past, beginning with Lao Tzu, and separate these from what Lao Tzu called «sidetracks from the Way» in Chinese religion and philosophy. Moreover, Orthodox Christianity alone can open to the Chinese the greatest mysteries and the final end of the life in Christ: deification through total infusion of the Light of Uncreated Light.

In 1981 Fr. Seraphim, speaking of the ancient orthodox tradition of China, said, «If Christianity could have managed to get inside this tradition somehow and become a part of it, it would have worked, for the soul of the Chinese people would have been very well disposed to it.»⁷⁹¹ With people coming to Christ as never before in the history of China, at a rate of more than ten million per year we see today the fulfillment of Fr. Seraphim’s wish. While love for Christ is evaporating from decadent Western civilization, it is blossoming in China. The Far East is far outpacing the West not only in the number of new Christians, but also in its sacrificial witness of Christ before the modern world.

The Chinese people, who speak the oldest surviving language in the world, are connected to a noble and profound ancient culture. Now that so many are finding Christ the incarnate Tao, the next step is to connect themselves with the ancient tradition preserved in the Christian East, where they

will find the most pun image of Christ and the most powerful means of acquiring His Grace. When this occurs, the noetic Jesus Prayer, enshrined in the inner temples of many Chinese hearts, will rise like incense to Christ. may the present book serve as a stepping-stone in this process of discovering, connecting and ascending.



Appendix Two:

A Letter of Hieromonk Seraphim Rose to a Spiritual Seeker

Fr. Seraphim wrote the following letter toward the end of his life. He was addressing a young man whom he had never met, but whom he had heard was interested in the writings of the French metaphysician René Guénon. As stated earlier, it was Guénon who had first taught Fr. Seraphim the necessity of orthodoxy and of tradition. This understanding had led him to value the Chinese tradition, with its strong sense of orthodoxy, and Gi-ming Shien as an authentic transmitter of that tradition; and had finally led him to embrace the traditional expression of Christ's revelation in Orthodoxy. In an unusual turn of ideas, Fr. Seraphim shows in this letter how his path to tradition and orthodoxy enabled him to find Truth that is ultimately not a tradition at all. He acknowledges his identity as a Westerner and affirms the Christian roots of the West, then explains that the path of Christ is not specifically Western or culture-bound.

In this letter it will be seen how Fr. Seraphim falls into neither «fundamentalism» nor syncretism. Religious fundamentalism (believing that traditions outside one's own are all wrong) is intellectually satisfying to narrow minds, while religious syncretism (believing that all traditions are equal) is satisfying to broad minds. In avoiding both extremes, Fr. Seraphim followed a path that was not intellectually satisfying at all, for such is the path of Truth. As he himself wrote, «When I became a Christian I voluntarily crucified my mind, and all the crosses that I bear have only been a source of joy for me. I have lost nothing, and gained everything».

Dear Ken,

Solomon (Rhonda) has shared with me your recent letter to her, and in reading it I sense in you a kindred spirit to whom a word from me might not be in vain.

It so happens that René Guénon was the chief influence in the formation of my own intellectual outlook (quite apart from the question of Orthodox Christianity). I read and studied with eagerness all his books that I could get hold of; through his influence I studied the ancient Chinese language and resolved to do for the Chinese spiritual tradition what he had done for the Hindu; I was even able to meet and study with a genuine representative of the Chinese tradition [Gi-ming Shien] and understood full well what he [Guénon] means by the difference between such authentic teachers and the mere «professors» who teach in the universities.

It was René Guénon who taught me to seek and love the Truth above all else, and to be unsatisfied with anything else; this is what finally brought

me to the Orthodox Church. Perhaps a word of my experience will be of help for you to know.

For years in my studies I was satisfied with being «above all traditions» but somehow faithful to them; I only went deeper into the Chinese tradition because no one had presented it in the West from the fully traditional point of view. When I visited an Orthodox Church, it was only in order to view another «tradition» – knowing that Guénon (or one of his disciples) had described Orthodoxy as the most authentic of the Christian traditions.

However, when I entered an Orthodox Church for the first time (a Russian Church in San Francisco), something happened to me that I had not experienced in any Buddhist or other Eastern temple; something in my heart said that this was «home», that all my search was over. I didn't really know what this meant, because the service was quite strange to me, and in a foreign language. I began to attend Orthodox services more frequently, gradually learning the language and customs, but still keeping all my basic Guénonian ideas about all the authentic spiritual traditions.

With my exposure to Orthodoxy and to Orthodox people, however, a new idea began to enter my awareness: that truth was not just an abstract idea sought and known by the mind, but was something personal – even a Person – sought and loved by the heart. And that is how I met Christ. I am now grateful that my approach to Orthodoxy took several years and had nothing of emotional excitement about it – that was Guénon's influence again, and it helped me to go deeper into Orthodoxy without the ups and downs that some converts encounter when they are not too ready for something as deep as Orthodoxy. My entrance into the Orthodox Church occurred at the very time I left the academic world and gave up the attempt to communicate the Chinese tradition to the Western world. My Chinese teacher also left San Francisco shortly before this – my only real contact with the Chinese tradition – and in Guénonian fashion he disappeared utterly, leaving no address. I remember him fondly, but after becoming Orthodox I saw how limited was his teaching: the Chinese spiritual teaching, he said, would disappear if communism endures in China. So fragile was this tradition – but the Orthodox Christianity I had found would survive everything and endure to the end of the world – because it was not merely handed down from generation to generation, as all traditions are; but was at the same time given from God to man.

I look back fondly now on Rene Guenon as my first real instructor in Truth, and I only pray that you will take what is good from him and not let his limitations chain you. Even psychologically, «Eastern wisdom» is not for us who are flesh and blood of tin West; Orthodox Christianity is clearly the tradition that was given us – and it can be clearly seen in the Western Europe of the Him ten centuries, before the falling away of Rome from Orthodoxy But it also

happens that Orthodoxy is not merely a «tradition» like any other, a «handing down» of spiritual wisdom from the past; it is God's Truth here and now – it gives us immediate contact with God such as no other tradition can do. There are many truths in the other traditions, both those handed down from a past when men were closer to God, and those discovered by gifted men in the reaches of the mind; but the full Truth is only in Christianity God's revelation of Himself to mankind. I will take only one example: there are teachings on spiritual deception in other traditions, but none so thoroughly refined as those taught by the Orthodox Holy Fathers; and more importantly, these deceptions of the evil one and our fallen nature are so omnipresent and so thorough that no one could escape them unless the loving God revealed by Christianity were close at hand to deliver us from them. Similarly: Hindu tradition teaches many true things about the end of the *Kali Yuga*; but one who merely knows these truths in the mind will be helpless to resist the temptations of those times, and many who recognize the Antichrist (Chakravarti) when he comes will nonetheless worship him – only the power of Christ given to the heart will have strength to resist him.

It is my prayer for you that God will open your heart, and you yourself will do what you can to meet Him. You will find there happiness you never dreamed possible before; your heart will join your head in recognizing the true God, and no real truth you have ever known will be lost. *мая* God grant it!

Feel free to write whatever is in your mind or heart.

With love, Fr. Seraphim



Icon of the Mother of God, «The Mountain Unhewn by Hand of Man». The icon's title and symbolism refer to Nebuchadnezzar's vision, described in Daniel 2:34–35, of the stone cut out of a mountain by no human hand», which the ancient Christians saw as a prophecy of Christ's birth from a Virgin (i.e., without human seed). In Nebuchadnezzar's dream – which occurred around 600 B.C., the time of Lao Tzu – the stone (Christ) «became a great mountain and filled all the earth». This image is referred to in chapter 15 of Part I: «Christ the Eternal Tao». Painted in Russia in the sixteenth century, the icon shows the artistic influence of Russia's neighbor, China – especially in the clouds which are woven into the Virgin's clothing, symbolizing the heavens.

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⁴⁰⁹St. Gregory of Sinai, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 222. Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation, and Early Man*, pp. 396–98.

⁴¹⁰St. Gregory Palamas, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 377.

⁴¹¹Cf. Genesis 1:26.

⁴¹²St. Macarius of Egypt, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 3, p. 300. St. Gregory Palamas, in *Tire Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 296. Cf. Romans 5:12.

⁴¹³St. Macarius of Egypt, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 3, p. 300.

⁴¹⁴Genesis 3:5.

⁴¹⁵St. Mark the Ascetic, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 117.

⁴¹⁶Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 1, p. 88.

⁴¹⁷John Ross, D.D., *The Original Religion of China*, pp. 23, 25.

⁴¹⁸See, for example, Bernhard Karlgren, tr., *The Book of Documents (Shu Ching)*, p. 48. On how T'ien and Shang Ti were used to designate the same supreme Deity, see James Legge, *The Religions of China*, p. 10.

⁴¹⁹Karlgren, tr., *The Book of Documents (Shu Ching)*, pp. 59, 73.

⁴²⁰Karlgren, tr., *The Book of Odes (Shih Ching)*, p. 151; Ross, pp. 91–94.

⁴²¹Karlgren, tr., *The Book of Documents*, p. 59.

⁴²²Laurence G. Thompson, *The Chinese Way in Religion*, pp. 1–6.

⁴²³For the fascinating text of the Chinese Emperor's sacrifice to Shang Ti in A.D. 1538, see James Legge, *The Notions of the Chinese Concerning God and Spirits*, pp. 26–31. Also published, with commentary, in James Legge, *The Religions of China*, pp. 43–51.

⁴²⁴For a description of later Chinese polytheism, see James Legge, *The Religions of China*, pp. 167–170.

⁴²⁵*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 15 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).

⁴²⁶Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, p. 22.

⁴²⁷*Analects of Confucius* 3:10–11 (James Legge and Waley, trans.).

⁴²⁸The most ancient Chinese historical documents tell of a great flood occurring in the twenty-fourth century B.C., which was the same time it occurred according to Biblical chronology.

⁴²⁹*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 14 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).

⁴³⁰The parenthetical phrase “of man” was added by Gi-ming Shien by way of exegesis. In the translation notes of Fr. Seraphim, “clue” (*jhi*) is also condered as “main-thread.”

- ⁴³¹ Ibid., chs. 52 and 56 (Waley, trans.); ch. 16 (Rose, trans.).
- ⁴³² Ibid., ch. 49 (Ren Jiyu, trans.).
- ⁴³³ Ibid., ch. 78 (Lin Yutang, Ch'u Ta- kao, Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁴³⁴ Ibid., ch. 8 (Gi-ming Shien and Rose, trans.).
- ⁴³⁵ Ibid., ch. 67 (Wu and Legge, trans.).
- ⁴³⁶ Ibid., ch. 49 (Mair, trans.).
- ⁴³⁷ Ibid., ch. 63 (Wu and Red Pine, trans., italics added).
- ⁴³⁸ James Legge, *The Religions of China*, pp. 143,223–24.
- ⁴³⁹ Ibid., p. 137.
- ⁴⁴⁰ *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 38 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ⁴⁴¹ Ibid., ch. 52 (Rose and Mair, trans.).
- ⁴⁴² John 7:24.
- ⁴⁴³ Quoted in Holmes Welch, *Taoism: The Parting of the Way*, p. 77.
- ⁴⁴⁴ See Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, pp. 98–99.
- ⁴⁴⁵ *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 52 (Rose, Waley and Mair, trans.).
- ⁴⁴⁶ Gi-ming Shien, «Being and Nothingness in Greek and Ancient Chinese Philosophy,» pp. 18–19.
- ⁴⁴⁷ This is the same Teh that is found in the title of Lao Tzu's book, *Tao Teh Ching*, which has been translated by Arthur Waley as *The Book of the Way and Its Power*. Teh is more commonly rendered as «virtue» because, when referring in human teh, it corresponds roughly to the original Latin *virtu*. However, when Lao Tzu speaks specifically of the *Teh* of the Tao, it is better rendered as «Power» – or as «Grace», as we shall show.
- ⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., ch. 51 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.); eh. 65 (Gi-ming Shien and Wu, trans.).
- ⁴⁴⁹ From the notes of Eugene (Fr. Seraphim) Rose, taken during Gi-ming Shien's classes on the *Tao Teh Ching*.
- ⁴⁵⁰ Red Pine, *Lao Tzus Taoteching*, pp. 42,102.
- ⁴⁵¹ St. Seraphim of Sarov, *Little Russian Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 92.
- ⁴⁵² *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 54 (Wu, trans.); ch. 23 (Gia-fu Feng, English and Wu, trans.); ch. 28 (Gi-ming Shien and Tam C. Gibbs, trans.).
- ⁴⁵³ Ibid., ch. 39 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ⁴⁵⁴ Gi-ming Shien, «Being and Nothingness in Greek and Ancient Chinese Philosophy,» p. 23.

- ⁴⁵⁵ Gi-ming Shien, «Nothingness in the Philosophy of Lao Tzu,» p. 63.
- ⁴⁵⁶ Gi-ming Shien, «Being and Nothingness in Greek and Ancient Chinese Philosophy,» p. 23.
- ⁴⁵⁷ Gi-ming Shien, «Nothingness in the Philosophy of Lao Tzu,» p. 63.
- ⁴⁵⁸ Gi-ming Shien, «Being and Nothingness in Greek and Ancient Chinese Philosophy,» p. 23.
- ⁴⁵⁹ *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 34 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, ch. 51 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, ch. 81 (Wu, trans.).
- ⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, ch. 79 (Fu Huisheng and Legge, trans.).
- ⁴⁶³ Tien (Heaven), as a reference to the Supreme Being, is to be distinguished from t'ien-ti (heaven and earth), which refers to the totality of the created order, and is often translated as «nature». For Lao Tzu, Blillr the Tao was benevolent, nature was not, in and of itself. Thus in the *Tao Teh Ching* we read: «Heaven and earth are not benevolent» (ch. 5).
- ⁴⁶⁴ Ping-ti Ho, *The Cradle of the East*, p. 336.
- ⁴⁶⁵ *Tao Teh Ching*, chs. 47, 73 (Wu, Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁴⁶⁶ On «Heaven» being identified with «Tao» in the *Tao Teh Ching*, see Auliur Waley, *The Way and Its Power*, p. 233m and Ingrid Fischer-Schreiber, *The Shambhala Dictionary of Taoism*, p. 183.
- ⁴⁶⁷ Quoted in Ross, *The Original Religion of China*, p. 92.
- ⁴⁶⁸ *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 73 (Wu, trans.).
- ⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, chs. 59, 67, 68, 73 (Wu, Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁴⁷⁰ Exodus 3:14.
- ⁴⁷¹ Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakha rov). *His Life Is Mine*, p. 18.
- ⁴⁷² Exodus 34:29–35.
- ⁴⁷³ *The Philokalia*, vol. 3, pp. 331, 347–48. See also 2Corinthians, ch. 3.
- ⁴⁷⁴ In Greek, this is called *hypostasis*, which might be translated as “personal essence.»
- ⁴⁷⁵ In Greek, *ousia*, which might be translated as “common essence.»
- ⁴⁷⁶ See Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, pp. 123–24.
- ⁴⁷⁷ Eva Wong, *The Shambhala Guide la Taoism*, pp. 27–28.
- ⁴⁷⁸ Liu I-Ming, *Awakening to the Tao*, p. 85.

