THE HESYCHAST CONTROVERSY:

A PRACTICE AND ATTITUDE

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Mahir Kerem Çelikel, The Hesychast Controversy: A practice and attitude

The Hesychast controversy in the Late Byzantine period may be perceived as one of the last segments of the ongoing debate between outer wisdom, based on pagan philosophy, and inner wisdom, the teachings of Christianity. The focus of this thesis is an attitude perceived among a certain group of monks that dismisses scholarship, particularly secular learning, stressing religious experience instead and positioning its adherents as a spiritual elite in a fight for authority against a scholarly establishment.

The controversy has not been researched thoroughly, and in the scholarly literature the controversy seems to be disjunct from the meditative practices of hesychasm itself and often presented as the result of political-social-intellectual developments. However, given the emphasis on religious experience and access to knowledge beyond words exhibited by the hesychasts when their divine visions during meditation came into question, the attitudes against secular learning should be investigated with the development of the practice itself.

This thesis argues that the inner-outer wisdom debate, which had emerged in the Late Antique period, got its hesychast flavor only in and after the tenth century with the development of meditative practices. It was necessary for the meditative practices around hesychasm to mature to a sufficient extent in order for the rejection of scholarship based on reason and the accompanying spiritual elitism to make their presence felt. As religious experience, like any other experience, is mediated, only after the development of a successful practice, allowing replication and participation, could scholarship be countered with spiritual experience. A perspective from the Islamic world focusing on the developments around dhikr suggest that the controversy was already in the making. The development of a meditative practice would create a spiritual elite who, having gained confidence and legitimacy through their access to an alternative mode of knowledge acquisition, would ensure that regular learning should only have a secondary position in public life.

Tez Özeti

Mahir Kerem Çelikel, The Hesychast Controversy: A practice and attitude

Bizans'ın geç dönemlerinde ortaya çıkan Hesikazm tartışması, Bizans'in başından beri tam olarak çözemediği dış ve iç bilgelik, yani Hıristiyanlik öncesi pagan Yunan felsefesi ve Hıristiyanlik öğretisinin belki de son çatışması olarak görülebilir. By tezin odak noktasi 1330'larda ortaya çıkan tartışmada belli bir grup keşiş arasında belirginleşen dünyevi eğitimi küçümseyen, reddeden ve buna karşılık dinsel tecrübeyi yücelten ve de kendilerini ruhani seçkinler olarak gösteren yaklaşımlardır.

Hesikazm tartışmasına günümüz tarih yazımında fazla değinilmemekte, varolan eserlerde de tartışma, taraf olan keşişlerin gerçekleştirdikleri, Sufizm'deki zikri andıran ve tartışmaya adını veren "hesikazm" adlı meditasyon tekniğinden kopuk, genel siyasal-toplumsal-düşünsel süreçlerin bir sonucu olarak gözükmektedir. Keşişler bu meditasyon sırasında tanrısal olarak addettikleri bir ışık gördüklerinde ve bu tecrübenin inançsal altyapısı Bizanslı diğer düşünürler tarafından eleştirildiğinde, felsefenin kuru sözcüklerini yerlebir eden, dinsel tecrübeye vurgu yapan yaklaşımlar bize bazı keşişlerin etrafında gelişen bu dünyevi eğitime karşı hisleri Bizans'ta oldukça uzun bir gelişme süreci izleyen hesikazm tekniğiyle beraber incelemek gerekliliğini gösterir.

Bu tez Geç Antik dönemde beliren dünyevi-ruhani bilgelik ayrımının ancak hesikazm tekniğinin belli bir olgunluğa ulaştığı onuncu yüzyıldan itibaren gec dönemdeki hezikazm tartışmasinda ortaya çıkan tada ulaştığını göstermektedir. Ancak hesikazm tekniği yeterli olgunluğa ulaştığında, kökleri erken dönem Hıristiyanlığına dayanan dünyevi bilgelik karşıtlığı ve buna karşı öne sürülen ruhani seçkinlik kendini bu kadar güçlü bir şekilde ortaya koyabilmiştir. Tüm tecrübeler gibi dinsel addedilen tecrübeler de insana dolaylı yoldan ulaştığı için ancak bu tür tecrübeleri belli bir başarıyla yaşatmayı ve paylaşmayı sağlayacak bir teknik ile dünyevi felsefeye karşı ruhani tecrübesellik ortaya konabilmiştir. Islam dünyasindaki zikrin gelişim sürecinden bakıldığında Hesikazm tartışması çok daha doğal bir sonuç olarak gözükmektedir. Bir meditasyon tekniğinin gelişmesi ruhani seçkinliği, bilgiye başka bir şekilde ulaşma şekli sunan bu meditasyon tekniğiyle özgüven ve izleyenlerin gözünde meşruluk kazanan ruhani seçkinlik de dünyevi eğitimin toplumda ikincil bir konum almasını sağlayacaktı.



Theophanes the Greek (1340-1410), *Transfiguration*, ca. 1403, Tempera on wood, 184 x 134. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

While faith based on theological reasoning is today universally engaged in a bitter struggle with doubt and resistance from the prevailing brand of rationalism, it does seem that the naked fundamental experience itself, that primal seizure of mystic insight, stripped of religious concepts, perhaps no longer to be regarded as a religious experience at all, has undergone an immense expansion and now forms the soul of that complex irrationalism that haunts our era like a nightbird lost in the dawn.

Robert Musil (Austria, 1880-1942), *The Man without Qualities*

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Mysticism keeps men sane. As long as you have mystery you have health; when you destroy mystery you create morbidity. The ordinary man has always been sane because the ordinary man has always been a mystic. He has permitted the twilight... He has always cared more for truth than for consistency. If he saw two truths that seemed to contradict each other, he would take the two truths and contradiction along with them. His spiritual sight is stereoscopic, like his physical sight: he sees two different pictures at once and yet sees all the better for that… The whole secret of mysticism is this: that man can understand everything by the help of what he does not understand. The morbid logician seeks to make everything lucid, and succeeds in making everything mysterious. The mystic allows one thing to be mysterious, and everything else becomes lucid.

G. K. Chesterton (England, 1874-1936), *Orthodoxy*

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

During the fourteenth century the Byzantine Empire was unsettled by a religious controversy around the meditative practice of hesychasm, and more specifically its doctrinal underpinnings concerning the experience of God. The conventional name of the practice, hesychasm, comes from the term *hesychia* (ἡσυχία), meaning 'stillness' or 'quietude.' *Hesychia* and its variants had a long history in the monastic tradition. As early as the fourth century, hesychasm was related as the "joy of the true monk." Hesychasts (ἡσυχασταί) could refer to those who isolated themselves in an ascetic fashion, or in imperial legislation it could be synonymous with anchorites.[1] Within this thesis the term hesychast will be used to refer to a group of monks who made their presence felt only in the last centuries of Byzantium. They were not representative of the whole monastic establishment. Their opponents were also often monks. Engagement in a particular meditative practice drew them apart from their brethren.

The name of this practice has problems of its own. The practice and its predecessors were not always collected under one term. For example, one text relates that the fathers called these practices "stillness of the heart (ἡσυχία καρδίας - *hesychia kardias*), others attentiveness (προσοχή - *prosoche*), others the guarding of the heart (φυλακή καρδίας - *phylake kardias*), others watchfulness (νήψις - *nepsis*) and rebuttal (άντιλογία – *antilogia*, άντίρρησις - *antirrhesis*), and others again the investigation of thoughts and the guarding of the intellect (φυλακή νού - *phylake nou*)."[2] An earlier text uses several of these terms interchangeably; both watchfulness and attentiveness, for example, are related to be "the hearts

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[1] John Meyendorff, "Is Hesychasm the Right Word?" *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* VII (1983) [=*Okeanos, Essays presented to Ihor Ševčenko*], 447-48; John Meyendorff, "Mount Athos in the Fourteenth Century: Spiritual and Intellectual Legacy," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 42 (1988), 158.

[2] Pseudo-Symeon (possibly late 12th/early 13th c.), *The Three Methods of Prayer*, in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text,* Vol.4 (Faber and Faber, 1999), 69-71

stillness."[3] One of the later treatises on the practice relates that saints used different names for the practices, but the practice itself was the same.[4] In this thesis hesychasm is used as an umbrella term to refer to all these practices. However, in the translations employed the original names are kept and the definitions given above are assumed to be used.

Monks performing this practice had often witnessed a light, yet the controversy began in the 1330s and lasted for about thirty years when Barlaam, an orthodox from Calabria, heard some monks interpret the light they witnessed to be of divine origin, more specifically as the light around Jesus when he was transfigured on Mount Tabor.[5] Barlaam argued that this could not be so, as that light was only a transient creation. It could be experienced in the here and now only if it was eternal and uncreated, thus identical with God who, however, could not be seen. He denounced the monks to the patriarch. Gregory Palamas rose to the defense of the hesychast monks and put forth the distinction between the essences and energies of God. While the essence of God could not be participated in, His energies could be, allowing the experience of an incomprehensible God. This Palamite doctrine ensured a series of opposers after Barlaam was denounced.

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[3] Hesychios (possibly 8th or 9th c.) in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.1 (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 163.

[4] "Some of the saints have called attentiveness the guarding of the intellect, others have called it custody of the heart, or watchfulness, or noetic stillness, and others something else. All these expressions indicate one and the same thing." Nikiphoros the Monk/the Italian (end of the 13th century), *On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart*, in Palmer, Ware and Sherrard, *The Philokalia* Vol.4, 204.

[5] Transfiguration from the New Advent Bible, Matthew 17: 1-8, is as follows:
"And after six days Jesus takes unto him Peter and James, and John his brother, and brings them up into a high mountain apart: And he was transfigured before them. And his face did shine as the sun: and his garments became white as snow. And behold there appeared to them Moses and Elias talking with him. And Peter answering, said to Jesus: Lord, it is good for us to be here: if you will, let us make here three tabernacles, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. And as he was yet speaking, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them. And lo a voice out of the cloud, saying: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear him. And the disciples hearing fell upon their face, and were very much afraid. And Jesus came and touched them: and said to them: Arise, and fear not. And they lifting up their eyes, saw no one, but only Jesus."

Gregory Akindynos, who had previously pursued monasticism on Mount Athos,[6] began criticizing the Palamite doctrine. His part in the controversy got entangled with the Civil War of 1341-1347 between the usurper John Kantakouzenos and the regency in Constantinople. During this period Palamas was briefly censured. Yet after the victory of Kantakouzenos, Palamas's doctrine was again endorsed. He was elected archbishop of Thessaloniki and the patriarchal throne was occupied successively by hesychast monks. Although Palamas seemed to have won the battle the controversy continued. Nikephoros Gregoras, who next opposed Gregory Palamas, had supported Kantakouzenos during the Civil War. Furthermore he was critical of Barlaam. Nevertheless Gregoras had been disagreeing with Kantakouzenos on the Palamite doctrine. He began publicly writing against Palamas but at a council in the Blachernae palace Palamas was again recognized as orthodox. Following Palamas's death, the final feeble attempt against Palamas belongs to Procohoros Kydones. After he wrote his arguments against the Palamite doctrine to the patriarch, Prochoros was expelled from his monastery on Mount Athos and he was condemned, defrocked, and excommunicated in Constantinople. With the condemnation of Prochoros Kydones, the controversy came to an end in 1368. Gregory Palamas was proclaimed a saint in the same year.[7]

On the surface the controversy could have been about the uncreated/created nature of the light witnessed by the hesychast monks. After the Palamite doctrine, composed in part against the accusations of Barlaam, the controversy seemed to be focused more on the energy/essence distinction in God. Yet the controversy was complicated by many issues. Both Gregory Palamas, who rose to the defense of the hesychast monks, and his opponents accused one another of divergence from

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[6] In fact Meyendorff suggests that Gregory Palamas could have been the spiritual father of Gregory Akindynos. John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (New York: St Vladimir's Press, 1998), 40.

[7] References for these events are provided in the next chapter.

tradition. The union negotiations with the Latin Church and the Civil War further muddled the controversy as the sides often had to take a position on these issues as well.

Like any other major controversy, the Hesychast controversy[8] is interesting from various perspectives. The controversy may be taken to highlight the tension between the Byzantine and the Latin worlds, by laying bare the intellectual rift between the Latin West which was transformed by Scholasticism, favoring the application of reason to dogma, and the Byzantine world which still followed the patristic tradition, based on the sayings of the Church Fathers of much earlier centuries. The authority in religious matters, that is whether spiritual experience or scholarly knowledge is the prerequisite for exegesis and application of belief, is another concern highlighted by the controversy.

The present thesis aims to investigate the Hesychast controversy from another perspective, focusing on an attitude, highlighted by the controversy, which also informs the previous issues. Throughout the controversy a dissenting attitude came to the fore questioning the use of, and at times disregarding, secular knowledge, and more specifically ancient Greek philosophy. According to hesychasts, philosophy was weak, and could even lead astray. Facts of experience were held higher than the empty words of philosophers. Likewise, inspiration was held in higher regard than reason. I believe the practice of hesychasm was vital in the development of this opposition. In current historiography this link between practice and attitude is often not stressed; the hesychast practice appears to be something performed by a group who also happened to oppose secular learning.

In general histories of the Byzantine Empire, the controversy is only briefly touched upon. George Ostrogorsky traces back the mystical and ascetical

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[8] Because it refers to a singular controversy in the 14th century, the Hesychast controversy is capitalized.

developments that resulted in the Hesychast controversy to the eleventh century and more specifically to Symeon the Theologian. He relates that the teachings of Symeon had much in common with that of Palamas. Gregory the Sinaite is credited with the later proliferation of hesychast activity. For Ostrogorsky the hesychast doctrine "expressed the fundamental longing of Greek spirituality, … the longing to bridge the gulf between this world and the next." As for the outcome, Ostrogorsky stresses the position Byzantium took in relation to the Latin West. Though there was a strong Latin influence in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the first half of the fourteenth century saw the rise of the "conservative Greek tradition" which was "diametrically opposed to Western culture as well as to the Roman Church."[9]

Cyril Mango relates that the only possible reform for Byzantine monasticism was a return to the desert fathers and their intense spirituality. He argues, rather hazily, that the Hesychast controversy "belongs to the history of spirituality rather than to that of monasticism as an institution." After relating that the hesychast manifesto of Palamas, which will be dealt with later, had identified the monks as persons of spiritual vision, Mango adds with a jab: "it is hard to imagine that the good monks of Vatopedi who fought their neighbors of Esphigmenou with clubs over the possession of some fields and set fire to one another's trees were the same monks who claimed for themselves such a lofty position in God's design."[10]

According to Robert Browning, Byzantium had an ongoing tradition of mysticism and the fourteenth-century hesychasts added certain physical methods to the established intellectual methods of meditation, and Browning finds these new methods to be of Indian origin. The controversy seems to arise due to the political

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[9] George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, revised edition (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 511-12, 522-23.

[10] Cyril A. Mango, *Byzantium: the Empire of New Rome* (New York: Scribner, 1980), 123.

problems of the "decaying empire."[11] Later Browning relates that scholarship and piety were two reactions to the challenges of the Byzantine Empire after the restoration of Byzantine rule in Constantinople in 1261. He notes the anti-rationalism of the hesychasts. The hesychast movement and other developments such as the civil wars and plagues, "combined to change the balance of values in Byzantine society."[12]

Warren Treadgold notes that the hesychast debate got muddled with personal animosities, the civil war and the union negotiations with the Western Church. He finds the underlying issue to be "the longlasting and in part natural distrust between intellectuals and mystics." Then he relates that the Byzantine church followed "its own traditions and decided for the mystics."[13]

According to John Haldon, the rise of hesychasm had polarized the opinion within the Church. Many of the regular and higher clergy opposed the teachings of Gregory Palamas.[14] Later he identifies the two tendencies that made "an essential contribution to Byzantine identity," as "Hellenistic rationalism," with the accompanying classical literary and philosophical heritage and "the religious anti-rationalism and piety of the 'fundamentalist strain' of Christianity."[15] When the West began to emerge as a rival to Byzantium in the later tenth and eleventh centuries, Byzantium began to retreat into hellenism. As the state shrank in the following

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[11] "It is difficult not to see in the hesychast movement, with its concentration on individual perfection, its markedly anti-intellectual tone, and its abjuration of political responsibility, a despairing response to the apparently insoluble problems of a decaying empire, in which the gap between traditional ideology and reality grew wider." Robert Browning, *The Byzantine Empire* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1992), 237-38.

[12] He continues: "Sanctity became a more acceptable means of distinction than scholarship. It was one which was more widely accessible, too. And as a vehicle of ethnic and social identity, a somewhat overemotional orthodoxy was far better adapted to the needs of the times than familiarity with classical literature." Ibid., 273.

[13] Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 827.

[14] John Haldon, *Byzantium, a history* (Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2000), 49.

[15] Ibid., 165-66.

centuries, Byzantines further retreated into a Greek and Orthodox identity independent of the earthly empire. John Haldon relates that the clash of ideas during the Hesychast controversy took place within this context. The hesychastic movement may have served as a flight from the concerns of a secular world in response to the politically declining empire, but this, according to Haldon, is impossible to say.

Judith Herrin relates that with the conclusion of the controversy Byzantium developed a “mystical spirituality” more in line with “many eastern religions” and apart from “the intellectual theology of the West.”[16]

In histories with a greater focus on the period or history of religion in particular, the controversy often arises more sharply as a clash between scholarship and spirituality. Then, whether the Byzantine intellectuals or the hesychast monks were more in line with the ongoing Byzantine tradition emerges as often an implicit question.

Steven Runciman notes a strong wave of mysticism by the end of the thirteenth century. While the empire was falling to pieces, there was a growing concern over personal spirituality and a renewed interest in philosophy. After relating the narrative of the controversy, Runciman argues that Palamas was seeking to explain a doctrine that was implicit in the patristic traditions. He seeks to identify two groups within the mystical tradition. Nicholas Kabasilas (ca. 1322/3-after 1391) and his pupil Symeon, metropolitan of Thessaloniki (1416/17-1429), emerge as the humanist representatives of Eastern Mysticism. Nicholas Kabasilas, though a supporter of Palamas, did not prescribe a retreat from the world or its concerns. For him, participation in the liturgy and the sacrament was a mystical experience on its

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[16] Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: the surprising life of a medieval empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 201.

own. Hesychasts, however, are representatives of a more mystical tradition.[17] In a slightly later work, Runciman relates again that the doctrine of Palamas was not novel.[18] He blames the philosophers for the ensuing controversy. It was the "philosophers of the fourteenth century … men less well grounded in the works of the Christian Fathers and, some of them, affected by Western Scholasticism" who found the doctrine "new and unacceptable." Runciman paints Palamas as the successor of the fathers and saints of the Eastern tradition, while the opposition to the Palamite doctrine was due to the recent interest in philosophy.

Unlike Runciman, who had found fault with the philosophers for the Hesychast controversy, Donald M. Nicol views the controversy as a point of disruption, when the two long-standing branches of Byzantine thought, based on the 'wisdom of the Hellenes' and the 'inner wisdom' of the Christian revelation, collided. After noting the double revival of learning and spirituality among the respective circles of saints and scholars in the late Byzantine period, Nicol notes that "the wandering mystic, the holy men and hesychasts of this latter age, tipped the balance too far in the other direction by their total rejection of the wisdom of this world, past or present."[19]

More in line with Runciman, J. M. Hussey also sees hesychasm as "a development and reaffirmation of the spiritual experience of deification, the underlying basis of Christian life in the Orthodox church."[20]

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[17] Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 138-156.

[18] Steven Runciman, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 47.

[19] Donald M. Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 50-51.

[20] J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 260.

The comparison with the West voiced above by Herrin and other scholars also highlights the mutual stance of the Eastern and Western churches concerning the controversy, as it stamped the historiography on the issue. For the Catholic world, constantly arguing with the Orthodox Church about whether to use or not use leavened bread or how to deal with the procession of the holy spirit from the other members of the trinity, the doctrinal innovation following the Hesychast controversy was just another Greek contribution to the metaphysical dispute. Karl Krumbacher, for instance, saw it as the "reaction of national Greek theology against the invasion of Western scholasticism."[21] *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* published in the early twentieth century, still begins the topic of hesychasm with the following remarks:

> The story of the system of mysticism defended by the monks of Athos in the fourteenth century forms one of the most curious chapters in the history of the Byzantine Church. In itself an obscure speculation, with the wildest form of mystic extravagance as a result, it became the watchword of a political party, and incidentally involved again the everlasting controversy with Rome.[22]

Kenneth M. Setton, in *The Papacy and the Levant*, finds an essential difference between the Greeks and Latins. Greeks are mystics and Latins are morbid logicians. He writes, "as the eastern mystic became concerned with the divine vision, the juridically minded westerner thought of his moral presentment before God." Like Krumbacher in the nineteenth century, Setton refers to a defensive position in Byzantium. "As reason became the dominant passion of Latin theologians, the Greeks tended to retreat into an ivory tower of spiritual and cultural irrationalism."[23]

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[21] Karl Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur von Justinian bis zum Ende des Oströmischen Reiches* (1891), 43; cited in Adrian Fortescue, "Hesychasm," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* Vol. 7 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910). <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07301a.htm>.

[22] Fortescue, "Hesychasm," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* Vol. 7.

[23] Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204-1571),* Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1976), 42.

What looks like a mystical teaching from the Latin point-of-view may form the core of Orthodox spirituality and identity. Already in the eighteenth century, for example, when Greek Orthodox religious leaders were alarmed at the influence of the Western Enlightenment on their fellow Greeks, they were convinced that the regeneration of the Greek nation would come through the revitalization of Orthodox spirituality. *The Philokalia*, a collection of fourth- to fifteenth-century texts on the practice of a contemplative life, and in a way a handbook of hesychasm, was the result of this endeavor and provided for this thesis the majority of the texts on this practice.[24]

For the Orthodox Church of the twentieth century, the Hesychast controversy still seems to represent a genuine divide between the East and the West. When in 1998 Patriarch Bartholomew spoke at the *Synaxis* of Patriarchal Ruling Bishops, for example, he began by first criticizing Western Scholasticism. He said that it had reduced divine truths and God himself to concepts. Bartholomew continued: “Even communion with God is a conceptual enterprise. Thus, genuine experience of God beyond concepts and ideas and the participation in the uncreated light and energies of God in general become an impossibility for the West.” Consequently, for the West, all metaphysical experiences of all religions were nothing but deception or illusion. As a proof of this, Bartholomew told the audience to “remember the position of Barlaam and Akindynos regarding the Uncreated Light of the Holy Hesychasts,

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[24] The editors of the *Philokalia*, Macarius Notaras (1731-1805), Metropolitan of Corinth, and Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (1738-1809), were both members of the Kollyvades movement, concerned with the restoration of traditional practices, opposing unwarranted innovations. *Philokalia* was first published in Venice in 1782. Alexander Kazhdan, “Philokalia,” in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, edited by Alexander P. Kazhdan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1656; Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), 99-100.

and the dispute regarding this Light between them and Saint Gregory Palamas,"[25] referring to characters who will be dealt with in this thesis.

In contrast to the statements of Bartholomew, the Latin world had taken a different stance against mysticism and personal experience of the divine. In the late nineteenth century, the first Vatican Council of 1870 had reacted to the emphasis on experience as a source of religious authority. In 1907, Pius X alleged that Catholic modernists wrongly held to the idea that faith and revelation were rooted in religious sentiment or an intuition of the heart. This reliance on "personal experience," the encyclical explained, caused modernists to "fall into the opinion of Protestants and pseudomystics."[26] The entry "mysticism" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* is also telling in this regard. It offers a historical sketch and then includes a section of criticism. Mysticism may "have some real foundation in the human nature." Reason does have its limits, yet where reason was powerless, philosophers gave way to feeling and imagination, leading eventually to pantheism. "This result was a clear evidence of error at the starting-point," explains the article. "The Catholic Church, as guardian of Christian doctrine, through her teaching and theologians, gave the solution of the problem. She asserted the limits of human reason: the human soul has a natural capacity, but no exigency and no positive ability to reach God otherwise than by analogical knowledge."[27] Human reason may have its limits but mysticism does not offer an alternative.

Later the Catholic world too seems to have realized the importance of the personal experience of the divine. John Paul II was perhaps alarmed by the

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[25] Maximos Aghiorgoussisi, Metropolitan Maximos of Ainos and Presiding Hierarch of Pittsburgh, "The Challenge of Metaphysical Experiences Outside Orthodoxy and the Orthodox Response," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review 44/1-4* (1999), 22.

[26] Ann Taves, "Religious Experience," in *Encyclopedia of Religion,* 2nd Edition, Vol. 11 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 7739.

[27] George Sauvage, "Mysticism," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* Vol. 10 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911) <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10663b.htm>

particularity of the Latin world which, though it had its own mystics, never developed a mystical practice like hesychasm, or its parallel in the Islamic world, dhikr. In his apostolic letter of 2002, he commended the practice of the rosary. “The Rosary belongs among the finest and most praiseworthy traditions of Christian contemplation,” writes John Paul II, “developed in the West, it is a typically meditative prayer, corresponding in some way to the ‘prayer of the heart’ or ‘Jesus prayer’ which took root in the soil of the Christian East.”[28]

The stance of the Catholic world, which probably had the upper hand in influencing the academic views on hesychasm, ensured a Palamite reaction from the Orthodox camp. John Meyendorff, the author most associated with hesychasm, can be seen to respond to the Catholic world by taking on a strongly Palamite view.

For Meyendorff, writing in a polemical work published in 1959, the Hesychast controversy was definitive in the safeguarding of the Orthodox tradition. By condemning the opponents of Palamas,

> the Byzantine church had condemned the spirit of the Renaissance… For had that church remained passive before the advance of nominalism there is no doubt that a whole whirlwind of the new ideas of modern times would have broken down the framework of medieval society and led to a crisis like that suffered in the Christian West, i.e. Renaissance, Neopaganism, and Church Reformation in the spirit of the new nominalist philosophy.[29]

Furthermore, the movement allowed Orthodox Christianity to survive under the Ottoman yoke, which he repeats in another, more academic work published during the same year as well.[30]

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[28] <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20021016_rosarium-virginis-mariae_en.html>

[29] “It was that movement which finally triumphed in the East, and that triumph enabled Oriental christianity to survive under the Turkish yoke, and long to remain a stranger to the great crisis of secularism which was brought on by the Renaissance in the West.” John Meyendorff, *St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality, Grégoire Palamas et la Mystique Orthodoxe* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1959), translated by Adele Fiske (Crestwood: St Vlamidir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 90, 93-94.

[30] John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas, Introduction à l’étude de Grégoire Palamas* (1959), translated by George Lawrence (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1964, 1998), 25

Meyendorff in his later years seems to have adjusted himself to a more balanced view concerning the Palamite position.[31] In the historiographical introduction to his article, “Mount Athos in the Fourteenth Century,” he relates the polarity of the views concerning Palamite theology. On one hand the criticism of Palamite theology “remains strong among those who accept as self-evident some basic presuppositions of medieval Latin scholasticism,” and defenders of Palamism provoked by this view are “not always aware of problems that might, at least in the minds of honest critics, have some legitimacy and require articulate answers.” He goes on to relate some basic problems of the field. The first concerns terminology. ‘Hesychasm’ is the standard term for the hermits going back to much earlier periods, thus addressing the problem of calling hesychasm a new development. The second concerns the political alliance during the civil war, the relationship between the landowning aristocracy and their representative Kantakouzenos and monks trying to protect their own property. This he, rightly, finds to be also problematic. He notes that a favorable position on the Palamite doctrine did not necessarily correspond with support for the political ambitions of Kantakouzenos.

One of the few works focusing on the Hesychast controversy is the unpublished Ph.D. thesis of Lowell Clucas, which more than any other work provided the backbone of this thesis.[32] Clucas points to the confused nature of the Palamite doctrine and seeks to better understand the critics of Palamism. He believes that the opponents of the Palamite doctrine were right in their accusations, and that Palamas had misrepresented the texts he chose from the patristic literature, in particular those concerning the divine energies which Palamas drew

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[31] John Meyendorff, “Mount Athos in the Fourteenth Century: Spiritual and Intellectual Legacy,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* Vol. 42 (1988).

[32] Lowell Clucas, *The Hesychast controversy in Byzantium in the fourteenth century: a consideration of the basic evidence*, Ph.D. Thesis (University of California, 1975).

upon to create a doctrinal backing for the experience of the divine, who in essence is incomprehensible but could be participated in his energies.

In an article written ten years later,[33] he begins with Nikephoros Gregoras in front of the palace, waiting to be heard, while Palamas and his supporters were feasting inside. Putting Nikephoros Gregoras on the center stage is apt, as unlike some other critics of the Palamite doctrine he, perhaps better than anyone else, represented the Byzantine intellectual tradition that was pushed aside. In his article Clucas notes that neither Holy men nor their critics were a new phenomenon in Byzantine history. In comparing the changes from the twelfth century, Clucas notes that the earlier critics were charging the holy men with "greed, charlatanry and ignorance," whereas the accusations made by the anti-Palamites were on "intellectual arrogance, mystical presumption and lust for power," noting a change in the attitude of the critics, from that of "lofty contempt" to a mounting anxiety and concern.

A. N. Williams, in *The Ground of Union, Deification in Aquinas and Palamas*,[34] compares the thoughts of Gregory Palamas and the founder of the dominant ideology in the West, Thomas Aquinas. He notes that Palamas never appealed to private revelation in the shaping of doctrine; thus, he is much a theologian as Aquinas. Instead of polarities in their thought, the author finds distinctions. Thomas Aquinas strives for clarity, Gregory Palamas more often reminds the reader of the poverty of all human language in the face of the inexpressible. Aquinas focuses on divination in the next life, while Palamas does so in this one. Concerning the idea of deification, Williams believes there is no clear divergence between Aquinas and Palamas and alludes to a divide in their respective

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[33] Lowell Clucas, "The Triumph of Mysticism in Byzantium in the Fourteenth Century," in *Byzantine Studies in Honor of Milton V. Anastos, Byzantina kai Metabyzantina*, edited by Speros Vryonis Jr. (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1985)

[34] A. N.Williams, *The Ground of Union, Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 169

traditions only in the later periods following the Enlightenment. On the attitude towards secular education, Aquinas is "generally more open to the possibility that secular knowledge might prove helpful." Palamas on the other hand is more suspicious.

Dirk Krausmüller, in his chapter "The rise of hesychasm,"[35] takes into account the development of the practice alongside the controversy. He discusses at great length the three treatises beginning from the first one written in the late twelfth or the early thirteenth century. This earlier work of Pseudo-Symeon was still not widely accepted, but a rapid expansion of hesychasm on Mount Athos is noted for the subsequent period, culminating in more thorough treatises. Krausmüller criticizes the often monolithic portrayal of Byzantine monasticism and relates the divergent thoughts within the Byzantine monastic tradition. Before the controversy in 1307, Theoleptos of Philadelphia had faced opposition from people who pursued secular wisdom and rejected the hesychastic method. Gregory of Sinai was also confronted by the more learned among the monks of Mount Athos who accused him of innovation and attempted to expel him from the mountain. Of the responders to these criticisms, Palamas is seen as the most foolhardy. Whereas Gregory of Sinai was careful with regard to the dangers of mystical experience, Palamas shows no such concern, and his polemic against his enemies was at the expense of large parts of Byzantine tradition. Concerning the success of the Palamites, Krausmüller notes several factors. They were a close group with a common agenda and contacts with the elite. Perhaps the greatest success of Gregory Palamas and the hesychasts around him was the ability to "subvert, appropriate or suppress well-established alternative models of spiritual life and to present themselves as the only

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[35] Dirk Krausmüller, "The rise of hesychasm," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity,* Vol. 5*, Eastern Christianity*, edited by Michael Angold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 101-26.

true representatives of orthodox monasticism." Arising during a period of political decay, hesychasm is related to resemble a fundamentalist movement.[36]

Apart from the clash of the two branches of Byzantine thought, the anti-intellectual impulse is still not investigated to satisfaction.[37] Furthermore, there seems to be little connection between the practice of hesychasm and the intellectual attitude. This thesis hopes to contribute by arguing the central role of a practice in the reshaping of an intellectual tradition, asking why and how this opposition arose, whether it arrived concomitantly with the practice or was developed later on.

The Hesychast controversy had from the start certain peculiarities which set it apart from the ongoing inner-outer wisdom debate. First there was, what may be called, a spiritual elitism. Palamas himself often pointed out that spiritual matters were to be left to spiritual men. These spiritual men were the hesychasts following in the path of the saints.

A second particularity is the stress on an access to knowledge that comes not through human reason but by inspiration through the grace of God. In the so-called *Hesychast manifesto*, which I will later mention in this thesis, the monks addressed the claims that they were diverging from the doctrine. They responded by

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[36] "With the disparagement of reason and its exclusion from Christian life eastern monasticism assumed a distinctly fundamentalist character. Like modern fundamentalisms this development may well be explained through the political instability of the late Byzantine period: at a time when their society and culture was attacked from all sides the Byzantines turned inward and strove to preserve the 'pure' inner core." Ibid., 126.

[37] Additionally, in a Ph.D. thesis of 1997, Koutsoures Demetrios is related to detail the synodical proceedings, trying to argue for the legal status of the synods. The hesychastic controversy is again one of a clash between humanism and divine-humanism of the church fathers. The hesychastic synods are related to have defended the unity of the church and salvation of the entire human being. On the other hand, in 2006 Juan Nadal Cañellas is related to take Akindynos' side in the controversy and argue that Palamas was not in the patristic tradition as was suggested. Akindynos emerges to be much a part of the hesychast environment, being a monk himself, and not an outsider as Palamas and Meyendorff portrayed him. Koutsoures Demetrios, "Synods and Theology connected with Hesychasm: The synodical procedure followed in the hesychastic disputes," Ph.D. thesis (Athens: National and Capodistrian University, 1997); reviewed by Fr George D. Dragas, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* (Spring 2000, 45), 631. Juan Nadal Cañellas, *La Résistance d'Akindynos à Grégoire de Palamas* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006). The comments are from the reviews of Josef Lössil, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 58 (2007), 336; and Andrew Louth, *The Journal of Theological Studies* 58 (2007), 346-48.

declaring that they were not ignorant of the doctrines of Christianity. Then they further assert that they are not ignorant of the doctrines “both openly proclaimed,” meaning the gospels or regular teachings of Christianity, and “those which are mystically and prophetically revealed by the Spirit to such as are accounted worthy.” Then, the monks describe these worthy people. These people “have been initiated by actual experience,” rather than words, and most significantly, “through the practice of the life of stillness,” meaning hesychasm, they devote their attention undistractedly to themselves and to God.” Thus, the hesychast monks declared that they were privy to a knowledge that comes to them through inspiration.

