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**The Proto-Hesychasts:
Origins of mysticism in the Eastern church**

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ABSTRACT

The Proto-Hesychasts suggests that the thinkers between and including Basil the Great and Symeon the New Theologian were important largely for their role in forming the fourteenth-century Hesychastic movement in the Eastern church. This conclusion is reached in part by viewing the period from an Orthodox rather than a broadly Christian perspective. Chapter Two surveys previous research on Proto-Hesychasm, and Chapter Three sets forth certain Hesychastic trends in the Proto-Hesychasts including monasticism, dark and light mysticism, an emphasis on the heart, *theōsis*, the humanity of Christ, *penthos*, and unceasing prayer. The author finds himself in agreement with Alexander Schmemmann for whom Hesychasm was not a novel departure but the completion of a basic tendency of the Orthodox Church. The Hesychasts did not teach a new doctrine but continued and perfected the tradition that immediately preceded them.

The thesis proper commences in Chapter Four with the fourth-century Cappadocians who established monasticism as the predominant milieu of Proto-Hesychasm and placed much emphasis on both *theōsis* and dark mysticism. This mysticism, codified by Gregory of Nyssa, would come into conflict with the light mysticism of their contemporary Pseudo-Macarius, but both currents would be passed on to the Hesychasts, though the latter would triumph to a degree. Macarius, affected by little besides the Bible and Syrian theology, was a seminal figure within Proto-Hesychasm, and Chapter Five shows him to be responsible not only for the stress on light mysticism but on heart mysticism in Proto-Hesychasm and Hesychasm. Mark the Monk and Diadochus of Photike were the first to recognize the vitality of his thought, and it was through them that Macarius' spirit spread to subsequent Proto-Hesychasm, most notably that of Symeon the New Theologian.

Fourteenth-century Hesychasm emerged from two main fonts, the philosophical and the ascetic. Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor, discussed in Chapter Six, were the philosophical precursors of Hesychasm, even though the former may have not been a Christian and the latter's eschatology was characterized by a thoroughgoing Neoplatonic immanentism. The philosophers transmitted to the Hesychasts a virtually unacknowledged Platonism, but, despite their intellectualism, they exhibited typical Proto-Hesychast traits like dark and light mysticism, monasticism, *theōsis*, unceasing prayer, and, in Maximus, a stress on the humanity of Christ which would contribute to the Hesychasts'

distinctive refusal to disown man's material nature.

Representatives of the ascetic school of Proto-Hesychasm, covered in Chapter Seven, included Isaiah of Scetis, Dorotheus of Gaza, John Climacus, and Isaac of Nineveh. These monks, who were often abbots, concerned themselves mainly with issues like *theōsis*, *penthos*, and unceasing prayer but from a solely monastic point of view. In Chapter Eight the abbot Symeon the New Theologian is shown to be their redoubtable successor, but he was somewhat more philosophical than they were. Hesychasm has been called a recapitulation of his thought, and this is only slightly hyperbolic. Essentially the last Proto-Hesychast, Symeon took the theological elements that came before him and bequeathed these to the Hesychasts who tended to not acknowledge his influence due to his controversial career.

Key terms: apophatic method, asceticism, Cappadocians, Christ/Christian, Eastern Orthodox Church, heart mysticism, Hesychasm, Jesus Prayer, mysticism, *penthos*, Taboric Light, *theōsis*

PREFACE

Western Christianity today is characterized by a fascination with Eastern Christianity, a characteristic to which I am not immune and which helped form the genesis of this thesis. As I wrote it I found myself engaged in much rereading, especially Mark the Monk's *On the Spiritual Law*, *On Those Who Imagine that They Are Made Righteous by Works*, and Symeon the New Theologian's *Discourses*. For their help with various aspects of this thesis I would like to thank Dan Lioy, Rikus Fick, Frank Kovács, Chris Woodall, Roger Schlesinger, Stuart Rochester, and Peg Evans. I am also indebted to Herrie van Rooy of North-West University for looking over and correcting my Semitic transliterations.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Problem Statement

The Eastern Orthodox mystics from Basil the Great to Symeon the New Theologian, in other words from the Arian crisis to the dawn of Hesychasm, have something nebulous and indistinct about them. Campenhausen's statement about Gregory of Nyssa is true not only for Gregory but for the thinkers of this entire period. Despite Gregory's cleverness, according to Campenhausen (2000: 116), he remained in the second rank, and in consequence his theology possesses "a veiled, remote, and sometimes ambiguous quality." None of the mystics of this period wrote an *almagest*, a *summa*, or, with the possible exception of John Climacus, a *ktēma es aei*. This is not to deny that they are great; rather they occupy an intermediate stage between such late antique figures as Origen and Athanasius on the one hand and the Hesychasts on the other. They might almost be compared to the thinkers of the Western Middle Ages, posed between the flamboyant philosophizing of the ancient Greeks and the Renaissance humanists.

Even Orthodox scholars neglect to look at these figures from a thoroughly Orthodox perspective as would have been salutary. They view Basil the Great and Maximus the Confessor, for instance, as important for their role in Christianity rather than for their position in Eastern Orthodoxy. They fail to notice that seemingly irrelevant aspects of these thinkers, such as Basil's preoccupation with monasticism and Maximus' concern with the humanity of Christ (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 99-103; Maximus the Confessor, 1985: 11), are in fact closely related to the succeeding Hesychastic age.

This does not mean that nothing has been written on the subject of the interrelationship between these individuals and their influence on one another and on Hesychasm. Plested (2004), in a cautious study, attempts to trace the specter of Pseudo-Macarius over the three centuries that followed him. Chryssavgis (in Barsanuphius & John, 2006(1): 14) draws his reader's attention to the claim Isaiah of Scetis exercised on the Palestinian school of asceticism and this school's subsequent hold over John Climacus, Symeon the New Theologian, and Gregory of Sinai. Ware (in John Climacus, 1982: 67) identifies Climacus' influence as extending to his proximate successors Hesychius the Priest and Philotheus of Sinai as well as to Symeon the New Theologian and Peter of Damascus. Hesychius for him

tends to codify John's references to the Jesus prayer in order to make it his dominant theme, and Symeon takes to heart his instructions on *penthos*, despondency, and the spiritual father. Ware's discernment (in 1982: 67) of John's impact on Hesychasm echoes that of Florovsky (1987a: 242).

Krausmüller (2006: 104) sees a connection, albeit a complex one, between the Sinaitic school of asceticism and certain mystics such as Pseudo-Symeon. Hill (2003: 121) emphasizes Gregory Palamas' indebtedness to Symeon the New Theologian and finds the latter responsible for Hesychasm's stress on "a self-hypnotic state of heightened awareness" and even its breathing exercises, short prayers, and bodily positions. For Schmemmann (1963: 234-235) Hesychasm was not a novel departure but rather the completion of a basic tendency of the Orthodox Church. Gregory Palamas, according to Schmemmann, ineluctably lived in the tradition that came before him and perceived of it as "a unity of faith and experience." Likewise Turner (1990: 69) claims that Symeon the New Theologian's roots were firmly planted within the Orthodox tradition, and Hunt (2004: 171, 182) reveals that he was conversant with the desert fathers and the Syrian mystics. In line with this is Maloney's classification (in *Symeon the New Theologian*, 1980: 13) of Mark the Monk, Diadochus of Photike, John Climacus, Philotheus of Sinai, and Isaac of Nineveh as the "hesychastic fathers."

Despite all this, the relevant scholars (e.g., Plested, 2004) have refrained from considering this period as a period, and some important questions have therefore never been asked. The central question of this thesis is: How can the mystics between and including Basil the Great and Symeon the New Theologian best be characterized? The questions that arise from this main question are: What can be learned from the previous students of this period? What were the tendencies of fourteenth-century Hesychasm which succeeded the period? How can a Proto-Hesychastic mentality be detected in the Cappadocians and Pseudo-Macarius? How can Proto-Hesychasm be discerned in philosophers like Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor? How can Proto-Hesychasm be discerned in ascetics like John Climacus and Isaac of Nineveh? How can Proto-Hesychasm be discerned in Symeon the New Theologian?

1.2 Aim, Objectives, and Central Argument

The aim of this thesis is to ascertain whether the mystics from Basil the Great to Symeon the New Theologian are important primarily as precursors of Hesychasm. The objectives must be seen in their relation to the aim. The study approaches the subject from the following angles: to identify the significant contributions of previous students of Proto-Hesychasm, to establish the tendencies of fourteenth-century Hesychasm, to verify a Proto-Hesychastic mentality in the Cappadocians and Pseudo-Macarius, to verify Proto-Hesychasm in the Eastern Christian philosophers, to verify Proto-Hesychasm in the Eastern Christian ascetics, and to verify Proto-Hesychasm in Symeon the New Theologian. The central theoretical argument is that the main contribution of the mystics from Basil the Great to Symeon the New Theologian was to prepare the way for Hesychasm which represented the culmination of Eastern Orthodox mysticism.

1.3 Methodology

The thesis will employ linguistic, historico-philosophical, and literary methods. It proposes to make use of traditional hermeneutics based on a Christian understanding of history (e.g., Kaiser & Silva, 2007) rather than one based on what Augustine called the earthly city and which has been accorded wide currency since the early twentieth century (Van Til, 1974: 207). Traditional hermeneutics discloses truth in theology no less than it does in any other discipline. Since the author's religious background is one that finds most sympathy with the broad spectrum of the Protestant tradition he acknowledges a responsibility to give balanced recognition to sources that are not written exclusively by those of this persuasion in order, insofar as is practicable, to arrive at conclusions that might otherwise be biased. The approaches that will be employed in this historico-theological study include a definition of the terms as they are to be understood in the rest of the work, a detailed analysis of historico-philosophical data and the literary contributions of experts in the field of Eastern Orthodoxy, and an evaluative and comparative scrutiny of documented evidence from the period in the light of biblical revelation, using widely acknowledged hermeneutical principles.

2.0 PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON PROTO-HESYCHASM

2.1 Introduction

It is the intention of this chapter to identify previous scholarly contributions to the study of Proto-Hesychasm, especially as they relate to linking the Proto-Hesychasts to one another and therefore to discerning in Proto-Hesychasm a time period to be distinguished from a preceding and following time period; and to ascertain whether previous scholars have perceived in the Proto-Hesychasts a foretelling of fourteenth-century Hesychasm in which Eastern Orthodox mysticism came into its own.

Much has been written about Proto-Hesychasm in the past fifty or so years, for example Kriovcheine (1986), Elm (1994), Alfeyev (2000b), Chryssavgis (2004), and Hevelone-Harper (2005); but few of these writings have attempted to link the Proto-Hesychasts to one another or to the ensuing Hesychastic age. Some of those that have been mentioned in the first chapter, and it is now time to consider them in more detail. It is hoped these writings will bear the weight of any omission. They feature studies primarily of the Cappadocians, Maximus the Confessor, the ascetics of the Palestinian school, John Climacus, Symeon the New Theologian, and the eleventh-century author of *The Three Methods of Prayer*.

2.2 Early Research

Writing in 1933 Florovsky remarked the impact of John Climacus' *Ladder of Divine Ascent* on its immediate successors John of Raithu, Elias of Crete, and Photius. He noted its translation into such languages as Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, and Slavonic and, more importantly, its effect on Symeon the New Theologian, the Hesychasts, and the Slavic Neo-Hesychasts. Interestingly for an Orthodox scholar he did not neglect to observe the mark John made on Catholic theologians, especially Dionysius the Carthusian, called Doctor Ecstaticus on account of his mystical visions. Florovsky attributed John's influence on the Hesychasts to the stress he laid on *hēsychia* (quietude or tranquillity) and the remembrance of Jesus in prayer (Florovsky, 1987a: 242). His proof text was John's famous definition of *hēsychia* in which he connected the unceasing worship of God and waiting on Him to the remembrance of Jesus. The remembrance of Jesus was to be present with the mystic's every breath; this continual remembrance would yield an appropriate appreciation of the value of

hēsychia (*Sc. Par.* 27) (John Climacus, 1982: 269-270).

It was logical to draw such a deduction from the *Ladder*'s use of the word *hēsychia* and its rudimentary Jesus prayer, both concepts of which were put to the service of Hesychasm. John's impression on Symeon was seen by Florovsky as noteworthy, and in fact Symeon has sometimes been viewed, understandably but wrongly, as the first Hesychast. John's emphasis was more on the "heart" than on the "mind." Florovsky incautiously employs these terms as they were understood by Plato rather than by the Proto-Hesychasts (Chryssavgis, 2004: 79), but he is not unaware that John's advice was fortified by psychological analysis. The *Ladder* is for him almost obsessive-compulsive: John explains every demand he makes and continually has the logic of his ordering system before his mind. Florovsky claims his instructions were only for monks, and it cannot be stressed often enough that monasticism was the milieu of both Proto-Hesychasm and Hesychasm, although, in the latter case especially, all Christians were seen as capable of participation in the mystic quest.

In his book *The Fathers of the Greek Church*, published in 1955, Campenhausen, an individual of uncanny insight, devoted three chapters to the Cappadocian fathers: Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. Although he did not deign to link these figures to their Proto-Hesychast successors his portrait of Gregory of Nyssa rings true for all the mystics of the period. Gregory was the younger brother of the formidable Basil, and as a result he was forced to struggle for his personality, position, and manner of life. In addition to this he was the successor of a great generation. A show of humility came easily for his brother Basil because of his inward confidence, and Basil's complete surrender of himself to God gave a harmony to his character which Gregory lacked. Gregory was certainly clever, but during his lifetime he continually found himself in the second rank and there was therefore "a veiled, remote, and sometimes ambiguous quality" about his theology, even in the face of its outstanding originality (Campenhausen, 2000: 115-116).

Campenhausen's study was not on the Proto-Hesychasts but on the Greek fathers from Justin Martyr to Cyril of Alexandria, and his concern in the immediate context was to contrast Gregory with his brother Basil. Nonetheless had he inquired into the Cappadocians more closely he would have observed the veiled and remote quality of which he spoke in all of them. This trait, common to the Proto-Hesychasts in general, can be attributed to their following so closely on the heels of the great Nicene and ante-Nicene fathers—men such as

Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius—and their feelings of inferiority resulted in the production of few works of magisterial importance by them. On the positive side Campenhausen distinguishes in both Gregory and Basil a determination to develop their intellectual and spiritual personalities to the full, a characteristic which subsequent Proto-Hesychasts possessed while eschewing, in monkish humility, the need for independence and the conscious, contemptuous pride he discerns in the brothers.

It was Schmemmann (1963: 234-235) who drew the closest parallel between the Proto-Hesychasts and their successors. He claimed, against Western and specifically Catholic scholars, that Hesychasm was not a novel departure “expressing all the extremes and peculiarities of Eastern mysticism” but the fulfillment of a previously existing trend (1963: 234). To be sure the Hesychasts of Mount Athos garnered intense controversy with the patriarchal school of Constantinople thanks to their emphasis on *theōsis* and the “gathering of the mind” associated with the contemplation of the divine or Taboric Light. More accurately than did Florovsky, Schmemmann distinguished not between a mind and heart theology but between an official theology and a theology of experience. For the Constantinopolitan theologians the Hesychasts’ doctrine of *theōsis* equated God with the universe and was therefore pantheistic. But the greatest of the Hesychasts, Gregory Palamas, lived in the tradition that came before him and held his predecessors in as high a regard as did his opponents (1963: 235). In Hesychasm the essential teachings of the Proto-Hesychasts were revived. The Hesychasts were not pantheistic because the world was not seen by them as merging with God on the level of essence, but on the level of energies it was capable of communion with Him, of having Him within itself, and of growing nearer to Him.

In the earliest research on Proto-Hesychasm are encountered such salient observations as the impact of John Climacus on the Hesychasts, and the assertion of a veiled and remote quality in one of the Proto-Hesychasts which was attributed to his following a great generation. The latter observation separates at least the earliest Proto-Hesychasts from the period that came before them and tends to establish a mindset for Proto-Hesychasm in general. Most useful of all was Schmemmann’s contention that Hesychasm was the fulfillment of a previously existing trend. In none of this research, however, were the Proto-Hesychasts seen as a specific entity living at a specific time nor were they regarded as the main instigators of fourteenth-century Hesychasm.

2.3 Recent Research

Maloney (in Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 13) selected seven Proto-Hesychasts—Mark the Monk, Diadochus of Photike, John Climacus, Elias Ecdicos, Philotheus of Sinai, Ephrem the Syrian, and Isaac of Nineveh—and termed them the “hesychastic fathers,” a phrase which has the tendency to reveal their noteworthy position in the formulation of Hesychasm. Maloney differentiates between them and their predecessors such as the two Gregories, Pseudo-Macarius, and Evagrius on the one hand, and Western characters like St. Augustine on the other. It is regrettable that he does not consider the mystics in the former category hesychastic fathers which is certainly their due, but his contrast between the writings of all these figures with the intensely personal writings of the last of the Proto-Hesychasts, Symeon the New Theologian, is astute: Symeon’s literary productions mirror the man more fully even than do Augustine’s and lay bare his interior experience of Jesus and the Trinity as few writings have. Maloney’s selection of hesychastic fathers reveals that there were many such mystics, notably Ephrem the Syrian and Evagrius, who cannot be included in the present study for reasons of space.

Following in the footsteps of Florovsky, Ware (in John Climacus, 1982: 67-68) perceives the influence of John Climacus on subsequent Proto-Hesychasts and Hesychasts. As does Florovsky he enumerates the languages the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* was translated into during the ancient and early medieval periods, adding only Georgian (1982: 68). Hesychius the Priest and Philotheus of Sinai were the first to carry John’s torch. The former duly observed his allusions to the remembrance of Jesus in prayer and made it his dominant theme. Ware expresses forgivable surprise that the *Ladder* was not cited in the eleventh-century Orthodox anthology the *Euergetinos*, but such neglect was not to last for long. Before he became a monk, and while he was setting his affairs in order, Symeon the New Theologian read his family’s copy of the *Ladder*. According to his biographer he became closely familiar with it and “like good earth he accepted the seed of the word in his heart” (Nicetas Stethatos, *Vit. Sym.* 6) (1982: 67).

Ware states that Symeon was especially taken by the *Ladder*’s instructions on *penthos*, despondency, and the spiritual father, but he fails to mention that the book impelled him to pray at the tombs (Hunt, 2004: 176) which is urged in the *Ladder*’s eighteenth step, on insensitivity. In the twelfth century Peter of Damascus quoted John thirteen times, and John

was also heavily relied on by the Hesychasts, especially for his pronouncements on *hēsychia* and the invocation of Jesus' name. Gregory of Sinai quoted from him more than any other writer and named him first in his list of monastic readings. Ware closes his discussion of the *Ladder's* influence by noting its absorption by the Russian monks Nil Sorsky and Joseph Volotsky, the former of whom can properly be regarded as a Neo-Hesychast. Unlike Florovsky, Ware refrains from mentioning the Catholic mystic Dionysius the Carthusian, but he includes the Latin translation he read (John Climacus, 1982: 68).

Without drawing explicit attention to the Hesychasts, Pelikan (in Maximus the Confessor, 1985: 10-11) writes about Maximus in a way that would not be inappropriate in a discussion of Hesychasm, particularly its stress on the humanity of Christ and how this relates to the idea of *theōsis*, an idea that first surfaced in the Second Epistle of Peter and which runs somewhat counter to the current of Western Augustinian thought. According to Maximus *theōsis* was possible only through the incarnation and bodily resurrection of Christ. In Pelikan's mind Protestant theologians in particular disdain this as a purely physical understanding of salvation. Maximus held that although it is impossible for man to deify himself, God in Christ can be said to deify man "insofar as man has deified himself." It is unfortunate that Pelikan does not connect Maximus' interest in the humanity of Christ with what Hill (2003: 121-122) understands as the Hesychasts' non-Origenist habit of viewing human nature in an integrated way, a way that does not radically separate body and soul.

In his study of Symeon the New Theologian, Turner (1990: 69) claims, as did Schmemmann about Gregory Palamas, that Symeon's roots were deep within the tradition that came before him. Moreschini, writing in 1996 on the subject of Basil the Great's asceticism, refers to the Basiliad, a group of buildings that included a hospital, a guesthouse, craftsmen's shops, a church, a bishop's residence, and a monastery (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 101). This complex, which ideally should be contrasted with Plotinus' elitist and aborted Platonopolis (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 12) (Plotinus, 1991: cxi-cxii), prefigured Byzantine medieval society at the time of Hesychasm for which monasticism was the dominant milieu. Moreschini states that Basil's type of monasticism became fundamental in medieval religious culture in both the Christian West and, more significantly, the Christian East (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 102-103). It is not to his purpose to draw a connection between the Basiliad and monasticism during the age of the Comneni, in other words during the final years of Proto-Hesychasm, but this can be inferred from comparing his remarks with Angold's study

(1995: 308-314) of the monasteries of the later period which aimed at sustaining the poor, the sick, and the elderly.

Hill (2003: 121) deems Symeon the New Theologian responsible for Hesychasm's stress on "a self-hypnotic state of heightened awareness in which the mystic could hope to see God" as well as its breathing exercises, short prayers, and yoga-like bodily positions. He goes further and avers that Gregory Palamas was the Orthodox Thomas Aquinas; in other words he was not a creative theologian but a restater of Proto-Hesychastic doctrines, albeit "in a newly integrated and relevant way" (2003: 119). He finds little in Gregory that cannot be found in some way in the Proto-Hesychasts and praises his work as a distillation of all previous Orthodox theology, an accolade that has variously been given to Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus.

Hunt (2004: 171, 182) discloses the influence of the great Egyptian and Syrian ascetics on the New Theologian, and Plested (2004) traces the spirit of Pseudo-Macarius on the Eastern Christian mystics of the fifth through the seventh centuries. Chryssavgis (in Barsanuphius & John, 2006(1): 14-15) approaches the Palestinian school of asceticism from the viewpoint of its reception of the teachings of Basil the Great, Origen, Didymus the Blind, Evagrius, and Isaiah of Scetis. The school was particularly indebted to Basil's stress on obedience and Isaiah's strictures on eating and drinking, and it passed these down to Theodore the Studite, Symeon, and the Hesychasts Gregory of Sinai and Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopouli. John Climacus, and the "circle" that was drawn up about his legacy, developed the Palestinian concepts of being untroubled and discerning. One-tenth of the letters of Barsanuphius and John the Prophet found its way into the eleventh-century anthology the *Euergetinos*, though with modifications, and Dorotheus of Gaza and John figured prominently in the contemporaneous *Pandektes* (cf. Angold, 1995: 364).

