

## The Ecclesiology of the *Philokalia* *Krastu Banev*

The *Philokalia* is an itinerary through the labyrinth of time, a silent way of love and gnosis through the deserts and emptinesses of life, especially of modern life, a vivifying and fadeless presence.... It must be stressed, however, that this spiritual path ... cannot be followed in a vacuum. Although most of the texts in the *Philokalia* are not specifically doctrinal, they all presuppose doctrine even when they do not state it. Moreover, this doctrine entails ecclesiology. It presupposes a particular understanding of the church and a view of salvation inextricably bound up with its sacramental and liturgical life.

(*Philokalia*, “Introduction” to the English translation).<sup>1</sup>

A “silent way” but one which cannot be followed “in a vacuum”. Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, now Metropolitan of Diokleia, are emphatic that the ascetic way presented in the *Philokalia* is at the same time both doctrinal and ecclesial. The clarification introduced here is also a warning. Even when the texts “do not state it” they “presuppose” a very particular set of doctrinal beliefs and their ecclesial manifestation. What this refers to is, of course, the dogmatic and liturgical framework of the Orthodox Church, and in particular the longstanding tradition of the Holy Mountain, Mount Athos, itself a continuation of the earlier monastic traditions in Egypt and Palestine. To establish the essential connection between asceticism, doctrine and ecclesiology is important because the loss of one of these three will ultimately lead to a distorted view of salvation. The “silent way” if followed “in a vacuum” will lead to a dead end. And if the first readers of the *Philokalia* were not in need of such a warning, readers today, especially those living in “the deserts and

emptinesses” created by individualism and consumerism certainly do. For the temptation to take the philokalic message as yet another anti-depressant tablet is nowhere stronger than in our modern Western society. It is, therefore, in this modern context that we first observe the need to reflect on the “ecclesiology” of the *Philokalia*.<sup>2</sup>

The issue that troubles modern ecclesially-minded readers of the *Philokalia* seems to be that of the collection’s emphasis on individual spirituality which, so it appears, undermines the salvific role of the community of believers, the church. The central tension here is between prayer understood as the liturgical act of the whole church and the non-liturgical private discipline of prayer. Thus Fr Alexander Schmemmann famously rejected what he called the “refined narcissism” of those Orthodox people who use quotations from the *Philokalia* in their church bulletins. He saw the main problem as the “singling out of spirituality as a thing in itself”, and denounced the “spiritual madness” of those Orthodox people who “study spirituality”.<sup>3</sup> A little more nuanced is the view of the renowned Greek theologian Christos Yannaras. In a recent Christmas interview for the Russian Christian magazine “Киѡѡ” (“Cephas”), Prof. Yannaras criticized individualist approaches to the *Philokalia*:

We have in Greece parishes with 90,000 parishioners. These are not a parish. People are more united at a football match than in parishes of this size. In my opinion, this is where the main problem lies. We cannot resolve major theological problems remaining suspended in the air.... Do you permit me to be a little provocative? I will ask you a question: Have you ever thought why the *Philokalia* is so popular today in the West? If you read the *Philokalia*, you will see that the church is not mentioned, it is absent. If according to the *Philokalia* the mind is united with the heart – then all is well. You do not need anything else – not the church, not the Eucharist. I do not speak of

the patristic texts in the anthology which are deep and important. The problem is with the choices made over the selection of texts. These choices were not made in an ecclesial spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Just as with the rest of Prof. Yannaras's theology, this passage is not to be read as a simple criticism of the bad West. It should be read as belonging to the genre of self-criticism: the cited reflection is made in an interview for a Russian Orthodox magazine and deals with current parish life in Greece. This demonstrates that Yannaras's criticism of Christians who remain "suspended in the air" is aimed at the Orthodox themselves: first in Greece, then in Russia and then in West. In his analysis, what informs both the composition and the reading of the *Philokalia* on its native Orthodox soil is the exclusive, and thus negative, concern for individualistic piety. In another place, the now Metropolitan Kallistos Ware has also criticized some of the abbreviated modern Western editions of the *Philokalia* which only concentrate on the prayer of the heart, as if it were possible to practice it as a spiritual technique in an ecclesiological and doctrinal vacuum.<sup>5</sup> The "Introduction" to the English translation of the *Philokalia* also emphasizes the need to see the collection in the context of the church "bound up with its sacramental and liturgical life". This warning can be viewed as a direct response to the kind of criticisms voiced so characteristically by both Schmemmann and Yannaras. For Yannaras, the choices over the selection of texts "were not made in an ecclesial spirit" and St Nikodimos was the person responsible for this apparent lack of an ecclesiological dimension.<sup>6</sup> Sherrard and Ware's response was that all the texts "presuppose doctrine" which in turn "entails ecclesiology".