I argue that the Hesychast controversy was the result of the development of hesychasm, and the whole process was a natural outcome of the development of a meditative practice. This is why it has been necessary to survey the development of the attitudes against scholarship in parallel with the development of the practice.

The thesis starts with the Hesychast controversy in the fourteenth century. In the second chapter I provide the issues raised by the controversy. Chapter 3 investigates the precursors of the practice and the attitudes against scholarship in the Late Antique period. I note that in the Late Antique period there were voices against philosophy. But here we have to keep in mind that pagan culture had not truly wilted at this point. Many of the authors shunning philosophy could have done so to ease their passing from one mode of life to another or to better represent themselves and their ideas to a newly forming society.

In chapter 4 I look at the Middle Byzantine period. As the previous scholarship also notes, the precursors of the Hesychast controversy go back to the tenth century. It is only then that spiritual elitism and a form of inspirational knowledge begin to emerge, particularly with the writings of Symeon the Theologian.

Meanwhile the hesychast methods start with an intense prayer in the fourth century. By the eighth or ninth centuries, a practice begins to emerge more strongly.

Hesychios of this period notes several types. Practice seems to have evolved by the time of Symeon.

Chapter 5 shows the codifications in the practice and the further establishment of the attitudes encountered in Symeon the Theologian. One of the last figures I mention, Gregory of Sinai, does not even bother with philosophy but dismisses any idea that comes from the faculty of human intellect and not through the grace of God. And such a proposition makes further sense when we realize that he actually promotes a method that allows the acquisition of knowledge through grace.

Chapter 6 looks at dhikr in the Islamic world. I wanted to look at dhikr in Sufism initially because of its similarities to hesychasm. There is a similar meditative practice allowing peak religious experience and there is a particular group answering to a renunciatory mode of spirituality. I was curious if there were similar attitudes developing around the practice. I believe there are. Sufis are also a select group, they underline their elite standing which is based on their access to an inspirational knowledge. Sufis tends to disagree with philosophy, but they, at times, also discredit other religious sciences, or at least place themselves above others. This I believe may stress something I touched upon in the case of Gregory of Sinai, that an attitude against philosophy may have been only on the surface. The stance could have been against knowledge acquired through human intellect and against scholars in general who sought to theorize on matters the practitioners sought to monopolize.

I believe that in both the Byzantine and the Islamic worlds, alongside the development of meditative practices, an attitude pointing to inspiration rather than reason as a way to God gained strength and legitimacy. And I suggest that such an attitude, or a sentiment among the public at large, could have had much wider and longstanding consequences.

CHAPTER 2: THE HESYCHAST CONTROVERSY

Spiritual virtue is lame if it lacks worldly wisdom.

Nikephoros Gregoras

There are people in our own times, who boast of pagan Greek learning and the wisdom of this world, and who completely disobey spiritual men in matters of the Spirit, and choose to oppose them.

Gregory Palamas

In 1334 Papal delegates arrived in Constantinople to discuss the possibility of church union. Negotiations for the union with the Latin West would be accompanied by theological debates. Nikephoros Gregoras was chosen by emperor Andronikos III Palaiologos (r.1328-41) to defend the Byzantine position against the Latins. Gregoras, who would play a greater role in the later stages of the Hesychast controversy as an opposer of the Palamite doctrine, was born around 1293 in Herakleia of Pontus. Having arrived in Constantinople in 1311-12, he had learned logic and grammar from the later patriarch John and astronomy from Theodore Metochites, eventually settling in his teacher's monastery at Chora. He was praised as a polymath with diverse interests, which included the reform of the Julian calendar. He had won renown after a public debate against Barlaam of Calabria in 1330, and even greater renown by his arguments against two earlier Papal emissaries. It is probably due to his illustrious career that he became the first choice for the debate. He nonetheless declined, saying that a debate with the Latins was utterly futile.

Nikephoros Gregoras had reservations about the use of philosophy, particularly Aristotelian philosophy. He claimed that logic was just a word-play for mediocre minds, since Aristotelian syllogisms were nothing more than instruments which "actually prove inadequate to help us reach the transcendental reality of

theological truths."[38] He compared Aristotelian syllogisms to the rudder of a ship which someone keeps at home, imagining himself thus to be a captain. According to Gregoras, the kind of knowledge we acquire through logic was "not knowledge of the real things, rather logic may only provide us with knowledge of the sensible objects which are mere images of reality and not reality itself."[39] He would conclude that a purified and true intellect in the state of grace had no need of Aristotle's syllogisms. For there was no doubt that the logician used "deceitful methods in order to charm those uninitiated, and to confuse them, and at worst to lead them to blasphemous conclusions."[40] As Ikaros was mistaken to think that with his wings he would be able to fly close to the sun, in the same way those who believed that they may use logic as an instrument to find out something about God and his attributes were dangerously deluded.[41] Nikephoros Gregoras was the representative of the homegrown Byzantine intellectual tradition, different from that of the Latin West arising from the Scholastic school infused with Aristotelianism. It has also been suggested that, at least after the speeches of Gregoras in 1334 urging the Byzantines not to participate in discussions with the Latin theologians, the Byzantines developed the notion of equating Aristotelianism with the Latins and

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[38] Katerina Ierodiakonou, "The Anti-Logical Movement in the Fourteenth Century," in *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources*, edited by Katerina Ierodiakonou (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 221.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 222.

Western Scholasticism.[42] When Gregoras declined to debate with the Latin delegates, the emperor turned to Barlaam to defend the Byzantine position.[43]

Barlaam was born around 1290 to an Orthodox family in Calabria, in southern Italy. He eventually moved to Thessaloniki where he attracted the attention of John Kantakouzenos, who had become *megas domestikos* (supreme military commander) around 1325, at age 30. In 1330 Barlaam came to Constantinople, where John Kantakouzenos appointed him as the head of a school attached to the Constantinopolitan monastery of Saint Savior in Chora, probably irritating its earlier head, Nikephoros Gregoras.[44] Whereas Gregoras was firmly rooted in the Byzantine humanistic tradition, Barlaam was, in certain ways, an outsider. He was familiar with the works of Thomas Aquinas,[45] yet was critical of the general use of syllogisms, especially in matters concerning the Godhead where he favored the use of the patristic tradition, going back to the interpretations of the Fathers as a guide.[46] "I am writing about the demonstrative syllogism of Aristotle and his followers," wrote Barlaam in 1336, "in accordance with which it is impossible to ascend to the knowledge of God, or rather to subject God to our knowledge, which is what the

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[42] Ibid., 222-23.

[43] Steven Runciman, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 68-69; Michael Angold, "Byzantium and the West 1204-1453," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity* Vol. 5*, Eastern Christianity*, edited by Michael Angold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 63; Demetrios N. Moshos, *Platonism or Christianity, The Philosophical presuppositions of the Anti-Hesychasm of Nikephoros Gregoras* (AD 1293-1361), reviewed by George S. Bebis, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 44 (1999), 1-4.

[44] Angold, "Byzantium and the West," 62.

[45] "He was the first Orthodox spokesman to demonstrate a proper grasp of the works of Thomas Aquinas, which he consulted in Latin." Angold, "Byzantium and the West," 63. This has been questioned by some scholars. It has been argued that he was not familiar with Thomistic theology before the negotiations of 1334. Reinhard Flogaus, "Palamas and Barlaam Revisited: A Reassessment of East and West in the Hesychast Controversy of 14th century Byzantium," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 42 (1998), 6.

[46] Angold, "Byzantium and the West," 63.

Latins boast about."[47] In the debates Barlaam rested his case on negative theology, a theology shying away from telling what God *is*, but content with pointing to God by what he *is not*. Given the impossibility of proving doctrinal issues on which there were not sufficient biblical references, Barlaam proposed that it was best to disregard these as they could lead to speculation and schism.[48] There was probably nothing to disagree with his aim, but his methodology was met with disapproval by Gregory Palamas.

Gregory Palamas (ca. 1296-1359), later St. Gregory of Thessaloniki,[49] was born to an aristocratic family originally from Asia Minor which had emigrated to Constantinople at the end of the thirteenth century. His father, Constantine Palamas, was a senator, a personal friend of the Emperor Andronikos II and a tutor to the future emperor Andronikos III. Gregory Palamas was initiated to the hesychast practice in his youth,[50] but also received regular education, studying grammar,

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[47] Angela Constantinides Hero, *Letters of Gregory Akindynos* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1983), 15-17.

[48] Lowell Clucas, "Eschatological Theory in Byzantine Hesychasm: A Parallel to Joachim Da Fiore?" *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 70/2 (1977), 325; Angold, "Byzantium and the West," 63.

[49] His memory is celebrated not only on the day of his death but also a week later than 'the Triumph of Orthodoxy,' commemorating the end of the Iconoclast controversy. *Philokalia* notes this adding that "this means that his successful defense of the divine and uncreated character of the light of Tabor and his victory over the heretics of his time - Barlaam, Akindynos, Gregoras and others - were seen as a direct continuation of the preceding celebration, as nothing less than a renewed Triumph of Orthodoxy." G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 287.

[50] Theoleptos of Philadelphia (ca. 1250-1322), who would later be called a forerunner of hesychasm by Palamas, provided spiritual guidance to young Gregory Palamas. He initiated the young boy to the hesychast practice. Theoleptos, was himself introduced to the mystical life on Mt. Athos. He was imprisoned in Constantinople by Michael VIII Palaiologos for his opposition to the Union of Lyons, but was assigned to the see of Philadelphia after the accession of Andronikos II. Theoleptos was also the spiritual guide for princess Irene Choumnos, who married the despot John Palaiologos, son of Andronikos II. After she became a widow, she entered a convent and became a supporter of Akindynos, a main critic of Palamas. John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (New York: St Vladimir's Press, 1998), 17-18.

rhetoric, physics, logic, “and all the science of Aristotle.”[51] His biographer takes care to mention that he was successful in all his studies. To refute the claims that he was an “ignoramus without education,” or even illiterate, he related that he was once asked by the emperor Andronikos to speak about Aristotle’s logic.[52] Apparently, the seventeen year old Palamas showed such an understanding of philosophy that all the wise men were delighted, and even the Great Logothete (Theodore Metochites) was full of admiration and said to the emperor: “if Aristotle himself had been here in flesh and blood, he would have praised him.”[53] After his father’s death, around 1316, the Palamas household converted to monasticism. Aged twenty, he travelled to Mount Athos with two of his brothers, while his mother with two of his sisters and many of their servants entered convents in Thessaloniki.

Gregory spent the next twenty years in monastic seclusion on Athos, except for a six-year period when he left Athos for Thessaloniki due to Turkish incursions. He was among some other monks who had to leave Athos for the same reason. Among these were Gregory the Sinaite[54] and his disciples such as Isidore and Kallistos, who would be future patriarchs. Palamas and Isidore stayed in Thessaloniki. The duo gathered around themselves a spiritual circle in Thessaloniki, including monks, lay people, and also some ladies of the high society.[55] Isidore, though not yet a monk, was their leader. Gregory the Sinaite had told his disciple, Isidore, that he was to stay in the world and be an example to those who lived the

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[51] He is not thought to have studied Plato as Platonic metaphysics generally came after Aristotle in Byzantine education. His education would have been limited to elementary and general courses. Ibid., 29-30.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Gregory of Sinai was one of the later authors on the practice of hesychasm and he will come up in Chapter 5.

[55] The hesychast monks seem to have been very popular among the elite. Demetrios Kydones, whose brother was also to be condemned by the hesychasts, remembered Isidore fondly, as he was kind of a tutor in the Kydones household. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 35.

worldly life. This, Meyendorff asserts, is something peculiar to the hesychasm of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The monk's life was "conceived as having a prophetic mission in and for the world," rather than a means of individual salvation.[56] Of course this assertion may be inverted to suggest that the monks were becoming more assertive in imposing their virtues on the world at large.

Palamas did not stay in Thessaloniki for very long, he retired to a hermitage near Beroea in 1326 while was thirty years old. Palamas spent five days of the week in total solitude, joining other monks on Saturday and Sunday for services. Philotheos, a later patriarch and the author of Palamas's *Life*, writes that a monk named Job was a friend of Palamas and lived not far from his cottage. This Job maintained that the uninterrupted prayer was only possible for the monks, whereas Palamas asserted that all Christians, without exception, had received the command to pray continually. Job was finally convinced when he saw an angel who confirmed Palamas's teaching.[57]

In 1331 Serbian incursions made the area unsecure, and Palamas moved back to Athos and continued his life in seclusion. He began to write in 1334 and about 1336 composed his work on the procession of the Holy Spirit[58] due to the recent interest in the Union of the Churches. Around 1335 or 1336 he became the abbot of a monastery,[59] but was not very popular there as he soon left it. Palamas returned to the monastery of St. Sabbas where he began to take notice of Barlaam.[60]

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[56] Ibid., 34-35.

[57] Ibid., 38.

[58] Byzantium held that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father, whereas in the Latin world the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father "and the Son (*filioque*)."

[59] The monastery of Esphigmenou. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 29-30.

[60] For the biography of Gregory Palamas see, Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 17, 28-41.

Unlike Barlaam, however, Palamas defended the Byzantine position rather than evading the question concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit. When his friends first asked him whether his position and that of Barlaam were in agreement, he first responded by saying that both were orthodox. When he read Barlaam's writings, however, he realized that they were undermining his defense of Orthodoxy.[61]

Gregory Palamas was disturbed by Barlaam's method, particularly his use of negative theology. Without certain knowledge of God, the doctrine would simply slide down to relativism, and no one would be able to demonstrate the truth of their doctrines.[62] Barlaam may have defended the Byzantine position, but his method would not enable the imposition of the Byzantine doctrine, rather he was simply evading the differences of thought in the two schools.[63]

Around 1339 Barlaam went to Avignon, where the papacy resided at the time. The monk Gregory Akindynos, who would later turn against Palamas and play a more important role in the controversy, mediated the correspondence between the two figures. For now, Akindynos warned his friend Barlaam, saying: "you seem to me to have risen very high as a result of your important mission to the Italians, or, if you prefer, your exalted station, and to have departed from our way of reasoning."[64] After Palamas began criticizing Barlaam, the latter, in turn, launched an attack on the hesychast milieu of Palamas.

Barlaam met hesychast monks in Constantinople and Thessaloniki. He talked about "monstrosities" and "absurd doctrines that man with any intelligence or

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[61] Ibid., 44.

[62] Ierodiakonou, "The Anti-Logical Movement in the Fourteenth Century," 226-27.

[63] Some of Barlaam's arguments were wholeheartedly embraced by other Palamites. Neilos Kabasilas, for example, plagiarized them in his own anti-Latin writings. Flogaus, "Palamas and Barlaam Revisited," 6.

[64] Hero, *Letters of Gregory Akindynos*, 21.

even a little sense, cannot lower himself to describe, products of erroneous belief and rash imagination."[65] He began ridiculing their practices, calling them *omphaloskopoi*, navel-gazers. Akindynos' opposition to Barlaam was less on theological grounds and more on Barlaam's "insulting treatment of the holy hesychasts" and his "love of meddling." He warned that Barlaam's accusations against Palamas would be futile. It was unlikely that Palamas would be proven a heretic. He told Barlaam not to attack a man who enjoyed "a great reputation because of his piety and devout life."[66]

When the hesychast monks had experienced a light through various methods of concentration and breath control, they had interpreted this as the light in which Jesus was transfigured on Mount Tabor. Barlaam's criticism of hesychasm was on this interpretation. How could the monks experience the light on Mount Tabor if that light was only a transient creation? The light could only be experienced if it was eternal, therefore identical with God. Yet, then, it could not be visible as God

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[65] He continues: "They taught me almost marvelous separations and reunions of mind and soul, the relations of the demon with the latter, the differences between red and white lights, the intelligible entrances and exits produced by the nostrils while breathing, the shields around the navel, and finally, the vision of Our lord with the soul that is produced within the navel in a perceptible manner with full certitude of heart." Meyendorff, *St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality,* 85.

[66] Hero, *Letters of Gregory Akindynos*, 27-29.

is invisible.[67] Going further, Barlaam also denounced the monks of a much earlier heretic movement stressing purification through prayer called Messalianism.[68]

Gregory Palamas rose to defense against the accusations of Barlaam. Palamas's defense of the hesychasts, in particular their experience of Taborian light, was founded on his willful interpretation of the patristic tradition to help justify the hesychast experience in line with the Byzantine impulse of deification (θέωσις-

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[67] Barlaam seems to have conceded the experience of the hesychast monks, criticizing only their interpretation. He is quoted as follows by Palamas in his *Triads*: "If they agree to say, that the intelligible and immaterial light of which they speak is the superessential God himself and if they continue at the same time to acknowledge that he is absolutely invisible and inaccessible to the senses, they must face a choice: if they they claim to see this light, they must consider it to be either an angel or the essence of the mind itself, when, purified of passion and of ignorance, the spirit sees itself and in itself sees God in his own image. If the light of which they seek is identified with one of these two realities, then their thought must be held to be perfectly correct and conformed to Christian tradition. But if they say that this light is neither the superessential essence, nor an angelic essence, nor the mind itself, but that the mind contemplates it as another hypostatis, for my part, I do not know what that light is, but I do know that it does not exist." Palamas however did not accept the angelic interpretation: "the hesychast, in fact, never claim that this light is an angel. Having been initiated by the teaching of the Fathers, they know that the vision of angels takes place in various ways, according to the capacities of those who behold it… But you who have not been initiated into these different modes of seeing angels, think to show that the angels are invisible to one another not because they are incorporeal, but in their essence, and implicitly you class the contemplators of God with Balaam's ass, which is also said to have seen an angel." Balaam refers to the Bible (Numbers 22:21-34),to a very cheerful story about Balaam and his donkey which sees an angel on the road, whereas Balaam does not. The unfortunate donkey gets beaten because he refuses to get back on the road. Then the Lord opens Balaam's eyes and he sees what the donkey had been seeing all along, namely that an angel was blocking the road. It remains unknown whether Barlaam was referring to the angelic vision with tongue in cheek, having the donkey in mind. Barlaam is quoted from Meyendorff, *St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality,* 86. Palamas' response is in Gregory Palamas, *For the Defense of Those Who Practice Sacred Quietude* (1338-1341), edited and introduced by John Meyendorff, (2nd edition, 1973), *Gregory Palamas, The Triads*, translated by Nicholas Gendle (Paulist Press, 1983), 58.

[68] Messalianism was an ascetic and pietistic movement stressing purification through prayer, and was already condemned at the councils of 4th and 5th centuries. Yet in this case, Barlaam could have been referring to Bogomilism that had appeared on Mount Athos in the 1320s. Monks had convened a council within three years and anathematized the 'heretic' Bogomils, expelling them from Mount Athos, but it is understandable that the monks would be very sensitive to these accusations. See Dmitri Obolensky, *The Bogomils, A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism* (Cambridge, 1948), 256; George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (revised edition, Rutgers, New Jersey, 1969), 513; Donald M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261-1453* (2nd edition, Cambridge, 1993), 210-14.

theosis), to unite with or participate God through His grace.[69] Palamas did this by differentiating between the divine substance and divine energies. Though both were uncreated, divine energies could be experienced, and the light experienced by the three fishermen on Mount Tabor was indeed this divine energy, which was of the kind made visible to the monks.[70] According to one of the later actors in the controversy, Nikephoros Gregoras, in order to justify the sight of the divine light by the physical eyes, Palamas had also used the "shocking expressions of higher and lower divinities," which he later abandoned for the more acceptable differentiation between the essence and energies of God.[71] Regardless of such a phrase, it is safe to say that the novel doctrine of Palamas raised a few eyebrows in Constantinople, and his interpretation ensured a series of opposers, who accused him of innovation and even polytheism. Barlaam was the first of these figures, and his attitude and standpoint would greatly determine the reception of the later critics of Palamas's doctrine, even when these later actors had quite different attitudes from Barlaam himself.

Akindynos related that Barlaam easily made enemies and set his heart "absurdly upon becoming another Socrates," and was therefore unable to keep quiet. He warned Barlaam that "almost everybody both ignorant and learned" would stand with Palamas against Barlaam. He had "started the war against venerable men," and they would not "overlook the man who was eager to answer" him, when they were under attack. Then Akindynos tells Barlaam that if he had left aside the

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[69] Gregory Palamas in the *Triads*: "In a word, we have to find a God who somehow can be participated. Everyone of us, who participates in Him in the way which is proper to him and according to the analogy of this participation, shall receive existence, life and deification." Joost van Rossum, "Palamism and Church Tradition: Palamism, its use of patristic tradition, and its relationship with Thomistic thought," Ph.D. Thesis (Fordham University, 1985), 8.

[70] Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 513.

[71] Lowell Clucas, *The Hesychast controversy in Byzantium in the fourteenth century: a consideration of the basic evidence*, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis (University of California, 1975), 169.

attack on the monks, and just focused on Palamas's doctrine concerning the energies and the nature of the godhead, he would have been more sensible. Now that he included his criticism of the monks in his doctrinal attack on Palamas, he had "weakened the latter charges by the inappropriate quality of the former."[72] Still Barlaam did not limit his accusations to the Palamite doctrine, but denounced the monks as heretics to patriarch Kalekas.

The conflict between Palamas and his detractors was deeper than just a position on doctrine. In a later homily, Palamas again touches upon the issue of the light in the transfiguration, which, relates Palamas, "is much opposed even in our own day by the enemies of the light." He relates that the disciples of Jesus passed "from flesh to spirit by the transformation of their senses, which the Spirit wrought in them, and so they saw that ineffable light." Thus the vision was not a straightforward act of the senses, but the result of transformation in the beholders themselves. "Those who are not aware of this light," writes Palamas, implying that he has witnessed it, or is at least aware of it, "who now blaspheme against it think that the chosen apostles saw the light of the Lord's transfiguration with their created faculty of sight."[73] Palamas does not take this vision to be a bodily act. "Away with those whose minds are blind and capable of understanding nothing more exalted than visible phenomena!," snaps Palamas. "But that we might know that Christ as God is for those who live by the Spirit and see with their spiritual eyes what the sun is for those who live by their senses and see with natural vision."[74] Who are these people incapable of seeing with their spiritual eyes? They are the scholars, and Palamas

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[72] Hero, *Letters of Gregory Akindynos*, 31-33.

[73] The homily is thought to have been written while he was in Thessaloniki, between 1347 and 1359, thus the "enemies of the light" may refer to Nikephoros Gregoras and other critics of Palamite doctrine around that time. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), On the Holy Transfigurations of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, in *Saint Gregory Palamas, The Homilies*, edited and translated by Christopher Veniamin (Mount Thabor Publishing, 2009), 269.

[74] Ibid., 270.

points out what he opposes in their endeavor: “There are people in our own times, who boast of pagan Greek learning and the wisdom of this world, and who completely disobey spiritual men in matters of the Spirit, and choose to oppose them.”[75] The matters of the spirit, meaning theology, are then, according to Palamas, to be left to the spiritual men, by which he implies the hesychasts.

In *For the Defense of Those Who Practice Sacred Quietude*, written between 1338 and 1341, Palamas had lashed back at those arguing for the ‘intellectual’ monk. “I have heard it stated by certain people that monks also should pursue secular wisdom,” tells Palamas, “and that if they do not possess this wisdom, it is impossible for them to avoid ignorance and false opinions.” Later he replies to those who say that the mind must be purified not only of passions but also of ignorance. “Yet the saints make no mention of the latter,” answers Palamas. The saints “transcend all knowledge by uninterrupted and immaterial prayers, and it is then they begin to see God.” Furthermore he perhaps builds upon the alienated, pagan identity of philosophy: the saints “never cease to keep watch over themselves, not wasting time to find out if someone else, a Scythian perhaps, a Persian, or an Egyptian, claims such-and-such knowledge, nor bothering about this ‘purification from ignorance.’ They know perfectly well that ignorance of that kind in no way hinders the vision of God.”[76] “The Lord did not expressly forbid scholarship,” added Palamas, “but neither did he forbid marriage, or the eating of meat, or cohabitation between married persons. There are many things that ordinary Christians may do which are strictly forbidden to monks by reason of their special way of life.”[77] In his *Defense*, Palamas answers the questions of a monk on whether monks should pursue secular wisdom. The monk who relates the question to Palamas was told

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[75] Ibid., 271.

[76] Meyendorff, *The Triads*, 1, 25, 58-59.

[77] Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 31.

that if the monks did not pursue learning they would not be able to "avoid ignorance and false opinions," and that "one cannot acquire perfection and sanctity without seeking knowledge from all quarters, above all from Greek culture, which is also a gift of God."[78] The monk who wanted an answer to these claims was not convinced himself, but since he was not able to make an argument against them, this job is left for Palamas. In his reply, Palamas stressed the pagan origins of philosophy: "for if a worthy conception of God could be attained through the use of intellection, how could these people have taken the demons for gods?" If the pagan philosophy ultimately did not help the pagan philosophers, how can it be of any service to the monk? "A good tree does not produce bad fruit,"[79] adds Palamas. Elsewhere he depicts philosophy as a snake: "the flesh of snakes is of use to us if we kill and dissect them and make preparations from them, which can be applied with discretion as a remedy against their own bites."[80] One proper use of philosophy Palamas condones is to counter philosophical arguments themselves.

Other followers of Palamas were even more direct in their attitudes towards philosophy. Patriarch Kallistos, after the fourth session of the Council when Nikephoros Gregoras had been put under house arrest, came personally to Gregoras's house. According to Gregoras, Kallistos declared that all the apostles, fathers, and the prophets had been uneducated men who abolished the learning of antiquity, and that he too, equally uneducated, rejoiced that he would now abolish

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[78] Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, 24.

[79] Matthew 7:18

[80] Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium*, 51. A variant of this imagery was expressed earlier by one of the greatest Byzantine 'humanists.' When writing about a particular doctrine in Neoplatonism, Psellos himself adds "there is nothing true in this, but we have to learn not only about the therapeutic herbs, but also about the poisonous ones, in order to become healthy with the former and to avoid the latter, without embracing extraneous doctrines as if they were ours." Michele Trizio, "Byzantine philosophy as a contemporary historiographical project," *Recherhes de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales* 74-1 (2007), 256.

Gregoras's wisdom and science.[81] One of the final opposers of Palamite doctrine, Prochoros Kydones,[82] was described by the patriarch Philotheos as the "first and foremost" of those "who applied themselves maniacally to the vanity of Hellenic studies and drank copiously of their errors."[83]

Although the opposers of Palamas also had reservations for the place of philosophy in theology, they nonetheless upheld the two worlds. Nikephoros Gregoras was mentioned previously where he conjured the imagery of Ikaros to describe one who tried to find God by Aristotelian logic. Gregoras also had written the life of his uncle John, who had brought him up and later in his life became a bishop. There, Gregoras writes that "spiritual virtue is lame if it lacks [a foundation of] worldly wisdom." Accordingly, his uncle John made sure that his nephew received the best of two fields, "mixing and mingling Hellenic and divine instruction so as to preserve intact the harmony between them and, by familiarizing him with the wisdom of the Hellenes, directing his mind to things more divine."[84] Akindynos in

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[81] Clucas, *The Hesychast controversy in Byzantium in the fourteenth century*, 492.

[82] Prochoros (ca. 1333/4-1369-70) had gone to Athos in youth and had taken his monastic vows there. He was expelled from his monastery in 1367 due to his opposition to Palamism. He knew Latin and made translations of Augustine, Boethius and Thomas Aquinas into Greek. Alice-Mary Talbot, "Kydones, Prochoros," in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium,* edited by Alexander P. Kazhdan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1161.

[83] Perhaps in 1367, Prochoros himself had written to the Patriarch complaining about the injustice and calumny to which he had been subjected. The reason for this, he said, was that tradesmen, cooks and actors, setting themselves up as novel experts in doctrine, had had the audacity to involve themselves in "the great mystery of theology, which God wished to make inaccessible to human beings." Russell, "Prochoros Cydones and the fourteenth-century understanding of Orthodoxy," 77-79. Norman Russell points out that this was not a good start, as the Patriarch Philotheos himself was of humble origins and had supported his studies under Thomas Magistos in Thessaloniki by serving as his cook. Thus Prochoros' jab at the lower classes might have also insulted the Patriarch. The writings he sent to the Patriarch were not well received either. The Patriarch found that the method of argumentation was thoroughly alien and that Prochoros did not expound the fathers 'in our manner' but subjected them to rational analysis by means of Aristotelian syllogisms. Prochoros was using the scholastic organization, with each topic arranged *pro* and *contro* and the solution given in a *responsio*. Ibid. Nicol suggests the "verbose and convoluted" style of Philotheos' writing, which he adds must have been difficult to understand even for grammarians and lexicographers, was in order to overcompensate for his humble upbringing. Additionally Philotheos Kokkinos was born of Jewish parents. Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium*, 43.

[84] Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium*, 60.

a letter from 1341-42 to Nikephoros Gregoras would congratulate him on his discourse against the Latins and against the Palamites, saying: “For religion it preserves what is right and for you it preserves the true philosophy, whose chief characteristic is enlightened reverence and prudence in matters concerning the Divinity and the rebuke of the ignorance and error in such matters of those men who stumble therein because of diabolical conceit.”[85]

This relationship of the two spheres features more prominently among the critics of Palamas.[86] Palamas had no place for “true philosophy.” He was interested in the facts, and the transformative experience. “Everyone who has the experience can only laugh at the contradiction of the inexperience, for they have learnt not through words but effort, and the experience which indicates the pains they take. It is effort which brings the useful fruits, and challenges the sterile views of the lovers of disputation and ostentation.”[87] Those who have experienced the ascetical combat, and the inner prayer “have no need here of words, for they know by experience, and do not agree with those who seek such things merely in a theoretical way, for they regard this as the knowledge that puffs up.”[88]

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[85] Hero, *Letters of Gregory Akindynos*, 69.

[86] Among the hesychasts, there were those who supported philosophical studies. Yet these figures are often later supporters of Palamas rather than the close circle of hesychasts around him. Kantakouzenos was, as previously related, a former patron of Barlaam. In the later generations, Nicholas Kabasilas (ca. 1322/3- after 1391) was a hesychast. In a letter dated to 1351/52, when he is describing his beloved Thessaloniki, he refers to the spiritual and classical heritage of his city with equal vigor. He refers to Thessaloniki’s rhetoricians and philosophers, found more in his city than the other cities, and “these intellectuals have the power to influence the style of any Hellene who wants to write like Euripides, even if he had not been previously inspired by the Muses.” Then Kabasilas mentions the divine philosophy of the monks and their life on the holy mountain, Athos. Franz Tinnefeld, “Intellectuals in Late Byzantine Thessalonike,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 57 [Symposium on Late Byzantine Thessalonike] (2003), 154. Elsewhere, Kabasilas also relates that Christian perfection requires the exercise of rationality, and in this respect, even among saints those devoted to profane learning can be considered superior to those who are not. Michele Trizio, “Byzantine philosophy as a contemporary historiographical project,” *Recherhes de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales* 74-1 (2007), 270.

[87] Meyendorff, *The Triads*, 46.

[88] Ibid., 48.

As Palamas was called to the council of June 1341 to be gathered in Constantinople, he also helped draft a tome on Mount Athos, a monastic manifesto, called the *Hagioretic Tome*.[89] The tome is perhaps the most eye-catching document of the whole controversy, all the more interesting as the Council of Trullo (692) had prohibited any individual from making dogmatic pronouncements outside an episcopal synod. The tome makes its addressees clear in its introduction, which also sets the tone of mystical experience against speech and words. The tome was "against those who, because of their own lack of experience and of faith in the saints, deny the mystical energies of the Spirit which, in greater ways than speech can express, are at work in those who live in accordance with the Spirit and which, though manifested in deeds, have not yet been demonstrated by words."[90] Then the tome dives into an eschatological model, where it is explained how the mysteries of the upcoming ages were, at first, only foreseen in the Spirit by the prophets, the saints, and to a lesser extent those whom the "Spirit accounts worthy." In the same manner that the prophets fully knew the tri-hypostatic nature of Godhead, even in the age of Mosaic law, so the monks of the tome know the doctrines of the Christian confession, "both those which are openly proclaimed and those which are mystically and prophetically revealed by the Spirit to such as are accounted worthy."

Who are these worthy people? "These are persons who have been initiated by actual experience, who have renounced possessions, human glory and the ugly pleasures of the body for the sake of the evangelical life." These people, "through the practice of the life of stillness they have devoted their attention undistractedly to themselves and to God, and by transcending themselves through sincere prayer and by establishing themselves in God through their mystical and supra-intellectual

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[89] Clucas, *The Hesychast controversy in Byzantium in the fourteenth century*, 24.

[90] Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), *Declaration of the Holy Mountain* (drafted in 1340), in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 418.

union with Him they have been initiated into what surpasses the intellect."[91] These worthy people were again the hesychast monks themselves, who had come to demand their voices be heard. Barlaam had brought the practices of the monks into the public sphere where it was open to criticism. Palamas and the Athonite monks around him responded by not just a defense but also by a monastic takeover of religious authority. Not content with the recognition of their authority in doctrine, the patriarchate itself came to be dominated by patriarchs of hesychast origin.[92]

This monastic takeover was already in the making before the Hesychast controversy. Byzantium had never developed the distinction of monastic and ecclesiastic institutions as had the Latin West. The Church like any bureaucratic organization needs to finance a qualified staff, which may be said to form the backbone of the elite structure. The Church in Constantinople had begun losing property and income to conquests since the eleventh century, and the fourteenth century saw the continuation or renewal of this trend. At the end of the day, the

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[91] Ibid., 419.

