

# AAA Orthodox Epistemology

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## CHAPTER VI of “Orthodox Psychotherapy”

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### 1. Orthodox Epistemology

- 1.1. The three degrees of knowledge according to St. Isaac the Syrian
- 1.2. Knowledge of God according to St. Gregory Palamas
- 1.3. P R A Y E R S

The subject of epistemology belongs to this book, and it forms the final chapter, as it is closely connected with the cure of man's soul. Previous chapters have shown that the fall, sickness and death of a man are precisely the death of his soul, nous, heart and reason, under the influence of evil thoughts. The fall is mainly the fall of the nous. When the soul, nous and heart are cured, one attains knowledge of God. Indeed it is not only when they are cured that one acquires knowledge of God, but also as far as they are cured. When they are cured as completely as possible, one attains a knowledge of God that is not in words about God, but knowing God Himself. In other words, it is in the cured heart that God is revealed and offers knowledge of Himself. Thus it is clear that Orthodox epistemology is closely related to the therapy of the soul. Knowledge of God is increased as healing increases, and a pure knowledge of God is given to that person who has been purified and cured.

In order to see this more clearly, we may concentrate on the teachings of two Fathers of the Church: St. Isaac the Syrian and St. Gregory Palamas. We shall look first at the three degrees of knowledge

according to St. Isaac the Syrian and then at knowledge of God according to St. Gregory Palamas.

## St. Isaac the Syrian on three degrees of knowledge

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St. Isaac the Syrian develops the theme of the three degrees of knowledge in chapters fifty-two and fifty-three of his Ascetical Homilies.

He begins by contrasting knowledge and faith. Human knowledge is marked by the fact that it has no authority to do anything “without investigation and examination”, but it must investigate whether that which it desires is possible (p.254). In human knowledge there is a great deal of intelligence, and it is mainly fallen intelligence which is at work, having overstepped its natural limits; that is to say, it is an intelligence which dominates the nous as well. Faith, however, has different limits, and herein seems to lie its great difference from human knowledge, as well as its great value. St. Isaac says that when we use the word ‘faith’ we do not mean the handing down of the dogmatic truths about the Persons of the Holy Trinity and about Christ’s becoming man and about the assumption of human nature by the Second Person of the Trinity, “although this faith is also very lofty”, but the main meaning of what we call faith is “that light which by grace dawns in the soul and fortifies the heart by the testimony of the mind, making it undoubting through the assurance of hope”. This spiritual faith does not learn the mysteries by aural tradition, “but with spiritual eyes it beholds the mysteries concealed in the soul, and the secret and divine riches that are hidden away from the eyes of the sons of the flesh, but are unveiled by the spirit to those who abide at Christ’s table through their study of His laws” (p.262). That is to say that while human knowledge is acquired through activity of the intelligence and

through human research, divine knowledge is acquired through faith. This faith is mainly that which dawns in the soul from the light of grace, and through this power one learns all the mysteries which are hidden from the eyes of the carnal men of this age. So “faith is more subtle than knowledge, just as knowledge is more subtle than palpable things” (p.262). Faith, which is divine knowledge, is more subtle than human knowledge.

St. Isaac explains the difference between human knowledge and faith. Human knowledge cannot learn without examination, while faith “requires a mode of thinking that is single, limpidly pure and simple, far removed from any deviousness or invention of methods...The home of faith is a childlike thought and a simple heart” (254). While human knowledge has intelligence at its centre, faith has the simple and guileless heart. Human knowledge “keeps within the boundaries of nature” while faith “makes its journey above nature” (254). That is to say, human knowledge is a purely natural condition, working within natural limits, while faith is a supranatural condition. Likewise human knowledge is unable to do anything without matter; it moves in a material world, while faith has authority, after the likeness of God, to make a new creation (p.254). Human knowledge does not dare nor wish to overstep the boundaries of nature, while faith “transgresses them with authority” (p.255). This is demonstrated by the lives of all the saints who, by the power of faith “have entered into flames and bridled the burning power of the fire, walking unharmed through the midst of it, and they have trodden upon the back of the sea as upon dry land” (p.255). And all these things which faith does are above nature and contrary to the ways of human knowledge. Human knowledge “keeps within the limits of nature”, while faith “passes above nature” (p.255). Human knowledge always seeks means “to safeguard those who have acquired it”, that is, it always takes protective measures and seeks to protect man by human means. But faith leaves it entirely to God. “The man who prays in faith never employs, or is engaged in, ways and means” (p.255). Human

knowledge does not begin a piece of work without having examined how it will end, while faith says: “All things are possible to him that believes. For to God nothing is impossible” (p.256).