To think about the "ecclesiology" of the *Philokalia* is to presume that there are ways of defining the *Philokalia* as a church book. And yet,

as Yannaras and Schmemmann point out, the *Philokalia* does not have much to offer in terms of ecclesiology: since broadly speaking the focus of the collections is on the prayer of the heart, as practiced by individual Christians, the church per se is seldom mentioned. One can, therefore entertain the view that the *Philokalia* offers alternatives to mainstream church-based Christian practice: a sort of gnostic private route for the spiritual specialist, with corresponding special techniques. Nevertheless, in the remainder of this essay I shall oppose the claim that philokalic prayer ignores normal church life or renders church participation unnecessary. My contention will be that the *Philokalia* is a fundamentally ecclesial book. The exposition will follow a division between what can be called the “implicit” and the “explicit” ecclesiology of the *Philokalia*.

## **Implicit Ecclesiology**

We begin analyzing the implicit ecclesiology of the *Philokalia* with a discussion on the origins of the term, the composition of the collection and the role played by its editors and translators. This demonstration of the ecclesial background of all the stages in the life of the collection will help us to uncover the implicit ecclesiology of the *Philokalia*.

As a patristic term “philokalia” has a clearly identifiable ecclesial provenance. The literal meaning of the Greek word φιλοκαλία (as well as of the Slavonic “добротолюбіє”) is “love of beauty” or “love of what is good”, and thus by extension “love of God”, the ultimate source of goodness and beauty. Used of books, φιλοκαλία designates an “anthology of good and beautiful things”, and this is precisely the meaning given to it

in the fourth century by St Basil of Caesarea and St Gregory of Nazianzus for their collection of extracts from Origen's writings.<sup>7</sup> In the eighteenth century, the same title with the same meaning was chosen for the anthology of Greek patristic writings on prayer prepared by St Makarios of Corinth (1731–1805) and St Nikodimos of Mt Athos (1749–1809).

Published in Venice in 1782, this new *Philokalia* quickly became the main literary witness to the tradition of personal non-liturgical prayer, known as “prayer of the heart”, as it was lived in the Christian East. With the almost simultaneous translation into Slavonic and then modern Russian, the new *Philokalia* spread across the vast expanse of Russian Orthodoxy. It was with a copy of this *Philokalia* in his bag that the pilgrim of *The Way of a Pilgrim* crossed imperial Russia (including, at that time, Poland and the Ukraine) living as a stranger and devoting his whole time to prayer.<sup>8</sup> The story of the pilgrim, however, is also the story of the continuous growth of the philokalic tradition. Its popularity in nineteenth-century Russia was immense. In the twentieth century it was translated into all major European languages becoming, in the estimation of one of its English translators, “the most significant Greek Orthodox book to appear during the whole of the four centuries of the Tourkokratia”.<sup>9</sup> Both St Makarios and St Nikodimos were practising members of the Orthodox Church, strong advocates of frequent communion in line with the programme of the Kollyvades movement.<sup>10</sup> Their lives were spent under the spiritual care of the Ecumenical patriarchate, which eventually numbered them among the saints. The “ecclesiology of the editors”, if we are permitted to use the phrase, cannot be questioned. Their intention, as the title page of the first edition states, was to offer their work for the benefit of the entire community of Orthodox faithful (εἰς κοινὴν τῶν ὀρθοδόξων

ὁφείλειαν), an expression which signifies the fullness of the church including both ordained and lay people as well as the monastics. The emphasis of the collection as a whole is on prayer as a universal Christian vocation. Among the selected authors not all but still a significant number were ordained clergy, including both monk-priests and bishops. All these elements implicitly suggest that the *Philokalia* was a clearly ecclesial undertaking.

But more than just a church-run project to gather church-related materials, the *Philokalia* was also conceived as having a very particular ecclesial purpose. It was intended, as St Nikodimos tells us in his “Introduction”, to help *practising* Orthodox Christians to arrive at a fuller understanding of the meaning of their church observances. The majority of his fellow Christians, St Nikodimos lamented, “are troubled about many things: about bodily and active virtues, or, to speak more truly, exclusively about the tools for securing the virtues; and they neglect the one thing needed, keeping guard over the intellect and pure prayer”.<sup>11</sup> In his “Introduction”, St Nikodimos reminds his readers that the purpose of all Christian life is “deification” which is infinitely greater and more exciting than just the keeping of church observances. Humanity is called to contemplation and union with God by grace, something which escapes verbal expression and is solely a matter of living experience. Those who understand will understand, repeatedly add the saintly authors in the *Philokalia*, clarifying that, if you are still lacking understanding, pure prayer and your cell will teach you! Thus the entire collection was seen by Nikodimos as an aid to re-discovering the true meaning of the church rites (fasting, liturgical prayer, charity) by re-kindling the grace received in Baptism. The work is to be undertaken by each Christian individually and

is defined as the “inner action” or “inner work” (the usual Greek and Slavonic terms are: ἐσωτερικὴ ἐργασία, внутреннее делание). This inner work takes place within what the Apostle Paul had defined as “the inner man” or “the inner self” (Rom. 7:22; 2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16). St Luke’s Gospel announced that: “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21) and in keeping with this proclamation St Nikodimos sees the purpose of the *Philokalia* in offering guidance to practising Christians on how to come yet closer to Christ the King, who through Baptism abides in the “kingdom” of their hearts. The individual sanctification advocated by the *Philokalia* does not exclude the church for it presupposes, firstly, Baptism, and then all other church sacraments and observances.