- ⁴⁷⁹ *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 53 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁴⁸⁰ Karlgren, tr. *The Book of Document (Shu Ching)*, pp. 55–56.
- ⁴⁸¹ Fr. Dumitru Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, p. 79.
- ⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 88 (italics added).
- ⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 93–94.
- ⁴⁸⁴ St. Maximus the Confessor, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 137. Quoted in Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 63.
- ⁴⁸⁵ Sophrony, *His Life Is Mine*, p. 28.
- ⁴⁸⁶ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 64.
- ⁴⁸⁷ St. Gregory Nazianzen, Oration Quoted in Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 46.
- ⁴⁸⁸ Exodus 33:19, 22–23.
- ⁴⁸⁹ Genesis 1:26.
- ⁴⁹⁰ Genesis 3:22.
- ⁴⁹¹ Cf. Genesis 18:2ff. Sophrony. *I In Life is Mine*, pp. 19–24.
- ⁴⁹² Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 46.
- ⁴⁹³ From Gi-ming Shien’s commentary on ch. 42 of the *Tao Teh Ching*, recorded by Eugene (Fr. Seraphim) Rose.
- ⁴⁹⁴ Deuteronomy 18:15, 18.
- ⁴⁹⁵ John 5:46; 1:45.
- ⁴⁹⁶ John 1:21.
- ⁴⁹⁷ John 4:25.
- ⁴⁹⁸ Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23.
- ⁴⁹⁹ Exodus 20:21.
- ⁵⁰⁰ Sophrony, *His Life Is Mine*, pp. 20.
- ⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- ⁵⁰² John 8:56–58.
- ⁵⁰³ According to the Jewish law of the time, if a person made himself out to be God, he was to be stoned to death. Therefore, when Christ called Himself «I AM», the Jews who did not recognize His Divinity immediately took up stones to throw at Him, but He escaped out of their hands (John 8:59) Likewise, they took up stones to kill Him when He said, «I and my Father are one» (John 10:30–31).

⁵⁰⁴Here the original Greek word for «power» is *dunamis*. Like the Chinese word *Teh*, *dunamis* is translated as both «power» and «virtue». The King James Bible, for example, reads: «For there went Virtue out of Him».

⁵⁰⁵Luke 6:19; 8:46.

⁵⁰⁶Matthew 17:2.

⁵⁰⁷Fr. George Calciu, «Divine Light in the Devil's Lair.» In *Father George Calciu: Interviews, Homilies, and Talks*, p. 266.

⁵⁰⁸The closeness of Christ to the Chinese mind is attested to by the great number of people who are turning to Christ in China today. See Appendix i.

⁵⁰⁹*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 8 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).

⁵¹⁰Philippians 2:7.

⁵¹¹Sophrony, *His Life Is Mine*, pp. 21.

⁵¹²Luke 22:25,27.

⁵¹³*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 34 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).

⁵¹⁴Mark 12:37.

⁵¹⁵John 7:46.

⁵¹⁶Isaiah 42:3.

⁵¹⁷Matthew 11:29.

⁵¹⁸*Tao Teh Ching*, chs. 34 and 73 (Gia-fu Feng, English and Waley, trans.).

⁵¹⁹Luke 9:56.

⁵²⁰John 8:58; 10:30; 14:16; 14:23; 15:26.

⁵²¹John 16:12:8:31–32; 14:26; 16:13.

⁵²²John 1:17.

⁵²³John 13:1.

⁵²⁴John 3:35.

⁵²⁵John 15:10.

⁵²⁶Sophrony, *His Life Is Mine*, pp. 28–29.

⁵²⁷John 10:30:17:21.

⁵²⁸Jeremiah 31:33.

⁵²⁹Mark 2:27.

⁵³⁰Matthew 22:37, 39–40. Cf. Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18.

⁵³¹Matthew 6:3.

⁵³²Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, pp. 123–24.

⁵³³*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 8 (Gi-ming Shien and Rose, trans.).

⁵³⁴Luke 6:27–28, 30, 37–38.

⁵³⁵John 14:9.

⁵³⁶John 14:28.

⁵³⁷John 5:17, 19–21.

⁵³⁸Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, pp. 144–45

⁵³⁹John 4:9.

⁵⁴⁰Philippians 2:7–8.

⁵⁴¹Eugene (Fr. Seraphim) Rose, «Emptiness and Fullness in the *Lao Tzu*» pp. 50–51.

⁵⁴²*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 11 (Gia-fu Feng, English and Waley, trans.).

⁵⁴³Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 201; St. Theophan the Recluse, *The Spiritual Life*, pp. 61–62.

⁵⁴⁴Luke 11:35; *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 52.

⁵⁴⁵*Nous* is sometimes rendered as “intellect,» as in the English translation of *The Philokalia*. Such a rendering can be misleading, since in modern usage Intellect» carries the connotation of abstract and deductive reason, from which the *nous* is to be carefully distinguished. In the following pages we have bourn to translate *nous* as “spirit,» since this captures more of the meaning of dir word for the modern mind.

⁵⁴⁶Lii Tung-pin [Lii Yen], *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, Thomas Cleary, trans., p. 13–15, 138–139.

⁵⁴⁷St. Theophan, *The Spiritual Life*, p. 61.

⁵⁴⁸Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, p. 136. St. John Damascene, «Orthodox Faith,» p. 236.

⁵⁴⁹*The Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 88.

⁵⁵⁰P’o («inferior soul,» «animal soul,» «body soul”) and *ying*, which according to Gi-ming Shien is to be equated with *hun* («superior soul,» In each soul,» «spirit soul»). In the ancient Chinese conception, it is the *bun* winch passes to the other world when the body dies. Similarly, the ancient Christian tradition teaches that only the *nous* passes into the future life at death, while the lower powers of the soul cease to be. (See Fr. Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, pp. 86–87, 96–97.)

⁵⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 308.

- ⁵⁵²St. Theophan, *The Spiritual Life*, p. 75.
- ⁵⁵³*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 52 (Rose and Mair, trans.).
- ⁵⁵⁴St. Theophan, *The Spiritual Life*, pp. 74–75.
- ⁵⁵⁵Luke 11:35.
- ⁵⁵⁶St. Theophan, *The Path to Salvation*, p. 260.
- ⁵⁵⁷On the union of the soul and the spirit, see also St. Isaiah the Solitary, «On Guarding the Intellect», in *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 26.
- ⁵⁵⁸*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 10 (Rose, trans.).
- ⁵⁵⁹St. Basil, letter 2, p. 7.
- ⁵⁶⁰*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 12 (Gi-ming Shien, trans.).
- ⁵⁶¹John 7:24.
- ⁵⁶²*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 71 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁵⁶³Romans 12:2; John 3:3.
- ⁵⁶⁴*The Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 201.
- ⁵⁶⁵Psalms 115:7–8; 29:11–12 (Septuagint).
- ⁵⁶⁶St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The First-Created Man*, pp. 81–82.
- ⁵⁶⁷*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 62 (Wu, trans.).
- ⁵⁶⁸Luke 5:21.
- ⁵⁶⁹Mark 10:47; Matthew 20:31.
- ⁵⁷⁰Fr. George was here paraphrasing a statement of French author Paul Claudel.
- ⁵⁷¹Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *We Shall See Him as He Is*, p. 154.
- ⁵⁷²Luke 23:34.
- ⁵⁷³Luke 23:43.
- ⁵⁷⁴Christ's Apostles wrote about this in their letters. See, for example, i Peter 3:18–19 and 4:6; and Ephesians 4:8–10.
- ⁵⁷⁵Cf. John 5:21–29; 1 Corinthians ch. 15.
- ⁵⁷⁶John 3:5.
- ⁵⁷⁷*Prayer Book*, pp. 341–42, 346.
- ⁵⁷⁸In the Eastern Orthodox baptism service, the candidate is asked three times, “Do you unite yourself to Christ?” – to which he replies, “I do.”
- ⁵⁷⁹St. Diodochus of Photiki, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 279.

- ⁵⁸⁰Ibid., vol. 4, p. 265.
- ⁵⁸¹Luke 17:21; Matthew 13:31–32.
- ⁵⁸²Matthew 13:44.
- ⁵⁸³*The Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 259–260.
- ⁵⁸⁴St. Seraphim of Sarov, *Little Russian Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 97.
- ⁵⁸⁵See *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 40.
- ⁵⁸⁶Matthew 12:45.
- ⁵⁸⁷Sophrony, *We Shall See Him as He Is*, p. 102.
- ⁵⁸⁸Ibid., p. 152.
- ⁵⁸⁹*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 15 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁵⁹⁰Luke 21:34.
- ⁵⁹¹Matthew 25:1–13; Luke 12:39.
- ⁵⁹²Luke 12:35–38.
- ⁵⁹³*The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 189.
- ⁵⁹⁴Ibid., vol. 4, p. 204.
- ⁵⁹⁵Mark 14:38.
- ⁵⁹⁶Mark 13:34–37.
- ⁵⁹⁷St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, p. 85.
- ⁵⁹⁸*The Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 67.
- ⁵⁹⁹Ibid., p. 200.
- ⁶⁰⁰Matthew 6:22.
- ⁶⁰¹*The Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 194.
- ⁶⁰²*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 52 (Waley, trans.); ch. 16 (Rose, trans.).
- ⁶⁰³St. Theophan, *The Path to Salvation*, pp. 136–37.
- ⁶⁰⁴Ibid., p. 289.
- ⁶⁰⁵Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakha rov), *St. Silouan the Athonite*, p. 66.
- ⁶⁰⁶Hieromonk Christodoulos (Aggeloglou), *Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain*(English version), p. 131.
- ⁶⁰⁷Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, p. 142.
- ⁶⁰⁸Matthew 5:39.
- ⁶⁰⁹Quoted in *Death to the World*, 110. II (1997), p. 9.

- ⁶¹⁰Barsanuphius and John, Sts., *Questions and Answers* (in Greek), p. 223.
- ⁶¹¹Tao Teh Ching, ch. 3 (Cleary, trans.)
- ⁶¹²St. Theophan, *The Path to Salvation*, p. 293.
- ⁶¹³Ibid., p. 299.
- ⁶¹⁴The ancient Chinese word kwei corresponds to the ancient Greek daemon.
- ⁶¹⁵*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 60 (Wu, Gi-fu-Feng, English, and Red Pine, trans.).
- ⁶¹⁶St. Theophan, *The Spiritual Life*, 82.
- ⁶¹⁷See *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 171 and M. Kontzevitch, *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 39–43.
- ⁶¹⁸*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 64 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁶¹⁹*The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 191.
- ⁶²⁰Nicetas Stithatos was a disciple and biographer of St. Symeon the New Theologian. His mystical writings are found in the fourth volume of *The Philokalia*.
- ⁶²¹Ibid., vol. 4, p. 117.
- ⁶²²Roy Masters, *How to Conquer Negative Emotions*, p. 2.
- ⁶²³*The Philokalia*, vol. 4, pp. 116–17.
- ⁶²⁴*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 64.
- ⁶²⁵Ibid., ch. 48 (Waley, trans.).
- ⁶²⁶On Richard Wurmbrand, sec pp. 490–91.
- ⁶²⁷*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 65 (Fu Huishcng and Cleary, trans.).
- ⁶²⁸Hieromonk Christodulos (Agge- loglou). *Elder Paisios* (in Greek), pp. 73–74, 95.
- ⁶²⁹That is, having the «one-pointed» thought that primordial man enjoyed (see p. 117). In Lao Tzu's words, this is «returning to the uncarved block».
- ⁶³⁰Fr. Sergius Chetverikov, *Elder Ambrose of Optina*, p. 235.
- ⁶³¹*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 46 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁶³²This is a translation of the Greek word *merimnao*, which comes from a root word meaning to divide, separate or draw in different directions. Christ is saying here that we should not allow our mind to be divided and distracted by diverse thoughts, which break the one-pointed thought with which man was first created.
- ⁶³³Luke 14:26; 12:22, 24–26.

- ⁶³⁴Luke 12:11–12.
- ⁶³⁵Matthew 18:3; *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 28 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁶³⁶Matthew 16:24–25.
- ⁶³⁷Gi-ming Shien, «The Basic Teachings of Taoism,» pp. 2–3.
- ⁶³⁸St. Abba Dorotheus, *Discourses and Sayings*, p. 126.
- ⁶³⁹Roy Masters, *Secrets of a Parallel Universe*, pp. 41, 43.
- ⁶⁴⁰*Tao Teh Ching*, chs. 18–19 (Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁶⁴¹*Ibid.*, ch. 64 (Wu, Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).
- ⁶⁴²Matthew 6:22–23.
- ⁶⁴³Sophrony, *We Shall See Him as He Is*, p. 155.
- ⁶⁴⁴Sophrony, St. *Silouan the Athonite*, p. 162.
- ⁶⁴⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 161–62, 179.
- ⁶⁴⁶Sophrony, *We Shall See Him as He Is*, pp. 155–56.
- ⁶⁴⁷*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 52. See p. 236 above.
- ⁶⁴⁸*Ibid.*, ch. 14, (Fu Huisheng, trans.)
- ⁶⁴⁹1 Kings 19:12.
- ⁶⁵⁰John 18:37.
- ⁶⁵¹Matthew 7:21–23.
- ⁶⁵²From a talk by Emanuel McLittle, psychologist, December 1995.
- ⁶⁵³*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 25 (Cleary and Fu Huisheng, trans.).
- ⁶⁵⁴John 1:14.
- ⁶⁵⁵*The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 164.
- ⁶⁵⁶Luke 6:45.
- ⁶⁵⁷St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Quoted in Abbot Chariton, *The Art of Prayer*, p. 49.
- ⁶⁵⁸St. Theophan, *The Path of Prayer*, p. 11.
- ⁶⁵⁹St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, p. 131.
- ⁶⁶⁰Chetverikov, *Elder Ambrose of Optina*, p. 251.
- ⁶⁶¹*The Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 276.
- ⁶⁶²*Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 186.
- ⁶⁶³St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, p. 83.

⁶⁶⁴Hieromonk Christodoulos (Aggeloglou), *Elder Paisios* (in Greek), pp. 55, 158.

⁶⁶⁵

Matthew 5:44–45.

⁶⁶⁶Nun Maria Stakhovich and Sergius Bolshakoff, *Interior Silence*, p. 99.

⁶⁶⁷*The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 166.

⁶⁶⁸St. Theophan, *The Spiritual Life*, p. 246.

⁶⁶⁹Psalm 6:2.

⁶⁷⁰St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, p. 118.

⁶⁷¹Acts 4:12.

⁶⁷²St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, pp. 78–79.

⁶⁷³Victor Afanasiev, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina*, p. 457.

⁶⁷⁴John 14:26; St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, pp. 79–80.

⁶⁷⁵*The Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 259.

⁶⁷⁶Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11.

⁶⁷⁷Sophrony, *His Life Is Mine*, p. 114.

⁶⁷⁸John 4:23–24.

⁶⁷⁹Archbishop Mark of Berlin and Germany, «A Conversation with Elder Nikodim on the Jesus Prayer.» In *The Orthodox Word*, no. 27 (2011), pp. 142–43.

⁶⁸⁰Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, p. 135 (italics added).

⁶⁸¹Psalm 136(Septuagint).

⁶⁸²Abbot Chariton, *The Art of Prayer*, pp. 100–101.

