

## THE HESYCHAST MOVEMENT AND THE LITURGY

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**ABSTRACT.** This article shows the influence of the Hesychast movement on the liturgy, which led to a major liturgical reform in the Byzantine world. The ideal of “praying without ceasing” as a fruit of baptism led the hesychasts to consider it as the aim of the life of all Christians, monks and lay people, and to consider the neo-Sabaite *Typikon* as the most adapted *ordo* to serve as a school of prayer and to foster vigil and fasting, regarded in the patristic tradition as the main weapons against sin and passions. Conscious that “life in Christ” was anchored in the sacramental life of the Church, the hesychasts encouraged frequent communion and regarded the sacraments not as acts of individual piety but rather underlined their ecclesial and eschatological dimensions.

**Keywords:** hesychasm, liturgy, reform, neo-Sabaite *Typikon*, prayer, sacraments, vigil, fasting, Communion, Gregory of Sinai, Gregory Palamas, Philotheos Kokkinos, Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, Nicholas Kabasilas, Symeon of Thessaloniki

Alexey Pentkovskij once said that the influence of the Hesychast movement on the liturgy was the least studied aspect of hesychasm and pointed out that major liturgical reforms were undertaken under the influence of the hesychasts in the fourteenth century culminating in the formation of what is commonly called the “Byzantine rite.”<sup>1</sup> This is what I tried to illustrate in my

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<sup>1</sup> Alexey Pentkovskij, “Из истории литургических преобразований в Русской Церкви в третьей четверти XIV столетия,” *Символ* 29 (1993): 217. See also Miguel Arranz, “Les grandes étapes de la liturgie byzantine: Palestine – Byzance – Russie. Essai d’aperçu historique,” in *Liturgie de l’Église particulière et liturgie de l’Église universelle. Conférences Saint-Serge, XXII<sup>e</sup> Semaine d’études liturgiques, Paris, 30 juin–3 juillet 1975* (Bibliotheca Ephemerides Liturgicae, Subsidia 7) (Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 1976), 67–70.

doctoral dissertation devoted to the liturgical reform of Metropolitan of Kiev Cyprian Tsamblak (ca. 1336–1406), spiritual son of the great hesychast and Ecumenical Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos (ca. 1300–1379).<sup>2</sup>

A myth has formed in studies of the Hesychast movement that these monks only practiced the Jesus prayer in solitude. Nevertheless, a careful study of the documents proves the contrary. Take as an example a text by the initiator of this movement, Gregory of Sinai (ca. 1255–1346), whose *Life* was written by his disciple Kallistos, Patriarch of Constantinople between 1350 and 1363, where the program of the day of a hermit is described:

He who practises hesychasm must acquire the following five virtues, as a foundation on which to build: silence, self-control, vigilance, humility and patience. Then there are three practices blessed by God: psalmody, prayer and reading – and handiwork for those weak in body. These virtues which we have listed not only embrace all the rest but also consolidate each other. From early morning the hesychast must devote himself to the remembrance of God through prayer and stillness of heart, praying diligently in the first hour, reading in the second, chanting psalms in the third, praying in the fourth, reading in the fifth, chanting psalms in the sixth, praying in the seventh, reading in the eighth, chanting psalms in the ninth, eating in the tenth, sleeping in the eleventh, if need be, and reciting vespers in the twelfth hour. Thus fruitfully spending the course of the day he gains God's blessings. [...] For the night vigil there are three programs: for beginners, for those midway on the path, and for the perfect. The first program is as follows: to sleep half the night and to keep vigil for the other half, either from evening till midnight or from midnight till dawn. The second is to keep vigil after nightfall for one or two hours, then to sleep for four hours, then to rise for matins and to chant psalms and pray for six hours until daybreak, then to chant the first hour, and after that to sit down and practice stillness, in the way already described. Then one can either follow the program of spiritual work given for the daylight hours, or else continue in unbroken prayer, which

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<sup>2</sup> Job Getcha, *La réforme liturgique du métropolitain Cyprien de Kiev* (Collection « Patrimoines – Orthodoxie ») (Paris: Cerf, 2010), translated by Nikodimos Barousis in Modern Greek, *Το λειτουργικόν έργον του Μητροπολίτου Κιέβου Κυπριανού και η εισαγωγή του Σαββαΐτικου τυπικού εις την Λατρείαν* (Ανάλεκτα Βλατάδων 69) (Thessaloniki: Πατριαρχικόν Ίδρυμα Πατερικῶν Μελετῶν, 2016); see also idem, “La théologie liturgique du mouvement hésychaste,” *Supplément au SOP* 286 (2004): doc. 286.B [= *La Pensée Orthodoxe* 7 (2009): 39–52; in Russian, *Khristianskaia mysl'* 3 (2006): 18–27], and “Le Psautier de Cyprien: un témoin de l'évolution de la liturgie byzantine en Russie,” *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata* III.4 (2007): 33–47.

gives a greater inner stability. The third program is to stand and keep vigil uninterruptedly throughout the night.<sup>3</sup>

As it appears clearly in this text, the hesychasts distinguished continual prayer, that is, the recitation of the prayer of Jesus, from psalmody (chanting psalms), that is, the recitation of the services of the hours of the day and of the night contained in the *Horologion* (*Book of Hours*). As evidenced by this text, the hermit did psalmody at the first, third, sixth, ninth, and twelfth hour of the day, which corresponds to the offices of Prime, Terce, Sext, Nones, and Vespers. The text also evokes psalmody in the middle of the night, which corresponds to the *Mesonyktikon* (Midnight office), and the office of Matins. As the Metropolitan of Diokleia Kallistos Ware once noticed, the hermit was not exempt from reciting the divine office in his cell.<sup>4</sup> Thus, John Meyendorff was wrong to think that Gregory of Sinai would have belonged to an individualist tendency of the Hesychast movement denying liturgical prayer.<sup>5</sup>