It is true, according to St. Isaac, that human knowledge is not faulty, but faith is higher (p.256). Knowledge is perfected by faith, since “knowledge is a step whereby a man can climb up to the lofty height of faith” (p.257). When faith comes, what is in part is abolished. Then “it is by our faith that we learn those things that cannot be comprehended by the investigation and power of knowledge” (p.257). All the works of righteousness which are the virtues, that is, fasting, alms, vigil, holiness and all the “rest of such works performed with the body” and all those which are performed in the soul, that is, love for one’s neighbor, humility of heart, forgiving “those who have sinned”, recollection of good things, investigation of the mysteries concealed in the Scriptures, the mind’s occupation with good works, the bridling of the soul’s passions, and the rest of such virtues, “all these require knowledge”. Knowledge “guards them and teaches their order”. And all these things are steps by which the soul ascends “to the more lofty height of faith”. However, “faith’s way of life is more exalted than virtue’s labour, and it is not labour but perfect rest, consolation, and is accomplished in the heart and within the soul” (p.256-7).

All these things indicate that, according to the teaching of St. Isaac and the other holy Fathers, faith is higher than human knowledge, higher even than knowledge acquired through the practice of virtue. For faith is a charismatic condition, communion with God; it is “the heart’s understanding and vision”; it is the life which develops in the soul with the coming of the light of divine grace. In the next section, in the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas, we shall look at this knowledge of God, which is really “communion in being”, man’s communion and union with God. Thus it is a knowledge higher than any human knowledge, even than knowledge acquired through the practice of

virtues, for with it we find Christ Himself, who is hidden in the depths of the commandments.

St. Isaac the Syrian speaks of three kinds of knowledge. Let us examine how they differ, for I think that this will show us how the Orthodox tradition differs from the human cultural tradition, how divine knowledge differs from human knowledge.

There are three conceivable ways in which knowledge ascends and descends. These ways are body, soul and spirit (p.258). Indeed when the Fathers speak of body, soul and spirit they do not mean the three parts of man, but by the word 'spirit' they mean the gift of grace, that divine grace with which man is blessed. Without the grace of God a man is said to be a man of soul or flesh, while with the presence of grace he is called spiritual. While the nature of knowledge is one, it is refined and changes its modes according to these intelligible and sensible realms (p.258). Thus just as there are three sentient and intelligible modes: body, soul and spirit, so there are three kinds of knowledge related to them. According to the kind of knowledge which a man possesses, he shows his spiritual progress and his spiritual condition. Moreover, the kind of knowledge which someone has is an indication of his purification and healing. One whose soul is unhealthy has bodily knowledge, while one who is being healed has soul knowledge, and one who has been healed has spiritual knowledge. The latter knows the mysteries of the Spirit, which are unknown and incomprehensible to the man of flesh.

The first knowledge is acquired by constant study and diligence in learning, the second knowledge comes from a pure and good manner of life and from the mind's faith, and the third knowledge "is allotted to faith alone. For by faith knowledge is abolished, works come to an end, and the employment of the senses becomes superfluous" (p.264).

Let us look more analytically, on the basis of St. Isaac's teaching, at these three kinds of knowledge which indicate the sickness or health of a man's soul.

First, bodily knowledge. Some characteristic elements of human knowledge which are connected with the desires of the flesh are wealth, vainglory, adornment, bodily rest, and assiduity in rational wisdom, such as is suitable for the governance of the world and which devises the novelties of inventions and arts and sciences (p.258). This knowledge is opposed to faith, as we have explained before, because it thinks that "all things are by its own providence" (p.258). Wisdom and knowledge of things of this world without the other two kinds of knowledge are useless and create many problems for man. This knowledge is shallow and rude, for it is "naked of all concern for God" (p.258). Its concern is only for this world, and because it is controlled by the body, "it introduces into the mind an irrational impotence" (p.258).