These observances, however, when understood philokalically, are not simply matters of individual Christian duty, but steps on the ladder that reaches up to the gates of the Kingdom, a ladder of heavenly joy. Thus the fifth-century bishop and theologian Diadochos of Photiki speaks of the two types of Christian joy:

Initiatory joy is one thing and the joy of perfection is another. The first is not exempt from fantasy while the second has the strength of humility. Between the two joys comes a “godly sorrow” (2 Cor. 7:10) and active tears.<sup>12</sup>

The second stage of active tears “between the two joys” comes when the first inspiration and the initial power of Baptismal grace diminish and the strength of true humility is not yet in sight. It is precisely at this stage that the *Philokalia* is particularly effective. This more profound ecclesiological role of the *Philokalia* presupposes a complex anthropological and theological awareness. It presupposes not only the

reception of Baptism in the church, but also the acceptance of the ecclesial vision of deified humanity, particular to the Eastern Christian tradition. There is thus a deep doctrinal level which implicitly supports the whole philokalic endeavour. This doctrinal level is connected with the tradition, which maintains that the Christian God is both beyond and yet near, both the inaccessible Creator *and* the Sustainer of life whose embrace everyone can feel. This distinction between the divine nature (inaccessible) and the divine energies (accessible) was made explicit in the Hesychast controversy. What this amounted to was nothing short of a revolution of religious thought, for it postulated that humanity's relationship with God is not a matter of "obligation and moral duty" but of "participation in divine life": Christianity is not a "religion" but a "mystagogy". When St Nikodimos objected to his contemporaries' limited understanding of what their life in church was about, he was keen to stress that ecclesial observances are not simply a matter of Christian obligation, or duty. Rather, they are the means to achieving the desired union with God, or deification. But to speak of deification and to remain a Christian monotheist is only possible if one's beliefs are in harmony with the doctrinal tradition of the Fathers of the Eastern church, from the great Cappadocians to St Gregory Palamas.<sup>13</sup> Like modern chemical pencils that only work on the correct type of paper, the ascetical way of the *Philokalia* is only visible against the solid doctrinal ground of the Eastern Orthodox church.

At this juncture we arrive at the requirement for quite specific spiritual training. Does the above mean that the *Philokalia* should not be offered to the general reader since the required anthropological and theological awareness is not present in all people at all times? When faced



with this problem the original compilers and translators of the anthology held two different opinions: St Makarios and St Nikodimos decided in favour of the average Greek-speaking Christian; the translator into Slavonic, St Paisy Velichkovsky, decided against this saying that the book is only suitable for a monastic readership.<sup>14</sup> St Paisy's restraint was governed by his belief that the advice found in the *Philokalia* should always be measured against the advice of a spiritual father (and seekers of such advice are found mainly among the monastics). St Paisy's opinion was based on his long experience as a spiritual child and then a spiritual father both in Moldavia and on Mt Athos. There he had learned that spiritual advice, just like medicine, cannot be given in abstraction: every case is individual and has to be decided in consultation with one's spiritual father (doctor). It is said that it was only under strong pressure, from the then metropolitan of St Petersburg, that St Paisy agreed to bring his translations into the light of day, in print.

On the Greek side things were different. St Nikodimos tells us in his prologue that he is aware of the danger, but is convinced that it presents no major obstacle:

Even if occasionally some people go slightly astray, what is surprising in that? For the most part this happens to them because of their conceit.... But, trusting rather in Him who said, "I am the way and the truth" (John 14:6), let us embark on the task [of inner prayer] with all humility and in a spirit of mourning. For, if a person is free from conceit and the desire to please others, even though the whole evil host of demons attacks him, yet they cannot approach him.... Draw near, all of you who share the Orthodox calling, laity and monks alike, who are eager to discover the kingdom of God that is within you, the treasure hidden in the field of the heart [cf. Mat. 13:44], which is the sweet Lord Jesus.<sup>15</sup>

Thus St Nikodimos insists that the *Philokalia* is to be offered to the general public. But this in itself does not resolve the issue raised by St Paisy. If the *Philokalia* is to be read “in the world” and not just in monasteries, who is going to fill the place of the spiritual father for the people in the world? St Nikodimos does not give a direct answer to this question. The answer that suggests itself as a result of the discussion so far is that the spiritual director of the general reader is the church herself. By participating in the life of the church, in its sacraments, services and works of charity, every Christian is given all instruction needed, if only they are prepared to receive it. The strength and importance of this personal link with the church is visible above all in the life of St Nikodimos whose devotion to the church is exemplary. Amongst his many writings – he has been called “An encyclopaedia of Athonite learning” – a very large and yet for the most part still unpublished section is comprised of liturgical songs, offices for saints and for the Mother of God. This in fact is the only original contribution he has made, given the fact that the rest of his work (including the *Philokalia*) consists mainly of translations and commentaries. Thus, as demonstrated in the case of its editor, the *Philokalia* does not exclude the church from its vision, but, on the contrary, fully supports it.<sup>16</sup>

With this conclusion the implicit ecclesiology of the *Philokalia* acquires a very important role. The collection is not just a church enterprise for practising church members. Its medicinal quality is fully effective only in the church, as the church safeguards the integrity and vitality of the medicine. Finally, it is the church that assumes the role of spiritual guide for the non-monastic readers of the *Philokalia*.