⁶⁸³Sophrony, *His Life Is Mine*, p. 113.

⁶⁸⁴Luke 14:28.

⁶⁸⁵Matthew 16:24.

⁶⁸⁶Luke 9:62.

⁶⁸⁷Matthew 12:45.

⁶⁸⁸*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 53 (Waley, Ren Jiyu, Gia-fu Feng and English, trans.).

⁶⁸⁹Matthew 22:37.

⁶⁹⁰John 12:25.

⁶⁹¹Luke 14:26.

- ⁶⁹²St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *On the Prayer of Jesus*, pp. 108–9.
- ⁶⁹³Matthew 5:44, 20:27.
- ⁶⁹⁴St. Theophan, *The Path of Prayer*, p. 28.
- ⁶⁹⁵John 4:20–21.
- ⁶⁹⁶Mark 11:25–26.
- ⁶⁹⁷St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, p. 213.
- ⁶⁹⁸*The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 182.
- ⁶⁹⁹Sophrony, St. *Silouan the Athonite*, p. 139.
- ⁷⁰⁰St. Theophan, *The Spiritual Life*, p. 121.
- ⁷⁰¹St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, p. 216. See Psalm 77:26–28 (Septuagint).
- ⁷⁰²Mai-mai Sze, *The Way of Chinese Painting*, pp. 34–35.
- ⁷⁰³Matthew 12:34, 13:15, 15:18.
- ⁷⁰⁴See, for example, *The Philokalia*, vol. 3, p. 269.
- ⁷⁰⁵*Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 421.
- ⁷⁰⁶Chariton, *The Art of Prayer*, p. 52.
- ⁷⁰⁷Mark 7:23.
- ⁷⁰⁸St. Theophan, *The Spiritual Life*, pp. 189–90.
- ⁷⁰⁹Matthew 5:8.
- ⁷¹⁰St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, p. 218.
- ⁷¹¹Quoted in St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, p. 129 (emphasis added).
- ⁷¹²Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, p. 133.
- ⁷¹³St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, p. 85.
- ⁷¹⁴Quoted in St. Theophan, *The Path to Salvation*, p. 226.
- ⁷¹⁵St. Theophan, *The Spiritual Life*, p. 130.
- ⁷¹⁶St. Theophan, *The Path to Salvation*, p. 225.
- ⁷¹⁷*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 12 (Gi-min Shien and Cleary, trans.)..
- ⁷¹⁸John 7:38.
- ⁷¹⁹John 7:39.
- ⁷²⁰Sr. Theophan, *The Spiritual Life*, pp 199–200.
- ⁷²¹*Ibid.*, p. 198; Chariton, *The Art of Prayer*, p. 125.

- ⁷²²Chariton, *The Art of Prayer*, pp. 72–60.
- ⁷²³From a talk by Fr. George Calciu at the St. Paisius Monastery, February 1998.
- ⁷²⁴In the Jesus Prayer, this is generally done while «pulling» the knots of an Orthodox prayer rope (*cbotki*) with the left hand.
- ⁷²⁵St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, p. 87.
- ⁷²⁶Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, p. 136–137, 149.
- ⁷²⁷*Hesychasm*: pertaining to inward stillness.
- ⁷²⁸Sophrony, *His Life Is Mine*, p. 114.
- ⁷²⁹*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 10 (Fu Huisheng, trans.).
- ⁷³⁰*Ibid.*, ch. 64 (Cleary and Ren Jiyu, trans.).
- ⁷³¹*The Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 337.
- ⁷³²Sophrony, *His Life Is Mine*, p. 112–13.
- ⁷³³*Ibid.*, p. 113.
- ⁷³⁴St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, pp. 84–85.
- ⁷³⁵Chariton, *The Art of Prayer*, p. 127.
- ⁷³⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 158–59.
- ⁷³⁷St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, p. 216.
- ⁷³⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 129–30.
- ⁷³⁹Chariton, *The Art of Prayer*, p. 129.
- ⁷⁴⁰St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, p. 207.
- ⁷⁴¹St. Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies*, p. 348.
- ⁷⁴²*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 11. Quoted in *Voice of the Martyrs Newsletter*, March 1997, p. 2.
- ⁷⁴³*Voice of the Martyrs Newsletter*, March 1997, p. 2.
- ⁷⁴⁴St. Basil, letter 2, p. 7.
- ⁷⁴⁵*The Philokalia*, vol. 4, pp. 117–19.
- ⁷⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 120, 174.
- ⁷⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 137.
- ⁷⁴⁸John 17:22–23, 26.
- ⁷⁴⁹St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Discourses*, p. 298.
- ⁷⁵⁰Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, pp. 178–79.

- ⁷⁵¹*The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 177 (italics added).
- ⁷⁵²Sophrony, St. *Silouan the Athonite*, p. 179.
- ⁷⁵³Sophrony, *We Shall See Him as He Is*, pp. 26,46–47,162,164–66.
- ⁷⁵⁴Christodoulos, *Elder Paisios* (in Greek), pp. 265–66.
- ⁷⁵⁵Sophrony, *We Shall See Him as He Is*, pp. 178, 183–84.
- ⁷⁵⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 166–67.
- ⁷⁵⁷St. Symeon, *The Discourses*, pp. 28–29.
- ⁷⁵⁸Sophrony, *We Shall See Him as He Is*, p. 172.
- ⁷⁵⁹Gregory Palamas, St., *Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts*, p. 84.
- ⁷⁶⁰Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 133.
- ⁷⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 134.
- ⁷⁶²Archbishop Basil Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ*, p. 388.
- ⁷⁶³*The Philokalia*, vol. 4, pp. 316–17.
- ⁷⁶⁴*Ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 347–48.
- ⁷⁶⁵Sophrony, *We Shall See Him as He Is*, pp. 157–58.
- ⁷⁶⁶Quoted in Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ*, p. 388.
- ⁷⁶⁷Sophrony, *We Shall See Him as He Is*, p. 30.
- ⁷⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 189.
- ⁷⁶⁹Quoted in Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ*, pp. 364–65.
- ⁷⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 386.
- ⁷⁷¹St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, p. 228.
- ⁷⁷²Chetverikov, *Elder Ambrose of Optina*, pp. 27–28.
- ⁷⁷³John 14:2–6.
- ⁷⁷⁴St. Paisius Velichkovsky (1722–1794) was the man responsible for rediscovering and compiling the anthology of ancient texts known as *The Philokalia*.
- ⁷⁷⁵I.e., he did not celebrate the Liturgy.
- ⁷⁷⁶«Pascha» – the traditional name for the Feast of Christ’s Resurrection – comes from the Hebrew word for “Passover,» for it is the celebration of Christ’s passing over from death to life. In the West this Feast is wrongly called “Easter,» after a Western European pagan festival.
- ⁷⁷⁷“Christ is Risen!» is the traditional Paschal greeting and exclamation in the Christian East. “In Truth He is Risen” is the traditional answer.

⁷⁷⁸Epiklesis: the prayers for the transformation of the Holy Gifts.

⁷⁷⁹“Divine Light in the Devil’s Lair,» lectures of Fr. George Calciu, delivered at the St. Paisius Monastery, Forestville, California, July 1997 (the monastery has since moved to Safford, Arizona). Additional narrative taken from an interview with Fr. George by Nun Nina, Los Angeles, California, November 1996. In *Father George Calciu: Interviews, Homilies, and Talks*, pp. 75–83, 247–56, 263–77.

⁷⁸⁰John 4:13–14.

⁷⁸¹Matthew 22:11–12.

⁷⁸²Matthew 7:14.

⁷⁸³From unpublished notes of Fr. Seraphim Rose for an article on Eastern Orthodoxy in China.

⁷⁸⁴Holy Transfiguration Monastery, «The Holy Orthodox Martyrs of China: An Historical Background»; «The First Chinese Orthodox Martyrs.” In *The True Vine*, no. 8 (Winter 1991), pp. 13–40, 42–49. This issue also contains a complete Service to the Chinese Orthodox Martyrs.

⁷⁸⁵From the unpublished notes of Fr. Seraphim Rose.

⁷⁸⁶«The Orthodox Church in China.» In *Tserkovnaya Zhizri* (Church Life) (in Russian) nos. 5–8 (1986), p. 110.

⁷⁸⁷Richard Spencer, «Tiny Chinese Church Seeks Recognition.» In *London Daily Telegraph*, January 3, 2004.

⁷⁸⁸See «Orthodoxy behind the Great Wall.” In *Foma* (Thomas) (in Russian), no. 12 (2001), p. 16–17.

⁷⁸⁹Richard Spencer, «Tiny Chinese Church Seeks Recognition.”

⁷⁹⁰Fr. Seraphim Rose, «The Chinese Mind.” In *The Orthodox Word*, nos. 187–88 (1996), pp. 104–5.

⁷⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 105.

Commentary on the Nine Enneads of Part I: «Christ the Eternal Tao»

Chapter 1

Line 3:

The Primal Essence

As shown in Parts II and III, God can be known through his Uncreated *Energies*, which can be perceived by the spiritual eyes as Light and can be experienced as Divine Grace (in Chinese, *Teh*); but in His *Essence* God is wholly unknowable. This teaching was expressed most eloquently in the fourth century a.d. by St. Gregory Nazianzen, whose spirit ascended to heavenly mysteries. Taking up the image of Moses on Mount Sinai, St. Gregory describes what was revealed to him:

«What is this that has happened to me, O friends, and initiates, and fellow-lovers of the truth? I was running to lay hold on God, and thus I went up into the mount, and drew aside the curtain of the cloud, and entered away from matter and from material things, and as far as I could I withdrew within myself. And then when I looked up, I scarce saw the back parts of God; although I was sheltered by the Rock, the Word that was made flesh for us. And when I looked a little closer, I saw, not the Primal and unmingled Essence, known to Itself – to the Trinity, I mean; not that which abides within the first veil, and is hidden by the Cherubim; but only that which at last even reaches to us. And that is, as far as I can learn, the Majesty, or as holy David calls it, the Glory, which is manifested amongst creatures, which It has produced and governs. For these are the Back Parts of God, which He leaves behind Him, as tokens of Himself like the shadows and reflection of the sun in the water, which show the sun to our weak eyes, because we cannot look at the sun itself, for by its unmixed light it is too strong for our power of perception».⁷⁹²

Lao Tzu also spoke of the Essence of the Word (Tao) as being unknowable, beyond the darkness of incomprehensibility:

Dark and dim, within is the Essence.

(*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 21, Gi-ming Shien, trans.)

Commenting on this passage of Lao Tzu, the eleventh-century Chinese writer Su Ch'e says: «The Tao has no form. Only when it changed into Teh does it have an expression. Hence Teh is the Tao's visual aspect. The Tao ... remains in the dark unseen».⁷⁹³

Line 9:

the Ancient Sage

«Lao Tzu» literally means «Old Master» or «Old Sage».

Lines 12–13:

*There is no name whereby the Primal Essence can be named,
Neither in this age nor in the age to come.*

This statement of the great mystical writer St. Gregory Palamas († a.d. 1359) defines the way of apophatic or negative theology. While *cataphatic* or positive theology proceeds by affirmations, apophatic theology proceeds by negations. A primary source of apophatic teaching is found in the *Areopagitica* – mystical works written in the tradition of St. Dionysius the Areopagite and dated to the fifth century a.d. Basing himself on these works, Vladimir Lossky explains the way of apophaticism as follows:

«All knowledge has as its object that which is. Now God is beyond all that exists. In order to approach Him it is necessary to deny all that is inferior to Him, that is to say, all that which is. If in seeing God one can know what one sees, then one has not seen God in Himself but something intelligible, something which is inferior to Him. It is by *unknowing* (*agnosia*) that one may know Him Who is above every possible object of knowledge. Proceeding by negations one ascends from the inferior degrees of being to the highest, by progressively setting aside all that can be known, in order to draw near to the Unknown in the darkness of absolute ignorance».⁷⁹⁴

Hence the ancient Christian writers say that, although we can apply to God such terms as Essence, Being, Mind or Thought, we must understand that, ultimately, He is beyond all these. St. John Damascene († a.d. 750) writes: «All that we can state affirmatively about God does not show His Essence, but only what relates to His Essence. And, if you should ever speak of good, or justice, or wisdom, or something else of the sort, you will not be describing the Essence of God, but only things relating to His Essence».⁷⁹⁵

Line 31:

Finally, we call Him Mind or Thought...

When referring to God the Father, some ancient Christian writers use the term Mind, others use Thought. In the present work, we have usually referred to Him as «Mind».

Lines 45–48

Thus the essence that can be conceived of as essence is not the Primal Essence, etc.

An echo of the first line of the Tao Teh Ching, which is an expression of apophatic theology: «The Tao that can be spoken of [literally, the Tao that can be ‘Taoed’] is not the eternal Tao».

Chapter 2

Line 2:

So did the Primal Mind utter the Primal Word (Logos).

The concept or name «Word» we find in its exalted significance many times in the books of the Old Testament. Such are the expressions of the Psalter: «Forever, O Lord, Your Word abides in heaven» 1 Psalm 118:89); «He sent forth His Word and He healed them» (Psalm 106:20) – a verse which refers to the Exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt; «By the Word of the Lord were the heavens established» (Psalm 32:6). The author of the Wisdom of Solomon writes: «Your allpowerful Word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne» (Wisdom 18:15–16).⁷⁹⁶

With the help of this Divine name, the ancient Christian teachers attempted to explain the mystery of the relationship of God the Son to God the Father, as in the teaching of St. Dionysius of Alexandria which is set forth later in this chapter.

Line 8:

*«From the Womb ... before the morning star have I begotten You.
(Psalm 109– Septuagint)*

The existence of the Son rests in the very Essence of God the Father. King David the Prophet uses the expression regarding the Son: «From the womb ... have I begotten You» – from the Womb, that is, from the Essence of the Father. Similarly, the Apostle John writes: «The only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father» (John 1:18), here referring to the Father's Essence as a bosom.

By means of the word «begotten», the existence of the Son is shown to be above any kind of creatureliness, above everything created. An existence which comes from the Essence of God can only be Divine and eternal. That which is begotten is always of the same essence as the one who begets. But that which is created and made is of another, lower essence and is external with relation to the Creator.

Line 11:

*Born before heaven and earth ...
(Tao Teh Ching, ch. 25)*

In using the word «born» (sen 生) rather than «made», Lao Tzu was, like the Prophet David, foreshadowing the Christian revelation of the Divine *begetting* of God the Son.

The Son was begotten before the creation of heaven and earth. Created things are made at a certain time. But the Son, coming directly from the Essence of the Father, was begotten outside time, in eternity. In other words,

there was a time when created things did not exist, but there was never a time when the only begotten Son did not exist.

Christ Himself referred to His eternal begetting when He called Himself «the only begotten Son of God» (John 3:18); and He spoke of His eternal existence when He said, «Before Abraham was, I AM», and, «Father ... You loved me before the foundation of the world» (John 8:58; 17:24).

Lines 14–29:

Mind does not exist without word,

Nor word without Mind, etc.