Finally Krausmüller (2006: 104-107) takes in hand the minor figure of Pseudo-Symeon, author of *The Three Methods of Prayer*, and detects an agonistic relationship between him and the Sinaitic school of asceticism, but a relationship nonetheless. Krausmüller's stimulating chapter deserves to be better known, but it is extreme and, in the eyes of the present writer, misguided. His hypothesis that Gregory Palamas was not a true inheritor of Proto-Hesychasm is controversial, and his identification of Pseudo-Symeon as a Hesychast is overconfident in view of the fact that he was not much removed from the New Theologian in

time, which is not the case with Nicephorus the Monk whom he also discusses (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 64; Orlov & Golitzin, 2001: 281).

The most recent research on Proto-Hesychasm has contributed such insights as the labeling of certain Proto-Hesychasts as “hesychastic fathers,” the confirmation of Florovsky’s opinion that John Climacus directly influenced Hesychasm, and a portrait of one Proto-Hesychast that is strongly Hesychastic in nature (Pelikan in Maximus the Confessor, 1985: 10-11). A comparison of two studies (Moreschini and Norelli, 2005(2): 101-103; Angold, 1995: 308-314) reveals how Basil the Great, one of the first Proto-Hesychasts, affected monasticism during the last years of Proto-Hesychasm. Recent research has also established that Symeon the New Theologian was partly responsible for the Hesychasts’ bodily postures during prayer, that the Palestinian school of asceticism impacted the Hesychasts, and that the Sinaitic school of asceticism made an impression on a figure shortly preceding the age of the Hesychasts. Nonetheless a clear view of the Proto-Hesychasts as an entity existing at a specific time has been lacking in these writings as well as a cognizance of their major role in the rise of Hesychasm. It could even be argued that recent research constitutes a retrogression since it does not follow up on Schmemmann’s contention that Hesychasm was the fulfillment of a previously existing trend. In fact one scholar (Krausmüller, 2006: 125-126) denies this position altogether.

2.4 Conclusion

It was the aim of this chapter to identify previous scholarly contributions to the study of Proto-Hesychasm, hoping to find therein the linking of Proto-Hesychast to Proto-Hesychast in order to establish a certain group existing at a certain time, and to determine whether this group was a prime mover on fourteenth-century Hesychasm. The chapter has found that despite excellent research on the connections between the Hesychasts and the Proto-Hesychasts, especially by the Orthodox liturgical theologian Alexander Schmemmann, no study has clearly regarded the Proto-Hesychasts as a distinguishable group and, more importantly, none has addressed them in terms of their culmination in Hesychasm.

Yet although the relevant scholars refrain from viewing the Proto-Hesychasts as an entity this does not mean they refuse to do so. It is more accurate to assert that they do not explicitly notice the issue. The same can be said of their failure to see the Proto-Hesychasts as direct instigators of Hesychasm. This is somewhat regrettable, especially if one is looking at the situation from an Orthodox perspective rather than a more ecumenical one, but it helps to establish a rationale for this study of Proto-Hesychasm. Before examining the Proto-Hesychasts themselves it would be fitting to briefly address the Hesychastic paideia since it is an objective of this thesis to contemplate Hesychastic traits in the forerunners of Hesychasm.

3.0 THE MENTALITY OF FOURTEENTH-CENTURY HESYCHASM

3.1 Introduction

It will be instructive at the outset of this investigation to identify certain distinguishing characteristics and interests of Hesychasm in order to see them at work in the Proto-Hesychasts. This is a secondary objective of the thesis and will tend to verify whether the chief role of the Proto-Hesychasts was to prepare the way for Hesychasm.

A brief survey of Hesychasm will be attempted before the investigation of the main characteristics of the school which, in its heyday, lasted from 1280 to 1360. The exponents of Hesychasm that are chosen are Gregory Palamas, Gregory of Sinai, Nicephorus the Monk, and Theoleptus of Philadelphia. Gregory Palamas is chosen primarily because he was the greatest of the Hesychasts and their chief spokesman (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 288). The other three are included by virtue of their enviable place in the eighteenth-century anthology the *Philokalia* which is not to deny that Gregory of Sinai was a major player in the formulation of Hesychasm (1995(4): 207). The characteristics displayed by these figures could be extended indefinitely, but eight will suffice for now: monasticism, dark mysticism, light mysticism, and an emphasis on the heart, *theōsis*, the humanity of Christ, *penthos*, and unceasing prayer.

3.2 A Survey of Hesychasm

Hesychasm derives from the Greek word *hēsychia*, meaning quietude or tranquillity. The Hesychasts did their most vital work in the early part of the fourteenth century on Mount Athos, the mecca of Hesychasm (Elwell, 2001: 552). They were known especially for their formalized Jesus Prayer, usually “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me,” together with certain bodily positions and breathing techniques which they viewed as useful accessories or aids to the prayer (Cross & Livingstone, 2005: 768). The Hesychasts advanced a theology of experience over an official theology (Schmemmann, 1963: 234). Their aim was the union of mind and heart and the resultant vision of the divine or Taboric Light, the same Light that Christ had burned with when He stood with His disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13) and which represented for them the divine energies in contradistinction to the divine essence. The divine essence was self-existent, incomprehensible, and incommunicable, while the energies were the attributes of God,

distinct but inseparable from His essence and the channel through which the mystic communed with Him (Hill, 2006: 157).

The Hesychasts encountered their first detractor in the Calabrian monk Barlaam (fl. 1337) who ridiculed their bodily techniques and accused the Hesychasts of impairing God's unity by distinguishing between His unknowable essence and knowable energies and thus creating, in an almost Arian way, two gods, one transcendent and one immanent. While Barlaam was less mystical than the Hesychasts he was thus more of a Platonist than they were. Gregory Palamas countered Barlaam's charge of disunity by asserting that God is indivisibly divided and united dividedly (*Topics of Nat. and Theol. Science* 81) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 384). Hesychasm was vindicated by Eastern church councils in 1341, 1347, and 1351 and began to receive strong popular support. When the anti-Hesychast Nicephorus Gregoras died his body was dragged through the streets of Constantinople (Douglas, 1978: 467), an action that synthesized Athonite mysticism with the Byzantine need for violence.

In the main characteristics of the Hesychasts will be discerned the mold which the Proto-Hesychasts, according to the central argument, should also fit. The thesis thereby follows the view of Schmemmann (1963: 234) that Hesychasm was the fulfillment of a previous existing tendency rather than that of Krausmüller (2006: 125) who contends that the Hesychasts "were able to subvert, appropriate or suppress well-established alternative models of spiritual life and . . . present themselves as the only true representatives" of Orthodox mysticism.

3.3 Monasticism

Monasticism was the main medium of Hesychasm. Theoleptus of Philadelphia left his wife in order to become a monk and wrote on the monastic profession. Nicephorus, of Italian origin, was a monk of Mount Athos, and eventually of the most isolated parts of the peninsula. Gregory of Sinai practiced monasticism in Cyprus, Sinai, Crete, Mount Athos, Thessalonica, and Paroria near Bulgaria where he introduced many Slavs to Hesychasm (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 175, 192, 207-208). For Krausmüller (2006: 123-124), Gregory propagated Hesychasm as a monastic lifestyle. Gregory Palamas, a pupil of Theoleptus, a possible acquaintance of Gregory of Sinai, and the most important of the Hesychasts, wrote a treatise on monasticism for the nun Xenia (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 289; Russell, 2004:

309-310). He had become a monk at the age of twenty and convinced his mother and siblings to follow his example. He went to Mount Athos and ultimately picked its oldest community, the Great Lavra. He stayed there for eight years, when Turkish attacks forced him to leave for Thessalonica. At Thessalonica he was ordained a priest, but he chose to live as a hermit on a mountain near Berea where he saw his fellow anchorites only on weekends (Hill, 2003: 116).

3.4 Dark Mysticism

These monastics practiced two types of mysticism: dark mysticism and light mysticism. Dark mysticism refers to God's unknowability, rarely to physical or spiritual darkness which are generally regarded as evil (cf. John 1:5; 3:19; 13:30). The Hesychasts' dark mysticism is encountered in Theoleptus' instruction to the monastic to lay aside representational images in order to attain "an ignorance surpassing all knowledge" (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 181). Gregory Palamas insisted that God transcends all earthly ways of thinking and is therefore unknowable, although he also held that God is beyond unknowing. He thus accepted both the apophatic and cataphatic approaches to God which are not unrelated to the concepts of God's essence and energies.

3.5 Light Mysticism

The light mysticism of the Hesychasts complemented their dark mysticism. Light mysticism was of course also known to the Western church (cf. Hildegard, *Ep. ad Guibert* 332-333; Herman the Jew, *Opus. de Conv.* 12) (Hildegard of Bingen, 1990: 18-19; Schmitt, 2010: 227). For the Hesychasts it had two shades of meaning: the cataphatic experience of God, and this experience as it was manifested by divine light. The Hesychasts believed that during their mystical visions they were united with the Uncreated Light, the light that Christ had burned with when He stood with His disciples on Mount Tabor; for this reason they sometimes called the Uncreated Light the Taboric Light. The Hesychasts maintained the Uncreated Light could be seen but not with material eyes, hence only Christ's disciples saw it and not the Jews who were gathered at the foot of the mountain. Palamas said that even blind Hesychasts could see it, likely referring to blinded political dissidents among the monks. Christ illuminated the bodies of His disciples on Mount Tabor because they were worthy, but in Palamas' time the light did not illuminate the body from the outside but the soul from within (Hester, 2001: 24-25). Contemporary descriptions of near-death experiences often connect heavenly light

with unutterable love. The Taboric Light does not seem to have been linked with this love. But participation in the Taboric Light was not of course a near-death experience and in any case did not nullify the Hesychasts' emphasis on compassion.

The light was infinite in time and space, and the one who saw it reflected it like a mirror or a sheet of water reflected the sun. According to Palamas, St. Paul had seen the light when he was caught up into the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2). There, in an almost Plotinian way, he beheld "a light without limit, depth, height, or lateral extension, a sun infinitely brighter and greater than the universe, with himself standing in the midst of it, having become all eye" (*Triads* 1.3.21; cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* 4.8.1) (Gregory Palamas, 1983: 38; Plotinus, 1991: 334). Gregory of Sinai spoke of the transfiguring nature of the Taboric Light, and Palamas equated it with the light with which Christ would shine at His Second Coming. In manifesting this light, he maintained, the Hesychasts were prophets of the Second Coming just as the Old Testament saints were prophets of the Messiah's first coming (*Hag. Tome*, Prol.) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 418-419).

3.6 The Heart

The Hesychasts owed their light mysticism ultimately to the imposing figure of Pseudo-Macarius who was also responsible for their heart mysticism. They incessantly stressed the heart (*kardia*), by which they meant not only the physical heart but the emotions and the conscience as well (1995(4): 431). Nicephorus the Monk, who wrote a work on the guarding of the heart, said the mystic was to mentally find the heart's source before praying the Jesus Prayer, and he was to inhale as though inhaling his mind and pushing it into his heart. The union of mind and heart resulted in the same kind of joy a man on a long journey has when he returns home to his wife and children (Gregory Palamas, 1983: 16). The heart is for him the vital center of the life of the soul and the body and contains the treasure of the inner kingdom. Palamas likewise regarded the heart as man's spiritual center. Gregory of Sinai, for whom the heart was warm at the beginning of prayer, stated that prayer was a liturgy celebrated in the sanctuary of the heart (*On Commandments and Doctrines* 43) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 220, 211). He warned the mystic that during prayer he should allow nothing to enter his heart but the memory of Jesus (Krausmüller, 2006: 116).

3.7 *Theōsis*

The ultimate outcome of the light and heart mysticism of the Hesychasts was *theōsis* or divinization. The Hesychasts believed that when they were unified with the Uncreated Light they shared God's nature. This was in keeping with the promise of the apostle Peter that his readers would become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4; cf. 1 John 3:2) and was a key theme in the early fathers, surfacing in Irenaeus, Theophilus of Antioch, Origen, Athanasius, and the Cappadocians. Ephrem the Syrian said that God in His mercy has called mortals gods through grace (Brock, 1987: 239; cf. Psalm 82:6; John 10:34). Anastasius of Sinai, a distant pupil of John Climacus, defined *theōsis* as “the ascension toward what is better—it is neither a diminution nor an alteration of nature. In other words, by *theōsis* man will not cease being man; he will simply become perfect man” (*apud* Moore, 2005: 187). Gregory Palamas maintained that *theōsis* was not merely symbolic but a reality that could be experienced in the present life.

3.8 The Humanity of Christ

Theōsis was paradoxically and inextricably tied to the doctrine of the humanity of Christ. It is somewhat puzzling to think of mystics maintaining a high view of the body, but the Hesychasts did so. They emphasized the complete humanity of Christ and, in a thoroughly un-Platonic way, extended it to the Christian. This was the reason for their breathing techniques and complex bodily posture during prayer: sitting cross-legged with their beards touching their chests and gazing at their stomachs. Nicephorus was the first to describe the breathing techniques of the Hesychasts in which the mind was drawn into the heart before commencing the Jesus Prayer (Gregory Palamas, 1983: 16). For him these bodily exercises facilitated vigilance in prayer. Gregory of Sinai also emphasized the breathing techniques, although in his case they were to be done in tandem with prayer. He said that the monk should bow while seated and pray, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy” (*On Stillness 2; On Prayer 1*) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 264, 275). There is also in Gregory's system some emphasis on trembling which is of course a bodily manifestation of mystical experience.

The breathing exercises and bodily postures of the Hesychasts led their enemy Barlaam to dub them the Omphalopsychoi, the Belly-soul People, and request for a council to condemn them as heretics. If, as has been suggested, Orthodox theology is a series of footnotes to Origen (Golitzin in Symeon the New Theologian, 1997(3): 167), Barlaam was the footnote the most heavily imbued with Origen's distaste for the body. Correlative to this was his negative view of the emotions. Palamas, however, defended the Hesychastic body postures which allowed the mystic to turn his concentration inward. He argued that the body is an integral part of the human entity. Men are superior to angels because of their bodies: it is their bodies that give men dominion over the earth, and it is their bodies as well as their souls that Christ divinized when He became incarnate (Hill, 2003: 121). The body of Christ, infused with divine energy, was the source of the mystic's deification.

The *Hagioritic Tome* penned by Gregory states, "If the body will in the future partake together with the soul in the ineffable good things, then it is evident that it will so partake even now, as far as its capacity allows" (6) (Keselopoulos, 2001: 47). Christ's deity did not abandon His humanity even during His burial and resurrection. Yet there remains a shade of anti-materiality in Palamas' thought: "The spiritual delight which comes upon the body from the intellect is itself in no way corrupted by its communion with the body, but transforms the body and makes it spiritual" (*Defense of the Holy Hesychasts* 1.3.5) (2001: 5). In other words the body is potentially corrupting and in need of transformation. This is an inheritance of both Platonism and Neo-Chalcedonianism and one which will be encountered in certain Proto-Hesychasts.

3.9 *Penthos*

Related to Christ's, and the Christian's, possession of a body are the ideas of *penthos* and unceasing prayer which are often combined. The existence of *penthos*, contrition or weeping for one's sins, tends to be overlooked among the Hesychasts. The concept goes back to Christ's pronouncement in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are those who mourn (*penthountes*)" (Matthew 5:4). Other biblical precursors are Psalm 6:6-8; 38:6, 9; 39:12; 42:3; 80:5; 102:3, 4, 9; 137:1; Luke 7:36-50. *Penthos* was also present in the desert fathers: Abba Arsenius kept a cloth on his chest to absorb the tears that fell from his eyes (Chryssavgis, 2004: 147), and Poemen said he wished he could weep like the Virgin at the foot of the cross (Ward, 1984: 187). The concept stood in contrast to the warnings against emotion uttered by the Greek

philosophers, especially the Stoics, which were also embraced by certain church fathers (Hunt, 2004: xi); but in defending tears, specifically that they are the mother and daughter of prayer, Gregory Palamas averred that *penthos* contributed to prayer. Tears are “wretched, bitter, and wounding for those who have scarcely tasted the blessed affliction, but become sweet and inoffensive for those who have the fullness of joy” (*Triads* 2.2.7) (Gregory Palamas, 1983: 50). Prayer does not dispel such joy and pain; rather the two phenomena, prayer and *penthos*, mutually encourage one another.

3.10 Unceasing Prayer

This prayer was, as often as not, the uninterrupted Jesus Prayer (*Iēsou euchē*) of which there are instances even in the Western church (cf. Ebner, 1993: 99-100). Gregory of Sinai was introduced to the Jesus Prayer by the monk Arsenius (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 207), and Gregory Palamas practiced it while he lived as a hermit near Berea (Hill, 2003: 116). For the Sinaite the aim of the Jesus Prayer was to openly reveal the Holy Spirit’s energy which the mystic had already received in baptism. The prayer allowed him to experience divine grace directly and not merely symbolically. It additionally had the virtue of transforming the soul into a noetic altar on which the Lamb of God was continually offered (*On Commandments and Doctrines* 112) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 237). According to Theoleptus the function of the Jesus Prayer was to unite the three functions of the mind—*dianoia*, *nous*, and *pneuma*—and focus them on the Trinity. It was the Hesychasts’ repetitious prayers, together with their breathing techniques, which won them the criticism of the Calabrian monk Barlaam (Hill, 2003: 117).

3.11 Conclusion

In this chapter have been outlined characteristics of the Hesychasts that it is hoped can be shown to have existed before them in order to substantiate the central argument that the Proto-Hesychasts’ claim to fame, as it were, was in their role as precursors of Hesychasm. The thesis follows Schmemmann rather than Krausmüller in its belief that Hesychasm was the fulfillment of a previously existing trend. In the Proto-Hesychasts will optimally be described characteristics which were predominant in the Hesychasts, namely monasticism, dark mysticism, light mysticism, and an emphasis on the heart, *theōsis*, the humanity of Christ, *penthos*, and unceasing prayer. Of the four Hesychasts who have been selected, all were

monastics. In them are discernible inclinations towards both dark and light mysticism, a stress on the heart as man's spiritual center, the possibility of divinization even in time, and a belief in Christ's full humanity. They also display a tendency towards unceasing prayer and weeping for their sins, characteristics which are related to the doctrine of Christ's humanity. It is time to turn to the Cappadocians, the first Proto-Hesychasts, who bequeathed to the Hesychastic paideia most notably its subscription to *theōsis* and dark mysticism.

4.0 PROTO-HESYCHASM IN THE CAPPADOCIANS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will elucidate Hesychastic elements in the Cappadocians, the first protagonists of the study, and will verify whether they can truly be regarded as Hesychasts before Hesychasm, thereby advancing the central argument that the Proto-Hesychasts' main function was to prepare the way for Hesychasm. This will be accomplished primarily by an analysis of the lives and thought of the three major Cappadocians. These characters are chosen because in them are seen the first stirrings of mysticism in the Orthodox Church (cf. Geanakoplos, 1984: 179), due both to their idyllic background and their being situated in the relatively peaceful atmosphere between the Arian crisis and the Christological controversies.

Cappadocia was a forested mountain region in eastern Asia Minor from which the Persian kings once exacted a tribute of horses and sheep. Before its conversion to Christianity it was the home of a goddess who was served by six thousand priestesses (Orr, 1986(1): 568), and it was the birthplace of the pagan wonder-worker Apollonius of Tyana. It gave the Eastern church three of its greatest thinkers: Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. Basil was the most political, Gregory of Nazianzus the most theological, and Gregory of Nyssa the most mystical and Proto-Hesychastic and therefore the most important for the present purpose.

4.2 Basil the Great

4.2.1 Life

Basil was born in Cappadocian Caesarea in 330 to a devout and wealthy family. His grandfather had been martyred during Diocletian's persecution of the Christians; his grandmother Macrina the Elder had sat at the feet of Gregory Thaumaturgus, a disciple of Origen; and his mother Emmelia and sister Macrina became nuns. His younger brother was Gregory of Nyssa. Basil was educated first by his father, a rhetor who died relatively early in his life, and then in Caesarea, Constantinople, and Athens where he studied rhetoric and philosophy with his fellow Cappadocian Gregory of Nazianzus. The friends' teacher, the Armenian Prohaeresius, had all the swagger and pride of the professional sophist and was a Christian in name only. His simple house, so his pagan pupil Eunapius said, breathed the

atmosphere of the Nine Muses (Ruether, 1969: 20-21). He was also charismatic; Eunapius claimed he hung on his words “as he might [of] some god who had revealed himself unsummoned and without ceremony” (Russell, 2004: 213). Basil imbibed Platonism in Athens to such a degree that he could later say that while the present life consists of beholding shadows the future inheres in beholding archetypes (Pelikan, 1993: 315). Of Plato’s doctrines he rejected the eternality of the world, the divinity of the human soul, and the radical separation between the intelligible and sensible worlds, understanding the dichotomy as being rather between God and His creation. Nyssen, and to a greater extent Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, would lose touch with this concept.

Basil and Gregory were in large part immune to the neopaganism that would convert their contemporary Julian the Apostate during his stay at Athens. They went only to the churches and schools of Athens, avoiding its theaters, amusement buildings, and brothels. Basil later wrote that they viewed the classics as a rose whose thorns one must beware of and whose color and fragrance were of less importance than the honey they provided for the bee (Schaff, 1968: 896).

As this statement shows the Cappadocians had a fine eye for the beauty of the natural world, although it was not exclusively their property in the early church (cf. Elowsky, 2006: 329). In his homilies on the six days of creation, Basil calls the stars “eternal flowers of heaven” which raise the spirit of man “from the visible to the invisible” (Schaff, 1968: 897), and he wants his hearers to have so much admiration for creation that wherever they are the least plant will remind them of the Creator (Hall, 1998: 89). He claims to see the wisdom of God in a stone, an ant, a gnat, and a bee (Florovsky, 1987c: 83). Gregory of Nyssa spoke of the sweet sadness that filled him when he saw the lilies of Cappadocia in the spring. Cappadocia was rich in unspoiled terrain, and it was not merely from book learning that Gregory could write, commenting on the Song of Solomon, that the goat “can pass over rocks with a sure foot, agilely turn on mountain peaks,” and “courageously pass through difficult, rough places” (*Hom. Cant. 15*) (Wright, 2005: 353).

When Basil returned from Athens he was, according to his brother, “puffed up beyond measure with the pride of oratory” and looked down on everyone else. It was through the goodwill of his sister Macrina that he soon realized that oratory meant nothing, and he no longer scorned to work with his hands. He wrote that he awoke as out of a deep sleep. “I

beheld the wonderful light of the Gospel truth, and I recognized the nothingness of the wisdom of the princes of this world that was come to naught. I shed a flood of tears over my wretched life, and I prayed for a guide who might form in me the principles of piety” (*Ep.* 223.2) (Quasten, 1986(3): 205). So he poured out his heart to his enemy Eustathius in a letter which Florovsky (1987a: 141) calls one of the most edifying in the history of Christian thought. This might seem biased coming from an Orthodox scholar, but it is hard to deny and the letter certainly anticipates the Proto-Hesychast concept of *penthos*.