In a letter addressed to hermit monks, the hesychast Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos recommended them as well to spend their time in prayer, psalmody, and reading the Holy Scriptures, mentioning explicitly the divine offices in the church (έν τῷ ναῷ ἀκολουθίαις), as well as the recitation of the Psalter and the psalmody of the Third, Sixth, and the *Typika* of the Compline in the cell (έν τῷ κελλίῳ). Kokkinos refers himself among others to the rule of the angel given to Pachomius.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Gregory of Sinai, *Chapters in Acrostic* (Κεφάλαια δι' ἀκροστιχίδος) 99 and 101, PG 150, 1272C–1273A; English translation in *The Philokalia. The Complete Text Compiled by St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth*, trans. Gerald E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, vol. 4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 233–234, and Evgenia Kadloubovsky and Gerald E. H. Palmer, *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 57–58.

<sup>4</sup> Kallistos Ware, “Separated from All and United to All: The Hermit Life in the Christian East,” in *Solitude and Communion. Papers on Hermit Life Given at St. David’s, Wales in the Autumn of 1975*, ed. Arthur M. Allchin (Oxford: Fairacres, 1977), 43.

<sup>5</sup> Jean Meyendorff, *Saint Grégoire Palamas et la mystique orthodoxe*, 2nd edn (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), 51.

<sup>6</sup> A critical edition of this text (Πρός τινα τῶν σπουδαίων ἀδελφῶν αἰτήσαντα πῶς δεῖ διάγειν έν τῷ κελλίῳ) is available in Georgi R. Parpulov, *Toward A History of Byzantine Psalters* (Plovdiv, 2014), 303–308 (Appendix E5). The text was translated into Italian and Spanish by Antonio Rigo and Amador Vega respectively, “Ad un monaco zelante,” in *L’amore della quiete (ho tes hesychias eros): l’escismo bizantino tra il XIII e il XV secolo*, ed. Rigo (Magnano: Edizioni Qiqajon, 1993), 175–180 = “A un monje celante que le ha pedido cómo hay que comportarse en la celda,” in *Silencio y quietud. Místicos bizantinos entre los siglos XIII y XV*, eds. Rigo and Vega (Madrid: Siruela, 2007), 159–163.

A somewhat later text, the *Spiritual Century* of Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos (late fourteenth century), which was included in the *Philokalia* of Nicodemus the Hagiorite, gives a similar testimony. Kallistos II Xanthopoulos, who was Ecumenical Patriarch in 1397 for only three months, was, together with his brother Ignatios, spiritual father of a renowned monastery in Constantinople attended by Nicholas Kabasilas and Symeon of Thessaloniki. They also insist on the recitation in the cell of the Midnight office, the Hexapsalm, Psalm 50, the canon, the hymnography and doxology of Matins, the first hour and the other offices of the hours, in addition to the prayer of Jesus.<sup>7</sup> For instance, they write to hesychasts: “Upon awakening, first give praise to God and, having asked His intercession, begin your most important work, that is, to pray in the heart, purely and without distraction. Pray thus for about an hour. [...] Then sing the midnight service.”<sup>8</sup>

I shall add a third example, namely the passage of a letter from Patriarch Euthymius of Tarnovo (1327–1402) to a monk living on the Holy Mountain named Cyprian, who is generally identified with Cyprian Tsamblak, where the patriarch instructs the monk as follows: “Never neglect the chanting of Matins and of the hours, of Vespers as well as Compline, and with these, the Midnight office, for they are powerful weapons of the soul against enemies.”<sup>9</sup>

All these examples testify to the fact that the hesychast monks in no way neglected the liturgical offices, which explains why they were at the origin of a real liturgical reform in the Byzantine world during the fourteenth century. Let us now try to define its major principles.

### The Universality of Prayer

For the great hesychast doctor Gregory Palamas (*ca.* 1296–1357), the command of the Apostle Paul to “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thes 5:17) must be applied to all Christians without any exception. Therefore, the unceasing prayer is a necessity for both monks and people living in the world. We find this idea in a passage from the *Life* of Saint Gregory Palamas, written by the hesychast Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos, where he tells a debate between the saint and an old monk named Job:

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<sup>7</sup> Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, *Century 25–27 and 37*, ed. in *Φιλοκαλία τῶν ἱερῶν νηπτικῶν*, vol. 4 (Athens: Ἀστήρ, 1991), 224–226, 236–237, trans. in *Writings from the Philokalia*, 195–198 and 209–211.

<sup>8</sup> Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, *Century 26*, trans. in *Writings from the Philokalia*, 197.

<sup>9</sup> See the appendix “Евфимия патриарха Трновского послание к Киприану мниху, живущему в Святей горе Афонсцей” in Vladimir Kachanovskiy, “К вопросу о литературной деятельности болгарского патриарха Евфимия,” *Христианское Чтение* 2 (1882): 246.