St. John Damascene, in speaking of the relation of the Son to the Father, contemplates various ways in which a word is related to a mind:

«A word is the natural movement of the mind, by which the mind moves and thinks and reasons, as if it were the light and radiance of the mind. And again, a word is that integral thought which is spoken in the heart. Still again, there is the spoken word which is the messenger of the mind».⁷⁹⁷

Chapter 3

Line 2:

So does the Primal Action proceed from the Primal Mind.

The revelation of the procession of the Holy Spirit («Primal Action») from God the Father («Primal Mind») comes from the words of Christ: «Whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, Who proceeds from the Father» (John 15:26). Like the Divine begetting of the Son, the Divine procession of the Holy Spirit occurs from all eternity, outside time.

Line 8:

So does the Primal Breath rest in the Primal Word.

This line points to the mystical relationship between the Holy Spirit («Primal Breath») and the Son («Primal Word»). God the Father told St. John the Baptist: «The one on Whom you see the Spirit *descend and remain*, this is He Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit» (John 1:33). When baptizing Christ, St. John saw that «the Spirit descended from heaven like a dove and abode upon *Him*». According to St. Gregory Palamas, this temporal event is a reflection of an eternal relationship; for the Spirit, «going forth from the Father in a movement we can neither see nor understand», abides or «comes to rest» in the Son. St. John Damascene also says: «We believe ... in the Holy Spirit Who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son».

Applying this teaching to the contemporary Christian world, which is often characterized by either wild emotions or dry theories, the Romanian writer Fr. Dumitru Staniloae († 1993) writes:

«The presence of Christ is always marked by the Spirit resting upon Him, and the presence of the Spirit means the presence of Christ upon Whom He rests.... Therefore, there is no knowledge or experience of Christ apart from the Spirit, nor is there any experience of the Spirit by Himself in isolation.... The Spirit is the means and the intensity of ill knowledge of the transcendent Godhead, and Christ as the Logos is the structured content of that knowledge. Where the content is wanting, the soul becomes lost in its own structures, in an inconsistent and disordered enthusiasm, and this has indeed happened with so many anarchical ‘experiences’ and so many enthusiastic but destructive currents within Christianity, which cannot be said ever to have possessed the Holy Spirit truly if it is true that the Holy Spirit is not present apart from Christ. Moreover, where the Spirit is absent as the means by which we come to the living knowledge of Christ, Christ becomes the object of a frigid theoretical science, of definitions put together from memorized citations and formulae».⁷⁹⁸

Line 16:

The Breath of the Primal Mind is like a wind.

In John 3:8, Christ compares the Holy Spirit to the wind.

Chapter 4

Line 2:

The Mind, Word and Breath were One ...

The analogy of the Holy Trinity as Mind (or Thought), Word and Breath (or Action) has been used by teachers of the authentic Christian tradition throughout history, and notably in recent times by the nineteenth-century Russian visionary St. John of Kronstadt.

Lines 4–5:

The Oneness of these Persons is a mystery

Whose vastness cannot be comprehended by even the highest spirits.

The mystery of the Holy Trinity, since it has to do with the Essence of God, is ultimately incomprehensible not only to human beings, but to angels as well. St. Gregory Nazianzen says that it would be impossible to speak of God's Essence «even if you were a Moses and a god to Pharaoh, even if you were caught up like Paul to the third heaven and heard unspeakable words, even if you were raised above them both and exalted to angelic or archangelic

place and dignity. For though a thing be all heavenly, or above heaven, and far higher in nature and nearer to God than we, yet it is farther distant from God, and from the complete comprehension of His Essence, than it is lifted above our complex and lowly and earthward-sinking composition».⁷⁹⁹

Lines 11–12:

*Not only did They have this love,
They are this love.*

For, as the Apostle John says, «God is love» (1 John 4:8).

Line 20:

Sent by the Mind as the Messenger to the world ...

Just as the spoken word is a messenger of the mind, so is the Son the Messenger of the Father (see the commentary on chapter 2, lines 14–29).

Chapter 5

Line 24:

This is the perfect love, the original unity, the original harmony, the final mystery

To which no human thought has ever succeeded in rising.

Cut off from the world, alone with God in the forest, St. Gregory Nazianzen was one who went beyond all human thought in beholding the Light of the One Triadic God. In one of his mystical poems lit) writes: «From the day whereon I renounced the things of the world in consecrate my soul to luminous and heavenly contemplation, when the supreme intelligence carried me hence to set me down far from all tli.il pertains to the flesh, to hide me in the secret places of the heavenly tabernacle; from that day my eyes have been blinded by the Light of the Trinity, Whose brightness surpasses all that the mind can conceive; for from a throne high exalted the Trinity pours upon all, the ineffable radiance common to the Three. This is the source of all that is here below, separated by time from the things on high.... From that day forth I was dead to the world and the world was dead to me».⁸⁰⁰

Chapter 6

Line 4:

They dwelt in the Darkness that was before darkness ...

The former Darkness is that of the Divine Incomprehensibility, as in apophatic theology; the latter darkness is the physical darkness III n came into being when light was created.

Line 7:

By Thinking which is beyond thought, the Primal Essence creates.

«God», says St. John Damascene, «contemplated all things before their existence, formulating them in His Mind; and each being received its existence at a particular moment, according to His eternal thought and will».⁸⁰¹

Lines 10–11

with these two hands of the Mind,

Thought becomes deed.

St. Basil the Great († a.d. 379), when speaking of the creation of the angels, traces the manifestation of the Three Persons in the work of the creation in the following way: «In the creation, consider first the primordial cause of all that has been made – this is the Father; then the operating cause – which is the Son; and the perfecting cause – the Holy Spirit: so that it is by the will of the Father that the heavenly spirits are, by the operation of the Son that they come into existence, and by the presence of the Spirit that they are made perfect».⁸⁰²

Chapter 7

Line 8:

the Pre-eternal Word

St. Isidore of Pelusium († a.d. 435) defines eternity as follows: «*Eternity* is ever-existent life, and this concept is applied usually to the one unoriginate nature, in which everything is always one and the same. The concept of immortality, on the other hand, can be ascribed to one who has been brought into being and does not die, as, for example, an angel or a soul. Eternal in its precise meaning belongs to the Divine Essence, which is why it is applied usually only to the Worshipful and Reigning Trinity».

In this regard even more expressive is the phrase «the Pre-eternal God», which is used in Eastern Orthodox liturgical poetry.⁸⁰³

Lines 9–10:

All things, then, were made by the Word,

And without Him was not anything made that was made ...

These lines from the Gospel of John refer to the Word as being the «operating cause» in the act of creation (see the commentary on chapter 6). The Apostle Paul gives the same teaching. Referring to Christ, he writes: «For by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and

invisible, whether Thrones, or Dominions, or Principalities, or Powers. All things were created by Him, and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things subsist» (Colossians 1:1617).

Following from this teaching, in traditional iconography it is always Jesus Christ – the Word and Son of God – Who is shown performing the act of creation. Michelangelos Sistine Chapel ceiling, which shows God the Father as the «operating cause» of the creation, is thus a departure from traditional iconography and teaching.

Lines 13–14:

*Of numbers so vast that if their names should be written every one,
Even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.
(cf. John 21:25)*

According to a tradition handed down from the Apostle John's disciple Prochorus, these lines at the end of Johns Gospel refer not merely to the deeds which Jesus Christ performed while on earth in the flesh, but to *all* the deeds that He – as the Pre-eternal Word of God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe – performed since time began.

Lines 19–20:

The Mind spoke, calling upon the Pre-eternal Counsel – the Word and the Breath –

Saying, «Let us make man».

In the creation of man, the Father, Son and Spirit are represented in Scripture as saying, «Let us make man», whereas in all the other acts of creation God only says, «Let there be light», «Let the earth bring forth living creatures», etc. (Genesis 1:3–26). It is as if, in the creation of mankind alone, the Holy Trinity consulted within Itself before creating, which indicates that the human race was to be a special creation, distinct from the others, having a higher purpose in the world. The «consultation» of the Holy Trinity is called by St. John Damascene the «eternal and on changing Counsel of God».

Lines 21–22:

*And through the Breath of Heaven entering into man's nostrils,
Man became a living soul.*

(cf. Genesis 2:7)

Physical breath is an expression of the soul. According to the ancient Christian teachers, only those beings which have breath have souls; and only man, having received the breath of life from the mouth of God Himself (in the figurative expression of Genesis 2:7), has an immortal spirit, meant to dwell with God forever.

Chapter 9

Line 1:

«I am the Way», said the Pre-eternal Word.

(John 14:6)

Following from these words of Christ, St. John Damascene calls God «the Way and the outstretched guiding Hand to them that are drawn to Him».⁸⁰⁴ Likewise, St. Maximus the Confessor writes: «The Logos of God called Himself the Way; and those who travel on this way He presents, purified from every stain, to God the Father».⁸⁰⁵

Line 5–6:

«The movement of the Way consists in returning,

Returning to the Source.»

(Tao Teh Ching ch. 40)

Only the first of these lines is actually from the Tao Teh Ching. The words «to the Source» were added in brackets by Gi-ming Shien in his translation, in order to bring out the metaphysical meaning behind Lao Tzus words.

Line 9:

For «no one goes to the Mind except through the Word.»

(cf. John 14:6)

The Son or Word of God, being the «operating cause» by which all things come forth from the will of the Father in the act of creation, is also the operating cause by which the creation is to return to the Father in the act of redemption. In the words of St. Athanasius the Great († a.d. 373): «*The renewal of creation has been wrought by the Self-same Word Who made it in the beginning.* There is thus no inconsistency between creation and salvation; for the One Father has employed the same Agent for both works, effecting the salvation of the world through the same Word Who made it at the first».⁸⁰⁶

Chapter 10

Lines 4–6:

They found Him in living beings, in mountain crags and flowing streams, in seas and winds.

He was not these things,

But He spoke in these things, guiding them.

St. John Damascene explains: «Through nature the knowledge of the existence of God has been revealed to all people. The very creation of its harmony and ordering proclaims the majesty of the Divine Nature».⁸⁰⁷

Chapter 11

Line 4:

Not having seen Him, but only His traces ...

Wang Pang, in his eleventh-century commentary on the *Tao Teh Ching*, says of the Tao: «All we see are its traces.... It can't be described».⁸⁰⁸

Lines 16–17:

If the seed is preserved whole, nothing will come from it.

Only if it dies will it give life.

Foretelling His own crucifixion and resurrection, Christ said: «Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit» (John 12:24).

Chapter 12

Lines 19–25:

For the Sage, the Way dwelt in the Darkness of Incomprehensibility,

Yet He was not that Darkness;

The Way dwelt beyond all being,

Yet He was nor non-being;

The Way emptied Himself,

Yet He was not emptiness.

He was not an eternal void ...

In Part II (see pp. 24041) we have quoted Gi-ming Shien to show that, in the *Tao Teh Ching*, «nothingness» refers to spontaneity and self-forgetting, not to nihilism and non-being. «The Tao remains in the realm of existence», says Gi-ming, and thus is not to be equated with non-being. This teaching is echoed by the eighth-century Chinese sage Lü Yen: «Those obstructed by nothingness, clinging one-sidedly to this principle, sit blankly to clear away sense objects and think that the Way is therein. Though they speak of nothingness, this is really not the Way. Those obstructed by emptiness cling to this partial principle.... They vainly talk of empty emptiness, and emptiness is not voided, so it becomes nihilistic emptiness».⁸⁰⁹

By going deeply into oneself, one can have an experience of eternal non-being, but it is a grave error to regard this as the Absolute, as God or the Tao. Archimandrite Sophrony writes:

«He is deluded who endeavors to divest himself mentally of all that is transitory and relative in order to cross some invisible threshold, to realize his eternal origin, his identity with the Source of all that exists; in order to return

and merge with Him, the nameless, trans-personal Absolute. Such exercises have enabled many to rise to supra-rational contemplation of being; to experience a certain mystical trepidation; to know the state of silence of the mind, when the mind goes beyond the boundaries of time and space. In suchlike states man may feel the peacefulness of being withdrawn from continually changing phenomena of the visible world; may even have a certain experience of eternity. But the God of Truth, the Living God, is not in all this. It is man's own beauty, created in the image of God, that is being contemplated and seen as Divinity, whereas he himself still continues within the confines of his creatureliness. This is a vastly important concern. The tragedy of the matter lies in the fact that man sees a mirage which, in his longing for eternal life, he mistakes for a genuine oasis.... This movement into the depths of his own being is nothing else but attraction towards the non-being from which we were called by the will of the Creator».⁸¹⁰

The error of taking this as a true experience of God is seen in the fact that the same experience can be had through hallucinogenic drugs. For further teachings of Archimandrite Sophrony on mistaking the «darkness of divestiture» or the light of one's spirit for God or the Tao, see Part II, pp. 327–29.

Line 43:

«Is the Way a Child of something else?» the Sage asked ...

(Tao Teh Ching, ch. 4)

It is interesting that Lao Tzu should ask this question, since the Way is indeed the Child of the Father-Mind.

Certain teachers of Christian antiquity have used the following formula when speaking of the Father, Son and Spirit: The Spirit is God *within us*, the Son is God *with us*, and the Father is God *above and beyond us*. In order for us to know the Father/Mind beyond us, we must first be shown Him by the Son/Word with us – for, as Christ said, «No man comes to the Father but by Me» (John 14:6). Lao Tzu had glimpsed the Word as the principle of order and purpose which permeates all things: but the Word, not having taken flesh, had not yet revealed Himself as a Personal Absolute, nor had He «shown us the Father» (cf. John 14:9) as a Personal Absolute. Even the ancient Hebrews had not dared to call all God by the intimate, personal name of Father; but this was precisely the name that Christ told His disciples to use when addressing God.

Judging from his rhetorical question, «Is the Way a Child of something else?» it seems that Lao Tzu, in intuiting the presence of the Word in nature, had also come to ponder the possibility of the existence of the Mind. Christ said, «He who has seen me has seen the Father» (John 14:9), for the Word and the Mind are of one Essence.

Chapter 14

Lines 5–6:

*Before the Way came into the world,
The restless world groaned for His coming.*

According to St. Maximus the Confessor, it was the Divinely appointed function of the first man to unite in himself the whole of creation. Having attained to perfect union with God, he was to grant this state of union to the creation. After man's fall from his original appointment, the creation fell with him into a state marked by corruption; and yet still it longed to fulfill its original designation – to be united with God through man. Thus, the Apostle Paul bears witness that «the whole creation groans and travails together until now» (Romans 8:22).

Since the task which was given to man was not fulfilled by Adam, it is in the work of Christ, the second Adam, that we can see what was originally meant to be.

Lines 25–29:

*Therefore did the various forms that were made groan for their Maker
To restore the lost one to the Way ...
And thus regain the Original Harmony.*

Through the coming of the Word, it is possible for man to fulfill his Divine appointment: to be united with God and to gather together in his love the whole cosmos, regaining the original harmony that had been lost at the fall.