Basil traveled to Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Egypt and studied the lives of their monks. Afterwards he went to Annisa in Pontus where he took up his abode in a cloister next to his mother’s and sister’s nunnery (Krueger, 2004: 112). He was thus an early practitioner of Proto-Hesychast monasticism. He looked out every day over a plain that seemed to him more beautiful than Amphipolis on the Strymon River. A waterfall and a river nourished the flowers outside the cloister, and he gloried in them no less than in his neighbors the deer and the goats. His description of the hermitage and its environs is one of the first nature paintings known in Western literature (Schaff, 1986a: 896).

Gregory of Nazianzus briefly joined Basil and his fellow monks. Consistently negative, he called the terrain dark, cold, and inaccessible and the cloister itself a rat hole (*myōxia*); but it was there that he helped Basil compile the *Philocalia*, meaning *Love of the Beautiful*, a sort of testimony to the fascination Origen held for the Cappadocians and an important source for the original Greek of Origen’s writings. Their interest in Origen can perhaps be traced back to their spiritual heritage in Gregory Thaumaturgus. Significantly the *Philocalia* includes Origen’s famous letter to Thaumaturgus. In general it contained the Alexandrian’s least speculative writings, for which one can probably thank Basil. The figure that emerges from the collection is not the theologian who speculated that the devil might be saved and that the resurrection body was spherical but rather the young Christian who wanted to be martyred with his father and who refused to eat with the heretic Paul (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.2) (2004(II, 1): 250). Although Basil would refer to Origen only twice after the compilation of the *Philocalia*, Origen was a potent background figure for Proto-Hesychasm, and the Cappadocians adroitly tailored his angelology and anthropology to the thought of Athanasius, himself influenced by Origen (Russell, 2004: 206). One should keep in mind that the two compilers of the *Philocalia* ordained Evagrius, the monastic codifier of Origenism, to two different positions before his possible sexual lapse and subsequent flight to Jerusalem;

Evagrius would in fact regard Gregory as his intellectual mentor (Douglas, 1978: 358; Brock, 1987: 64).

Basil was ordained a lector by Dianius of Cappadocia and a priest by Dianius' successor Eusebius. He had been called to Dianius' deathbed to hear his confession that he had betrayed Nicene Christianity during the reign of Constantius; the scene shows the high reputation that he was beginning to acquire (Campenhausen, 2000: 90). There was friction between Basil and Dianius' successor because even though Basil was the subordinate he tended to be domineering. Yet that is not all there was to him. He was a mass of contradictions, and his speech and walk, which were imitated by those who admired him, were marked by thoughtfulness, hesitancy, and melancholy (Chadwick, 2001: 346). After a quarrel with Eusebius Basil returned to Pontus, but Eusebius successfully begged him to come back (Campenhausen, 2000: 90). Basil succeeded him as bishop of Caesarea and in this capacity he fought for the establishment of Nicene Christianity. He may have been more courageous than Athanasius since he did not have a group of fanatical followers to protect him as Athanasius did, although he did have certain followers, fiercely opposed to Bishop Eusebius, who were called Nazarites (Elm, 1994: 67).

The Arian emperor Valens threatened Basil with banishment and death through his prefect Modestus; he replied that he was willing to die for Christ and that banishment and torture meant nothing to him. When Modestus remarked that no one had before spoken to him in such a manner, Basil, with some of his old pride, said that Modestus had perhaps never met a bishop before (Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orat.* 43.50) (Quasten, 1986(3): 206). Eusebius of Samosata gave a similarly strong confession of faith and was exiled. He would be recalled by the Western emperor Gratian, only to be killed two years later by a brick thrown by an Arian woman.

Shortly after Basil's altercation with Modestus the emperor's six-year-old son fell ill; the boy's mother believed it was divine judgment for her husband's unkind treatment of Basil. Paradoxically it was she who had encouraged her husband's Arianism. Valens sent for Basil, and Basil demanded that he renounce Arianism. When he refused the bishop replied that God's will concerning the child would be done; the child recovered but soon died (Socrates, *Hist. Eccl.* 4.26) (Schaff, 2004(II, 2): 111). Valens later contributed to Basil's charities when he visited Caesarea, but he ordered that his ecclesiastical jurisdiction be cut in half, an action

that would lead Basil to create the largely spurious sees of Nyssa and Sasima. Yet Valens seems to have respected Basil because he appointed him his representative in an official commission to Armenia, a journey that proved stressful to him because of his ill health (Chadwick, 2001: 333-334).

Basil was the only major Nicene not ousted by Valens since he knew both when to defy the emperor and when to ignore him. This was no small accomplishment since Valens had caused eighty Homoiousian clerics to be abandoned aboard a burning ship (Davis, 1990: 110). Both Valens and his brother, the Western emperor Valentinian, had unpredictable tempers. Valentinian had two bears called Golddust and Innocence to which those who angered him were thrown, and he died when he burst a blood vessel in a fit of rage (Grant, 1985: 260). But there was a cautiousness in Valens' nature that his brother lacked. Ammianus Marcellinus avers that he was extremely slow both to appoint and remove officials, and this may help explain his equitable dealings with Basil (1985: 265). Valens died fighting the Visigoths in the battle of Adrianople, and his body was never found. Ambrose called the disaster "the massacre of all humanity and the end of the world" (1985: 264). Basil died five months afterwards in his late forties, worn out with his responsibilities and conscientious practice of Proto-Hesychast monasticism. The epithet "the Great" was given to him almost immediately. The final triumph of Nicene Christianity at the First Council of Constantinople occurred two years later in 381.

Basil ate only bread, salt, and herbs, and he wore only one outer garment. He diligently tended the poor and the lepers whom he alone of his colleagues did not fear to kiss; this is known thanks to Gregory's funeral oration on his friend. His social conscience anticipated and surpassed that of Chrysostom (Schroeder in Basil the Great, 2009: 29). This was probably due not only to his close reading of the New Testament but because of the influence of the Homoiousian ascetic Basil of Ancyra. He sought tax relief for clerics, monks, and iron workers in the Taurus Mountains, and it was sometimes his job to act as an arbitrator since going to court was generally too expensive for the people. He was a responsible pastor and often prolonged his sermons so that the men in his church would not go off and gamble, finding "bad language, sad quarrels, and the pangs of avarice" (*Hex.* 8.8) (Dunn-Wilson, 2005: 68).

He had to chastise clergymen who were guilty of sexual misconduct while standing in judgment on others. He disliked how merchants took advantage of feasts of the martyrs to hold bazaars, but he could not stop the practice. During the famine of 369 he arranged for free meals for Christians, pagans, and Jews who were hated by the Christians and pagans alike. He rebuked those who did not assist the starving, styling them murderers. He also sold what remained of his family inheritance, both to aid the poor and to give an example to the wealthy.

Basil helped create a group of buildings, later called the Basiliad, which administered to the poor and sick and contained a chapel for religious observances (Basil the Great, 2009: 33-35). The Basiliad should be contrasted with Plotinus' elitist and aborted Platonopolis (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 12) (Plotinus, 1991: cxi-cxii). For the Basiliad he wanted everyone to possess only one garment and cited Scripture for his example (Matthew 10:10; 19:21; Luke 3:11) (*Ep.* 150.3; Basil the Great, 2009: 35). The buildings prefigured medieval society in both the West and the East where monasticism would become the dominant milieu of Hesychasm (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 102-103). The monasteries of twelfth-century Byzantium which sustained the poor, the sick, and the elderly (Angold, 1995: 308-314) were only following the path set out by Basil.

4.2.2 Thought

One is used to thinking of Nazianzen as the orator of the Cappadocians and forgets that Photius claimed Basil was a better writer than Plato. His style was terse and was a relief next to the flowery and overblown writing of his time. His many letters are important for the details they provide about his life, and in this they are markedly different from those of Leo the Great (Jurgens, 1979(2): 3; Quasten, 1986(4): 590). He carried on a correspondence with the rhetor Libanius and the eventual heresiarch Apollinarius. His letters are at times hypocritical. He ladens the official Demosthenes with extreme praise, but he gives other correspondents his true opinion: Demosthenes is "a fat sea monster," "a friend of heretics," and "the first and greatest of our evils" (Jurgens, 1979(2): 4; Florovsky, 1987c: 147). Manipulating the authorities was an acceptable method of epistolary expression and had a precedent in Speusippus' famous letter to Philip of Macedon (Dillon, 2003: 34). Together with Basil's letters can be mentioned an exhortation to his nephews in which he attacked Greek literature only for its reprehensible morality, not for its possibility to undermine a young Christian's faith.

Basil's monastic writings were translated into Armenian, Georgian, Arabic, and Slavic. The Eastern church has had no monastic orders such as the Western church (Geanakoplos, 1984: 179); Basil's rules would therefore exert a wide sway, even over the monasticism of Neo-Hesychast Russia (Goldfrank, 1970(1): 47). His long (311 canons) and short (45 canons) rules were presented in the form of questions and answers, probably the actual questions of monks he visited with his replies being taken down by stenographers and then revised by him. The Proto-Hesychast method of asking and answering questions (*erōtapokriseis*) goes back to the Egyptian *Apophthegmata Patrum* (Young, Ayres & Louth, 2004: 292-293). Basil's monastic ideas, which he began to hammer out as early as his time in Pontus with Nazianzen, were influenced by the Pachomian monks; by the monastic aspirations of the eccentric but charismatic Eustathius of Sebaste, an exemplar in what has been termed Homoiousian asceticism; and possibly by his sister Macrina (cf. Krueger, 2004: 113).

Homoiousian asceticism was characterized by the mingling of ascetics of both sexes, in accordance with the "neither male nor female" of Galatians 3:28. The purity of this kind of asceticism was ensured by the women wearing men's clothes and shaving their heads (Elm, 1994: 108); the former custom recalls Plato's female disciple Axiothea. The "bisexual" habit of the Eustathians continued in some circles, despite official reprimands, at least until 787 (1994: 222). Some insight into this type of asceticism is gleaned from Aphrahat's "demonstration" on the Bnai Qyama, the Sons of the Covenant, an ascetic group that was not above agitation during the Christological crisis of the fifth century (Chadwick, 2001: 563). The Sons of the Covenant, who comprised both male and female members, were regarded as more dedicated than the rest of the Christian community. There were two entities in their band: the Bthule (virgins) and the Qaddishe, holy laymen and women who abstained from sexual intercourse in accordance with Exodus 19:10, 15 (Brock, 1987: xxi-xxii).

Basil owed much to Homoiousian asceticism, but he rejected its tendency to mingle the sexes, and he was subsequently viewed as the true founder of monasticism in Asia Minor. He also came to believe that Eustathius' ideas were too harsh and elitist; these ideas are likely reflected in the Syrian *Book of Steps (Ketaba Demasqata)* which envisions a dichotomy between the upright who are fed on milk and the perfect who are fed on the solid food of asceticism (Hebrews 5:13-14) (Hill, 2006: 112). Eustathius' followers would go so far as to say that married Christians could not be saved, but Basil did not think that Christians who did not practice asceticism were inferior to those who did, though he felt that asceticism was the

surest way to win God's love. This prefigured the Hesychasts' insistence that the Uncreated Light was available to all Christians and not only monks. Basil praised the cenobitic over the anchoritic life because it allowed one to practice Christian love. The solitary life, he bluntly said, was in conflict with the law of love. It was also impossible to fulfill certain commandments in this life such as humility and long-suffering, not to mention societal duties like educating children, comforting the sick, and caring for orphans. The anchorite was like someone who had learned carpentry or metallurgy but did not practice these trades (*Long Rules* 7.4) (Basil the Great, 2005: 122).

Basil's ideal abbot was more like an older brother than a father, again prefiguring the Hesychastic ideal of compassion. His rules influenced all subsequent Eastern monastics and certain Western monastics like Cassian and Benedict. He did not believe there was a call for separate clothing to wear at different seasons or at night, and he prohibited laughter but not smiling. He did not forbid any food, only immoderation in eating and drinking. Sleep was to be kept at a minimum to avoid wet dreams, a preoccupation of later Proto-Hesychasts (*Ep.* 2.6) (Schaff, 2004(II, 8): 112).

Basil wrote on the liturgy and church discipline. He prescribes wine mixed with water for the Eucharist, a practice which soon became dominant, the Armenians being among the last to accept this innovation as with so many others. Basil himself celebrated the Eucharist four times a week and on saints' days. He thought that serving communion to oneself was acceptable in the event there was no priest or deacon to administer it. He was against a man marrying two sisters even if he married the second after the death of the first (*Ep.* 160.1) (Jurgens, 1979(2): 6; cf. Leviticus 18:18). Abortion was the deliberate destruction of a fetus by a woman and was therefore murder. A deacon who committed fornication was to be stripped of his position but could receive communion as a layman; this was in accordance with the precept that the sinner could not be punished for the same sin twice. Digamists were to be excommunicated from one to two years and trigamists from two to three, the length of time depending on the sincerity of their repentance. The punishment for incest was the withholding of the Eucharistic cup for eleven years (*Ep.* 217.75) (1979(2): 8). This should be contrasted with the view of Abba Poemen that if one is truly contrite God will receive him back after only three days of penance (Ward, 1984: 169; Symeon the New Theologian, 1997(3): 44).

Polygamy was moderate fornication. A man who killed his wife in a fit of rage was not a homicide but a murderer. Basil attacks the double standard: adulterers are just as guilty as adulteresses. A digamist is to be defrocked from the ministry if he is a cleric. (This would happen to Irenaeus of Tyre in the next century, though for political reasons.) Basil had a special liking for soldiers and did not view them as murderers, but their hands were unclean and they were to be denied communion for three years (*Ep.* 188.13) (Jurgens, 1979(2): 7).

Basil was the least progressive, the least Origenistic, and the least allegorical of the Cappadocians. He was not only a great administrator but had a good philosophical mind which is much in evidence in his early works, particularly *Against Eunomius*. He was influenced in his theology by the Homoiousian clergymen Basil of Ancyra and Eustathius of Sebaste, as well as by the early Apollinarius, but he eventually became a Homoousian, that is he journeyed from a view of the Son as being of like substance with the Father to one of His being of one substance with the Father (cf. DelCogliano, 2011: 197-223). During this transitional period he used the expression “invariably like in substance” (*aparallaktōs homoion kat’ ousian*) for the Son, a Homoiousian statement that bordered strongly on Homoousianism (*Ep.* 9.3) (Jurgens, 1979(2): 15).

While Athanasius had emphasized God’s unity Basil and his fellow Cappadocians began to look at God’s diversity and so played an important role in the early Christian understanding of the Trinity, a preoccupation they had inherited from Origen. If the controversy over the Trinity does not greatly contribute to an understanding of the relationship between Proto-Hesychasm and Hesychasm, it gives one an idea of Eastern Orthodoxy’s theological bearings which were reaffirmed by Hesychasm, as Schmemmann (1963: 234-235) has so aptly intimated.

In their different ways Aristotle, Plotinus, and the Homoiousians contributed to the Cappadocians’ doctrine of the Trinity. Basil saw God as one in substance and three in person (*mia ousia, treis hypostaseis*) (Quasten, 1986(3): 228). One should look to Origen rather than Porphyry for the background to this formula, but Origen only vaguely contributed to the Cappadocians’ insights. His Son was to a degree subordinate to the Father, and his Spirit was subordinate to the Son although he held that all three hypostases were divine. At times, especially when speaking of the Father and the Son, Origen anticipated the Neoplatonic way of talking about the One and the Nous. Somewhat awkwardly he made the Father’s power

extend over all creation, the Son's power over all living things, and the Holy Spirit's over what the Gnostics called the pneumatics (Sabo, 2010: 56). Like Origen (and the Homoiousians) Basil chose the word *hypostasis* over *prosōpon*, mainly because Sabellius had used the latter to describe his three modes—Father, Son, and Spirit—of the one God. Secondly, *prosōpon*, like the Latin *persona*, conveyed the idea of a mask. Finally, *prosōpon*—and in this it was to be distinguished from *persona*—sometimes carried with it the notion of impersonation (Quasten, 1986(3): 229).

Basil stated that the three persons of the Trinity were three manifestations of the substance of God just as Peter, Paul, and Timothy are three manifestations of humanity. This of course can be interpreted to mean that there are three gods; but Nyssen would come to Basil's rescue: in the case of God there is less of a distinction between persons than there is between men because God is incorporeal and because the actions of each of the divine persons, as Gregory of Nazianzus intimated, are one and the same. Nazianzen said that the three persons of the Trinity were identical but for their relationships to one another, as represented by the words "begetting," "begotten," and "proceeding." In the transcript of the faith he prepared, and which Eustathius of Sebaste signed and later renounced, Basil pointed out that it was not correct to call the Holy Spirit either begotten or unbegotten and that the correct order of the persons in the Trinity was Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*Transcript of Faith* 3) (Jurgens, 1979(2): 5). There he writes that the Spirit derives from the Father through the Son; the Western church would come to the position that He derived from the Father and the Son equally. To his brother Gregory Basil compared the three hypostases to links on a chain: the one who grasps the Holy Spirit, one link of the chain, draws the Father and the Son as well (Hill, 2003: 74).

The first two books of Basil's *Against Eunomius* deal with the relationship between the Father and the Son, and the third with the deity of the Holy Spirit. Basil's interest in the Holy Spirit is anticipatory of the pneumatological trend of the Hesychasts. His terminology is at times redolent of the pseudo-Platonic writings, and his pronouncement at the outset of the third book has kinship with the *Second Platonic Letter*: "The Son is second in order from the Father, because He is from Him; and in dignity, because the Father is His origin and cause" (*Contra Eun.* 3.1; *Second Platonic Letter* 312E) (Jurgens, 1979(2): 14; Dillon, 1996: 367). He also looks forward to Pseudo-Dionysius in his stress on angelology: the Holy Spirit is holy by His nature; the angels are holy by participating in God's holiness which they do by loving

Him. Angels were important for the Proto-Hesychasts because they were the monk's heavenly counterpart (cf. Turner, 1990: 160, 182). Basil of Ancyra, a key influence on Basil, explicitly stated this (Elm, 1994: 205). Basil himself wrote, "What state can be more blessed than to imitate on earth the choruses of angels?" (*Ep.* 2.2) (Schaff, 2004(II, 8): 110).

Eunomius, the radical Arian or Anomoean, had occasioned the writing of Basil's first major theological work by alleging that the divine nature was unbegotten and that if the Son was begotten He was therefore not God. To him it seemed impossible for God to beget a preexistent Son. Basil pointed out that Eunomius' argument that the Son can both be a creature and one begotten before time was illogical since the act of creating the Son would necessarily have had to take place in time (*Contra Eun.* 2.17) (Jurgens, 1979(2): 13-14). For the Cappadocians begottenness was not so much a characteristic of the Son as a description of His relationship in the Trinity. Echoing Origen Basil said that the relationship between the Father and the Son existed from all eternity. Beginning and cause do not imply temporality when one is speaking about God. There was not a moment when the Father became a father or the Son a son; therefore their relationship is not to be thought of in human or temporal terms (cf. Kopecek, 1979(1): 31-32). This was also true with such Neoplatonists as Plotinus and Porphyry: the first principle never acquired "fatherhood"; it always had it (Moore, 2005: 77). Here one can see how clearly the early Christians were indebted to the Platonists for their thought forms.

At any rate, according to Basil, blanket statements about the deity cannot be made because God is at bottom unknowable. In saying this Basil, probably relying on Clement of Alexandria, bequeathed to Gregory of Nyssa and the other Proto-Hesychasts their dark mysticism which would also be reflected in the Hesychasts, though not to the extent that light mysticism would. The idea of God's unknowability went against Eunomius whose doctrine of God's knowability had a parallel in the thought of the early Arian Asterius (Kopecek, 1979(1): 29-30). Basil says that the names for God show what He is or what He is not, but His essence is not perceivable to anyone but the Spirit and the Son. The Cappadocians therefore rejected the Neoplatonic axiom that names established realities.

The third book of Basil's *Against Eunomius* hinted that the titles Holy Spirit and Paraclete revealed the deity of the third person of the Trinity, but both here and in his formal treatise on the Holy Spirit he never explicitly calls Him God, though such divinity is implied and at one point he alleges that the Spirit partakes of the fullness of the deity (*De Spirit. Sanct.* 18) (Basil the Great, 1980: 73). He did not insist on the Spirit's deity for theological orthodoxy because some anti-Arian Christians, particularly Homoiousians, were unsure about it and a unified front against the Homoeans needed to be maintained. He foresaw that the question of Christ's two natures would be an even greater source of divisiveness. Athanasius praised Basil's approach as becoming weak to win the weak. The First Council of Nicaea (325) had in any case not made the divinity of the Spirit explicit, but Basil held to it and encouraged Nazianzen, who was less well known, to make himself clear on this point. He tellingly broke with his mentor Eustathius of Sebaste over the Spirit's deity (*Ep.* 223.7) (Schaff, 2004(II, 8): 265). He should not be blamed too much for the break; Eustathius had been publicly condemned by his own father for wearing the garb of a pagan ascetic (the *peribolaion*) rather than that of a priest.

Basil's treatise was dedicated to Nazianzen's cousin Amphilochius of Iconium who had requested it. Amphilochius depended on Basil for much theological advice, though Nonna Harrison (in Basil the Great, 2005: 17) goes too far in saying that he was Basil's spiritual son. This is a regrettable avowal since it fails to grasp the interior isolation of this formidable Proto-Hesychast theologian and social worker. The twenty-ninth chapter contains a florilegium of the fathers, something that would be imitated by Cyril of Alexandria in the next century.

Basil affirms that the Spirit is always present with the other two hypostases in the work of creation and sanctification, the latter being an important preoccupation of the Hesychasts. He says that if there is any virtue in baptismal water it is only because of the Spirit's presence there. The Spirit's place in the Godhead is shown by the fact that angels exist by the will of the Father, are created by the Son, and are perfected by the Spirit. Because of the danger of tritheism one must not too consciously dwell on the fact that there are three hypostases, just as the Hebrews refrained from pronouncing the name of God. Count if you must, Basil writes, but do not damage the faith by your counting (*De Spirit. Sanct.* 18) (Jurgens, 1979(2): 18). He maintains that since the Son is the image of the Father one cannot speak of two gods any more than he can speak of two kings when he refers to a king and his image. This passage would be

commented on in resolving the Iconoclastic controversy, a fact which shows how seminal an influence the Cappadocians were on Orthodox theology (John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images* 1.35) (2003: 42). Like Clement of Alexandria, Basil believed the apostles had unwritten doctrines and practices, including triple immersion and the renouncing of Satan and his angels, which would later be accepted by the church at large.