This ascetic was once sitting with the great man ... and listening attentively to what he was saying, because he had heard him say among other things that every person called by Christ, of whatever station in life, ought to practice unceasing prayer in accordance with the Apostle's exhortation, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thes 5:17), which is addressed to the Church as a whole, and also with the prophet David, who even though he was a king said: "I keep the Lord always before me" (Ps 15:8). The great Gregory, too, doubtless follows them when he says: "It is more important to remember God than to breathe," himself addressing the faithful as a whole in the same way. "It is necessary," he concluded, "that we too, persuaded by the examples I have given, should teach these things in the same way not only to those who have left the world and embraced the monastic life, but also to men, women and children, to the educated and the uneducated, to everyone without distinction, and make every effort to introduce them to it." When the old man heard the wise Gregory say these things ... [h]e tried to argue against such manifest and incontrovertible arguments, maintaining that this was only for monastics who had withdrawn from the world, not a general teaching for the many living a secular life. The great man added to his arguments many other similar examples but was utterly unable to persuade the elder, so he put a stop to the discussion as he was anxious to avoid loquaciousness and contention. [...] God immediately resolved their dispute from above. Using an angel as a minister, he taught the ignorant monk in a compassionate way what he had not learned, at the same time honouring Gregory supernaturally, one might say, for what he had said. "With regard to what was being discussed a short while ago, O elder, do not hold any other opinion whatsoever than that which the holy Gregory expressed."<sup>10</sup>

From this principle that prayer is a universal Christian virtue, and that all monks and lay people, must devote themselves to continual prayer, derives the other principle that the liturgical offices of monks and lay people must be regulated by one and the same *ordo*, one and the same *typikon*. And in the eyes of the hesychasts of the fourteenth century, this *typikon* was the neo-Sabaite *Typikon* in use at the time on the Holy Mountain, which they conceived as endowed with patristic authority, as asserted at the turn of the fifteenth century by Symeon of Thessaloniki:

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<sup>10</sup> Philotheos Kokkinos, *Λόγος εἰς τὸν ἐν ἀγίοις πατέρα ἡμῶν Γρηγόριον ἀρχιεπίσκοπον Θεσσαλονίκης* 29, ed. Demetrios Tsamis, *Φιλοθέου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως τοῦ Κοκκίνου ἀγιολογικὰ ἔργα. Α΄. Θεσσαλονικεῖς ἄγιοι* (Thessaloniki: Κέντρον Βυζαντινῶν Ἐρευνῶν, 1985), 457–458; English trans. Norman Russell, *Gregory Palamas. The Hesychast Controversy and the Debate with Islam. Documents Relating to Gregory Palamas* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 81–82.

This ordinance (διάταξις) is very necessary and patristic. It is indeed our divine Father Sabbas who recorded it, after having received it from Saints Euthymius and Theoktistos, as they had received it from their predecessors and from Chariton the Confessor. This regulation (διατύπωσις) of Saint Sabas which, as we learned, had disappeared after the ruin of the place by the barbarians, our Father among the saints, Sophronios, patriarch of the Holy City, put all his care into restoring; and again, after him, our divine Father and theologian John of Damascus renewed it and transmitted it in writing.<sup>11</sup>

For the hesychasts, sacred Tradition was extremely important, since this is what connects the believer to the mystery of salvation. As Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos write:

From the very beginning, from the first coming of Christ on earth up to our times, our glorious teachers who followed Him, shining like lamps in the world with the radiance of their life-bearing words and wonderful deeds, have transmitted to one another right up till to-day this good seed, this sacred drink, this holy germ, this inviolate token, this grace and power from above, this precious pearl, this Divine inheritance of the fathers, this treasure buried in the field, this betrothal of the Spirit, this kingly symbol, this running water of life, this Divine fire, this precious salt, this gift, this seal, this light, and so on. This inheritance will continue to be so transmitted from generation to generation, even after our time up to the very second coming of Christ.<sup>12</sup>

The hesychasts wanted by their liturgical reform to restore and renew the Tradition which they considered to have been received from the Fathers. Thus, they envisaged reform not as an innovation but as an authentic restoration. The reform was mainly implemented by the hesychast Patriarch of Constantinople Philotheos Kokkinos and aimed to unify the liturgical rites of the whole Church on the basis of the neo-sabaite *Typikon* which the hesychasts had practiced on Mount Athos. Thus, “the sung office” (ἀσματική ἀκολουθία), the old cathedral rite of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, already considered too complicated at the time of the Latin occupation, practiced in cathedral and parish churches, as well as the Stoudite monastic rule which ordered the liturgical celebrations of the monasteries, were replaced by a synthetic liturgical tradition elaborated on the basis of the neo-Sabaite monastic tradition reworked in the eleventh century, which had been introduced to Mount Athos as early as the thirteenth century.

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<sup>11</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, *De sacra precatone* 302, PG 155, 556CD.

<sup>12</sup> Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, *Century 97*, trans. in *Writings from the Philokalia*, 268.

Philotheos Kokkinos' disciple, Cyprian Tsamblak, the Metropolitan of Kiev, who implanted this liturgical reform in his metropolis in the fourteenth century, constantly justifies the changes introduced into the worship by a reference to the Fathers, and for this he uses each time the classic expression: "we have received from our Fathers." For example, in order to abolish the ancient Constantinopolitan custom of the daily celebration of the Liturgy of the Presanctified during the weekdays of Great Lent and its reduction to only two celebrations per week, on Wednesday and Friday, Cyprian resorts to the argument from patristic authority in order to impose a Palestinian usage, as testified by the neo-Sabaite *Typikon*:

We have not received [from our Fathers] to celebrate the Presanctified before Wednesday. [...] Let it be known that in this first week of fasting, we have been given permission to celebrate the Presanctified only twice, on Wednesday and Friday. [...] We received this from the Lavra of our venerable Father Sabbas and from the coenobium of our God-bearing Father Euthymius.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, Cyprian bases himself on the authority of the tradition received from the Desert Fathers and from the Apostles to justify the suppression of the celebration of the Liturgy of the Presanctified on Great Friday, as was prescribed by the ancient Constantinopolitan usage: "We have received from Palestine not to celebrate the Presanctified on the holy day of the Crucifixion, nor the [Eucharistic] liturgy, nor to set the table, nor to eat. [...] We have received from the Holy Apostles not to eat anything on Great Friday."<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the revival of the Sabaite tradition on Athos goes hand in hand with the Hesychast revival of the fourteenth century. It was followed by a diffusion by the hesychasts of the "neo-Sabaite" *Typikon* everywhere in the Empire and in the "Byzantine Commonwealth," thus synthesizing Hagiopolite, Palestinian, and Constantinopolitan traditions. The hesychasts considered the neo-Sabaite *Typikon* as a model for the rule of prayer of the Church because of its great ascetic rigor, its fidelity to the ancient monastic and patristic tradition, and also because it remained accessible to the specific needs of their particularly troubled times. This liturgical reform carried out by the hesychasts is at the origin of a liturgical synthesis which goes hand in hand with the great dogmatic synthesis carried out at the same time by the great hesychast master, Gregory Palamas.

