

Nepsis in the Philokalia

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Abstract

This paper is a review of nepsis according to the Philokalia Fathers. The Philokalia is a collection of texts written between the fourth and the fifteenth centuries by spiritual masters of the Orthodox Christian tradition. After a person believes and is baptized in Christ, he has put on Christ and become a new man. He grows up to be like Christ by renewing his heart and nous. The Philokalia fathers concern on the renewal of the nous. And the most important way to renew the nous is by controlling the nous with all nepsis (*prosoche*) and praying (*proseuche*). The Philokalia fathers emphasized the importance of nepsis because they believed that the arch-enemy of the soul is a certain kind of thought which they described with the word *logismoi*. Nepsis is the guarding of the heart and nous from *logismoi*. Nepsis and prayer belong together. Nepsis is the mother of prayer.

Keywords: *nous, nepsis, Philokalia, prayer, watchfulness*

Introduction

When a person has believed in Christ and is baptized in Christ, as Apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Galatia, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have put on yourselves in Christ" (Gal 3:27). She puts on Christ's clothe and becomes a new human being (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24). She is constantly conformed to the image *oricon* of Christ (Col 3:10; Rom 8:29) or the form or *morphe* of Christ becomes real in her (Gal 4:19, "until Christ is formed in you"; see also 1 John 3:2).

The new man is still a God's seed (1 John 3:9) and needs to renew both in soul and body. The soul will be mature in Christ, no longer as a baby in Christ, as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Corinthians (1 Cor 13:11) and Ephesus (Eph 4:13 εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον, full maturity, no longer νήπιος, small child or baby). The soul grows toward Christ (Eph 4:15). And the body will be declared on the Day of Christ to be glorified and put on a body of glory like the body of Christ (Phil 3:21). Therefore, this new man will be perfect when the Day of Christ is revealed. The soul and body are Christ-like. She will participate in the divine nature or experience the divination (*theosis*) as written by the Apostle Peter, "... that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature ..." (2 Pet 1:4). Theosis is the ultimate goal of the human beings. Theosis penetrates all spheres of human existence. Theosis testifies to the inexplicably grand mystery of God's divine intimacy with human beings.ⁱ

The process of theosis is a renewed process or ἀνακαινούμενον (Col 3:10). It is in a passive form and it means that God is working on the renewal (see Phil 2:13; God is energizing both the will and the energy in you, ὁ θεὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ τὸ θέλειν καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας) but we are invited to work together with Him (see 1 Cor 3: 6; and 1 Cor 3:9, "Because we are the fellow workers of God; you are God's field, God's building "Θεοῦ γὰρ ἐσμεν συνεργοί· θεοῦ γεώργιον, θεοῦ οἰκοδομὴ ἐστε). We are *Theou's sunergoi*, that is, working together or synergizing to become perfect synergy in order to grow like Christ (*Theosis*).ⁱⁱ

The renewal process basically starts from human's heart. Why? For Jesus said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him, because from within, from the heart of a person, all evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder arise" (Mar 7: 20-21; see also Matt 15:19) and, "A good man out of the good treasure brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things" (Matt 12:35). Therefore, the Philokalia fathers concern on the renewal of the heart.ⁱⁱⁱ

What is the renewal of the heart? It is the renewal of the mind (Rom 12:2). The word "mind" in the original language is "νοῦς," "Nous," and is more accurately translated as "the eye of the heart" or "the single eye" as taught by Jesus, "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness" (Matt 6:22-23). The word "eye" is singular, and it does not refer to the physical eyes. It is the spiritual or the inner eye and it is called "nous" by the Apostle Paul.

What is the renewal of the nous? It is putting on the Nous of Christ (see 1 Cor 2:16). The Philokalia fathers concern on this one. The most important way to renew the nous is *nepsis* or watchfulness.^{iv}

This article is going to review of Philokalia's theme on *nepsis*. What is the *nepsis* according to the Philokalia fathers? This question will be discussed and hopefully help the readers to renew his heart and nous in order to achieve the theosis.