Plotinian influence has been detected in the ninth chapter of the treatise, though it is possible that phrases of Plotinus had entered the common intellectual current (Russell, 2004: 209). Many scholars, and Russell is fortunately not one of them, forget the existence of the Middle Platonists and tend to push Christian acquaintance with Plotinus too far back, yet a firsthand acquaintance with Plotinus was maintained by Basil's brother Gregory. Basil writes that the Christian is unable to draw near to the Spirit until he withdraws from the passions. The one who has thus cleaned the royal image can see the Spirit's image and its archetype, God the Father. The Holy Spirit shines on the saint like the sun on all men, and those who are illuminated by His rays become spiritual and illuminate others (*De Spirit. Sanct.* 9) (Schaff, 2004(II, 8): 15).

The result of all this is eventually to be made God. Here is encountered the theotic impulse in Eastern Orthodoxy which would be perfected by the Hesychasts but which went back to St. Peter (2 Peter 1:4) and was even anticipated in the Old Testament, namely in God breathing His Spirit into the dry bones and in the four living creatures being bearers of His glory (Ezekiel 1:1-28; 10:1-22; 37:1-14). Two other patristic parallels to Basil's theoticism are Athanasius who had written of Christ that He was made man that man might be made God (*De Inc. Verbi* 54.3) (2004(II, 4): 65), and Gregory of Nazianzus who said that Christ would make him God by the power of His incarnation (*Orat.* 29.19) (2004(II, 7): 308). It should be pointed out that while the Eastern fathers believed the Christian could attain unity with God, they did not believe he could share God's nature. Even the Hesychast Gregory Palamas would assert that the Christian could share God's energies but not His essence (Hill, 2003: 120).

4.2.3 The *Hexaemeron*

One of Basil's most enduring works was his *Hexaemeron*, a philosophical investigation of the first six days of creation. In it he interpreted the Genesis record from a literal standpoint, but though he preferred literal interpretation to allegorical he was open to Christological interpretation, particularly of the Psalms (Harrison in Basil the Great, 2005: 13). The *Hexaemeron* contrasts the creation account in Genesis with that put forward in Plato's *Timaeus*, though his source was less likely the *Timaeus* than Posidonius' commentary on the dialogue. Basil grants the interchangeability of the Demiurge with God, the Aristotelian division of the universe into the sublunary and supralunary spheres, and the concept of *sympatheia* or universal harmony (*Hex.* 2.2) (Armstrong, 1967: 432). But he does not hold to an Indefinite Dyad out of which God made the universe: God created both organized and unorganized matter. Basil follows Origen when he speaks of an eternal spiritual world prior to the material world and when he thinks of the soul's immersion in this latter world as primarily educative (Greer in Origen, 1979: 11). He structured the universe with fire at the top (above the firmament) and air, water, and earth below it. Fire was warm, air was moist, water was cold, earth was dry, and none of the elements was found in any place complete and unmixed since they had once been intermingled (Armstrong, 1967: 433).

Origen had equated the waters above the firmament with the intelligible realm, but to Basil these waters were literal waters intended to abate the fiery substance and prevent a universal conflagration. Above the firmament the angels, confined to particular places but curiously not creatures of time, lived in a material world which Basil equated with fire or light (*Hex.* 2.5) (1967: 435). This depended on a literal interpretation of Psalm 104:4, "who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire," an interpretation rejected by the two Gregories. The Cappadocians bequeathed to subsequent Proto-Hesychasm a healthy interest in angels. Light is the common ground of the universe, passing back and forth through the firmament, whereas time exists only below the firmament. At the moment of creation light was universally diffused just as a lamp fills a whole room with its radiance.

The creation of the firmament in space led to the creation of time which led to the creation of the sensible world; but because God created the firmament, time, and the sensible world outside of time Basil alleged that the firmament came before the earth only in the sense that a container comes before its contents or light comes before a shadow cast by a physical object

(*Hex.* 2.5) (1967: 437). The body is a creation of time and is destined to perish with it, but the soul is, like the angels, a creature of light and the firmament is no barrier to it. The Hesychasts would accept Basil's equation of the soul with a creature of light, thanks to the mystical union with Christ, but to this they would add the body, the soul's counterpart.

4.2.4 Conclusion

This section has verified a Hesychastic mindset in the leader of the Cappadocians, the first Proto-Hesychasts, and thereby advances the central argument that the Proto-Hesychasts' main function was to prepare the way for Hesychasm. Basil's Proto-Hesychasm consisted largely in (1) his work for monasticism, which became the most vital medium of Hesychasm. His (2) rejection of the elitism of Eustathius of Sebaste had a parallel in the Hesychasts' belief that all Christians could be united with the Uncreated Light and not only monks. His (3) view of the abbot's exercising authority more like a brother than a father also anticipated the Hesychastic ideal of compassion.

There was a pronounced strain of mysticism in Basil's writings. According to Isaac of Nineveh he "preeminently chose silence and seclusion from all things" in order to be "unremittingly in the proximity of God by means of . . . continual prayer" (Hunt, 2004: 148). For Moore (2005: 101) Basil elevates God so far above the human mind that absorption into the deity is the main outcome of the divine-human relationship. Moore is prone to exaggeration but not in this case. In his homilies Basil speaks of light falling on the Christian heart which gives it a foretaste of heaven, and he instructed his hearers to leave their bodies and rise above the stars, allowing their souls to contemplate the divine nature (Dunn-Wilson, 2005: 69). These are prefigurements of (4) light mysticism, but (5) dark mysticism was more notable in his thought and would be his, and Gregory of Nyssa's, chief bequest to the Proto-Hesychasts.

Basil's (6) interest in the Holy Spirit would also be transferred to them. Neoplatonic elements have been seen in his treatise on the Spirit. His "royal image" is paralleled by Gregory's emphasis on mankind's being created in God's image, and (7) his subscription to *theōsis* can be related to his brother's insistence on likeness to God which had been the ultimate stage of the mystic quest since Plato (*Theaet.* 176; cf. *Phaedr.* 248, 253) (2007: 530, 125, 127). There is a certain foreshadowing of (8) the concept of *penthos* in the young Basil's weeping over his

life as an orator as well as in his praise of Christian women for their prayers and abundance of tears (*De Orig. Hum.* 1.18) (Basil the Great, 2005: 46). As far as his effect on the less Hesychastic tendencies of the Proto-Hesychasts, he can certainly be shown to have influenced Pseudo-Dionysius' interest in angels, though probably less so than Gregory of Nazianzus, the Cappadocians' chief angelologist and the figure who will next be taken in hand.

4.3 Gregory of Nazianzus

4.3.1 Life

Gregory of Nazianzus was the greatest orator of the Cappadocians, and for the Orthodox he, along with John the Evangelist and Symeon the New Theologian, is alone worthy of the title theologian. He was born in 329 in a village outside Nazianzus to a clerical father, Gregory the Elder, who had been converted by his wife Nonna from Hysistarianism, a Hellenized Judaic sect that was monotheistic and held to the Sabbath and the dietary laws but not circumcision (*De Anim. Suae Calam.* 287-290) (Hall, 1998: 65). When one of her sons died Nonna wore white to his funeral to celebrate his journey to heaven. One of her daughters was married, and she and her husband practiced continence.

Gregory the Younger claimed to have been consecrated to God from his mother's womb. He chose to devote himself to chastity after a dream in which two virgins, who styled themselves companions of Jesus Christ and who represented purity and chastity, urged him to join them. He later compared them to the angels who conveyed divine light to mankind and who stood by the throne of God (Gregory of Nazianzus, 2001: 167). This reflected his bent towards angelology which was shared by his fellow Proto-Hesychasts. Gregory studied first in Cappadocian Caesarea and later in Palestinian Caesarea and Alexandria where he met Athanasius and developed a taste for both Origenism and Platonism. In his twenties he sailed to Athens and encountered a storm on the way; as was the custom of the time he had delayed his baptism so it was with some trepidation that he endured it. He ascribed his deliverance to the prayers of his parents who had been forewarned about his situation through dreams and portents.

In Athens Gregory studied rhetoric and philosophy in company with Basil whose relationship with he described as one soul inhabiting two bodies, which is even more extreme than the story of Harun ar-Rashid and Jafar sharing one garment. However it is possible that Gregory was better friends with his younger brother Caesarius to whom he wrote that his friendship with him was the greatest achievement of his life. Basil and Gregory shared the same lodgings in Athens; Gregory would later say that they knew only two roads from their house, the one to the church and the other to the library. Hill says, tongue in cheek, that perhaps all the parties happened at their home (2003: 69), but if the two had parties they would have been more like the meal of the Emmaus disciples after the resurrected Christ had broken bread and vanished. Hill's comment is typical of his irreverence, but he is not incapable of divulging unexpected insights on the Hesychasts and Proto-Hesychasts.

Another fellow student was Julian the Apostate; Gregory would later remark his eccentricity, an eccentricity which bespoke for him the conflict of a troubled conscience, and penned these prophetic words about him: "What evil is the Roman Empire here educating for itself!" (*Hoion kakon hē Rōmaiōn trephei*) (Schaff, 1968: 912). But Julian would be, as Jerome said, only a mild persecutor of the Christians and was in many respects a relief after the Homoousians' ordeal under Constantius. Gregory's later works against the Apostate are disfigured by hatred and according to a perceptive comment of Quasten's (1986(3): 242) have no value. He goes so far as to call Constantius a paragon of piety and virtue, mainly because he did not forbid Christians from teaching the classics as Julian did.

While at Athens Gregory obtained detailed knowledge of Plato and Aristotle but none or very little of Plotinus. Not long before he was thirty he returned to Cappadocia and was baptized (Ruether, 1969: 29). He lived at his parents' home where he gave himself wholeheartedly to the ascetic and contemplative life, refusing even to listen to music other than to sing hymns. This places him energetically in the Proto-Hesychastic milieu. He ate only bread and salt and drank only water; it is known that the desert fathers also ate salt which it seemed impossible to live without. Gregory wore a coarse garment and, like Origen had done, slept on the ground (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.3) (Schaff, 2004(II, 1): 252). More than any other writer of his century he would equate *philosophia*, contemplation, with Christianity. He used the word "philosopher" for the ascetic and seemed to have often thought in terms of Clement of Alexandria's Christian gnostic. His brand of monasticism was uniquely reclusive and would reappear in the last Proto-Hesychast, Symeon the New Theologian.

Gregory visited Basil's monastery in Pontus, but in his letters to Basil after he returned home he ridiculed the monastic life although he praised it to the active life of the churchman. He received a setback to his spiritual aspirations when his father forcibly and without his prior knowledge ordained him a priest during the Christmas service of 361 (Ruether, 1969: 32). The reader's blood pressure can be saved by remembering that the fourth century was an era of enforced ordinations, a phenomenon resulting from the fact that the growing percentage of Christians outstripped the number of available clergymen. Such involuntary consecrations were partly responsible for the unchristian behavior of some of the bishops who were nonetheless unfazed by their abstemious obligations, asceticism being a thing taken for granted by both Christians and pagans in late antiquity. In the sixth century John the Prophet would even speak of Gregory's ordination with approval.

Nonetheless Gregory was stung by his father's tyranny and immediately fled to Basil's monastery in Annisa. The following spring his father called him back for assistance, having been accused by certain monastics of heresy; they could apparently detect traces of Homoiousianism in his orthodoxy. The younger Gregory's task was to defend his father and repair his own reputation which had suffered from his act of leaving town. Gregory preached a sermon in his father's church that lyingly blamed his flight on his own feelings of unworthiness for the priesthood. He preached not one but three addresses on this theme, the second of which was probably not delivered. The third was preached a week after the first to a half-empty church (Russell, 2004: 216). In it he associated himself with his father and solicited the obedience and love of his parishioners for them both.

Campenhausen (2000: 106), with an acumen increasingly rare among patristic scholars, remarks that it is almost impossible to determine the thought that lay behind these oratorical tirades, but they would influence Chrysostom's important treatise on the priesthood. The real reason for Gregory's return seems to have been that he did not want to abandon his aging father, but in fleeing from his responsibilities he made himself enemies in his father's church. These, and the monks already alienated by his father, would be a thorn in his side (Gregory of Nazianzus, 2002: 11). It has been observed, by Quasten (1986(3): 236), that Gregory's career was a succession of flights from and returns to the world. His heart's desire was for seclusion, but he tended to accept the responsibilities that were thrust on him, both out of vanity and from a sense of responsibility.

Eight years later Gregory's friendship with Basil was strained by Basil's insistence that the apolitical Gregory travel to Caesarea to vote for him in the upcoming elections for bishop. Later, when Basil had become bishop and was attempting to exert his ecclesiastical authority over Anthimus of Tyana, Basil appointed his brother to Nyssa and Gregory to Sasima which was less a town than a stopping place, a "deplorable and cramped little village . . . without water or vegetation" (Ruether, 1969: 36). Sasima was in the mountains and was known only to travelers; the parishioners of its church would not have appreciated Gregory's theological sophistication. Gregory's father pressured him to accept Basil's ordination, but in an oration after the consecration Gregory expressed his repugnance toward the two ordinations that had been forced on him and afterwards, despite Basil's threats, continued to assist his father in Nazianzus.

Though Gregory never forgave Basil for the ordination it must be remarked that Basil sacrificed himself and his personal freedom for Christ and expected Gregory to do the same. He certainly possessed a tyrannical streak, but he exhibited less complexes than did Gregory. The two men, however, soon reaffirmed the show of friendship, and after Basil's death Gregory was to say, "Whenever I handle his *Hexaemeron* and take its words on my lips, I am brought into the presence of the Creator, and understand the works of creation, and admire the Creator more than before, using my teacher as my only means of sight" (Pelikan, 1993: 7). As this excerpt reveals Gregory, like Ambrose, sometimes read aloud to himself. The ancients were more intelligent than their modern counterparts in being able to give extempore speeches at a moment's notice, something Plotinus expected of his pupils, but less intelligent in their habit of reading aloud, though this was due in part to the lack of spacing between words (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 2; cf. Augustine, *Conf.* 6.3) (Plotinus, 1991: ciii; Augustine, 2006: 97-98; Alfeyev, 2000b: 183).

As his father's assistant Gregory was called upon to deliver the message of consolation after a hailstorm had destroyed the crops of Nazianzus and left the elder Gregory overwhelmed. His comfort to his parishioners was that it is better to be punished in this life than in the next (*Orat.* 16.7) (Jurgens, 1979(2): 28). He also delivered his father's funeral oration at which Basil was in attendance. There he spoke of the one who dies as being with the eternal like a small light circling around the great light which prefigures the light mysticism of the Proto-Hesychast Pseudo-Macarius, as does his habit of calling baptism illumination (*phōtismos*) and his designation of the human mind, created in God's image, as radiant (*Orat.*

18.42) (Schaff, 2004(II, 7): 269; Eliade, 1965: 57). Of the Cappadocians Gregory was the most sensitive to light mysticism.

A year after his father's death Gregory's mother died. He preached her funeral oration but later fled to the *parthenōn* or nunnery of St. Thecla in Seleucia (Elm, 1994: 186-187). This should not be surprising if one remembers that Homoiousian asceticism was initially "bisexual." Gregory's main reason for fleeing to Seleucia was his fear that no bishop would be found to replace him if he did not leave his post. His practice of monasticism marks him as a Proto-Hesychast more than anything else. Even in Seleucia he was not alone with his beloved solitude since Nicenes throughout the empire wrote to him for advice. He emerged from isolation in 397, a year when Basil died and he himself received a request from Constantinople to lead its Nicene community which was orthodox in a city of Arians, thanks to the solicitous work of the emperors Constantius and Valens.

The community had no real church building, only a villa that was called the Church of the Resurrection and which was donated by Gregory's cousin Theodosia (Russell, 2004: 219). Here he preached his five theological orations which earned him the title of theologian. In the first oration he satirizes the Christians for the intensity with which they discussed theology, almost as if it were something fashionable. In the second he speaks of the providence of God as displayed in the works of creation. He also attacks the rationalism of the Eunomians and asks how mankind, who cannot even explain the nature of life, can know God. He quotes Manoah's words to his wife: "We shall surely die, because we have seen God" (Judges 13:22), and concludes that even a vision of God is too much for humanity to bear, let alone His nature (*Orat.* 28.19) (Gregory of Nazianzus, 2002: 51). God's ineffability is shown by the fact that the angels, who fill men with awe, are filled with awe towards Him. The dark mysticism of the Proto-Hesychasts is clearly in evidence here. In the third oration Gregory addresses the relationship between the Father and the Son. In the fourth he uses Scripture to attack the Arian notion of the inferiority of the Son to the Father, and in the fifth he treats of the deity of the Holy Spirit, a key issue for him and one that would anticipate the Hesychasts' interest in pneumatology.

Basil's death had spurred the two Gregories to strenuous theological work to make up for so great a loss. As has been revealed, Nazianzen helped clarify the mystery of the Trinity by averring that the three hypostases were identical but for their relationships: unbegottenness (*agennēsia*), begottenness (*gennēsis*), and procession (*ekporeusis* or *ekpempsis*) (*Orat.* 25.16; 26.19) (Quasten, 1986(3): 250). The concept of distinguishing properties (*kat' idiotēta*) among the Trinitarian hypostases was ultimately indebted to the Homoiousians (Florovsky, 1987c: 92).

In an oration against the Arians Gregory proclaimed his determination to affirm the Spirit's deity even if his audience choked on it. His orations were sometimes marred by his unfulfilled promises to end soon (Dunn-Wilson, 2005: 76). He delivered a minor sermon against divorce, maintaining that an adulterer was just as guilty as an adulteress. The current Roman laws were, in his opinion, too much in favor of divorce and too harsh on women. God meant for men and women to have the same dignity, as in the fifth commandment which commanded a child to honor his father and mother equally (Exodus 20:12) (*On the Words of the Gospel* 6.28-29; Jurgens, 1979(2): 34).

Gregory was even more interested in angelology than Basil, largely for theotic reasons. He says that if angels are not corporeal they are the nearest thing to corporeality, an insight that would be shared by the Proto-Hesychast Pseudo-Macarius. His word for angels is ascents (*anabaseis*) which shows that they are man's means, or man's example, of returning to God. An angel is a ray (*aporroē*) of the divine light, and man becomes such an *aporroē* by cleansing his soul, Basil's royal image (*Orat.* 40.5) (Armstrong, 1967: 442-443). The human soul has kinship more with the angelic realm than with anything terrestrial; in his poem on virginity he calls man another angel. Here is glimpsed an idea that meshes with the Hesychasts' belief in *theōsis*. Though the concept of *theōsis* existed before Gregory he was the first to use the word, and Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor, the most philosophical of the Proto-Hesychasts, would bring it into prominence. Damascius is apparently the only pagan to have used it (in speaking of the suprasubstantial henads); but the concept was of course amicable to the pagan worldview, and Proclus made extensive use of *ektheōsis* (Russell, 2004: 255-256, 341; Kharlamov, 2009: 157). Some of Gregory's lesser known anticipations of Hesychasm were his stress on *penthos* and his anticipation of the Jesus Prayer by his assertion of a connection between prayer and breathing, even though he took this to be solely metaphorical (Chyrssavgis, 2004: 38).

Gregory successfully weathered both the desecration of the Church of the Resurrection by the Arians and the attempt of Maximus the Cynic to rob it from him. Maximus was an Egyptian clergyman and unscrupulous adventurer who pawned himself off as an emulator of the humility of the Cynics. He wore a white robe, carried a staff, and dyed his hair blond. Pope Damasus, no friend of the Cappadocians, accused Maximus of wearing an idolatrous garb (*habitus idoli*) and having long hair which the apostle Paul said was a shame to a man (*Ep.* 5) (Schaff, 2004(II, 14): 180-181). Ambrose of Milan, often at loggerheads with the pope, would take up Maximus' cause, to no avail. Nazianzen was originally taken in by Maximus, both because of his political naïveté and because he was himself influenced by Cynic ethics, namely in withdrawal from the world, compassion for human littleness, and the scorn of pride, though he elsewhere criticized the greed and vulgarity of the Cynics (*Orat.* 27.9) (Gregory of Nazianzus, 2002: 33).

Shortly after Maximus had been put in his place the emperor Theodosius I, having recovered from a serious illness, vacated the Arian churches for the Nicenes and personally presented Gregory with the Church of the Apostles, previously the domain of the Homoean bishop Demophilus. Like Valens Theodosius was influenced in his theological mindset by his wife who prevented him from meeting with Eunomius. He also convened the First Council of Constantinople (381) over which Gregory presided. The council was composed largely of new Nicenes, that is ex-Homoiousians from Asia Minor and Syria, but it was the Egyptian bishops who turned on Gregory, a precursor of things to come in the careers of the patriarchs Chrysostom, Nestorius, and Flavian. Alexandria was already under the impression that the see of Constantinople was somehow hers. The Egyptian bishops insisted that Gregory could not be bishop of Constantinople since he was technically bishop of Sasima; in reality he was no longer bishop of Nazianzus which was his more than Sasima was. Gregory was also displeased that the conciliar creed skirted around the Spirit's deity, an issue important for him as it would be for the Hesychasts. The emperor was insistent that all the Homoiousians be considered, but the Pneumatomachians, as they were called, eventually walked out. The emperor's take on the Pneumatomachians was different from that of Gregory who quipped that they needed something to blaspheme or life would be unlivable (*Orat.* 31.2) (2002: 117).

Unable to bear the political dissension of the council, which also resisted his attempts at resolving the Melitian schism in Antioch, Gregory asked to resign his position both on it and in the Church of the Apostles. The emperor, sensing his unpoliticalness, accepted. Gregory preached a farewell sermon in which he claimed that he wanted to be sacrificed like Jonah for the good of all despite the fact that he, unlike Jonah, was innocent. He was succeeded by Nectarius, an elderly civil servant who had not yet been baptized and who knew little of theology. He had been recommended by Diodore of Tarsus and was chosen by the emperor, significantly, from a list the conciliar bishops had given him (L'Hullier, 2000: 109).

The bitterness engendered by this betrayal lasted the rest of Gregory's life (Florovsky, 1987c: 113). He acted for awhile as bishop of Nazianzus where he contended with Apollinarian heretics and a hostile clergy, but he retired two years later after having made his cousin Eulalius his successor. Overall he had been head bishop of Nazianzus for only three years. His retirement was not easy. He practiced rigorous asceticism, sometimes living in caves with the beasts and going about shoeless and sleeping on the ground covered with a sack, though he sometimes went to the other extreme of visiting hot springs for health reasons.

Jurgens' (1979(2): 27) portrayal of Gregory as having a mild disposition because he was not as domineering as Basil, is a fantasy. Wickham (in Gregory of Nazianzus, 2002: 9) is more to the point when he wishes he knew more about Augustine's personality and less about Gregory's. Nonetheless Gregory's prickliness never approached that of Jerome or even Epiphanius. He was undeniably quick-tempered, in continual physical pain, and prematurely aged. He loved solitude, woodcraft, and the classics and modeled his writings after those of the sophists. He wrote hundreds of poems, really metrical prose, which make for wearisome and at times banal reading. One of them attacks women's cosmetics, as was the fashion (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 118). In the following century the myth that Theodoret of Cyrhus' mother had bad eyesight from cosmetics is encountered (*Hist. Rel.* 1188ff.) (Schaff, 2004, II(3): 1).