[92] From the 4th to the 9th century only 5 of the 48 patriarchs (10%) were of monastic origin. In the 9th century (815-912) this would jump to 7 out of 12 (58%), go back to 4 out of 12 (33%) in the 10th century, and finally to 14 out of 28 (50%) in the 11th and 12th centuries. In the 14th century, after the anti-Palamite patriarch Kalekas who had no monastic connections, the patriarchate would be ruled by a series of patriarchs of monastic origin: Isidoros (1347-50), Kallistos (1350-53), Kokkinos (1353-54), Kallistos for a second time (1454-63), Kokkinos for a second time (1364-76), Neilos (1379-88) and Anthony (1389-90, 1391-97). See Meyendorff, "Mount Athos in the Fourteenth Century," 160; Alexander Kazhdan and Alice-Mary Talbot, "Constantinople, Patriarchate of," in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, edited by Alexander P. Kazhdan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 521-23. Krausmüller too notes a change from before to after 1204. "During the eleventh and twelfth centuries the deacons of St Sophia had staffed most major bishoprics and had monopolized the theological discourse whereas the monks were tightly controlled and largely marginalized. However, this system did not survive the collapse of the empire in 1204 and from the later thirteenth century onwards we find monks not only in prominent positions in the church hierarchy but also at the forefront in the fight against a union with the Latins." Dirk Krausmüller, "The rise of hesychasm," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity Vol. 5, Eastern Christianity*, edited by Michael Angold (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 125

patriarchate was having serious financial problems,[93] whereas the monastic center of Mount Athos was still prospering in the later part of the fourteenth century, when new monasteries were being founded.[94] By the fourteenth century, most of the bishoprics were administered by officials of monastic origin, and even before the resolution of the Hesychast controversy a large percentage of the patriarchs were monks in the hesychast tradition.[95] These monk-patriarchs were at times out of place in the bureaucratic establishment in Constantinople. A patriarch of monastic origin, Athanasios (r. 1289-93 and 1303-1309), who in Palamas's words "adorned the patriarchate for a number of years," would be dismissed by Nikephoros Gregoras as being "unlettered and uncultured." Another patriarch of monastic origin, Niphon (r. 1310-14), was also said to be illiterate and according to Gregoras was a luxury-loving gourmet, better suited to be a dealer in real estate than a patriarch.[96]

The self-confidence of Palamas and the Athonite monks around him could be the result of the ongoing dependance of the church on the human resource of the monasteries. This might have taken some time to develop, as even in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when half of the patriarchs were of monastic origin, the hold of church authority over the monastic establishment was still strong, and even monks themselves came to depend on the Church hierarchy, asking advice from patriarchal

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[93] A patriarchal document of 1315 would relate this as follows: "Formerly the mother of the church, that is the great church of God, had not a few revenues, and gave splendidly... But the confusion and malaise of affairs and the alteration and transition of time and hostile movement have touched the incomes of the church and led to difficulties in and lessening of the revenues." See Speros Vryonis, Jr., *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), 311-13.

[94] Anthony Cutler, "Athos, Mount" in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium,* edited by Alexander P. Kazhdan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 224-25.

[95] Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church* (Harvard University Press, 2004), 243.

[96] J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford, 1990), 249-53.

officials specialized in canon law.[97] By the fourteenth century, however, the hesychast monks' scorn of the Church in Constantinople became more conspicuous.[98]

The strong monastic voice found support in some circles in Constantinople, as the *megas domestikos* John Kantakouzenos told Barlaam to consider what was right, urging him to put away his love of strife and to trust in the monks, who, following the tone of the tome, were wiser in these matters.[99] However, Barlaam insisted on his position, and at a council headed by Andronikos III (r. 1328-41) and attended by John Kantakouzenos as well as the members of the senate, judiciary, bishops and abbots, Barlaam was condemned on 10 June 1341, and Palamas was declared Orthodox.[100] Barlaam left Byzantium for the West, and a year later in 1342 he converted to Catholicism in Avignon and became the bishop of Gerace in Calabria.

In the following period until 1368, the controversy continued, with various groups rising in opposition to the Palamite doctrine and perhaps the inordinate influence of the hesychast monks in the affairs of the Church. During the civil war of 1341-47, as John Kantakouzenos sought to overtake the throne, the controversy was brought further into the political arena. Though Kantakouzenos had supported

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[97] Dirk Krausmüller, "The Athonite monastic tradition during the eleventh and early twelfth centuries," in *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism*, edited by Anthony Bryer and Mary Cunningham (Aldershot, 1996).

[98] Philotheos Kokkinos, a friend of Palamas and later patriarch, would not praise the City for its beauty, wealth or wisdom. He added: "For there they sport with the divine as if with draughts and dice, or to quote the wise theologian, as if these things were horse races and theaters, and they treat what is seen contemptuously and betray the divine and evilly perform what is mystical as in a theater or drama." Perhaps the later patriarch of monastic origin, in deploring the ecclesiastical liturgy in Constantinople, was showing signs of a self-conscious and self-confident monkish group that would come to demand greater authority in the church. This point was raised in Clucas, *The Hesychast controversy in Byzantium in the fourteenth century*; see also Clucas, "Eschatological Theory in Byzantine Hesychasm," 343-44.

[99] Clucas, *The Hesychast controversy in Byzantium in the fourteenth century*, 184.

[100] Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium,* 210-14.

Barlaam at the beginning, he later gave his support to the Palamite cause. To be sure, camps were not easy to identify and a positive attitude to hesychasm was not a sure sign of support for Kantakouzenos. Yet we should not so easily disregard the political calculations of Kantakouzenos in his bid for the upmost political power in Byzantium. It would be naive to assume that Kantakouzenos had only salvation in mind when he thought about the Palamite doctrine, just because he later took on monastic habits and was interested in theology. Nikephoros Gregoras later accused him for suggesting to him in private that Gregoras should "imitate the ways of a cuttlefish" and change his posture, while the emperor would handle Palamas and "get rid of the light of Tabor in a crafty fashion."[101]

Perhaps uniquely in Byzantine history, the Hesychast controversy does not appear to have resulted in a wide, social unrest. The involvement of the public in obscure theological disputes, due to their genuine worry over their salvation,[102] was an ongoing trend in the Palaiologan period, as the public response to union

[101] Clucas, "The Hesychast controversy in Byzantium in the fourteenth century," 183, 481.

[102] Timothy E. Gregory, *Vox Populi* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1979), 222.

negotiations with the Latin church suggests.[103] Yet the public seems to be out of the picture, apart from the period of the Civil War of 1341-47.[104]

During the civil war, under the regency in Constantinople against the usurper John Kantakouzenos, the tide turned against Palamas, as he was arrested and excommunicated.[105] After the success of Kantakouzenos, however, Palamas made a triumphant return and his doctrine emerged unscathed against various

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[103] John Bekkos, who was the patriarch trying to enforce the Union of Lyons during the reign of Michael Palaiologos (r.1259-82), would complain: "What can one say when women and children still in the nursery, when men whose knowledge is limited to farming or manual labor, all cry criminal to anyone who so much as whispers about the union of churches?" Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium*, 15.

[104] During the civil war the Zealots, who had taken the rule of the city of Thessaloniki, refused the entry of Gregory Palamas, recently appointed archbishop of the city. The rumors of innovation in doctrine may have moved the Zealots in Thessaloniki against Palamas, as well as his association with the usurper Kantakouzenos. According to Kantakouzenos the regency had come to depend on the people rather than the aristocracy who mostly sided with Kantakouzenos. Nikephoros Gregoras, probably as a rhetorical device, mentions the public opinion against the new doctrine of Palamas but he also points out that, at least in the early stages, the authorities thought it necessary to keep the debates as silent as possible, because it was not necessary to extend the discussions of the sacred mysteries of theology to the profane ears of the common people. In any case, we do not hear of public outbursts, people chanting in the streets either in favor of or against Palamas. Lowell Clucas, *The Hesychast controversy in Byzantium in the fourteenth century,* 144. However, Meyendorff relates that the Palamite assemblies of 1341, 47, and 51 were sometimes the scene of violent popular demonstration, as Akindynos and Gregoras complained. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas,* 81.

[105] Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium,* 210-14.

adversaries.[106] The same Gregoras, who had in 1334 argued against the use of Aristotle by the Latins and the futility of engaging in arguments against them, after the success of Palamas at the council of 1350-51 would have to backtrack a little and declare that even if the Latins were political and cultural enemies, and their Christianity differed in certain aspects, there was no reason to dismiss everything they said out of hand.[107] When Gregoras died around 1360, the Palamites dragged

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[106] During the Civil War, Palamas had to contend with the patriarch Kalekas and Gregory Akindynos. After the entry of Kantakouzenos into Constantinople in 1347, the patriarch Kalekas was condemned and Akindynos was excommunicated and died in exile. Isidore, metropolitan of Monemvasia, had been deposed by Kalekas for his support for Palamas. Now, Isidore was made patriarch. Matthew of Ephesus, Chariton of Apros (and one other metropolitan) raised an opposition to the Palamite victory and in July 1347 produced a tome, condemning Palamas, Isidore, and their followers. The metropolitan of Side, Cyril, was also strongly suspected of being an anti-Palamite. In 1350 patriarch Isidore passed away, having served only three years. In his place another hesychast, Kallistos, was elected. At this time another opposition to Palamite teaching came to the fore, led by the former metropolitans of Ephesus and Ganos, and the polymath Nikephoros Gregoras. Nikephoros Gregoras had supported Kantakouzenos during the civil war. Furthermore he was critical of Barlaam's conversion to Catholicism, saying that Barlaam had reverted to the customs and dogmas of the Latins in which he had been reared. Nevertheless Gregoras had been disagreeing with Kantakouzenos on the Palamite doctrine since the 1340s. Gregoras, it seems, was hesitant at first, and his involvement was at first academic and theoretical. Around 1351, he began writing his homilies against Palamas. In the trial he was also supported by Arsenios, the Bishop of Tyre (1351-66), representing the Patriarch of Antioch, Joseph, a vigorous opponent of the new mystical theology of Palamas. Nonetheless at the council of 1351, in the Blachernae palace, orthodoxy of the hesychasts was again recognized. In 1353 the patriarch Kallistos had refused to crown Matthew, the son of John Kantakouzenos, and withdrew from the patriarchate. He was replaced with yet another hesychast, Philotheos Kokkinos. In 1354, as John Kantakouzenos was forced to abdicate the throne to the actual heir John V Palaiologos (r. 1341-91), Kallistos resumed his patriarchate in 1355. In 1359 Gregory Palamas died in Thessaloniki and in 1363 Philotheos Kokkinos again became the patriarch after Kallistos' death. Prochoros Kydones in the late 1360s criticized the Palamite doctrine's positive affirmations about God, and pointed out the distortions of the Patristic conceptions. He wrote these criticism to the patriarch, and his brother Demetrios claimed that the patriarch Philotheos saw 'chain of godheads' being dissolved by the truth of Prochoros' arguments who remained true to the ancient doctrine as against the innovation of Palamas. Prochoros was expelled from his monastery in 1367, he went to Constantinople where he was condemned, defrocked, and excommunicated in the council of 1368. With the condemnation of Prochoros Kydones, the controversy came to an end. Clucas, "The Triumph of Mysticism in Byzantium in the Fourteenth Century;" Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium,* 210-14; Nicol, *Church & Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium*, 39; Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 522; Runciman, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance*, 68-69; Russell, "Prochoros Cydones and the fourteenth-century understanding of Orthodoxy," 78-79; Normal Russell, "The Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos and His Defense of Hesychasm," in *Spirituality in Late Byzantium*, edited by Eugenia Russell (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 21-22; Judith R. Ryder, *The Career and Writings of Demetrius Kydones: A Study of Fourteenth-Century Byzantine Politics, Religion and Society* (Brill, 2010), 126; Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor*, 334.

[107] Clucas, "The Hesychast controversy in Byzantium in the fourteenth century," 471.

his corpse through the streets of Constantinople.[108] Gregory Palamas was canonized in 1368.

The reactionary stance against secular scholarship, especially if it was from the Latin West, continued after the controversy. Several years later, Demetrios Kydones sent a letter to the daughter of John VI Kantakouzenos, Helena Kantakouzene Palaiologina (1333/4-97), who had married John V and become empress in 1347. The letter was attached with his translations of Augustine of Hippo:

> For not only does your love of learning encourage rejoicing in those who desire that great things always be said about you, but also, because of your eagerness for it, learning does not seem to be completely despised, and there seem to be some people who even long for it. If what is honored by rulers has many admirers, perhaps someone who looks toward your example will also covet the honor that comes from learning and will advise others to work hard for its sake. Thus through you learning will speak up boldly once again, and what is truly good will also be considered good.

Kydones was hoping that Helena may emerge as a patron of learning. Talking about Augustine, Kydones relates his importance in accommodating philosophy to Christianity. Kydones closes by hoping that Helena, devoting herself to "the writings and, becoming full of the simple piety of the man, ... will laugh at those who divide Hellene and Scythian in Christ,[109] and who ask about the native lands of writers rather than their ideas."[110]

Yet in other aspects the Hesychast controversy was not so final in determining the intellectual stance of the Byzantine intellectuals. By the time of Gennadios Scholarios (1400/5-1472) who would, after the fall of Constantinople, become the first patriarch under Ottoman rule, the Palamite doctrine was long

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[108] Alice-Mary Talbot, "Gregoras, Nikephoros," in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, edited by Alexander P. Kazhdan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 875.

[109] Colossians 3:11

[110] Frances Kianka, "The Letters of Demetrios Kydones to Empress Helena Kantakouzene Palaiologina," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 [*Homo Byzantinus: Papers in Honor of Alexander Kazhdan]* (1992), 157.

accepted by the Church. Yet Gennadios was still trying to reconcile Palamism with the developments in the Latin West. He thought that the followers of Barlaam and Akindynos did not know that many teachers among the Latins had determined things concerning the problem of essences and energies in a manner which was more in harmony with St. Gregory of Thessaloniki and the whole Orthodox church than them.[111] Gennadios was an admirer of Thomas Aquinas. In a margin of his summary of *Summa Theologiae* he wrote: "You should not have lived in the West, dearest Thomas, where you were forced to defend the aberrations of that Church and where you, amongst other things, also have undergone that one which has to do with the procession of the Spirit and the distinction between the divine essence and energy. For you could have been, indeed, unfailing also in your theological teachings, as you are in fact in these ethical writings."[112] Gennadios' admiration of Latin teachings was in contrast with the state of learning in his native Byzantium. When he was going to the council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-39), the future patriarch noted that only three or four people in the capital devoted themselves to learning, and even these were more concerned with appearances than substance.[113]

At the council Gennadios supported the union of the churches. Another eastern representative at that council had been fed up with the Latins' tendency to quote Aristotle as an authority, finally bursting: "What about Aristotle, Aristotle? A fig for your fine Aristotle." When asked whose authority he accepted, he replied, "Saint Peter, Saint Paul, Saint Basil, Gregory the Theologian; a fig for your Aristotle,

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[111] van Rossum, "Palamism and Church Tradition," 44.

[112] Ibid., 40.

[113] Ihor Ševčenko, "The Decline of Byzantium Seen Through the Eyes of Its Intellectuals," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 15 (1961), 175.

Aristotle."[114] To the Eastern Orthodox world continuing to live in the patristic tradition, where arguments were still based on the commentaries of the Church Fathers of the fourth century, the Latin world, transformed by the wave of Scholasticism, synthesizing philosophy with theology by applying reason to dogma, was speaking a different language.[115] Gennadios, however, did appreciate the Latin method, saying that the Latins had:

> contended brilliantly for their faith so that no one with a sense of justice has any reason to reproach them... They brought forward from the common Fathers of the Church, the six most renowned in dignity, wisdom and the struggles for the faith as witnesses of their doctrine… They argued so precisely and clearly, expressing the question in exact words and as befits teachers, appending also the reasons and the texts of Holy Scripture from which they had drawn that doctrine as an inevitable conclusion… On our part nothing was said to them to which they did not manifestly reply with wisdom, magnanimity and truth…[116]

Yet mere logical position and the clarity of argument were only a part of the conviction for a Byzantine. The same Gennadios, after 1444, became the leader of the anti-unionists and would await the conquest of the city in seclusion, with a message nailed to the door of his cell:

> Wretched Romans, how you have been deceived! Trusting in the might of the Franks you have removed yourselves from the hope of God. Together with the City which will soon be destroyed, you have lost your piety. Be Thou merciful to me, O Lord. I give witness before Thee that I am innocent of this offense. Know, O wretched citizens, what you do! Captivity is about to befall you because you have lost the piety handed down to you by your fathers and you have confessed your impiety. Woe unto you in the judgment.[117]

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[114] The 'fig' comment was voiced by a Georgian envoy. Joseph Gill, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 227.

[115] Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 62.

[116] Gill, *The Council of Florence*, 225-26.

[117] Harry J. Magoulias, translator, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks by Doukas, An Annotated Translation of 'Historia Turco-Byzantina'* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975), 204. It has been noted to me that there are two recent works on Gennadios Scholarios. Marie-Hélène Blanchet*, Georges-Gennadios Scholarios (vers 1400-vers 1472): un intellectuel face à la disparition de l'empire Byzantin* (Paris: Institut Français d'Etudes Byzantines, 2008); Christopher Livanos, *Greek Tradition and Latin Influence in the Work of George Scholarios: Alone against All of Europe* (NJ: Gorgias, 2006).

The full impact of the Hesychast controversy is hard to judge, as Byzantium came to an end only a century later. What I will investigate in the next chapters is what to make of the anti-intellectual impulse witnessed in the controversy. First, I will look into Late Antiquity to search for the precursors of this impulse and see whether it had any connections with the development of ascetic practices.

CHAPTER 3: LATE ANTIQUITY: PRECURSORS

> *There is nothing in common between philosopher and the Christian, the student of Greece and heaven, Athens and Jerusalem, the Academy and the Church.*
>
> Tertullian

> *So it is that we have upheld from pagan education whatever constitutes an investigation and theory of what is true… Knowledge … is not something that we must oppose because there are some who like to say so.*
>
> Gregory of Nazianzos

As the hesychast practices and attitudes emerged from a monastic milieu, the origins of these are to be sought in early Christian asceticism. There could have been many role models for the early ascetics. One could be the philosophers of antiquity who had, like their later Christian ascetic counterparts, stressed an upstanding stance in life. Some particular practices of asceticism may be glimpsed in movements such as Pythagoreanism, which was revived among the Romans in the first century BC. While pagan religious practices also included fasting, the Pythagorean movement had made this into a way of life, a reaction, a response on its own.[118] For the philosophers of antiquity, their striving for knowledge had already made necessary not just the search for and articulation on knowledge but also a way of life in line with what they pronounced. Porphyry of Tyre (234-305), one of the founding figures of Neoplatonic philosophy, for example, argued that the goal of philosophy was self-purification and the cleansing of the soul from the worldly passions.[119] Some of the early Christians had first tried the philosophy of this kind as an answer to their problems, before moving on to Christianity. Justin (d.c. 165) was one of these. He had sought philosophy before his conversion to Christianity,

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[118] Mary Ann Tolbert, "Asceticism and Mark's Gospel," in *Asceticism and the New Testament,* edited by Leif E. Vaage and Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Routledge, 1999), 31.

[119] Majid Fakhry, "Philosophy and Theology from the Eighth Century C.E. to the Present," in *The Oxford History of Islam*, edited by John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 269-270.

yet was not satisfied with the result. Justin, like so many after him, had a crisis, a conflict arising from the limitations of the conceptual world he had learned to grasp with the raw condition he experienced as a whole. After his conversion, however, he still called himself a philosopher and wore the philosophical garment,[120] relating Christianity as "the only sure and advantageous philosophy."[121]

If the secular intellectual traditions were open to asceticism, so might have been the religious milieu from which sprang Christianity. The history of Jewish asceticism, and meditative practices associated with it, seems to be one of disruptions. The later Medieval period which saw the development of Kabbalah in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries had its roots in Late Antiquity, but was not necessarily the result of a continuous and consistent articulation. When the sources become more available in the ninth century, this earlier phase of Jewish mysticism appears to be already fully developed, or even in decline. Not much is known about the formative period from the fourth to the sixth centuries or earlier.[122] Yet there were ascetic impulses in early Judaism. Essenes, for example, were a religious group that flourished around Palestine from the mid-second century BC until the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. They might have practiced a form of asceticism

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[120] B. N. Tatakis, *Christian Philosophy in the Patristic and Byzantine Tradition*, edited, translated and annotated by George Dion. Dragas (Rollinsford: Orthodox Research Institute, 1952, 2007), 25-26.

[121] "The understanding of the incorporeal beings captured me at the highest level, the theory of ideas gave wings to my sprit so that within a short space of time I believed that I had become wise." Philosophy, as it stood, did not offer him what he sought. Justin was foolish as to believe that he would soon see God, or that this was the purpose of Plato to begin with. Justin, then, met a Christian who related to him that "in very old times, before the so-called philosophers, people lived happy, righteous, beloved by God, and they spoke 'through the Holy Spirit' and these were those who foretold things which were going to happen and which now come to pas; these were called Prophets." Their works were still around, and "those who read them can, if they have faith in them, gain a great benefit concerning the beginning and the end and concerning all that a philosopher needs to know. They did not speak with proofs; above all proofs they spoke as worthy witnesses to the truth." For Justin, Christianity was the philosophy that he had sought. "When I thought on my own, about all these words, I found that this philosophy was the only thing that was firm and beneficial," he relates, "and so, because of this, I am also a philosopher." Tatakis, *Christian Philosophy*, 25-26, 29.

[122] Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 41.

including celibacy, which fed into early Christianity. In fact, it has even been suggested that John the Baptist was one.[123] This group, and their practice of celibacy, was described by various authors such as Philo, Josephus and Pliny.[124] It is in the later periods of this earlier phase that the documentation becomes more illuminating. It is only then that we get a glimpse of a practice similar to hesychasm. One such document, composed in Babylonia between the sixth and ninth centuries, describes a meditative technique, beginning with preparatory rituals such as the washing of garments. Then, sitting in a room or attic for 12 days reciting prayer and, more significantly, repeating the names of the angels, the practitioner reaches a pure state and an experience allowing glimpses of knowledge. The testimony part of the text relates the astonishment of the rabbis in seeing the benefits of the practice. They did not believe the benefits of the practice until a fool did it, and became equal to the rabbis. He relates: “It was done again by the shepherds, and they became equal to me.” A certain illiterate populace performed the practice and “were made equal to the wise scholars.”[125]

Although this practice is interesting in its similarities to hesychasm and dhikr, it is more startling in the testimony itself that the rabbi seems to be fine with the ease with which an illiterate population could be made his equal, taking in mind the probable long training he had to go through. The account is interesting, yet it belongs to a fairly late period. By this time the Christian ascetic practices had already begun to develop.

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[123] Gideon Bohak, “Essenes,” in *Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, edited by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, Geoffrey Wigoder (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 234-35.

[124] Steven D. Fraade, “Ascetic Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” in *Jewish Spirituality, From the Bible Through the Middle Ages*, edited by Arthur Green (New York: The Crossroad Publishing, 1985), 268.

[125] Michael D. Swartz, “Hekalot Rabbati §§ 297-396: A Ritual for the Cultivation of the Prince of Torah,” in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity, A Sourcebook,* edited by Vincent L. Wimbush (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 227-232.

Ascetic impulses may have been present in Christianity from the start. Whether asceticism was an integral part of early Christianity or a slightly later adoption remains open to debate. The Bible itself is ambiguous on this matter. The Gospel of Mark, for example, may portray a Jesus who withdraws for periods of prayer and commands those who follow him to leave their families and wealth, but he also dines with his followers, travels with women and blesses the bond of marriage.[126] Already in the third century, Antony had predecessors when he retreated to the desert in about 270.[127] The fourth century would see the rise of monasticism, when, according to Athanasius of Alexandria "the desert was made a city by monks, whose citizenship was that of heaven."[128]

The influence of these two traditions, Judaism and Classical philosophy, may be seen in how the Christian ascetics had to address their predecessors. After the emergence of monasticism in Egypt and Palestine and its spread to Asia Minor, Neilos the Ascetic (d. c. 430), the abbot of a monastery near Ankyra, related that the disciples of Christ were the true philosophers, unlike the Ancient Greeks or the Jews, who fell short of this goal; the Greeks because they often did not practice what they preached, or even when they pursued asceticism, they did not do this for

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[126] Mary Ann Tolbert, "Asceticism and Mark's Gospel," 29.

[127] Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation, Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 27.

[128] Ibid., 28.

the afterlife, and the Jews because they denied Christ.[129] Neilos defined philosophy as "a state of moral integrity combined with a doctrine of true knowledge concerning reality."[130] Christ was the first to establish the way of true philosophy by the purity of his life which he attained by holding his soul above his passions:

> He taught us that the true philosopher must renounce all life's pleasures, mastering pains and passions, and paying scant attention to the body: he must not overvalue even his soul, but must readily lay it down when holiness demands. The apostles received this way of life from Christ and made it their own, renouncing the world in response to His call, disregarding fatherland, relatives and possessions. At once they adopted a harsh and strenuous way of life, facing every kind of adversity,

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[129] "Many Greeks and not a few Jews attempted to philosophize; but only the disciples of Christ have pursued true wisdom," writes Neilos, "because they alone have Wisdom as their teacher, showing them by his example the way of life they should follow." That is only Christians had both the true knowledge and the model for a true life. "For the Greeks, like actors on a stage, put on false masks; they were philosophers in name alone, but lacked true philosophy. They displayed their philosophic calling by their cloak, beard and staff, but indulged the body and kept their desires as mistresses. They were slaves of gluttony and lust, accepting this as something natural. They were subject to anger and excited by glory, and they gulped down rich food like dogs. They did not realize that the philosopher must be above all a free man, and not a slave of the passions who can be bought or sold." The main problem of the Greek philosophers was that their practice was not in line with their teachings and that they lacked virtue. "At times they even tried to theologize, although here the truth lies beyond man's unaided grasp, and speculation is dangerous; yet in their way of life they were more degraded than swine wallowing in the mud. And when some of them did try to apply their principles in practice, they became worse than those who only theorized, for they sold their labors for glory and praise. Usually their only object was to show off, and they endured hardships simply to gain cheap applause." Even when Greek philosophers attempted virtue, they are found lacking since their outlook is not directed to the afterlife. "What can be more stupid than to keep silent continually, live on vegetables, cover oneself with ragged garments of hair and spend one's days in a barrel," asks Neilos "if one expects no recompense after death? If the rewards of virtue are restricted to this present life, then one is engaged in a contest where no prizes are ever offered, wrestling all one's life for no return but the toil and the sweat." Jews fared a little better as they encouraged their disciples to follow an appropriate way of life. They lived in tents, abstaining from all luxuries and their provision for their bodily needs was moderate. As well as devoting attention to the practice of virtues, they also attached great importance to contemplation. Yet they gained nothing from their arduous ascetic contests as they denied Christ, failing to gain anything from their labors, "falling short of the true goal of philosophy." Neilos the Ascetic (d. c. 430), in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.1 (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 200-201.

[130] This definition of philosophy seems to have continued in Byzantine history. The *Encyclopedia* of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (r. 945-959) defines philosophy as: "correct moral practice combined with a doctrine of true knowledge about Being," adding also that "both Jews and Hellenes fell short of this, since they rejected the Wisdom that came from heaven and tried to philosophize without Christ who was the only one to offer a paradigm, in word and deed, of the true philosophy." *Suda Lexicon*, also of the 10th century, has the same definition. John Duffy, "Hellenic Philosophy in Byzantium and the Lonely Mission of Michael Psellos," in *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources*, edited by Katerina Ierodiakonou (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 140-42.

> afflicted, tormented, harassed, naked, lacking even necessities; and finally they met death boldly, imitating their Teacher faithfully in all things. Thus through their actions they left behind a true image of the highest way of life.[131]

The philosophers of antiquity, therefore, may be seen to give way to the emerging Christian monks, who would replace the former's pursuit of secular wisdom with a quest for holiness.[132] Yet the latter's stance to the former was not uniform. At first Christianity may have gained ground "not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in the demonstration of spirit and power,"[133] particularly to the masses, but eventually it had to preach to the more intellectual, or at least refute the claims of older traditions. From the Latin world, Tertullian (ca. 160-230) was absolute in his rejection of pagan philosophy, relating that there was "nothing in common between philosopher and Christian, the student of Greece and heaven, Athens and Jerusalem, the Academy and the Church," also calling philosophers "patriarchs of heretics."[134] Yet voices such as Tertullian's may have found less receptive ears in the Eastern Mediterranean, which had greater urbanization and deeper roots in Antiquity. Already by the fourth century, Cappadocian Fathers were taking a more moderate approach. Of the three fathers, Gregory of Nyssa and Basil of Caesarea were educated in the Academy of Athens, and Basil would address young people "on the benefits to be derived from the writings of the Greeks," encouraging them to study, albeit with discernment, the classics of Greek literature.[135] The third father, Gregory of Nazianzos displays a similar attitude:

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[131] Neilos the Ascetic (d. c. 430), 200-201.

[132] Steven P. Marrone, "Medieval philosophy in context," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, edited by A. S. McGrade (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 12-13, 17.

[133] I Corinthians 2:4-5

[134] Tatakis, *Christian Philosophy*, 45-47.

[135] Nick Trakakis, "Gregory Palamas on the Relationship Between Philosophy and Theology," *Theandros* 3-1 (2005) <http://www.theandros.com/palamas.html

> So it is that we have upheld from pagan education whatever constitutes an investigation and theory of what is true; but whatever leads to the demons, to deceit and the abyss of destruction we have cast aside. Nevertheless, everything, even the deceptions, are useful for our piety, because they help us to see the good by contrast with what is evil, and because by their weakness they help us to strengthen our own teaching. Knowledge therefore, is not something that we must oppose because there are some who like to say so.[136]

These fathers, in spite of their close association with pagan learning, would later be considered the highest ecclesiastical authority.

Christians had begun to withdraw into the solitary life in the third century, first, perhaps, to escape persecution, and later to seek ascetic mortification of the body, instead of the martyrdom of the earlier periods.[137] The ascetic impulses based on the sufferings of Jesus, once Christianity became the dominant religion, could not continue as they were. The first Christian ascetics could suffer for their marginal beliefs against a pagan elite; now their successors had to emulate their example in an environment where Christianity was already the norm. The only suffering they could face would be a self-chosen one.[138] From these ascetic movements, Byzantine monasticism would emerge from the mid-third century onwards, mostly in the regions of Egypt and Palestine. In the fourth century, monasticism spread to Asia Minor by Basil of Caesarea (329/30-379). He had visited monasteries in Syria and Egypt. In the 360s he drew up rules that favored a more moderate form of asceticism and greater involvement with the local community in the form of social services. Monasticism even reached Constantinople in the fourth century, beginning an infiltration into political and urban life.[139]

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[136] Tatakis, *Christian Philosophy*, 58.

[137] Alice-Mary Talbot, "Monasticism," in *Palgrave Advances in Byzantine History*, edited by Jonathan Harris (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 121.

[138] Tolbert, "Asceticism and Mark's Gospel," 45.

[139] Talbot, "Monasticism," 122-23.

One of the earlier representatives of the monastic tradition was Jerome (ca. 347-ca. 420). He had embraced monasticism at youth, traveling through Antioch, Constantinople, Rome, and eventually settling in Jerusalem in 386. In a letter written to a daughter of his patron Paula, Jerome displays the strong intellectual background in early monasticism and the goal of marginalization from a world different from that of the Gospels. He advises his disciple not to appear overly eloquent, or speak with a lisp, as women did to appear as sophisticated as possible. Then he asks: "How can Horace go with the Psalter, Vergil with the Gospels, Cicero with the Apostle?" Jerome had to cut himself from his family and, more difficult than this, from the exquisite food to which he was accustomed. Still, he could not part from his library. He would forget to eat while reading Cicero. At those times, when he began to read a prophet, the uncultivated style of the latter caused him to shrink with horror.[140] As in the case of Tertullian, according to Jerome, one had to choose one world or the other. In the rest of the letter Jerome encourages the would be monastic in her endeavor. "I do not want you to associate with married women," he writes, "I do not want you to visit the houses of the nobility. What if silly little women are in the habit of priding themselves on the fact that their husbands are judges and occupy positions of some dignity…. Learn in this respect a holy pride. Know that you are better than they."

Ascetics appear to withdraw from public life with their social standing in mind. Neilos of Ankyra (d. c. 430), for example, called on his fellow monks to "avoid staying in towns and villages." It was better that the inhabitants of towns and villages should come to the ascetics instead. He justifies asceticism with the Scripture, as it praises those who "leave the cities and dwell in the rocks, and are like the dove."[141] However this was not a total disengagement from the public. "Let us seek the

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[140] Bart D. Ehrman, Andrew S. Jacobs, editors, *Christianity in Late Antiquity*, 300-460 C.E., *A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 284.

[141] Jeremiah 48:28

wilderness," writes Neilos, "and so draw after us the people who now shun us." He gives the example of John the Baptist, who "lived in the wilderness and the populations of entire towns came out to him." Rich people with great means endured hardship just to see John the Baptist.

> For holiness is held in higher honor than wealth; and the life of stillness wins greater fame than a large fortune. How many rich men there were at that time, proud of their glory, and yet today they are quite forgotten; whereas the miraculous life of this humble desert-dweller is acclaimed until this day, and his memory is greatly revered by all.[142]

Thus Neilos urges his audience to give up flocks and herds to "become real shepherds," to abandon "sordid commerce," to acquire the 'pearl of great price,'[143] to stop tilling the earth which 'brings forth thorns and thistles'[144] and become the "cultivators and keepers of paradise." After this call for career change, Neilos begins addressing the contemporary problems of monasticism. He urges to "give up everything and choose the life of stillness, and so put to silence those who now reproach us for owning possessions." Apart from owning property, one other factor which causes ridicule on the monastic profession is the lack of discipline in spiritual advancement. Many monks were merely entering monastic life, learning the basics and then claiming to be able to teach others "things he has not mastered himself." "Who would not laugh" asks Neilos, "when he sees someone who yesterday served in a tavern, posing today as a teacher of virtue, surrounded by pupils? Or when he sees a man who has just left a life of civic dishonesty now swaggering all over the marketplace with a crowd of disciples?"[145] Neilos then talks about the importance of the spiritual director,[146] and the need to follow the proper order and sequence in the

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[142] Neilos the Ascetic (d. c. 430), 214.