The Russian term for a monastic saint, *prepodobny*, literally means «in the original likeness»; that is, one who has attained the likeness of Adam in Paradise. The Lives of Orthodox Christian monastic saints of all lands tell of ascetics who have fulfilled man's original designation, being a link between God and the cosmos, and gathering the creation together in their love. One story is found in the Life of St. Paul of Obnora († a.d. 1429), who lived in the remote forests of the Russian North, praying ceaselessly and purifying his mind. One day another hermit who was living in the same area went to him and saw in the forest a wondrous sight. According to the saint's Life: «A flock of birds surrounded the marvelous anchorite; little birds perched on the Elder's head and shoulders, and he fed them by hand. Nearby stood a bear, awaiting his food from the saint; foxes, rabbits and other beasts ran about, without any enmity among themselves and not fearing the bear. Behold the life of innocent Adam in Eden, the lordship of man over creation, which together with us groans because of our fall and thirsts to be delivered into 'the liberty of the children of God' (Romans 8:21)».⁸¹¹

Line 52:

The Way always seeks the lowest place.

For a discussion of the meaning of «the lowest place», see the commentary on chapter 36.

Chapter 15

Line 1:

«The Valley and the Spirit do not die»...

(Tao Teh Ching, ch. 6)

The «Valley» is an image often employed by Lao Tzu to symbolize a state of self-emptying that remains ever full. As water empties itself into the lowest place, the nadir of the valley, so do the Tao and its followers seek the lowest place of humility and voluntary weakness, wherein is their strength.⁸¹²

Lines 4–6:

«this gate shall be shut», said the Ancient Prophet.

It shall not be opened, and no one shall pass through it;

For the Lord shall enter by it».

The Prophet Ezekiel writes of his vision: «And the said Lord to me: This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall pass through it; for the Lord God of Israel shall enter by it, and it shall hi shut» (Ezekiel 44–Septuagint).

The ancient Holy Fathers have regarded this as a prophecy of the birth of God from a virgin, and also of the ever-virginity of Mary. Thus the liturgical poetry of the Eastern Church often refers to «the closed gateway of the Virgin».

Line 14:

Who had lived, unknown, in silence and purity in the Great Temple ...

This account of the Virgin Mary's childhood is found in the *Protevangelion* of James from the Apocryphal New Testament (published in English in *The Lost Books of the Bible*), which serves as a basis for Eastern Orthodox Church services to the Virgin Mary throughout the year.⁸¹³

According to the *Protevangelion*, Mary was consecrated to the Lord by her parents at the age of three, at which time she went to live in the temple of Jerusalem. The High Priest Zachariah – future father of St. John the Baptist – received her and set her to dwell in the Holy of Holies: the high place of the temple where only priests were allowed to go, and that at only certain times of the year. In the Holy of Holies she was fed by the hand of an angel. She remained in the temple until the age of twelve, when Zachariah betrothed her to the aged Joseph.

Lines 35–36:

Because she had returned to the state of the uncarved block, the pristine simplicity,

She became the «mountain unhewn by the hand of man,»

Whom the Ancient Prophet had foretold.

The «uncarved block» is Lao Tzu's symbol for the state of simplicity and oneness with the Creator and the creation, which man possessed in the beginning. The «mountain unhewn by the hand of man» refers to the Old Testament image (Daniel 2:34–35) of «the stone cut out of a mountain by no human hand», which the ancient Christian teachers saw as another prophecy of Christ's birth from a Virgin, i.e., a birth without human seed. This symbol forms the basis of the icon of the Mother of God on p. 450 of this book.

Chapter 16

Lines 12:

«Water ... dwells in lowly places that all disdain, and so it is like the Way.»

(Tao Teh Ching, ch. 8 – Gi-ming Shien, trans.)

Wu Ch'eng, a thirteenth-century commentator on the Tao Teh Ching writes: «Among those who follow the Tao, the best are like water: content to be on the bottom and, thus, free from blame. Most people hate being on the bottom and compete to be on the top. And when people compete, someone is maligned».⁸¹⁴

Chapter 17

Lines 3, 5:

The Way creates, but does not demand for itself..

Controls, but without compulsion.

(Tao Teh Ching, ch. 17 – Gi-ming Shien, trans.)

According to Christian mystical theology, the Creator-Logos has given to each created thing its own indwelling logos, its own inner essence or principle, which makes that thing distinctively itself, and which at the same time directs that thing towards its end – God. The Creator-Logos, drawing all things into unity, makes of the universe a harmonious and integrated «cosmos». He draws all things to Himself (cf. John 12:32), yet He controls without compulsion, directing each thing naturally, according to its own logos. As St. Maxi-

mus the Confessor writes: «The Origin and Cause of created beings has, as Truth, conquered all things naturally and has drawn their activity to Himself».⁸¹⁵

As followers of the Creator-Logos, it is our task to discern the *logos* dwelling in each thing and to bring it out. If we are to guide we must do so naturally, without compelling, not acting according to appearances or opinions, but according to the inner essence of each thing. This is especially true of our dealings with other human beings, who, despite an often misleading outer covering, have within themselves this inner principle which tends toward God.



St. Maximus the Confessor (a.d. 580–662), whose writings occupy more space than any other in *The Philokalia*, is one of the greatest fountainheads of Eastern Orthodox mystical theology. His metaphysical insights have been referred to extensively in the nine enneads of Part I.

Line 16:

He called Himself rather «the least in the Kingdom of Heaven» and «the Son of Man».

According to St. Theophan the Recluse and the ancient Holy Fathers, when Christ speaks of the who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven», He is referring, in His humility and self-abasement, to Himself.

Christ calls Himself «Son of Man» about eighty times in the four Gospels.

Chapter 19

This chapter describes the Sermon on the Mount. If one goes to the Holy Land today, one can still see the place on the Sea of Galilee where this sermon was given, looking much the same as it did in Christ's time. On one side of the hill is a sloping meadow where the people gathered to hear the words that Christ spoke at the beginning of His public ministry.

Line 10:

«Blessed are the meek»...

(Matthew 5:5)

In the Old Testament it is said that Moses «was very meek, above all the men who were upon the face of the earth» (Numbers 12:3). The fact that this powerful prophet and deliverer should be called meek indicates that godly meekness does not in any way mean spinelessness. Rather, it is the quality of being emptied of selfishness, which enables one to be filled with the power of God and thereby remain invincible in spirit.

Chapter 20

Lines 6–13:

«Superior virtue is unconscious of its virtue.

Hence it is virtuous.

Inferior virtue is conscious of its virtue,

Hence it is not virtuous».

(Tao Teh Ching, ch. 38 – Gi-ming Shien, trans.)

Once a monk asked the great desert father, St. Macarius of Egypt († a.d. 390), «How can one be poor in spirit, especially when one is inwardly conscious that he is a changed man, and has made progress, and has come to a knowledge and understanding which he did not possess before?»

Macarius answered: «Until a man acquires these things and makes progress, he is not poor in spirit, but thinks highly of himself; but when he comes to this understanding and point of progress, Grace itself teaches him to be poor in spirit, which means that a man being righteous and chosen of God does not esteem himself to be anything, but holds his soul in abasement and disregard, as if he knew nothing and had nothing, even though he knows and has. And such a thought becomes as it were a part of nature and rooted in a man's mind. Do you not see how our forefather Abraham, elect as he was, described himself as 'dust and ashes' (Genesis 18:27); and David, anointed to be king, had

God with him, and yet what does he say? ‘I am a worm and not a man, a very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people’ (Psalm 21:6)». ⁸¹⁶

In teaching His disciples this «superior virtue that is unconscious of its virtue», Christ told His disciples: «When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done that which was our duty to do’» (Luke 17:10).

Chapter 21

Line 13:

He came not to the healthy, but to the sick ...

When the Pharisees were scandalized by Christ eating with publicans and sinners, Christ said to them, «Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick» (Matthew 9:12). Here, of course, he meant not physical, but spiritual and moral sickness.

Lines 15–16:

*Therefore the good, the righteous, the beautiful, the healthy and the rich
Railed at Him, smote Him, and cast Him out as evil.*

The Wisdom of Solomon lays bare the thoughts of the seemingly righteous who are jealous of the truly righteous person: «The ungodly, reasoning within themselves not aright, said: let us oppress the righteous man.... He was made to reprove our thoughts; he is grievous for us even to behold, for his life is not like other men’s, his ways are of another fashion. We are esteemed of him as counterfeits. He abstains from our ways as from filthiness; he pronounces the end of the just to be blessed» (Wisdom 2:1, 10, 14–17).

Lines 17–18:

*For He was a reproach to their seeming goodness,
Turning it on its head.*

In apostolic times, Christians were accused of «turning the world upside down» with the revolutionary teachings of Christ (Acts 17:6).

Line 20:

to raise them to the true goodness of their original nature.

St. Maximus the Confessor writes about how we have corrupted our true human nature, made in the image of God, and about what it means to be restored to it:

«The self-love and cleverness of people, alienating them from each other, have cut our single human nature into many fragments. They have so extended the insensibility which they introduced into our nature and which now dominates it, that our nature, divided in will and purpose, fights against itself.

Thus anyone who has succeeded by sound judgment and nobility of intelligence in resolving this anomalous state of our nature has shown mercy to himself prior to showing it to others; for he has molded his will and purpose in conformity to nature, and through them he has advanced toward God by means of nature; he has revealed in himself what it means to be ‘in the image [of God]’ and shown how excellently in the beginning God created our nature in His likeness and as a pure copy of His own goodness, and how He made our nature one with itself in every way – peaceable, free from strife and faction, bound to God and to itself by love, making us cleave to God with desire and to each other with mutual affection». ⁸¹⁷

Lines 22–25:

«Why do you call me good?

There is none good, save one»:

That is, His Father – the Mind –

Who existed with Him from pre-eternity.

(cf. Luke 18:19)

According to St. Gregory Nazianzen, Christ said this to the rich young ruler who called him «Good Master» because the ruler was testifying to His goodness while viewing Him as a mere man. Perfect goodness, Christ is saying, belongs to God alone, while human goodness is only relative.

This same teaching is found in Lao Tzu. Gi-ming Shien writes: «Objective universal value is to be preferred in judgment to the relative value of private opinion. Absolute value can only be judged in relation to the One or Being.... Lao Tzu denies the particular value as illusory fantasy and seeks rather the value of the absolute or the whole One. He said: ‘When all the world recognizes the beauty of the beautiful then it turns to ugliness. When they recognize the good of the good, it ceases to be good’ (Tao Teh Ching, ch. 2). The particular recognition destroys the universal state in which objective value was held». (See the complete quote of Gi-ming on pp. 500–501.)

Chapter 22

Line 6:

And the poor fishermen caught the universe in their nets.

This line is inspired by the Eastern Orthodox troparion hymn for the Feast of Pentecost:

Blessed art Thou, O Christ our God, Who hast made the fishermen [i.e., the Apostles] most wise, by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit, and thereby having caught the universe. O Lover of mankind, glory to Thee!

Chapter 24

Although the Logos, as Lao Tzu says, has no beginning or end (*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 14), He is both the Beginning (or «Original Principle» – *Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 52) and the End of all created things.

The teaching of Christ the Logos as the End of all things is profound and mysterious. As stated in the commentary on chapter 17 above, each created thing has its own *logos*: its own inner essence or principle. The *logos* of each thing is an «idea» of God, according to which it comes into existence at a certain time and place, and in a certain form, and according to which it develops. It is each thing's point of contact with God, and at the same time the end toward which it tends. God has produced in His creatures the love that makes them tend towards Himself, drawing them to their fulfillment.

The ideas or *logoi* of individual things are contained within the higher or more general ideas, as are species within a genus. The whole is contained in the Creator-Logos, the unifying Cosmic Principle. Therefore, when we seek to penetrate into the inner essences or principles (*logoi* or «words») of created things, we are led finally to knowledge of the Word, the «operating cause» and at the same time the End of all things.

The Logos is the Beginning of all things because from Him flow the creative outpourings, the particular *logoi* of creatures. He is the End of all things because He is the center toward which all created beings tend. This is the mystical meaning behind His words: «I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending» (Revelation 1:8).

This understanding also sheds light on the nature of Lao Tzu's teaching. The Ancient Sage, in contemplating the inner essences of created beings and seeking to penetrate into their end – their *logoi* – was led naturally to intuitive knowledge of the Logos. In chapter 52 of the *Tao Teh Ching*, he writes:

*Having found the mother, we know the child;
Knowing the child, we then observe the mother.
(Gi-ming Shien, trans.)*

St. Maximus the Confessor explains it this way: «He who does not limit his perception of the nature of visible things to what his senses alone can observe, but wisely with his spirit searches after the essence which lies within every creature, also finds God; for from the manifest magnificence of created beings he learns Who is the Cause of their being».⁸¹⁸

Line 24:

For at the End, where I am ...

Before His final passion, Christ prayed for his disciples: «Father, I will that they also, whom You have given me, may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which You have given me» (John 17:24).

Chapter 26

Lines 2–9:

«The multitude are joyful and merry ...
I alone seem to have lost everything.»
(*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 20)

Some modern scholars claim that Lao Tzu wrote these lines only as a figurative device – if indeed he existed at all! The Chinese tradition, however, maintains that the lines are both literal and autobiographical. We prefer to adhere to the living tradition, since it comes from human experience and the common suffering of a people, whereas the theories of modern scholars often come from abstract speculation. Anyone who has at least a little experience of following the Way cannot doubt that the author of the *Tao Teh Ching* must have experienced exactly what he described in these lines: out of place in worldly society, and cut off from fleeting earthly happiness by virtue of his being «different». Lao Tzu concludes the lines, however, by saying that his very «difference» from others is at the same time the source of his consolation; for he draws his sustenance, not from outward things as do others, but from the Source of all things, the Tao.

Chapter 28

This chapter describes Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday).

Lines 2–3:

«He who is conscious of honor and glory,
Yet keeps to disgrace,
Resembles the Valley of the World.»
(*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 28 – *Gi-ming Shien*, trans.)

«Everyone wants to be first», says Chuang Tzu, «while I alone want to be last: which means to endure the worlds disgrace».

Chapter 29

Line 5:

The Way left the City and descended into the Valley of the World.

That is, Christ leaves Jerusalem and descends into the Kedron Valley, which lies between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. Here the literal valley is compared with Lao Tzu's symbolic Valley of self-emptying; for Christ, leaving Jerusalem after His triumphal entry into it, descends on the path to His final abasement and humiliation.

Lines 9–10:

*And now the duplicitous one, pretending to return His love,
Betrays Him with a kiss.*

Betrayal by a hypocritical friend is much more dangerous than an attack by an enemy, as Bishop Augustinos of Fiorina, Greece, writes: A hypocrite is a person who appears to be someone's best friend, gains his confidence, and then deceives and uses him terribly. That kind of harm cannot be done by an enemy. You can see and protect yourself from an enemy, but not a hypocrite». ⁸¹⁹

Line 15:

The duplicitous one delivered the Simple One to death ...

Judas was a hypocrite, and therefore his eye was not «single» (Matthew 6:22). He was divided in soul; hence, he is here called «duplicitous», which comes from the Latin duplex, meaning «twofold». Christ, on the other hand, was wholly simple, for in God there is no division (see chapter 79).

Lines 19–20:

*He being Himself the Way on which He trod,
The Way of return to pristine Simplicity.*

When Lao Tzu spoke of returning to pristine Simplicity (line 4), he was referring to the *logoi* of created beings drawing closer to their End, the simple and undivided Logos.

Chapter 30

Lines 9–10:

*Long ago, in the beginning,
He had been abandoned by man in the Garden ...*

That is, when man cut himself off from God through eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden.