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<sup>13</sup> *Psalter of Cyprian*, ff. 272<sup>r</sup>, 274<sup>r</sup>; cf. Getcha, *La réforme liturgique*, 443–444.

<sup>14</sup> *Psalter of Cyprian*, f. 281<sup>v</sup>; cf. Getcha, *La réforme liturgique*, 446–447.

## Night Vigil

As the rule of Gregory of Sinai attests, the hesychasts cherished prayer during the night. Indeed, as seen above, according to St. Gregory, the perfect monk does not sleep at all but would “stand and keep vigil uninterruptedly throughout the night.”<sup>15</sup> This is not an innovation of the hesychasts. Indeed, night prayer has always been recommended in the monastic tradition. The monks considered the night as a good time for prayer, where man can speak alone with God. For example, the *History of the Monks of Egypt* recounts that Antony woke up his disciple Paul the Simple in the middle of the night to spend the rest of the night in prayer, until the ninth hour of the day.<sup>16</sup> John Cassian also attests to the ancient practice in Egyptian monasticism of praying at night to which he attaches the rule of the twelve psalms revealed by an angel to Pachomius.<sup>17</sup>

The attachment of the hesychasts to prayer during the night explains why the dissemination of the purely monastic office of *agrypnia* (all-night vigil) to the entire Church was one of the fundamental points of the Hesychast liturgical reform. This office had developed at St. Sabbas in Palestine for practical reasons, namely the impossibility of the hermit monks to go back and forth from the monastery church to their cell in the desert during the night. For this reason, the Sabaitic anchorites held an all-night vigil on the eve of Sundays and feasts and would spend the entire night in prayer in the main church of the monastery. During the liturgical reform of the hesychasts, this service was diffused in cenobitic monasteries and in secular churches as well for reasons of liturgical theology, namely the importance given to night prayer. This served to make this nocturnal community service into a school of prayer for all Christians. Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos testify to the existence of this office on the eve of Sundays and of feast days in their *Spiritual Century*. They exhort the hesychasts:

it is always useful to force yourself to keep night vigil, it is better for you always to keep vigil on Sundays, in spite of the additional vigils which may occur during the week [...]. You will soon see for yourself the great profit this brings you, for in the words of the prophet Isaiah: “Then shall thy light break forth like the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily” (Is 58:8). St. Isaac says: “The work of fasting and vigil is the beginning of every endeavour directed against sin and lust, especially in

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<sup>15</sup> Gregory of Sinai, *Chapters* 101, trans. in *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, 234, and *Writings from the Philokalia*, 58.

<sup>16</sup> *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* 24, ed. André-Jean Festugière (Subsidia Hagiographica 34) (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961), 131–133.

<sup>17</sup> John Cassian, *Institutes* II, 4, ed. Jean-Claude Guy, *Jean Cassien, Institutions cénobitiques* (SC 109) (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 64.



the case of a man who fights against the sin which is within. This practice shows hatred of sin and lust in the doer of this invisible warfare. Almost all passionate impulses decrease through fasting. The next thing which specially helps in spiritual doing is night vigil. He who keeps these two as his companions through life is a friend of chastity.”<sup>18</sup>

This service of Sabaite origin spread starting from the fourteenth century thanks to the efforts the hesychast Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos, who occupied the patriarchal throne twice (1353–1354/5, 1364–1376) and who had been abbot of the Great Lavra on Mount Athos (ca. 1342–ca. 1345) where he composed two important liturgical documents: the *Διάταξις τῆς ἱεροδιακονίας* (*Diataxis* of Sacred Service) ordering the Divine Offices and particularly of the all-night vigil (*agrypnia*) according to the neo-Sabaite *Typikon*, and the *Διάταξις τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας* (*Diataxis* of the Divine Liturgy) giving detailed rubrics for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Thus, Philotheos’ *Diataxis* of Sacred Service represents one of the final stages of the development of the monastic vigil service, which was thus codified and introduced in all churches for the eve of Sundays and major feasts. It pushed even the urban monks to return to the sources of a more austere monasticism of the desert and to introduce it in the secular churches in place of the ancient “sung office.”<sup>19</sup>

Philotheos’ *Διάταξις τῆς ἱεροδιακονίας* describes in detail the all-night vigil: how the priest and the deacon who serve must bow in front of the icons, what liturgical vestments they must wear, how they must cense the whole church before the beginning of the office, what the singers should sing, how the canonarch should act, when the doors of the sanctuary should be opened and closed. *Inter alia*, it prescribes that the prayers of the Constantinopolitan *Euchologion* which were read throughout Vespers and Matins of the “sung office” must from now on be read one after the other during Psalm 103 of Vespers and during the Hexapsalm of Matins. It prescribes how the little entrance of Vespers, with the censer preceded by two luminaries, must take place, how the *litē* (λιτή) must take place in the narthex and how the blessing of the loaves is to be done in the middle of the church, followed by the selected patristic reading. It then unfolds the order of Matins with the *polyeleos* and the reading of the Gospel. And it describes how the anointing takes place after the end of the Matins on feast days.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, *Century 33*, trans. in *Writings from the Philokalia*, 206.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Robert Taft, *The Byzantine Rite. A Short History* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 82; Arranz, “Les prières presbytérales des matines byzantines,” *OCP* 38 (1972): 85.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Goar, *Εύχολόγιον sive rituale graecorum complectens ritus et ordines divinae liturgiae* (Paris, 1647), 1–8.