The Philokalia

The Philokalia, given its ever-increasing popularity during the past half-century, remains a mysterious work in many ways. The title page of the original Greek edition, published in Venice in 1782—a large folio volume, running to 1,207 pages in double columns — refers to the patron who funded the book, John Mavrocordato, in prominent capital letters. But it does not name the two editors. We know for sure who they were: Makarios of Corinth (1731–1805) and Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain (1749–1809), both of whom had been glorified by the Orthodox Church as saints.^v

The Philokalia is a collection of ascetic and mystical text, edited by St. Makarios and St. Nikodimos, and written by some 36 authors, which extends from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries chronologically. The Philokalia is love for the beautiful, the exalted, the excellent, understood as an important source of truth and life. It is in that love "the mind (nous) is purified, enlightened and perfected," as the subheading of the original edition puts it.^{vi}

Having the Nous of Christ

To renew the nous in the heart is to have the nous of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). And it means that "to think," φρονέω (*froneo*) like Christ's mind, "Let this mind be in you who is also in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5; Τοῦτο γὰρ φρονείσθω ἐν ὑμῖν ὁ καὶ ἐν χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ).

What is φρονέω (*froneo*) like Christ? The nous is directed towards the things of the Spirit, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit" (Rom 8:5).

Our inner thoughts should direct to the Spirit or *froneo* on the things of the Spirit not of the flesh and then we will live (Rom 8:13; see also Phil 3:19). For *froneo* on the things of the flesh brings the mindset of the flesh, φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς (*fronema sarkos*) which is death (Rom 8:6) and *froneo* of the things of the Spirit brings forth a spiritual mindset, φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος (*fronema pneumatos*) which is life and peace (Rom 8:6). *Fronema pneumatos* also means *froneo* on the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God not on things on earth or the world that bring destruction (Col 3:1-2; Phil 3:19).

To have the nous of Christ is to have the *fronema pneumatos*. The nous lives according to the Spirit and becomes the spiritual mindset. This *fronema pneumatos* and by the work of the Spirit will ultimately put to death the works of our flesh as written by the Apostle Paul, "... by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom 8:13).

If the nous is evil (see Matt 6:22-23) or does not live according to the Spirit then it will bring up *fronema sarkos* or the mindset of the flesh. The *fronema sarkos* will bring about the works of the flesh and it means we live according to the flesh and we will die (Rom 8:13). Evil nous is the same as living according to the flesh and bringing about the mindset and the deeds of the flesh.

Logismoi and Epithumia

According to Jesus, from the heart (*kardia*), evil thoughts arise, *dialogismoi kakoi*, οἱ διαλογισμοὶ οἱ κακοὶ (Mar 7:21). Therefore, from *inside nous* and *fronema* it is able to produce an evil *logismos*. This *fronema sarkos* is manifested in the form of evil thoughts or *logismoi kakoi*. Therefore, we must guard the nous so that the nous does not produce some evil *logismoi*.

The evil *logismoi* are the seeds of flesh lust or *epithumia sarkos*. The *fronema sarkos* produces evil *logismoi* and evil *logismoi* produce lust of the flesh as written by the Apostle Paul, Ἡ γὰρ σὰρξ ἐπιθυμεῖ, "because the flesh is passionate" (Gal 5:17). From *fronema* and *logismoi* now takes the form of *epithumia* or lust (desire). And if these *fronema* and *logismoi* are controlled by flesh or *sarkos*, then they produce lust of flesh or *epithumia sarkos*. And if this *epithumia sarkos* is fertilized, it will give birth to sin (Jam 1:15) or the works of the flesh, τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκὸς (Gal 5:19). The Apostle James explains, "Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (Jam 1:15, Εἴτα ἡ ἐπιθυμία συλλαβοῦσα τίκτει ἁμαρτίαν· ἡ δὲ ἁμαρτία ἀποτελεσθεῖσα ἀποκύει θάνατον). Conception or *sullambanois* like a woman's fertilized seed so that she becomes pregnant and gives birth to a child. Thus, *the epithumia* is fertilized and gives birth to sin and if the sin is ripe, it brings death.