[143] Matthew 13:46

[144] Genesis 3:18

[145] Neilos the Ascetic (d. c. 430), 214-216.

[146] Ibid., 220.

spiritual path. “Guests at a dinner may not like the introductory dishes and may feel more attracted by what comes later,” relates Neilos, “but they are forced to comply with the order of the courses.” Likewise “to become a true monk a man should not work backwards from the end to the beginning, but start at the beginning and so advance towards perfection. In this way he will himself gain what he seeks, and will also be able to guide his disciples to holiness.”[147]

With the establishment of a tradition, those answering to an ascetic calling began to develop their respective mystical teachings, turning the physical asceticism into an internal religious life.[148] *Theosis* (deification) had become the dominant model for salvation already by the third century. It had two sources: the Bible, which stated, “thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion and may become participants in divine nature,”[149] and Neoplatonic philosophy, talking about assimilation to God.[150] Byzantine monasticism, then, came up with a variety of practices to aid this endeavor.

Evagrios, born in Pontos around 345 and died in Egypt in 399, was a disciple of the Cappadocian fathers. Prayer emerges as a central motive in his text. “If you are a theologian you will pray truly,” writes Evagrios, “and if you pray truly, you are a theologian.”[151] He describes an intense prayer, which at times seems like a meditative practice on its own. According to him “prayer is communion of the intellect with God.”[152] He addresses the state necessary for such a communion. Just

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[147] Ibid., 222-23.

[148] Tatakis, *Christian Philosophy*, 117-18.

[149] 2 Peter 1:4.

[150] A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union, Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 27.

[151] Evagrios Pontikos (ca. 345/46 - 399), in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.1 (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 62.

[152] Ibid., 57.

as Moses was forbidden to approach the burning bush before he had loosened his sandals from his feet, the practitioner of prayer seeking to commune with one who is "beyond sense-perception and beyond concept," must free himself from very impassioned thought.[153] First one has to pray with tears. When one is in prayer, however, the demons suggest up imaginary need for various things, stirring up remembrance of these things, which leads the intellect to go after them, and failing to find them to depression and misery. The intellect is the channel of this digression, and thus one has to make his intellect "deaf and dumb during prayer."[154] In fact prayer at times is like a fight against the demons, one must persevere. One saint "living a hesychastic life in the desert was attacked, as he was praying, by demons who for two weeks tossed him like a ball in the air," yet they were unsuccessful according to Evagrios, from distracting his mind from prayer.[155] Even angels themselves might be a distraction. A monk was practicing the inner prayer in the desert, when two angels came and walked on either side of him tells Evagrios. The monk, however paid to no heed to them, "for he did not wish to lose what was better. He remembered the words of the Apostle, saying "neither angels, nor principalities, nor powers… shall be able to separate us from the love of Christ."[156] The prayer has to be done without "outward forms and gestures," and more importantly, the intellect should be free of forms during prayer.[157] Evagrios repeats this several times. It is obvious that the prayer prescribed by Evagrios may lead to visions, against which the practitioner must be on guard. "When you are praying," instructs Evagrios, "do not shape within yourself any image of the Deity, and do not let your intellect be

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[153] Ibid., 58.

[154] Ibid.

[155] Ibid., 68.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Ibid.

stamped with the impress of any form, but approach the Immaterial in an immaterial manner, and then you will understand."[158] The demons may have a part to play in the visions one sees. "While you are praying purely and calmly, sometimes they suddenly bring before you some strange and alien form, making you imagine in your conceit that the Deity is there. They are trying to persuade you that the object suddenly disclosed to you is the Deity, whereas the Deity does not possess quantity and form."[159] Later when he relates that "the monk becomes equal to the angels through prayer, because of his longing to 'behold the face of the Father who is in heaven," [160] he quickly rushes to remind the reader that one should "never try to see a form or shape during prayer." Having "a sensory image of angels or powers of Christ… would be a madness. It would be to take a wolf as your shepherd and to worship your enemies, the demons... I shall say again what I have said elsewhere: blessed is the intellect that is completely free from forms during prayer."[161] Evagrios is one of the first authors to prescribe this intense prayer free from form.

Isaiah the Solitary (d. 489/91) was also a monk in Egypt before moving to Palestine.[162] He stresses the central role of the heart and the need to guard over it. By keeping a watch over senses and thoughts, one can recognize the evil distractions and concentrate more fully on prayer.[163]

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[158] Ibid., 63.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Ibid., 68.

[161] Ibid.

[162] G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.1 (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 21.

[163] "Stand guard ... over your heart and keep a watch on your senses, and if the remembrance of God dwells peaceably within you, you will catch the thieves when they try to deprive you of it. When a man has an exact knowledge about the nature of thoughts, he recognizes those which are about to enter and defile him, troubling the intellect with distractions and making it lazy. Those who recognize these evil thoughts for what they are, remain undisturbed and continue in prayer to God." Isaiah the Solitary (d. 489/91), in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.1 (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 24.

Mark the Ascetic (fifth or sixth century), who may have been in Ankyra before his journey south, spent his life in Egypt or Palestine. He also relates the perseverance of the monk during "pure prayer," and he also advocates a fight against the stumbling blocks encountered during this intense prayer. Should one ever "reach the stronghold of pure prayer," he must not "accept the knowledge of created things" which are presented at that moment by the enemy, to lure the practitioner from "what is greater." Some knowledge is acquired during prayer, but this is not the aim of prayer, it is a distraction. Like many of the early authors on these practices Mark warns about wanton religious experience. When the enemy offers knowledge to distract from prayer, "it is better to shoot at him from above with the arrows of prayer, cooped up as he is down below, then to parley with him as he offers us the knowledge he has plundered, and tries to tear us away from this prayer which defeats him."[164]

It is difficult to construct the journey of hesychastic ideas because many of the monastic texts and authors are not dated with precision. The next author also suffers from this predicament. Abba Philimon lived in Egypt before the twelfth century, as texts from this century already begin to refer to him. Since Egypt of his day appears to have been a part of the Byzantine Empire, he is dated to the sixth or early seventh century. The narrative about his life is important because it is thought to contain the earliest explicit citation of the Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me" (Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, Υἱὲ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐλέησόν με).[165] In the narrative, Abba Philimon appears to have earned his income by making ropes and baskets, giving them to the steward of the Lavra in exchange for a small ration of bread. He ate only bread and salt, and even these not every day, and spent most

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[164] Mark the Ascetic (5th or 6th century), in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.1 (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 140.

[165] G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.2 (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), 343.

of his time in contemplation, “enveloped by divine light and established in a state of joyfulness.”[166] He spent his time in retreat, approached only by those who gave him his bread. He appears to be more forgiving for visions than Evagrios. Once when asked on the mystery of contemplation, he answered: “I tell you, my son, that when one’s intellect is completely pure, God reveals to him the visions that are granted to the ministering powers and angelic hosts.”[167] Following Isaiah the Solitary, his method of inward meditation is deep in the heart and involves watchfulness (νήψις). He advises to “keep watch in your heart; and with watchfulness say in your mind with awe and trembling ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me.” The brother who applied this method was successful at first, finding stillness and filled with sweetness, yet later he found that it had left him, and he could not practice it or pray watchfully. Philimon’s suggestion in this case was to follow the apostolic command ‘pray without ceasing.’[168]

The hesychastic prayer does not appear as a fully developed practice in Late Antiquity. However, we have seen perhaps its beginning stages in the form of intense, repetitive prayer and a stress on the prayer itself. In many ways, Late Antiquity saw the emergence of traditions and impulses that fed into the Hesychast controversy of much later centuries. The period had seen the birth of Christian asceticism feeding from the nascent ascetic elements in Judaism and the later

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[166] Abba Philimon (earlier than the 12th century, possibly 6th or 7th century), in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.2 (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), 344.

[167] Ibid., 347.

[168] The command is from Thessalonians 5:17. Abba Philimon continues as follows: “You have had a brief taste of stillness and inner work, and have experienced the sweetness that comes from them. This is what you should always be doing in your heart: whether eating or drinking, in company or outside your cell, or on a journey, repeat that prayer with a watchful mind and an undeflected intellect; also chant, and meditate on prayers and psalms. Even when carrying out needful tasks, do not let your intellect be idle but keep it meditating inwardly and praying. For in this way you can grasp the depths of divine Scripture and the power hidden in it, and give unceasing work to the intellect… Pay strict attention to your heart and watch over it, so that it does not give admittance to thoughts that are evil or in any way vain and useless.” Abba Philimon, 347-48.

phases of antique philosophy. It developed an attitude to the latter while at the same time adopting its stance and some of its teachings. The word philosopher itself, meaning lover of wisdom, gradually acquired the meaning of someone fleeing licentiousness and luxury as well as a pagan, eventually meaning an ascetic or monk.[169] If the sufferings of Christ were indeed a focus of emulation for the ascetics, this had to transform as Christianity gradually acquired a dominant position in the Empire. If we are to see asceticism not as a simple withdrawal from society, but as a performance[170] where the ascetic goes away from the society, whilst making sure that someone notices, the plot of that withdrawal had to change. The new ascetics had to voluntarily flee a world, not pagan, yet not Christian enough to their taste. Though the ascetic literature made a point about fleeing far away from society, this has been recognized as a *topos*. The ascetics still lived close to the settled areas, monasteries were linked together by trade networks and monks often had correspondence with the organized church.[171]

A stance against secular learning also seems to be there from the start. However, this attitude in Late Antiquity might be a motif more to distance the ascetic characters from their previous backgrounds in secular education, rather than a direct attack on secular learning itself. The rejection of worldly education and sophisticated learning was present early on as the *Life of Antony* (d. 356) by

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[169] G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 1483.

[170] Asceticism can be seen as "performances within a dominant social environment intended to inaugurate a new subjectivity, different social relations, and an alternative symbolic universe." Richard Valantasis, "Contructions of Power in Asceticism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63 (1995), 797; cited in Susan R. Garrett, "Luke as Advocate for Asceticism," in *Asceticism and the New Testament,* edited by Leif E. Vaage and Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Routledge, 1999), 72.

[171] Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity*, AD 395-600 (London: Routledge, 1993), 74.

Athanasius demonstrates.[172] Yet ascetic writers' appeal to simplicity can also be seen as a rhetorical device, another *topos*, now of "unletteredness," not necessarily reflecting the reality.[173] In his letters, for example, Antony is found to be a much more intellectual and sophisticated character than the simple illiterate monk portrayed in his *Life* by Athanasius.[174] Averil Cameron stresses this tension, relating the "praise of the unwashed and uncultured over and against the social advantages of civilization and learning," which the authors often did not "hesitate to display themselves in their own writing," as "indicative of an area of deep ambiguity and uncertainty in contemporary Christian culture."[175] Yet when and how this rejection of secular learning, possibly for one's own credentials, spilled outwards, when these traditions became self-conscious programs of interpretation, and when meditative practices associated with asceticism gave practitioners access to knowledge and authority that the non-practitioners did not possess remain to be seen in later chapters.

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[172] Averil Cameron, "Remaking the Past," in *Interpreting Late Antiquity, Essays on the Postclassical World*, edited by G. W. Bowerstock, Peter Brown, Oleg Grabar (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 14.

[173] Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 53-54.

[174] Bart D. Ehrman, Andrew S. Jacobs, editors, *Christianity in Late Antiquity*, 300-460 C.E., *A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 308.

[175] Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 179; cited in Clark, *Reading Renunciation,* 56.

CHAPTER 4: THE MIDDLE BYZANTINE PERIOD: EMERGENCE OF THE PRACTICE AND ATTITUDE

> *Anyone who thinks himself intelligent because of his scholarly or scientific learning will never be granted insight into divine mysteries unless he first [discards] both his presumption and the knowledge that he has acquired. But if he does this and … allows himself to be led by those wise in divine matters, he will enter with them into the city of the living God … He will see and learn what others cannot ever see or learn. He will then be taught by God.*
>
> Symeon the Theologian

> *Suppose then that someone were able to step outside the bounds of all things pertaining to the body, and take up his position at the height of spiritual perfection, what would he have in common with the world around him?*
>
> Michael Psellos

After Late Antiquity, Byzantium had to face the Islamic conquests of its wealthy southern provinces, followed by the troubles of Iconoclasm in two waves during the eighth and early ninth centuries until the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843. The monastic establishment, it seems, did not wait for Iconoclasm to end, as its 'golden age' had already started from the end of the eighth century. The greatest number of new monasteries in Constantinople date from the end of the eighth and ninth century.[176] Yet in earlier centuries of the Middle Byzantine period, monastic literature was still largely undertaken by monks living in the former bedrock of asceticism, Egypt, now under Islamic rule.

Hesychios was an abbot of the Monastery of the Mother of God of the Burning Bush (Vatos) at Sinai. He lived possibly in the eighth or the ninth century.[177] Like Abba Philimon discussed in the previous chapter, Hesychios too stresses the

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[176] Monasteries in Constantinople:

	9th (+..8th)	10th	11th	12th
New	75	26	43	15
Disappearing	28	29	24	
Total Attested	75	73	87	78

See; Peter Charanis, "The Monk as an Element of Byzantine Society," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 25 (1971), 67.

[177] G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.1 (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 161.

notion of watchfulness, which appears to be a practice on its own. If practiced continuously, it frees the practitioner from impassioned thoughts, words and evil actions. In this way it offers “in so far as this is possible, a sure knowledge of the inapprehensible God.”[178]

God is “inapprehensible,” yet “watchfulness” allows a relatively more sure knowledge of God. This method of watchfulness, however, does not appear to have solidified into a single practice; there appears to be several, differing types. Hecychios’ work, however, has the feel of a treatise, as he tries to impart various methods to practice.[179] One method involves the scrutiny of every mental image or provocation, as “only by means of a mental image can Satan fabricate an evil thought and insinuate this into the intellect in order to lead it astray.”[180] Another method is “freeing the heart from all thoughts, keeping it profoundly silent and still, and … praying.”[181] A third method involves “continually and humbly calling upon the Lord Jesus Christ for help.”[182] The fourth method is “always to have the thought of death in one's mind.”[183] Another effective method is to “fix one's gaze on heaven

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[178] “Watchfulness is a spiritual method which, if sedulously practiced over a long period, completely frees us: with God's help from impassioned thoughts, impassioned words and evil actions. It leads, in so far as this is possible, to a sure knowledge of the inapprehensible God, and helps us to penetrate the divine and hidden mysteries. It enables us to fulfill every divine commandment in the Old and New Testaments and bestows upon us every blessing of the age to come. It is, in the true sense, purity of heart, a state blessed by Christ when He says: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'… Just as a man blind from birth does not see the sun's light, so one who fails to pursue watchfulness does not see the rich radiance of divine grace.” Hesychios (possibly 8th or 9th c.) in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.1 (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 162.

[179] “I shall now tell you in plain, straightforward language what I consider to be the types of watchfulness which gradually cleanse the intellect 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.” Ibid., 164.

[180] Ibid.

[181] Ibid.

[182] Ibid., 165.

[183] Ibid.

and to pay no attention to anything material."[184] All these methods of watchfulness act like "doorkeepers and bar entry to evil thoughts." The intellect has a role in watchfulness. It should be quick and keen, and when it perceives an invading demon, the practitioner should "at once rebut it, crushing it like the head of a serpent." Yet this cannot be done by the unaided powers of the intellect. The demons may pretend to be overcome and then trip the practitioner with self-esteem. The intellect is like the molten idol of the Israelites, it is crippled. If one "stupidly places all its confidence in itself, it falls headlong like a hawk." One should, instead, invoke Jesus against the demons. According to Hesychios, watchfulness and the Jesus Prayer mutually reinforce one another. "The name of Jesus should be repeated over and over in the heart as flashes of lightning are repeated over and over in the sky before rain." This guarding of the intellect appears by now to have become a central calling of the monk. It enables the "worthless sinners, ignorant, profane, uncomprehending and unjust" to become "just, responsive, pure, holy, and wise through Jesus Christ." Furthermore, it enables the practitioners to "contemplate mystically and to theologize; and when they have become contemplatives, they bathe in a sea of pure and infinite light, touching it ineffably and living and dwelling in it." As in the advice of Abba Philimon, Hesychios prescribes the combination of watchfulness and the name of Jesus with breathing. "With your breathing combine watchfulness and the name of Jesus or humility and the unremitting study of death. Both may confer great blessing."[185]

Philotheos of Sinai (ninth or tenth century) follows the teachings of Hesychios.[186] Now, watchfulness takes on a form of a warfare of the intellect

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[184] Ibid.

[185] Ibid.

[186] In fact, the three Sinaites, John Klimakos (6th/7th c.), Hesychios (8th-9th c.), and Philotheos (9th/10th), are thought of as a Sinaite School of Ascetic theology. G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.3 (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 15.

(noetic) for Philotheos who calls to “stand bravely and unflinchingly at the gate of the heart, with true remembrance of God and unceasing prayer of Jesus Christ.”[187]

Later on when he is describing another battle of the intellect, he talks about how the intellect must hide itself in Christ, “the light for which it longs.” Then he adds, “he who has tasted this light will understand what I am talking about,” perhaps hinting at the emergence of a common experience, readily understood by other practitioners who follow the various methods.[188]

Symeon the Studite in the tenth century differentiated between demonic and divine stimuli. During prayer, if the practitioner feels frightened, hears some noise or sees a light around him, he should not be troubled but concentrate more fully on his prayer. “Demonic disturbances, alarms and excursions occur so that you will lose heart and give up your prayer; then, if this happens regularly, you will fall into the demons' power.” However, if another light, beyond description, and the soul is filled with joy and a feeling of a desire for higher things accompanied with tears, this is a divine visitation. During this intense psychological contest, the practitioner must be in humility, and be like “a child who, frightened by some hobgoblin, dispels his terror by flying into the arms of his mother or father.” Symeon advises to resort to God

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[187] “Where humility is combined with the remembrance of God that is established through watchfulness and attention, and also with recurrent prayer inflexible in its resistance to the enemy, there is the place of God, the heaven of the heart in which because of God's presence no demonic army dares to make a stand.” Philotheos of Sinai (possibly 9th or 10th century), in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.3 (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 16-17.

[188] “Watchfulness cleanses the conscience and makes it lucid. Thus cleansed, it immediately shines out like a light that has been uncovered, banishing much darkness. Once this darkness has been banished through constant and genuine watchfulness, the conscience then reveals things hidden from us. Through the intellect it teaches us how to fight the unseen war and the mental battle by means of watchfulness, how we must throw spears when engaged in single combat and strike with well-aimed lances of thought, and how the intellect must escape being hit and avoid the noxious darkness by hiding itself in Christ, the light for which it longs. He who has tasted this light will understand what I am talking about.” Ibid., 25.

through prayer, and then the practitioner will escape the fear which the demons provoke.[189]

Symeon the Studite stands apart from the group of previous authors, if only in his location. Unlike the previous authors from Sinai, he resided in the Stoudios Monastery in Constantinople. His disciple, Symeon the Theologian (949-1022), would turn out to be one of the major figures of Byzantine monasticism.

Symeon the Theologian[190] was born in 949 to wealthy Byzantine provincial aristocrats in Paphlagonia. After a rudimentary education, at age 11 he was sent to Constantinople to be perfected in "profane culture and rhetoric."[191] Yet at age 14, he left his studies at the court in Constantinople to pursue asceticism. At the monastery of Stoudios he met Symeon the Studite and adopted him as a spiritual father.[192] He had his first vision in his twenties. One day as he was standing and reciting "God, have mercy upon me, a sinner," uttering it with his mind rather than his mouth, suddenly he witnessed a divine radiance from above, and Symeon, having lost awareness of his surroundings, "saw nothing but light all around him."[193]

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[189] Symeon the Studite (early 10th century), as related by his disciple Symeon the Theologian, in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.4 (Faber and Faber, 1999), 61.

[190] Symeon is one of three personalities given the title "Theologian." Others are John the Apostle and Gregory (329/30-389/90). Bartholomew I, "Orthodox Theology: Divine Charisma and Personal Experience," translated by John Chryssavgis, *Theology Today* (Apr 2004), 7-8.

[191] Rosemarry Morris, "Political Saint of the Eleventh Century," in *The Byzantine Saint*, edited by Sergei Hackel (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 44.

[192] John A. McGuckin, "Symeon the New Theologian (d.1022) and Byzantine monasticism," in *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism*, edited by Anthony Bryer and Mary Cunningham (Variorum, 1996), 18-20; George Maloney S.J., "Introduction," In *Symeon the New Theologian*, translation by C.J. de Catanzaro (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 6.

[193] "a flood of divine radiance appeared from above and filled all the room. As this happened the young man lost all awareness of his surroundings and forgot that he was in a house or that he was under a roof. He saw nothing but light all around him and did not know whether he was standing on the ground… Instead he was wholly in the presence of immaterial light and seemed to himself to have turned into light… His mind then ascended to heaven and behold yet another light, which was clearer than that which was close at hand." Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022), *The Discourses*, in *Symeon the New Theologian*, translation by C.J. de Catanzaro (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 245-46.

He entered monastic life at twenty seven, still under the spiritual guidance Symeon the Studite, who was yet a simple lay monk.[194] Symeon the Theologian's teaching in monastic life was not favored by all. The Abbot of Stoudios asked him to leave after only a few months. He went to the neighboring monastery of Saint Mamas, and there he became abbot within three years. According to his biographer, Symeon had to deal with a monastery that had become a refuge for worldly monks, who did not appreciate his strict rules for monastic life and rebelled.[195] While his strict approach in monasticism was unappreciated, his charismatic, mystical teachings had attracted the elite of the city,[196] also bringing suspicion on himself from the archbishop Stephen, the chief theologian at the court. He challenged Symeon to a formal disputation in the patriarchal palace. The discussion was on the subject of trinity, and the outcome was Symeon's exile in 1009.[197] The exile, it seems, was less dramatic than it sounds, as he spent it on the opposite shore of the Bosporus, near Chrysopolis, in a small town called Paloukiton, where he built a monastery around a ruined chapel dedicated to Saint Marina. There he lived out his days.[198]

With Symeon we encounter the hesychast monastic virtues, the spiritual elite, spiritual knowledge as legitimization and even perhaps a requirement of direct access to divine, transplanted in an urban monastic environment. First, as the rebellion of the monks indicates, he emerges as a monastic reformer. According to

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[194] Maloney, "Introduction," 7-8.

[195] Ibid., 8-9

[196] A "group" of disciples of Symeon the Theologian met at the house of a certain Christopher Phagoura in Constantinople. They continued to do so even after Symeon had been censured by the patriarch Nicholas Chrysoberges and Sergios for venerating an icon of his own spiritual father, Symeon of Stoudios. The same Christopher Phagoura later built a small house for Symeon on the Asiatic shore. It is assumed that he and the clique around Symeon were well-off members of the government elite in the capital. Rosemarry Morris, "Political Saint of the Eleventh Century," 49.

[197] Maloney, "Introduction," 8-9.

[198] Ibid., 13.

Symeon the New Theologian, detachment and freedom from worldly cares was incumbent on all monks, “not only the hesychast, living alone, or the monk under obedience, but also the abbot, the spiritual director of many, and even a monk charged with specific duties.”[199]

His works, talking in the language of direct experience, must have played a significant part in his popularity, at least in non-ecclesiastical circles.[200] Symeon, as his troubles with ecclesiastical authorities would suggest, was a critic of the Church establishment. In one of his hymns, he depicts Christ talking about the bishops as follows:

> They unworthily handle my body
> and seek avidly to dominate the masses…
> They are seen to appear as brilliant and pure,
> but their souls are worse than mud and dirt,
> worse even than any kind of deadly poison,
> these evil and perverse men.[201]

The main critique of Symeon against those of the ecclesiastical establishment is their lack of spirituality. “We strive by all means to receive the dignity of the apostles, and even buy their authority with gold, without fearing God or being ashamed in the presence of those who see it!” writes Symeon. “No one dares ascend the throne of the emperor without his consent. An unlearned man dares not take on himself the part of a grammarian or teacher of rhetoric, or an illiterate man attempt to read

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[199] Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022), in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 35.

[200] He describes a person who has advanced beyond the beginner stages of the spiritual journey, who is “inwardly illumined by the light of the Holy Spirit, cannot endure the vision of it,” but falls face down and cries out in great fear and amazement, since he has “seen and experienced something that is beyond nature, thought or conception.” He becomes like someone inflamed with fever, and although he “pours forth tears that bring him some relief, the flame of his desire kindles all the more. Then his tears flow yet more copiously and, washed by their flow, he becomes even more radiant. When, totally incandescent, he has become like light, then the saying is fulfilled, 'God is united with gods and known by them', in the sense perhaps that He is now united to those who have joined themselves to Him, and revealed to those who have come to know Him.” Ibid., 38.

[201] Maloney, “Introduction,” 11.

before the people. But it is the dignity of the apostles to which you aspire or which you receive, before you have received the grace of the apostles or see the fruits thereof cultivated in you."[202] Symeon's type of direct spirituality is ought to be incumbent for all, especially those who take part in the Church. "But as for those … who have not been changed at all in action, knowledge, and contemplation, how are they not ashamed to call themselves Christians?," he asks. "How dare they open their mouths and shamelessly speak of God's hidden mysteries with indifference as though they were lying on a bed? How do they not blush to count themselves among Christians and number themselves among those who are spiritual?… But this we have addressed to those who profess to know everything and speak of it, who think that they are something, though they are nothing."[203]

In many parts of his *Discourses*, Symeon seems to be rebelling against his times. He outlines "a new heresy," which is "believing oneself to be unable to obey the Gospel like those of old." People who fall into this heresy say "there is no one in our times and in our midst who is able to keep the Gospel commandments and become like the holy Fathers," that is they don't want to "believe and practice, for faith is shown by the deeds," and nor do they care to be contemplatives and "see God, by the illumination and reception of the Holy Spirit." Those who hold these views, according to Symeon, "have not fallen into one particular heresy, but rather into all of them." Symeon here is most disturbed, like the theologian of hesychasm, Gregory Palamas, will be in the fourteenth century, about the loss of *theosis* (deification) and thus salvation. "Those who make these claims," he writes, "shut up the heaven that Christ opened for us, and cut off the way to it that he inaugurated for us."[204] The people whom he addresses seem to accept the saints, but see them as

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[202] Symeon the New Theologian, *The Discourses*, 215-16.

[203] Ibid., 196.

[204] Ibid., 312.

products of a previous age, they do not accept that they be among them or that they emulate their examples. These opponents of God, and Symeon also calls them antichrists, say “it is impossible, impossible!” Symeon asks: “Tell me, why it is impossible? By what other means have the saints shone on earth and become lights in the world?... But if you refuse to suffer and be distressed, at least do not say that the thing is impossible.”[205] Symeon on the whole is in revolt against a trend which was starting in Byzantium at this period, and would continue until the end of the twelfth century. Taking both the troubles of Symeon in establishing the cult of his spiritual father, and the compilation of Saints, both the calendar (synaxarion) and the collection of their lives (Metaphrastic corpus), Paul Magdalino proposes that from the end of the tenth century, the Church was “tending… to conceive of the communion of saints as a closed society, whose numbers were now more or less complete.”[206] The people, especially those in the Church, were not concerned with emulating the Saints. Some were pursuing other interests, against which Symeon attacked with equal vigor:

> [A]nyone who thinks himself intelligent because of his scholarly or scientific learning will never be granted insight into divine mysteries unless he first humbles himself and becomes a fool, discarding both his presumption and the knowledge that he has acquired. But if he does this and with unhesitating faith allows himself to be led by those wise in divine matters, he will enter with them into the city of the living God. Guided and illumined by the divine Spirit, he will see and learn what others cannot ever see or learn. He will then be taught by God.[207]

These people taught by God will be regarded as fools by those wise in the wisdom of the world. But it is they who are fools, burst Symeon, “spouting an inane secular wisdom, the stupidity of which God has demonstrated[208] and which Scripture

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[205] Ibid., 312-13.

[206] Paul Magdalino, “The Byzantine Holy Man in the Twelfth Century,” in *The Byzantine Saint*, edited by Sergei Hackel (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 61.

[207] John 6:45

[208] Corinthians 1:20

condemns as material, unspiritual, devilish, filled with strife and malice.[209] Since these people are blind to the divine light, they cannot see the marvels it contains; they regard as deluded those who dwell in that light and see and teach others about what is within it. On the contrary, it is they themselves that are deluded, not having tasted the ineffable blessings of God."[210]

Niketas Stethatos, Symeon's successor, disciple and biographer, continues in the line of his teacher. Niketas was born around the beginning of the eleventh century and entered the monastery of Stoudios at Constantinople. He talks about three types of visions that visit human beings during sleep. There are dreams of "materialistic sensually-minded people who worship their belly." Then there is the visions of those who practice stillness. Finally there are revelations, which pertain "to those who are perfect, who are energized by the Holy Spirit, and whose soul through mystical prayer is united to God."[211]

The spiritual elite begin to emerge more starkly in his writings: visions are only for the hesychast monks.[212] He also has advice for practitioners. The unceasing prayer that allows stillness is not a mere bodily practice, but a practice of mental

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[209] James 3:15

[210] Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022), in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 46-47.

[211] Niketas Stithatos (11th century), in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 124-25.

[212] "Things seen in sleep are ture and imprinted on the spritual intellect in the case, not of everyone, but only of those whose intellect is purified, who have cleansed the soul's organs of perception and who are advancing toward the contemplation of the inner essences of created things. Such people do not worry about day-to-day matters, nor are they troubled about this present life. Through long fasts they have acquired an all-embracing self-control and through exertion and hardship they' have attained the sanctuary of God, the spiritual knowledge of created being and the wisdom of the higher world. Their life is the life of angels and is hidden in God, their progress is based upon holy stillness and on the prophets of God's Church." Nikitas Stithatos, 125.

concentration.[213] Niketas relates the stages on the path of deification. It begins with the knowledge of created things which is attained by the practice of virtues. The final stage is the unification with the primordial light.[214] This final goal is the "initiation into the hidden mysteries of God … so that each becomes a wise theologian … illuminating others with the inner meaning of theology."[215] Through meditation, whether figuratively or literally, one can become a theologian.

Symeon's and his successors' voice is one that was heard much louder in the fourteenth-century Hesychast controversy, but in the eleventh century his position seems to be more marginal. His direct impact is uncertain.[216] But after his death, his works were appreciated by the patriarch Michael I Keroularios (r. 1043-58), who came into conflict with Psellos who was the foremost Byzantine intellectual of his time.[217] The Middle Byzantine period had seen not only these developments in the practice of hesychasm and its accompanying attitude but secular learning, at which Symeon had lashed back, had also seen a revival.

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[213] "It consists not in what is outwardly perceived - outstretched hands, bodily stance, or verbal utterance - but in our inner concentration on the intellect's activity and on mindfulness of God born of unwavering compunction; and it can be perceived noetically by those capable of such perception." Ibid., 128.

[214] "When through the practice of the virtues we attain a spiritual knowledge of created things we have achieved the first stage on the path of deification. We achieve the second stage when – initiated through the contemplation of the spiritual essences of created things - we perceive the hidden mysteries of God. We achieve the third stage when we are united and interfused with the primordial light. It is then that we reach the goal of all ascetic and contemplative activity." Ibid., 148.

[215] "The final stage, "involves immersing our contemplative intellect in the inner principles of providence, justice and truth, and also the interpretation of the arcane symbolism, parables and obscure passages in Holy Scripture. Its final goal is our initiation into the hidden mysteries of God and our being filled with ineffable wisdom through union with the Holy Spirit, so that each becomes a wise theologian in the great Church of God, illuminating others with the inner meaning of theology." Ibid., 150-52.

[216] Michael Angold suggests that his mystical teaching on the divine light had a muted response. Michael Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Komneni 1081-1261* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 273.

[217] Alexander Kazhdan, "Michael I Keroularios" in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, edited by Alexander P. Kazhdan (Oxford University Press, 1991), 1361.

The ninth and early tenth centuries under the Macedonian Dynasty (867-1056) had seen intensified interest in antiquity when many of the texts were reproduced in minuscule script.[218] Photios (c. 810-after 893), serving as patriarch in the latter part of the ninth century, is a figure associated with this development as he himself gathered a compilation of ancient Greek literature.[219] The fruits of these labors came however a century later.

Michael Psellos was born in 1018 to a modest family and later made a career in civil administration. Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042-55) introduced the title “Chief of the Philosophers” for Michael Psellos.[220] The age of Psellos is noted with expansion on the simple erudition on ancient texts, gathered in the previous centuries, to a more engaging enterprise, when new views were formed on the shoulders of ancients and philosophy was applied to current problems in areas such as theology.[221] Psellos’ intellectual world was appreciative of the delicate foundation of secular knowledge. He relates: “the whole of God is not approachable to us and the whole of nature cannot be grasped by our reason,”[222] yet he stood apart from the monks at Bithynian Olympos who, upon even hearing the name of Plato, would make the sign of the cross and murmur anathematisms against the pagan Satan.[223]

Psellos stands in direct opposition to Symeon on the ideal role of the human in a social environment. Symeon had prescribed emulation of the saints for all.

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[218] Katerina Ierodiakonou and Börje Bydén, "Byzantine Philosophy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.) <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2008/entries/byzantine-philosophy/>

[219] Ibid.

[220] Alexander Kazhdan, “Hypatos ton Philosophon” in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, edited by Alexander P. Kazhdan (Oxford University Press, 1991), 964.

[221] Ierodiakonou, Bydén, "Byzantine Philosophy."

[222] Tatakis, *Christian Philosophy in the Patristic and Byzantine Tradition*, 253.

[223] Ibid., 256.

Psellos's view is a negation of Symeon's. In his *Chronographia,* he distinguishes three kinds of souls. "The first type is that which lives in isolation, by itself, freed from the body, unbending and altogether incapable of compromise." This is someone who has renounced the world. The second type is one who "chooses to live the life of moderation." This man, who is neither a saint nor sinner, "plays his part in public affairs." The third type is the "voluptuous and the sensual man."[224] This is of course undesirable. Yet Psellos implies that this is not the only undesirable option of the three. He returns to the first kind:

> Suppose then that someone were able to step outside the bounds of all things pertaining to the body, and take up his position at the height of spiritual perfection, what would he have in common with the world around him? 'I have put off my tunic,' says the Scripture, 'and how shall I put it on again?' By all means let him go up his high and lofty mountain: let him stand with the angels, so that unearthly light may be shed upon him: let him separate himself from men and avoid their society … no one on earth has ever triumphed over the force of nature to such an extent.[225]

Symeon the Theologian had urged every Christian to emulate the saints of old. Psellos questions whether the imaginary saintly ideal that Symeon was espousing had any use in public life.