Line 20:

Not willing to watch with Him one hour.

Even Christ's Apostles could not stay awake for one hour in the Garden of Gethsemane, to keep watch with Him in his time of temptation when He was about to be delivered to death (Matthew 26:40).

Chapter 31

Line 10:

The darkness has no power of itself...

St. Diadochus of Photiki, a fifth-century Father of *The Philokalia*, explains: «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 does not, except when we give it existence through our actions».⁸²⁰

Chapter 32

The revelation of Christ presents itself to us in the form of antinomies, which form, as it were, a cross for human thought. As the End or point of convergence of the universe, the Logos stands at the midpoint of the contraries, uniting and overcoming them in Himself, just as a cross intersects two lines. Thus, the balancing or uniting of opposites forms a constant theme of both the theology and liturgical poetry of the ancient Christian tradition. It is also a constant theme of the *Tao Teo Ching*, which foreshadows that tradition, as in

Everything carries the Yin at its back and the Yang in front;

Through the union of the pervading principles it reaches harmony.

(Tao Teh Ching, ch. 42 – Gi-ming Shien, trans.)

In the present chapter, the antinomic form of Christian liturgical poetry is employed in order to show how the strife of the contraries is overcome by Christ's law of love.

Lines 3–4:

He took the sentence of death

In order to abolish the sentence of death.

St. Maximus the Confessor expresses this as follows: «The Lord demonstrated His equity and justice when in His self-abasement He submitted deliberately to the sentence to which what is passible in human nature is subject, and made that sentence a weapon for the destruction of sin and death».⁸²¹

Chapter 34

Lines 12–13:

«If it were not laughed at», said the Ancient Sage,

«It would not be the Way».

(Tao Teh Ching, ch. 41 – Gi-ming Shien, trans.)

«The message of the Cross», writes the Apostle Paul, «is foolishness to those who are perishing; but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... If anyone among you seems to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God... We are fools for Christ's sake» (1Corinthians 1:18, 3:18–19; 4:10). From early Christian times there have been many such «fools for Christ» who have kept their virtue and otherworldly wisdom hidden in God. Bishop Nikodim of Belgorod, a twentieth-century martyr, writes: «There are people who are mocked by all, despised by all, who are sometimes abhorred by even the most lost person. Homeless, destitute, wretched in appearance, tormented by hunger and thirst, they wander amidst cold and self-satisfied people. Cold, hunger, eternal mockeries, contempt and complete loneliness – this is the lot of these people. The world considers them mad, stupid, pathetic people who have neither reason nor shame. Only the simple soul of the believers among the people regards them with compassion and calls them ‘little blessed ones,’ God's people; and the rare, tender and noble heart will feel the greatness of spirit in them and the unearthly beauty of their souls. These are the fools for Christ».⁸²²

Though not usually as striking as the «fools for Christ», the ancient Chinese sages were known to hide their virtue in the same way. Lao Tzu writes of himself:

Others have more than they need, but I alone have nothing.

I am a fool. Oh, yes! I am confused.

Other men are clear and bright,

But I alone am dim and weak.

Other men are sharp and clever,

But I alone am dull and stupid.

(Tao Teh Ching, ch. 20 – Feng and English, trans.)

The Chinese commentator Lu Hui-ch'ing (eleventh century a.d.) says further, «The sage wears an embarrassed, foolish expression and seldom shows anyone his great and noble virtue».⁸²³

Chapter 35

Lines 1113:

*I thirst for the one lost sheep
Who has departed from the Way,
For I have loved him.*

By «one lost sheep» is meant mankind as a whole. This image is derived from Christ's parable: «If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?» (Matthew 18:12).

According to the teaching of the ancient Holy Fathers, the «ninety nine» sheep are the angelic hosts, while the one sheep is mankind. The Son of God came from heaven to earth to seek out and save the one sheep that had gone astray («departed from the Way»).

Lines 14–17:

*He who had once been my friend,
With whom I had once held sweet converse in the Garden,
Has nailed me to a Tree,
Like unto the Tree of the Garden from which he plucked the fruit.*

By «my friend» is again meant the whole of mankind. Each human being, possessing the quality of personhood and being made in the image of God, contains within himself the whole universe. Therefore, when Adam fell into corruption, he brought all of creation into corruption with Him. And when Christ, Who is called the Second Adam, suffered and died innocently, He did so for the whole human race, and ultimately for all of creation.

Interestingly, the vehicle of the fall and that of the redemption are the same: a tree. St. John Damascene writes: «Since death came by a tree, it was necessary for life and the resurrection to be bestowed by a tree. In Eastern Orthodox liturgical poetry the Cross is frequently called «the Tree».

Lines 18–19:

*But greater love has no man than this:
That a man lay down his life for his friend.
(cf. John 15:13)*

When Christ said this (the original reads «friends»), He was speaking of laying down His life for His disciples. «No longer do I call you servants», He told them, «for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you» (John 15:15).

Chapter 36

Line 6:

the humble and weak shall be exalted.

(Tao Teh Ching, ch. 66)

Su Ch'e (eleventh century a.d.) comments on this teaching of Lao Tzu: «The sage doesn't try to be above or in front of others. But when he finds himself below or behind others, the Tao can't help but lift him up and push him forward».⁸²⁴

Line 11:

Lower me to the lowest point, says the Way.

«The lowest point» or «lowest place», to which we have referred frequently in this text, corresponds to the Chinese word *wu* 無

. This term occurs countless times in the *Tao Teh Ching*, and always in a highly charged context. Usually it is translated as «nothingness» or «emptiness.»

This «emptiness» was discussed at length by the young Fr. Seraphim Rose (then known as Eugene Rose) in an essay he wrote for his masters degree in Oriental languages, «Emptiness and Fullness in the Lao Tzu». Following from the teaching of Gi-ming Shien, Fr. Seraphim explains that the «nothingness» or «emptiness» that Lao Tzu values is not a lack or a «blank», nor does it represent an extreme or an exhaustion. In the words of Lu Hui-ch'ing, the above-mentioned commentator on the *Tao Teh Ching*, «What is meant here by emptiness is not total emptiness but the absence of fullness. And what is meant by stillness is not complete stillness but everything returning unconsciously [spontaneously] to its roots».⁸²⁵ Fr. Seraphim indicates that, for Lao Tzu, «nothingness» (*wu*) is the «point of convergence», the «midpoint» where the minimum or «minim point» has been attained in humility and self-forgetting. «This understanding of *wu*», he writes, «allows us to approach another celebrated passage [of the *Tao Teh Ching*] from a new angle. The usual understanding of the opening lines of chapter 11 is, as in Waley,

We put thirty spokes together and call it a wheel;

But it is on the space where there is nothing that the utility of the wheel depends.

But we might now translate this more concretely as

Thirty spokes join in a single hub,

And it is just in this, its minim point, that the use of the carriage lies.

«Here *wu* is the single, smallest point, the point of convergence of the spokes, which is the 'axis' upon which the wheel turns and the carriage moves.»⁸²⁶

Also in chapter n of the *Tao Teh Ching*, Lao Tzu says that the *wu* of a vessel (the space inside) is what is most «useful» in it, and similarly the *wu* of a house (its doors and windows). Here *wu* is used to denote empty space, but it is not nonexistent, it is not a «nothing», for it is «used». As Fr. Seraphim writes: «It is what exists on the very 'tip' of existence, a sonic thing just verging on 'nothing.' It is the very 'least' thing that can be spoken of at all».

Christ, it will be remembered, called Himself «the least in the Kingdom of Heaven», and in His parables He likened the Kingdom of Heaven to the «least» thing that can be spoken of: «a grain of mustard seed which ... is less than all the seeds that are upon the earth» (Mark 4:31), and «leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal» (Luke 13:21).

Christ, as the Way, occupies the *wu* of the universe: not in the standard meaning of «nothingness» as «blankness», but in the meaning that Lao Tzu gives it, as the «minim point» or «least place». Christ lowers Himself, empties Himself, in poverty of spirit and unlimited self-giving. In this, as we have said, lies His unlimited power.

If Lao Tzu's wheel of thirty spokes can be seen as a metaphor of the universe, then Christ the Tao or Logos can be seen as being at the *huh n* (that universe. This corresponds with the Christian understanding of the Logos as the center or midpoint to which all of the *logoi* of creatures tend. Being at the midpoint. He is also at the lowest point. (See Part II p. 271.)

Chapter 39

Lines 3–4:

*When desire is curtailed at the nadir of the Valley,
One sees all that is and moves beneath the surface.*

The nadir of the Valley refers to *wu* as it appears in the *Tao Teh Ching* (see the commentary on chapter 36). This is the «minim point» or «midpoint» that the Tao occupies.

As we have seen in the commentary on chapter 15, Lao Tzu uses the image of the Valley to represent self-emptying; and hence it conveys the idea of *wu*. The Valley, of course, converges at its nadir, its minim point.

Another image that Lao Tzu uses to convey the same idea is that of the ridgepole of a roof. The ridgepole is the roof's point of convergence, its minim point; and the roof itself can be seen as a kind of inverted valley. In chapter 58 of the *Tao Teh Ching* we read:

*Calamity is what good fortune leans against;
Good fortune is what calamity rests upon.*

Who knows their ridgepole?

(Fr. Seraphim Rose, trans.)

When one attains to the minim point or ridgepole through curtailing selfish desires, one no longer fears calamity or craves for good fortune, but now for the first time one understands them both.

Commenting on Lao Tzus image of the ridgepole, Fr. Seraphim Rose writes: «There could scarcely be a more vivid image than this for expressing the relationship between the contraries in Lao Tzus thought: they cannot be conceived apart from each other, and the key to understanding them lies in neither extreme, but in their juncture».⁸²⁷

Line 5:

Dead men see everything.

Those who have overcome their passions, curtailing their desire for created things, are given to see beyond sensible realities and into the inner essences (logoi) of things, including their fellow human beings. «Only a soul which has been delivered from the passions», writes St. Maximus, «can without error contemplate created beings».⁸²⁸

Lines 2223:

And at last, in this sorrow,

There is perfect freedom.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta expresses it this way: «This is the surrender: to accept to be cut to pieces, and yet every piece belongs to God. You are free then».

Chapter 41

Lines 9–10:

Follow me, says the Way,

Down into the deep pools of the Valley ...

Once more we have used Lao Tzu's symbol of the Valley. The «deep pools» represent the lowest place or minim point of the Valley, the point of complete self-abandonment to the Way. The image of deep pools also employs Lao Tzu's symbol of water, which «is like the Tao» (see chapter 16).

Lines 1112:

Where the water ever empties itself,

Is ever emptied, yet ever full.

In chapter 4 of the *Tao Teh Ching* we read:

*The Tao appears to be emptiness, so its function seems insufficient;
But, fathomless, it seems to be the source of all things.*

(Gi-ming Shien, trans.)

And in chapter 45:

*Great fullness is as if deplete;
Yet in its use it is not exhausted.*

(Fr. Seraphim Rose, trans.)

Line 16:

Emptied, you will be ever full.

Discussing the relationship between emptiness and fullness in the *Tao Teh Ching*, Fr. Seraphim Rose writes:

«We must ask what happens once one has reached the point of ‘convergence’, the ‘minim.’ The answer has already been given: one proceeds to the ‘maximal’; when one has expired,’ it remains only for him to ‘inspire’; the end of emptiness’ is ‘fullness.’

«Yet ‘fullness’ is of two kinds for Lao Tzu; there is the true fullness arrived at through the minim,’ and there is the fullness of excess, which leads to exhaustion. ‘Those who possess this Tao do not try to fill themselves to the brim’ (*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 15)....

«Lao Tzu takes a dim view of excessive ‘filling,’ but he approves of the right sort. ‘The valley, by obtaining the One, is filled’ (*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 39). For, ‘if a thing is hollow, it will be filled’ (ch. 22). The right kind of ‘filling’ is the great filling’ that Lao Tzu praises in chapter 45....”

Finally, Fr. Seraphim asks how it is possible to attain a state of being «ever full»:

«Is the ‘sage’ – the man who, through attaining the ‘minim’, has gained everything – beyond all change? Does he, having become ‘full’, never again become empty’? This could not be, for the world Lao Tzu describes is one of constant change. But since his ‘fullness,’ unlike that of the ‘multitudes,’ is not an extreme, but a moderate one – it seems, indeed, as though empty’ (ch. 45) – he will not come to catastrophe. He will ‘turn back’ before the extreme and converge’ in the ‘minim».⁸²⁹

Chapter 43

Line 3:

Because you cannot see the end.

On the metaphysical meaning of «the end», see the commentary on chapter 24.

Chapter 44

Lines 18–19:

up the valley path:

We reach the flatland ...

Once we have found the Way in the «deep pools of the Valley», we seek to share the water with the thirsty ones on the «flatland». For «he who believes on me», says the Way, «out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water» (John 7:38).

Line 31–32:

I have opened the mysterious gate to you.

In the first chapter of the *Tao Teh Ching*, the Tao is called the «gate to all mystery». With His self-emptying on the Cross, the Word of God opened to mankind this mysterious gate – the gate to Paradise and the heavenly realm – for the first time since the primordial fall.

Lines 33–34:

Enter into my joy,

You who have tasted my pain.

St. Maximus the Confessor teaches on the mystery of suffering with God: «If God suffers in the flesh when He is made man, should we not rejoice when we suffer, for we have God to share our sufferings? This shared suffering confers the kingdom on us. For he spoke truly who said, 'If we suffer with Him, then we shall also be glorified with Him' (Romans 8:17)».⁸³⁰

Lines 41–42:

Taste incorruption,

You who have lain in the grave with me.

«He who knows the mystery of the Cross and Tomb», says St. Maximus, «knows also the essential principles of all things».

Chapter 45

Lines 14, 16:

A little child does not calculate...

Soft and yielding like water, his mind is therefore boundless.

One of Lao Tzu's favorite images is that of the «infant». As Fr. Seraphim explains: «The Tao, and he who is in accord with it, are pliant, supple, fluent, like an infant, like water».⁸³¹

Line 17:

Spontaneous, he accepts without thought the Course that all things follow.

Gi-ming Shien identifies Lao Tzus goal of *wu* (the minim point of self-emptying) with spontaneity. Just as our internal organs function without our thinking about them, and just as we breathe without being aware of it, so does the person in accord with the Tao act without calculation and without desire («non-action»). Gi-ming calls this a kind of transcendent «forgetfulness».

Such is the spontaneity of which Christ spoke: «The kingdom of God is as if a man should cast seed upon the ground; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knows not how. For the earth brings forth fruit of itself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come» (Mark 4:26–29).