We can fail the fertilization process before he gives birth to sin. How? Again, our *nous* and *fronema* play an important role. And this is an inner battle or battle of the soul to fight *logismoi* and the lust of the flesh. John Cassian uses a battle image to explain how the devils strike us in nous and heart. St. Gregory of Sinai speaks of battling for God in the domain of nous. In which the devil attempts to force us to give the idol of sensuality a sacrifice of nous. Origen said that the spring and source for all guilts are bad thoughts or *logismoi*. That's the unseen war. He had to cut off the brush of evil thoughts which beset him.^{vii}

This is an invisible battle because it takes place in our hearts or hearts, says the fathers of the Philokalia Church. As Matta El-Maskeen, a monk from the Egyptian Coptic Church, was quoted by Anthony M. Coniaris as saying,

Nous is a battlefield where humans first encounter sin. This is the border where humanity meets its mortal enemy, the Devil. It's not strange that the enemy must choose the human nous as a battlefield to wage his fierce struggle. Psychologists say that the nous is the crown above the human body that directs our actions and behavior whether we wake up or sleep; it controls feelings, consciousness, emotions, will, and mind- mind too .. Thus, the central human nous which controls human behavior. Therefore, if humans are defeated on this battlefield, it is the Devil who then has all the talents and abilities of humans. with extraordinary and varied strengths, but despite all this, he still doesn't have any i access to us except through our nous. This is an important fact that many of us need to be aware of - especially those who struggle in the realm of virtue, truth, and holiness. Because even though Satan is a great spiritual power, the scope of his activities against humans is very limited. He cannot approach anyone except through nous, the only part of our nature that is vulnerable to war with him - nous is the target of his attacks.^{viii}

George Timko also states that the church fathers emphasize that human beings' greatest misconception is that he feels his body makes him sin. He still excuses his body. If lust wakes up in him, he says, "That in my human nature is something given by God." He thinks that lust originates with his sexual hormones and not with his nous. But, the Fathers say, the body is a neutral instrument; don't blame it. You had better start looking into your conscience if you want to find the root of the guilt. According to Mark the Ascetic, "Blaming your nous and not your body for having sinned. For if the nous had not gone forth into sin, the body would not have gone after it."^{ix} This is why the nous has been described as a battlefield. All battles are lost or won first in the internal dialogue of the nous.

The *fronema pneumatōs* brings good *logismoi* as the Apostle Paul wrote, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good reports, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things" (Phil 4:8). The word "meditates" is λογίζομαι which in the plural noun is *logismoi*. They are the *logismoi* that are compatible with the Spirit (see Rom 8:5). Such *logismoi* come from the *fronema pneumatōs* because the nous has lived according to the Spirit as the Apostle Paul explained, "... live by the Spirit, and you will not obey the desires of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). So, if the nous *froneo* on the things of the Spirit, it will produce the *fronema pneumatōs* and the *fronema pneumatōs* brings *logismoi* as recorded in Philippians 4:8 above. And such *logismoi* brings the desire of the Spirit, *epithumia pneumatōs*, as written by the Apostle Paul in Gal 5:17, Ἡ γὰρ σὰρξ ἐπιθυμεῖ κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος. And what is very important is how the *epithumia pneumatōs* is fertilized and produces the fruit of the Spirit, *karpos pneumatōs* (see Gal 5:22-23).

Maturity

To produce the fruit of the Spirit is not an easy process because of the nature of the flesh in our hearts which we have to fight by killing or crucifying the flesh along with lust or *epithumia* or *pathema* as written by the Apostle Paul (Gal 5:24). *Crucify the flesh and its passions and possess Christ's Nous -> froneo of Christ -> fronema pneumatōs -> logismoi pneumatōs -> epithumia pneumatōs -> and karpos pneumatōs is the process of renewing our new human beings towards the image and likeness of Christ.* This is the growth of a baby becoming an adult Christian (1 Cor 13:11). We throw away our childish nature as Coniaris said that in Christ mature means to put away childish things in its negative aspects: self-centeredness, insistence on one's own way, anger, blame on other people, envy and jealousy. To be a mature Christian means to be more and more like Christ in his positive aspects. It's not enough to simply grow up. We must become something fully mature like Christ. Jesus said, "Be perfect, for I am perfect" (see also Eph 4:15). It is a life-long work done by the Holy Spirit by regular repentance and the baptismal faith.^x