Given the patriarch Michael I Keroularios' championing of Symeon the Theologian, it was obvious that the two figures would come head to head.[226] Was knowledge, and more specifically theology, the domain of the humanists whose training in philosophy could allow them to expand the Christian doctrine, or the

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[224] "For instance, if the soul, despite the deep and numerous emotions to which it is subject, chooses to live the life of moderation, as though it were the exact center of a circle, then it brings into being the man who plays his part in public affairs. Such a soul is neither really divine nor entirely concerned with the apprehension of spiritual things, nor yet overprone to indulge the body, nor subject to passion." This is the middle way Psellos commends. "On the other hand, if the soul turns aside from this middle course and marches on the path that leads to low, base passions, then it produces the voluptuous and the sensual man." Michael Psellos (1018-96), *Chronographia, Fourteen Byzantine Rulers,* translated by E. R. A. Sewter (Penguin Books, 1953, 1966), 264-265.

[225] Michael Psellos (1018-96), *Chronographia, Fourteen Byzantine Rulers,* translated by E. R. A. Sewter (Penguin Books, 1953, 1966), 264-265.

[226] Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Komneni*, 31.

spiritual elite, who became theologians through direct access to the divine? Psellos implied that the patriarch was hoping to compensate his lack of formal education with the gifts of the spirit.[227] Keroularios held to the ascetic elitism of Symeon, whereas Psellos championed the social human being instead of a saint.[228] In the final count, the tension between the two figures was resolved because of a political crisis in Byzantium.

In the early 1050s as the relations between Byzantium and Rome became more tense. Constantine IX wanted an alliance to resist the Normans in Italy. Yet when the papal legate Humbert arrived in Constantinople, he came into disagreement with Keroularios. The disagreement resulted in the reciprocal excommunication of Humbert and Keroularios on 1054.[229] This was a great political victory for Keroularios, and he ran the government through the reigns of Theodora and Michael VI, and through the transfer of power to Isaac I Komnenos. When his relations with Isaac I Komnenos worsened, however, Isaac used the intellectual

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[227] Ibid., 27-31

[228] Ibid., 31

[229] 'Great Schism' of 1054 was not considered so great at the time and made little change on the ground. The anathemas referred only to the participants, and not to their successors. Furthermore, the cardinal's bull of excommunication praised the emperor and the people of Constantinople as 'most Christian and orthodox.' 45 years later in 1089, when the emperor Alexios I Komnenos was to receive the papal representatives in Constantinople, the patriarchate did not consider itself to be in schism with Rome. Jane Baun, "Church," in *Palgrave Advances in Byzantine History*, edited by Jonathan Harris (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 114.

camp, headed by Psellos. Psellos would be the accuser in his trial, yet Keroularios died on his way to the trial.[230]

Psellos was, whether forced or with self-motivation, following the delicate balance between faith in doctrine and philosophy. Philosophy is subordinate to Christian teachings.[231] He doesn't appear to be headstrong in his intellectual position either. For example, why did he give up horoscopy? "For my own part - and this is the truth - it was no scientific reason that made me give up these ideas," he writes, "but rather was I restrained by some divine force. It is not a matter of logical argument - and I certainly pay no attention to other methods of proof. But the same cause which, in the case of greater and more learned scholars than I am, has brought them down to a level where they accept Hellenic culture, in my case exercises a compulsion upwards, to a sure faith in the truth of our Christian theology."[232] He was appreciative of human emotion. In describing an icon of the Mother of God he relates: "I am describing not what I observed, but what I felt, for She looked as though She had completely changed Her nature, being transformed

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[230] Psellos was critical of some outgrowths from the, so-called, Chaldaean teachings. The cults around these teachings included magic rites, possibly culminating in a supreme climax of vision of God (Θεοφάνεια). In the *Accusation* against the patriarch Keroularios, Psellos accuses him of impiety (ασέβεια). He asserts that a pious person should avoid heresies, "and above all the Chaldaean philosophy with its inventions and tales about oracles, different kinds of spirits, spells, and the differentiation of gods." Psellos accuses the patriarch of having received two monks from Chios, and with them a prophetess, a women named Dosithea who pretended to be filled with godhead. Keroularios was taken by these visitors' teachings and they were taken everywhere, even to Saint Sophia. While Keroularios was the "priest of things divine," he "simply practiced the hellenic rites, and pursued the Chaldaean oracles." J. M. Hussey, *Church & Learning in the Byzantine Empire 867-1185* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 82-85; Alexander Kazhdan, "Michael I Keroularios" in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, edited by Alexander P. Kazhdan (Oxford University Press, 1991), 1361.

[231] "I have enumerated all these things both to bring you to a state of broad learning and to make you familiar with Hellenic doctrines," writes Psellos. "Now I realize that our Christian teaching will clash with some of those doctrines, but it was not my intention to have you exchange the one for the other - that would be madness on my part; rather, I wanted you to become devoted to the former and merely take cognizance of the latter. And if they somehow stand a chance of helping you towards the truth, then make use of them." Duffy, "Hellenic Philosophy in Byzantium," 150.

[232] Michael Psellos, *Chronographia,* 267.

into a beauty approaching the Divine, quite beyond the sensation offered by sight."[233] This intuitive, insightful man represented in many ways the Byzantine humanist, whose capricious standing was revealed by an outsider from Calabria, John Italos (c. 1025- after 1082) who would become a disciple and successor of Psellos.

John Italos had been born in Calabria around 1025 and moved to Constantinople around 1049. He succeeded Psellos as the Chief of the Philosophers. He was tried for advocating the systematic use of philosophy in theology. It is remarked that he even questioned the supremacy of theology over philosophy.[234] He had faced trials first in 1077, when he still enjoyed the support of the emperor Michael VII Doukas (r. 1071-78), and was found not guilty. The second trial in 1082 was after the accession of Alexios I Comnenos (r. 1081-1118) and he was condemned.[235]

Anna Komnene (1083 - c.1153/4), daughter of emperor Alexios, was not an eyewitness to the events around Italos, but mentions them in her *Alexiad*. She relates that her father, as "a true representative of God," was troubled to see the church being rocked by the ideas of John Italos.[236] Italos was a pupil of Psellos, but because of his "uncouth and barbaric temperament," was unable to "grasp the profound truths of philosophy."[237] Anna stresses two attributes of Italos. First that he is a foreigner, whose philosophical knowledge might be commendable, but his grammar was defective, was not capable of rhetoric, and his accent was not to the

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[233] Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Komneni*, 33.

[234] Ierodiakonou, Bydén, "Byzantine Philosophy."

[235] Robert Browning, "Enlightenment and Repression in Byzantium in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," *Past & Present* 69 (Nov., 1975), 13.

[236] Anna Komnene (1083 - c.1153), *Alexiad* (1143-53), translated by E. R. A. Sewter, revised with introduction and notes by Peter Frankopan (1969, 2003, 2009), 146.

[237] Ibid., 147.

taste of Anna.[238] Second, Anna portrays Italos as having an unstable temperament; he did have very powerful arguments, yet "temper was his master."[239] Then Anna digresses to relate the piety of her parents, especially how her own mother would read the Holy Fathers. "Inquiries into the physical nature of things did not interest her so much as the study of dogma," Anna relates, "for she longed to reap the benefits of true wisdom."[240] When his father took charge, he found "a general neglect of culture and literary skills, with the art of literature seemingly banished," and "he was eager to revive whatever sparks still remained hidden beneath the ashes. ...But he did advise them to devote attention to Holy Scripture before turning to Hellenic culture."[241] Alexios duly referred Italos to preliminary examinations under his brother Isaac, and with his brother's recommendation, Alexios committed Italos to appear before the ecclesiastical tribunal, where Italos was condemned.[242]

The emperor's own piety had been called to question earlier because of the confiscation of Church wealth. Given the connection of Italos to the Normans, the enemy of the Byzantines at the time, he would have made an easy target for Alexios to show how pious he was.[243] The trial of Italos was followed by the trials and condemnation of his student, Eustratios, bishop of Nikaia, for employing reason to

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[238] Ibid., 148.

[239] These traits of John Italos are also encountered in the Timarion, a 12th century tale of journey to Hell. There, Italos is portrayed as trying to sit alongside Pythagoras, who rejects him for being a Christian. Then he gets into a fight with Diogenes, who retorts by saying how he was respected by no less a person than Alexander, while John was treated by the Byzantines as scum and was hated by all the Galilaeans. Italos, thus emerges as having failed to be neither a philosopher nor a Christian. While he is taken away, he is pelted with stones and scolded for having failed in grammar and being a laughingstock when he tried to write speeches. Psellos, on the other hand, who is referred as the "Byzantine professor," is greeted respectfully. *Timarion* (12th century), translated by Barry Baldwin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 72-74; Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, 149.

[240] Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, 150.

[241] Ibid., 151.

[242] Ibid., 151-52.

[243] Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium, The Transformation of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 228.

clarify faith. Around twenty-five similar trials took place, which were instigated and executed mostly by the imperial authority.[244]

According to Robert Browning, philosophy pursued in the eleventh century by men of originality and distinction like Psellos had vanished from the scene, and the Komnenian period was an age of "uncreative erudition, of sterile good taste."[245] Yet the Komnenian age had many contradictions set against the aristocratic takeover and the imposition of family relations onto the bureaucratic and meritocratic establishment of the Byzantine state. Whereas the Komneni blocked the advancement of philosophy, the period offered humanists other opportunities to expand.[246] The economic and demographic expansion under the Komneni could have enabled more men to acquire higher education, and the emergence of an "aristocracy with intellectual and artistic pretensions created a larger market for their skills."[247] The emerging intellectual circles and the Komnenian distrust for alternative foci of authority held back the domination of the hesychast ideals in monastic circles.

A monastic resurgence is noted for the eleventh century.[248] Throughout the twelfth century, the monastic establishment was becoming more economically independent. Yet the monastic reforms, the suspicion of unconventional forms of spirituality and the patronage of intellectuals dismissive of, at least some forms of, monasticism is thought to have held back monastic, and more particularly hesychastic, ideals from getting the center stage.[249] Eusthatios (c. 1115-1195/96),

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[244] Ibid., 229-30.

[245] Browning, "Enlightenment and Repression in Byzantium in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," 5.

[246] Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium,* 255.

[247] Ibid., 241.

[248] Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Komneni*, 271-273.

[249] Ibid., 10.

scholar, writer and after around 1178 archbishop of Thessaloniki, is one the individuals exemplifying the Komnenian aristocratic civility with a sneering attitude towards the current monastic establishment.

Eustathios' stance against the monastic establishment is nuanced. He has praise for some monks, particularly those in Constantinople, who were exemplars of faith and virtue.[250] Scholarly activity among the monks also deserves praise. Palamas was questioning the use of scholarship for the monks, Eusthatios prefers just the opposite. "Wise monks, men of letters and men of virtue and initiates of useful learning project their voices, adorn their speech, pouring forth inspired allusions like rivers, whose sources are a delight to the cities of God," he explains but the hypocritical holy men "cultivate silence and reticence, so as to avoid criticism."[251] Eustathios was appalled by the lack of scholarly activity, or even literacy among the monks. How could the monks teach the message of the gospels or debate theological positions without any background in spiritual literature? He tried to amend the situation by gathering an anthology of spiritual works. He decided to include a work from Gregory of Nazianzos in his anthology and went to the library of a nearby monastery, only to find out that the book had been sold. When he questioned the abbot on this transaction, the abbot replied: "What need have we of such books?" Eustathios asks "what need did such monks have of anything, if they

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[250] The text perhaps also signals that the teachings or at least the tone of Symeon, and his discourse on the light was catching on. Eustathios writes: "The monks of Constantinople will teach you moreover that assimilation into the cloud of darkness is not something obscure, difficult to see and understand, dependent upon what lurks hidden, brooding, and festering in the recesses of the soul. Instead, it depends upon the virtue in you; uncelebrated and so unrevealed. You ought to at once become light and the cloak of concealment about you will be in imitation of God, round Whom are clouds and darkness. You will not simply be the dark, but the gloom will encircle you, concealing the light of virtue, which, being hidden, is bound to burst forth in a new guise, resembling, whether you like it or not, a bright lamp. God, the Father of lights, loves such lights: or in other words, good deeds. Knowledge of them resounds like echoing thunder. They burst like lightening across the ecumene, shining before men. Their odor is not like the divine, but its sweet smell wafts upwards to heaven itself." Ibid., 354.

[251] Magdalino, "The Byzantine Holy Man in the Twelfth Century," 56.

were unable to appreciate such books?"[252] Not only were the monks unable to understand the value of a library, they furthermore were not comfortable in the presence of the educated, preferring to deal with the ignorant instead.

Virtue was also lacking in some monks. Their concerns could be more on their economic wellbeing rather than salvation. The monks engage in worldly affairs, grow vines and trade. They continuously harass their neighbors for their adjacent plots.[253] They want to attract rich patrons to enter their monasteries, promising them "holiness without pain, salvation without sweat, immediate access to God, and entrance to a paradise, from which the flaming sword was missing."[254]

Eustathios was not sympathetic to the hermits either. Like Psellos, he concedes that it might be admirable to fight demons in solitude where God is one's only spectator and referee, but those who fight in full public attention are also worthy, and their deed may in fact surpass those of the hermit, since the track of those who fight in the public domain is harder than that of the hermit. In his commentaries on Homer, Eustathios relates that the Cyclopes who, "trusting in the immortal god, plant nothing and dwell in hollow caves," were analogous to the

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[252] Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Komneni,* 351.

[253] Alexander Kazhdan with Simon Franklin, "Eustathios of Thessalonica: the life and opinions of a twelfth-century Byzantine Rhetor," in *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh & Twelfth Centuries* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), 150-51.

[254] Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Komneni,* 349.

"anchorites of our time."[255] The monks had to display an utility to be praised by Eustathios.[256]

He and his contemporaries wanted to see the spiritual life under the church authority. The call for church authority over the monkish elements set loose was first voiced by the Patriarch Leo Stypes (r. 1134-43), who asked: "How can one excuse those who just decide, without approval or consecration, to become healers of souls, teachers of a way of life, exponents and authors of proper learning, or, in some cases, dogmatists?"[257] Theodore Balsamon (ca. 1130/40-after 1195), a canonist, occupying several high positions in the church hierarchy, would cry:

> I see many such wandering the towns and not being punished, but actually welcomed as saints by some, I want to know the reason, and I demand reform… There are many means to salvation of the soul, and one may be saved by them without scandal.[258]

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[255] Kazhdan "Eustathios of Thessalonica," 151-52.

[256] The holy men amidst the civil society was attacked more directly by his contemporaries. The poet John Tzetzes (ca.1110-1180/85) would ask his runaway slave to pursue a career in Constantinople: "For now, every disgusting and thrice-accursed wretch like you only has to put on a monastic habit, or hang bells from his penis or wrap fetters or chains round his feet, or a rope or chain round his neck - in short to dress himself up to look self-effacing in an ostentatious and highly theatrical way, and put on an artificial and highly calculated air of artless simplicity. Immediately the city of Constantine showers him with honors, and the rogue is publicly feted as a saint above the apostles, above the martyrs, and above whatever is pleasing to God. Why describe in detail the sweetmeats and delicacies and tit-bits, the bags of money and the privileges with which the city regales this monster? Leading ladies, and not a few men, of the highest birth consider it a great thing to fit out their private chapels, not with icons of saintly men by the hand of some first-rate artist, but with the leg-irons and fetters and chains of these accursed villains, which they obtain from them after much supplication, and then replace with others." He also explains the reason for his anger when he protests the small income he gets from popularizing the classics for his patrons, who then proceed to pay inordinate prices to monks selling fruit. In the 12th century, Byzantine urban expansion had reached its peak, and Constantinople was attracting many immigrants. Tzetzes also complains about these: "Cretans and Turks, Alans, Rhodians, and Chiots - all the most thieving and corrupt elements of every race and land - these are the people who are made saints in Constantinople." Magdalino, "The Byzantine Holy Man in the Twelfth Century," 54-59.

[257] Ibid., 62.

[258] He continues: "For this reason many holy patriarchs arrested many of the chained anchorites who squatted in the church of Saint Niketas, along with others who roamed the streets and faked demonic frenzy, and locked them up in public jails in accordance with the canon." Ibid., 59-60.

Balsamon would also note that the Benedictine monasticism was closer to canonical tradition than the looser patterns of monastic organization now followed by the Byzantines.[259] As a member of the Church, Eustathios, too, wanted to see the monks under the authority of the local bishop. He related that the monks hate the bishops because "they reckon that if there were no bishops, they would be everything in the world and the only people to whom churches would be subject would be to those dressed in black all over."[260]

These attitudes questioning the utility of the monks and freelance spirituality may have slowed down the growth of hesychasm, but the period nonetheless saw some texts touching on hesychast practices. Ilias the Presbyter, for example, writing in possibly the late eleventh or early twelfth century, talks about the divine light, stressed in Symeon the New Theologian.[261] One who offers the Jesus Prayer undistractedly with his natural thoughts at rest, "contemplates that which transcends every intellect," is "granted to some extent a vision of the divine light."[262]

Peter of Damaskos (after the late tenth century, more likely twelfth century) [263] first relates the stages of contemplation. Then he talks about the legitimacy of ideas arising "spontaneously in the intellect of those who have attained a state of stillness, free from discursive thought." These are to be accepted as valid ideas, unlike the results of discursive thought, which are purely subjective. He thus argues that the ideas acquired through meditation have greater authority than those of the

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[259] Ibid., 60.

[260] Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Komneni,* 188.

[261] Palmer, Ware and Sherrard, *The Philokalia* Vol.3, 32.

[262] "Whenever the soul, paying no attention to external things, is concentrated in prayer, then a kind of flame surrounds it, as fire surrounds iron, and makes it wholly incandescent. The soul remains the same, but can no longer be touched, just as red-hot iron cannot be touched by the hand. Blessed is he who in this life is granted the experience of this state and who sees his body, which by nature is of clay, become incandescent through grace." Ilias the Presbyter (late 11th or early 12th century), in ibid., 45-46.

[263] Palmer, Ware and Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.3, 70.

scholars. Yet he also hastens to add that every word or act ought to be supported by divine Scripture.[264]

By the Middle Byzantine period the meditative practices had advanced to a level where authors thought it necessary to describe their variants, the subsequent experience and what to do with the knowledge acquired from this meditation. Subsequent with the developments in the practice, the self-confidence of the practitioners also grew. Through meditation they, and only they, became theologians. They did not wish to be instructed by the scholars on the matters of faith. Secular learning which was in turn the buttress of the learned was undermined, and contrasted with the experience acquired through meditation, which was more real and more in line with the Christian examples.

Byzantium that fell to the Latins in 1204 was a complicated society with different forces pulling it apart, held together only by the aristocratic structure imposed by the Komneni. The holy men and the hesychast ideals were supported, privately, while they were generally held in check in the public domain. True philosophers like Psellos or Italos had vanished from the scene, yet the Byzantine intellectuals were nonetheless living in a vibrant, civil society that often criticized the holy men whose contribution to social life was in question. Byzantines still felt a cultural superiority to the Latins. All these would change with the Latin conquest of 1204 and its aftermath.

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[264] Peter of Damaskos (after the late 10th century, more likely 12th c.), in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.3 (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 212.

CHAPTER 5: AFTER 1204: CODIFICATION OF THE PRACTICE AND ASCENDANCY OF THE ATTITUDE

> *Only those who through their purity have become saints are spiritually intelligent in the way that is natural to man in his pre-fallen state. Mere skill in reasoning does not make a person's intelligence pure, for since the fall our intelligence has been corrupted by evil thoughts. The materialistic and wordy spirit of the wisdom of this world may lead us to speak about ever wider spheres of knowledge, but it renders our thoughts increasingly crude and uncouth... By knowledge of truth understand above all apprehension of truth through grace.*
>
> Gregory of Sinai

If the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204 was a watershed moment, it was so most starkly in the Byzantine relations to the Latin West. It is only in the aftermath of 1204 and the reestablishment of Byzantium in Constantinople in 1261 that we see the Byzantine cultural superiority prior to 1204 give way to a view of Latins not just as mere merchants or soldiers, but also as cultural peers or even superiors.[265] Following the development of professional theology with the establishment of the *Studium Parisiense* and papal sanctioning of the Dominican order stressing the study of theology for its members, the Latin world had come up with a synthesis between religion and philosophy. This great intellectual leap, Scholasticism, had no counterpart in the Byzantine world.[266] In the later Palaiologan period, some Byzantine intellectuals such as Demetrios Kydones responded by bespeaking a certain intellectual inferiority. Demetrios, after his initiation into the Latin world through translating the *Summa contra Gentiles* of Aquinas into Greek, would deplore his fellow Byzantines who continued to view Westerners as "oxen and asses [who] could not be credited as capable of anything worthy of human beings [except]… a dubious skill in trade and running taverns," arguing it was the Latins who had

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[265] Gill Page, *Being Byzantine: Greek Identity Before the Ottomans, 1200-1420* (Cambridge, 2008), 68.

[266] John Meyendorff, "Theology in the Thirteenth Century: Methodological Contrasts," in *The 17th International Byzantine Congress: Major Papers*, edited by A. D. Caratzas (New Rochelle, N.Y., 1986)

achieved superiority in both philosophy and theology.[267] On a major point of contention, the issue of the *filioque,* for example, Kydones asserted that the Latins had overcome the Byzantines by the sheer force of their logic and their more thorough investigation of the subject.[268]

The Byzantine state resurrected in Constantinople by Michael VIII Palaiologos (r. 1259-82) was lacking in political capital and stood in contrast to the Komnenian period. Michael Palaiologos was a usurper, but he was not the first one in Byzantine history. What made his case more unsavory was the good name of the Laskarid dynasty whom he replaced. The Nicean period would be remembered by the later generations as a heroic one. In retrospect it would seem like a time of hope, when the state was purged of the corruption that characterized Byzantium before 1204, when imperial autocracy was curbed and a more equitable society came into being.[269] Pachymeres relates that when a certain high-ranking government official would hear of the recovery of the ancient capital he would proclaim in dismay: “What sins have we committed, that we should live to see such misfortunes? Let no one harbor any hopes, now that the Romans hold the City again,”[270] showing both the negative associations of the capital and the positive developments under the Laskarid dynasty period. Michael was the regent of the last Laskarid ruler, John IV Laskaris (1250-ca.1305). After Michael took back Constantinople in the 1261, he duly blinded the 11-year old John and imprisoned him. Michael then became the sole emperor but Patriarch Arsenios

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[267] A. Edward Siecienski, *The Filioque, History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (Oxford , 2010), 143-44.

[268] Ibid.

[269] Michael Angold, “After the Fourth Crusade: The Greek Rump States and the Recovery of Byzantium,” in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 749.

[270] Angeliki Laiou, “Political-Historical Survey 1204-1453” in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 283.

excommunicated him. Arsenios was deposed but his supporters refused to acknowledge the successors of the patriarch, causing a schism within the Orthodox church until 1310. After the return to Constantinople, now sole emperor, Michael tried to forestall foreign threats by agreeing to the widely unpopular Union of Lyons (1274) with the Catholic church. With the Palaiologan disappointment, made obvious from start, the ascetic elite again gained prominence.[271] The saints that reemerged in this period were those associated with opposition to the Palaiologan dynasty.[272] It is also roughly in this period that we begin to get the most detailed treatises on the hesychastic practices.

Hesychios, living possibly in the eighth or ninth century, had mentioned several methods of contemplation. With Symeon the Studite, the hesychastic practices were becoming established more fervently in the capital. This period, from the late twelfth century onwards, marks further developments in the practice, attesting to its success. Now the treatises codify the various practices. One of the earlier texts is by an anonymous Pseudo Symeon and the other by Nikephoros the Italian, a monk on Mt. Athos during the reign of Michael VII (1259-82), opposing his pro-Latin policies.[273]

The text of Pseudo-Symeon is dated to possibly the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. It seems that Pseudo-Symeon is writing in an age when the practices around hesychasm are followed by a greater number of people, yet there has not been a codification of these practices yet. Three methods are outlined, and

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[271] Magdalino, “The Byzantine Holy Man in the Twelfth Century,” 65-66.

[272] Ruth Macrides, “Saints and Sainthood in the Early Palaiologan Period,” in *The Byzantine Saint*, edited by Sergei Hackel (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 69.

[273] Dirk Krausmüller. “The rise of hesychasm,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity Vol. 5, Eastern Christianity*, edited by Michael Angold (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 102.

from the defense of these methods and their criticism, one gets the impression that all three were practiced during his time.[274]

In the first method:

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

Yet this is not a favorable method. His heart may grow proud and exalted, he may delude himself that what is happening to him as the effect of divine grace. Those who adopt this method may also delude themselves of seeing lights with their bodily eyes, smell sweet scents, and hear voices. They may fail to see the devil appearing as an angel of light, and putting their trust in him, lead a life of delusion, refusing to accept the counsel of anyone else. They may even commit suicide.[275]

If the first method implies a total receptiveness to outside, the second method is the opposite:

> A person withdraws his intellect from sensory things and concentrates it in himself, guards his senses, and collects all his thoughts; and he advances oblivious of the vanities of this world. Sometimes he examines his thoughts, sometimes pays attention to the words of the prayer he is addressing to God, and sometimes drags back his thoughts when they have been taken captive; and when he is overcome by passion he forcefully strives to recover himself.

Yet this method is also in vain. One has shut himself in but he cannot fight back. The practitioner of this method is “like a person fighting at night,” and worse yet is often

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[274] “There are three methods of prayer and attentiveness, by means of which the soul is either uplifted or cast down,” begins Pseudo-Symeon, “whoever employs these methods at the right time is uplifted, but whoever employs them foolishly and at the wrong time is cast down.” Pseudo-Symeon (possibly late 12th or early 13th century), *The Three Methods of Prayer*, in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.4 (Faber and Faber, 1999), 67.

[275] Ibid., 67-68.

mocked by others.[276] Still Pseudo-Symeon relates that this second method is nonetheless better than the first.[277]

The third method is the favorite of Pseudo-Symeon, yet he also relates that "there are very few to be found who practice it." In this method one does not gaze upwards, raising his hands, concentrating his thoughts and call down help from heaven. Nor does one begin by keeping guard over the senses with the intellect, "while failing to observe the enemies who attack from within." The third method begins with obedience and pure conscience with respect to God, then to the spiritual father, and third to other people and material things.

The difference of this method is in its active introspection.[278] The holy fathers, according to Pseudo-Symeon, "abandoned all other forms of spiritual labor and concentrated wholly on this one task of guarding the heart, convinced that through this practice they would also possess every other virtue, whereas without it no virtue could be firmly established."[279]

In preparation for this third method, one should strive to acquire first "freedom from anxiety with respect to everything," being "dead to everything," then preserve a pure conscience, and third be completely detached, so that the thoughts do not incline towards anything worldly. Sitting down in a corner of a quiet cell, one should close the door and withdraw the intellect from everything worthless and transient. Pseudo-Symeon continues:

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[276] "He hears the voices of his enemies and is wounded by them, but he cannot see clearly who they are... Falsely imagining that he is concentrated and attentive, he falls victim unawares to self-esteem. Dominated and mocked by it, he despises and criticizes others for their lack of attentiveness."

[277] Ibid., 68-69.

[278] "True and unerring attentiveness and prayer mean that the intellect keeps watch over the heart while it prays; it should always be on patrol within the heart, and from within - from the depths of the heart - it should offer up its prayers to God... It will keep watch always within the heart, repulsing and expelling all thoughts sown there by the enemy."

[279] Ibid., 69-71.

> Rest your beard on your chest, and focus your physical gaze, together with the whole of your intellect, upon the centre of your belly or your navel. Restrain the drawing-in of breath through your nostrils, so as not to breathe easily, and search inside yourself with your intellect so as to find the place of the heart, where all the powers of the soul reside.

First the practitioner will find only darkness which eventually will give way to "unceasing joy" as "the intellect attains the place of the heart." Yet, the fight continues and the intellect has to drive away any distractive thoughts with the help of the invocation of Jesus Christ.[280]

The other manual on hesychasm comes from Nikephoros the Monk (end of the thirteenth century). He was born in Italy to a Catholic family. Later he converted to Orthodoxy and became a monk at Mount Athos. He was fiercely against the unionist policies of Michael VIII Palaiologos (r. 1259-1282). He was exiled from Athos in 1276, for his repudiation of Latin theology, and spent five and a half months in prison in Constantinople. During his stay in Constantinople, he taught the hesychast methods of prayer to Theoleptos. Palamas writes that Theoleptos was among the leading disciples of Nikephoros. Then Nikephoros was expelled to Palestine, there he was tried by the Latins and then sentenced to exile in Cyprus. Theoleptos became bishop of Philadelphia around 1283. He was back in the capital at the end of the 1310s, delivering homilies at the monastery of Philanthropos Soter. Theoleptos, in turn, taught Gregory Palamas the hesychastic practice.[281]

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[280] "To start with you will find there darkness and an impenetrable density. Later, when you persist and practice this task day and night, you will find, as though miraculously, an unceasing joy. For as soon as the intellect attains the place of the heart, at once it sees things of which it previously knew nothing. It sees the open space within the heart and it beholds itself entirely luminous and full of discrimination. From then on, from whatever side a distractive thought may appear, before it has come to completion and assumed a form, the intellect immediately drives it away and destroys it with the invocation of Jesus Christ. From this point onwards the intellect begins to be full of rancor against the demons and, rousing its natural anger against its noetic enemies, it pursues them and strikes them down. The rest you will learn for yourself, with God's help, by keeping guard over your intellect and by retaining Jesus in your heart. As the saying goes, sit in your cell and it will teach you everything." Ibid., 72-73.

[281] Angela C. Hero, *The Life & Letters of Theoleptos of Philadelphia* (Massachusetts, Brookline: Hellenic College Press, 1994), 12-14, 19, 25 (n12).

Gregory Palamas, the later hero of hesychasm, will relate that Nikephoros "seeing the many beginners were incapable of controlling the instability of their intellect, even to a limited degree … proposed a method whereby they could restrain to some extent the wanderings of the fantasy."[282] As in the case of Pseudo-Symeon, the psychosomatic technique appears as a prelude to the commencement of the Jesus Prayer. Nikephoros relates the importance of a spiritual guide, but nonetheless recommends the method for those who cannot find such a mentor.

He begins the text with an opening that reads like an advertorial:

> If you ardently long to attain the wondrous divine illumination of our Savior Jesus Christ; to experience in your heart the supracelestial fire and to be consciously reconciled with God; to dispossess yourself of worldly things in order to find and possess the treasure hidden in the field of your heart;[283] to enkindle here and now your soul's flame and to renounce all that is only here and now; and spiritually to know and experience the kingdom of heaven within you; then I will impart to you the science of eternal or heavenly life or, rather, a method that will lead you, if you apply it, painlessly and without toil to the harbor of dispassion, without the danger of being deceived or terrified by the demons.[284]

Drawing in his audience further, he talks about some of the results of these practices. Through watchfulness the heart of Antony was able to perceive God and acquire the power of clairvoyance. He, for example, was able to save a man dying from thirst in the desert, because he was revealed to him during prayer. Like Pseudo-Symeon, Nikephoros relates that many names were given to meditative practices: "some of the saints have called attentiveness the guarding of the intellect, others have called it custody of the heart, or watchfulness, or noetic stillness, and others something else. All these expressions indicate one and the same thing."[285]

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[282] G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 193.

[283] Matthew 13:44

[284] Nikiphoros the Monk/the Italian (end of the 13th century), *On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart*, in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.4 (Faber and Faber, 1999), 194.

[285] Ibid., 204.

How does one learn these methods? Few receive it directly from God, but this is very rare. One should instead learn from an “unerring guide, so that under his instruction we may learn how to deal with the shortcomings and exaggerations suggested to us by the devil whenever we deviate left or right from the axis of attentiveness.” One must diligently search for such a guide, but if no such guide is found, then the instructions of Nikephoros are to be followed.

He begins with importance of the breath. Breath serves to cool the heart.[286] Thus the path of the breath leads to the heart. First, the practitioner must seat himself, concentrate his intellect, and lead it into the respiratory passage through which the breath passes into the heart. The intellect must be compelled with the inhaled breath to descend into the heart. This will be a joyful return: “Just as a man, after being far away from home, on his return is overjoyed at being with his wife and children again, so the intellect, once it is united with the soul, is filled with indescribable delight.” Once the intellect is firmly established in the heart, it must not remain silent or idle. “It should constantly repeat and meditate on the prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me', and should never stop doing this. For this prayer protects the intellect from distraction, renders it impregnable to diabolic attacks, and every day increases its love and desire for God.” If the attempts are unsuccessful, then one must banish all thoughts from the discursive faculty, which is in the breast, by praying the Jesus Prayer ceaselessly. “If you continue to do this for some time, it will assuredly open for you the entrance to your heart,” ensures Nikephoros, as he knows himself from experience.[287]

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[286] “You know that what we breathe is air. When we exhale it, it is for the heart's sake, for the heart is the source of life and warmth for the body. The heart draws towards itself the air inhaled when breathing, so that by discharging some of its heat when the air is exhaled it may maintain an even temperature. The cause of this process or, rather, its agent, are the lungs. The Creator has made these capable of expanding and contracting, like bellows, so that they can easily draw in and expel their contents. Thus, by taking in coolness and expelling heat through breathing, the heart performs unobstructed the function for which it was created, that of maintaining life.”

[287] Ibid., 205-206.