Most men of our time, unhealed in soul, possess this knowledge and cultivate it continually. The whole of contemporary civilization, which creates many anomalies of soul and body, is in this state. Hence this one-sidedness of knowledge creates many problems. Here is how St. Isaac describes them. The man of this bodily knowledge is a prey to faint-heartedness, sorrow, despair, fear of the demons, trepidation before men, the rumor of thieves and the report of murders, anxiety over illnesses, concern over want and the lack of necessities, fear of death, fear of sufferings, of wild beasts and of other similar things that make up the sea of the present life (p.258). The man who possesses this human and bodily knowledge does not know how to abandon himself to God's mercy but tries in his own ways to solve the various problems. But when he cannot give solutions, for different reasons, then he "strives with men as though they hindered and opposed" this knowledge (p.258). He comes to blows with men because they hinder the possession of the goods of bodily knowledge.

This bodily knowledge, worldly care, completely eradicates love. It makes one examine other people's small sins and errors and their causes, and their weaknesses, it makes one dogmatise and oppose the words of others, become sly in all one's doings and devise ways to dishonour people. This knowledge contains presumption and pride (p.259).

We see clearly that bodily knowledge is characteristic of contemporary civilisation. With prophetic insight St. Isaac presents the causes and pursuits of this carnal man, describes his struggle and anguish, and also presents the frightful results of this bodily knowledge. Disturbance of personal relationships, lack of love, obstinacy and cunning in all actions are the things which define the contemporary man who is sick in soul, far from God.

The second knowledge, that of the soul. When a man renounces the first, bodily, fleshly knowledge and turns to the desires and conversations of the soul, then all the good deeds of the soul's knowledge follow. These are fasting, prayer, mercy, reading of the Scriptures, the modes of virtue, battle with the passions, and so forth (p.258). All these deeds are made perfect by the Holy Spirit. They do not happen by the power of man but by the working together of man and the Holy Spirit. There are stages in the acquisition of knowledge. The second degree of knowledge is made perfect "when it has laid the foundation of its action on seclusion from men, reading the Scriptures, and prayer" (p.260). That is to say, the possessor of this knowledge of the soul lives in stillness, with all that implies, as we described in the preceding chapter. He prays to God unceasingly and studies the Scriptures in this holy atmosphere of stillness in order to nourish his soul, not in order to learn the words of God out of curiosity. This category includes those people who are being cured of psychic ulcers and the wounds of their soul. This cure offers a knowledge which can be called the preliminary stage and anteroom of that other, spiritual

knowledge, which the coming of the grace of God will provide in the heart of man.

The third, spiritual knowledge. When man's knowledge is raised above worldly concerns and begins to see inwardly "what is hidden from the eyes" and when it scorns the things "from which the perverseness of the passions arises" and stretches itself upward in its desire for the promises of the age to come and in its searching into hidden mysteries, "then faith itself swallows up knowledge, converts it, and begets it anew, so that it becomes wholly and completely spirit" (p.261).

Then it can fly to the places of the bodiless angels; it knows the spiritual mysteries, the governings of the spiritual and the corporeal. That is to say, it knows the inner principles of beings. Then the inner senses awaken and the soul receives the resurrection which gives assurance of the future resurrection of men. St. Isaac, who possessed this spiritual knowledge which is the life of faith, wrote: "Then it can soar in the realms of the bodiless and touch the depths of the unfathomable sea, musing upon the wondrous and divine workings of God's governance of intelligible and corporeal creatures. It searches out spiritual mysteries that are perceived by the simple and subtle nous. Then the inner senses awaken for spiritual doing, according to the order that will be in the immortal and incorruptible life. For even from now it has received, as it were in a mystery, the intelligible resurrection as a true witness of the universal renewal of all things" (p,261).