The mature person in Christ is not the person who goes through life expecting love as a child, but the person who gives love. The mature person in Christ is the person to understand, to forgive, to take responsibility for his mistakes, to discipline himself, to be humble, to realize that he is nothing without God. When St. Paul writes to the Colossians "First of all put love, which binds all together in perfect harmony" he selects love as its most

important complement of maturity and of spirituality. When we allow the Trinity to come in and live in us, we can achieve that type of Godly maturity in our lives.^{xi}

Nepsis

The key to be mature in Christ or the process of renewing nous is now how to watch our nous with all vigilance (*nepsis*) and praying (*proseuche*) as Jesus said, "Keep watching always while praying, so that you have the strength to escape all that will happen, and so that you stand before the Son of Man"(Luk 21:36; see also Matt 26:41; 24:42-44).The Philokalia fathers emphasized the importance of nepsis, because the arch enemy of the soul was thought to be a sort of thought, as described by the word *logismos* (singular) or *logismoi* (plural).

Like the nous is the ruler or king of the kingdom of ourselves and this king is assisted by ministers and generals namely nepsis and prayer. Nepsis becomes a general who fights in the front to drive out all enemies and prayer becomes a minister who whispers all the words of Christ into our hearts and nous. Without these ministers and generals, surely, the king will lose when enemies come to attack. As said by one of the Philokalia Fathers, St. Symeon the New Theologian, "Attention must be so united to prayer as the body is to the soul ... Attention must go forward and observe the enemies like a scout, and it must first engage in combat with sin, and resist the bad thoughts that come to the soul. Prayer must follow attention, banishing and destroying at once all the evil thoughts which attention previously fought, because by itself attention cannot destroy them."^{xii}

Jesus' Teaching

Nepsis or inner attention is based on the words of Jesus. It is only through watchfulness and alertness that we can ever be ready for the hour the Lord addressed when His disciples asked, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" (Matt 24:3). "Watch, therefore, for you do not know what hour the Lord is coming" (Matt 24:42). Jesus often spoke to His disciples on the subject of vigilance (Matt 24:4-5, 42-44; 26:41; Luk 21:34-36). "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He comes, shall find watching," said Jesus (Luk 12:37). The Lord's Day has come. He shall come unintentionally as "a thief in the night" to the ones who are not watching (1 Thess 5:2), but He shall come not to watch as a thief but as the Bridegroom of our souls.

At the conclusion of His imminent apocalypics, Jesus told His disciples: "Watch! I'm telling everyone what I want to you: Watch!" (see Mark 13:33,37). This kind of vigilance prevents demonic thought from overcoming the heart, allowing the nous to focus on the "necessary thing" (Luk 10:42). "The nous of an attentive man is the sentry, the sleepless guardian, placed over the inner Jerusalem," wrote St. Seraphim. Such a heightened state of vigilance causes a person to be awake even when he sleeps, "Though I sleep, my heart keeps awake" (Song of Solomon 5:2).^{xiii}

Watchfulness means that the entire person stands with full attention to God while he prays. When he prays to him, He is completely available to Him. The subconscious (nous) is not like a faulty television that can not be shut off or channels flipped or volume raising. It is possible to control the subconscious. Thenous has a switch (*hegemonikon*) to check the thoughts (*logismoi*). The *hegemonikon* (nous) is the steward of the spirit. A ship would never enter the port without a helmsman. The "power of God" in holy baptism is particularly *hegemonikon*. The nous is, as Jesus claimed, "the eye of the soul." When, indeed, the eye is one, the entire body is full of light (see Matt 6:22-23).^{xiv}

Jesus links watchfulness with prayer, "Watch, therefore, at all times praying..." Attentiveness and prayer belong together. No one can be truly attentive without the power that comes from prayer. To be successful, a person's efforts to be vigilant must be buttressed by God's power. In fact, it has been said that *prosoche* (attention) is the mother of *proseuche* (prayer). "Watch and pray," said Jesus, "that you enter not into temptation..." Jesus taught that watchfulness and prayer are inseparable in the unseen warfare with the unclean thoughts and demons. Prayer is not just a blessing but hard work. This requires constant watchfulness, nepsis and caution. This is why Proverbs 4:23 says, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for out of it flow the springs of life."