## Explicit Ecclesiology

We have so far been engaged with assembling the evidence for what was called the “implicit” ecclesiology of the *Philokalia*. The moment has now come to show that the *Philokalia* does talk overtly about the church, and that in fact it has quite a lot to say on the subject. When we find explicit references to the church, these are mainly concerned with: a) doctrinal formulations, services and singing, b) fasting, charity and hospitality, and c) the sacraments (Baptism, Eucharist, confession and ordination). Often these three pools of references are neglected when generalizations on the (lacking or only presupposed) ecclesiology of the *Philokalia* are made. Thus one way of reading our title – “The Ecclesiology of the *Philokalia*” – is to think that once the direct references to the church celebrations and observances are brought to light, the fundamental ecclesial character of the *Philokalia* will become plain and obvious to all. With this aim in view, we proceed to analyze the explicit references to the church in the *Philokalia*.

### a) Church Doctrine and Church Services

An important ascetical principle guides the resoluteness of the philokalic authors as to why Christians are to accept wholeheartedly the doctrinal formulations of the church. The *Discourse on Abba Philimon* (one of the Egyptian desert fathers, 4-5<sup>th</sup> century) contains the following lapidary advice: “Recite the holy Creed of the Orthodox faith before you fall asleep. For true belief in God is the source and guard of all

blessings”.<sup>17</sup> St Peter of Damaskos (11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> cent.) was also emphatic that one should readily accept the teachings of the church. He thus argued that true spiritual safety comes from following the mind of the whole community of faith, the church:

It is on this account that with firm faith and by questioning those with experience we should accept the doctrines of the Church and the decisions of its teachers, both concerning the Holy Scriptures and concerning the sensible and spiritual worlds. Otherwise we may quickly fall because we walk according to our own understanding.<sup>18</sup>

The ascetical principle behind the strong views expressed by Abba Philimon and Peter of Damaskos is that to follow one’s own mind is intrinsically wrong for the monk. This principle is made explicit in the monastic spirituality of the Christian East, going back to the home of Abba Philimon, the Egyptian desert. Outside of the *Philokalia*, one does not need to look further than the “Introduction” to the alphabetical collection of the *Apophthegmata* to discover that in the understanding of its monastic editors the calling of the monk was above all one of rejection of personal opinion in the spirit of obedience to the teaching of the fathers.<sup>19</sup> In the passage quoted above, this obedience is also ecclesiological: it entails acceptance of the ‘doctrines of the Church’.

After church doctrine, the *Philokalia* addresses also practical questions related to the performance of the church services and to singing in church. For the sake of bringing to light the explicit ecclesiology of the *Philokalia* we will need a few extensive quotations. Again, the *Discourse on Abba Philimon* offers some very good examples:

“Say the daily prayers laid down by the holy fathers. By this I mean, try to recite the Third, Sixth, and Ninth Hours, Vespers and the night services. Strive to keep your mind undistracted, always being attentive to your inner thoughts. When you are in church, and are going to partake of the divine mysteries of Christ, do not go out until you have attained complete peace. Stand in one place, and do not leave it until the dismissal. Think that you are standing in heaven, and that in the company of the holy angels you are meeting God and receiving Him in your heart.”<sup>20</sup>

When the good brother heard this, his soul was wounded by divine longing; and he and Abba Philimon went to live in Sketis where the greatest of the holy fathers had pursued the path of sanctity. They settled in the Lavra of St John the Small.... And by the grace of God they lived in complete stillness, unfailingly attending church on Saturdays and Sundays but on the other days of the week staying in their cells, praying and fulfilling their rule.

The rule of the holy Elder (Philimon) was as follows. During the night he quietly chanted the entire Psalter and the Biblical canticles, and recited part of the Gospels. Then he sat down and intently repeated “Lord have mercy” for as long as he could. After that he slept, rising towards dawn to chant the First Hour. Then he again sat down, facing eastward, and alternately chanted psalms and recited by heart sections of the Epistles and Gospels. He spent the whole day in this manner, chanting and praying unceasingly.... His intellect was often lifted up to contemplation, and he did not know if he was still on earth.<sup>21</sup>

These quotations speak for themselves and their ecclesiology is obvious: one is not to understand the spiritual message of the *Philokalia* without the church, without its patterns of regular daily worship, the reading of Scripture, the chants and the oft-repeated prayer “Lord have mercy”. In the context of the monastic tradition of the desert, we can safely infer that the Eucharist is also included as part of Elder Philimon’s rule of “unfailingly attending church on Saturdays and Sundays”.

