

Prologue of the *Philokalia*  
(On Noetic Prayer) -  
*A Primer of Mystical Theology*  
by  
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**G**od, the blessed Nature, the most perfect perfection, the Creative Beginning of all good and of all beautiful, the above-good and above-beautiful, having predetermined according to His divine design from everlasting to deify man, and having deigned this purpose for man within Himself from the beginning before all things, created him when He deemed appropriate. And since man received his body from matter and God put a soul into him from Himself, something of a world is made, great by virtue of the powers and sublimity contained in a small body, to see visually the sensible Creation and to be initiated into the spiritual, according to Gregory the Theologian. What else, indeed, besides an actual statue and an image made by God intermingled full of all graces? And afterward seeing that He gave him the law of the Commandment - like a test of man's self-determinism - He decided that He must in the future separate from him. And, as Sirach says: "He left him in the power of his own inclination" (15:14), to choose according to his opinion whatever presented itself. He would have received as a reward for keeping the commandment the hypostatic grace of deification, he would have become God and he would have been illumined unto the ages with the true light. However, oh evil machination of envy! The prime mover of evilness did not allow him to see these things actualized. He was filled with envy against the Fashioner and against the fashioned, as the sacred Maximos says. Against the one, so that the all-hymned power of Goodness would not become obvious in practice in deifying man; against the other, so that he may not appear a partaker of the supernatural glory by deification. Seeing that with his deceptions the deceiver beguiled faithless man, he made him with his supposed well-intentioned counsels to transgress the commandment which would have made him God. And seeing that he distanced him from the divine glory, the rebel imagined that he was some Olympic champion, because he was able to interrupt the effectuation of the pre-eternal will of God.

However, that I may speak concerning the divine oracles, the plan of God for the deification of human nature remains forever and His deep thoughts unto all the coming generations (Ps. 32:11); that is, the reasons of providence and of judgment which aim at this goal continue unchanged both during the present age and in the future one, according to the explanation of the sacred Maximos. For this reason the most divine Word Himself of the Father deigned in the last days out of compassion to violate the desires of the rulers of darkness, and to bring to pass and to accomplish His ancient and true will. With the good pleasure of the Father, then, and the cooperation of the Holy Spirit He became incarnate, He took on matter in the likeness of our nature and when He deified it, He gave us afterward also His salvific and deifying commandments. In baptism He sowed in our hearts, like a divine seed, the perfect grace of His All-holy Spirit and He gave to us, according to the divine Evangelist, authority, so as to practice His life-giving commandments according to the changing abilities in our spiritual stature and by their execution to keep within us the grace inextinguished and, finally, to bear fruit, to make us children of God (Jn. 1:12) and Gods and to end up as a perfect man, unto the spiritual stature for the fullness of the gifts of Christ (Eph. 4:13). In summary, this was the end and the consequence for us of the whole economy of the Word.

Alas! It is proper here to groan bitterly, according to the divine Chrysostom. We received so much grace and were deemed worthy of so much respect, so that our soul, purified by the Spirit in Baptism, shines more than the sun, and when we mindless ones received this most divine brilliance, as much as from ignorance and, more so, darkened from the stupor of worldly cares, we buried the grace below the passions to such an extent, so as to be in danger of extinguishing completely from within us the Spirit of God. And we will suffer whatever they who answered Paul did who said to him: "We have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" (Acts 19:2), that it might become of us in truth as it was in the beginning, according to the prophet (Is. 63:16), when grace did not rule us. Woe to our weakness; would that our evilness and our longing for the material, beyond what is necessary, disappear. And what is truly astonishing is this: if we hear that grace works in others, we envy them and we defame them, even if we do not believe that grace exists in this age. And afterward? The Spirit enlightens those Fathers wise in divine things, oriented toward uninterrupted watchfulness and attentiveness in all things and guarding of the nous, and He reveals to them a method to again find grace, a method truly wondrous and most scientific. The method was the ceaseless prayer to our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God. Not simply with the nous alone and the lips (this is obvious without exception to all who chose piety and easy to the chief of them) but turning the whole nous to the interior man, where there is also the sublime. This way within themselves, in the depths of their heart they call upon the all-holy name of the Lord, seeking with patience His mercy, being attentive exclusively and only to the words of the prayer, accepting nothing else, either from within or from without, keeping their mind completely imageless and pure. They took the roots and - no one would have said it - the content of this work from the very teaching of the Lord. Somewhere He says to us: "The kingdom of God is found within you" (Lk. 17:21); and somewhere else: "Hypocrite, first cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean" (Mt. 23:26). These things are not said for the sensible part of man, but pertain to the interior man. And the Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians this way: "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; that he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ with His Spirit may dwell in you hearts" (Eph. 3:14-17). What could be clearer than this testimony? In another place he says: "Singing and chanting to the Lord in your hearts" (Eph. 5:19). Do you hear? Within the heart, he says. This is also affirmed by the chief of Apostles Peter, saying: "Until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2 Pet. 1:19). That this is mandatory of every faithful is taught by the Holy Spirit in myriads of other pages of the New Testament. This can be confirmed by as many as wish to search them carefully.