Gregory compared his writing of poetry to an old swan whispering consolation to itself with its tired wings. His prose was more luminous, a fact of which he seems to have been aware. Gregory's style was that of the so-called Second Sophistic: ornate and with word-coinages and archaisms (Russell, 2004: 215). When Jerome asked him about an ambiguous expression in the Byzantine Text of the Gospels, "the second Sabbath after the first" (Luke 6:1), Gregory

acknowledged that he could not explain it but wryly invited the younger man to hear him preach on it so that, amid the applause of the congregation, Jerome could imagine he understood the meaning. Jerome, who would gain fame as an exegete, said that he learned the exegesis of Scripture from Nazianzen.

In his writings Gregory frequently alluded to Homer, Pindar, and Euripides as well as the ancient philosophers, and after a young teacher asked him for his books of literature he replied by urging him to throw himself courageously into the sophist's work. When the parents of his grandnephew Nicobulus were reluctant to send the youth to Athens to complete his training Gregory wrote a letter which persuaded them of the wisdom of pursuing their son's secular education. He gave Nicobulus copies of his letters, and the young man preserved and arranged these (Ruether, 1969: 54).

But like the other Cappadocians Gregory deplored rhetoric when it was set beside theology, much as Plato did when it was set beside philosophy. On her deathbed Macrina the Younger brought Gregory of Nyssa up short for employing a rhetorical turn of phrase (Pelikan, 1993: 15). Likewise Gregory of Nazianzus' highest praise for his mother was that she refused "to have her ears or tongue, which had received and uttered divine things, defiled by Grecian tales or theatrical songs" (1993: 13). For the Cappadocians Greek philosophy was only slightly better than its literature, and even Gregory of Nyssa would object to the Platonic tendency to make matter eternal, unbegotten, and coeval with God. The Cappadocians were therefore in step with the Proto-Hesychastic *paideia* which was almost solely religious. Nonetheless their occasional use of pagan philosophy would be accepted by the Hesychasts. In his stimulating, controversial, and testy discussion of Hesychasm, Krausmüller (2006: 123) fails to adequately take note of this. Gregory Palamas, for instance, did not shrink from the study of Aristotle and compared the Greek philosophers to serpents from which one could extract useful pharmaceuticals (*Triads* 1.1.20) (Gregory Palamas, 1983: 28; cf. Schmemmann, 1963: 236), although the Hesychasts did not immerse themselves in pagan philosophy to the degree of their intellectualistic opponents like Barlaam. The Hesychast and Cappadocian use of Greek philosophy went back to Origen who had called it spoiling the Egyptians.

4.3.2 Conclusion

In this section Hesychastic elements were detected in the official theologian of the Cappadocians, verifying his participation in the Proto-Hesychast milieu and so helping to advance the central argument that the Proto-Hesychasts' main function was in their role as precursors of Hesychasm. Nazianzen's Proto-Hesychasm is observed chiefly in (1) his practice of asceticism. Though he was a less influential figure on Hesychasm than the other two Cappadocians, he was even more in tune with the spirit of Eastern Orthodox mysticism on a psychological level. His reclusiveness and continual attempts to withdraw from the world prefigure Symeon the New Theologian's desire to pursue the interior life while hidden, as it were, deep in the earth. In his study of the New Theologian, Alfeyev (2000a), an Orthodox scholar of Proto-Hesychasm, is too adamant in deducing Symeon's thought from that of Gregory, but here is one instance in which it is illustrated.

Other Proto-Hesychastic tendencies of Gregory are (2) his stress on God's unknowability, which reflects dark mysticism, and (3) a degree of light mysticism exhibited by his use of the term *phōtismos* for baptism, his comparison of the departed soul to a small light circling around the great light, and his designation of the divine image of the soul as radiant. His (4) subscription to *theōsis* and belief that man is a ray (*aporroē*) of the divine light would be a fruitful subject to broach in discussions of Hesychastic mystical experiences. Gregory's (5) interest in *penthos*, (6) unceasing prayer, (7) pneumatology, and (8) his somewhat favorable attitude toward pagan philosophy would also find a home in Hesychasm. As for his influence on his fellow Proto-Hesychasts he bequeathed to Dionysius an intense interest in angelology. This interest was somewhat less in evidence in Basil and still less in Gregory of Nyssa who will now be considered.

4.4 Gregory of Nyssa: The Divine Darkness

4.4.1 Life

Gregory of Nyssa was more of a philosopher than his brother Basil which is surprising in view of the fact that unlike Basil and Nazianzen he did not spend time in Athens. Krueger (2004: 111), whose study is unique because of its attention to the idea of authorship, opines that Gregory had the greatest theological mind of the fourth century, to which could be added Christian philosophical mind. He may have been married and even remained married while a

bishop, but in the latter case he likely practiced continence, hence Nazianzen's letter of condolence on the death of Nyssen's "sister" Theosebeia. In his early book on virginity, a phenomenon which he compares to the Garden of Eden and which he praises for physiological reasons, Nyssen writes of the great gulf that separates him from the glory of virginity. He also writes that earthly and spiritual marriage are incompatible because the latter requires continence, mortification of the passions, and scorn of fleshly needs while the former requires their opposites (*De Virg.* 20) (Quasten, 1986(3): 271). Yet it was not by any romantic dalliance that Gregory earned Basil's reproof but by his embarking for a brief period on the career of a rhetorician, a profession which he renounced after temporarily entering Basil's monastery, thereby becoming a bona fide Proto-Hesychast. The Orthodox scholar Florovsky (1987a: 143) has in fact described his mysticism as a philosophical justification for monasticism, thereby linking Proto-Hesychastic monasticism with, one infers, dark mysticism.

Basil would later appoint Gregory bishop of the insignificant town of Nyssa, between Cappadocian Caesarea and Ancyra, and explain that he wished Gregory to confer distinction on his see rather than for it to confer distinction on him; Nyssa today is known only because of Gregory. Gregory bore no hard feelings towards Basil whom he idolized and whom he was convinced was the equal of the apostles. In one of his ascetic writings he refers to him as "that most godly bishop and our father in God" (*De Virg.*, Intr.) (Quasten, 1986(3): 269), and in another place he says that Basil's soul was fashioned after God's image. Basil must have been truly great to be so extravagantly admired, not only by his brother but by Nazianzen; the latter's feelings for him were ambiguous, but he praised him for seeming to be covered with clouds like the wise men of the Old Testament (Florovsky, 1987c: 110).

As Basil later discovered, his brother was not cut out to be a cleric. Gregory was a poor financial administrator and was not firm with his congregants, though some of them left his church after he rebuked them. More seriously he would be forced to leave his see for a time and hide in the mountains of Pontus when he was threatened with imprisonment by the Arians (Drobner, 2007: 278).

Gregory revered his sister Macrina almost as much as he did Basil and called her his teacher. Macrina had entered a nunnery so as to remain faithful to her betrothed after he died at an early age, or rather she refused to consider further offers of marriage because her fiancé was, in view of the Resurrection, still alive (Krueger, 2004: 112). She invited lowly women to the nunnery who would have otherwise lived miserable lives. She was not incapable of doing good, but she was a forceful personality and it is not surprising that the equally forceful Basil does not mention her in his writings, though he acknowledged the spiritual help of his mother and grandmother (Basil the Great, 2009: 15). Macrina rebuked Gregory both for using a rhetorical turn of phrase and for complaining about how he had been persecuted by Valens (Pelikan, 1993: 15; Krueger, 2004: 121).

Gregory's own intensity, it would appear, came out less in his life than in his philosophy. He wrote a biography of Macrina and recorded a dialogue with her on her deathbed, of which the former is both more factual and more autobiographical. The biography was suggested by his acquaintance Olympius who had urged that Macrina's good deeds would not be forgotten with time, which was often the case with women in late antiquity (2004: 112). The point of the life was, as Gregory makes clear, thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) to God. He recalls Macrina reading Scripture and helping her mother raise the younger children. He says she reached true wisdom (*dia philosophias*) through virtue, speaks of her death as the crowning of the bride of Christ (Quasten, 1986(3): 275-276), and compares her to an angel, reflecting the Proto-Hesychastic mantra that the angel was the ascetic's heavenly counterpart (Krueger, 2004: 121-122; cf. Turner, 1990: 160, 182). A dream he had the night before he met the dying Macrina in Annisa displays his Proto-Hesychast mysticism. He was, he wrote, carrying relics of the martyrs in his hand and a light seemed to emanate from them (Krueger, 2004: 126). He and Macrina must have been close; she requested that he shut her eyes after her death which he did even though it turned out there was no need for him to do so. Gregory and a nun then covered her body with a dark robe (2004: 126).

His dialogue with Macrina, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, is the Christian answer to Plato's *Phaedo* but also to the *Symposium*, with Gregory playing Socrates to his sister's Diotima (Gregory of Nyssa, 1993: 11; Krueger, 2004: 113). In it is revealed that Macrina tried to conceal her difficulty breathing when she talked with Gregory and appeared cheerful only for his sake (Quasten, 1986(3): 261), but one should not view the dialogue as a verbatim transcript of their conversation though they probably touched on ideas found there. Gregory

maintains, against Origen, that the soul and the body have a single beginning. The soul goes to heaven or hell after death and yet somehow remains close to the body. God's nature as love is combined with the dark or apophatic mysticism of the Proto-Hesychasts, that is with an emphasis on what God is not.

Gregory was in attendance at the First Council of Constantinople (381) where he defended Nazianzen. The city was then surfeited with theology. "If you ask someone how many obols a certain thing costs," Gregory wrote, "he replies by dogmatizing on the born and the unborn. If you ask the price of bread they answer you, the Father is greater than the Son and the Son is subordinate to Him. If you ask is my bath ready they answer you, the Son has been made out of nothing" (*apud* Vryonis, 1970: 38). He can thus be pictured, far from a dour ascetic, buying food and other goods in the capital.

Gregory was progressive in regard to the question of sacred images which would lead to the Iconoclastic controversy, and recorded that he had read the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac many times without weeping but wept when he saw the story painted (Schaff, 2004(II, 14): 539). This again shows how seminal an influence the Cappadocians were on Orthodox theology. He went to Palestine to avert a schism and was shocked by the hatred of the religionists there. He afterwards claimed that one was no nearer to God in Palestine than in Cappadocia; there was no virtue in a hajj. Cappadocia was indeed viewed as a second holy land by Gregory and his spiritual family who had caught the significance of Christ's words that God's worshippers should worship Him in spirit and truth regardless of their locale (John 4:21-23). Cappadocia could, without much effort, become the Judean wilderness or, as it did for Gregory when he wrote his life of Moses, the Sinai peninsula. In his introduction to the life Gregory denied there was any worth in being born a Chaldean, as Abraham was, or in having lived, like Moses, in Egypt (*Vit. Moys.* 1.14) (Gregory of Nyssa, 1978: 32-33). In his expostulations against pilgrimages he exhibits a degree of heart mysticism which came into its own with the Proto-Hesychast Pseudo-Macarius: "The true Bethlehem, and Golgotha, and Mount of Olives, and Resurrection, are all found in the heart of the man who has God" (Florovsky, 1987c: 148).

Gregory outlived his fellow Cappadocians, and it is a testament to their renown and his that Theodosius chose him to preach the funeral orations after the deaths, in quick succession, of his daughter and wife (Drobner, 2007: 278). He had already preached one such sermon after the death of Melitius, the first chairman of the Council of Constantinople. The oration had opened with the imagery of gloom but concluded optimistically, making use of the metaphor of wine, wine which “makes glad the heart of man” (Psalm 104:15) (Wright, 2005: 185). In the oration he spoke of the goddess Envy, showing how hard pagan habits were to die out among the Christians (Schaff, 2004(II, 5): 513-514). Gregory appears to have spent much time in the capital towards the end of his life, taking part in three minor synods there. The last thing known about him is that he attended the last with Amphilochius of Iconium.

4.4.2 Works and Theology

Gregory’s writings are perhaps the most complete system of Christian philosophy before Aquinas (Hill, 2003: 73). His *Large Catechesis* was the most significant work of its kind since Origen’s *De Principiis* (an important sourcebook for Proto-Hesychasm) and was a predecessor to the theological writings of John of Damascus. Yet the church historian Socrates knew Nyssen mainly for his funeral orations and his treatise on the origin of man (*Hist. Eccl.* 4.26) (Schaff, 2004(II, 2): 111). With only a little exaggeration Hill (2003: 73) says that Gregory remains well-known today to only a few Orthodox priests. This statement reveals that the Cappadocians, like all the Proto-Hesychasts, are of interest chiefly to Eastern Orthodox readers.

Despite his important work for Christianity Gregory was the least biblical of the Cappadocians. One is not surprised to learn that when he received a letter from the pagan sophist Libanius, the teacher of Chrysostom, he called his friends together so he could read it aloud in their presence. His greatest non-Christian influences were Plato, Plotinus, and the Stoics (Quasten, 1986(3): 284). The ethics of his age was Stoic and its metaphysics Platonic. In only a hundred years Neoplatonism had completely permeated the culture; it was certainly well suited to the world-denying ethos that characterized Christianity and paganism alike during its age. Even Gregory’s occasional dependence on Aristotle was Neoplatonic; but, as in the case of Origen, he transmuted Plato’s thought to serve a Christian purpose. This view, it is only fair to say, is denied by Cherniss and even more radically by Apostolopoulos (*apud* Roth in Gregory of Nyssa, 1993: 11-12) who takes Gregory for a pagan philosopher who

disguised his thought with biblical quotations. Gregory's reason for doing this is said to have been fear. This is an unlikely hypothesis since non-Christian philosophy was publicly taught until the time of Justinian, and it tends to take Gregory away from the Proto-Hesychast milieu to which he indubitably belonged.

Gregory appears to have owed something to Syrian theology. He wrote an encomium of Ephrem the Syrian, reworked one of Pseudo-Macarius' writings, and may have been influenced by his older contemporary Eustathius of Antioch, even in his Christology. Like Eustathius he wrote on the title verses of the Psalms as well as on the witch of Endor against Origen, arguing, as Eustathius had, that the apparition the witch brought forth was not of Samuel but of a demon masquerading as Samuel (Quasten, 1986(3): 267). He resembles Eustathius when he speaks of Christ putting on the garb of servitude, though one should not push this point too far.

Gregory was the most ornate writer of the Cappadocians as Basil was the least. This attribute of his can be seen more in nineteenth-century than in contemporary translations. It is often hard to date his writings because he refers to himself as an old man as early as his thirties. Among his works is a regrettable inquiry into why some infants die young. His answer is that God can detect they will become wicked when they grow up, an answer that was probably not much comfort to the grieving parents (Jurgens, 1979(2): 57). His book on virginity which was requested by Basil and was indebted to a similar work by Basil of Ancyra, a former doctor, has already been mentioned (Quasten, 1986(3): 203). Gregory himself was not ignorant of what then passed for medicine and once attended a lecture in which a medical expert said the objective of medicine was to restore the original balance of the elements in the body.

Gregory's homilies on Ecclesiastes cover only the first three chapters, but they make for entertaining reading. He initially compares the Preacher (Solomon's alter ego) with Christ (*Hom. Eccl.* 1) (Wright, 2005: 193). The icons of Neo-Hesychast Russia that depicted Christ as a presbyter were indebted to Gregory's comparison. As was his custom his exegesis is allegorical but not when he discusses the life of Solomon. He portrays Solomon as more ascetic than he is portrayed in the scriptural accounts, but he claims he will not argue against his being involved in pleasure (*Hom. Eccl.* 3) (2005: 208).

Gregory gives five illustrations of the vanity or futility Solomon saw in life: a word made up for a joke but which has no meaning, children building sandcastles, archers shooting at stars, a man chasing the wind, and a runner running against his shadow or trying to stand on its head (*Hom. Eccl.* 1) (2005: 193). Solomon's planting vineyards results in a diatribe against wine, one of whose evils is that it causes excessive bonhomie. He deplores the king's arrogance and callousness when he says he bought male and female slaves as though they were herds of goats or pigs. He thinks Solomon gathered gold to warn people against evil by his own experience. One remarks Gregory's ineptness with money matters when he says that the one who buys bread with gold gets something useful in return for something useless. What is so praiseworthy about gold? he asks. Does anyone wish to be turned into gold—yellow, heavy, speechless, lifeless, and senseless? (*Hom. Eccl.* 4) (2005: 211). Yet his words are enlightening insofar as they attack greed.

Gregory's last writings were his best and most Proto-Hesychastic, namely the *Homilies on the Song of Songs* and the *Life of Moses* which is strictly speaking neither biographical nor exegetical. In the *Homilies* he writes ecstatically of the mystical life, a habit he had not learned from Philo or Origen but rather from Plotinus. He takes issue with Theodore of Mopsuestia's literal interpretation of the Song of Solomon and employs the Platonic word for love, *erōs*, explaining that he means for it to be a more intense form of *agapē* or Christian love. He appropriately makes use of the myth of Eros and Psyche and imbues it with dark mysticism: the heavenly Bridegroom comes to the soul at night, but He reveals nothing of Himself because one cannot see at night. For Gregory the Bridegroom does not even enter the room. To describe the mystical state he refers to sober drunkenness; Plotinus had also compared the vision of the One with drunkenness and in so doing combined the positive and negative approaches to God. Joseph ~~haza~~haya likewise prayed for his thoughts to be "inebriated with the commixture" of God's love (Brock, 1987: 356; cf. Pseudo-Macarius, *Hom.* 8.4; 1992: 82).

In the *Homilies* Gregory insists that God is beyond gender (Wright, 2005: xxvi). His concept of the deity was wholly intellectualistic like Origen's and would not have been appreciated by the Anthropomorphite monks of Egypt. The Bridegroom, he says, has neither color, form, quality, quantity, place, appearance, evidence, comparison, nor resemblance. He cannot be more Platonic than when he calls God the fountain of beauty whose emanation established all living beings (*Hom. Cant.* 13) (2005: 347).

Gregory referred to Basil as the Master, and in his writings on the Trinity he echoes him in his assertion that Peter, Paul, and Barnabas should be called one man rather than three, which is a rather extreme remark (Quasten, 1986(3): 286); but there was more unity in the divine than in the human analogy because, as Nazianzen had shown, the only distinction among the members of the Trinity was their relationships to one another. One also sees men involved in different pursuits and living in their own microcosms which is not the case with the persons of the Trinity (1986(3): 286). In his work on the Holy Spirit Gregory compares the three members of the Trinity to three lamps; the first imparts its light to the second and through the second to the third. His interest in the Spirit was paralleled by that of his fellow Cappadocians and prefigured the pneumatological trend of the Hesychasts.

Basil the Great often emphasized Proto-Hesychast dark mysticism, or the unknowability of God, and said that knowledge of God was knowledge precisely of His unknowability, an unknowability that inspires rather than hinders Christian worship. He believed that a Christian knows God's qualities of greatness, power, wisdom, and goodness but not, as the Anomoeans said, His essence. Basil had written against Eunomius' *Defense*, and Eunomius had replied with his *Defense of the Defense* which was in turn attacked by Gregory. Eunomius was so radically logical that Gregory invented a new logic to counter him (Moore, 2005: 85). He ironically referred to his opponent as "our omniscient friend" and noted that, in devoting a large part of his work to self-glorification, he rejected the scriptural injunction to let another man praise you and not your own mouth (Proverbs 27:2) (*Contra Eun.* 1; Wright, 2005: 165).

Gregory accepted Basil's opinion on the unknowability of God against the Anomoeans and distinguished between His essence and His activity. Basil had said that the Son's names showed His relationship to humanity but did not reveal His nature which was ineffable because divine. He even averred that no name was able to express God (Florovsky, 1987c: 90). Gregory went further: the names were human inventions and had no substantial reality. "We know that this Being exists, but there is no name which can completely comprehend its ineffable and infinite nature. If there is such a name we do not know it" (1987c: 161). God's essence is unknown because He is infinite and unlimited; Gregory was in fact one of the first fathers to stress God's infinity (Hill, 2003: 75). All that can be known about God is because of His actions among mankind; the designation "God" applies only to these actions. Gregory insisted that there was an unbridgeable divide between the Trinity and mankind which made

the Creator unfathomable to the creature. He was indescribable, “above any meaning that can be invested in a word” (*Contra Eun.* 1) (Jurgens, 1979(2): 52).

Likeness to God, and therefore the Proto-Hesychast concept of *theōsis*, was the object of the spiritual quest for Gregory as it had been in Plato’s *Theaetetus*, though Gregory probably owed more to Plotinus on this point than Plato (*Enn.* 6.9.11; *Theaet.* 176; cf. *Phaedr.* 248, 253) (Plotinus, 1991: 549; Plato, 2007: 530, 125, 127). It was made easier for the Christian than the philosopher because he knew that man is made in the image of God or, more precisely, according to the image of God since only Jesus Christ was the image of God. For Origen the image of God in man was primarily his soul (*nous*), but for Gregory it was not only his soul but his virtue (*aretē*). He rejected the Alexandrians’ distinction between image and similarity (*eikōn* and *homoiōsis*) in which the latter is dependent on the former but understood them as synonymous (*De Hom. Opif.* 5) (Quasten, 1986(3): 292). Some of the ways in which man was like God were his potential for purity, freedom from passion, blessedness, and alienation from evil. As in Neoplatonism like can be known only by like, the divine only by the divine (cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.9.11) (1991: 549). Gregory accepts the Platonic formula that the eye can behold rays of light because of the fact that light is part of its nature. There is a spark of divinity in man because he is made in God’s image which is why he can obtain union with God. Such union adumbrates the Hesychasts’ participation in the Taboric Light.

Gregory admits that the heart needs to be purified “from every creature and unruly affection” before one can see the divine nature in himself (*Hom. Beat.* 6) (Quasten, 1986(3): 294). He would have wholeheartedly endorsed this statement of Plotinus which has parallels with Stoic ethics: “Withdraw into yourself and look, and if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smoothes there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work” (*Enn.* 1.6.9) (Plotinus, 1991: 54). In his life of Moses Gregory (*Vit. Moys.* 2.316) (1978: 135) compares his reader to such a sculptor and urges him to carve the divine oracles in his heart.