On the subject of singing church hymns, Peter of Damaskos is perhaps the best person to turn to. Let us be reminded that he is one of the

principal authors in the collection, whose texts fill up the largest section, and yet he does not talk about the Jesus prayer. So the emphasis on church hymns is even more important here. He is the only writer who quotes complete sections of the Greek Orthodox hymn books. He weaves seamlessly into his discourses “On contemplation” whole passages from the services for Holy Week, Matins for the major feasts, Vespers and Matins for the eight tones of the week, and Compline. Here are a few illustrations:

“O virgin-born, do not cast me away, harlot though I am; do not spurn my tears, O joy of the angels; but receive me in my repentance O Lord, and in Thy great mercy do not reject me a sinner.”<sup>22</sup>

Have mercy on my brethren and fathers, on all monks and priests everywhere, on my parents, my brothers and sisters, my relatives, on those who have served us and those who serve us now [the officiating priests], on those who pray for us and who have asked us to pray for them, on those who hate us and those who love us, on those whom I have injured or offended, on those who have injured or offended me or who will do so in the future, and on all who trust in Thee. Forgive us every sin whether deliberate or unintentional. Protect our lives and our departure out of this world from impure spirits, from every temptation, from all sin and malice, from presumption and despair, from lack of faith... Give rest to our fathers and brethren who have departed this life before us, and through the prayers of them all have mercy on my unhappy self in my depravity. See how feeble I am in all things: rectify my conduct, direct my life and death into the paths of peace, fashion me into what Thou wilt...

Give peace to Thy world, and in ways best known to Thee have mercy on all. Count me worthy to partake of Thy pure body and Thy precious blood, for the remission of sins, for communion in the holy spirit, as a foretaste of eternal life in Thee with Thine elect, through the intercessions of Thy most pure Mother, of the angels and the celestial powers, and of all Thy saints; for Thou art blessed through all the ages. Amen

“Most holy Lady, Mother of God, all celestial powers, holy angels and archangels, and all saints, intercede for me a sinner. God our Master, Father almighty, Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son and Holy Spirit, one Godhead, one Power, have mercy on me a sinner.”<sup>23</sup>

After praying in this way you should immediately address your own thoughts and say three times: “O come, let us worship and fall down before God our King.” Then you should begin the psalms reciting the *Trisagion* after each subsection of the Psalter,<sup>24</sup> and enclosing your intellect within the words you are saying.

Peter of Damaskos is here praying with the prayers of the church – mot à mot – they have become *his* prayers. His is a prayer for the whole world, and then for “my unhappy self”, preparation for the reception of Holy Communion is after the petition “Give peace to Thy world, and in ways best known to Thee have mercy on all.” The way Peter of Damaskos’ quotations are interwoven with the rest of his inspired exhortations suggests that he is quoting from memory, very much as happens with Scriptural quotations throughout the *Philokalia*. It is the subject of another dissertation to examine how the Word of God had become the native language of the fathers in the *Philokalia*. But with Peter of Damaskos we have a striking, and to my knowledge unique, example of the words of the church becoming the language of personal prayer.

## **b) Church Fasts and Social Outreach**

On the question of church fasts and social outreach, our next witness is St Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022).<sup>25</sup> “The New Theologian” was originally an ironic nickname given to him by the opponents of his devotion to his spiritual father, St Symeon the Pious. The philokalic

tradition has, however, accepted the name and confirmed the spiritual greatness of the New Theologian. He is remembered especially for his unforgiving attitude to spiritual indolence. This is displayed in the following characteristic injunctions: “Never go to communion without tears”,<sup>26</sup> “Take care never to receive communion while you have anything against anyone, even if this is only a hostile thought”,<sup>27</sup> “You should arrive first at the church services, especially matins and the Liturgy, and leave last, unless forced to do otherwise”.<sup>28</sup> The original Greek *Philokalia* contains only a small section from his writings, the *Practical and Theological Texts*. For our purpose, of interest are those passages where St Symeon gives us information on the ecclesial observances of his day. We begin with a citation on the fasting periods:

You should observe the great Lenten fast by eating every third day (not counting Saturdays and Sundays), unless there is a major feast. During the other two main fasts – before Christmas and before the Feast of the Dormition – you should eat every other day. On the remaining days of the year you should eat only once, except on Saturdays and Sundays and on feast days but do not eat to repletion.<sup>29</sup>

Symeon was clearly a zealous advocate of strict monasticism. Nevertheless, his strictness did not prevent him from knowing how to be a good guest – “you should eat what is put in front of you, no matter what it is, and take wine with uncomplaining self-restraint”<sup>30</sup> – and how to relate positively to the rest of God’s created world:

Visit the sick, console the distressed, and do not make your longing for prayer a pretext for turning away from anyone who asks for your help; for love is greater than prayer. Show sympathy towards all, do



not be arrogant or over-familiar, do not find fault with others, or ask for anything from the abbot... be respectful towards all priests, attentive in prayer, frank and loving towards everyone....<sup>31</sup>