This knowledge was possessed by all the saints of God, such as Moses, David, Isaiah, the Apostle Peter, the Apostle Paul and all the saints who were accounted worthy of this perfect knowledge, "to the degree possible for human nature" (p.259). In reality this knowledge comes from vision of God and of the uncreated light, from divine revelations or, as St. Isaac puts it, "by diverse contemplations and

divine revelations, by the lofty vision of spiritual things and by ineffable mysteries...” (p.259). Then knowledge is swallowed up by these visions of God and the person feels that he is dust and ashes (p.259). He acquires the blessed state of humility and simplicity. Thus spiritual knowledge, that is, knowledge of God, is the fruit of theoria. It is received by the person who has progressed from carnal knowledge to that of the soul and thence to spiritual knowledge.

Briefly one can say that the first knowledge “renders the soul cold to works that go in pursuit of God”. The second knowledge warms the soul to the swift course “on the level of faith”. The third knowledge is rest from labour, “which is the type of the age to come, for the soul takes delight solely in the mind’s meditation upon the mysteries of the good things to come” (p.262).

This teaching of St. Isaac is very relevant to the subject which we are treating, for the following reason. In the beginning of the book we mentioned that the members of the Church are not divided into good and bad or moral and immoral, making human ethics the criterion, but into the sick in soul, those being cured, and those cured. Precisely these three categories correspond to the three degrees of knowledge. Those whose soul is sick are people of bodily, worldly knowledge, those being cured are the ones who in different degrees are acquiring the soul’s wisdom and knowledge, and those cured are the saints of God, who possess spiritual knowledge, true knowledge of God. Most people of our time, who are sick in soul because they know nothing of the nous and the heart, are in the first bodily, fleshly knowledge. Others belong to the second knowledge, because they are struggling to be cured by means of the whole ascetic method available in the Orthodox Church. And the saints, who exist even today, belong to the third knowledge, since they have been cured of their sicknesses and so have acquired knowledge of God.

## St. Gregory Palamas on the Knowledge of God

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Now that we have explained the teaching of St. Isaac the Syrian about the three degrees of knowledge, we can go on to look at knowledge of God according to the Athonite saint Gregory Palamas. When a person rises from bodily knowledge to the soul's knowledge and from that to spiritual knowledge, then he sees God and possesses knowledge of God, which is his salvation. Knowledge of God, as will be explained further on, is not intellectual, but existential. That is, one's whole being is filled with this knowledge of God. But in order to attain it, one's heart must have been purified, that is, the soul, nous and heart must have been healed. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt.5,8).

Let us look at things more analytically.

As I have indicated, Barlaam insisted that knowledge of God depends not on vision of God but on one's understanding. He said that we can acquire knowledge of God through philosophy, and therefore he considered the prophets and apostles who saw the uncreated light, to be below the philosophers. He called the uncreated light sensory, created, and "inferior to our understanding". However, St. Gregory Palamas, a bearer of the Tradition and a man of revelation, supported the opposite view. In his theology he presented the teaching of the Church that uncreated light, that is, the vision of God, is not simply a symbolic vision, nor sensory and created, nor inferior to understanding, but it is deification. Through deification man is deemed worthy of seeing God. And this deification is not an abstract state, but a union of man with God. That is to say, the man who beholds the uncreated light sees it because he is united with God. He sees it with his inner eyes, and also with his bodily eyes, which, however, have been altered by God's action. Consequently theoria is union with God. And this union is knowledge of God. At this time one is granted

knowledge of God, which is above human knowledge and above the senses.

St. Gregory explains this whole theology in places throughout his writings. But since it is not our intention in this chapter to make a systematic exposition of his whole teaching about the knowledge of God, we shall limit ourselves to analysing the central point in it as it is presented in his basic work 'On the Holy Hesychasts', known as the Triads. Again we must add that we shall not present the whole teaching as it is set out in that book, but only the central points. After each quotation we shall give the reference.