Man’s being made in God’s image is often rendered useless because of the evil that surrounds him and adheres to him. It is the outside world, all things uncomely and broken, which drags the soul down rather than anything in the soul itself. The soul has the tendency to rise upwards even as the body is apt to sink downwards. Nyssen is more naive than the Middle Platonist Numenius for whom there was nothing good in creation (*apud Calcidius, Comm.*

Tim. 113ff.) (Dillon, 1996: 374). He acknowledges that one must continually fight against sin in order to achieve purification and dispassion (*apatheia*), but it lies within man's free will to choose for virtue, a fact which Christ had implied when He said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

Gregory's treatise on the origin of man was intended as a continuation of his brother's unfinished *Hexaemeron*, though it must be observed that Basil produced two homilies on the creation of man in rough manuscript (Basil the Great, 2005: 15). The treatise develops the teaching of Philo and Origen on the two Genesis accounts of creation which portray the creation first of the Form Man and then of the first two humans. Basil, by contrast, believed the first account concerned the divine image in man and the latter the human body or, at other times, what God created and how He created it (2005: 16). According to Gregory the creation of the Form (*idea*) took place in the second heaven, and since the Form was like God it was one. With the creation of the first two humans plurality and corporeality were introduced into the Form. Gregory's discussion of the second creation of mankind, like that of Plato's *Timaeus*, tends to accentuate the strangeness of the material world. The Form knows God's transcendence; the individual man, after the Fall, knows only His immanence.

Man essentially undergoes two falls, the first of which is not really a fall but which nonetheless adds to his rational soul what Plato had called his irrational soul, composed of the spirited and the libidinous (*thymikon* and *epithymētikon*). The Platonists believed that man shared the first with the lions and the second with the flies. Like Tertullian, Nyssen denies that this part of the soul is truly irrational. Tertullian's argument was that in Jesus, where the spirited and the libidinous took the form of indignation with the Pharisees and earnestly desiring to eat the Passover with His disciples, they acted in entire accordance with reason (*De Anim.* 16) (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(3): 195). Nyssen would agree with this, but he notes that the acquisition of an irrational soul paves the way for the passions which can occasion sins, what he calls vicious passions (*pathē kata kakian*) and which are observed in mankind after the Fall (*De Hom. Opif.* 18) (Armstrong, 1967: 451). In *The Soul and the Resurrection* he even speaks of the two irrational parts of the soul as warts growing out of the rational part, but it is for him the will, which acts on the passions, that is responsible for vice and virtue.

Gregory uses Plato's myth of the charioteer from the *Phaedrus* to show that the spirited and the libidinous are not in and of themselves evil (*Phaedr.* 253-256; *De Anim. et Res.* 61B) (Plato, 2007: 128-129; Armstrong, 1967: 451). The rational soul is the charioteer, and the two parts of the irrational soul (or, for the dichotomous Gregory, the two parts of the irrational part of the soul) are the two horses. The charioteer must be in control so that the spirited will lead to courage and the libidinous to aspiration for the divine and therefore to Proto-Hesychastic *theōsis*. He also uses the passage from Exodus 12 describing the first Passover and compares reason to the blood-stained lintel of the door and the spirited and the libidinous to the doorposts; the blood signifies faith in Christ (*Vit. Moys.* 2.96-98) (Gregory of Nyssa, 1978: 76-77).

Gregory wrote his own *Hexaemeron* which went against Basil, though in tribute to Basil he followed a literal interpretation of Scripture. In it he reinterpreted *ex nihilo* creation to mean God creating not out of nothing but out of Himself and stated that man's material nature accrued from the Fall. His disparagement of matter, also shown by his description of his dying sister being loosened "from the chains of the body" (Krueger, 2004: 122), would be rejected by the Hesychasts. He indulged in speculation about the four elements. The heaviest go to the center and the lightest to the circumference, a phenomenon which makes fire an intermediary between the sensible and intelligible worlds (*Apol.* 80D-81A) (Armstrong, 1967: 448).

As opposed to Basil, Gregory made the waters above the firmament the celestial intelligences which comprise the second heaven that has analogies to the Neoplatonic *Nous*; the third heaven is ineffable and contains beings that are the Forms of the intelligences. Man is the only creature who belongs to both the sensible and intelligible worlds and who can unite them in his own person, with little help from Christ other than an acceptance of His love and knowledge. This emphasis on human effort derives from the Stoics, but it does not prevent the Christian from being tongue-tied on reaching the second and especially the third heaven to which the apostle Paul was raptured (2 Corinthians 12:2) (*Apol.* 64D; 1967: 455). When Moses climbs the fiery mountain he is said to have ascended from the visible to the invisible where he saw divine things that the human understanding was powerless to reach. The life of Moses was for Gregory an illustration of the continual ascent towards God which frequently characterized his writings. Such ascent was not for all. He believed that Moses' fear on the fiery mountain was sympathetic fear because of his association with the children of Israel: he

was timid when he approached God in the presence of the people but bold when he stood before God alone (*Vit. Moys.* 1.45) (Gregory of Nyssa, 1978: 43).

4.4.3 The *Life of Moses*

The *Life of Moses* contains the fullest exposition of Gregory's mysticism, and it climaxes with Moses' experience of God on Sinai. It is not for nothing that Geanakoplos (1984: 179) calls Gregory one of the earliest exponents of mysticism in the Greek church. This incidentally validates the assertion of the present thesis that he was one of the earliest Proto-Hesychasts. As was customary for his time Gregory subtitles his work *On Perfection in Virtue*. In a similar manner Marinus would subtitle his life of Proclus *On Happiness*. Gregory's life has something in common with the haggadahs in stressing the miraculous and glossing over the immodest (Gregory of Nyssa, 1978: 5). There was hardly anything in early Christianity that did not in some way go back to Judaism; even its paintings stemmed from the paintings of less traditional synagogues (Sandmel, 1979: 142).

Gregory was forced to use the example of Moses since there were not many lives of the Christian saints, a defect he tried to remedy with his accounts of Ephrem the Syrian and Gregory Thaumaturgus. Christian biography had not yet developed into a genre but soon would in the capable hands of Jerome. Philo Judaeus had already written a life of Moses, and Clement of Alexandria had epitomized the Hellenistic Jewish traditions about him in his *Stromateis*; Moses was a figure known even to the Platonists Numenius and Iamblichus, the latter of whom called him Mochos (Origen, *Contra Cels.* 4.51; Iamblichus, *Vit. Pyth.* 14) (Dillon, 1996: 364-365, 143). But Gregory instigated the fascination with him within Proto-Hesychasm, as will be seen notably with Pseudo-Dionysius and Isaac of Nineveh.

He begins the work with a summary of Moses' life and passes on to its allegorical and mystical interpretation. The male and female children of the Hebrews, of whom Pharaoh wanted only the females spared, he equates with virtue and vice, an interpretation of the sexes common to Philo and Origen and one that is found in both the Pythagoreans and the Taoists (*Vit. Moys.* 2.2) (Gregory of Nyssa, 1978: 55; Burkert, 1972: 51, 471). Female readers will be more receptive to Philo's other comparison of the two parts of the irrational soul, the libidinous and the spirited, to the female and the male. Moses being nursed by his mother while brought up by Pharaoh's daughter serves as a warning for Gregory that if one is

involved in pagan learning he should not separate himself from the milk of the church, a warning that, as in the case of Nazianzen and the Hesychasts, does not rule out pagan learning. He states something similar in speaking of Zipporah's circumcision of her son: "There is something fleshly and uncircumcised in what is taught by philosophy's generative faculty; when that has been completely removed, there remains the pure Israelite race" (*Vit. Moys.* 2.39) (Gregory of Nyssa, 1978: 63). Gregory compares Aaron to an angel because he is older than Moses, as angels were created before men, but still his kinsman, as man's immaterial nature has kinship with the angels. It has already been seen that this Cappadocian belief harmonizes with the Hesychastic union with the Taboric Light. Aaron helps Moses in his divine task just as angels help the people of God fight against evil. Nyssen shares with Basil and Nazianzen the interest in angelology that would prove so decisive for the Proto-Hesychast Dionysius the Areopagite.

Theodicy plays some part in his work. He does not deny that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but the initial impulse away from God was of Pharaoh, not of God who sends men influences that either attract or repel them based on their inclination and free will. Evil is not the work of God but the work of sin (*Vit. Moys.* 2.86) (1978: 74). Gregory holds that the Egyptians did not truly experience darkness during the ninth plague but only thought they did since God makes His light shine on the just and the unjust alike. In any case the return of light after three days prefigures the final forgiveness of mankind.

Gregory does not think that God killed the firstborn of Egypt; this story was introduced only to show that one must destroy the first offspring of evil. He is somehow under the impression, perhaps with a memory of the massacre of the innocents, that the firstborn were children, a fact which explains his denial of their death (*Vit. Moys.* 2.91) (1978: 75). The Jews were told to eat the Passover with haste in order to bring out the transience of earthly existence. Philo (*Vit. Cont.* 7) (1981: 51) had earlier contrasted the repasts of the Therapeutae with those in Plato's dialogues which were adulterated by the presence of flute girls, dancers, and jugglers. Gregory contrasts the Jews' meal with the leisurely feasts of his day in which one wore flowing tunics. Unlike in the case of this latter meal the Jews were to have belts girded about their tunics, signifying that the pleasurable life must be drawn in as far as possible by reason, and they were to wear shoes which represented the ascetic life "which breaks and crushes the points of the thorns and prevents sin from slipping inside" (*Vit. Moys.* 2.107) (Gregory of Nyssa, 1978: 79).

Gregory highlights Moses' withdrawal from the world as a shepherd and his withdrawal from the Israelites into the darkness of Sinai, aspects which the more monastically minded Proto-Hesychast Gregory of Nazianzus would have been expected to bring out had he written a life of Moses. Moses initially sees God as light in the burning bush, but later, as he advances spiritually, he sees God as darkness. Even after seeing God in the cataphatic and apophatic senses, and even after his face shone so that he had to veil himself when he appeared before the children of Israel, Moses was still unsatisfied with his mystical experience and requested to see God's face (cf. Exodus 33:18; 34:29-35). God told Moses that he could not see His face and live, meaning that if one thinks God can be known he does not have life because, in his assumption that God can be known like any sensory object, he has turned from true being (*Vit. Moys.* 2.230-234) (1978: 114-115). God allowed Moses to see only His back in order to urge him to follow Him because one cannot follow someone he faces. It is only in following God, therefore, that the mystic can behold Him.

Gregory traces Moses' mystical progress (*epektasis*) on Mount Sinai thusly: he forsakes the Israelites at the foot of the mountain; he hears the sound of the trumpets; he enters the dark sanctuary of divine knowledge; and he passes on to the tabernacle not made with hands. This tabernacle, of which the earthly tabernacle was an image, encompasses the universe and is equated with Christ (*Vit. Moys.* 2.174) (1978: 98). One can profitably draw a parallel here with the Logos of Middle Platonism which was both a storing place for the Forms and a personalized entity, an idea that would be accepted with some reservations by the philosophical Proto-Hesychasts Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor.

On the passage in which Balaam unsuccessfully tries to curse Israel, Gregory writes that magic is unavailing against the virtuous and that any curse against them will redound to their blessing; later he identifies magic as the deceits of this world through which men are drugged as by Circe's philter (*Vit. Moys.* 2.316) (1978: 135). He treats of sexual immorality in the story of the Moabite women seducing the children of Israel but not in the story of the golden calf. He also refrains from discussing God's punishment of Moses for his anger with the Israelites, probably because, coming so late in his career, it would not fit the mold of perfection in virtue.

4.4.4 Mysticism and Universalism

It is time to treat Gregory's Proto-Hesychastic mysticism in more detail. The ascent to God, as has been seen, was for him an ascent of darkness, a phenomenon Origen had earlier commented on with reference to Psalm 18:11, though for Origen it was the illumination of the burning bush that more accurately described the mystical experience. For Nyssen the truer metaphor was darkness which symbolizes that God cannot be perceived with the senses. The closer the ascender comes to God the more he realizes that God cannot be perceived with the mind any more than he can with the senses. Gregory thus popularized dark mysticism in Proto-Hesychasm. He was in fact one of the first Christian writers to have a favorable attitude toward darkness, a concept he gleaned from Philo (Arthur, 2008: 9; Špidlík, 2005: 210, 216). The soul in the third heaven begins to realize that even the angels do not know God (cf. Brock, 1987: 353). When John the Evangelist said that no one has ever seen God (John 1:18) he meant that knowledge of God's essence is unattainable by men and angels alike. There is a radical fissure (*diastēma*) between God and His creation.

The soul finds God only in its inability to find Him, and there is therefore the need for faith which is beyond knowledge (*epignōsis*) (*Contra Eun.* 2) (Armstrong, 1967: 455). But for all its darkness the ascent to God is a kind of attainment. "Every desire towards the beautiful which draws us on in this ascent is intensified by the very progress towards the beautiful. And this is truly to see God: never to have this desire satisfied" (*Vit. Moys.* 2.238-239) (Esler, 2000(1): 588). The infinite progress toward God is because of God's infinite nature. The outwardly hopeless ascent to Him can be likened to the part the Arthurian knights took in the Grail quest: their quest was unsuccessful but was the most useful thing they had ever done.

Gregory thought of the works of Solomon as displaying the journey of the human soul, beginning with youth in Proverbs, going on to old age and death in Ecclesiastes, and attaining perfection in the Song of Solomon where Christ is the bridegroom and the Christian the bride. While the bride had been for Origen the church, for Nyssen it was the human soul, an interpretation not unknown to Origen (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 129). Gregory does not follow Origen on the preexistence of the soul, the transmigration of souls, or the possibility that material bodies were a punishment for sins committed in a preexistent life although, as in the case of Origen, the coats of skin God gives Adam and Eve are said to be a denser kind of materiality (*De Anim. et Res.* 10) (Gregory of Nyssa, 1993: 114).

There are no recurring worlds in Gregory as there are in Origen, but even Origen's worlds come to an end (Greer in Origen, 1979: 16). Quoting the apostle Paul that God's will was that all men should be saved, Gregory thought of the Last Judgment as less a judgment than a healing process; and while Basil had denied salvation to the unregenerate and Gregory of Nazianzus merely hoped for it, Nyssen believed in the final forgiveness of all men and even the demons, interpreting eternal punishment as long periods of time and insisting that hell was a place of purification rather than punishment. It has been seen that for Gregory evils can adhere to the soul, and it is the removal of these accretions which causes pain in the future punishment. He compares the phenomenon to gold being purified from admixtures in the fire or, in an apt but more labored metaphor, to a rope coated with dried mud being cleaned by dragging it through a narrow opening (*De Anim. et Res.* 7) (Gregory of Nyssa, 1993: 84).

In the eighth century the patriarch Germanus unsuccessfully tried to show that Gregory's universalism was due to Origenist interpolations, but the forgiveness of mankind permeates his writings and not only those on the apocatastasis (Quasten, 1986(3): 290). The non-Christian, because spirit, would experience the second death in order to be cleansed from the filthiness of the flesh before being restored to his Creator. The fires of hell represent the remorse of conscience (Moore, 2005: 96). God was Himself a fire who drew pure souls to Him and purified impure souls, in either case taking back that which originally came from Him. Gregory thereby prefigured the universalism of Isaac of Nineveh. In the afterlife humanity would be transformed into something divine; one can take this as the last word in Proto-Hesychastic *theōsis*. The resurrection body would be more spiritual than man's present body and would not have generative or digestive organs (*De Anim. et Res.* 10; cf. Barsanuphius, *Ep.* 607) (Gregory of Nyssa, 1993: 112, 114; Barsanuphius & John, 2007(2): 191). In its heavenly estate the soul would not become satiated with God, as in the case of Origen's preexistent minds, because there is in God an infinite sharing, something always new to be grasped or discovered (Pelikan, 1993: 317).

4.4.5 Conclusion

In this section have been described Hesychastic elements in the most mystical of the Cappadocians which helps advance the central theoretical argument that the Proto-Hesychasts' main function was in their capacity as precursors of Hesychasm. Campenhausen (2000: 116) states that there is even in Gregory's most original writings "a

veiled, remote, and sometimes ambiguous quality,” and, in so doing, he sums up the psychological ethos of Proto-Hesychasm. Gregory’s importance in the development of Proto-Hesychasm cannot be overstated. This includes (1) his use of darkness to describe the ascent to God, a concept only latent in Origen, which introduced a central image into the mystic conversation and one that would be opposed by the light mysticism of Pseudo-Macarius. Even Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite would not emphasize the imagery of darkness as much as Gregory, although he gladly took from him the principle of God’s unknowability as well as his belief in the liturgical power wielded by the Christian priest, a concept that was also known to Nazianzen (*Orat.* 2.22) (Schaff, 2004(II, 7): 209).

Other manifestations of Proto-Hesychasm apparent in Gregory are (2) his monasticism, (3) his interest in pneumatology, and (4) his refusal to repudiate pagan learning. His (5) stress on *theōsis* and likeness to God would play a large role in forming the Hesychastic mindset of union with the divine, and his comparison of the soul to an angel further facilitated this attitude. Gregory’s position on the ultimate divinization of man was as emphatic as anything in the Hesychasts, and his belief in the apocatastasis would find a place in the Proto-Hesychasm of the Syrian Isaac of Nineveh. It is another Syrian, Pseudo-Macarius, who will be the next focus of investigation.

5.0 PROTO-HESYCHASM IN PSEUDO-MACARIUS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will advance the central argument that the Proto-Hesychasts were important largely as precursors of Hesychasm. It will do this by meeting a secondary objective of the thesis, namely the verification of Hesychastic elements in the Syrian mystic Pseudo-Macarius and his epigones Diadochus of Photike and Mark the Monk. The chapter will proceed by an analysis of the milieu and thought of the mystics under discussion. Pseudo-Macarius is chosen because in him one is faced with an unsystematic thinker who was nonetheless to occupy a major role in the development of subsequent Proto-Hesychasm and Hesychasm. His light mysticism came into apparent conflict with the dark mysticism of Gregory of Nyssa, but both forms of mysticism would be accepted by the Hesychasts who also enthusiastically embraced Macarius' stress on the heart as man's spiritual center. Diadochus and Mark were the first to recognize the importance of Macarius' type of Proto-Hesychasm which had its origins in the Bible and Syrian theology.

5.2 Pseudo-Macarius: Towards the Hesychastic Light

5.2.1 Milieu

The fifty homilies composed by Pseudo-Macarius are the apotheosis of cenobitic spirituality in East Syria. The author's real name is unknown. Hermann Dörries (*apud* Maloney in Pseudo-Macarius, 1992: 7) with his usual impetuosity held that he was to be equated with the Messalian leader Symeon of Mesopotamia because of the fact that one of the Macarian writings bears the name of Symeon. That the author was named Symeon is supported by the fact that the Arabic translation (mistakenly) attributes his homilies to Symeon the Stylite. The identification of Pseudo-Macarius with Symeon of Mesopotamia is, however, overconfident. It cannot be ruled out that his followers called him *makarios* which means "blessed." The homilies were falsely ascribed to the desert father Macarius the Great as early as the sixth century. Their milieu fits neatly with the monastic mentality of Proto-Hesychasm which the present thesis has striven to ascertain.

Pseudo-Macarius was a moderate adherent of the Messalian heresy. Plested (2004) insists too strongly that he wrote against the Messalians, though it is possibly correct to say that he occasionally wrote to correct radical Messalian tendencies. The Messalians were known as Euchites; both the Syriac *mṣalī* and the Greek *euchomai* mean “to pray”; but the designation Euchite should be avoided because it also refers to a group that constituted a link in the development from Messalianism to Bogomilism. The Messalians were sometimes called Enthusiasts but called themselves Pneumatikoi which means Spiritual Ones. They were so fanatical about prayer that they ceased all labor because prayer, they thought, would give them *apatheia*, serenity and freedom from temptation. They believed prayer should be kept up without interruption, an idea which went back to the apostle Paul’s command to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and which would affect the Jesus Prayer of the Hesychasts. They also tended to deny that baptism was beneficial for spiritual progress.

The Messalians at one time boasted eighty members which they pointed out was the number of Solomon’s concubines in the Song of Solomon (6:8). The ninth-century polymath Photius records as Messalian leaders Adelphius, Sabbas the Eunuch, another Sabbas, Eustathius of Edessa, Dadoes, and Symeon (2004: 20). According to Theodoret, Adelphius informed Flavian of Antioch, who had deceitfully drawn him out, that by prayer alone they could replace their indwelling demon with the Holy Spirit who not only administered liberation from sin but gave them the gift of prophecy (*Hist. Eccl.* 4.10) (Schaff, 2004(II, 3): 114-115). The Messalians’ emphasis on the Spirit would significantly be echoed by the Hesychasts, and it is not surprising to discover that Gregory Palamas would at one point be accused of Messalianism (Meyendorff in Gregory Palamas, 1983: 4).

The Messalians spent much time sleeping since they thought their dreams had the character of prophecy; they claimed to be able to see both the Trinity and evil spirits. They were not mentioned as having any books at the Council of Side (390) but as possessing them at the Council of Ephesus (431) which condemned Messalianism as a “filthy heresy” despite the fact that its chairman, Cyril of Alexandria, sympathized with the group; Cyril’s enemy John of Antioch accused him of crowding the council with Messalians from Pamphylia (Plested, 2004: 22). Because of the two councils the Macarian literature is often taken to have been composed between 390 and 431, but an earlier date is probable (2004: 13-14). If the *Asketikon* is the work of Macarius, one can understand why Cyril, with his interest in *theōsis*, was amenable to it (cf. Elowsky, 2006: 32; 2007: 257; Russell, 2004: 191-204).

Colless (2008: 58) notes that the Messalians were not as heretical as their enemies made them out to be. When they said that a demon (*šī'da*) dwelled in their heart they probably meant that evil dwelled there rather than that it was the abode of a literal demon (cf. Arabic *šidda*, “violence”). Many of the things said about them were distortions of their thought and sometimes outright lies. The heresiologist Epiphanius spoke of pagan and Christian Messalians and incautiously tried to link them. Ephrem the Syrian claimed they lived in debauchery (Plested, 2004: 17). Others alleged that they held the cross in horror, refused to honor the saints, mutilated and perjured themselves, dissolved marriages, and possessed a community of women for sexual purposes (Florovsky, 1987a: 151; cf. Chadwick & Oulton, 1954: 45).

According to the Council of Constantinople of 426, the Messalians permitted women to serve as clergy (Elm, 1994: 194). This harkens back not only to charismatic groups like the Montanists but to the “bisexual” nature of Homoiousian asceticism, exemplified, for instance, by Eustathius of Sebaste. Radical Messalians and radical Eustathians tended to merge (1994: 212), hence the Syriac *Book of Steps* has been variably labeled Eustathian or Messalian.

Pseudo-Macarius clearly belongs in an East Syrian milieu. He speaks of the northern part of the rivers freezing over which rules out an Egyptian environment. He refers to the endemic war between the Roman and Persian Empires, probably in his case the cycle closing with the death of Julian the Apostate (Plested, 2004: 13). The only river he names is the Euphrates, and his Greek contains many Aramaisms. He uses the Syrian names of the months of the year, quotes from the Diatessaron and the Syrian pseudepigraphal writings, and resembles in his poetic style Ephrem the Syrian and Aphrahat the Persian Sage (2004: 14).