Spontaneity is characterized by not prying into unnecessary questions and seeking useless knowledge. Lao Tzu says, «When spiritual intelligence is apprehended then human wisdom may be discarded» (ch. 10); and elsewhere he says that «the sage ... causes people to be without knowledge and desire» (ch. 3). St. Macarius of Egypt expresses a similar idea, using – like Lao Tzu – the image of an infant:

«Eat as much bread as you find, and leave the wide earth to pursue its way; go to the brink of the river, and drink as much as you need, and pass on, and seek not to know whence it comes, or how it flows. Do your best to have your foot cured, or the disease of your eye, that you may see the light of the sun, but do not inquire how much light the sun has, or in what sign it rises. Take that which is given for your use. Why do you go off to the hills and try to discover how many wild asses and other beasts dwell there? The babe, when it comes to its mother's breast, takes the milk and thrives; it does not search for the root and wellspring from which it flown so. It sucks the milk, and empties the whole measure; and another hour passes – the breasts fill up. The babe knows nothing of it, nor the mother either, although the supply proceeds from all her members».⁸³²

Chapter 47

Lines 3–7:

«The stiff and unbending is the disciple of death», said the Anciem Sage.

The gentle and yielding is the disciple of life.

A tree that is unbending is easily broken.

The hard and the strong will fall.

The soft and weak will overcome».
(*Tao Teh Ching, ch. 76*)

Commenting on this passage of Lao Tzu, Fr. Seraphim Rose writes: «The 'strong,' the 'firm,' and the stiff': three attributes of the powerful that are yet overcome by the 'weak' and 'soft.' The reason is clear: they are tense and unyielding; powerful for a while, they cannot stay thus alw.iyn, They have reached their extreme. Their 'contraversion' [turning about from one opposite to another] is near at hand».⁸³³

Lines 8–9:

*If a painful experience comes upon a humble soul.
She bends and thus remains whole.*

Fr. Seraphim further points out that the image of «bending» has in do, once more, with the «point of convergence» or minim point of selfemptying that is Lao Tzu's goal – for the act of bending, while it is issues in duality, springs from a single point. For example, when a piece of paper is folded in half, its fold becomes its point of convergence. And if water were to fall on that paper, it would flow down into the fold, which has become its minim point: a point or abyss of humility.

Lines 13–15:

*Thus she goes on her way,
Untroubled, undepressed, in complete peace of mind,
Having no cause to get angry or to anger anyone.*

The sixth-century desert father, Abba Dorotheus, whose teachings form the basis of this chapter, tells the following story to illustrate:

«Once the holy elder, Abba Naum, was ill and his brother, instead of honey, poured linseed oil over his food – pernicious stuff that it is. Nevertheless the elder said nothing but ate it in silence and even took a second helping to satisfy his need, without blaming his brother or saying that he had done it maliciously. Not only did he say nothing, he was not annoyed with him even in thought. And then the brother learned what he had done and began to lament over it saying, 'O Father, I have murdered you! And you have put this sin upon me because you said nothing!' How meekly he replied, 'Don't be troubled, my son. If the Lord wished me to eat honey He would have made you put honey on it,' and he immediately confided the matter to God. What has it to do with God, venerable elder? The brother made a mistake and you say, 'If God wished.' What has it to do with God? And he insists, 'Yes! If God had wanted me to eat honey, the brother would have put honey on.' The fact that the elder was so sick that day that he could take no food did not make him angry with his brother, but he referred the whole thing to God; and the elder

was quite right to say, ‘If God had wanted me to eat honey He would even have changed the oil into honey.’

«But we, for each little thing, go and accuse our neighbor and blame him as if he were maliciously going against his conscience. And if we hear a word we straightaway distort its meaning and say, ‘If he did not intend to annoy me he would not have said it...’ We leave God Who grants us occasions of this kind to purify us from our sins and we run after our neighbor crying, ‘Why did you say this to me? Why did you do this to me?’ And whereas we would be able to reap great profit from things of this kind, we bring just the opposite on ourselves, being unaware that everything happens by the foreknowledge of God for the benefit of each of us».⁸³⁴

The spiritual attitude of the elder of this story – that of accepting everything as God’s providence – has its parallel in the *Tao Teh Ching*, in the images of pliancy, yielding and bending that Lao Tzu frequently employs.

Line 26:

For nothing is more powerful than lowliness.

This teaching of Abba Dorotheus finds expression in the writings of Dostoyevsky, here speaking through the character of Elder Zosima:

«At some thoughts a man stands perplexed, above all at the sight of human sin, and he wonders whether to combat it by force or by humble love. Always decide: ‘I will combat it by humble love.’ If you resolve oil that once for all, you can conquer the whole world. Loving humility is .1 terrible force: it is the strongest of all things, and there is nothing else like it».⁸³⁵

Chapter 51

Line 19:

The spirit of forgiveness is the spirit of the Way.

Richard Wurmbrand († 2001), a Romanian-Jewish Christian pastor who endured fourteen years of torture in communist prisons, told many stories of the superhuman power of forgiveness exhibited by fellow prisoners who were followers of the Way:

«I have seen Christians in communist prisons with fifty pounds of chains on their feet, tortured with red-hot iron pokers, in whose throats spoonfuls of salt had been forced, being kept afterward without w.i.ut, starving, whipped, suffering from cold, and praying with fervor for the communists. This is humanly inexplicable! It is the love of Christ, which was shed into our hearts.

«Afterward, the communists who had tortured us came to prison, too. Under communism, communists, and even communist rulers, in put in prison almost as often as their adversaries. Now the tortured and the torturer were in the same cell. And while the non-Christians showed hatred toward their former inquisitors and beat them, Christians took their defense, even at the risk of being beaten themselves and accused of being accomplices with communism. I have seen Christians giving away their last slice of bread (we had at that time one slice a week) and the medicine which could save their lives to a sick communist torturer, who was now a fellow-prisoner....

«A Christian was sentenced to death. Before being executed, he was allowed to see his wife. His last words to his wife were, ‘You must know that I die loving those who kill me. They don’t know what they do and my last request of you is to love them, too. Don’t have bitterness in your heart because they kill your beloved one. We will meet in heaven.’»⁸³⁶

Chapter 52

Lines 1–2:

When one blames others, there is contention;

When one finds one’s own faults, there is peace.

The Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian († a.d. 372), which is read repeatedly during Great Lent in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, expresses this truth: «Grant me to see my own sins and not to judge my brother».

Abba Dorotheus relates an incident from his monastery to show what perpetual agitation arises when we set about blaming others. It is not difficult to see ourselves in the two brothers he describes:

«There came to me once two brothers who were always rowing, and the elder was saying about the younger, ‘I arrange for him to do something and he gets distressed, and so I get distressed, thinking that if he had faith and love towards me he would accept what I tell him with complete confidence.’ And the younger was saying, ‘Excuse me, reverend father, but he does not speak to me with the fear of God, but rather as someone who wants to give orders. I reckon that this is why my heart has not full confidence.’ Impress on your minds that each blames the other and neither blames himself, but both of them are getting upset with one another, and although they are begging each other’s pardon, they both remain unconvinced. One says, ‘He does not show me deference and, therefore, I am not convinced’; and the other says, ‘Since he will not have complete confidence in my love until I show him deference, I, for my part, do not have complete confidence in him.’ My God, do you see how ridic-

ulous it is? Do you see their perverse way of thinking? God knows how sorry I am about this.... Each of them had to throw the blame on the other, but what they really ought to do is just the opposite. The first ought to say: I speak with presumption and therefore God does not give my brother confidence in me. And the other ought to be thinking: My brother gives me commands with humility and love but I am unruly and have not the fear of God. Neither of them found that way and blamed himself, but each of them vexed the other.

«Don't you see that this is why we make no progress, why we find we have not been helped towards it? We remain all the time against one another, grinding one another down. But each considers himself right and excuses himself, as I was saying, all the while keeping none of the commandments yet expecting his neighbor to keep the lot!»

Chapter 53

This chapter is based on the teaching of Elder Sampson Sievers († 1979), a man well equipped to speak on the subject of forgiveness.

In 1917 Elder Sampson became a novice monk in a monastery near St. Petersburg, and in 1919 he was arrested by the communist secret police. That same year he was shot in a mass execution. «Firing squads were executing prisoners», he related several years later. «A commissar led tin into some kind of building, and from there we were loaded onto wagons with window grates. It wasn't frightening to me at all, I was not alone. Someone was with me, some kind of power. A certain ray of joy. When they placed me against the wall, I was absolutely peaceful – this meant that it must happen this way, because He was watching over me. He allowed this to take place, which means that it was necessary. For I was born not unto destruction but for eternal salvation. Never throughout my whole life did I judge anyone, even those who did the shooting, but I excused them and justified what they did. They were fulfilling orders, their obligations. What they were ordered to do, they did. They did not have the courage to say, 'No, I will not!' That is their only fault. But the Lord will take away their guilt because no one had enlightened them.

«They fired their guns ten to fifteen paces away from me. There were six or seven men. I became hot. The bullets hit me in the arm, in the chest».

Elder Sampson was then thrown into a common grave. His fellow monks came to take away his body, and, in pulling it out from under the mass of corpses, they discovered that he was still breathing. They brought him to his mother, who nursed him back to health. In 1929 he was arrested again and sent to the Gulag. Altogether, he spent nearly twenty years in the concentration

camp system. In his later years he served as a spiritual father to countless people, being loving yet demanding with his spiritual children, digging deeply in order to root out enmity and egoism.

The Elder became especially tough when one of his spiritual children would refuse to forgive someone, even for some petty annoyance. «I think», he said, «I've always concluded: this means that they still have not gotten the point, that the whole secret, that all the salt of Christianity lies in this: to forgive, to excuse, to justify, not to know, not to remember evil.

«He who does not want to forgive, to excuse, to justify consciously, intentionally... that person closes himself to eternal life before God, and even more so in the present life. He is turned away and not heard by God».⁸³⁷

Chapter 55

Line 17:

Finding the one wounded nature common to all...

Wang Pi (third century a.d.) teaches: «The sage penetrates the nature and condition of others. Hence he responds to them without force and follows them without effort. He eliminates whatever misleads or confuses them. Hence their minds become clear, and each realizes his own nature».⁸³⁸

Chapter 60

Lines 7–9:

«And who is my neighbor?» the Way was asked.

Our neighbor is whomever the Way puts before us:

Insider or outcast...

When confronted with the commandment, «Love your neighbor», a lawyer tried to justify himself by asking Christ, «Who is my neighbor?» He thought that «neighbor» signified his immediate relations, kinsmen, ethnic brothers or co-religionists, which meant that he would not have to love those outside his own circle. Christ answered the lawyer's question with the parable of the Good Samaritan. A certain man, He said, lay dying, but the most respected leaders of his own religion passed him by. Only a Samaritan – who was considered a heretic and an outcast – had compassion on him and helped him. Thus it was an outsider who proved to be the man's neighbor, showing

love even on one who considered him an enemy. «Go», said Christ to the lawyer, «and do thou likewise» (Luke 10:29–37).

Lines 19–21:

*Love for neighbor, then, is love for all equally,
And equally with ourselves.*

If our love is selective and conditional, we have not yet prepared ourselves for eternity, for among the spirits of heaven there abides one love, love for all equally. (See Elder Ambrose’s vision of eternity on pp. 404–6.)

Chapter 61

In this chapter we have once more drawn from the teaching of Abba Dorotheus. Here is indicated the crucial difference between «preliminary fear» and «perfect fear» of God, which explains such seemingly contradictory Scriptural passages as «By fear of the Lord every man turns away from evil» (Proverbs 16:6) and «Perfect love casts out fear» (1 John 4:18), Setting forth this teaching in more detail, Abba Dorotheus writes:

«There are, as St. Basil says, three states through which we can be pleasing to God. The first, that of fearing punishment; this makes us acceptable and we are in the state of slaves. The second, the state of servants working for wages, fulfilling orders for our own advantage and, by doing so, earning our wages. The third is the state of sons, where we strive for the highest good. For a son, when he comes to maturity, does his father’s will not for fear of being beaten, nor to receive a reward from him, but because he knows he is loved. He loves and honors his father, and is convinced that all his father possesses is his own. Such a man is worthy to hear, ‘You are no longer a slave, but a son, an heir of God through Christ.’ As we said, he no longer fears God with that preliminary fear, but really loves Him».⁸³⁹

Chapter 64

Lines 25–29:

*There are two kinds of pain:
Pain of the senses –
An absence of the object of the body’s desire;
And pain of the soul –
An absence of the object of the soul’s desire.*

In speaking here of the soul, we mean the one inward being of man, the highest part of which is the spirit (see Part II, pp. 276–79). The soul, since it contains man’s eternal spirit, has an innate desire for its Creator. When man is cut off from his Creator, his soul’s desire is not met, and thus he experiences spiritual pain – an internal, moral suffering, a gnawing emptiness. This pain manifests itself in anxiety, worry, fear, depression, anger, rage, etc.

Chapter 65

Line 21:

*«Control of the passions by will is called strength».
(Tao Teh Ching, ch. 55 – Gi-ming Shien, trans.)*

Through control of the passions, we are given insight into the essence of things; and, conversely, this insight helps us to control our passions. Such was the experience of Lao Tzu, Socrates, and other pre-Christian sages, and such is the experience of followers of the Way after His coming in the flesh. St. Maximus the Confessor writes:

«Every spirit caught up by God cuts off simultaneously both the energy of the passions and the uncouth jostle of thoughts. In addition to this it also puts an end to the licentious misuse of the senses. For the passions, brought triumphantly into subjection by the higher forms of contemplation, are destroyed by the sublime vision of nature».⁸⁴⁰

Line 35:

The true End and fulfillment of desire.

Since man is meant for nothing less than union with God, desire for the Uncreated is the only desire that he should have. Desire for created things is unworthy of man and his exalted calling, and therefore it must end in discontent.

Chapter 66

The ideas in this chapter come from a manuscript of Fr. Seraphim Rose, written shortly after he became a Christian, and discovered and published only after his death. Fr. Seraphim wrote these ideas in the form of an «Answer» to the character of Ivan in Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. In Ivan, Fr. Seraphim saw the man that he himself had once been: an overly intellectual Western man who tries to understand everything with his mind, and therefore ends in doubting, in atheism Ivan tried vainly to find an intelligible explana-

tion by which to reconcile himself to suffering; but, as Fr. Seraphim tells him, one's suffering can only be reconciled by loving surrender to Him Who voluntarily surrendered Himself on the Cross, Who suffered for us and with us, but Who, unlike us, suffered as an absolute innocent.⁸⁴¹

Chapter 67

Even after fourteen years of unspeakable tortures, Richard Wurmbrand could write: «The prison years did not seem too long for me, for I discovered, alone in my cell, that beyond belief and love there is a delight in God: a deep and extraordinary ecstasy of happiness that is like nothing in this world. And when I came out of jail I was like someone who comes down from a mountain-top where he has seen for miles around the peace and beauty of the countryside, and now returns to the plain».⁸⁴²

Chapter 70

Lines 10–12:

Without offenses, humility has not been tested.

Without adversities, true love has not been tested.

Without afflictions, virtue has not been tested.

Lin Xian-gao (1924-), a Chinese Christian pastor who endured twenty-one years in communist prisons for his faith, says the following: «A Christian who has not suffered is a child without training. Such Christians cannot receive or understand the fullness of God's blessing. They know the Lord only as an acquaintance rather than as an intimate heavenly Father».⁸⁴³

Chapter 72

Lines 1–2:

His concern is not with the ideas of men;

Nor with their classes, or states, or nations, or warring factions

Classes and states are man-made entities, not ontological realities. This was realized by Alexander Solzhenitsyn in the Gulag slave-labor camps, where sorrow and suffering forced him to penetrate into the core of his existence.