We note here the emphasis on including the church: “all priests” and so by implication their flocks. Symeon moreover affirms that the desire for prayer should never be used as an excuse to sever contact with those who are in need for, in his memorable phrase, ‘love is greater than prayer’. In another place Symeon develops his idea even further declaring that, “We, the faithful, should look upon all the faithful as one single being, and should consider that Christ dwells in each of them. We should have such love for each of them that we are willing to lay down our lives for him.”<sup>32</sup> The reason given for this command of universal love is that Christ dwells in each believer. From here, in Symeon’s view, comes the assurance of the church’s entry into God’s Kingdom. The gift of the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is received by the church on earth as a pledge of the eternal heavenly blessings to come:

The Church – the bride-to-be composed of all the faithful – and the soul of each of us receive from Christ, the bridegroom-to-be, only the pledge of the Spirit. The eternal blessings and the kingdom of heaven are given subsequent to this earthly life, though both the Church and the individual soul have the assurance of them through the pledge they have received.<sup>33</sup>

Here the ecclesiology is very clear; it even includes one of the rare definitions of the church in the *Philokalia*. In St Symeon’s characteristic words, the church is the bride-to-be of Christ composed of ‘all the faithful’ and, simultaneously, of the ‘the soul of each’ individual. The soul is thus presented as a microcosm of the church.<sup>34</sup> As a corollary to this parallel

definition we can affirm that the perfection of the soul, aimed at by St Symeon and the other philokalic authors is at the same time a perfection of the church. Thus there can be no real opposition between the *Philokalia* and the church. Ultimately, they both strive for the same eternal blessings: union with Christ, the Bridegroom, in the gift of the Spirit.

### **c) Sacraments and Celebration of the Eucharist**

In the philokalic vision, the union with Christ in the *eschaton* includes a foretaste of the blessings in the present: this foretaste is to be found in the sacrifice of the Eucharist, and in the other celebrations of the church. St Symeon the New Theologian gives us the following in relation to the Eucharist and ordination:

A certain priest-monk, who had full confidence in me as his friend, once told me this: “I have never celebrated the Liturgy without seeing the Holy Spirit, just as I saw Him come upon me when I was ordained and the metropolitan said the prayer while the service-book rested on my head”. When I asked him how he saw it at that time, and in what form, he said: “Undifferentiated and without form, except as light. At first I was astonished, beholding what I had never beheld before; and as I was asking myself what it might be, the light said to me, its voice heard only by the intellect: ‘Thus have I appeared to all the prophets and apostles, and to those who are now the saints and the elect of God; for I am the Holy Spirit of God’. To him be glory and power to the ages. Amen”.<sup>35</sup>

When discussing the celebration of the Eucharist, for example, the *Philokalia* lays emphasis simultaneously on the personal sanctity/repentance of the celebrant and on the greatness of the mystery

which is celebrated. In other words, church life requires inner holiness, the fruit of philokalic striving and wisdom: it is not that either precludes the need for the other, but rather that the two things go together, each depending on the other. Let us consider two examples from St Theognostos. In an important passage devoted to the daily celebration of the Eucharist he says:

Remember that you look daily on the salvation of God which, when he saw it but once, so terrified and amazed Symeon the Elder that he prayed for his deliverance (cf. Luke 2:29). If you have not been assured by the Holy Spirit that you are equal to the angels and so an acceptable intermediary between God and humanity, do not presumptuously dare to celebrate the awesome and most holy mysteries, which even the angels venerate and from whose purity many of the saints themselves have in reverent fear dawn back. Otherwise you will be destroyed because of your pretence to holiness.<sup>36</sup>

St Theognostos's advice on the importance of personal sanctity for those actively involved in the ecclesial celebrations is later repeated in the form of a story:

There was once a monk-priest who had a reputation for piety and was held in honour by many on account of his outward behaviour, though within he was licentious and defiled. One day he was celebrating the divine Liturgy and, on reaching the cherubic hymn, he had bent his head as usual before the holy table and was reading the prayer, "No one is worthy...", when he suddenly died, his soul having left him in that position.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, contrary to certain standard generalizations, the *Philokalia* does talk overtly about the church and, in fact, has quite a lot to say on the

subject. The unambiguous and direct references to the church demonstrate that the *Philokalia* has a well-defined ecclesial character. Its ecclesiology is not just presupposed, or implicit, but on the contrary, also quite explicit. This explicit ecclesiology, however, has its own distinct characteristics. The quotations from St Theognostos give us the general flavour quite well. The sound is one of warning. Thus we hear St Symeon the New Theologian give the following lapidary advice: “Do not pull down your own house because you want to build a house for your neighbour”.<sup>38</sup> Taken in the context of the monastic life of prayer, this simple remark reveals a great deal about how the philokalic authors approached both life in general, and life in the church in particular. When the *Philokalia* does talk about the church, the message is always one of caution: unless the spiritual powers of Christians are well ordered their external church observances are of no effect.