Here is a characteristic passage in which he briefly presents this teaching: "One who has cleared his soul of all connection with things of this world, who has detached himself from everything by keeping the commandments and by the dispassion that this brings, and who has passed beyond all cognitive activity through continuous, sincere and immaterial prayer, and who has been abundantly illuminated by the inaccessible light in an inconceivable union, he alone, becoming light, contemplating by the light and beholding the light, in the vision and enjoyment of this light recognizes truly that God is transcendently radiant and beyond comprehension; he glorifies God not only beyond his nous's human power of understanding, for many created things are beyond that, but even beyond that marvelous union which is the only means by which the nous is united with what is beyond intelligible things, 'imitating divinely the supracelestial nouses'" (2,3,57).

We find the central teaching of St. Gregory in this passage. In order to attain vision of the uncreated light, a person must cut off every connection between the soul and what is below, detach himself from everything by keeping Christ's commandments and through the dispassion which comes from that, he must transcend all cognitive activity "through continuous and sincere and immaterial prayer".

Therefore he must have been healed already, through keeping Christ's commandments and through freeing his soul from all sinful connection with created things. He is illuminated by the inaccessible light "abundantly through an inconceivable union". He sees God through union. Thus he becomes light and sees by the light. Seeing the uncreated light, he recognises God and acquires knowledge of Him, because now "he recognises truly that God is above nature and beyond comprehension".

St. Gregory also develops this teaching at other places in the Triads.

The vision of God, theoria of the uncreated light, is not a sensory vision but a deification of man. Speaking of Moses' vision of God "face-to-face and not in enigmas", he recalls the passage in St. Maximus the Confessor that says: "Deification is an enhypostatic and direct illumination which has no beginning but appears in those worthy as something exceeding their comprehension. It is indeed a mystical union with God, beyond nous and reason in the age when creatures will no longer know corruption" (3,1,28;CWS p.84). So the vision of the uncreated light is man's deification. He sees God through deification and not through cultivating intelligence. The vision of uncreated light is called a deifying gift. It is not a gift of created human nature, but of the Holy Spirit. "Thus the deifying gift of the Spirit is a mysterious light which transforms into light those who receive its wealth. He not only fills them with eternal light but also grants them knowledge and life appropriate to God" (3,1,35;CWS p.90). Thus the vision of God is not external but comes through deification (2,3,25).

This deification is union and communion with God. According to St. Gregory, "Vision of the uncreated light is not simply abstraction and negation, it is a union and a divinisation which occurs mystically and ineffably by the grace of God, after the stripping away of everything from here below which imprints itself on the nous, or rather after the cessation of all noetic activity; it is something which goes beyond

abstraction” (1,3,17;CWS p.34f). The contemplation of uncreated light is “by the divinising communion of the Spirit” (1,3,5;CWS p.33). “So the contemplation of this light is a union, even though it does not endure in the imperfect: but is the union with this light other than a vision?” (2,3,36;CWS p.65)

St. Gregory speaks of ecstasy. But this ecstasy, in patristic teaching, has nothing to do with the ecstasy of Pythia and the other religions. Ecstasy comes when, in prayer, the nous abandons every connection with created things: first “with everything evil and bad, then with neutral things” (2,3,35;CWS p.65). Ecstasy is mainly withdrawal from the opinion of the world and the flesh. With sincere prayer the nous “abandons all created things” (2,3,35;CWS p.65). This ecstasy is higher than abstract theology, that is, than rational theology, and it belongs only to those who have attained dispassion. But it is not yet union. That is to say, the ecstasy which is unceasing prayer of the nous, in which one’s nous has continuous remembrance of God and has no relation with the ‘world of sin’ is not yet union with God. This union comes about when the Paraclete “illuminates from on high the man who attains in prayer the stage which is superior to the highest natural possibilities and who is awaiting the promise of the Father, and by His revelation ravishes him to the contemplation of the light” (2,3,35;CWS p.65). Illumination by God is what shows His union with man.