Macarius sometimes presents the Holy Spirit as Rachel, the true mother. The Holy Spirit was feminine in both Manichaeism and the Syrian Gnostic *Hymn of the Pearl*. Syrian theology, as Hunt, with a touch of feminism, notes (2004: 233), overflowed with images of motherhood and gestation to describe the Spirit’s work. Both the Syriac and Hebrew words for “spirit”—*rûḥā* and *rûaḥ*—were feminine (Pseudo-Macarius, 1992: 7), but this fact did not necessarily imply feminine gender. Macarius occasionally spoke of the Holy Spirit as the bridegroom of the soul, and John the Venerable wrote in the eighth century, “Your Spirit is also styled Genetrix . . . in that he has engendered all into this world” (Plested, 2004: 44;

Colless, 2008: 168).

In addition to his Syrian orientation Macarius employs Latinisms, probably not because he had been a soldier but, the present writer suggests, because he had spent time in imperial administration, as could be illustrated by his knowledgeable description of kings, courts, and even the mint: the fallen human soul, deprived of the king's stamp, is said to lose honor and value in the same way that a coin which does not bear the emperor's image is not circulated (Florovsky, 1987a: 156). No monastic writer before Macarius uses the legal term *enklēma* for the charge against fallen man. This also serves to place him in a previous official and possibly legal capacity.

Unlike the more extreme Messalians, Pseudo-Macarius did not abuse the sacraments or church authorities, nor did he condemn sloth. He was also not opposed to the body, and his mysticism did not transcend rational thought or discourse. Like Basil the Great he addressed his monks as Christians rather than monks so he was close to the inclusiveness of the Hesychasts. Basil's ninth chapter from his treatise on the Holy Spirit was especially revered by Macarius, and there was possibly mutual influence. Basil respected the Messalians' Proto-Hesychast emphasis on the Spirit but was wary of their hostility to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, an attribute he strove against in his recommendation of cenobitic over anchoritic monasticism which seems to have had much in common with the antisocialism of the Cynics.

Gregory of Nyssa liked what he saw in the unsophisticated but deeply spiritual monasteries of Syria and was conspicuously absent at the Council of Side (390) which was presided over by Amphilochius of Iconium with whom he was otherwise known to attend synods. It is probable that he rewrote the second half of Pseudo-Macarius' *Great Letter* to form his own *De Instituto Christiano*. That this work is different in style from his other works shows that it was he, or a disciple, who was dependent on Macarius and not the other way around as was once assumed (Pseudo-Macarius, 1992: 10-11). Canévet, something of a black sheep in this area, denies that *De Instituto Christiano* is Nyssenian (*apud* Plested, 2004: 51). It must be admitted, in Canévet's favor, that Gregory's admiration for Pseudo-Macarius is perplexing in view of the latter's preference of light mysticism to dark mysticism. Nonetheless, against Canévet, Macarius' Messalian milieu has several points of analogy to the Homoiousian asceticism that was part of Gregory's background. The present writer would argue that it was not so much Macarius' message that moved Gregory as his own enthusiasm for the Syrian

ascetics, as glimpsed in his *In Suam Ordinationem* (cf. 2004: 54).

Macarius was an unsystematic but not inconsistent thinker. Some of his homilies contain the questions of his monks and his replies. As in the case of Plotinus, his students' questions helped crystallize his thought (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 13) (Plotinus, 1991: cxii). In a very discrete way he gives information about his spiritual experiences and so emulates the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 12:2). The sign of the cross once appeared to him as light and plunged itself deep into his inner man. Another time, when he was praying, he fell into a trance and found himself before the altar where three loaves of leavened bread were offered him, and the more he ate the greater were the number of the loaves (*Hom.* 8.3) (Pseudo-Macarius, 1992: 81). He once put on a splendid robe and was transfigured in a manner that is reminiscent of the transfiguration of the Neo-Hesychast Seraphim of Sarov (Hill, 2006: 371). These visions seem to have affected his metaphysics. He pictures angels, demons, and human souls as having "subtle bodies." The soul's subtle body is similar both to an angel and to one's physical form. Macarius' view of the soul as a subtle body may indicate traces of Stoicism (Plested, 2004: 34), but this was a position shared by the Proto-Hesychast Gregory of Nazianzus who was anything but Stoically inclined. Plested (2004: 35), who draws the reader's attention to the parallel with Stoicism, himself observes that Macarius calls the soul bodiless and describes it by such adjectives as "well-winged," "light," and "swiftly moving" (*eupteros, elaphros, eukinētos*). The soul's subtle body, then, would have less in common with Stoicism than with the Platonic *ochēma*, the soul's vehicle which became, in later Platonism, its passionate envelope (Dillon, 1996: 376).

5.2.2 Thought

If the divine darkness introduced to Proto-Hesychasm by Gregory of Nyssa was a bad thing Macarius immediately came to the rescue. While he accepted the legitimacy of the apophatic approach to God, this did not lead in him to the use of images of darkness. Although Plested (2004: 69) opines that he may not have known of Nyssen's development of the theme of darkness, it seems unlikely he would have been affected by it if he had. He repeatedly describes God in terms of light and fire and stresses not the darkness of Sinai but the light that shone in Moses' face, the fire of the burning bush, and the fire which caught up Elijah from the earth. In Hebrew thought, which is always relevant in a Syrian environment, fire (*'ēš*) was often placed in close proximity to light (*'ôr*), itself a symbol of Yahweh's salvation (Jenni &

Westermann, 1997(1): 64; McKenzie, 1968: 177). Fire was the parallel and counterpart of light. It was Yahweh's servant, a sign of His presence, and the medium through which the saint traveled to heaven (Propp, 1999: 222). Fire mysticism was known to Macarius' contemporaries. Abba Arsenius was once seen by a monk to be "entirely like a flame"; Abba Sisoies died in a fiery radiance; and when someone asked Abba Joseph what he had to do to be saved, he stretched out his glowing fingertips toward heaven and said, "If you will, you can become all flame" (Symeon the New Theologian, 1995-95, iii: 99-100).

Although one does not wish to draw too strong of a parallel between Macarius and the Gnostics, and therefore to confuse Christianity with Gnosticism, light and fire mysticism were certainly used by the latter, often with reference to Jesus. Light mysticism is encountered notably in *Pistis Sophia*:

There came forth after it a great power of light, giving a very great light, and there was no measure to its accompanying light, for it came forth from the Light of Lights, and it came forth from the last mystery, which is the 24th mystery from within outwards, these which are in the ranks of the second space of the First Mystery. That light-power, however, came down upon Jesus and it surrounded him completely as he was sitting at a distance from his disciples, and he gave light exceedingly, there being no measure to the light which was his. And the disciples did not see Jesus because of the great light in which he was, or which was his, for their eyes were darkened because of the great light in which he was (*Pis. Soph.* 1.2) (Schmidt, 1978: 9-11).

Fire mysticism is prominent in the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas* where Jesus, or Thomas, utter the following statements: "I have thrown fire upon the world, and look, I am watching it until it blazes." "He who is near me is near the fire, and he who is far from me is far from the kingdom." "If I tell you one of the sayings he spoke to me, you will pick up rocks and stone me, and fire will come from the rocks and consume you" (10, 82, 13) (Meyer, 2007: 140, 150, 141).

Macarius makes much use of the imagery of the lamp and the candle, and, as in the case of Abba Joseph, states that the Christian can become fire. God draws near to him not only in contemplation but in an unapproachable glory of light (Florovsky, 1987a: 164). Fire is also related to the Proto-Hesychast concept of *penthos*. In one of his most succinct discussions of fire Macarius calls tears that are shed in the knowledge of the truth "precious pearls" (*Hom.* 25.8) (Pseudo-Macarius, 1992: 163). At the resurrection all things will become light, but Macarius does not envision the extinguishment of the individual personality. He was not as

enthralled to Platonism as Nyssen and emphasized both God's transcendence and immanence. One can find God in the depths; one can find Him in the lions' den guarding Daniel; one can find Him in the fire accompanying the three children; one can find Him on the mountain with Moses and Elijah; and one can find Him in oneself (*Hom.* 12.12) (1992: 101-102).

Macarius was the father not only of light mysticism but of heart mysticism in Proto-Hesychasm. By heart he meant something similar to the English word "conscience," but he meant much else besides. The heart is the unconscious, the home of the intellect, and the place where man meets God. He thus takes over some of the Old Testament understanding of the heart (*lēb*) which placed it as the seat not only of the emotions but of the intellect (1992: xv). This understanding of the heart as the center of the human person was shared by Aristotle, the Stoics, and Cicero but not by Plato for whom there was a basic difference, still discernible in Western culture, between the head and the heart (Chryssavgis, 2004: 79).

Macarius envisions three stages of growth in the Christian heart and so reflects Syrian theology which often thought in terms of a threefold progression. Examples of tripartite structures in Syrian Christianity, as Healey demonstrates (in Hill, 2006: 112), could be enumerated indefinitely. In the Gnostic *Hymn of the Pearl* the first man falls by losing his robe, that is his celibacy; there follows the age of the old man and then the age of the new man whose robe is returned through baptism. There is a like scheme in Ephrem the Syrian who employs the figures of the wood of the tree of knowledge, the wood of Noah's ark, and the wood of the cross; one brought about Adam's death, another Noah's salvation, and the third life through Jesus Christ.

There is a tripartite injunction in Philoxenus of Mabbug, namely ascetic practice, the keeping of the commandments, and virtue (Colless, 2008: 75). There are for Simon Taibutheh three stages in the spiritual ascent: the exodus from Egypt, mountains and darkness, and the plain of serenity (2008: 87); and for Joseph ~~h~~zzaya three stages as well: the stage of the body (*pagrānūthā*), the stage of the soul (*napsānūthā*), and the stage of the spirit (*rūhānūthā*) (Brock, 1987: 314-315). Tripartite structures are obviously indebted to the Trinity, but there is clearly something about the number three which corresponds to the human mind as is evident from the three initial hypostases of Middle and Neoplatonism and the view of the

Pythagoreans that three represented wholeness (Burkert, 1972: 467; cf. Hillyer, 1992: 19).

The three stages of growth in Macarius' heart are, first, when it lies under the domain of evil; second, when it is indwelt by the quarreling spirits of sin and grace; and finally, when its sin has been cast out by the Holy Spirit, a process which he sometimes terms deification (Pseudo-Macarius, 1992: xiii). Most of the time the heart is in its second ambiguous stage. "The heart is but a small vessel," he writes, "yet dragons are there, and there are also lions; there are poisonous beasts and all the treasures of evil. There also are rough and uneven roads; there are precipices. But there too is God, the angels, the life and the Kingdom, the light and the apostles, the heavenly cities and the treasures of grace—all things are there" (*Hom.* 43.7) (1992: xvi). There are infinite depths to the heart: reception rooms, bedrooms, doors, antechambers, offices, exits, death and life, righteousness and unrighteousness.

The less sinister aspects of the heart are indicative of the possibility of Proto-Hesychast *theōsis*, as is their own bright nature. He describes the soul, largely equated by him with the heart, as "shining all round like a bright pearl or precious stone." This parallels the two Gregories' understanding of the human soul having kinship with the angelic realm and additionally correlates with Evagrius' comparison of the soul's light with the divine *š'kînâ*, the dwelling of God on the earth (cf. Arabic *sakana*) (Plested, 2004: 69).

Macarius did not think that original sin was completely cleansed in baptism and so was not as naive as his joyful writings seem to suggest. This was a Messalian trait and runs, muted, through Proto-Hesychasm like a stream within a stream. Philoxenus of Mabbug would reject Macarius' downplaying of baptism which was for him the new birth though he acknowledged that the wetness of the water did not linger with the baptized as the baptism of the Spirit did (Hill, 2006: 112; Brock, 1987: 112). In Macarius baptism is only the first step in the Christian's invisible warfare (*aoratos polemos*). It is mainly a pledge (*arrabōn*) which, like the evangelic *mina*, needs to be worked with in order to obtain profit (Luke 19:13-25) (Plested, 2004: 88). There is a parallel here with his great admirer and opposite Gregory of Nyssa who wrote that in the case of those who were unrepentant "the water remains water, since the gift of the Holy Spirit is nowhere manifested in what has taken place" (Alfeyev, 2000a: 89). Nothing is more necessary in invisible warfare for Macarius than the Spirit's attempts to renew the image of God in the Christian. These attempts can properly be regarded as reflective of Proto-Hesychast *theōsis*, but sanctification does not completely take effect

until the resurrection, a fact which Symeon the New Theologian would seem to have been at odds with.

By prayer the believer gains the grace of the Spirit which, when all is said and done, is more valuable than the sacrifice of Christ. Macarius allows some of his ascetics to dedicate themselves solely to prayer. The monk's responsibility is prayer just as the farmer's is farming, the merchant's his business, and the married man's his wife. The beginning and end of effective prayer was, not unexpectedly, quietude or tranquillity (*hēsychia*). The concept of *hēsychia* can be better understood by remembering that for Pindar it was keeping to one's own, and that the Neo-Hesychast Nil Sorsky's translation of the word, *bezmolvie*, contained the idea of no disturbance or agitation (Wade-Gery, 1932: 224; Nil Sorsky, 2003: 24).

Macarius' anthropology should now be inquired into more closely since he sometimes distinguishes the function of the intellect within the heart to the extent that they tend to become dichotomous, the heart in such cases being synonymous with the soul. Employing a hoary metaphor from the *Phaedrus*, he states that the intellect "drives" the heart as the charioteer drives his chariot (*Phaedr.* 253-256; *Hom.* 15.34) (Plato, 2007: 128-129; Pseudo-Macarius, 1992: 121). The intellect is the center of the heart as the pupil is the center of the eye. As both the director and center of the heart, it bears somewhat the same relationship to it that the Plotinian One bears to the Nous (Plotinus, 1991: xci). Yet even the intellect is not above suspicion; Macarius speaks un-Platonically of this entity as "bestial, wild, and material" (Plested, 2004: 36).

In addition to the heart should be distinguished the evil in man which is like a second soul joined to the rational soul. In a similar manner the Middle Platonist Numenius posited two rational souls in every man, one of which was evil and was like the apostle Paul's "old man" which dwells in one's members and wages war against the law of the mind (Romans 7:23) (Frs. 43-44; Dillon, 1996: 448-449; cf. Eckhart, *Comm. Ex.* 214; 1986: 110-111). Macarius' grim view of evil, which he shares with this unorthodox Platonist, was perhaps a holdover from Manichaeism which was still prevalent in Mesopotamia; but unlike the Manichaeans he did not equate evil with matter, and in fact did so less than Gregory of Nyssa who was not formally against matter. He was more biblical than Gregory and was a forerunner, with Maximus the Confessor, of the Hesychasts' integrated way of viewing matter and spirit, a situation Hill (2003: 121-122) has discerned in Gregory Palamas.

Your heart, Macarius bluntly tells his reader, is a tomb and a sepulcher, and the powers of Satan walk about in it (*Hom.* 11.11) (Pseudo-Macarius, 1992: 95). This coheres with the Gospel's allegation that from the heart proceed evil thoughts and adulteries (Matthew 15:18-19). The divine image in man is covered by a thick veil or fog, and only a part of the soul is ever touched by divine grace. Satan wraps the soul in sin as in a "purple robe of darkness" (Florovsky, 1987a: 157; cf. Mark the Monk, *Ep. Nich.* 12.2; Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 158-159). Here one sees evidence both of Macarius' knowledge of royalty, admittedly a commonplace knowledge, and his distaste for darkness.

Every sin of the Christian can be compared to a betrothed queen committing fornication. The greatest of the saints cannot completely forgo sin and pride, though David came close to perfect humility when he wrote, "I am a worm and not a man" (Psalm 22:6). Those who received visions could lapse terribly into sin, and the one who had surrendered to the Holy Spirit and was drunk with heavenly things could turn to evil (cf. Alfeyev, 2000b: 69). This is reminiscent of the Proto-Hesychast Symeon the Pious' statement that the monk could attain the light yet later fall into sin (Turner, 1990: 183). Even the apostles were capable of wrongdoing: Peter needed to be corrected by Paul, and Paul entered into such a violent argument with Barnabas that the two had to part company (*Hom.* 27.10) (Pseudo-Macarius, 1992: 178). Macarius had personal knowledge of ascetics and miracle-workers who had gone bad. He knew of a rich man who had sold all his wealth but sank into dissipation, and of a confessor of a Roman or Persian persecution whose eyelids had been burned away but who came to accept and covet money. He also knew of a man who had been tortured and cast into prison where he was served by a nun who admired him for his witness for the faith until the two fell into fleshly lust (*Hom.* 27.14-16) (1992: 180).

To a degree the Christian can choose his destiny. Prostitutes and tax collectors want to enter the kingdom of heaven, and it is only the effort that must be expended, the weeding out of the thorns and thistles of the heart, which turns them away. It lies in man's power to become a son of God or a son of perdition. Humans are more paradoxical than animals. A serpent spews poison; a wolf is rapacious; a lamb is a prey to marauders; a dove is guileless; but a man can be either rapacious or the victim of marauders, either an adulterer or one who does not allow himself to look at a woman lustfully (*Hom.* 15.24-25) (1992: 117).

Macarius' belief in free will, though real, has been exaggerated by Florovsky which is to be expected from an Orthodox scholar (cf. Clendenin, 2003: 190-192). He does this largely by focusing on the importance of free will to Macarius with a concomitant minimization of the role of divine grace in his theology (Florovsky, 1987a: 154-155). Macarius certainly stresses free will, but he equally emphasizes original sin and divine grace. His view of humanity is sterner than Gregory's, but he gives the illusion of being more optimistic. He speaks of Jesus as "paradise, tree of life, pearl, crown, builder, cultivator, sufferer, one incapable of suffering, man, God, wine, living water, lamb, bridegroom, warrior, armor, Christ, all in all" (*Hom.* 31.4) (Pseudo-Macarius, 1992: 195). His thought breathes a spirit of goodwill toward men which accepts the ugly and the deformed, the sinner and the prostitute, the Greek and the Jew.

"After I received the experience of the sign of the cross," he writes, "grace now acts in this manner. It quiets all my parts and my heart so that the soul with the greatest joy seems to be a guileless child. No longer am I a man that condemns Greek or Jew or sinner or worldling. Truly, the interior man looks on all human beings with pure eyes and finds joy in the whole world. He wishes to reverence and love all Greeks and Jews" (*Hom.* 8.6) (1992: 83). This passage forcefully looks forward to the Hesychasts' extolment of compassion and so helps to establish Macarius as a Proto-Hesychast. He goes on to describe the opening of doors to the compassionate mystic and his entrance into many mansions (cf. John 14:2). The further he enters, the more mansions he discovers and the richer he becomes. Russell (2004: 244) aptly contrasts the never-ending progress (*epektasis*) discerned here with that of Gregory of Nyssa. In the latter the progress is from light into darkness; in Macarius it is towards an ever increasing perception of divine light.

Those who are thoroughly penetrated by the Holy Spirit want to embrace the whole human race, both the good and the wicked; such souls are the most like Christ. The Christian should not judge prostitutes, sinners, or riotous persons. He is rather to think of them as spiritually whole, even if they are not, just as he is to think of those who are crippled as physically whole. Macarius thereby anticipates the Proto-Hesychast Isaac of Nineveh's advice that one should attribute good things even to wicked men (*De Perf. Rel.* 5.86) (1998: 98). At the same time he is to look at the world as though its evil were a thing beyond him, just as a three-year-old might view the pyrotechnics of a professional dialectician (*Hom.* 15.26) (Pseudo-Macarius, 1992: 118).

Though Macarius addresses all Christians he thinks, as the Hesychasts would, particularly in terms of monastics who have detached themselves from temporal things. Those who have refused to do so are like someone who goes to fetch things out of a burning house, or someone at sea who refuses to take off his clothes and swim to safety. The best reason Macarius can give for becoming an ascetic is that what God offers man is what a king offers who invites a commoner to feast at his royal banquet, or what a fair maiden offers who takes a beggar for her husband, clothes him in resplendent robes, and places a jeweled crown on his head. Such a Christian will be to God what a bevy of maidens without blemish or reproach are to a king, and his affection for his Lord is like the affection of a woman espoused to a man, a woman who brings all her possessions and her dowry and puts it into his hands with the words, “I have nothing of my own. All that I possess is yours. Both my dowry is yours and my soul as well as my body is yours” (*Hom.* 32.9) (1992: 200).

5.2.3 Conclusion

This section has met a secondary objective of the thesis by establishing a Hesychastic mentality in Pseudo-Macarius and thereby advances the central argument that the Proto-Hesychasts were important largely as precursors of Hesychasm. All subsequent Eastern Orthodox discussion of (1) the divine light and (2) the heart can be attributed to Macarius. He was a towering figure in Orthodoxy and of extreme importance in the formation of Hesychasm. He introduced the Taboric light into Orthodox mysticism, the light that Christ had burned with when He stood with His disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. The thesis will discover his light mysticism engaging in amicable controversy with Gregory’s dark mysticism and finally triumphing over it, although not completely. Equally prominent in his Proto-Hesychasm were (3) his monasticism, (4) his pneumatology, (5) his praise of compassion, and (6) his use of the word *hēsychia* for tranquillity.

Macarius’ (7) subscription to the idea of *theōsis* can be shown by his talk of the Spirit’s attempts to renew the image of God in the Christian. Although he did not emphasize the humanity of Christ, he did not ignore the material aspect of man’s nature. He placed (8) a certain stress on *penthos*, weeping for one’s sins, but not as much as subsequent Proto-Hesychasts would. His Messalian milieu and (9) emphasis on unceasing prayer anticipated the Jesus Prayer of the Hesychasts.

Macarius left an indelible stamp on Proto-Hesychasts as diverse as Dionysius the Areopagite, Isaac of Nineveh, Mark the Monk, Diadochus of Photike, and such marginal figures as Joseph Hazzaya and John the Venerable. Joseph would postulate five signs of the Holy Spirit's operation, the first three of which are properly speaking Macarian, namely love for God which burns the mystic's heart like fire, humility (again with reference to Psalm 22:6), and compassion which is accompanied by *penthos* (Colless, 2008: 27-30). Macarius' spirit extended well beyond the Proto-Hesychasts. Gregory Palamas, the Hesychast par excellence, was instrumental in making his homilies required reading in the monasteries of Mount Athos, and John Wesley was affected by his theology of the heart (Chadwick, 2001: 414; Pseudo-Macarius, 1992: xi).

5.3 Macarius' Epigoni

Macarius' influence was first felt by Mark the Monk and Diadochus of Photike who transferred it to John Climacus, and this despite the fact that Diadochus disliked Macarius' concept of the Christian being unsure of his final salvation (Chadwick, 2001: 413). Diadochus drew much inspiration from Macarius' inward fire, and Mark sought recourse in his technique of unceasing prayer as a weapon against the passions. In both of the epigones is encountered the metaphor of violence (cf. Matthew 11:12) which would be passed on to the ascetic school of Gaza.