The Philokalia Fathers

Nepsis: guarding the heart

Nepsis is the way of guarding the heart and nous from logismoi. St. Isaiah The Solitary wrote that as long as you are in your body, not to leave your heart unguarded. Just as a farmer can't feel secure about the crop growing in his fields because he doesn't know what's going to happen to it before it's deposited in his granary, so a man shouldn't leave his heart unwatched as long as he's still breathing through his nose. He can not realize

what emotion would strike him until his last breath; thus, as long as he breathes, he must not leave his heart unguarded, but should pray to God for His aid and grace at every moment.^{xv}

Why heart? There are always temptations (*peirasmōs*) from Satan and Satan's temptations are conquering our heart (*kardia*) (Acts 5:3; 1 Pet 5:8; Eph 6:11) so that from the heart possessed by Satan, it will arise evil thoughts (*logismoi*) (Mark 7:21; Matt 15:19).

St. Isaiah The Solitary told that, "Be attentive to your heart and watch your enemies, for they are cunning in their malice. In your heart be persuaded of this: it is impossible for a man to achieve good through evil means. That is why our Saviour told us to be watchful, saying: 'Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there are that find it' (Matt 7:14)."^{xvi} *Logismōis* part of the intellect (*nous*). This evil thought will bring up your desire or lust (passion; *epithumia*) and if the lust is fertilized, it will give birth to sin (Jam 1:14-15) and it means that if the lust is done by our ego, it will give birth to sin. The watchfulness, prayer, especially Jesus Prayer, Psalms and reading the scriptures crowd the evil thoughts of our minds.

How do we guard our heart? *By Guarding our heart means that guarding our nous*. St. Isaiah The Solitary writes, "When the nous grows strong, it makes ready to pursue the love which quenches all bodily passions and which prevents anything contrary to nature from gaining control over the heart. Then the nous, struggling against what is contrary to nature, separates this from what is in accordance with nature."^{xvii} *Guarding our nous could be done only in prayer and nepsis*.

There is a deep core in the nous where the whole person converges. That focus should be completely dedicated to Jesus. The essence of sincere prayer is to be fully present to Christ. This inner devotion to God when we speak to Him is the essential part of inner attention. St. Theophan said, "When praying to God, start as if you had never prayed before." John Ciardi said once, "A man is what he does with his attention."^{xviii} The nous is like a bridegroom, St. Ilias the Presbyter said, "The nous that encloses itself within the mind during prayer is like a bridegroom conversing with the bride inside the bridal chamber."^{xix}

We look over our fragmented nous and bring it back and forth to the terms we say. This is shown beautifully in the liturgy where the words, "Let us pray to the Lord again and again," welcome our attention and focus it on Christ. This attention is often drawn to us during the liturgy with the words "again and again." It's an appeal for nepsis, vigilance. St. Basil the Great emphasized the importance of nepsis. We must vigilantly guard our hearts not only in order to avoid sacrificing the mind of God or to sully the remembrance of His miracles by vain imagination, but also in order to carry out the sacred thoughts of God, imposed on our minds as an imminent indication by a constant and pure reminder. In so doing, he fulfills the statement, "I have always put the Lord before me: for he is on my right hand that I may not move" and he also observes the rule, "To the glory of God, if you feed, drink, or do anything else you do" We will behave as if in the presence of the Lord and live as if each thinking were held by him.^{xx}