The *Psalter of Cyprian* prescribes the office of all-night vigil on the eve of Sundays and of major feasts as well as of other feasts according to the discretion of the superior, in accordance with the spirit of the neo-Sabaite *Typika*. It explicitly mentions that it is to be served a dozen times during the year.<sup>21</sup>

### The Importance of Fasting

As already seen, following Isaac the Syrian, Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos considered vigil and fasting as the two privileged weapons against sin.<sup>22</sup> The hesychasts thus inherited the ascetic tradition of fasting which was a biblical, apostolic, and patristic practice. Indeed, fasting is present in both the Old and New Testaments. Christ himself began his earthly ministry by retiring in order to fast for forty days in the desert.<sup>23</sup> Since the apostolic era, Wednesdays and Fridays have been fasting days, as attested by the *Didache*<sup>24</sup> and taken up by the *Apostolic Constitutions*.<sup>25</sup> This document recalls also the practice of fasting for forty days before the baptism administered during the Easter Vigil, modeled on the forty days of fasting of Christ in the desert, and lies at the origin of the fast of forty days before Pascha,<sup>26</sup> added to the fast of Holy Week.<sup>27</sup> Since the ancient Church, there was also a fast of one week, following the octave of Pentecost, which marked, after the abolition of fasting throughout the fifty days of the Paschal period, the resumption of ordinary time,<sup>28</sup> and which was eventually extended until the feast of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul (June 29), known in the Byzantine tradition as the Apostles' Fast. Around the year 700, a third period of fasting appeared in Byzantine monastic circles, namely the forty days of fasting prior to the Nativity of Christ, by analogy with the forty days of Lent preceding Pascha.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Psalter of Cyprian*, ff. 195v, 221r, 223r, 232r, 240v, 246r, 267r, 288v, 289v; cf. J. Getcha, *La réforme liturgique*, 214.

<sup>22</sup> See *supra* n. 18.

<sup>23</sup> Mt 4:1-2.

<sup>24</sup> *La Doctrine des douze apôtres (Didachè)* 8, 1, eds. Willy Rordorf and André Tuilier (SC 248) (Paris: Cerf, 1978), 173.

<sup>25</sup> *Les Constitutions apostoliques* VII, 23, ed. Marcel Metzger (SC 336) (Paris: Cerf, 1987), 50.

<sup>26</sup> *Les Constitutions apostoliques* VII, 22, ed. Metzger, 48; *Les Constitutions apostoliques* V, 13, ed. Metzger (SC 329) (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 246.

<sup>27</sup> *Les Constitutions apostoliques* V, 18, ed. Metzger (SC 329), 268.

<sup>28</sup> *Les Constitutions apostoliques* V, 20, 14, ed. Metzger (SC 329), 382.

<sup>29</sup> Venance Grumel, "Le jeûne de l'Assomption dans l'Église grecque," *Échos d'Orient* 32 (1933): 162-194; Ivan Mansvetov, *О постах Православной Восточной Церкви* (Moscow: M. G. Volchaninov, 1886).

As we can see, in the Byzantine tradition, fasting was not an individual act of piety, but a communal and liturgical practice, since fasting was prescribed for the entire ecclesial community on specific days and in preparation for major liturgical feasts. In their *Spiritual Century*, Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos exhort hesychasts to fast in a rather strict form three times a week, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday:

On the second, fourth, and sixth day of the week observe the ‘niners,’ that is always take food only once a day (at the ninth hour of the day). Eat about six ounces of bread, of dry food not to satiation, and drink three or four cups of water following the 69th rule of the Apostles which says: “If a bishop, or a priest, or a deacon, a reader or a singer does not fast during the Holy forty days before Easter, or on Wednesday or Friday, let him be cast out, unless he does this through bodily illness. If he be a layman, let him be excommunicated.” Fast on Mondays was established later by the holy fathers.<sup>30</sup>

Concerning the other periods of fasting, they write:

I think it is superfluous to talk in detail about the diet and mode of life during holy Lents, for as you are ordained to behave during ‘niners,’ so must you behave during the holy Lents, except Saturdays and Sundays. But, if you can, be even more strict, more sober during them, especially during the great forty days Lent which is as it were the tithe paid to God for the whole year, which brings to conquerors in Christ rewards for their efforts on the bright day of Divine Resurrection.<sup>31</sup>

It is interesting to note that the neo-Sabaite *Typikon* promoted by the hesychasts was more rigorous in the practice of fasting than the Stoudite *Typikon*. Take for example the observance of Great Saturday. While the *Typikon* of Alexis the Stoudite (1034) provided for breaking the fast after the evening liturgy of St. Basil by eating fish, cheese, and eggs, a practice also attested by the *Hypotyposis* attributed to Theodore the Stoudite (ninth century),<sup>32</sup> the Sabaite tradition was more rigorous, since it provided that, at the end of this liturgy, bread and wine be blessed and a piece of bread, figs or dates be distributed in the church, with a cup of wine, as the only refreshment of the day.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, *Century 31*, trans. in *Writings from the Philokalia*, 204–205.

<sup>31</sup> Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, *Century 35*, trans. in *Writings from the Philokalia*, 208.