The next stage in the development of hesychasm was undertaken by Gregory the Sinaite, who saw the Hesychast controversy beginning in the 1330s, yet did not play a significant part in it. He was born near Klazomenai (Urla, near İzmir) around 1255 (or 1265) and died in Paroria, Thrace after 1337. Born to wealthy parents, he was captured in his youth by Turks. After his release he fled to Cyprus where he became a monk and then went to Mount Sinai. He had disputes with other monks, and went to Crete. There he studied with a monk named Arsenios and learned the Jesus Prayer. He returned to Mount Athos possibly around the turn of the century, and there, reportedly, he reintroduced this hesychastic method. In his *Vita*, it is claimed that Gregory, arriving on Athos from Sinai, found no help in his search for *hesychia*, eventually reviving the tradition on Mount Athos. Yet Meyendorff disclaims this statement, calling it a hagiographic cliché, used to enhance Gregory's role.[288] As mentioned, he played no part in the Hesychast controversy breaking around 1335.[289]

Gregory relates two modes of union, either the heart is already drawn to the heart before the commencement of the Jesus Prayer, or the prayer itself is used to draw the intellect to the heart.[290] Gregory relates that one has to sit from dawn on a seat about nine inches high, compelling the intellect to descend from the head to the heart and retain it there.

> Keeping your head forcibly bent downwards, and suffering acute pain in your chest, shoulders and neck, persevere in repeating noetically or in your soul 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy.' Then, since that may become

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[288] John Meyendorff, "Mount Athos in the Fourteenth Century: Spiritual and Intellectual Legacy," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 42 (1988), 158-59.

[289] Palmer, Ware and Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.4, 205-207.

[290] "For either the intellect, cleaving to the Lord, is present in the heart prior to the action of the prayer; or the prayer itself, progressively quickened in the fire of spiritual joy, draws the intellect along with it or welds it to the invocation of the Lord Jesus and to union with Him. For since the Spirit works in each person as He wishes, one of these two ways we have mentioned will take precedence in some people, the other in others." Gregory of Sinai (ca. 1265-1346), *On Stillness*, in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.4 (Faber and Faber, 1999), 263.

> constrictive and wearisome, and even galling because of the constant repetition… let your intellect concentrate on the second half of the prayer and repeat the words 'Son of God, have mercy'. You must say this half over and over again and not out of laziness constantly change the words. For plants which are frequently transplanted do not put down roots. Restrain your breathing, so as not to breathe unimpededly; for when you exhale, the air, rising from the heart, beclouds the intellect and ruffles your thinking, keeping the intellect away from the heart. Then the intellect is either enslaved by forgetfulness or induced to give its attention to all manner of things, insensibly becoming preoccupied with what it should ignore. If you see impure evil thoughts rising up and assuming various forms in your intellect, do not be startled. Even if images of good things appear to you, pay no attention to them. But restraining your breathing as much as possible and enclosing your intellect in your heart, invoke the Lord Jesus continuously and diligently and you will swiftly consume and subdue them, flaying them invisibly with the divine name.

Then Gregory relates a variety of authors on the use of the breath, it seems that one has to restrain the breath, for example breathing only from the nostrils “so as to not breathe easily.[291] Sitting on a stool is to make the practice more arduous, the practitioner must endure, but might sit on a mattress for a while.[292] Gregory addresses the question of silent or voiced prayer and the mantra to be uttered. He is lenient on this issue. The mantra of the Jesus Prayer may be said in full or in part, and both silent and loud prayers are fine.[293]

Concerning the outcome of this practice, Gregory, like earlier authors, gives warning against the readily perceived visions. One should concentrate on formless

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[291] Ibid., 264-66.

[292] Ibid., 275.

[293] “Some of the fathers advise us to say the whole prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy,' while others specify that we say it in two parts - 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy', and then 'Son of God, help me' - because this is easier, given the immaturity and feebleness of our intellect… Again, some fathers teach that the prayer should be said aloud; others, that it should be said silently with the intellect. On the basis of my personal experience I recommend both ways. For at times the intellect grows listless and cannot repeat the prayer, while at other times the same thing happens to the voice. Thus we should pray both vocally and in the intellect. But when we pray vocally we should speak quietly and calmly and not loudly, so that the voice does not disturb and hinder the intellect's consciousness and concentration. This is always a danger until the intellect grows accustomed to its work, makes progress and receives power from the Spirit to pray firmly and with complete attention. Then there will be no need to pray aloud - indeed, it will be impossible, for we shall be content to carry out the whole work with the intellect alone.” Ibid., 275-76.

remembrance.[294] Delusions are dangerous because "the intellect itself naturally possesses an imaginative power and in those who do not keep a strict watch over it can easily produce, to its own hurt, whatever forms and images it wants to."[295] Moreover the practitioner may suffer harm, be deceived, lose his wits, or worse yet, "from inexperience or ignorance say things that should not be said." He might "speak about truth … without being aware of what he is saying," or without being "in a position to give a correct account of things." Either referring to, or foreseeing, the Hesychast controversy, Gregory relates that this gives the hesychasts a bad name, bringing "abuse and ridicule on the heads of hesychasts."[296] Of the three later authors, Gregory of Sinai seems to be the one who is most cautious of direct religious experience following meditation. A wrong interpretation may both harm the practitioner by giving him false opinions and it may also give bad reputation to their profession.

Gregory of Sinai, also builds upon the saintly, spiritual superiority laid down by the authors before him:

> Only those who through their purity have become saints are spiritually intelligent in the way that is natural to man in his pre-fallen state. Mere skill in reasoning does not make a person's intelligence pure, for since the fall our intelligence has been corrupted by evil thoughts. The materialistic and wordy spirit of the wisdom of this world may lead us to speak about ever wider spheres of knowledge, but it renders our thoughts increasingly crude and uncouth. This combination of well-

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[294] "If while engaged in spiritual work you see a light or a fire outside you, or a form supposedly of Christ or of an angel or of someone else, reject it lest you suffer harm… The holy fathers teach that if the heart is in doubt about whether to accept something either sensory or conceptual that enters the soul, then that thing is not from God but has been sent by the devil. Moreover, if you become aware that your intellect is being enticed by some invisible power either from the outside or from above, do not trust in that power or let your intellect be so enticed, but immediately force it to continue its work. Unceasingly cry out: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy', and do not allow yourself to retain any concept, object, thought or form that is supposedly divine, or any sequence of argument or any color, but concentrate solely on the pure, simple, formless remembrance of Jesus. Then God, seeing your intellect so strict in guarding itself in every way against the enemy, will Himself bestow pure and unerring vision upon it and will make it participate in God and share in all other blessings." Ibid., 270.

[295] Ibid., 283.

[296] Ibid., 281-82.

> informed talk and crude thought falls far short of real wisdom and contemplation, as well as of undivided and unified knowledge. By knowledge of truth understand above all apprehension of truth through grace. Other kinds of knowledge should be regarded as images of intellections or the rational demonstration of facts.[297]

According to Gregory of Sinai, a true spiritual teacher, demonstrates things clearly, not by "mere verbal dexterity, like that of profane philosophers," but through enlightening others "through the contemplative vision of created things manifested to him by the Holy Spirit." Echoing Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), the Sufi scholar who will be discussed in the next chapter, Gregory related that "a true philosopher is one who perceives in created things their spiritual Cause, or who knows created things through knowing their Cause, having attained a union with God that transcends the intellect and a direct, unmediated faith: He does not simply learn about divine things, but actually experiences them." The true philosopher is not just the Christian, nor the one who follows the virtues of Christ, but one who has contemplative wisdom, and one who, we assume, has more or less direct access to God. He has learnt from God, "the principles of ascetic practice, an insight into the spiritual causes of created things," and most problematically for the controversy that was about to come, "a precise contemplative understanding of doctrinal principles (theology)."[298]

Anyone practicing the ascetic life, devoting himself to the contemplation of God and cleaving to stillness, becomes an interpreter of sacred texts. "An interpreter is one proficient in the practice of the ascetic life and still actively engaged in scriptural exegesis… A true philosopher is one who has attained, consciously and directly, a supernatural union with God." Gregory does not write these lines without the full knowledge of their implications. Later on he directly criticizes the Church. "Those who write and speak and who wish to build up the Church, while lacking the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are … worldly people void of the Spirit… Such people

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[297] Ibid., 212.

[298] Ibid., 245-46.

come under the curse which says, 'Woe to those who are wise in their own sight, and esteem themselves as possessors of knowledge;'[299] for they speak from themselves and it is not the Spirit of God that speaks in them."[300] Whereas the modern reader would be more inclined to regard theology expounded by philosophy to be more objective and the experience to be intensely subjective, Gregory does not think so:

> For those who speak what are simply their own thoughts before they have attained purity are deluded by the spirit of self-conceit… What people say when they speak on their own account is repellent and murksome, for their words do not come from the living spring of the Spirit, but are spawned from the morass of their own heart, a bog infested with the leeches, snakes and frogs of desire, delusion and dissipation; the water of their knowledge is evil-smelling, turbid and torpid, sickening to those who drink it and filling them with nausea and disgust.[301]

A stance against secular learning was encountered early on in Late Antiquity. Philosophy could be alien to Christian teachings, it was after all pagan in origin. Yet here Gregory does not even mention the pagan origins of secular wisdom. Reason itself was faulty to begin with. He stages on one hand "real wisdom" and "undivided and unified knowledge" acquired through the grace of God, and on the other the "well-informed talk and crude thought" acquired through the corrupt intelligence. Any knowledge that is attained not through the grace of God, but through one's self is "repellent and murksome." The stance against secular learning is focused now on the mode through which it is acquired, and it is reasonable to assume that this was only possible when some group had mastered another method of knowledge acquisition. In the same text Gregory also relates who is sanctioned for exegesis. "An interpreter of sacred texts adept in the mysteries of the kingdom of God is everyone who after practicing the ascetic life devotes himself to the contemplation of

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[299] Isaiah 5:21

[300] Matthew 10:20

[301] Gregory of Sinai, *On Stillness*, 246-47.

God and cleaves to stillness."[302] The meditative practice itself has become a prerequisite for the interpretation of sacred texts.

In the previous chapter, it was seen that the stage for the Hesychast controversy was set in the Middle Byzantine period. Practice was seen to gradually solidify in the eighth or ninth century with Hesychios, who nonetheless still listed several types. With Symeon the Studite the practice got rooted in the capital, and the hesychasts began to emerge more strongly as the spiritual elite. Symeon the Theologian in many ways exemplified this transformation of a mode of life that sought greater recognition and exhibited greater self-confidence. Unfortunately we do not know what Symeon taught to the elite group gathered around him. Through his disciple Niketas Stethatos, we perceive that the practice had developed to a point where Niketas felt necessary to elucidate on the unceasing prayer, recommending a focus not on the bodily stance but on the inner concentrations.

The stage might have been set, but the act seems to have been held in check by the Komneni. Yet the later codification of the practice under the Palaiologi points to the success of the practice. Palamas's comment that Nikephoros had seen many beginners incapable of controlling themselves is telling in this regard.

With the practice the monks were able to get glimpses of an inapprehensible God, something the intellect could not achieve on its own, and were not silent about their self-acknowledged superiority and authority in the matters of religion.

Lastly, I will investigate a parallel case of an intellectual attitude around a practice, the development of dhikr in the Islamic world to show, I hope, that an established, articulated meditative practice was instrumental in the development of a spiritual elite, against whom those well-versed in secular learning often could not compete in matters of religion.

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[302] Ibid.

CHAPTER 6: A PARALLEL CASE: DHIKR IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

Books! You are excellent guides, but it is absurd to trouble about a guide after the goal has been reached … The first step in this affair is the breaking of ink-pots and the tearing-up of books and the forgetting of all kinds of knowledge.

Abū Saʿīd ibn al-Khair

Arguments and proofs are of no use in deciding whether the Sufi approach should be rejected or accepted, since it belongs to the intuitive experience.

Ibn Khaldun

Dhikr[303] is a meditative practice in Islam that emerged with Sufism in ninth- and early-tenth-century Baghdad and was rapidly articulated with guidelines on both the procedure of dhikr and its outcome.[304] The term dhikr, and its derivates, are mentioned in about 250 qurʾānic verses, and even the Qurʾān itself is referred to as dhikr, a reminder. Other meanings can be remembering, mentioning, recollection, invocation.[305] The Qurʾān not only mentions dhikr, but it also encourages it in verses

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[303] Because dhikr is the subject of this chapter and will be referred to continually it will not be italicized.

[304] The dhikr emerging in this period was less clearly articulated, yet it seems that it already had some variants. The dhikr related by Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896), which will be touched upon below, is one of silent, solitary dhikr. According to Böwering, the later dhikr sessions in Sufi orders (*ṭarīqas*) of the 12th century are thought to have developed from this solitary dhikr. Yet the direct development from solitary to communal, gathering dhikr seems to be problematic. Already by the 10th century, Baghdad sufis were congregating in urban locales, developing distinctive rituals of dhikr in connection with auditions of poetry and music (samāʿ) that led to ecstasy. And even earlier in the life of Junayd (d. 910) at the end of the 9th century, communal dhikr is mentioned. Junayd was a proponent of a more sober method of Sufism in line with the urban life. Apparently, one of his disciples used to shriek whenever he heard of any dhikr. Junayd threatened to dismiss him if he did so again. Fearing dismissal, the disciple put so much restraint on himself that sweat would trickle from every hair on his body whenever he heard of dhikr. Finally one day the unfortunate disciple uttered a loud cry and expired. The dhikr, it seems was also intimately connected with samāʿ, auditions at gatherings from the end of the 9th century onwards, and may have emerged as a both solitary and communal practice. Gerhard Böwering, "Dekr, in Sufism" in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (1994) (www.iranica.com); Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism, The Formative Period* (California: University of California Press, 2007), 20; Al-Sarraj (d. 988), Kitab al-Luma fi'l-tasawwuf, translated by Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (Leyden: Brill, 1914), 73.

[305] Böwering, "Dekr, in Sufism."

such as: “remember Allah with much remembrance,”[306] or “remember your lord within yourself humbly and with awe, without raising your voice, mornings and evenings.”[307] The impetus and the legitimization for a practice of dhikr seems to be there from the start. The concept of dhikr was there, but it did not stand alone: *duʿāʾ*, regular prayers of *ṣalāt*, *samāʿ* and any kind of activity which reminded one of God, could be a dhikr. Dhikr could be combined with some of these practices such as *samāʿ*, furthermore it could be in competition with some of them.[308]

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[306] 33:41
يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ اٰمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا

[307] 7:205
وَاذْكُر رَّبَّكَ فِي نَفْسِكَ تَضَرُّعًا وَخِيفَةً وَدُونَ الْجَهْرِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ بِالْغُدُوِّ وَالْآصَالِ

[308] *Fikr*, a more intellectual reflection, was one of these. Al-Ḥallāj (857-922), related that the way to God was through “the garden of Dhikr,” which was equal to the way of *fikr*, whereas many later Sufis would downplay *fikr*, preferring dhikr instead. Ghazālī (1058-1111) in *Revival of the Religious Sciences* will relate that *tafakkur* (meditation) surpasses dhikr (invocation) and *tadhakkur* (remembrance), “for *fikr* (reflection) is dhikr with something else added.” Also in the 12th century, another Sufi figure, Ahmad-i Jam (d. 1141-42), showed preference to *fikr* rather than dhikr. For those who had advanced to the level that they were now living in the spiritual realm (*ʿālam-i bāṭin*) and had knowledge of the heart, *fikr* was better than dhikr. For those who were just starting, however, dhikr was more preferable: “for the seeker to practice contemplation at this stage would be like a man setting out on a dark, cloudy night, on route unknown and unfamiliar… To be occupied with dhikr is more beneficial for him, since dhikr softens the heart, illumines the eye of the heart, and unlocks the heart’s *fikr*.” Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism, A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 317; Muhammad Isa Waley, “Contemplative Disciplines in Early Persian Sufism,” in *The Heritage of Sufism* Vol. I, edited by Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 544-46.

Though parallels to hesychasm could also be found in Buddhism and in Judaism,[309] it was dhikr that grabbed the most attention of the scholars. Dhikr, on the whole, has been studied even less than hesychasm, here perhaps the lack of a

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[309] The Kabballah of Judaism, which had its formative period from the 12th to 13th century, traced its spiritual beginnings to 6th to mid-11th century Baghdad. At this early stage Judaism may have influenced Sufism in its formative period which also took place in Baghdad. Baghdad was the center of Jewish learning at the time, and some of the stories in the genre of *isra'illiyat*, tales of pious Israilites, are traced back to rabbinic sources. Tales of conversion of Jews to Islam under Sufi masters may also indicate a resemblance, or openness of Sufi ideals to previous Jewish teachings. More significantly some Sufi teachings, such as the hidden hierarchy of saints whose blessings sustain the world, are thought to originate in talmudic literature. This close relationship between Judaism and Islam continued in Muslim Spain where Ibn Arabi is related to have held discussions with a Jewish Rabbi on the nature of holy letters of the Holy Scriptures. It is related that Kabbalah emerged as a method of interpretation of Judaism at the end of the 12th century, countering Maimonidean intellectualism. In the later development of Kabbalah, some kabbalists and philosophers had contradictory views on interpretation of Judaism, while some others tried to consolidate the two outlooks. It is further noted that while kabbalists often had a negative view of philosophy, the dominant attitude of philosophers, at least in Iberia, was quite positive. In Spain, Abraham Abu'l-Afiyah (Abulafia) (d. after 1291) developed a meditative technique, called *hazkarah*, meaning 'remembrance,' recalling the Sufi ritual of dhikr both in name and method. After Spain, Egypt emerged as a strong center of Jewish mysticism where Abraham Maimonides, son of the rationalist philosopher Moses Maimonides, after the death of his father in Egypt became the spiritual leader of Egyptian Jewry, and later the political leader of the Jews. He admired the Sufis and claimed that the true dress of the ancient prophets of Israel was similar to the ragged garments worn by the Sufis. He adds: "do not regard as unseemly our comparison of that (the true dress of the prophets) to the conduct of the Sufis, for the latter imitate the prophets (of Israel) and walk in their footsteps not the prophets in theirs." He also relates that several Sufi practices, such as the investiture of the master's cloak, a Sufi ritual of initiation was practiced by the ancient saints (*awliya'*) of Israel. The Geniza Documents have also shed some light on the Sufi influence in Jewish mysticism. Works found in the geniza (storeroom) of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo include Muslim Sufi writings in Arabic or Hebrew of various authors such as Al-Junayd, Al-Qushayri, al-Hallaj, Al-Ghazali, and original writings by Jewish authors heavily influenced by Sufi themes. One of Abulafia's disciples wrote a book, called *Shaare Tsedek* (Gates of Justice), in 1295, possibly in Palestine, where he also talks about the Muslim meditative practices: "I … one of the lowliest, have probed my heart for ways of progress to spiritualization: the vulgar, the philosophic, and the Kabbalistic way. The vulgar way is that which, so I learned, is practiced by Moslem ascetics. They employ all manner of devices to shut out from their souls all natural forms, every image of the familiar, natural world. Then, they say, when a spiritual form, an image from the spiritual world, enters their soul, it is isolated in their imagination and intensifies the imagination to such a degree that they can determine beforehand that which is to happen to us. Upon inquiry, I learned that they summon the Name, Allah, as it is in the language of Ishmael. I investigated further and I found that, when they pronounce these letters, they direct their thought completely away from every possible natural form, and the very letters Allah and their diverse powers work upon them. They are carried off into a trance without realizing how, since no Kabbalah has been transmitted to them. This removal of all natural forms and images from the soul is called with them effacement (*maḥw*)." Joseph Dan, The Heart and the Fountain, An Anthology of Jewish Mystical Experiences (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 23; Paul B. Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism," in Medieval Jewish Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 201-208; Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Philosophy and kabbalah: 1200-1600," in Medieval Jewish Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 218; Gershom G. Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 146-47.

great controversy around this practice is to blame. In the literature on hesychasm a passing mention is often made concerning the similarities between the two practices. Both Steven Runciman and John Meyendorff point to the similarities between the two practices, but very briefly. [310] Meyendorff finds a distinction between the practices of hesychasm on one hand and yoga and dhikr on the other. Dhikr and yoga are physical techniques which immediately produce the desired effect, whereas in hesychasm the physical aspects are only auxiliary to the goal which is reached only by the grace of God.[311] Meyendorff sees the difference in the theology of grace and assumes, wrongly, that in dhikr the practitioner gets what he wants, whereas in hesychasm the destination is only reached by the grace of God.[312] Kallistos Ware, in a recent speech, differentiates between yoga and dhikr,

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[310] John Meyendorff: "On the other hand, one cannot deny the existence, especially in the later period under discussion, of some communication between Islam and Christianity on the level of spiritual practice and piety. It has been pointed out that a startling similarity exists between the Moslem *dhikr* - the invocation of the name of God connected with breathing - and the practices of the Byzantine hesychasts. Byzantine monasticism continued to flourish in Palestine and on Mount Sinai, while pilgrims continually visited the Holy Land. All this implies the existence of contacts that were other than polemical." John Meyendorff, "Byzantine Views of Islam," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964), 131. Steven Runciman: "It may be that influences from such Eastern sources penetrated into Byzantine monasticism. The traditional home of monastic meditation was the monastery of Sinai, which from its geographical situation was in intimate touch with the muslim world; and Muslim mysticism probably received influences through Persia from India. There was also a more direct route to Byzantium through Anatolia. The greatest of Persian mystics, Jelal ad-Din ar-Rumi, came in the 13th century to Konya, the ancient Iconium, where he wrote and taught and founded his sect of the Mevlevis, the Whirling Dervishes, who by the gyrations of the dance reach a state of ecstasy. Attitudes suitable for contemplation as well as breathing exercises were known to the Muslim Sufis. It is likely that there was an informal and unwritten interchange of practices between Christian and Muslim mystics." There was however a difference. "The Indian and, to a lesser extent, the Muslim mystic sought to induce a state of auto-hypnosis in which he could become the passive recipient of divinity…" Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 136.

[311] "The yoga and dhikr "are physical techniques, which by themselves and immediately produce the desired effect, whereas the hesychast method is never more than a means to gain attention and the silence of the spirit, and the practice of the virtues and fasting are specific conditions for it, it is the combination of these factors, of which breathing is by no means the most important, which make man receptive of grace." John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Press, 1998), 140.

[312] John Meyendorff, *St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Press, 1974), 59.

finding dhikr to be more familiar to hesychasm.[313] Unlike Meyendorff, he notes that for both exercises "union with God is entirely a free gift of grace." One small difference, according to Ware, is that dhikr is often performed collectively, whereas the Jesus Prayer is normally recited by the hesychast alone in the seclusion of his cell.[314]

As mentioned, dhikr emerged from the Sufi tradition forming in ninth-century Baghdad. Baghdad sufis had sought experiential knowledge through many interconnected methods: asceticism, seclusion, poverty, vigilant observation (*murāqaba*), hearing (*samāʿ*), and dhikr.[315] Though some of his other ideas on mystical experience were controversial,[316] Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896) taught that the constant recollection of God would assure the practitioner into the immediate presence of his Lord, and relive the experience of the primordial covenant between God and humanity, when the human race was made to bear testimony to his lordship.[317] He himself observed the method of recollecting God by repeating the mental prayer "God is my witness" (*Allahu shāḥidī*) and understood this recollection to be his daily nourishment.[318]

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[313] Kalistos Ware, "Identity and Difference in the Spiritual Life: Hesychasts, Yogis, and Sufis-Summary," Athens Dialogues (2010) <http://athensdialogues.chs.harvard.edu/cgi-bin/WebObjects/athensdialogues.woa/wa/dist?dis=71>

[314] He notes an exception: in the Orthodox Monastery of St. John the Baptist at Tolleshunt Knights in Essex, it turns out, "Jesus Prayer is said communally in church, for two hours each morning and for another two hours each evening."

[315] Karamustafa, *Sufism,* 19.

[316] He related that the mystic could experience a witnessing of God (*mukāshafa*) in his life through "the light of certitude" (*nūr al-yaqīn*) which God would grant him as a reward for his royalty and self-abnegation. This was found heretical by some authorities, as it was contrary to the mainstream doctrine of witnessing God only on the day of resurrection. Furthermore he also asserted the idea of the "light of Muhammad," which showed similarities to the role of Jesus in breaching the gap between humanity and the divine. He conceived Muhammad as a column of light, like a crystal drawing the divine light upon itself and projecting it onto humanity. This idea was distorted by the Ḥanbali circles to mean that the God would be seen on the day of resurrection in the form of a Muhammad-like being. See Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 86; and Böwering, "Early Sufism Between Persecution and Heresy," 59-62.

[317] Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism,* 86.

[318] Böwering, "Early Sufism Between Persecution and Heresy," 59-62.

By the tenth century dhikr was becoming more established. Al-Sarraj (d. 988) relates several variants such as the dhikr with the tongue and dhikr with the heart.[319] Al-Qusayrī (986-1072) expounded on the mystical states achieved by dhikr such as presence, unveiling, and witnessing.[320] He related that the continual dhikr of the tongue would eventually lead to the dhikr of the heart.[321] In another work attributed to Qushayri, he explained how to differentiate between thoughts that come from God and those from Satan, and how to navigate the turbulent mental states that occurred in dhikr.[322] The dhikr also had achieved a ritualistic component in the relationship between the Sufi spiritual guide, *shaykh,* and the disciple by the time of Qushayri. In his advice for sufi novices, he tells that the master would instruct the novice in a method of dhikr as he sees fit and command him to mention a certain name with his own tongue, ordering the heart of the aspirant to recollect God alongside with the

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[319] Al-Sarraj relates the three kinds of dhikr: dhikr with the tongue, which was rewarded tenfold, dhikr with the heart, rewarded sevenhundredfold, and "dhikr of which the reward is beyond weighing or counting, consisting as it does of being filled with love and with modesty because of nearness (to God)." He also relates the popular dhikr formulas such as "there is no God but God," or "glory be to God," or spiritual dhikr, concentrating of the heart upon God and his attributes. Dhikr is taken up by one of al-Sarraj's contemporaries, al-Kalabadhi (d. c. 995). He puts forth dhikr as the link to the primordial covenant between man and God. According to al-Kalabadhi, the people heard their first dhikr when God addressed them: "Am I not your Lord?" This dhikr lay dormant in their hearts until they heard the dhikr again, hence their reason for becoming ravished upon hearing the dhikr. Muhammad Isa Waley, "Contemplative Disciplines in Early Persian Sufism," in *The Heritage of Sufism* Vol. I, edited by Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 531; Al-Sarraj, *Kitab al-Luma fi'l-tasawwuf*, 61; Kenneth S. Avery, *A Psychology of Early Sufi samāʿ* (Routledge, 2004), 22

[320] Beginners first experience glimmers, dawnings and flashes, as "for them, these rays of the sun of divine knowledge do not last very long." Through dhikr a person first experiences presence (of the heart with God), followed by unveiling, and finally witnessing, in the presence of the Absolute Truth, "when the sky of the innermost heart is free from the clouds of veiling," and when "the lights of God's self-manifestation appear to the heart clearly and without interruption," like "an uninterrupted sequence of lighting in the middle of a dark night." Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri (986-1072), *Al-Risala al-qushayriyya fi 'ilm al-tasawwuf, Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism*, translated by Professor Alexander D. Knysh, reviewed by Muhammad Eissa (Garnet Publishing, 2007), 97-99.

[321] Ibid., 233.

[322] The work in question is *Tartib al-suluk* (the structure of wayfaring). Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 119.

heart.[323] Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111) talks about dhikr in detail in his work *Revival of the Religious Sciences*, in the chapter "Explanation on the Wonders of the Heart." He describes the solitary dhikr, beginning with how one retires alone to his room. He starts saying "Allah" unceasingly concomitantly with his heart until "he gives up moving his tongue and sees the word as though it were flowing on his tongue." Then the dhikr passes from the tongue to the heart, at all times obliterating the level behind its advance. Then by the grace of God "the gleams of the Truth will shine in his heart."[324] Dhikr was elaborated on by the later authors of this period who wrote

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[323] The shaykh should tell the novice: "keep this remembrance with you constantly as if you were always present with God in your heart." Though the novice may experience "evil whisperings" at first, he should persevere, so that "before long the lights of his acceptance would being to shine in his heart and the suns of arrival would rise in his innermost self." Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri, *Al-Risala al-qushayriyya fi 'ilm al-tasawwuf*, 407.

[324] "He patiently endures it until its trace disappears from his tongue and he finds his heart steadily applied to remembrance. Then he perseveres in this until there is effaced from his heart the image and letters of the expression and the form of the word, and the meaning of the word remains bare in his heart, present in it as though cleaving to it and not parting from it… He has freedom of choice until he reaches this terminus and a freedom to seek to prolong this state by repelling the whisperings (of Satan), but he has no freedom in seeking to attract the mercy of God Most High. Rather, by what he does he becomes exposed to the gusts of God's mercy and it remains for him only to await the mercy which God will open to him as He opened it to the Prophets and Saints by this way." The outcome of the practice depends on, to use Christian terminology, the grace of God. "At this point, if his will is sincere and his intention pure and his perseverance proper, and he is not pulled by his passions or distracted by inner concern with worldly attachments, the gleams of the Truth will shine in his heart. In its beginning it will be like rapid lighting and will not remain. Then it will return and it may tarry. And if it returns, it may remain, and it may be snatched away. And if it remains, it may, or may not be prolonged. And the likes of it may be manifested in close succession, and it may be limited to a single kind. The abodes of God Most High's Saints in it are innumerable just as the difference of their natural disposition and character cannot be reckoned. This way definitely comes down to sheer purification on your part and purgation and burnishing, then to readiness and waiting, nothing more." Al-Ghazālī, *Ihya Ulm ad-Din*, "Kitab Sharh Ajaib al-Qalb," in Al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance from Error*, translated by R. J. McCarthy (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2000), 323-324.

about the physical aspects of dhikr and the preparatory rituals.[325] Ibn ʿArabī (1165-1240) begins his work, *Treatise on the Lights in the Secrets Granted One Undertaking Retreat* (*Risālat-ul-Anwār fimā yumnah ṣāḥib al-khalwa min al-asrār*), edited in 1204/5 in Konya, with the retreat. After retreating, the practitioner should occupy himself with dhikr, whatever sort he chooses. Yet the highest dhikr is the greatest name, 'Allah,' saying 'Allah Allah' and nothing beyond 'Allah.' One should also protect himself from the corrupt imaginings that might distract from dhikr. The psychosomatic aspects of dhikr are taken into account by Ibn ʿArabī.[326] As the body affects the outcome of dhikr, the dhikr in turn affects the body, which is a good thing yet the practitioner has to distinguish between angelic and demonic influences.[327]

Ibn ʿArabī goes into great detail concerning the actual experience in dhikr. The mental states encountered in dhikr appear as tests, through which one must always persevere to achieve the next level. If for example a form should appear and say "I am God," the practitioner has to say "far exalted be God above that," and turn

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[325] According to Najm al-Din Razi (1177-1256) in preparation for dhikr one had to perform a major ablution (*ghusl*), put on clean clothes, prepare an empty chamber, and preferably burn some fragrance. Then one had to sit cross-legged, facing the qibla. Najm al-Din Razi continues: While performing the dhikr, the disciple should put his hands on his thighs, concentrate his heart, close his eyes, and then with total reverence begin to utter the formula 'la ilaha illa'llah' with al his might. He must bring the words 'la ilaha' up from the navel and direct the words 'illa'llah' down to the heart in such a way that the effect and power of the invocation reach all parts of his body." Najm al-Din Razi is talking here about the silent dhikr. The practitioner "is not to raise his voice, however, but must keep it as hidden and as low as he can," and he relates the *Qurānic* command to remember the Lord inwardly in silence. Muhammad Isa Waley, "Contemplative Disciplines in Early Persian Sufism," in The Heritage of Sufism Vol. I, edited by Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 533.

[326] He advises to pay attention to the diet: "It is better if your food be nourishing but devoid of animal fat. Beware of satiation and excessive hunger. Keep your constitution in balance, for if dryness is excessive, it leads to corrupt imaginings and long, delirious ravings." Ibn ʿArabī (1165-1240), *Risālat-ul-Anwār fimā yumnah ṣāḥib al-khalwa min al-asrār (Treatise on the Lights in the Secrets-Granted-One who Undertakes Retreat)*, translated by Rabia Terri Harris, *Journey to the Lord of Power* (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 1981, 1989), 30-31.

[327] "If there should be an influence which alters the constitution - and that is desirable - distinguish between angelic and demonic spiritual influences by what you find in yourself when they come to an end. That is, if the influence is angelic it is followed by coolness and bliss, you will not be aware of any pain, ... and influence leaves knowledge. But if it is demonic, pain and distress, bewilderment... ensue and it leaves mental disorder. Protect yourself, and do not cease repeating the dhikr in your heart, until God drives the demonic influence from it." Ibid.

his attention away from the form and occupy himself with dhikr. An intense concentration and a willful attitude in meditation was encountered in the Byzantine tradition early on, as Mark the Ascetic in the fifth or sixth century had advocated a fight against stumbling blocks encountered during intense prayer, advising the practitioner not to accept the knowledge of created things that would lure the practitioner from "what is greater." Ibn ʿArabī prescribes a similar attitude, whatever is offered during dhikr, the practitioner has to persist.[328] In the final stage of dhikr, the remembered manifests himself to the practitioner, and "calling him to memory is effaced in the actual recollection of him." Yet this final stage, this 'vanishing of dhikr,' seems to be a bit tricky as the sensation is very much like going to sleep.[329] During a session of dhikr one also receives knowledge and Ibn ʿArabī relates what one must do with the information received. The secrets attained through dhikr are to be kept secret.[330]

Ibn ʿAṭa Allah (d. 1309), who wrote the "first systematic treatise" on dhikr, was born in mid-thirteenth-century Egypt. His grandfather was a jurist. His father, however, had been a disciple of al-Shadhili (1196-1258), who had formed a Sufi order more in line with the urban ideals, rejecting asceticism and the wearing of special clothing to distinguish themselves.[331] Ibn ʿAṭa Allah was well-educated and

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[328] "If everything in the universe should be spread before you, receive it graciously - but do not stop there. Persist in your quest, for he is testing you. If you stay with what is offered, he will escape you. But if you attain him, nothing will escape you." Ibid., 32.

[329] "The way to distinguish between them is that contemplation leaves its evidence and is followed by bliss, whereas sleep leaves nothing and is followed, on awakening, by remorse and the asking of forgiveness." Ibid., 36.

[330] "What he first discloses to you is his gift of command over the material order… It is the unveiling of the sensory world which is hidden from you, so that walls and shadow do not veil you from what people are doing in their houses. However, if God has informed you of anyone's secret, you are obliged to preserve it from exposure… So act in accordance with the divine name as-Sattār, the veiler." Ibid., 35.