From this spiritual and scientific work, accompanied also by the practical execution of the commandments and of the remaining moral virtues, because of the warmth which is created in the heart and the spiritual energy from the calling on the all-holy Name, the passions are burned up; because our God is fire, fire which consumes evil (Deut. 4:24). Continuing on, the nous and the heart, little by little, are purified and are unified together. And when they are purified and united, one with the other, from that point the fruits of the Spirit rise up once again in the soul and all the fullness of good things are lavished upon man. And that I may speak briefly, from here it is possible to return to the perfect grace of the Spirit which was granted to us from the beginning in Baptism, and which certainly exists in us, but the passions have buried it, just like the ashes bury the spark. It will shine again spreading its rays as before, we will contemplate it, we will be enlightened in the nous and then we will be perfected and we will be deified in a becoming manner.

Most of the Fathers today mention this work sporadically in their writings, with the idea that it applies only to people who are familiar with it. Some, however, because they understood the possible ignorance and or indifference of our generation concerning this salvific contemplation, therefore explained thoroughly and readily the tradition to us, their children, and its practical application with some physical methods. They praised it with countless descriptions; they said it was the beginning of every God-pleasing work, a mountain of blessings, the clearest marker of repentance, a noetic practice which constitutes the crown of true theoria; and they admonish all of us to this most beneficial work. But now I lament, and my emotion interrupts my speech. All the books which philosophize about the true cathartic and illumining and perfecting - in the words of the Areopagite - work, but also as many others by those who are called Watchful, because they speak about attention and watchfulness, all together those which contain something of necessity within and tools which contribute to the same subject and have the same goal, that is, to make man God, almost all of these have been lost on account of the antiquity of their authors, on account of their scarcity, but also - and why not? - because they have never been published. If some have remained somewhere, these also are moth-eaten and completely worn out, as if they never existed at all. I will also add this; because most of our own exhibit negligence and are preoccupied with many things, and I mean with bodily and practical virtues, or, that I might speak more truly, only with the instruments of the virtues, and they expend their life on these, whereas concerning this, that is, the guarding of the nous and pure prayer, I don't know how, they are completely indifferent, without a single idea. And this short and most-sweet work is in danger of being lost completely, resulting in the tarnishing and extinguishing of grace and together with it the slipping away of our union with God and our deification. And we have said how this was the plan of God which He had put into action from the beginning with all of His will. This is the perfect end with which the creation of the world and the economy of the Word of God for our salvation and our life unto eternity are concerned and in general all that have occurred in a divine manner within the Old and New Testament.

Whereas formerly many, both secular and kings, and as many as lived in palaces being troubled daily by business and worldly cares, had one main work, the uninterrupted prayer within the heart - and we encounter many within the narrations - now on account of heedlessness and ignorance, not only among those who live in the world, but also among the very monks who live a solitary life in silence, this work has become most sparse, unto great harm, and extremely hard to come by. And because they are deprived of this weapon, albeit each one fighting according to his ability his own battle and undergoing labors for virtue, they do not bear a single fruit, because it is impossible for anyone to bear fruit without the unceasing remembrance of the Lord and complete purity of heart and nous from every evil thought: "Without me," He says, "you can do nothing," and somewhere else: "Whoever abides in me bears much fruit" (Jn. 15:5).

From this fact I conclude that there is no other reason why there was such a shortage in those that should have shone forth in holiness, both during their life and after their death, and why there has been such a great decline in those that can be saved in our time; that is, because we have neglected that work which raises one up to deification. And without the deification of the nous, someone said, not only can man not be sanctified, but he cannot even be saved. For this alone to be heard is most fearful, because sanctification and salvation is one, according to the explanation given by the wise. But something else which is of the utmost importance is that we have an absence of those books which teach this. Without these, however, it is impossible to succeed in our task.

Look, however, here is that one so fine and good in all things, the really true friend of Christ, Mr. John Mavrogordatos. To absolutely no one does he come after in distinction as pertaining to generosity, to charity, to hospitality and to the rest of the choir of virtues. He is always ablaze with virtuous zeal to benefit the general public.