<sup>32</sup> Pentkovskij, *Типикон патриарха Алексия Студита в Византии и на Руси* (Moscow: Moscow Patriarchate, 2001), 377; Theodore the Stoudite, *Hypotyposis*, PG 99, 1716.

<sup>33</sup> Getcha, *La réforme liturgique*, 285.

This bears witness to the attention and seriousness given to the practice of fasting by the hesychasts. In the fourteenth century, the liturgical reform of the hesychasts disseminated throughout the Orthodox world the Constantinopolitan practice of fasting from the first of August until the feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos (August 15), thus creating a fourth period of annual fasting which was added to the other periods of fasting known hitherto.<sup>34</sup> To protect the population against epidemics, it had become customary in Constantinople to take out on the first of August the relic of the Holy Cross kept in the imperial palace and to carry it in procession to the various churches of the city, thus traversing all the districts of the imperial capital in order to purify the air and protect the inhabitants from epidemics. These processions, district by district, took place until August 14, the eve of the Dormition, when the venerable Cross was brought back to the imperial palace.<sup>35</sup> The fast which accompanied this procession of the Cross later became known as the Dormition Fast, since it preceded the feast.

### **The Importance of the Holy Sacraments**

Another misinterpretation of the Hesychast movement sometimes considers the hesychasts of the fourteenth century as new Messalians who claimed that salvation can be obtained by the sole practice of individual prayer. As we know, in the second half of the fourth century, the Messalians denied that the sacraments (including baptism) gave grace, declaring that the only spiritual power was constant prayer that led to acquisition of the Holy Spirit. This was certainly not the case with the hesychast monks. For their leader, Gregory of Sinai, “prayer is the manifestation of Baptism” (βαπτίσματος φανέρωσις).<sup>36</sup> Thus, prayer is a product or development of the sacrament of baptism. As Kallistos Ware once commented:

Such is Gregory’s basic orientation. Prayer is God within us – God who dwells in our hearts through Baptism; to pray is to pass from the stage of baptismal grace present in our hearts secretly and unconsciously, to the point of full perception and conscious awareness when we feel the activity of grace directly and immediately.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Getcha, *La réforme liturgique*, 223–229.

<sup>35</sup> Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, II, 8, PG 112, 1005–1009.

<sup>36</sup> Gregory of Sinai, *Chapters* 113, trans. in *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, 237, and *Writings from the Philokalia*, 62.

<sup>37</sup> Ware, “The Jesus Prayer in St. Gregory of Sinai,” *Eastern Churches Review* 4 (1972): 9.

Gregory Palamas, the great doctor of Hesychasm, insists on the fact that the sacraments of the Church and continuous prayer are the two means by which man achieves his union with God. About the sacraments, he writes:

To this end, [God] established holy baptism and gave us saving laws. He preached repentance and shared His own body and blood with us. For it is not only human nature in general, but each believer as a person who receives baptism, governs his life by the holy commandments and becomes a partaker of the Bread that makes divine and of the Cup. By these means Christ justified each one of us personally and restored us to obedience to the heavenly Father.<sup>38</sup>

It is remarkable that the starting point of the *Spiritual Century* of Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos is a reflection on the divine grace that is granted to man in the sacrament of baptism through the economy of Christ. Hence their exhortation to hesychasts and believers to keep active this grace received from God:

Have you realised the power of this sacrament? Have you understood the travail of our complete spiritual regeneration after we leave the holy font, its fruits, its fullness and the honours of victory? Do you see how much it lies in our power to increase or to diminish this supernatural grace, that is, to show it forth or to obscure it? What obscures it is the storm of worldly cares, and the ensuing darkness of passions which attack us like a whirlwind, or a wild torrent and, flooding our soul, give it neither rest nor possibility to look at the truly good and blessed things for which it was created. Instead, it is mauled and tortured by the waves and smoke of sensory lusts, it is plunged into darkness and dissoluteness. Conversely, grace is manifested by that which is reflected from the Divine commandments, in the souls of those who walk not in the flesh, but in the Spirit; for it is said: "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). Grace leads such souls towards salvation and raises them, as by a ladder, to the very summit of perfection, to its very highest degree-love, which is God.<sup>39</sup>

According to Kallistos and Ignatios, the believer's response to the divine grace received in the sacrament of baptism must be the fulfillment of the divine commandments, the practice of the virtues, the practice of the Jesus Prayer, the

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<sup>38</sup> Palamas, *Homily 5*, 3, ed. Basil Pseftonkas, in *PS*, vol. 6, 83; English trans. Christopher Veniamin, *Saint Gregory Palamas. The Homilies* (Waymart, PA: Mount Thabor Publishing, 2009), 35.

<sup>39</sup> Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, *Century 5*, trans. in *Writings from the Philokalia*, 167-168.

practice of fasting, the psalmody of the divine offices. Prayer is inseparable from the grace received through the sacraments. On the contrary, it keeps it alive. As a conclusion to their *Spiritual Century*, taken up in the *Philokalia*, Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos emphasized the benefits of frequent communion:

The greatest help and assistance in purification of the soul, illumination of the mind, sanctification of the body and a Divine transformation of the two, as well as in repulsing passions and demons and, above all, in transubstantial union with God, in joining and merging with Him, is frequent communion in the holy, pure, immortal and life-giving Mysteries—the precious body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, Our God and Saviour—approached with a heart and disposition as pure as is possible for man.<sup>40</sup>

As a result, they encouraged the hesychasts to communicate frequently on the basis of the Holy Scriptures and the tradition received from the Fathers, affirming among other things:

St. Basil the Great writes equally in his letter to the noble Cesarea: “It is good and most useful to have communion every day and to partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, for Christ Himself says clearly: ‘Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life’ (Jn 6:54). For who can doubt that to participate constantly in life, means to have the most abundant life. We take communion four times every week: On Sunday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, as well as on other days if commemoration of some saint falls on them.” I believe that this saint celebrated liturgy on these days, because, being burdened with many cares, he could not do so every day. And St. Apollos said: “Monks should, if they can, have communion of the Holy Mysteries every day, since he who withdraws from the Holy Mysteries withdraws from God, and he who constantly receives communion, always receives the Saviour into himself. For the Saviour Himself says: ‘He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him’ (Jn 6:56). Thus this practice is most useful for monks, for by this means they are constantly commemorating the passion of Christ for our salvation. Moreover they must each day be ready and so prepare themselves as always to be worthy to partake of the Holy Mysteries and receive remission of sins.” This order of life was always observed in the brotherhood of St. Apollos.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, *Century 91*, trans. in *Writings from the Philokalia*, 259.

<sup>41</sup> Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, *Century 92*, trans. in *Writings from the Philokalia*, 263–264.

Both disciples of the hesychasts Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, Nicholas Kabasilas and Symeon of Thessaloniki also attached great importance to frequent communion. Kabasilas considered that it is through Eucharistic communion that believers obtain the remission of the sins they confess: “Besides, there is also among the holy mysteries that which, when men repent of their sins and confess them to the priest, delivers them from every penalty of God the Judge. Yet even of this mystery they are not able to obtain the effect unless they feast at the sacred banquet.”<sup>42</sup> In his *Explanation of the Divine Liturgy*, he affirms that “the Holy Spirit gives remission of their sins to those who partake of these sacred gifts.”<sup>43</sup> At the end of his treatise on *Life in Christ*, he stresses the importance for Christians of tending to a continual communion:

Now the true Bread who “strengthens the heart of man” (Ps 103:15) and came down from heaven bringing us life (cf. Jn 6:32-33) will suffice for all things. He will intensify our eagerness and take away the inborn sluggishness of the soul. Him we must seek in every way in order that we may feed on Him and ward off hunger by constantly attending this banquet. Nor should we unnecessarily abstain from the holy table and thus greatly weaken our souls on the pretext that we are not worthy of the Mysteries. Rather, we must resort to the priests [for confession] on account of our sins so that we may drink of the cleansing Blood.<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, Symeon of Thessaloniki affirmed, like his masters, that all, clerics and lay people, should tend towards frequent communion:

We, bishops and priests, let us always be participants of the awesome mysteries, celebrating with attention, with a contrite heart and confession; as to others, let them receive communion frequently with repentance, a contrite heart, and preparation of soul; let none of those who fear God and love the Lord refrain from receiving communion during Great Lent. And let those who have enough strength and attention approach communion with Christ more often, and even, if they can, every Sunday, and more particularly the elderly and infirm: for it is in this communion which is our life and our strength.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Nicholas Kabasilas, *La Vie en Christ* IV, 22, ed. Marie-Hélène Congourdeau (SC 355) (Paris: Cerf, 2009), 284–285; English trans. Carmino J. de Catanzaro, *The Life in Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 121.

<sup>43</sup> Kabasilas, *Explication de la divine liturgie* XXXIV, 4, eds. Séverien Salaville, René Bornert, Jean Gouillard, and Pierre Périchon (SC 4bis) (Paris: Cerf, 1967), 215.

<sup>44</sup> Kabasilas, *La Vie en Christ* VI, 102, ed. Congourdeau (SC 361) (Paris: Cerf, 2009), 128–129, trans. de Catanzaro, 193.

<sup>45</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, *De ordine sepulturæ* 360, PG 155, 672C.

Symeon rejected the idea of those who, basing themselves on the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor 11:27-30, renounced Eucharistic communion, considering that to communicate unworthily could result in their condemnation and lead to their death. On the contrary, the Archbishop of Thessaloniki clearly affirmed that frequent communion is not only the source of sanctification and purification from sins but also the source of life, of strength, and the means of acquiring eternal life: "And do not be afraid to commune of Life, as some men fear without reason who say 'in order not to die.' You will die more quickly if you do not receive the dread mysteries, because they are for your life, strength, power, and a viaticum for eternal life."<sup>46</sup> For this reason, relying on patristic tradition, Symeon encouraged priests to celebrate the Divine Liturgy every day so that Christians could communicate frequently: "St. Chrysostom, who wrote in agreement with [the Holy] Father Basil what relates to the Divine Mystagogy, praises those who receive communion daily with piety and dignity," specifying in passing "in Catholic [i.e., secular] churches and everywhere it is imparted to those who are full of good will to accomplish that which pertains to Mystagogy every day."<sup>47</sup>

Among the questions raised in the letter mentioned above from Patriarch Euthymius to the monk Cyprian, which we usually date between 1371 and 1373, we find the question of Eucharistic communion by anchorites in the absence of a priest.<sup>48</sup> This is characteristic of the spirituality and theology of hesychast circles which led an eremitical or *skētē* life, and where frequent communion, even in the absence of a priest, was considered a very important practice. Euthymius affirms that the monk in good health must go to the *katholikon* of the monastery to attend the Divine Liturgy and receive communion there: "Therefore it is not suitable for someone to neglect the holy *synaxis* while being healthy and strong in spirit, nor even the priest of God; he ought to go there with humility and to delight in the dread and immortal mysteries of God." No doubt Euthymius was aware that Eucharistic communion was not an act of individual piety, but an ecclesial event, that of the Eucharistic assembly. However, he concedes that monks who live far from a monastery and who are not subject to penance can administer the Eucharist to themselves in their cell: "Those who are not subject to penance and who have the blessing of their spiritual father and dwell in

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<sup>46</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, *De ordine sepulturæ* 360, PG 155, 672C-D.