[331] Danner, *The Key to Salvation*, 9; Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism,* 207-210.

the more accommodating aspects of the Shadhiliyya served him well.[332] Ibn ʿAṭa Allah was able to continue his career in *fiqh*, eventually becoming a Maliki jurist teaching in the al-Azhar mosque and privately in his *zāwiya.* As mentioned, Ibn ʿAṭa Allah's work is the first to devote its whole to the subject of dhikr.[333] He composed the work because he had not seen anyone who had written "an adequate and complete book or compiled a clear and comprehensive treatise on it."[334] The work promises to be "accessible to those desirous of spiritual gifts, hoping for reward," and overall it is quite accessible, including even short summaries at the end of some chapters. Ibn ʿAṭa Allah promises that "whosoever perseveres in the invocation will find that lights come to him constantly and that the veils of invisible things are lifted from him."

Throughout the work Ibn ʿAṭa Allah stresses the importance of the *shaykh* in the spiritual development of the seeker.[335] In other parts of the book various advices are given to the *shaykh*s concerning which dhikr formula to use for particular situations.[336] In his work, dhikr emerges both as a broad Islamic attitude and as a particular practice, a more focused version of this general outlook on life. Dhikr may take many forms, *duʿāʾ*, remembrance of the prophets or saints, reciting the *Qurān*,

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[332] "When troubled between his choice of career as a jurist and Sufism, his shaykh had told him: "If a merchant associates with us, we do not say to him, "leave your trade and come," or to an artisan, we do not say to him, 'leave your craft and come or to a student leave your studies and come, rather we take everyone as he is." Danner, *The Key to Salvation*, 2-6.

[333] Victor Danner, "Introduction, The Book of Wisdom," in *Ibn ʿAṭa Allah, The Book of Wisdom, Kwaja Abdullah Ansari, Intimate Conversations*, translated and introduced by Victor Danner and Wheeler M. Thackston (Paulist Press, 1978), 29-30.

[334] Ibid., 43-44.

[335] Apart from the figure of the *shaykh*, the saints are also stressed in the work. If the saints "were to err with a quantity of mistakes equal to the earth's weight, while not associating anyone with God, He would meet them with an equal amount of forgiveness.It is forbidden to wage war against someone whose sanctity is established." Ibid., 121.

[336] For example the *shaykh* should order the novice to invoke *al-Mukarram* (the honored) when the disciple has a low opinion of himself, or *al-Kabīr* (the great) when the manifestation of the nearness of God overcomes the disciple. Still other invocations such as 'the pardoner,' 'the virtuous' are recommended for the regular people, implying the teachings of the *shaykh* on the practice of *dhikr* would not be limited to a select group of disciples. Ibid., 85.

mentioning God's name, listening to poetry, song, conversation, or a story, may be dhikr. Thus, not just a Sufi but a theologian, a jurist, teacher, mufti or a preacher also remembers God.[337] The book, in fact, goes into detail not just in the practice of dhikr as we know it but also the dhikr aspects of the regular phrases used in the Islamic world. Then he goes into the practice itself and describes the general rules of conduct to be followed before dhikr,[338] the procedure to be followed in dhikr,[339] and the accompanying experiences.[340]

Later in the work, Ibn ʿAṭa Allah talks about *maʿrifa*, defined as "the perception of something as it is in its essence and attributes."[341] The type of *maʿrifa* and knowledge are regarded as the basis of judgement for the soul after death.[342]

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[337] Ibid., 45.

[338] Some of these are a general observation of repentance and self-discipline, refining inner nature, semi-withdrawal, and asceticism, as all are urged anyway. Then Ibn ʿAṭa Allah also recommends the wearing of proper, clean, sweet-smelling clothes and maintaining the purity of the stomach by eating lawful food. Although the invocation expels the parts arising from unlawful food, ensured Ibn ʿAṭa Allah, nevertheless, when the stomach is empty of unlawful food or whatever is doubtful, the benefit of invocation is in a greater or more lasting illumination of the heart. Other rules of conduct include: perfuming the place "for the sake of angels and jinn," sitting cross legged facing the qibla (if alone), placing the palms on the thighs, closing the eyes and facing straight ahead. If one is under the direction of a *shaykh*, one can also imagine him in front of himself. If the dhikr is to be done in an assembly, then they have to raise their voices in unison while invoking in a rhythmically balanced manner. If the practitioner is of advanced level, he may lower his voice. Ibid., 62-69.

[339] Though one who invokes in the heart does not need any rules, for the one who is at the early stages, Ibn ʿAṭa Allah recommends the following: The novice should invoke, with perfect force and respectful veneration. 'La ilaha illa'llah' should rise from above his navel. By the phrase 'la ilaha' he should intend excluding from the heart what is other-than-God. By the phrase but God, he should intend uniting the formula with the cone-shaped physical heart so as to fix 'illa'llah' firmly in the heart and let it flow throughout all the members of the body, causing the meaning of the invocation to be present in his heart at every instant. Ibid., 70-72.

[340] At first dhikr occurs in the area of the head, and one experiences the sound of cymbals and horns, as well as various other noises: rippling of water, wind blowing, fire blazing, sound of windmill, horses galloping, leaves rustling in the wind. In the next stage, dhikr of the heart, there is a sensation of a buzzing of a bee. Finally in the final stage (*dhikru's-sirr*), the heart is possessed by the invoked and the invoker is effaced. One quits the dhikr but dhikr does not quit him. One feels as if his head and limbs are bound as if shackled with chains. Another sign is that the spiritual lights never disappear, rather one always sees lights ascending and descending while the fires around the practitioner blaze and burn. Ibid., 48-50.

[341] Ibid., 112.

[342] Ibid.,113.

Maʿrifa in the general sense is possessed by all in creation which affirm the Being, the second more particular type, however, is a state that arises from contemplation.[343] In an elliptic fashion, Ibn ʿAṭa Allah also points out how important the practice of dhikr would be in acquiring status in the afterlife.

The roots of hesychasm were related to go back to as early as the fourth century to the intense prayer found in the works of Evagrios Pontikos. Dhikr started much later in the late ninth and tenth centuries. Although the practices around the use of the Jesus Prayer in hesychasm had a head-start, it lingered on, whereas dhikr had a more vigorous development both in the systematization and the articulation of the experiences it entailed. Though hesychastic practices began to emerge in the eight or ninth century, the texts on the practices were still vague before the thirteenth century in comparison with Sufi treatises which had begun to describe the practice in detail from the eleventh century onwards. Furthermore, an author such as Ibn ʿAṭa Allah who puts the practice in a social context has no counterpart in Byzantium.

The less vigorous development of hesychasm, I believe, has to do with the lesser urbanization of hesychasm in comparison with dhikr that had already emerged within the urban Sufism. The Christian ascetics who claimed to have run as far as possible from society still maintained urban contacts, yet practicing hesychasm in the desert with occasional contacts with local cities is different from performing it in Constantinople. There, both the concentration of practitioners, possible lay audience and participants ought to be greater in number, gathering a greater interest in the practice. An urban hesychasm was noted from the tenth century onwards, but still the center of hesychasm remained Mount Athos rather than Constantinople.

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[343] Ibid., 112-13.

Dhikr seems to have made a more socially transcribed position for itself in the Islamic world. The work of Ibn ʿAṭa Allah shows a practice that had diffused into social life. The social position of Sufism that had largely abandoned its ascetic origins early on in contrast to Christian monasticism which was more strict in its compliance to ascetic ideals may be the reason for this greater socialization and urbanization.[344] Sufism emerged in a much different milieu, yet displayed similar attitudes with regard to other intellectual practices around it.

Sufism emerging in ninth-century Baghdad drew supporters from the respectable middle and upper urban classes who could accommodate sufism within their daily life.[345] Their political views would be centrist or inactive, on religious issues they would often side with the traditionalists or the "semi-rationalist" schools of thought.[346] Their centrist position can be partly explained by their renunciatory

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[344] To what extent Christian monasticism or asceticism played a role in the development of Sufism is unclear. The Qurān itself praises monasticism in a few sūras, such as 5-82, "Of all people, they who say, "Behold, we are Christians," come closest to feeling affection for those who believe [in this divine writ]: this is so because there are priests and monks among them, and because these are not given to arrogance," revealing that the readily available monastic example was pondered early on. The intimacy of the Baghdadi elite and the monastic establishments has been noted in the late tenth century, possibly alluding to such a relationship earlier. Even before the crystallization of the ascetic traditions under Sufism in ninth-century Baghdad, the monks could be influential upon their fellow ascetics in the new Islamic tradition. One such story concerns a Muslim ascetic who had settled in Syria and, to avoid the crowds coming for his blessing, had sought to live in the desert. In the desert, al-Balkhi (d. 777-78) had contact with a Christian ascetic who instructed him on inner wisdom and the social benefits of ascetic life. Some of the seventh and eighth century Muslim ascetics were known as the "monks of the community." Their clothing was one eye-catching similarity to the monks around them as the wool, worn by these ascetics, was often associated with Christianity. Al-Sabakhī (d. 749), was of Armenian Christian origin, and his wearing of wool was denounced by a visitor from Kufa as a sign of his residual Christianity. Similarly, Ibn Sīrīn (d. 728) criticized the wearing of wool as an imitation of Christian monks. This wearing of wool would spread from Baṣra and Kufa to Baghdad where it would, possibly, give its name to the newly developing ascetic tradition, as the term *ṣūfiyya* is thought to originate from the Arabic word for wool, *ṣūf.* Jack Boulos Victor Tannous, "Syria between Byzantium and Islam: Making Incommensurables Speak," Ph. D. thesis (Princeton University, 2010), 549; Michael Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1996), 128-29; A. J. Arberry, *Sufism, An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London: George Allen & Unwim ltd., 1950), 37; Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism, A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 15-16.

[345] Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 23-24.

[346] Ahmet Karamustafa points out that figures such as al-Ḥallāj (d. 922) were marginal and outside the norm. Ibid., 24.

mode of piety, and partly by the strand of thought that would later come to full-flowering, a disdain for the use of reason in religious matters. Often coming from highly literate, intellectual backgrounds, these early sufis may have been building upon the Christian skepticism of philosophy. They were especially critical of the theological disputes of the Muʿtazila,[347] often aligning with the traditionalist schools such as the Ḥanbalis, who chose to rely on *ḥadīth* rather than reason in legal and theological matters.[348]

Early on the Sufis had to contend with other intellectual traditions which did not necessary correspond with the sufism methods or ideals. With the Abbasids (750-1258) and the shift of the cultural center to Baghdad, the great translation movement had gained speed in the reign of al-Māʾmūn (r. 813-33), the second son of Harun al-Rashid. He had founded the *House of Wisdom* in 830, which made the translation of philosophical texts into Arabic a priority.[349] With this movement the ninth century also saw the first original philosophical authors in the Islamic tradition,

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[347] The theological rationalism of the Muʿtazila had its root in Islamic philosophy which had also emerged in ninth-century Baghdad. Whereas Sufism was also building upon both the example of the ascetic philosopher and certain strands of philosophy such as Neoplatonism, Islamic philosophy, or *falsafa*, was through less derivate and more direct channels, branded more easily with an essential foreignness. There were already major routes through which philosophical works came into the Islamic world. One such route could have been through Persia. In 529 the Byzantine emperor Justinian had closed the School of Athens because of its pagan connotations. Seven teachers were received by the Persian king Chosroes I, a.k.a Anushirwan, who then founded the School of Gundishapur. when Baghdad became the capital of the Abbasid empire in 762, Gundishapur provided the Abbasid caliphs with court physicians. Another center was Alexandria, the center of Neoplatonism in the third and fourth centuries was in the Islamic Empire by the mid-seventh century. Perhaps most significantly, Syriac scholars were active in Syria and Upper Iraq in such centers as Antioch, Harran, Edessa, Qinnesrin and Nisibin, and many translations into Arabic could be from Syriac rather than directly from Greek. The reason for philosophy itself could be due to several reasons. It was partly the natural outcome of the intellectual heritage that Islamic culture had inherited. Furthermore, the methods of philosophy could help untangle the “ambiguous” verses in Qurān. As related in 3-5,7 ““It is He who has revealed the Book to you... Some of its verses are sound and are the mother of the book, and some are ambiguous (*mutashābihāt*). The application of philosophy to theology had also its uses in the political arena, in discussions on the free will or whether individuals, such as the Umayyad caliphs, were responsible for their actions. See Tannous, “Syria between Byzantium and Islam;” Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism* (Boston: One World Publications, 1997), 1-2, 13-15; Fakhry, “Philosophy and Theology from the Eighth Century C.E. to the Present,” 272.

[348] Karamustafa, Sufism, 21-22.

[349] Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*, 7-8.

such as al-Kindi (d. c. 866). Trying to justify philosophy and give it and its practitioners a good reputation, he relates philosophy as "the highest and noblest of human arts," as "the knowledge of the First, who is the cause of every truth." Trying to legitimize the foreign roots of philosophy, he urged to seek the truth from whatever source it emanated. Philosophy could be a handmaid of religion, the revelational truth summoned by the prophets could be demonstrated by rational arguments. Furthermore, in some cases, as in the ambiguous passages in the Qurān, it was even necessary. This view was shared by the Muʿtazila camp, but not the Mālikīs, Ḥanbalīs and other literalists.[350]

The rise of the rationalist Muʿtazila was also associated with the rise of theology, *kalam,* in the ninth century. The patronage of philosophy and rationalist thought did not last very long. Al-Kindi himself had enjoyed the patronage of caliphs al-Māʾmūn, al-Mu'taṣim and Al-Wāthiq, who identified themselves with the theological rationalism of the Muʿtazila. The imposition of the Muʿtazila position on the created nature of the *Qurān* resulted in the inquisition, *miḥna*, of 827-33. Yet this picture changed with the accession of al-Mutawakkil in 847.[351] During these early years, the theologians, jurists, and the sufis did clash. One such sufi, Dhū'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 859-62), had to contend with opposition from the Muʿtazila and the *Mālikī* jurists who condemned him for public preaching on the mystical experience, and during the inquisition he was even forced to leave Egypt.[352]

Thus, ninth-century Baghdad would see not only the rise of Sufism but also of philosophy and theology, where the practitioners of these disciplines had to fight for public legitimacy and political support. One response of the emerging Sufism to

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[350] Ibid., 23-24.

[351] Ibid., 64-65.

[352] Gerhard Böwering, "Early Sufism Between Persecution and Heresy," in *Islamic Mysticism Contested, Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, edited by Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 57.

this competition was the depreciation of reason and philosophy. The intimate knowledge of God was set as one of the main goals of Sufism early on. When al-Nūrī (d. 907-8) was asked by which means he knew God, he replied: "by God." When asked on the use of reason, he retorted: "reason is weak and can only lead to something that is weak like itself."[353] Concomitant with this depreciation, the notion of the 'select' was gaining ground. Already in the eighth century, ʿAbd al-Walīd ibn Zayd (d. c. 750) would relate that God would impart to his righteous friends (*awlīyāʾ*) the internal, secret knowledge (*ʿilm al-bāṭin*) of himself and of the world, placing him above other mortals, just below the prophets.[354] The previously mentioned Dhū'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī, opposed by the Maliki jurists and exiled by the *Muʿtazila*, was considered as one of the founding fathers of Sufism. He would distinguish three kinds of knowledge: that of the ordinary believer, that of the scholars and sages, and that of God's friends "who see God with their hearts."[355] It was not the theologian, the jurist or the philosopher who had the upper hand but the sufi, and the sufis legitimized this superiority by their experiential knowledge (*maʿrifa*).

This Sufi tradition developing in the second half of the ninth century in Baghdad as an urban expression of the ascetic, experiential mode of religious piety, during the course of the tenth century spread to other cultural centers of the empire, blending with other indigenous traditions.[356] The movement had caught on, as in the tenth century the Sufi texts would relate that there had been a surge in the number of those interested in Sufism, and those who had even begun to imitate the Sufis.[357] Like the spiritual guides stressed by the Byzantine authors such as Nikephoros,

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[353] Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 11-15.

[354] Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 16.

[355] Ibid., 41.

[356] Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 56.

[357] Ibid., 67.

Sufism began to be organized around individual *shaykh*s[358] and special places of congregation for the Sufis began to appear.[359] Furthermore, the late tenth and early eleventh centuries emerged as the period of construction and consolidation of the Sufi tradition with treatises, histories and apologetic works justifying sufism and its practices, relating also their concordance with the mainstream doctrines.[360] The twelfth century saw further institutionalization in Sufism with the emergence of the *ṭarīqa*s. [361]

One strategy of justifying the Sufi tradition rested on the *ḥadīth* of the prophet, that the scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) of his community were the only legitimate heirs. Al-Sarraj (d. 988) would proceed to group these scholars into three subgroups: *ḥadīth* experts (*ahl al-ḥadīth*), jurists (*fuqahāʾ*) and Sufis; disregarding the theologians or the philosophers. Of the three groups of scholars, the first two were only focused on the outer, general realities of faith. Only the Sufis possessed the

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[358] As the organization took shape around individual *shaykh*s, the pedigree of the *shaykh*s came to prominence, and spiritual genealogies, *silsila*, emerged at the end of the 10th century. This central role of the *shaykh* would continue in the 11th century, and in the 12th century service to the *shaykh* would be related as being better than worship or that one who did not have a *shaykh* did not have a religion. Karamustafa, Sufism, 116-17.

[359] Though the first sufis in Baghdad had met in residences or in mosques, from the mid-10th century onwards special places of sufi congregations begin to appear, eventually emerging as ribāṭs in Syria, Southwestern Iran and Arabia, *khānaqāhs* in Khorasan and as duwayya, buqa and zāwiya in other regions. Ibid., 121.

[360] Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism,* 116.

[361] Until the end of the 10th century, the Sufi practice was still propagated along loose teacher-disciple relationships, when an aspirant could attend the sermons of various teachers. From the end of the 10th century onwards, a more intimate relationship began to appear. The teachers began to expect greater loyalty from their students, and their particular teaching methods began to be known as 'the way' or *ṭarīqa*. From the 12th century onwards *ṭarīqa*s emerged as the main institution of the experiential mode of piety in Islam. This institutionalized form of Sufism, emerging under Seljuk rule, continued to attract donations form the Mongols and Mamluks, ensuring a strong economic basis for the dissemination of the Sufi mode of piety in the later periods. With this greater institutionalization, various *ṭarīqa*s began to stress their spiritual genealogies (*silsila*), rules of admission, instructions on seclusion, and instructions on dhikr, and the particular formulas to be pronounced. Al-Qushayri in the 11th century had mentioned that the *shaykh* would give a particular formula to the novice to practice his dhikr with. This tradition developed further with emerging *ṭarīqa* structure. The *ṭarīqas began to use specific* dhikr formula for their novices. In the admission of a novice into the order, the teacher would solemnly disclose to the novice a dhikr in a ceremony called the recitation of dhikr (*talqin al-dhikr*). Karamustafa, *Sufism, 125;* Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism,* 172-73, 176.

applied knowledge, only they were able to live up to the high standards of piety, thus were the spiritual elite (*al-khaṣṣa*) of the community.[362]

Gregory Palamas had written that those who were practicing inner prayer had no need of words, as they knew by experience and did not had to agree with those who sought thing in a merely theoretical way.[363] In a similar line, according to Al-Qusayrī (986-1072), living several generations later, people cultivated either received knowledge or knowledge based on reason. But the masters of Sufism had risen above both these options: "what is hidden from people is manifest for them, and the knowledge that others aim at they already posses as a gift from God. They are the people of attainment, (while) everyone is (still) seeking proof."[364] These sufis had a gift which enabled them to rise above the jurists, people of received knowledge, and philosophers, people of reason.

Some of these themes are encountered in the life of Abū Saʿīd ibn al-Khair (967-1049), who lived slightly earlier than al-Qusayri (986-1072).[365] Abū Saʿīd studied theology in Marv into his late twenties and then came to Sarakhs to continue his education. There, after converting to sufism, he abandoned his education on

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[362] Ibid., 119-20; Karamustafa, *Sufism,* 68.

[363] "For as all who have experienced ascetical combat, sensation painful to the touch is of greatest benefit to those who practice inner prayer. They have no need here of words, for they know by experience, and do not agree with those who seek such things merely in a theoretical way, for they regard this as "the knowledge that puffs up." Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), *For the Defense of Those Who Practice Sacred Quietude* (1338-1341), *Défense des saints hésychastes*, edited and introduced by John Meyendorff, (2nd edition, 1973), *Gregory Palamas, The Triads*, translated by Nicholas Gendle (Paulist Press, 1983), 48

[364] Karamustafa, *Sufism,* 99.

[365] Al-Sarraj of the previous generation is included in his spiritual lineage: Muhammad, the Prophet → Ali (d. 661) → Hasan of Baṣra (d. 728) → Habib Ajami (d. 737) → Dawud Tai (d. 781) → Maruf Karkhi (d. 815) → Sari Saqati (d. 867) → Junayd of Baghdad (d. 909) → Murtaish of Baghdad (d. 939) → Abu Nasr al-Sarraj of Tus (d. 988) → Abu'l-Fadl Hasan of Sarakhs → Abū Saʿīd ibn Abi'l-Khayr. R. A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1921), 100.

theology and jurisprudence.[366] He duly buried all his books, putting a stone on the mound and planting a myrtle twig there. Echoing his near contemporary Symeon the Theologian[367], he reportedly said: “Books! You are excellent guides, but it is absurd to trouble about a guide after the goal has been reached … The first step in this affair (sufism) is the breaking of ink-pots and the tearing-up of books and the forgetting of all kinds of (intellectual) knowledge.”[368]

After he returned to his home in Mayhana, he began saying continuously “Allah Allah Allah,” and whenever he left tired or drowsy he would see an apparition, a soldier with a spear, who would command him “O Abū Saʿīd say Allah.”[369] This intense dhikr continued for seven years in solitary retirement, and after he returned to Sarakhs, it took the form of solitary confinement in the cell opposite his *shaykh*. The confinement of the cell proved unsatisfactory for Abū Saʿīd, who proceeded to make an excavation in the cell to stand up in and putting a door on this small cave,

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[366] In Sarakhs he was led to a convent, in which the *shaykh* told him that all the 124.000 prophets were sent to preach one word: Allah. Some heard this word with their ear alone and some had it imprinted on their souls and repeated it until their whole being became this word, having understood the spiritual meaning of this word. They were so absorbed in it that they became unconscious of their own existence. After this encounter with sufism, Abū Saʿīd went back to his studies and his teacher realized something different in his student. Learning that he had went to the sufi *shaykh*, he told him that it was unlawful for him to come from that subject to this discourse Ibid., 6-8.

[367] “Anyone who thinks himself intelligent because of his scholarly or scientific learning will never be granted insight into divine mysteries unless he first humbles himself and becomes a fool, discarding both his presumption and the knowledge that he has acquired. But if he does this and with unhesitating faith allows himself to be led by those wise in divine matters, he will enter with them into the city of the living God. Guided and illumined by the divine Spirit, he will see and learn what others cannot ever see or learn. He will then be taught by God.” Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022), in G. E. H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware and Philip Sherrard, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol.4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 46-47.

[368] Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 21.

[369] Ibid., 6-8.

and stuffing his ears with cotton wool so that no disturbing sound might reach him, and his attention might remain concentrated.[370]

The stance against scholarship encountered in Abū Saʿīd's life was absolute but only personal. Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), however, was more vocal and articulate in his writings with regard to scholarship and the proper stance against it. Al-Ghazālī was introduced to philosophy through the works of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. In 1091, Niẓām al-Mulk appointed the thirty-three-year-old al-Ghazālī to the Nizamiyya *madrasa* he had founded in Baghdad. Al-Ghazālī first wrote the *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa* (The Aims of the Philosophers), followed by his criticism of philosophy in *Tafāhut al-Falāsifa* (Incoherence of the Philosophers) in 1095. After leaving his position in Baghdad he turned to Sufism and his major work *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (The Reviving of the Religious Sciences).[371]

Al-Ghazālī's objection to philosophers was based on the limits of human reason.[372] In his latest work *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* (Deliverer from Error), which is

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[370] After these intense dhikr sessions, his later life also gives glimpses of the relationship between the public and the ascetic. First people began to regard him with great approval, disciples gathering around him and converting to Sufism, neighbors showing respect and ceasing to drink wine. He in fact became a cult figure: a melon-skin he had thrown away was bought for 20 pieces of gold and dung from his horse was picked up by people who duly smeared their heads and faces with it to gain a blessing. Yet later he heard a voice: "is not thy lord enough for thee?," a light gleamed in his breast and most veils were removed. His social life turned upside down, at least for a little while. People began rejecting him, even going before the judge to denounce him as a heretic. They claimed that their crops wouldn't grow on account of his wickedness. Women from the roofs bespattered him with filth as he was sitting in a mosque, and people in the mosque said: "we will not pray together so long as this madman is in the mosque." Though this episode did not last very long, it showed Abū Saʿīd how everything was a test for the Sufi in life. For the historian, it might show that the Sufi ascetic was playing on a thin rope, his social standing was precariously balanced between the ascetic as the intermediary to God and a mad lunatic. Ibid., 12-13, 16-17. His later life intersects with two important figures. As he was passing through Tus, on his way to Nishapur, he said: "if you wish to look at the prime minister of the world, there he is," pointing to the child Niẓāmu'l-Mulk (b. 1018). Another tale relates his meeting with his contemporary Ibn Sīnā (980-1037) or Avicenna. The tale, which is thought to be highly unlikely, relates that the two met in Abū Saʿīd convent in Nishapur and spent three days and three nights in conversation. After their meeting, in a remarkable show of compatibility between Sufism and philosophy, the philosopher, reportedly said: "all that I know he sees," while the mystic declared "all that I see he knows." Ibid., 27, 42.

[371] John Renard, *Historical Dictionary of Sufism* (The Scarecrow Press, 2005), 94; Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 144.

[372] Dagli, "From Mysticism to Philosophy (and back)," 114.

also part autobiography, he relates his quest for knowledge and his reaction to the adherents of various traditions around him, including theologians, Ismailis, philosophers and Sufis, who "alone are privileged to be in the presence of God."[373]

Of these traditions Al-Ghazālī first dismisses theology as a science that fulfilled its purpose but not his, as its purpose was "to preserve the beliefs of the orthodox and protect them from the misinformation of the heretics."[374]

Though he may be similar to Gregory Palamas in some ways, al-Ghazālī appears to be a far more nuanced thinker. On the matter of philosophy, al-Ghazālī does not condone a wholesale rejection of philosophy. The differences between the two figures may be due to intellectual differences or their circumstances where al-Ghazālī was writing in a more comfortable position where Sufism was more or less accepted as a valid part of Islamic spirituality whereas Gregory Palamas read the reactions to hesychasm as a life-threatening attack on his own version of monastic spirituality.

On philosophy, Al-Ghazālī first relates various divisions of philosophy, discussing whether they entail affirmation or denial of religious matters. Unlike other

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[373] "I narrowed down the seekers of knowledge to four factions: Theologians, who claim that they the party of opinion and theoretical speculation; Esotericists, who claim that they the party of instruction and are privileged to receive instruction from the infallible imam; Philosophers, who claim that they are the party of logic and demonstration; and Mystics, who claim that they alone are privileged to be in the presence of God and are the party of vision and illumination." Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), *Al-Munqidh Min Al-Ḍalāl* (*The Rescuer from Error)*, in *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Muhammad Ali Khalidi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 64.

[374] Ibid., 65.

disciplines logic, for example, does not come up with results contrary or affirmative to religion, and is even necessary for sound definition.[375]

Then he relates an imagery, which is conjured also by Palamas a few centuries later. Al-Ghazālī warns:

> Just as one must protect unskilled swimmers from perilous shores, people must be shielded from reading philosophical books. And just as boys must be held back from touching snakes, people must be guarded against hearing the muddled statements of the philosophers… [Yet] ... the proficient snake charmer who can handle the snake and distinguish between the antidote and the poison, extracting the antidote and neutralizing the poison, should not withhold the antidote from someone who needs it... In addition, if someone in need of the antidote finds it repugnant once he knows that it is extracted from the snake, which is the source of the poison itself, he must be made to recognize his mistake.[376]

One must approach philosophy with caution, yet philosophy can also be used as an antidote to its own poison. Furthermore the last part suggests that people who normally shun philosophy should realize that philosophy has its uses against philosophy.

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[375] Mathematics concerns rigorously demonstrated facts which cannot be denied once they are known and understood. But still caution is advised. Two evils concern the study of mathematics. The fine precision of the mathematical arguments may create an undue regard for the practitioners of this discipline which might spill over to their thought on other matters. While the first criticism is valid, that the lucidity of a discipline in its own field does not presuppose its lucidity in another, the second evil in mathematics is not very clear. Al-Ghazālī argues that this second evil arises from the "from the case of an ignorant friend of Islam who supposes that our religion must be championed by the rejection of every science ascribed to the philosophers. So he rejects all their sciences, claiming they display ignorance and folly in them all." Concerning other disciplines of philosophy, al-Ghazālī relates that "nothing in the logical sciences had anything to do with religion by the way of negation and affirmation." As related, logical sciences are in fact they are prerequisites for a sound definition. Physics is a study of the natural world, and "just as religion does not require the repudiation of the science of medicine, so also it does not require the repudiation of the science of physics." Yet they must be opposed on certain points, "the basic point regarding all of them is for you to know that nature is totally subject to God Most High: it does not act of itself but is used as an instrument by its creator." The metaphysical sciences are the most dangerous lot. It is in them that most of the philosophers' errors, such as the denial of bodily resurrection, God's knowledge of the universals but not particulars and the eternity of the world, are found. Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), *Al-Munqidh Min Al-Ḍalāl* (*The Rescuer from Error)*, translated from the manuscript in the Sehid Ali Pasa, No. 1712, dated 1115-1116, five years after his death, and about ten years after the composition. In Al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance from Error*, translated by R. J. McCarthy (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2000), 63-66.

[376] Al-Ghazālī, *The Rescuer from Error*, in *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Khalidi, 75-76.

Though al-Ghazālī would become a foundational figure in Islamic thought, the whole impact of his works may be difficult to comprehend.[377] After his critique of philosophy, philosophical studies in the East are related to have diminished greatly.[378] In the West, in Muslim Spain, they continued, where Ghazālī's *Incoherence of Philosophers* would be retorted by the *Incoherence of Incoherence* by Ibn Rushd (Averroes).

Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1382), later in the fourteenth century, would credit al-Ghazālī with a new form of theology that focused on using logic to get rid of earlier opinions based on other philosophical disciplines.[379] The proposition of al-Ghazālī on the use of philosophy, more specifically logic, to cure its own poison seems to have resulted in a new school of thought by the time of Ibn Khaldūn. By refuting some parts of philosophy, al-Ghazālī was also bringing the philosophical discourse into the Islamic sciences. Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), again in the fourteenth century, would state that al-Ghazālī "was inclined to philosophy, but he presented it in the guise of Sufism and Islamic terminology. Because of this, Muslim scholars have responded to him,

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[377] Al-Ghazālī was not just criticizing philosophy but also putting the alternative of experiential Sufism on the intellectual arena. It is noted that he ensured "no system of thought based solely on the reasoning powers of human beings, independent of the truths of the religious tradition would ever take hold in the Islamic world," also pushing "the philosophical and metaphysical tendencies among the thinkers in the Islamic world towards coming to grips with revelations and supernatural truth claims of the mystics." Dagli, "From Mysticism to Philosophy (and back)," 34.

[378] Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism,* 148.

[379] Ibn Khaldun begins by talking about the degrees of faith. Then he relates the spread of the science of logic in Islam. Here, following al-Ghazālī, he notes that people made a distinction between logic and other philosophical sciences, and that logic was "merely a norm and yardstick for arguments and served to probe the arguments of the (philosophical sciences) as well as (those of) all other (disciplines)." The new theological approach, called "the school of recent scholars" by Ibn Khaldūn, used logic to study the basic premises of earlier theologians, refuting many of their ideas most of which were based on physics and metaphysics, which were not applicable to theology. The approach of this new school often included refutation of the philosophers where the philosophers's opinion differed from the articles of faith. He notes that "they considered the (philosophers) enemies of the articles of faith." According to Ibn Khaldūn, "the first to write in accordance with the new theological approach was al-Ghazālī." He also notes that later on scholars yet again began meddling with philosophical works. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1382), *Muqaddimah*, *The Muqaddimah, An Introduction to History*, translated by Franz Rosenthal (Princeton University Press, 1967, 2005), 352-53.

including his companions, Abu Bakr Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1148, not the famous Ibn ʿArabī) who said: "our master Abū Ḥāmid entered the stomach of the philosophers, then when he wanted to come out he could not do so."[380] Thus al-Ghazālī was more than two centuries after his death credited both with the refutation and the promotion of philosophy in Islam.

Perhaps al-Ghazālī's criticism of philosophy would not be so foundational if he had not put forth an alternative pursuit in its stead. After de-promoting the various fields of philosophy other than the study of logic, al-Ghazālī turned to Sufism, which offered "a combination of knowledge and practice."[381] Sufism offers not only an abstract conceptual system to investigate the divine, but also a lifestyle, an experience in line with the revelation. In another work, al-Ghazālī warned the "student of conventional knowledge, who is occupied with gratifying his ego and with worldly exploits, for he supposes that his knowledge alone will be his salvation and that his deliverance is in it, and that he can do without deeds, and this is the conviction of the philosophers."[382] Back in the *Deliverer from Error*, he relates: "I knew with certainty that the sufis were masters of states, not purveyors of words," adding: "I had learned all I could by the way of theory. There remained, then, only what was attainable, not by hearing and study, but by fruitional experience and actually engaging in the way."[383]

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[380] Scott Michael Girdner, "Reasoning with Revelation: The Significance of the Qur'anic Contextualizaiton of Philosophy in al-Ghazālī's Mishkat al-Anwar" (The Niche of Lights), Ph.D. thesis (Boston University, 2010), 94.

[381] "When I was done with these sciences, I turned my energies to the way of mysticism and came to know that their method is brought about by a combination of knowledge and practice. The objective of their knowledge is to overcome the obstacles found in the soul. They free the soul of blameworthy characteristics and malicious attributes in order to cleanse the heart of everything but God Almighty and adorn it with the recollection of God." Al-Ghazālī, *The Rescuer from Error*, in *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Khalidi, 76.