Vision, deification and union with God are the things which offer man existential knowledge of God. Then man possesses real knowledge of God. The deifying gift of the Holy Spirit, which is a mysterious light, transforms into divine light those who have attained it and not only fills them with eternal light, “but also grants them a knowledge and a life appropriate to God” (3,1,35;CWS p.89). In this state a person possesses knowledge of God. In reply to Barlaam’s teaching that God is known by the greatest contemplators, the philosophers, and that knowledge of God transmitted “by noetic illumination...is by no means

true” (2,3,78), St. Gregory Palamas declares: “God makes Himself known not only through all that is but also through what is not, through transcendence, that is, through uncreated things, and also through an eternal light that transcends all beings”. This knowledge, he says, is offered today as a kind of pledge to those who are worthy of it and which “illuminates them unendingly in the unending age”. That is just why the saints' vision of God is true, “and he who calls it false has strayed from the divine knowledge of God” (2,3,78). Thus anyone who ignores and disregards the vision of God, which offers true knowledge, is in reality ignorant of God.

These things show that the vision of God, deification, union and knowledge of God are closely bound together. They cannot be understood apart from one another. Breaking this unity takes man further away from knowledge of God. The basis of Orthodox epistemology is illumination and God’s revelation within the purified heart of man.

As we have seen, knowledge of God is beyond human knowledge. Vision of the uncreated light surpasses all epistemological activity and is “beyond sight and knowledge” (2,3,50). Since vision of the uncreated light is offered to the hearts of the faithful and perfect, that is why “it is superior to the light of knowledge” (2,3,18;CWS p.63). And not only is it superior to the light of human knowledge “from Hellenic studies”, but also the light of this theoria differs from “the light that comes from the Holy Scriptures”, since the light of the Scriptures may be compared to “a lamp that shines in an obscure place, whereas vision of the uncreated light resembles the morning star which shines in the day, that is to say, the sun” (2,3,18;CWS p.63). The grace of deification thus transcends nature, virtue and human knowledge (3,1,27).

The vision of the uncreated light and the knowledge that comes from this are not an unfolding of the rational power, they are not perfection

of rational nature, as Barlaam asserted, but they are superior to reason. They are knowledge offered by God to the pure in heart. Anyone who asserts that the deifying gift is a development of the rational nature puts himself in opposition to Christ's Gospel. If contemplation were a natural gift, then all people should be gods, one less and another more. But "the deified saints transcend nature", they are engendered by God, God gave them power to become "children of God" (3,1,30;CWS p.85).

The vision of the uncreated light, which offers knowledge of God to man, is sensory and suprasensory. The bodily eyes are reshaped, so they see the uncreated light, "this mysterious light, inaccessible, immaterial, uncreated, deifying, eternal", this "radiance of the Divine Nature, this glory of the divinity, this beauty of the heavenly kingdom" (3,1,22;CWS p.80). Palamas asks: "Do you see that light is inaccessible to senses which are not transformed by the Spirit?" (2,3,22). St. Maximus, whose teaching is cited by St. Gregory, says that the Apostles saw the uncreated Light "by a transformation of the activity of their senses, produced in them by the Spirit" (2.3.22).

Vision of the uncreated Light and the knowledge which comes from it transcend not only nature and human knowledge, but virtue as well. Virtue and the imitation of God prepare us for the divine union, but the mysterious union itself is effected by grace (3,1,27;CWS p.83).

Thus deification, which is the goal of the spiritual life, is a manifestation of God to the pure heart of man. This vision of the uncreated Light is what creates spiritual delight in the soul. For, according to St. Gregory, evidence of that light is that the soul ceases to give itself over to wrong pleasures and passions, and that it acquires peace and quietening of thoughts, and rest and spiritual joy, contempt for human glory, humility joined with secret rejoicing, hatred of the world, love of heavenly things, or rather love of the God of

Heaven alone, and a vision of uncreated light even if one's eyes should be covered or plucked out (3,1,36;CWS p.90).

From what has been said it is clear that the end of man's cure is vision of the uncreated light. But since in this chapter we are speaking about theoria, we may also look at Palamas' teaching that there are many degrees of theoria. He says that this theoria has a beginning, and the things that follow on from this beginning differ in degrees of darkness or clarity, but there is never an end, for its progress, like that of the rapture in revelation, is infinite. Illumination is one thing and continuous vision of light is another, and still another is the vision of things in that light whereby even things far off are accessible to the eyes, and the future is shown as already existing (2,3,35;CWS p.65). So there are degrees of theoria, and with it, degrees of knowledge.