## Conclusion

We have now demonstrated the implicit and explicit ecclesiology of the *Philokalia*. We have shown, firstly, that the *Philokalia* presupposes the church, because the authors it includes are church people and saints, because the compilers and first translators are church people and saints, and because it is addressed to practising church people who, it is hoped, are also on the way to sainthood. And, secondly, that the *Philokalia* does talk frankly and overtly about the church, directly mentioning church creedal formulations, the daily liturgical office, the sacraments, the singing of church hymns, charity, hospitality and love. Thus we can conclude that

the dichotomy between the *Philokalia* and the church is a false one: there is no contrast. Inner prayer and church participation are both necessary expressions of the same attention to God.

But if the ecclesiology of the *Philokalia* is so obvious, why the question at all? The apparent contrast has emerged from a misuse of the collection especially in the twentieth and the twenty first century with the rise of economic consumerism and its parallel methods for individual spiritual satisfaction. The overwhelming corrective for this impression is the implicit one discussed in the first part of the exposition. The whole background, genesis, conception, execution and intention, as well as the translations of the *Philokalia* are patently ecclesial. Even though the collection may appear to be offering or advocating something newer or better, a superior spirituality, it is only in the sense of self-criticism which is always part of the church's fundamental mission. The *Philokalia* is part of the internal movement for renewal which the church must always have if it is to be the church. The *Philokalia* is thus a clue to the inner meaning of church observances, as St Nikodimos wrote; but it is not a replacement for them. It advocates neither a breakaway movement, nor a quietist elite. The explicit endorsements of ecclesial life and participation, on which we focused in the second part of the exposition, are the result of the implicit allegiance: a book so rooted in the ecclesial life and project of the church cannot but, sooner or later, evince signs of its fundamental source and orientation. The explicit section is therefore, in a sense, only an assemblage of internal evidence for and illustrations of the implicit arguments. The *Philokalia* is thus a fundamentally ecclesial book. It is a manual to sanctity and a door to salvation; one of the many that lead to the treasures of God's house, the church.

The short Life of Maximos of Kafsokalyvia, hermit on the Holy Mountain, provides a fitting conclusion to our exploration illustrating the point that pure prayer, the central concern of the whole *Philokalia*, is one of the gifts treasured and transmitted in the church. In a conversation with St Gregory of Sinai (1255–1346), St Maximos described how he had received the gift of pure unceasing prayer while venerating – in church – an icon of the Mother of God:

From my youth, I had great faith in my Lady the Mother of God and I often prayed to her with tears asking her to give me the grace of pure prayer. One day, when I had gone, as my custom was, into the church, I repeated my prayer to her with all the warmth of my heart. Then, when I lovingly kissed her holy icon, I felt in my chest and in my heart a strange warmth, like a flame which came from the icon, and which did not burn, but which covered me like a dew.... From that moment on, dear Father, my heart began to say the prayer within itself, and my mind delights in the sweetness of remembering Jesus continually.... Since then, the prayer has continued without interruption in my heart.<sup>39</sup>

## Notes:

1. P. Sherrard and K. Ware, "Introduction", *The Philokalia: The Complete Text. Compiled by St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth*. Translated from the Greek by Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, 4 vols. (London: Faber and Faber, 1979-1995), 1: 13-15.

2. A concern only partially addressed by other scholars. See K. Ware, "The Spirituality of the '*Philokalia*'", *Sobornost* 13, no. 1 (1991): 6–24. Id., "St Nikodimos and the *Philokalia*," in D. Conomos and G. Speake (eds), *Mount Athos the Sacred Bridge: The Spirituality of the Holy Mountain* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005) , 69-121. Id., "Philocalie," in M. Viller and F. Cavallera (eds), *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*, vol. 12/1 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), 1336-52. A. Louth, "The Theology of the *Philokalia*," in J. Behr, A. Louth, and D. Conomos (eds), *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West. Festschrift for Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 351-361.

3. *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemmann, 1973-1983* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 18, 295.

4. Ch. Yannaras, КИФА № 12 (38) 2005. Available online at: <http://gazetakifa.ru/content/view/335/20/> [10 Dec 2009]. I owe this reference to Mr Zurab Jashi, research student at Durham University.

5. Ware, "Philocalie," 1351.

6. Ch. Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West*, translated by Norman Russell (Brookline, Mass: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007), 132.

7. *The Philocalia of Origen*, ed. J. Armitage Robinson (Cambridge, 1893).

8. *The Way of a Pilgrim; and, A Pilgrim Continues His Way.*

Translated from the Russian by Olga Savin (Boston: Shambhala, 2001).

For more on the intertextuality of *The Way of a Pilgrim*, see A. Golitzen, “Pilgrim and Community,” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 2, no. 2 (2002): 236-242.

9. Ware, “St Nikodimos and the *Philokalia*,” 72.

10. Ware, “St Nikodimos and the *Philokalia*,” 79-81.

11. St Nikodimos, “Introduction”, *Philokalia*, vol. 1 (Athens: Astir-Papadimitriou, 1957), xxi [in Greek], translated in Ware, “The Spirituality of the ‘*Philokalia*,’” 12.