[382] Al-Ghazālī, *Ayyuha'l-Walad (Letter to a Disciple)*, translated by Tobias Mayer (Islamic Texts Society, 2005), 6.

[383] Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Munqidh Min Al-Ḍalāl*, McCarthy, 78.

Then al-Ghazālī relates criticisms against dhikr. According to him, the reasoners and those given to reflection “find this way rugged and its fruit slow to come and the union of its requirements unlikely.” Other than its difficulty, these critics also related that during this “spiritual combat” the practitioner’s mind might be confused, and if the practitioner has not exercised and refined his soul by the realities of the sciences, vicious imaginings might cling to his heart. Like Barlaam against the hesychasts, the critics suggested that the aspirant pursue scholarship first. Had the practitioner first mastered the sciences, the dubious nature of the imaginings would have been apparent to him from the start.

Voices arguing that the foundational figures in religion were uneducated men who had risen to their position not through education were heard in the Hesychast controversy.[384] A similar point must have been also made by the Sufis. The same critics also alleged, according to al-Ghazālī, that the case of the Sufi is like someone “who would refrain from learning of science of *fiqh*,” and allege that the prophet “did not learn that but became a *faqīh* by means of revelation and inspiration.” Critics and Sufis were aware, it seems, that the Sufi methods of dhikr were much more in line with the inspirational mode of revelation which was the basis of religion.

There was valid criticism against the main experiential practice of Sufism, dhikr, and the knowledge generated by this practice. The critics touched upon the consequence of inspirational knowledge which might be problematic from the viewpoint of orthodoxy. The worldview based on the revelation of the prophet also sets up a mode of thinking based on inspiration which can easily be at odds with the doctrines in the initial revelation. The prophet had his authority not on the soundness of his arguments but on revelation, yet it could be controversial if his followers sought the same mechanisms to arrive at knowledge through a short-cut. That the

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[384] Clucas, *The Hesychast controversy in Byzantium in the fourteenth century*, 492.

inspiration achieved by the prophet turned out to be a revelation was a small chance, which was unlikely for a regular practitioner. The critics, according to al-Ghazālī, said that such a person was like one giving up farming in order to seek an unlikely chance of finding a treasure. First, one had to acquire what the learned have acquired, and then there would be "no harm in waiting for what has not been disclosed to all the learned, and it may be discovered there after by the spiritual combat."[385]

Al-Ghazālī does not retort to these criticisms. One could suppose that he, then, partially finds them valid. Yet the next section in "The Wonders of the Heart" is on the difference between the knowledge of the prophets and the saints on one hand and that of the learned and the philosophers on the other; where he begins by relating that "the wonders of the heart are outside the realms of things perceived through the senses, for the heart is also sense perception."[386] Thus al-Ghazālī retorts indirectly. Later on al-Ghazālī tries to justify the mystical experience of the Sufi with *ḥadīth* such as "beware the natural insight (*firasah*) of the believer, for he sees with the light of Allah."[387] Then on experiential knowledge, al-Ghazālī, relates two points which according to him gives validity to such knowledge. First he talks about the wonders of the true dream vision, arguing that it is by it that the unknown is unveiled, and if it is permissible in sleep it is also possible in the waking hours. Then more strongly, and directly, al-Ghazālī puts forth the prophet as an example

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[385] Ibid., 324.

[386] Al-Ghazālī, *Ihya Ulm ad-Din*, Kitab Sharh Ajaib al-Qalb, in "The Religious Psychology of al-Ghazālī: A Translation of his book of the Ihya on the explanation of the wonders of the heart iwth introduction and notes," translated by Walter James Skellie, Ph.D. thesis (The Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1938), 78.

[387] Ibid., 90-98.

for the mystic. If Muhammad was able to receive wisdom directly from heaven, so could his followers.[388]

Despite the critics, Sufism was doing well in the twelfth century. Sufis often attracted patronage. When the Andalusian traveller Ibn Jubayr (d. 1217) came to Damascus in the 1180s, he noted that the Sufi lodges were numerous and were ornamented palaces.[389] The Sufi lodges were well-endowed, with a strong economic support from the rulers. Their place in the religious landscape was buttressed by a series of Sufi authors, the most prominent of whom was al-Ghazālī. Yet in the twelfth century, some arguments of al-Ghazālī, particularly his insistence on the primacy of the Sufis in religious life, were still questioned. A criticism both from the jurists and the philosophers to al-Ghazālī did not arise in the East, but in the Muslim West, in al-ʾAndalus.

In al-ʾAndalus, jurists appeared before the Almoravid amir, claiming that al-Ghazālī's works could lead the Muslims to lose their faith, and recommending their burning. Though some critics of al-Ghazālī included some of his own disciples, and some of his critics also admired him, his works were nonetheless subject to official sanction first in 1109, two years before his death, and then in the early 1140s.[390] Al-Ghazālī had set a ranking for those who sought knowledge and piety, always giving prominence to the Sufis, who did not deal with words but with deeds and whose access to *maʿrifa* put them in a league above the traditional scholars. Some Maliki jurists in al-ʾAndalus began by arguing that *maʿrifa* could also be intellectual

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[388] "The Apostle of Allah was able to speak accurately about the unknown and things in the future, as is set forth in the Qurān. If that is permissible in the case of the prophet, it is also permissible for others. For a prophet is merely a person to whom the true nature of things has been disclosed, and who works for the reformation of mankind. So it is not impossible that there should exist a person to whom the true nature of things has been disclosed, but who does not work for the reformation of mankind. Such a man is not called a prophet, but a saint (walī)." Ibid., 98.

[389] Karamustafa, *Sufism,* 125.

[390] Delfina Serrano Ruano, "Why Did the Scholars of al-ʾAndalus Distrust al-Ghazālī? Ibn Rushd al-Jadd's Fatwa on Awlīyāʾ Allah," *Der Islam* (2006), 137-38.

knowledge, belonging to the scholar rather than the mystic.[391] Jurists were troubled by the hierarchy set by al-Ghazālī, in which he ranked those who had knowledge of God. It began with the prophets, friends of God (*awlīyāʾ*), then those who have knowledge about God (*ʿārifīn*), followed by the sound experts in religious sciences (*al-ʿulamāʾ al-rasikhin*), and finally the virtuous (*ṣālihīn*). The jurists were naturally troubled by the possibility that *awlīyāʾ* was a category denied to them, including only the Sufis.[392] They argued that precedence should not be awarded to some to the detriment of others. If these awlīyāʾ had precedence over the scholars, that meant the deeds of the former were better than those of the latter and would therefore receive a higher reward in the after life. Finally the scholars argued it was known for certain that "science (*'Ilm*) is better than action (*amal*)."[393] The scholars were trying to break the discourse of al-Ghazālī by attacking his precedence for deeds rather than words.

In one of the responses to the schema of al-Ghazālī, a scholar argued that the privileged position of Muhammad was not through his deeds but directly from his status as one chosen by God. The scholar related that it was rude and ignorant to propose that the prophet's precedence was based on hardship and on effort; perhaps attacking indirectly to the Sufi basis of the ascetic lifestyle, that by following a life of hardship they could get closer to the prophetic ideal.[394] In the final response, the jurist sought to dismantle the position of the Sufi in the hierarchy of al-Ghazālī by stressing that knowledge about God, rather than deeds, was the criterion for

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[391] Ibid., 140.

[392] Ibid., 141.

[393] Ibid., 142.

[394] Ibid., 149-50.

determining a position in religious superiority, thus opening the way for the *ʿulamāʾ* also to be the friends of God.[395]

Al-Ghazālī was also retorted by the Andalusian philosophers, among whom Ibn Rushd (Averroes) wrote the *Incoherence of Incoherence* in response to al-Ghazālī's *Incoherence of the Philosophers*. It is remarked that there were no great names in Islamic philosophy in the East after al-Ghazālī.[396] Yet in the West, in al-ʾAndalus, Islamic philosophy still flourished, also playing an important role in the transfer of Ancient Greek philosophy, and more specifically commentary on the Greek philosophy to the Christian West.[397]

Ibn Rushd was born in Cordoba in 1126. He was the chief judge of Seville in 1169 and chief judge of Cordoba two years later. Though Ibn Rushd himself suffered an inquisitorial persecution in 1197, he was later pardoned. In his work, the *Incoherence of Incoherence*, he answered the criticism of al-Ghazālī point-by-point, attacking also al-Ghazālī's denial of the necessary correlation between cause and effect, warning that who "repudiates causality, actually repudiates reason," which in

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[395] Ibid., 152.

[396] Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism,* 148.

[397] According to the native historian Saīd al-Andalūsī (d. 1070), the study of 'ancient sciences' had started early on during the Umayyad period in the ninth century. In the tenth century, the Umayyad caliph Ḥakam II (r. 961-76) had imported scientific and philosophical books from the East. During the reign of his successor Hishām II (r. 976-1009), books, especially those on astronomy and logic, were burned, yet philosophical studies were revived by the middle of the eleventh century. The Almohad dynasty, which replaced the Almoravids in al-ʾAndalus, were also curious patrons of philosophy. The Berber jurist Mahdī Ibn Tūmart, founder of the Almohad movement, had put forth the central notion of *tawḥīd*, thus the followers being called, al-mūwaḥḥidīn (those who declare *tawḥīd*), or Almohads. The doctrine of *tawḥīd* in the teachings of Ibn Tumart relied upon logical reasoning. His teachings assigned reason as a source of religious doctrine along with Qurān and Ḥadīth. The Almohads in turn were emerging as patrons of philosophy. One of the philosophers who received patronage from the Almohad caliph Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf was Ibn Tufayl. He was born near Granada and studied medical and philosophical sciences in Seville and Cordoba. In his philosophical novel, *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*, he relates the tale of a boy, Ḥayy, born on an island who using his own reason discovers the necessity of a creator. It was Ibn Tufayl who asked Ibn Rushd to write the commentaries on Aristotle commissioned by Abu Yaqub. Madeleine Fletcher, "The Almohad Tawhīd: Theology Which Relies on Logic," *Numen* 38-1 (June 1991), 110-127; Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*, 85-86, 93; Josep Puig, "Materials on Averroes's Circle," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 51-4 (Oct., 1992), 246.

turn meant the repudiation of the divine wisdom that presided over creation, ordering the creation according to a fixed causal pattern, from which the mind could discover its maker.[398]

Ibn Rushd himself, in turn, was reputed by one of those great names, Ibn ʿArabī, who like al-Ghazālī would become one of the major figures of Sufism. Though there were ascetic trends in al-ʾAndalus at the end of the ninth century, Sufism was propagated by the many Andalusian locals who went the East to study with the Sufi masters.[399] The Almohad dynasty, as well as patronizing philosophy, also gave official recognition to the Sufi orders for the first time in history.[400] The gradual assimilation of Sufism into the mainstream had been achieved by the early twelfth century, yet whereas a previous Sufi author such as al-Qushayri was already accepted as orthodox, the more recent al-Ghazālī was still, as we have seen, heavily criticized.[401]

Ibn ʿArabī, the most important figure of Sufism from al-ʾAndalus, was born in 1165 in Murcia and travelled widely in the East, including Syria and Anatolia. Like his predecessor al-Ghazālī, he was familiar with philosophy, but emphasized the limited capacity of philosophy in understanding the relationship between God and man.[402] In his youth he had met Ibn Rushd himself, who kindly received him and asked: "What manner of solution have you found through divine illumination and inspiration (*fi-l kashfi wa-l-fayḍi-l-ilahī*)? Is it identical with that which we obtain from speculative reflection (*al-naẓar*)?" Ibn ʿArabī replied "Yes No. Between the *yes* and *no*, spirits take their flight from their matter and heads are severed from their bodies." Ibn

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[398] Fakhry, "Philosophy and Theology from the Eighth Century C.E. to the Present," 286-289.

[399] Karamustafa, *Sufism, The Formative Period*, 71-72.

[400] Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*, 83.

[401] Ruano, "Why Did the Scholars of al-ʾAndalus Distrust al-Ghazālī?," 152.

[402] Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 166.

Rushd turned pale. He trembled and murmured: “there is no power save in God.” Ibn ʿArabī took this to mean that Ibn Rushd had understood his allusion. When Ibn ʿArabī wished to see Ibn Rushd again, he saw him while he was in ecstasy (*wāqʿia*). Ibn ʿArabī saw Ibn Rushd through a veil. “I saw him through the veil, but he did not see me or know that I was present. He was indeed too absorbed in his meditation to take notice of me. I said to myself: his thought does not guide him to the place where I myself am.”[403]

Was the thirteenth century, in which Ibn ʿArabī spent half his life, a turning point for the East? Though the problems of the region can be traced back to earlier periods, in this century both Byzantine and Islamic worlds saw political crises. For the Byzantine world this was the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204 and for the Islamic world it was the Mongol invasions culminating in the sack of Baghdad in 1258. Yet this difficult period also saw the renascence of Sufism. The sufi *ṭarīqa*s, emerging in the twelfth century, flourished in the thirteenth century. *Khanaqahs*, which were patronized by the Seljuks, continued to receive support from later dynasties such as Ayyubids and the Mamluks, who began to rely on the *shaykh*s residing in these institutions for political support. With Ibn ʿArabī and his doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the Islamic world was seeing the greater emergence of the mystical tradition, at a moment when the Christian West was abandoning its own Neoplatonist heritage in favor of Aristotelianism in the scholastic tradition.[404] The focus of the Islamic world was shifting to the East, to Syria and Egypt, where Ibn ʿAṭa Allah (d. 1309), a near contemporary of Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), was writing the “first systematic treatise” on dhikr and engaging in dispute over some aspects of the Sufi tradition.

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[403] R. W. J. Austin, *Ibn al’Arabi, The Bezels of Wisdom* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1980), 2-3.

[404] Victor Danner, “Introduction, The Book of Wisdom,” in *Ibn ʿAṭa Allah, The Book of Wisdom, Kwaja Abdullah Ansari, Intimate Conversations*, translated and introduced by Victor Danner and Wheeler M. Thackston (Paulist Press, 1978), 15-16.

Ibn ʿAṭa Allah was born in mid-thirteenth-century Egypt. His grandfather was a jurist. His father, however, had been a disciple of al-Shadhili (1196-1258), who had formed a Sufi order more in line with the urban ideals, rejecting asceticism and the wearing of special clothing to distinguish themselves.[405] Ibn ʿAṭa Allah was well-educated and the more accommodating aspects of the Shadhiliyya served him well.[406] Ibn ʿAṭa Allah was able to continue his career in *fiqh*, eventually becoming a Maliki jurist teaching in the al-Azhar mosque and privately in his *zāwiya.*

In his later career Ibn ʿAṭa Allah came into conflict with an outsider, now from Syria, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), who was attacking the more theatrical aspects of

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[405] Danner, *The Key to Salvation*, 9; Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism,* 207-210.

[406] "When troubled between his choice of career as a jurist and Sufism, his shaykh had told him: "If a merchant associates with us, we do not say to him, "leave your trade and come," or to an artisan, we do not say to him, 'leave your craft and come or to a student leave your studies and come, rather we take everyone as he is." Koury Danner, *The Key to Salvation*, 2-6.

Sufism in Cairo and some of its practices such as dhikr.[407] In religious matters, Ibn Taymiyya insisted on a return to the ways of the pious ancestors.[408] Though he praises al-Ghazālī,[409] and was himself a member of a *ṭarīqa*, he was nonetheless the most prominent critic of Sufism. The mystical experience could be an aid to personal faith, yet a Christian too could have mystical experiences, thus they alone were not the building blocks of religious truth which had to be based on prophetic,

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[407] Ibn Taymiyya is related in passing by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa who was born in 1304 and travelled widely in the Islamic world between 1325 and 1354. During his visit to Damascus in 1326, he relates a *Ḥanbali* jurist who "although enjoyed great prestige and could discourse on the scholarly disciplines, had a screw loose (*illā annā fi aqlihi shayʾan*)." He was talking about Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), who was related by a contemporary of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, al-Dhahabī (d. 1343-44), as someone hated by the Egyptians and Syrians who called him a liar and even an unbeliever. One reason for the contempt against Ibn Taymiyya was his stance against some aspects of the Sufi establishment of his day. Ibn Taymiyya was born in 1262 in Harran, four years after the Mongol destruction of Baghdad, when the intellectual center of the Muslim world had moved to Syria and Egypt under the Mamluks. His family had been forced to leave Harran to escape the Mongol army. Ibn Taymiyya spent most of his life in Syria, yet in Cairo he came into conflict with the Sufi establishment. The Sufis in Egypt had emerged as leaders of their communities, interceding between the people and the authority and helping them in times of need by performing miracles, often conveniently after their death. Ibn Taymiyya was fed up with their innovations and the more theatrical aspects of ascetic piety, such as the putting of ointment on their feet and then claiming to walk through fire, or rubbing their own skin with a pigment which made them look like sweating blood during *samāʿ*. Ibn Taymiyya likened the effects of the *samāʿ* to those of wine, and he worried about the moral dangers of listening to musical instruments such as the flute, which a *ḥadīth* identified as "the *muezzin* of Satan." He was also against the cult of saints. When he came head-to-head with the Sufi establishment who claimed that Ibn Taymiyya was unjustly attacking Ibn ʿArabī and condemning other Sufi practices such as dhikr, which he again denounced as *bidʿa*, the Sufi response was led by Ibn ʿAṭa Allah. Donald P. Little, "Did Ibn Taymiyya Have a Screw Loose?," *Studia Islamica*, No. 41 (1975), 95-96, 102-103; Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 20-21, 67. Yahya Michot, "Between Entertainment and Religion: Ibn Taymiyya's Views on Superstition," *The Muslim World* (Jan 2009), 19; Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam, Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 237; Mary Ann Koury Danner, *The Key to Salvation, A Sufi Manual of Invocation* (Islamic Texts Society, 1996), 8.

[408] Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*, 102.

[409] "He was too honorable to intentionally lie. In fact, he was among the most intelligent of people and most eager to seek knowledge and investigate the matters. (Even) when making those (incorrect) attributions, he was most intent of all people on stating the truth. He has many great discourses deserving of praise and approval. In the presentation and organization of his discourses he was among the best authors." Ibn Taymiyya, *Naqd al-ta'sis*, 3:100; cited by Ovamir Anjum, "Reason and Politics in Medieval Islamic Thought: The Taymiyyan Movement," Ph.D. Thesis (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008), 224.

not mystical revelation and Muhammad's sunna.[410] He was against the mysticism of Ibn ʿArabī, opposing his pantheistic mysticism and mystical speculation, categorically rejecting the doctrine of unity of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*).[411]

The case of Ibn ʿAṭa Allah was used to point to a wide usage of a meditative practice that was not encountered in hesychasm. His problems with Ibn Taymiyya reveal that even at this late period the meditative practices and the validity of knowledge acquired by them was questioned by a religious authority who did not especially condone philosophy. The Sufis operated not just in a different intellectual tradition but on a different plane, drawing criticism both from the philosophers and jurists.

The general outline of this survey suggests that the Sufi critique of other disciplines, mainly philosophy was significant. Whereas the patronage of philosophy was always fickle, Sufism drew more generous contributions, partly explained by their greater standing and approachability by the populace, as the example of Cairo seems to suggest. Though both traditions had a common root in the philosophy of Late Antiquity, the Sufi critics of philosophy nonetheless helped alienate the traditional study of philosophy. These Sufi critics of secular education were not ignorant, adamant rejectionists. Al-Ghazālī's earlier work, *The Object of Philosophy* (*Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa*), for example, was accepted and received by many as a genuine summary of the object of philosophy on its own.[412] Yet such Sufi authors were always a bit dissatisfied with an intellectual and merely rational understanding

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[410] Th. Emil Homerin, "Sufis and Their Detractors in Mamluk Egypt," in *Islamic Mysticism Contested, Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, edited by Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke (Brill, 1999), 234.

[411] Wael B. Hallaq, *Ibn Taymiyya against the Greek Logicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), xi-xiii.

[412] Steven Harvey, "Why Did Fourteenth-Century Jews Turn to AlGhazālī's Account of Natural Science?," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 91, No. 3/4 (Jan. - Apr., 2001), 359-376; Leor Halevi, "The Theologian's Doubts: Natural Philosophy and the Skeptical Games of Ghazālī," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (Jan., 2002), 20.

of the world. For them the mystical experience represented something beyond the knowledge a human being could attain through his own faculties alone. In the later bastion of Islamic philosophy, al-ʾAndalus, Ibn Rushd came up with a rebuttal on al-Ghazālī, but he was fighting a losing battle.

Ibn Khaldūn, writing his *Muqaddima* in the fourteenth century, included a chapter on the various kinds of sciences. He noted that the scientific instruction had disappeared among the inhabitants of Spain.[413] The East was luckier in this regard, as it did not face a discontinuity in its civilization. Old cities like Baghdad or al-Baṣra could be in ruin but science had a chance to be transplanted to Khorasan, Transoxiana, and Egypt.[414]

Then Ibn Khaldūn divides the sciences into two kinds: "one that is natural to man and to which he is guided by his own ability to think, and a traditional kind he learns from those who invented it." The first kind includes the philosophical sciences, the second are the traditional sciences, founded upon information based on the authority of the given religious law.[415] He includes Sufism as one of "the sciences of the religious law that originated in Islam."[416] He touches upon the slippery basis of Sufi doctrine based on the mystical experience. According to Ibn Khaldun, the mystical knowledge a sufi receives would be legitimate only if it originated in "straightforwardness." After all, Ibn Khaldun points out, there are other,

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[413] "The institution of scientific instruction has disappeared among the inhabitants of Spain. Their former concern with the science is gone, because the Muslim civilization in Spain has been decreasing for hundreds of years. The only scholarly discipline remaining there is Arabic and literature, to which the (Spanish Muslims) restrict themselves." Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah, An Introduction to History*, translated by Franz Rosenthal (Princeton University Press, 1967, 2005), 341.

[414] Ibid.

[415] Ibid., 343-44.

[416] Ibid., 358.

non-muslim ascetics who may experience similar visions, though theirs would not necessarily be valid.[417]

Some of the ideas of the Sufis were not favored by the scholars, yet they could not really argue with them: “Those who did not share their approach were not able to understand their mystical and ecstatic experiences in this respect. The muftis partly disapprove of these Sufis and partly accept them.” Then Ibn Khaldūn, offers an insight on the success of Sufi discourse. “Arguments and proofs are of no use in deciding whether the sufi approach should be rejected or accepted, since it belongs to the intuitive experience.”[418]

The intellectual sciences, according to Ibn Khaldūn, are “natural to man, inasmuch as he is a thinking being. They are not restricted to any particular religious group. They are studied by the people of all religious groups who are all equally qualified to learn them and to do research in them.” He lists four sciences: logic, physics, metaphysics, mathematics.[419] On the history of philosophy, and its demise, he notes that such sciences are still to be found in the East, in (non-Arab) Iran and Transoxiana. Then, most surprisingly, he notes:

> We further hear now that the philosophical sciences are greatly cultivated in the land of the Rome and along the adjacent northern shore of the country of the European Christians. They are said to be studied there again and to be taught in numerous classes. Existing systematic expositions on them are said to be comprehensive, the people who know them numerous, and the students of them very many. God knows better what exists there.[420]

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[417] “The Sufis do not consider removal (of the veil) sound unless it originates in straightforwardness. People who do not eat and who retire (from the world), such as sorcerers, Christians, and other ascetics, may obtain removal without the existence of straightforwardness. However, we mean only that removal which originates in straightforwardness.” Ibid., 361.

[418] Ibid., 361-62.

[419] Ibid., 371.

[420] Ibid., 375.

Was Ibn Khaldūn possibly referring to scholasticism in the Latin West? Philosophical studies in the West had been fueled by the Arabic commentaries on Greek philosophy, particularly on Aristotle and most famously by Ibn Rushd, where in the West they were being used for systematic analysis and speculation, concomitant with a new degree of rationalization in society.[421] The commentaries of Arabic philosophers, dismissed by the Islamic intellectuals, had caused a scholastic revolution in the West, which was also bypassing Byzantium.

In the literature on hesychasm, the only interest with dhikr was with regard to the origins and influences. Did dhikr come from hesychasm, or hesychasm from dhikr? Yet the case of dhikr is most informative not in answering the origin question but demonstrating another case of the development of a similar attitude around a similar practice. The greatest parallel between Byzantium and the Islamic world is observed not in the practices themselves, but in the outlook of those who practiced them, and their reaction to other intellectual traditions fighting for legitimacy and patronage.

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[421] Steven P. Marrone, “Medieval philosophy in context,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, edited by A. S. McGrade (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 10.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Before going into conclusion I have to stress some of the deficiencies of the present study. One major point omitted in this thesis was the attitude of the monks during Iconoclasm. Recent scholarship has cast a doubt on the mass monastic opposition to Iconoclasm, finding this to be a figment of later Byzantine historians.[422] Still there were among the monastic establishment those who resisted the iconoclastic policies, particularly during the second phase in the ninth century. However fickle, the language of this opposition would be interesting to investigate. On what ground and by which authority did the monks put forth their support for the use of icons? Did spiritual elitism raise its head at all? These would be interesting questions to pursue further.

The thesis compared the Byzantine, Islamic and Latin worlds at times, yet this comparison was less articulated than I would like. A comparative look into the organization of religion, education and intellectual life in the Latin, Byzantine and Islamic worlds would have helped the thesis with a more solid understanding. How do Byzantine monasticism, Latin monasticism and Sufism differ or how are they are alike? And what were the social roles of groups focusing on philosophy in these societies? These questions could be investigated.

The Latin world was referred to tangentially throughout the thesis but was not surveyed at length. The mystics were also abundant in the medieval West.[423] One obvious question concerns the possible lack of a meditative practice that finds a parallel with hesychasm or dhikr. The word 'possible' here is used only because of

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[422] Leslie Brubaker & John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680-850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 790-91

[423] Up until the 12th century the mystical movements were also abundant in the West. In the 13th century however, as the church and the states pursued greater centralization, repressive measures were taken to keep these movements in their place. Yet still the period between 1200 until 1600 is seen as a period of 'new mysticism.' Steven Fanning, *Mystics of the Christian Tradition* (Routledge: 2001), 90-102; Bernard McGinn, "The changing shape of late medieval mysticism," *Church History*, 65, 2 (Jun. 1996), 197-98

a fear of arguing for the nonexistence of something. Yet if John Paul II could only recommend the rosary as an alternative to the Jesus Prayer, we may assume that the Latin world did not develop any methods facilitating peak experience of the divine. If this is truly the case, one cannot help but ask, why is it so? In an essay on Late Antiquity, Peter Brown investigated the possible parting of ways between the Eastern and Western Mediterranean. He looked at the notion of the *holy*, noting that in the East the locus of holy remained more ambiguous and more diffuse, whereas in the West it was more focused and circumscribed around the Church. The holy men of the East often had no counterparts in the West.[424] The formation of the Catholic Church in the aftermath of the political and intellectual vacuum may have been the structural cause of both the more circumscribed notion of the holy, and the lack of a mystical practice, on par with dhikr or the Jesus prayer in hesychasm. Like the greater presence of holy men in Late Antiquity, these meditative practices remain as a point of divergence in the medieval period, between the Latin world on one hand, and the Islamic and Byzantine worlds on the other. Furthermore, the language of Latin mystics should also be investigated to see if and, hopefully, how they differed from their Islamic and Byzantine colleagues.

The development of Scholasticism in the Latin world, while faith based on reason seems to have come under increased criticism in the Byzantine and Islamic worlds, remains a very interesting subject. A modern spokesperson for Orthodoxy saw Scholasticism as a turning point for Western Christendom. “Protestants, humanists, atheists - the whole series of European philosophers - all graduated from the school of Catholicism,” he writes. “That is why they all speak the same language, the language of rationalism, and this is why, in spite of all their variances,

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[424] Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (University of California Press, 1989), 179-186

they understand each other so famously."[425] Not having looked into Scholasticism, I still think that he might have a point in this remark. If we take Scholasticism as an effort for a theology based on reason, this would have allowed a wedge in its discourse, allowing others to oppose or criticize aspects they disagreed with, using the same tool of reason. Yet, as Ibn Khaldūn had noted earlier, arguments and proofs were of no use against approaches belonging to the intuitive experience.

Finally the full impact of these meditative practices, how they shaped the future trajectory of their intellectual landscape, remains an open question.

In spite of these shortcomings the thesis does point to several issues not stressed by previous scholarship. It shows that the relationship between the meditative practices and intellectual attitudes demands further investigation.

In Byzantium, in their stance against scholarship, not all hesychasts were adamant in their rejection of secular learning, and certainly the opposers of hesychasm were not uncritical towards some attitudes in secular learning. However, a certain attitude dismissing the approach and goals of secular learning was detected. As we have seen, the various impulses gathering around the hesychast monks of the fourteenth century had their roots in Late Antiquity, when the emerging Christianity had to position itself against the well-established intellectual traditions around Greek philosophy. On the one hand, the workings of the Christian system of thought based on revelation were disjunct from those based on reason and contingent articulation. A stance against non-Christian learning would have helped the converts in transition from one world of thought to another, and give them legitimacy in the eyes of others.

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[425] Alexander Kalomiros, Against the False Union, Humble Thought of an Orthodox Christian concerning the Attempts for Union of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church with the So-Called Churches of the West, translated by George Gabriel (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1967), 38; cited in A. N.Williams, *The Ground of Union, Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 18

The difference of the hesychast stance from that in the Late Antique period is in its stress on spiritual elitism that builds upon first the redeclaration of the separate worlds of reason and revelation, and then claiming the revelationary mode only for a certain group of people, in our case the saints and monks practicing hesychasm. The development of a meditative practice allowing a successful participation in inspiration and, possibly, legitimacy in the eyes of the public was crucial in this regard. When Kantakouzenos told Gregoras to leave the matters concerning the Palamite doctrine to the monks who were wiser in the matters of religion, the monks' different mode of access to the divine could have played a part.

How does a meditative practice develop? First, the meditative practices involve bodily gestures which may be assumed to develop in a trial-and-error method to decide the most fruitful positions for the subsequent steps. Bowing down, hyper- or hypo-ventilation, and seclusion may bring about altered states of consciousness, ready for altered experiences. The treatises gradually talk more specifically about which postures to take, and if some are preferable to others. Tried and verified bodily techniques would have increased the success of the meditative practice.

Second, as all experience, including religious, is mediated, the articulation of methods and the subsequent experience are vital for the success of the practice. If you take on a treatise describing what you are to do, bodily and mentally, and what you are supposed to experience, you would be more likely to experience what the treatise prescribed in the first place.

What did the meditative practices not do? They did not create the stance against learning, some rudimentary forms of it were already there. Nor did they cause a whole-scale abandonment of secular education. Though it was related as a mode of knowledge acquisition alternative to reason, still the practitioners never used meditation alone to prove a certain theological issue.

A well-developed meditative practice would have allowed greater replication and participation of ideas and manners associated with the practice. It is one thing to talk of one's personal religious experience, and it is another to be able to offer a glimpse of that experience by showing the way through a proper method. Unfortunately, the penetration of the practice, how big a group actually practiced it, is uncertain. How much the public at large knew about the practice is equally unknown. Yet even if the practice remained among a fairly small group of monks, a developed practice would have allowed an easier passing on from master to disciple.

Finally, if we take secular learning as based on articulation of ideas through reason, a meditative practice could have allowed an alternative method of knowledge acquisition based now on inspiration tempered with preceding conditioning. The underlying elitist attitude may have been present in asceticism from the start. Those who performed asceticism could have developed a sense of superiority over the rest of the society from whom they expected a certain recognition. Yet I believe the development of a meditative practice was vital in the greater articulation and spread of this elitism. The occasional glimpses of spiritual elitism only burst out after the development of the practice from the ninth and more properly the tenth century onwards.

Furthermore, a well-developed meditative practice would have allowed a more ready implanting of desert spirituality into other environments. The stories of the mystical experiences of former ascetics might be inspiring, but a taste of those experiences would have created a stronger urban market and greater confidence in the practitioners themselves in imposing their own version of spirituality into a relatively alien landscape. I believe the development of a meditative practice was vital in the strong voice of the hesychast attitudes whose roots went back to Late

Antiquity. Thus, a look into the development of this practice was handled alongside the attitudes of those who practiced it.

Evagrios Pontikos had described an intense prayer early on in the fourth century. It was only in the Middle Byzantine period with Hesychios in the eighth or ninth century that we have several types of meditation listed. The transformative nature of this meditation was also more starkly illustrated by Hesychios. The ignorant became wise through meditation. It allowed one to theologize.

With Symeon the Studite int the tenth century a move to an urban environment was noted. Unlike his predecessors in the desert, who had probably only occasional dealings with the ecclesiastical and governmental establishments in the city, Symeon was reminded daily by hierarchies other than monastic or spiritual, whose decisions could ultimately direct his way of life. He reacted against those who speak about spiritual matters without having experienced them themselves. Perhaps it was only after the transfer to Constantinople that the spiritual methods for self-improvement gave way to self-conscious programs of interpretation. Although ascetic spirituality, that of running away from society, had always a performative aspect with the society as the audience in mind, with the shift to Constantinople, this form of spirituality began to demand further public recognition and authority.

The practice itself seems to be a success. By the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, Pseudo-Symeon felt it necessary to list all three methods practiced and suggested only one as the preferred type. Slightly later, Nikephoros the Monk sought to further codify the practice so that other enthusiasts would not stumble into errors. Perhaps the advertorial beginning of his treatise was a sign that there was a ready market for such elucidations on an already popular practice.

In the Islamic world, a stress on experiential knowledge was also encountered. This often allowed sufis to be held in higher regard than jurists or philosophers. A stance against *falsafa* was not only on the part of the sufis; jurist

often joined in. Still a stance, similar to that of the hesychasts, was detected among the sufis, who did not always prescribe a wholesale rejection of philosophy, and here the case of al-Ghazali is to be remembered, yet were effective in the marginalization of it. The case of dhikr, with its similarities to and differences from hesychasm, points to an underlying mechanism at play in the development of an attitude against learning based on human reason, developing around a meditative practice offering an alternative method of knowledge creation and legitimizing a spiritual elite. It was only when these societies developed effective meditative practices that a voice, arguing that the divine was beyond knowledge but within grasp, gained a strong hold in their intellectual landscape. The Hesychast controversy was the natural result of this process.

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