St. Isaac the Syrian urges us not even to hold converse with the distracting thoughts of the evil one. He warns of the danger involved in such conversation. It's a symbol of a spiritual, who finds knowledge and strength through grace, to not resist or disagree with the reasoning craftily sowed in us by the devil but to break off all ties with them through prayer. Her real understanding of the situation liberates her from a great deal of labor (vain and unnecessary). We are breaking off the complicated loops of a long roll by using this shortcut. Because all opposing thoughts can't always be silenced by argument and conquered by argument. Most of us are wounded, and it may take a long time to heal such accidents. You challenge adversaries with six thousand years of background! Your talk with them will provide the tools to bring your downfall, because in wisdom and knowledge they are far superior to you. Your nous is defiled by their vile thoughts, though, even if you win, and their foolish stench is in your memory. You become protected from all these consequences and anxiety by using the first approach (i.e. by avoiding discussion). There is no assistance except God.^{xxi}

Kallistos Ware wrote that, "Watchfulness means, among other things, to be present where we are—at this specific point in space, at this particular moment in time. All too often we are scattered and dispersed, we are living, not with alertness in the present, but with nostalgia in the past, or with misgiving and wishful thinking in the future... *The neptic man*, then, is gathered into the here and the now. He is the one who seizes the *kairos*, the decisive moment of opportunity."^{xxii}

St. John Climacus describes vigilance as "the quenching of lust, deliverance from dream phantoms, a tearful eye, a softened heart, the guarding of thoughts, the subduing of passions, the taming of spirits, the chastisement of the tongue, the banishment of fantasies" (The Ladder 20:5).^{xxiii} These words of John Climacus echo the words of Jesus, "Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so that they may open to him at once when he comes back and knocks" (Luk 12:35-36).

Throughout the *Philokalia*, we read that nepsis is a strong discipline of our thinking. He holds it at the heart's entrance, so that he recognizes the wonderful ideas as they arrive, listens what they are doing and understands what these thieves do and which images are being projected.

Nepsis and prayer

St. Symeon the New Theologian wrote of the importance of *uniting vigilance with prayer*: “Vigilance and prayer should be as closely linked together as the body to the soul, for the one cannot stand without the other. Vigilance first goes on ahead like ascout and engages sin in combat. Prayer then follows afterwards, and instantly destroys and exterminates all the evil thoughts with which vigilance has already been battling, for attentiveness alone cannot exterminate them.”^{xxiv} St. Symeon’s contribution to the later hesychast movement is often perceived retrospectively. John McGuckin describes him as a kind of fore-runner of the fourteenth century hesychast movement” despite not having authored the texts on methods of prayer.^{xxv}

St. Evagrius the Solitary thought that if, as the apostle says, you are dishearted, pray (Jam 5:13). Pray with fear, tremor, struggling, caution and alertness. It is especially necessary to pray in this way because the enemies are so evil. It is only when they see us weeping that they are ready to attack, to come and stand beside us, and say that our nous is not supposed to think of prayer. In this sense, they seek to captivate our nous to make our meditation and supplication futile and needless. Because prayer, when it is not carried out with fear and trembling, with inward diligence and caution is completely futile and pointless.^{xxvi}

St. Hesychios focused on Jesus prayer and nepsis, “Watchfulness and the Jesus Prayer, as I have said, mutually reinforce one another; for close attentiveness goes with constant prayer, while prayer goes with close watchfulness and attentiveness of nous.”^{xxvii} And “Forgetfulness can extinguish our guard over our nous as water extinguishes fire; but the continuous repetition of the Jesus Prayer, combined with strict watchfulness, uproots it from our heart. The Jesus Prayer requires watchfulness as a lantern requires a candle.”^{xxviii}

Thus, vigilance, nepsis, is achieved by guarding closely the senses and especially by the Jesus Prayer. In fact, the Church Fathers often quoted one sentence of Evagrius because it contained a suggestive alliteration of two Greek words *proseuche* (prayer) and *prosoche* (attention). Attentiveness and prayer belong together. No one can be truly attentive without the power that comes from prayer. To be successful, a person’s efforts to be vigilant must be buttressed by God’s power. In fact, it has been said that *prosoche* (attention) is the mother of *proseuche* (prayer). “Watch and pray,” said Jesus, “that you enter not into temptation...” Watchfulness and prayer are inseparable in the unseen warfare with the unclean thoughts and demons.