At this point we may also look at the teaching of St. Peter of Damascus about the eight stages of theoria (Philokalia 3,108). The first seven belong to this age, while the eighth belongs to the age to come. The first theoria is knowledge of the trials and tribulations of this life. The second is "knowledge of our own faults and of God's bounty". The third is knowledge of the terrible things before and after death. The fourth is deep understanding of the life led by our Lord Jesus in this world and of His disciples and the other saints, that is to say, the words and actions of the martyrs and the holy Fathers. The fifth is knowledge of the nature and flux of things. The sixth is theoria of created beings, or knowledge and understanding of God's visible creation. The seventh is understanding of God's spiritual creation, that is to say, of the angels. The eighth is knowledge concerning God, or what we call 'theology'.

Consequently theoria has many stages and degrees, and many must come before vision of the uncreated light, which is "the beauty of the age to come", "the food of the heavens". Among the degrees of theoria are remembrance of death, which is a gift from God, unceasing prayer,

the inspiration to keep Christ's commandments fully, knowledge of our spiritual poverty, that is to say, understanding of our sins and passions, and the repentance following it. All these things come about through the operation of divine grace. Certainly perfect theoria is vision of the uncreated light, which itself is differentiated into vision and continuous vision, as Palamas says (3,1,30).

So the purification which takes place by the grace of God creates the necessary preconditions for attaining that theoria which is communion with God, deification of man, and knowledge of God. The ascetic method of the Church leads to this point. It is not based on human criteria and it does not aim to make the person "nice and good", but to heal him perfectly and for him to achieve communion with God. As long as a man is far from communion and union with God, he has not yet attained his salvation. The spiritually trained person who sees the uncreated light is said, in the language of the Fathers, to be 'deified'. This expression is used by St. Dionysios the Areopagite, St. John of Damascus, and repeatedly, as we have seen, by St. Gregory Palamas (3,1,30;CWS p.85f).

The healing of the soul, nous and heart leads a person to the vision of God and makes him know the divine life. This knowledge is man's salvation.

We must pray fervently for God to grant us to reach this knowledge of God. The exhortation is clear:

"Come, let us ascend into the mountain of the Lord,  
even to the house of our God,  
and behold the glory of His transfiguration,  
glory of the Only-begotten of the Father.  
Let us receive light from His light,  
and with uplifted spirits  
let us for ever sing the praises of the consubstantial Trinity".

Here we rise and sing:

“Thou wast transfigured upon the mountain, O Christ our God, showing Thy glory to Thy disciples as far as they were able to bear it. At the intercessions of the Mother of God, make Thine everlasting light shine forth also upon us sinners, O Giver of light, glory to Thee.”

(Feast of the Transfiguration, Festal Menaion p.475-477)

## PRAYERS

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### **a) In quest of a spiritual healer**

“O Lord, who desirest not the death of a sinner but that he should turn and live, Thou who didst come down to earth in order to restore life to those lying dead through sin and in order to make them worthy of seeing Thee the true light as far as that is possible to man, send me a man who knows Thee, so that in serving him and subjecting myself to him with all my strength, as to Thee, and in doing Thy will in his, I may please Thee the only true God, and so that even I, a sinner, may be worthy of Thy Kingdom”. \*

St. Symeon the New Theologian

### **b) For knowledge of God and love for Him**

“Make me worthy, O Lord, to know and love Thee, not with knowledge from the exercise of a scattered nous; but make me worthy of that knowledge whereby, beholding Thee, the nous glorifies Thy nature, in divine vision which robs the mind of awareness of the world. Account me worthy to be lifted above my will’s wandering eye which begets imaginings, and to behold Thee in the constraint of the Cross’s bond, in the second part of the crucifixion of the nous, which willingly ceases

from its conceptual imagings to abide in Thy continuous vision that surpasses nature. Implant in my heart an increase of Thy love, that it may be drawn back from this world by fervent love for Thee. Awake in me understanding of Thy humility, wherewith Thou didst sojourn in the world in the covering of flesh which Thou didst bear from our members by the mediation of the Holy Virgin, that with this continual and unfailling recollection I may accept the humility of my nature with delight. \*

St. Isaac of Syria