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Introduction to the Philokalia Volume 1

The *Philokalia* is a collection of texts written between the fourth and the fifteenth centuries by spiritual masters of the Orthodox Christian tradition. It was compiled in the eighteenth century by two Greek monks, St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain of Athos (1749-1809) and St Makarios of Corinth (1731-1805), and was first published at Venice in 1782. A second edition was published at Athens in 1893, and this included certain additional texts on prayer by Patriarch Kallistos not found in the 1782 edition. A third edition, in five volumes, was also published at Athens during the years 1957-1963 by the Astir Publishing Company. It is on the Astir edition that our English translation is based. Thus our translation, which we likewise hope to publish in five volumes, will reproduce all the texts included in the three Greek editions.

We depart notably from these editions in but four respects. First, we have not included the introduction written by St Nikodimos, and we have rewritten the notes which he placed before each text or series of texts written by a single author.

Second, we have used a more reliable version of a text if one is now available. Where that has been the case, we signify it in the relevant introductory note.

Third, we have attributed to Evagrios the work *On Prayer*, which in the Greek editions is attributed to St Neilos; the explanation for this change of attribution is in the note preceding Evagrios' texts.

Fourth, we have placed in an appendix the text, attributed to St Antony the Great, which opens the Greek editions; the reasons for this decision are likewise stated in the note introducing that text. Where certain passages, or indeed entire sections, of individual texts attributed by St Nikodimos to particular authors are now known or suspected to have been written by other hands, we have

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indicated this either in the introductory notes to the texts in question or in footnotes. But in no case have we excised

any such passage or section on the grounds that it is not by the author to whom **St Nikodimos** has attributed it. The distinction between genuine and spurious where all these writings are concerned must rest, not on the correctness of the attribution of their authorship, but on whether or not they belong to the spiritual tradition which the collection as a whole represents.

All the texts in the original *Philokalia* are in Greek, and all except two were first written in Greek, and even these two (written originally in Latin) were translated into Greek in Byzantine times. But the influence of the work has by no means been confined to the Greek-speaking world. It was **Paisii Velichkovskii** (1722-1794), a Russian monk who visited Mount **Athos** and later settled in Moldavia, who first translated a selection of the texts into Slavonic, published, with the title *Dobrotolublye*, at Moscow in 1793 and reprinted at Moscow in 1822. This was the translation carried by the pilgrim in *The Way of a Pilgrim*; and indeed the impact of the *Philokalia* on Russian spirituality and culture in the nineteenth century was immense, as the writings of Dostoevsky, an assiduous reader of the book, alone sufficiently testify. A translation into Russian was made by **Ignatii Brianchaninov** (1807-1867) and was published in 18⁷⁷. Yet another Russian translation, still with the title *Dobrotolubiye*, was made by Bishop **Theophan** the Recluse (1815-1894), who included in it several texts not in the original Greek edition, and deliberately omitted or paraphrased certain passages in some of the texts of the Greek edition. Bishop **Theophan's** translation was published at Moscow in five volumes at the expense of the Russian Monastery of St **Panteleimon** on Mount Athos. The first volume of the series, originally issued in 1877, was reprinted in 1883, 1885, 1905 and 1913. A photographic reprint of the 1883 edition was begun by the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, **Jordanville, N.Y.**, in 1963. A Romanian translation, which also includes additional material, began to appear in 1946 under the editorship of Father **Dumitru Staniloae**; in 1976 the fifth volume of this edition appeared, and it is planned to complete it in eight volumes. A full French translation is in progress. Both the Romanian and the **Flinch** translations are based on the original Greek.

The only previous translation into English of texts from the

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Philokalia is that made by **E. Kadloubovsky** and **G. E. H. Palmer** in two volumes with the titles *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* and *Early Fathers from the Philokalia*¹ published in 1951 and 1954 respectively. This translation was made, not from the Greek original, but from **Theophan's** Russian translation, and covers slightly less than a third of the material of the Greek edition. It was because of this that the translators wrote in their Introduction to the second of these two English volumes that 'the only final solution to the problem of making the treasures contained in the *Philokalia* available to the West in a form as rich and as wisely balanced as the original is for someone with the necessary qualities ... to undertake to translate the whole of the original Greek itself. We can only hope that this work will one day be achieved; it might well be one of the greatest single contributions to perpetuating in the West what is highest in the Christian tradition.' The present translation is a direct consequence of the hope expressed in that Introduction, written over twenty years ago.

What first determined the choice of texts made by **St Nikodimos** and **St Makarios**, and gives them their cohesion? 'Philokalia' itself means love of the beautiful, the exalted, the excellent, understood as the transcendent source of life and the revelation of Truth. It is through such love that, as the subtitle of the original edition puts it, 'the intellect is purified, illumined and made perfect'. The texts were collected with a view to this purification, illumination and perfection. They show the way to awaken and develop attention and consciousness, to attain that state of

watchfulness which is the hallmark of sanctity. They describe the conditions most effective for learning what their authors call the art of arts and the science of sciences, a learning which is not a matter of information or agility of mind but of a radical change of will and heart leading man towards the highest possibilities open to him, shaping and nourishing the unseen part of his being, and helping him to spiritual fulfillment and union with God. *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 is an active force revealing a **spiritual** path and inducing man to follow it. It is a summons to him to overcome his ignorance, to uncover the knowledge that lies within, to rid himself of illusion,

¹ Faber and Faber, London.

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and to be receptive to the grace of the Holy Spirit who teaches all things and brings all things to remembrance. The texts of the *Philokalia* are, then, guides to the practice of the contemplative life. They constitute, as **St Nikodimos** puts it in his introduction, 'a mystical school of inward prayer' where those who study may cultivate the divine seed implanted in their hearts at baptism and so grow in spirit that they become 'sons of God' (John 1:12), attaining through such deification 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Eph. 4:13). The emphasis is therefore on inner work, on the cleansing of 'the inside of the cup and plate, so that their outside may also be clean' (Matt. 23:26). This does not mean that what one might call outer work - the keeping of the commandments and the practice of the moral virtues - is of no importance. On the contrary, such work is a pre-condition of that purification without which no real progress in inner work can be made. Indeed, in this respect outer and inner complement one another. Atrophy or defeat follow only when outer work is practiced as an end in itself, and the one thing needful - the inner practice of guarding the intellect and of pure prayer - is neglected. St Nikodimos himself remarks that such neglect is only too common: many there are who wear their whole life away in outer work, with the result that grace diminishes in them and they fail to realize the illumination of consciousness and purity of heart which are the goal of the spiritual path that the *Philokalia* charts for us.

An advanced state which may be acquired through the pursuit of this path is described as **hesychia**, a word which not only bears the sense of tranquility and silence (hence our translation: stillness) but also is linked through its Greek root with the idea of being seated, fixed, and so of being concentrated. It is therefore fitting that from this word should come the term **hesychasm**, frequently applied to the whole complex of theory and practice which constitutes the path itself. But here a certain caution is needed. Some modern historians, prone to over-simplification and **schematization**, have tended to speak of hesychasm as though it were a phenomenon of the later Byzantine world. They speak of the **hesychast** movement, and by this they mean the spiritual revival which, centered on Mount **Athos** in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, spread from there into neighboring lands such as Bulgaria, Serbia and Russia. Yet hesychasm itself is far more than a local historical movement dating

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to the later Byzantine centuries. On the contrary it denotes the whole spiritual tradition going back to the earliest