The inner struggle

St. Symeon praised highly the struggle to contain our thoughts through nepsis. At any moment our whole soul ought to have a clear view, to be able to see and notice the thinking coming from the evil one into our hearts and to repel them. The heart should always be full of faith, humility and love. Don't fear and flee conflict; there's no virtue where no struggle exists.^{xxix} Coniaris writes that nepsis is never easy. It requires constant struggle. The Fathers tell of a monk who prayed to God about the conflict brought about by the constant struggle to be vigilant. He wanted the struggle to come to an end. It did come to an end. He went to see his spiritual father and said to him, “I see myself in unbroken peace, without any conflict or struggle.” The spiritual father said to him, “Go and pray to God that the warfare may return, because through conflict the soul comes to proficiency and victory. And when the struggle comes, do not pray for it to be taken away, but that the Lord may give patience in persecution.”^{xxx}

St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain counsels that through mediation and service of senses, every thought of evil and every sort of passion reaches the heart. And if emotions are not protected, the bad impulses are not kept, either. How can these emotions be controlled and closed? Listen. Clear netting was put over the windows of the Temple of Salomon to avoid the invasion of impure insects (cf. Ez 41:6). This may inform you that those who do not want the unclean impulses of the senses to reach their souls will place[spiritual] net on their senses. What are these nets? What are these nets? It's a remembrance of death, for one; our account of the judgment before Christ; the remembrance of eternal suffering. St. Neilos has confirmed that this is so: “Those who desire to keep their nous as a clean and pure temple, where the doors and windows are covered with fine nets to prevent the entry of any impure insects, must similarly cover their senses by meditating on the sobering realities of the future judgment which prevent the entry of any impure images to creep in.”^{xxxi}

St. Philotheos of Sinai wrote that, “When engaged in noetic warfare, we should therefore do all we can to choose some spiritual practice from divine Scripture and apply it to our nous like a healing ointment. From dawn we should stand bravely and unflinchingly at the gate of the heart, with true remembrance of God and unceasing prayer of Jesus Christ in the soul; and keeping watch with the nous, we should slaughter all the sinners in the land (Psalm 101:8)”^{xxxii}

Tito Colliander describes such attentiveness, “The spider may be another example for you. In the middle of his web he sits and feels the smallest fly and kills it. Likewise, prayer watches in the middle of your heart: as soon as a trembling makes it known that an enemy is there, prayer kills it. To leave off praying is the same thing as deserting one’s post. The gate stands open for the ravaging hordes, and the treasures one has gathered are

plundered. The plunderer does not need long to accomplish his work: anger, for example, can destroy everything in a single second.^{xxxiii}

Paul Evdokimov wrote, “Vigilance allows us to recognize evil before being tempted . . . The spiritual masters make use of an image that was familiar in the desert: Strike the serpent on the head before he enters the cell. If the serpent enters, the struggle will be much more laborious.”^{xxxiv}

St. Macarios tells of how Adam was tempted through the senses, “Adam was created pure by God to serve him. However, the devil approached him and spoke to him and it was from without through the hearing that he was first received. It was after this that the devil entered his heart and pervaded his entire being.”^{xxxv}

St. Evagrius the Solitary warns, “Be the door-keeper of your heart and do not let any thought come in without questioning it. Question each thought individually: “Are you on our side or the side of our foes?” And if it is one of ours, it will fill you with tranquility.”^{xxxvi}

St. Hesychios gives the valuable insight that harmful foods make the body difficult, but the person who eats them can quickly take some bliss and therefore be unharmed as soon as he feels the pain. Often, once an intelligence that has imbued evil thoughts detects the anger, it is willing, through the deepest words of the spirit, to quickly remove them and fully get rid of them. This teaching and the accompanying knowledge were communicated through God’s mercy comprehension to watchers.^{xxxvii}

St. Maximos the Confessor warns us of the enemy’s stealing Christ from us through lack of vigilance. Let us not sleep, just watch our Lord and Savior so that nobody can take Him from the tomb of our hearts with eternal watching so that we can tell at some point that they came while we slept and stole Him away. We have rivals, because we would slip to sleep, that try to steal God from our souls. Let us hold Him in the tomb of our souls with constant watch; let him rest there; lay him sleep there; let him rise again there, if he will.^{xxxviii}