He, being inspired by the grace of Christ Who desires that all men should be saved and deified, changes our lament to joy by getting us out of this impasse. With his whole soul he presents to the general public the way of deification and, to say it this way, he assists with hands and feet and cooperates in every way, with the pre-eternal - as has been said - plan of God. This is glory and splendor. Behold, those things which were confined to a corner, in hiding and secret, ignored and moth-eaten, discarded and scattered here and there. Behold, those things which instruct us systematically in the purification of the heart, in the watchfulness of the nous, in the recalling of the grace within us and, take note, of deification, after he consolidated them all together without taking at all into consideration the expense, he delivers them to the great and resplendent light of print. (It was necessary, yes, that those things which speak about the divine enlightenment should also be deemed worthy of the light of print). With this decision those who are already familiar with the works are delivered from the labors of copying them and at the same time it stimulates in those who do not know the works the eros to acquire them and more so to put them into practice. You then have the following, my dearest reader, by the means of the most excellent Mr. John, uncut and at a low cost, this spiritual book. A book which is the treasure chest of watchfulness, the talisman of the nous, the mystical school of noetic prayer. A book which is the prime outline of practical virtue and the unerring guide of theoria, the paradise of the fathers, the golden chain of virtues. A book which is the condensed teaching of Jesus, the trumpet which recalls grace, and with two words, the very instrument of deification, the incalculably more desirable than all, that for which we searched for years and did not find. For this reason it is also an unavoidable necessity and obligation for you, according to every requirement of righteousness, to entreat God with long prayers for the sake of the benefactor and those who worked with him, that they may also attain to the same degree of deification, and because they labored for this, that they may also be the first to taste of the fruit.

Now that we have reached this point of the address, however, someone might remark that it is not permissible for us to make known to the hearing of the many some of the secrets of the book because they will be strange to them, because, someone will say, some danger lurks in them. We answer them with few words: we did not, beloved friend, undertake this project following our own thoughts, but more so from the example of others. From one side, from the Sacred Scripture which gives the commandment unconditionally to all the faithful to pray without ceasing and to always have the Lord before them (1 Thess. 5:17; Ps. 15:8), whereas according to Basil the Great it is impiety for us to say that the commandments of the Spirit contain something forbidden or impossible. From the other side, from the written tradition of the Fathers. For example, Gregory the Theologian admonishes all the people he is shepherding to remember God more than to breathe. And the divine Chrysostom wrote three whole works on the unceasing and noetic prayer and in innumerable places of his other works he exhorts all together to practice continual prayer. Furthermore, the wondrous Gregory of Sinai, visiting various cities, taught the same salvific work. But God Himself, sending His angel with wonder from heaven, sealed this truth, confounding the monk who was raising objections, as is shown at the end of this book. But I do not require words to explain this. The people themselves of the world and those who dwell in palaces, having, as we have said, this contemplation as their unceasing work, truly confirm our word, and they are able from their own examples to confound

the opponents. If, today, some have at one time slipped a little, what is so strange? This happened to some many more times out of self-conceit, according to Gregory of Sinai. I, however, believe that the basic and main reason for this aberration is that they did not follow exactly in all things the ways of the Fathers concerning this work. This work is holy and through it we have the greatest opportunity to be delivered from all error, and because the commandment of God in the law which leads to life, "was found," says Paul, "to be death for many" (Rm. 7:10). This, however, did not happen on account of the commandment. How could that be, being that the commandment is holy and righteous and true? (Rm. 7:12). It happened on account of the wickedness practiced by those under the lordship of sin. What should happen as a result of this? Should we condemn the divine commandment because of the sin of some? And should we also neglect such a salvific work because of the aberration by some? Not in any way. Neither the one, nor the other. But, rather, having courage toward Him who said, "I am the way and the truth" (Jn. 14:6), with all humility and with a sober disposition, let us take up the work. Because whoever is free of self-conceit and of the desire to please man, even if the whole army of demons wars against him, they will not even be able to approach him, according to the teaching of the Fathers.

Such are those things and this book, and from what we have said, it is apparent that it emphasizes the flawless work in every place, in every place and in every way. It is, therefore, especially expedient to apply that invitation of Wisdom (Prov. 9:1-6) to the supper and for us to gather everyone with a vociferous divine proclamation to the spiritual table of this book, as many as do not hate the divine suppers, nor give as excuses their fields and cattle and wives, like those who were called to the Gospel (Lk. 14:18-20). Come, therefore, come quickly, eat the bread of knowledge and wisdom and drink the wine which spiritually gladdens the heart and which withdraws from all sensible and noetic things because of the deification which this ecstasy begets and be inebriated by a truly sober inebriation. Come all, as many as are members in the Orthodox calling, lay people and monks together, as many as aspire to find the kingdom of God which is within you and the hidden treasure in the field of your heart (Lk. 17:21; Matt. 13:44), which is sweet Jesus Christ. Thusly, free from the captivity of this world and from the wandering of your nous and with a heart purified of the passions, by the ceaseless and awesome calling upon our Lord Jesus Christ and with the other co-operative virtues, which this book teaches, you shall be united together among yourselves and being united together in this way you shall all together be united to God, according to the supplication of our Lord to the Father where he said: "That they may be one, as we are one" (Jn. 17:11). And in this manner being united with Him and completely changed by the bliss and ecstasy which divine eros begets, you will be lavishly deified with a spiritual sensation and with a certain fullness of knowledge and you will return to the first plan of God, glorifying the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.