12. Diadochos of Photiki, “On Spiritual Knowledge,” 60, in *Philokalia*, 1: 271.

13. The continuity of the tradition is a matter of scholarly debate. For a detailed treatment of the subject see N. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

14. Cf. Ware, “St Nikodimos and the *Philokalia*,” 108. The relevant letter to Archimandrite Theodosy is extensively quoted in Sergiï Chetverikov, *Le starets moldave Païssij Velitchkovskij*, trans. François de Damas (Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1997), 155-162. On the abundance and quality of Paisy’s literary activity, see *Ibid.*, 251-266.

15. Translation in Ware, “The Spirituality of the ‘*Philokalia*,’” 19.

16. See detailed discussion in E. Citterio, “Nicodemo Agiorita,” in Carmelo G. Conticello and Vassa Conticello (eds), *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 936-939, 943.

17. “A Discourse on Abba Philimon”, in *Philokalia*, 2: 348.



18. “On the Three Stages of Contemplation”, in *Philokalia*, 3: 138.
19. “Introduction”, *Apophthegmata, Alph.*, PG 65:73C-76A.
20. “A Discourse on Abba Philimon”, in *Philokalia*, 2: 351.
21. “A Discourse on Abba Philimon”, in *Philokalia*, 2: 346.
22. St Peter of Damaskos, “The Third Stage of Contemplation”, in *Philokalia*, 3: 116. Citation from the service for Wednesday of Holy Week.
23. St Peter of Damaskos, “The Third Stage of Contemplation”, in *Philokalia*, 3: 118-119. Citations from the prayers at the end of Compline and the prayers at the Third Hour.
24. “Trisagion” – the triple ‘*Holy God, Holy Strong, Holy Immortal, have mercy upon us*’ – presumably followed by the prayer “Most Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us...” and then by the Lord’s prayer, according to the usual Orthodox practice. The Psalter is divided into twenty sections, each called a “kathisma”, and every “kathisma” is divided into subsections called a “stasis” or “antiphon”. The Trisagion comes after each antiphon. *Philokalia*, 3: 119, n.1-2.
25. St Symeon the New Theologian, “Practical and Theological Texts,” in *Philokalia*, 4: 25-66. On the difficulties with the appropriation of Symeon’s vision of the church, see A. Golitzin, “Hierarchy Versus Anarchy? Dionysius Areopagita, Symeon the New Theologian, Nicetas Stethatos, and Their Common Roots in Ascetical Tradition,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (1994): 131–79.
26. St Symeon the New Theologian, “Practical and Theological Texts,” 144, in *Philokalia*, 4: 59.
27. St Symeon the New Theologian, “Practical and Theological Texts,” 132, in *Philokalia*, 4: 54.

28. St Symeon the New Theologian, “Practical and Theological Texts,” 137, in *Philokalia*, 4: 55.

29. St Symeon the New Theologian, “Practical and Theological Texts,” 142, in *Philokalia*, 4: 58. The Apostles’ fast in June is not mentioned here.

30. St Symeon the New Theologian, “Practical and Theological Texts,” 145, in *Philokalia*, 4: 59.

31. St Symeon the New Theologian, “Practical and Theological Texts,” 143, in *Philokalia*, 4: 58.

32. St Symeon the New Theologian, “Practical and Theological Texts,” 61, in *Philokalia*, 4: 36.

33. St Symeon the New Theologian, “Practical and Theological Texts,” 79, in *Philokalia*, 4: 41.

34. On the theme of interiorized ecclesiology, see A. Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with Special Reference to its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition*, Analekta Vlatadon 59 (Thessalonike: Patriarchikon Hidryma Paterikon Meleton, 1994), 371-385.

35. St Symeon the New Theologian, “Practical and Theological Texts,” 153, *Philokalia*, 4: 62-63.

36. St Theognostos, “On the Practice of the Virtues”, 14, in *Philokalia*, 2: 362.

37. St Theognostos, “On the Practice of the Virtues”, 21, in *Philokalia*, 2: 363.

38. St Symeon the New Theologian, “Practical and Theological Texts,” 55, in *Philokalia*, 4: 35.

39. “From the Life of our Venerable Father Maximos of Kafsokalivia,” my translation from the second enlarged Russian edition of the *Philokalia* (Moscow, 1900, reprinted in 1992), vol. 5, 473. Cf. also the *Life* of the twentieth-century Russian Athonite, Saint Silouan, who had also received the pure prayer as a young novice “praying before an ikon of the Mother of God”. Archimandrite Sophrony, *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, translated from the Russian by R. Edmonds (Crestwood, N.Y., 1999), 391. For these two references, and for kindling my interest in the ecclesial dimensions of the philokalic tradition, I humbly acknowledge my debt to the late father-confessor of the Patriarchal Monastery of St John the Baptist in Essex, Archimandrite Syméon (1928–2009). I am grateful also to Mr Francis Garcia whose comments and editorial skill have greatly improved this text.