One of the many benefits of growing in watchfulness is the gift of discernment. Ware explains how this happens. Through the diligence and self-knowledge, a journeyman starts to gain the power of judgment or discernment (in Greek: *diakrasis*). As a person who is safe and who knows whether food is moldy or good is physical taste, the spiritual taste will differentiate him if it is produced with ascetic commitment and prayer. The difference between evil and good, between the unnecessary and the meaningful, between the imaginations inspired by the devil and images characterized by celestial archetypes in his creative imagination.^{xxxix}

Summary

Crucify the flesh and its passions and possess the nous of Christ through *froneo* of Christ --->*fronema pneumatos* --->*logismoi pneumatos* --->*epithumia pneumatos* ---> and *karpos pneumatos* is the process of renewing our new human beings towards the image and likeness of Christ. The key of the process is renewing nous by controlling the nous with all nepsis(*prosoche*) and praying (*proseuche*). The Philokalia fathers stressed the importance of nepsis as they felt that the soul’s arch-enemy was some thinking they identified with the term *logismoi*. *Logismoi* are essentially a group of thoughts that capture the nous and pollute it slowly into a world of fantasy. Nepsis is the guarding of the heart and nous from *logismoi*. Nepsis and prayer belong together. No one can be truly attentive without the power that comes from prayer. In fact, *prosoche* is the mother of *proseuche*.

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ⁱSee also the discussion on the topic of Theosis in Vladimir Kharlamo, ed., *Theosis Deification in Christian Theology* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2012), 1-21.

ⁱⁱSee the discussion on the energy of God and Theosis from Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1981), 22, 74, 109, 125-126.

ⁱⁱⁱSee Brock Bingaman and Bradley Nassif, eds., *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 12, 24, 26–30, 52, 67, 114, 148, 154, 198–202, 228, 263–66.

^{iv}See also Brock Bingaman and Bradley Nassif, eds., *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, on nous, 16, 21, 36, 52, 59, 67, 79, 83, 104, 121, 142, 186, 188–91, 199, 217, 223, 227, 245, 255, 263. And nepesis, 73, 103–4, 111, 266, 335.

^vKallistos Ware, “St. Nikodimos and the Philokalia,” in *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, eds. Brock Bingaman and Bradley Nassif (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 20.

^{vi}See also St. Nikodemos of The Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, Volume 1, translated by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 11.

^{vii}Anthony M. Coniaris, *Confronting and Controlling Thoughts: According to the Fathers of the Philokalia* (Minneapolis: Light & Life Publishing Company, 2004), 52.

^{viii}Coniaris, *Confronting and Controlling Thoughts: According to the Fathers of the Philokalia*, 34.

^{ix}George Timko, *Speaking of Silence*, edited by Susan Walker (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 179.

^xConiaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality*, 32.

^{xi}Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality*, 34-35.

^{xii}Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality*, 95.

^{xiii}Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality*, 92.

^{xiv}Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality*, 93.

^{xv}St. Nikodemos of The Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia: Volume 1*, 25.

^{xvi}St. Nikodemos of The Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia: Volume 1*, 26.

^{xvii}St. Nikodemos of The Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia: Volume 1*, 26.

^{xviii}Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality*, 94.

^{xix}St. Nikodemos of The Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia: Volume 1*, 26.

^{xx}Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality*, 97.

^{xxi}Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality*, 98-99.

^{xxii}Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press. 1981), 153.

^{xxiii}John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, translated by Colm Luibheid and Norman Russel (London: SPCK, 1982), 196.

^{xxiv}St. Nikodemos of The Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia: Volume IV*, 67.

^{xxv}John A. McGuckin, “Symeon the New Theologian’s Hymns of Divine Eros: A Neglected Masterpiece of the Christian Mystical Tradition,” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 5.2 (2005) 182.

^{xxvi}St. Nikodemos of The Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia: Volume I*, 37.

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