<sup>47</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, *De sacerdotio*, PG 155, 973A-B.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Getcha, "Recevoir la communion en cellule. Un témoignage du 14<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Rites de Communion. Conférences Saint-Serge. LV<sup>e</sup> Semaine d'Études Liturgiques, Paris, 23-26 juin 2008*, eds. André Lossky and Manlio Sodi (Monumenta Studia Instrumenta Liturgica 59) (Vatican: Libreria editrice vaticana, 2010), 267-274.



remote desert places have the power to administer communion to themselves whenever they wish.”<sup>49</sup>

The question of whether hermits could commune in a cell is not new. The *Life* of St. Luke of Steiris recounts that the saint who lived in the tenth century had asked this question to the Metropolitan of Corinth, who replied that there must be a priest who shall distribute communion from presanctified gifts.<sup>50</sup> Symeon, the Archbishop of Thessaloniki, received the same question at the turn of the fifteenth century, to which he replied: “The bishop grants, as we know, to some of the monks who live in the deserts and who have no priests, to keep the presanctified gifts in a box and to receive communion there in case of need with great piety, not as priests do, but in the following way [...],”<sup>51</sup> and he then prescribes the proper order of receiving the Eucharist.

All these testimonies attest that Eucharistic Communion was by no means neglected in hermit circles and that the hesychasts, on the contrary, encouraged frequent Communion. If this was so, it is because the hesychasts were sensitive to the ecclesial dimension of the performance of the sacraments. Thus, Kabasilas considers that the Eucharist signifies the Church: “the holy mysteries signify the Church because it is ‘the body of Christ’ and [the faithful] are ‘members of Christ, each for his part.’”<sup>52</sup> Moreover, for Symeon of Thessaloniki, the celebration of the holy mysteries in the earthly Church reflects the celestial liturgy:

One also is the work, the *hierurgy* of the Master, as well as the communion and the observation. And it is accomplished above as below. The difference is that there, [it is accomplished] without veils and without any symbol, whereas here [it is accomplished] through symbols (διὰ συμβόλων) because we are clothed with a corruptible flesh.<sup>53</sup>

For the same reason, the Archbishop of Thessaloniki insisted on the ecclesial character of the celebration of baptism. He observes that baptism was formerly celebrated by the bishop in his cathedral during the Paschal vigil or on days of great feasts in the presence of the fullness of the ecclesial community:

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<sup>49</sup> Kachanovskiy, “К вопросу,” 240 and 244.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Alexandr I. Almazov, *Тайная исповедь в Православной Восточной Церкви*, vol. 2 (Odessa: Typ. Odessa military district, 1894), 117.

<sup>51</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, *Responsiones ad Gabrielem Pentapolitanum* 41, PG 155, 889D.

<sup>52</sup> Kabasilas, *Explication de la divine liturgie* XXXVII, 6, eds. Salaville, Bornert, Gouillard, and Périchon, 229.

<sup>53</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, *De sacro templo* 131, PG 155, 340AB.

Since the very divine baptism thus appears to be the greatest work, the Church long ago celebrated the baptism of those who joined her through the bishops in the cathedral churches on feast days, when it is sung at the Divine Liturgy: "All of you who have been baptized into Christ," and more specifically on Great Saturday before the Divine Liturgy, when many readings from the divine prophets are being read.<sup>54</sup>

Symeon thus protested against making baptism a private and non-ecclesial event, insisting that it "is essential that all the faithful be present at this time as much as possible."<sup>55</sup> Thus, the hesychasts were the precursors of the theologians of the twentieth century who underlined the ecclesial dimension of the Liturgy thanks to a Eucharistic ecclesiology and who suggested the reintegration of the sacraments within the framework of the liturgical assembly of the Eucharistic celebration.

## Conclusion

Unlike several studies on Hesychasm which have focused on the individual practice of the Jesus Prayer by hesychast monks, forgetting that they also participated in the Liturgy of the Church, our examination of the sources shows that the influence of the hesychasts on the liturgy in Byzantium was decisive for the further development of the Byzantine liturgical tradition. The spiritual renewal led by the hesychasts of the fourteenth century went hand in hand with a real liturgical reform.

For the hesychasts, the practice of continual prayer was supported by the celebration of liturgical offices. For them, the neo-Sabaite *Typikon* they had practiced on Mount Athos seemed the most suitable for everyone, monks and lay people, especially since in their eyes it was endowed with patristic authority. The celebration of the nocturnal vigils prescribed by this *Typikon* as well as the rigor of its fasting rules corresponded perfectly to the teaching of the hesychasts, who considered nocturnal vigil and fasting as adequate weapons against sin. Moreover, the hesychasts were aware that prayer was a fruit of baptism and that it allowed baptismal grace to be kept alive. For this reason, they did not only focus on prayer, but also insisted on the importance of the sacraments in the Christian life, which they considered as a "life in Christ," nourished by frequent Eucharistic communion, which they did not envisage as individual piety but whose ecclesial dimension they kept in mind, since the Church was perceived by them as the figure, the *typos*, of the heavenly Kingdom.

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<sup>54</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, *De sacramentis* 62, PG 155, 221C.

<sup>55</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, *De sacramentis* 62, PG 155, 221B.

Considering monastic life as a paradigm for Christian life, the hesychasts emphasized the unity of monks and laity as well as of the earthly Church with the heavenly Church, in the one mystery of Christ. It is for this reason that they opted for the standardization of the liturgical life of the Church on the basis of the monastic neo-Sabaite *Typikon*, which in their eyes was best suited to ensure a spiritual renewal throughout the Byzantine world and its periphery.

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