«Gradually», he wrote, «it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties – but right through every human heart – and then through all human hearts.... And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains ... an unuprooted small corner of evil».⁸⁴⁴

Line 17:

this water we call joy ...

That is, the water which is «like the Way» in that it is yielding and always seeks the lowest place. In the underground recesses of humility and self-abandonment, into which Christ the Way empties Himself, we find the source of all joy, and out of us shall flow «rivers of living water» (John 7:38).

This image is continued in the succeeding chapter.

Chapter 73

Line 21:

Unless you change your mind.

The Greek word for «repentance», *metanoia*, means «to change the mind» (i.e., higher mind or spirit). About this, see pp. 286–87.

Line 22:

Unless you abandon the path of avarice, sensual pleasure, and self-exaltation.

In *The Philokalia*, St. Mark the Ascetic (fifth century a.d.) writes: «All vice is caused by self-esteem and sensual pleasure; you cannot overcome passion without hating them. Avarice is the root of all evil' (1 Timothy 6:10); but avarice is clearly a product of these two components.

«The spirit is made blind by these three passions: avarice, self-esteem and sensual pleasure. These three passions on their own dull spiritual knowledge and faith, the foster-brothers of our nature. It is because of them that wrath, anger, war, murder and all other evils have such power over mankind. Because of them we are commanded not to love 'the world' and 'the things that are in the world' (1 John 2:15); not so that we should hate God's creation through lack of discernment, but so that we should eliminate the occasions for these three passions».⁸⁴⁵

Chapter 75

Lines 32–33:

Having the freedom of choice.

One chooses freedom from choice.

The fact that we are always faced with the necessity of choice, says St. Maximus, is evidence of our imperfection, for if we were perfect we would do, immediately and naturally, that which accords with the Way. We go forward gropingly, and often do what is against our true nature. The closer we align ourselves with the Way, however, the less our «free will» will have to be employed, for we will act spontaneously from our true nature which was created to follow the Way.⁸⁴⁶

Lu Hui-ch'ing, commenting on chapter 38 of the *Tao Teh Ching*, writes: «Higher Kindness is kindness without effort to be kind. Kindness is simply a gift».⁸⁴⁷

Chapter 77

Line 3:

The Way is not found by those who seek after wonders ...

Fr. Seraphim Rose said: «It is not first of all miracles which reveal God to men, but something about God that is revealed to a heart that is ready for it. This is what is meant by a 'burning heart,' by which the two disciples [on the road to Emmaus] had contact with God Who came in the flesh (Luke ch. 24)».⁸⁴⁸

The modern-day miracle-worker Archbishop John Maximovitch († 1966) once healed a dying woman for whom the doctors had given up hope. When she came to his church later to be baptized because of the healing, he refused to do it. He believed that one should follow Christ not because of miracles, but because of love, out of a «burning heart».⁸⁴⁹

Line 5:

The Way is not found among those who seek after communion with spirits ...

The Russian ascetic and prophet St. Ignatius Brianchaninov († 1867) writes: «The idea that there is anything especially important in the sensuous perception of spirits is a mistaken one. Sensuous perception without spiritual perception does not provide a proper understanding of spirits; it provides only a superficial understanding of them. Very easily it can provide the most mistaken conceptions, and this indeed is what is most often provided to the inexperienced and to those infected with vainglory and self-esteem....

«Those who see spirits, even holy angels, sensuously should not have any fancies about themselves: this perception alone, in itself, is no testimony whatever of the merit of the perceivers. Not only depraved men are capable of this, but even irrational animals».⁸⁵⁰

Chapter 79

Lines 1–5:

«The essence of the Way», said the Ancient Sage,

«Is supremely true:

Within is the evidence.

From the beginning until now its name has remained,

And it contains all Truth».

(Tao Teb Ching, ch. 21 – Gi-ming Shien, trans.)

Some Western spokesmen of ancient Chinese philosophy, striving to justify their own moral and intellectual dilettantism, have given Westerners the impression that this philosophy is, at its core, relativistic. It takes a genuine transmitter of the Chinese tradition like Gi-ming Shien to cut through this false representation and reveal the tradition in its simplicity and practicality, founded on clear belief in Absolute Truth. In Gi-ming's elucidation of it, the philosophy of ancient China closely resembles that of ancient Greece, especially of Plato. In upholding a standard of Absolute Truth, both the ancient Greeks and the ancient Chinese prepared mankind for the incarnation of Truth in the Person of Jesus Christ.

In Chinese philosophy, Gi-ming affirms, «objective universal value is to be preferred in judgment to the relative value of private opinion. Absolute value can only be judged in relation to the One or Being. The One embraces and comprehends all things; its relation gives to each its mu value. Only in this absolute view can objective value be measured.

«When we leave the absolute and become entangled in the private judgment of subjective value then we are in relative value. Here we come into the sense of Protagoras' measure when he said, 'A thing seems green to one and blue to another, large to one and small to another, good to me and harmful to him. Consequently there is no objective truth and only the individual is the measure of truth. How many individuals are there? That is how many truths there will be. There is no objective truth at all.' That is the limitation of understanding which encompasses particular judgment.

«Lao Tzu denies the particular value as illusory fantasy and seeks rather the value of the absolute or the whole One. He said: 'When all the world rec-

ognizes the beauty of the beautiful then it turns to ugliness. When they recognize the good of the good, it ceases to be good' (*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 2). The particular recognition destroys the universal state in which objective value was held.

«We catch a similar view in Plato: 'The beautiful which is manifest in the sensible world is only relative beauty – that is, when compared with ugly things; they are not beautiful when we compare them with more beautiful things. They are fair today, foul tomorrow; fair at one place, or in one relation, or in one point of view, or to one person, foul under different circumstances and in the judgment of other persons. Hence everything in the world of phenomenal beauty is relative, fleeting and uncertain. But the idea of beauty is everlasting, without beginning and without end; without diminution and without decay; invariable, immutable and absolute. It is beautiful at all times, in all its relations, and from all points of view. It is not merely a notion, neither is it purely individual knowledge, but it is an eternal reality' (Symposium).

«Here is distinguished real objective value from the fantasy. The real wisdom which philosophy professes to love must of course base itself upon the objective universe and not upon private limitations of a universe of discourse. The merely relative is for entertainment, not for understanding».⁸⁵¹

Line 27:

For He said, «I am Truth».

In seeking the Truth, St. Augustine once asked, «Is Truth therefore nothing because it is not diffused through space finite and infinite?» – and the Truth answered him from afar, «Yet verily, I AM that I AM». Beholding the glory of Him Who is Truth, Augustine could only utter: «O Truth Who art Eternity! and Love Who art Truth! and Eternity Who art Love!»⁸⁵²

Chapter 80

Lines 7–8:

In the Way, there is a reversal,

A circle of return ...

As Fr. Seraphim Rose points out in his essay «Emptiness and Fullness in the *Lao Tzu*», there are three words in the *Tao Teh Ching* which are usually translated as «return»: 1) *fan* (*pran* in the Old Chinese pronunciation)

反, which means to «turn about» from one opposite to another; 2) *fu* (*byok*)

復, which means to «turn back» to a lower, earlier or more primitive state; and 3) *kwei* (*kwyed*)

歸 , which means to «converge» in a place of rest, to «come home». The motion of *kwei* can be depicted as a tending toward a single point at the center of a circle: toward a state of simplicity and stillness in which the tension of the contraries is harmonized. In this final «circle of return», one no longer «turns about» endlessly from one extreme to the other, but rather «turns back» from the extreme in order to «converge» in the center. Fr. Seraphim identifies this center as *wu*: the «minim point» of self-emptying which we have discussed earlier.⁸⁵³

Line 10:

And each person, a universe.

«You are a world within a world», says St. Nilus of Ancyra († a.d. 430): «Look within yourself, and see there the whole creation. Do not look at exterior things but turn all your attention to that which lies within. Gather together your whole mind within the noetic treasure-house of your soul, and make ready for the Lord a shrine free from all images».

St. Nicodemus of Mount Athos († 1809) elucidates this teaching in more detail: «God has placed man to be a sort of *macrocosmos* – a ‘greater world’ within the small one. He is indeed a greater world by virtue of the multitude of powers that he possesses, especially the powers of reason, of spirit, and of will, which this great and visible world does not have. This is why St. Gregory Nazianzen again stated that ‘God has placed this second cosmos (i.e., man) to be upon earth as a great world within a small one.’ Even when man is compared with the invisible world of the angels, again he is called a great world,’ while the invisible world is by comparison small. Man includes in his world both the visible and the invisible, while the angelic world does not include the elements of the visible world.... Man as cosmos draws the two ends of the upper and lower world together and thus reveals that the Creator of both is one».⁸⁵⁴

Chapter 81

Line 13:

The sole Bridegroom.

In his parables, Christ calls Himself the Bridegroom, meaning the Bridegroom of the human soul.

Richard Wurmbrand tells a moving story of how, when in a Romanian prison, he prayed to Christ as the Bridegroom of his soul. One day – it was Good Friday – he was put in the career for having written «Jesus» on the cell wall. The career was a cupboard built into a wall, just high enough to stand in

and twenty inches square, with a few small airholes and one hole for food to be pushed through. All the sides of the cupboard were studded with steel spikes, so that only by standing rigidly upright could one avoid impalement.

When Wurmbrand would collapse from muscle fatigue, lacerating himself on the spikes, the guards would let him out for a rest, then put him back in. In that suffocating darkness, he began to repeat a short prayer which he composed at that moment: «Jesus, dear Bridegroom of my soul, I love you».

«The quiet beating of a loving heart is a music that carries far», Wurmbrand writes, «so I said this phrase to the same rhythm. At first I seemed to hear the devil sneering, ‘You love Him, and He lets you suffer. If He’s all-powerful, why doesn’t He take you out of the career?’ I continued to say quietly, ‘Jesus, dear Bridegroom of my soul, I love you’. In .1 short time ... I had ceased to think.

«Later I was often to practice this detachment in bad moments. Jesus says in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, ‘For in such an hour as you think not the Son of Man comes.’ This has been my experience of Him. Don’t think, and Christ will come, taking you by surprise».⁸⁵⁵

* * *

⁷⁹²St. Gregory Nazianzen, «Second Theological Oration,” p. 289.

⁷⁹³Red Pine, *Lao Tzu’s Taoteching*, pp. 42–43.

⁷⁹⁴Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 25.

⁷⁹⁵St. John Damascene, «Orthodox Faith,» p. 172.

⁷⁹⁶Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, pp. 87–88.

⁷⁹⁷St. John Damascene, «Orthodox Faith,» p. 201.

⁷⁹⁸Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, pp. 22, 24–25.

⁷⁹⁹St. Gregory Nazianzen, «Second Theological Oration,» p. 289.

⁸⁰⁰Quoted in Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 44.

⁸⁰¹Ibid., p. 94.

⁸⁰²Ibid., pp. 100–101.

⁸⁰³Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmata Theology*, pp. 67–68.

⁸⁰⁴St. John Damascene, «Orthodox Faith,» p. 193.

⁸⁰⁵*The Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 172.

⁸⁰⁶St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, p. 26.

- ⁸⁰⁷St. John Damascene, «Orthodox Faith,» p. 166.
- ⁸⁰⁸Red Pine, *Lao Tzu's Taoteching*, p. 69.
- ⁸⁰⁹Cleary, *Vitality, Energy, Spirit*, pp. 93–94.
- ⁸¹⁰Sophrony, *His Life is Mine*, pp 115–16.
- ⁸¹¹I. M. Kontzevitch, *The Northern Thebaïd*, p. 43.
- ⁸¹²See Ren Jiyu, *The Book of Lao Zi*, p 20.
- ⁸¹³See *The Lost Books of the Bible*, pp. 37; and *The Festal Menaion*, pp. 47 T* 51–52.
- ⁸¹⁴Red Pine, *Lao Tzus Taoteching*, p. 16.
- ⁸¹⁵*The Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 217.
- ⁸¹⁶Quoted in Saints Barsanuphiu and John, *Guidance Toward Spiritual Life*, pp 151–52.
- ⁸¹⁷*The Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 196.
- ⁸¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 189.
- ⁸¹⁹Bishop Augoustrinos N. Kaniotes, *Sparks from the Apostles*, p. 190.
- ⁸²⁰*The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 253.
- ⁸²¹*The Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 246.
- ⁸²²«Foolishness for Christ,» in *Saint Herman Calendar 1998*.
- ⁸²³Red Pine, *Lao Tzus Taoteching*, p. 141.
- ⁸²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 133.
- ⁸²⁵Red Pine, *Lao Tzus Taoteching*, p. 32.
- ⁸²⁶Eugene [Fr. Seraphim] Rose, «Emptiness and Fullness in the *Lao Tzu*,» p. 47.
- ⁸²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 26.
- ⁸²⁸*The Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 201.
- ⁸²⁹Rose, «Emptiness and Fullness in the *Lao Tzu*,» pp. 51–51b.
- ⁸³⁰*The Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 170.
- ⁸³¹Rose, «Emptiness and Fullness in the *Lao Tzu*» p. 24.
- ⁸³²Quoted in Saints Barsanuphius and John, *Guidance Toward Spiritual Life*, p. 153.
- ⁸³³Rose, «Emptiness and Fullness in the *Lao Tzu*» p. 23.
- ⁸³⁴St. Abba Dorotheus, *Discourses and Sayings*, pp. 146–47.

- ⁸³⁵Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 386.
- ⁸³⁶Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, pp. 57,45.
- ⁸³⁷Elder Sampson (Seivers), «Discussions and Teachings of Elder Sampson,» pp. 215,222.
- ⁸³⁸Red Pine, *Lao Tzú's Taoteching*, p. 59.
- ⁸³⁹St. Abba Dorotheus, *Discourses and Sayings*, p. 110.
- ⁸⁴⁰*The Philokalia*, vol. 2, p. 274.
- ⁸⁴¹—See Hieromonk Damascene, *Father Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works*, pp. 98–104.
- ⁸⁴²Richard Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, p. 1.
- ⁸⁴³Ken Anderson, *Bold as a Lamb*, p. 22.
- ⁸⁴⁴Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 2, pp. 615–16.
- ⁸⁴⁵*The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 117.
- ⁸⁴⁶Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 125.
- ⁸⁴⁷Red Pine, *Lao Tzu's Taoteching*, p. 77.
- ⁸⁴⁸Fr. Seraphim Rose, *God's Revelation to the Human Heart*, p. 22.
- ⁸⁴⁹Fr. Seraphim Rose and Abbot Herman Podmoshensky, *Blessed John the Wonderworker*, p. 371.
- ⁸⁵⁰Rose, *The Soul After Death*, pp. 5859.
- ⁸⁵¹Gi-ming Shien, «The Basic Teachings of Taoism,» p. 6.
- ⁸⁵²St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, p. 107.
- ⁸⁵³Rose, «Emptiness and Fullness in the *Lao Tzu*» pp. 7–19. Fr. Seraphims reconstruction of the Old Chinese pronunciation has been slightly modified to accord with that of Victor H. Mair (see Mair's *Tao Te Ching*, pp. 139–40).
- ⁸⁵⁴St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, *A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 67.
- ⁸⁵⁵Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, pp. 56–57.