5.3.1 Diadochus of Photike

Diadochus was a signer of a letter in 457 from the bishops of Epirus to the emperor Leo I after the murder of the Alexandrian patriarch Proterius. His name is often paired with Mark the Monk's, and both writers were given to Symeon the New Theologian to read by his spiritual father. Diadochus was probably an abbot or hegumen which meshes with this paper's theory of Proto-Hesychasm's monastic slant. He was likely taken to Carthage at the end of his life by Gaiseric's Vandals (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 651). It was once thought that Evagrius was the main force behind his thought, but it is now known that this was Macarius (2005(2): 652). According to the usually cautious and credible Plested, he may have been introduced to the Macarian tradition by a direct disciple of Macarius who is described as a priest who loved God greatly yet grieved because he did not love him as much as he wished, and who is quoted as longing to leave the body because of his love for God (*On Spiritual Knowl.* 13, 91)

(Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 256, 289). This makes more sense than the claim of the indefatigable Dörries (*apud* Plested, 2004: 173-174) that the priest was Macarius himself.

Diadochus wrote a *Vision* which exhibits the Proto-Hesychastic technique of *erōtapokriseis*, John the Baptist in this case being the answerer. Its angelology anticipates that of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite (Quasten, 1986(3): 513). The work that is most pertinent for the present study is his hundred chapters, really paragraphs, *On Spiritual Knowledge*. The use of chapters stemmed directly from the pagan *Sentences of Sextus* which were popular in Christian communities and had been ushered into the monastic world by Evagrius. The technique was a characteristic one in Proto-Hesychasm and was employed not only by Diadochus but by Mark the Monk, Maximus the Confessor, Symeon the New Theologian, and Nicetas Stethatos among others (Mark the Monk, 2009: 91). It bore some kinship to the Ancient Near Eastern proverb and the Heraclitean aphorism.

Diadochus' chapters are said, by Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware (1979(1): 251), to be beautiful but not easy to grasp. Like Nyssen he places stress on man's being created in the image of God. He distinguishes between knowledge obtained from God mystically, and wisdom which is the ability to speak of divine things and is gleaned from a knowledge of the Scriptures. Relevant for the present purpose is his recommendation of short prayers such as "Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 12:3) which foreshadows the Jesus Prayer of the Hesychasts. The name of Jesus burns up "all the filth which covers the surface of the soul" (*On Spiritual Knowl.* 59) (1979(1): 270). The more one is energized by the Spirit the more he prays in his heart alone and without speech. Not unrelated to this is his remark that loquaciousness is to be avoided even if the conversation contains nothing evil.

The light and heart mysticism of Pseudo-Macarius are equally apparent in the chapters. The Holy Spirit is a protecting light which illuminates the shrine of the heart. The intellect that is energized by the divine light becomes translucent and sees its own light vividly (*On Spiritual Knowl.* 40) (1979(1): 265). But Diadochus warns against non-Christian visions of the light and states that, because of the deceit of the demons, God will not condemn anyone for not ascribing a vision to Him even if it originates from Him. Visions are not as critical as the perception of God's love in the heart. He allows for visions of the light while maintaining that physically perceptible visions are false. This would tie in with the Hesychasts' insistence that they could see God only with their spiritual sight.

Diadochus' opinions on dreams seem to have been influenced by Pseudo-Macarius and Athanasius' *Life of Anthony* (Plested, 2004: 146). As they were for Plato and the Stoics, dreams are a barometer of one's spiritual life (*On Spiritual Knowl.* 37) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 264). Good dreams result in *penthos*. He is aware of the psychological phenomenon of displacement in which a subject replaces another in a dream (Domhoff, 2003: 137) and of the evaporation of this phenomenon, as when soldiers reveal themselves as demons. Dreams in which one character is transformed into another are demonic and distressing. Even good dreams do not always bring happiness to the soul but rather "a sweet sadness" (*On Spiritual Knowl.* 37) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 264). He also puts forward a theory of dreams more in keeping with the modern scientific view of them: they are images reflecting the mind's wandering daytime thoughts (*On Spiritual Knowl.* 38) (1979(1): 264). There are for him two kinds of demons; the subtle ones attack the soul while the others enslave the flesh through lasciviousness. This can be compared to the Middle Platonist Apuleius' theory that there were gloomy, joyful, and clamorous demons whose feasts reflected their various proclivities (*De Deo Soc.* 14; cf. Xenocrates, *Is. et Os.* 316B; *Def. Or.* 417C) (Dillon, 1996: 318-319, 32).

Diadochus sometimes strikes a novel note. The monk is not to despise any food, though he is to practice asceticism in matters of diet since this will keep in check "the excitable parts" of his body (*On Spiritual Knowl.* 43) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 266). Wine taken in moderation is permissible, but aperitifs, wines mixed with other flavors, should be avoided because their artificial character offends the conscience. He asks, "What does wine lack that we should sap its healthy vigor by adulterating it with a variety of condiments?" (*On Spiritual Knowl.* 50) (1979(1): 267-268). One is reminded of his fellow Proto-Hesychast Basil the Great's rhetorical question (*To the Rich* 4) (2009: 49), "What better service do silver-encrusted tables and chairs or ivory-inlaid beds and couches provide than their simpler counterparts?" Diadochus allows recourse to medicine, but the acceptance of sickness with patience and courage leads to *apatheia* (dispassion) (*On Spiritual Knowl.* 53-54) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 268-269). It is not a sin to take baths, though they should be approached with caution because of the danger of self-indulgence and their recollection of Adam's ignoble nakedness. He elsewhere speaks of the leprosy of self-indulgence (52, 17) (1979(1): 268, 257).

Diadochus warns against “the false glitter of this life” (4) (1979(1): 253) and states that the body is attracted to the smell of pleasure. He believes Eve’s fall to have led to an increase in her sexual appetite with which she presently ensnared Adam (56) (1979(1): 269). Vain imaginings are sinful even when they are involuntary; the failure to confess such sins results in terror at the hour of death (100) (1979(1): 295).

Those who wish to be virtuous should for the most part avoid people. The vow of poverty enables the monk to lead others to the riches of the kingdom of God. As with Isaac of Nineveh, the fear of the Lord precedes love (cf. Proverbs 1:7); it also burns the soul in the fire of *apatheia*. And yet, in the end, perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18) (16; 1979(1): 257). When the monk has defeated all the passions, two are left: a zeal that does not want anyone else to be as pleasing to God as he himself is, and lust. The first is conquered by humility and love, the second by self-control, freedom from anger, and the remembrance of death (99) (1979(1): 294-295). This last principle will be encountered with mounting frequency in subsequent Proto-Hesychasm.

To a degree Diadochus condones anger; Jesus Christ twice became indignant and troubled because of death (John 12:27; 13:21) (62; 1979(1): 272). The monk should be angry against the devil and evil, though it is better to lament unjust men than hate them, and he should never go to court against anyone or defend himself in court. The Christian perfect in love does not become angry no matter how much he is harmed; he will be angry only with those who injure the poor or blaspheme.

Diadochus was in most respects a faithful disciple of Pseudo-Macarius except that he placed more emphasis on experience and interior perception (*aisthēsis*) (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 652). He is close, as would be natural, to the moderate Messalians. The Cappadocian ideal of likeness to God is to be preferred to baptism. As with Macarius, baptism does not completely heal the fallen human nature. He agrees with the Gospel that from the heart proceed evil thoughts and adulteries (Matthew 15:18-19), but he does not hold that Satan is in the heart. After baptism Satan acts on the soul, but from without rather than within, and often more fiercely (*On Spiritual Knowl.* 76) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 279). In keeping with the objective of the present chapter Diadochus can be shown to strongly foreshadow Hesychasm with his concepts of divine beauty, the union of the body with God, and the continual invocation of Jesus’ name (Florovsky, 1987a: 198).

5.3.2 Mark the Monk

5.3.2.1 Milieu and Works

Mark the Monk's interest in problems of Christology places him closer to 500 than to 400 where he was once situated. His neglect to define "hypostatic union," a term which is viewed as given, tallies with assigning him a later date. He made use of the Syriac Bible and the Diatessaron, but Plested (2004: 117) is probably correct in suggesting that he absorbed them secondhand from Macarius. Chadwick (*apud* Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 655) has argued that he is to be equated with the hegumen of a monastery near Tarsus who was asked by the intelligent and devious Severus of Antioch to vindicate himself against charges of Chalcedonianism and Messalianism. The latter charge would have stemmed from his view that baptism was unavailing in the matter of continued spiritual warfare, as well as his avoidance of mentioning the Eucharist. Mark is suggested by Chadwick to have responded to Severus' request with the treatises on the hypostatic union and baptism bearing his name, showing that he was neither a Chalcedonian nor a Messalian, although he possessed elements of both. These two documents are somewhat combative, though not to the extent of Cassian's *The Incarnation of the Lord Against Nestorius* (Schaff, 2004(II, 11): 551-621). Related to the accusation of Chalcedonianism is the absence of the Monophysite catchword *Theotokos* and the presence of three of the four Chalcedonian alpha privatives in Mark's writings (Plested, 2004: 129). In line with Chadwick's overall argument one may note that Photius accused Mark of being a Monophysite (*Bibl. Cod.* 200) (Quasten, 1986(3): 508).

Chadwick's attractive thesis, however, has to be abandoned for evidence that places Mark in Asia Minor with a writing career that ended around 485, as Vivian and Casiday have shown (in *Mark the Monk*, 2009: 24-26). The strongest evidence for placing him here is a passage in the *Letter to Nicholas the Solitary* in which he refers to himself in the third person, in keeping with apostolic humility (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:2). Nicholas, he reminds the addressee, was once voyaging from Palestine to Constantinople with his mother when his ship was sunk by a storm. He was one of only three voyagers to survive and temporarily took up residence with a compassionate freeman in Ancyra who led him to a holy man, no doubt Mark himself (*Ep. Nich.* 6.3-4) (2009: 66-67). Mark subsequently lived for a time as a hermit in the desert, perhaps in Palestine or Egypt as Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware (1979(1): 109) believe. He was somewhat erudite (*De Melchis.* 7) (Mark the Monk, 2009: 207) which befits an Asian better

than a Syrian environment. His sentences tended to be lengthy, and his adjuration to not reject learning was Proto-Hesychastic (*On Those Who Imagine* 65) (2009: 46, 120). He went so far as to claim that knowledge precedes faith, and yet the one who relies on theoretical knowledge alone is an unfaithful servant (*On the Spiritual Law* 112; *On Those Who Imagine* 5) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 118, 125).

There have been attempts to label Mark a Nestorian on the basis of his presentation of Christ as existing from (*ek*) both natures rather than in (*en*) both natures, but his language is at times highly Cyrillian. Vivian and Casiday (in *Mark the Monk*, 2009: 44) postulate that his avoidance of such terms as *Theotokos* and *physis* may have been his response to Zeno's *Henotikon* of 482, but this is also contradictorily when they believe him to have ended his writing career. Mark's emphasis on Christ's humanity certainly approaches Nestorianism, but instead of supposing that he had Antiochene tendencies it is probably more correct to say that he was following a pronouncement from the Epistle to the Hebrews which was pregnant with soteriological implications: "For since the children share flesh and blood, he likewise shared in them, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and free those who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life" (Hebrews 2:14-15, NAB) (*De Inc.* 30-31; 2009: 271).

Mark is described by Nicholas the Solitary as possessing a virtuous and holy soul devoted to God (2009: 81). He would exert an influence on such Proto-Hesychasts and marginal figures as Isaac of Nineveh, Hesychius the Priest, Symeon the New Theologian, Simon Taibutheh, and Dadisho Qatraya. Some works once attributed to him—*Fasting*, the *Neptic Chapters*, and *On Baptism*—are no longer regarded as his, the last having been written by Jerome the Greek (2009: 46). Mark did not write only to monks, and his treatise *On Repentance* appears to have been addressed to all Christians (2009: 144). In it he observes that the Ninevites were spared and the Sodomites destroyed because of their presence or lack of repentance (*On Repentance* 11) (2009: 161). He also wrote a treatise against the Melchizedekians, "leftist" Origenists of whom he probably did not possess firsthand knowledge (cf. Dechow, 1988: 118-119). It was this work which convinced Photius that he was a Monophysite.

Among his writings is the autobiographical *Monastic Superior's Disputation with an Attorney* in front of a gathering of his monks (Mark the Monk, 2009: 221-250). The attorney is somewhat pugnacious, apparently a well-earned stereotype, in this case because monastic preaching against lawsuits has jeopardized his career. At one point Mark compliments him, tongue in cheek, on his wisdom and cunning. Worried that this sarcasm has eluded the attorney he later expounds upon cunning which he equates with hypocrisy. The attorney soon leaves in anger, and Mark, touched to the quick by having lowered himself to his adversary's level, mourns to his monks that he is a narrow-minded old man and that he has prated about the spiritual law without keeping it himself. There follows an exchange with his monks in which the Proto-Hesychastic technique of *erōtapokriseis* is discernible.

5.3.2.2 Thought

Mark stresses gentleness, inner humility, and stillness (*hēsychia*). Relevant to the aim of the present chapter is his subscription to Proto-Hesychast concepts like *penthos*, unceasing prayer, and heart mysticism. *Penthos* is the result of Christ touching the monk's eyes (*On the Spiritual Law* 12) (2009: 93). Florovsky (1987a: 196) has done Proto-Hesychast studies a great service by labeling five kinds of tears in his work: tears of grief, tears of confession, tears of the spirit, tears of the mind, and tears of love.

Nothing can be accomplished without prayer which grants protection from despondency. Mark quotes the apostle Paul's command to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17) (*Disp. with an Attorney* 1.4; Mark the Monk, 2009: 226). Unceasing prayer is nothing more than the struggle against "the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12, NASB); it is also a sign of love for God. He exhorts the monk to pray vigilantly and to multiply his prayers (*On Those Who Imagine* 136, 89; *On the Spiritual Law* 16) (2009: 128, 123, 94). As such he refers, as would the Hesychasts, to the inner liturgy. Evil dwells in the heart, but suffering in the heart brings about spiritual refreshment. The heart is made contrite by self-control in sleep, food, and bodily relaxation. It can be broken in a gentle way but also in a violent and harmful way, probably, one would assume, by an inordinately harsh spiritual adviser. Proto-Hesychast light mysticism is exhibited in his statement that the Holy Spirit pours Himself out on the newly baptized like the sun (*On Those Who Imagine* 110) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 135). He sometimes takes a favorable attitude toward the body, due to his subscription to the doctrine of Christ's humanity. This idea,

which he shares with Diadochus, is Proto-Hesychastic, though it would come into its own only in the next century with Maximus the Confessor.

The greatest of God's gifts for Mark is "the angelic habit of the monastic order" (*Ep. Nich.* 2.3) (1979(1): 148). He urges his reader to travel the apostolic path which consists in taking up his cross and being bound in chains (Matthew 16:24; Acts 28:20) (*On Those Who Imagine* 157; 1979(1): 140). There are for him three (actually two) methods of godliness: not to sin, to patiently endure affliction, and to bewail one's shortcomings if he cannot endure it (*Disp. with an Attorney* 1.9) (Mark the Monk, 2009: 233). He has much advice for monks and even abbots. The spiritual father is not to become visibly angry with a disobedient subordinate. Anger is fueled by pride and can become indestructible, but thinking back to the events of the crucifixion will topple the structure of iniquity, rage, and anger (*Ep. Nich.* 10.1) (2009: 73).

Mark's stress on original sin was rare among the fathers of the Eastern church, although, unlike Augustine (*Retr.* 1.14.3), he held that Christians were restored to their pre-fallen condition of freedom (2009: 38). With the cross of Christ, the guilt of Adam was wiped away; all subsequent sin is therefore the Christian's own responsibility. Fallen humanity undertakes everything out of one of two unreasoning (*adialogistoi*) impulses: people-pleasing and the desire for comfort (*The Mind's Advice* 2) (2009: 176-177). Mark finds people-pleasing to be so seductive that it overwhelms even common sense. It is also more deceptive than the passions because it has a show of godliness (*Disp. with an Attorney* 1.9) (2009: 233).

Sin strikes the monk from all directions: from the world, the flesh, and the devil. The recollection of sin is to be avoided because it will lead to either despondency or the rekindling of the harmful desires of the past (*On Those Who Imagine* 139) (2009: 129). Memory incites to lust, particularly in the well-fed, the spirited, and the flabby. He compares the soul led astray by its thoughts to a calf grazing near precipices (*Ep. Nich.* 11.1; *On Those Who Imagine* 67) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 157, 131). The person who wants to destroy the passions while remaining entangled in them is like someone who tries to quench a fire with dried corn stalks. Like the Proto-Hesychast John Climacus he knows that one passion can drive out another. The fact that there is a time interval between sin and judgment is no reason to deny divine retribution (*On the Spiritual Law* 119) (Mark the Monk, 2009: 103). God will certainly judge the wicked and will repay the devotee of pleasure a hundredfold in suffering.

Mark advises, though he does not command, the young Nicholas the Solitary to avoid wine and drink little water and warns him that nocturnal emissions are a sin (*Ep. Nich.* 7.5-7; 11.1) (2009: 69, 74). Nicholas is urged to dry up “the moisture of sensual desire” by being content with little and by all-night vigils (*Ep. Nich.* 7.2) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 153). An isolated cenobitic existence is preferable to an anchoritic or conventional cenobitic existence because it protects the monk from contact with women as well as from the dangers of separation from a spiritual guide. The passions are strengthened by forgetfulness, ignorance, and laziness, “the three giants of the demonic Philistines” or “the three powerful giants of the devil” (*Ep. Nich.* 13.1-2) (1979(1): 159-160). Ignorance is the source of all evils, forgetfulness is its helper, and laziness weaves a “dark shroud enveloping the soul in murk,” probably an echo of Macarius’ purple robe of darkness (*Ep. Nich.* 12.2) (1979(1): 158-159; Florovsky, 1987a: 157). It is laziness which allows evil to root itself in the soul.

The Philistine triad is driven from the soul by another triad whose effectiveness Mark seems to overrate: mindfulness of God, spiritual knowledge, and true ardor (*Ep. Nich.* 13.2) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 158-159). But forgetfulness, ignorance, and laziness are not the only vices, as his discussion of pride shows. The monk is not to become proud because of his knowledge of Scripture nor to become the disciple of one who is proud. While compassion results in the strengthening of his spiritual gift, pride leads to its loss (*On the Spiritual Law* 6) (1979(1): 110). As would John Climacus he speaks of the passions as possessing progeny. Lack of faith is said to be the mother of envy, hatred, jealousy, treachery, strife, hypocrisy, favoritism, servility, slander, lying, and feigned godliness (*Disp. with an Attorney* 1.13) (Mark the Monk, 2009: 238).

5.3.3 Conclusion

In Mark and Diadochus, as with their mentor Pseudo-Macarius, are observed Hesychastic elements which help advance the central argument of the thesis that the Proto-Hesychasts were important mainly as precursors of Hesychasm. They reflect (1) monasticism, (2) light mysticism, (3) the heart, (4) *theōsis* in the form of likeness to God, (5) *penthos*, (6) unceasing prayer, and (7) the use of pagan learning. There is also in Mark (8) an emphasis on the humanity of Christ. The invocation of Jesus’ name in Diadochus is an anticipator of such Proto-Hesychast Jesus prayers as are found in Abba Philemon and John Climacus. Faithful to Macarius, the epigones stress the heart as the place where good and evil alike reside. They

relate light mysticism to the Spirit, but they caution against demonic light manifestations, one of the first warnings of this disquieting phenomenon, although Philoxenus of Mabbug, a contemporary of Mark, alleged that Satan appeared to the Messalian leader Adelphius in the form of light (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:14). Mark and Diadochus further adumbrate Hesychasm in (9) their extolment of compassion. Their anger that is to be directed against the demons looks forward to the spirit of “violence in all things” of the school of Gaza, and the prominence Mark gives to humility would influence Dorotheus for whom it was the chief virtue, outweighing even love. Before turning to these representatives of subsequent Orthodox asceticism it would be apposite to investigate the philosophers among the Proto-Hesychasts, namely Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor.

6.0 PROTO-HESYCHASM IN THE EASTERN CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHERS

6.1 Introduction

The present chapter will attempt to establish the central argument of the thesis that the Proto-Hesychasts were important largely as precursors of Hesychasm. It will do this by coming to terms with a secondary objective of the thesis, namely the ascertainment of Hesychastic traits in Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor. The chapter will proceed by an analysis of the lives, milieu, and thought of these two figures who are chosen by virtue of their role as the philosophers of Proto-Hesychasm. Fourteenth-century Hesychasm emerged from two fonts, the philosophical and the ascetic, and it is the task of this chapter to treat the former. It has been argued, with good reason, that Dionysius was not a Christian (Brons and Vanneste *apud* Perl, 2007: 2), but the Platonic excesses of his system were corrected by Maximus who, as shall be seen, was no less immanentistic in his eschatology. Despite this Dionysius and Maximus are vitally important as background figures to Hesychasm.

6.2 Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite

6.2.1 Apostolic Milieu?

Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, a Proto-Hesychast posing as St. Paul's convert Dionysius of Athens, was young enough to have studied Proclus and old enough to have been quoted with approval by the Monophysite representatives to the colloquy before the emperor Justinian in 532; the representatives found the quotations in Severus of Antioch's writings (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 665-666). It is difficult to date the writings of both Severus and Damascius, who resembles Dionysius, and this fact plays into the shifty author's hands. Dionysius' influence on Western Christian mysticism has been exaggerated. Aquinas accepted him, balancing his mysticism with his own scholasticism, but no one fully embraced Dionysius in the West until Meister Eckhart who transformed rather than extensively used his thought and who was at least equally dependent on such female mystics as Hadewijch, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 30; Roem, 1993: 224).

Rorem (1993: 227) finds Dionysius more influential in the Western church than in the Eastern church. The present writer disagrees and sides on this matter with Leclercq (in Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 25-32) who sees a dearth of Dionysian influence in Western Christianity. Rorem himself acknowledges Dionysius' impact on various aspects of Eastern Orthodox mysticism such as the Jesus prayer, monasticism, and *theōsis*.

Photius, though he admired the Dionysian writings, was one of the first, after Hypatius of Ephesus, to question their authenticity (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 665-666). Doubt persisted in some circles for centuries, but it was the German scholars Koch and Stiglmayr who, in 1895, conclusively proved the duplicity of the Areopagite by a comparison of his discussion of evil with that of Proclus (Rorem, 1993: 10, 17, 41). This has in turn given rise to intense speculation on the identity of the Areopagite. Rorem's fleeting and unfounded hypothesis (in Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 1) that the author was a woman is extremely unlikely given the rigid nature of gender roles in late Christian antiquity, but it shows what an awkward reputation the Areopagite has, in part of his own making. It is also at odds with Rorem's later statement that Dionysius' neglect by medieval female mystics was fitting since he completely ignored women except for the Virgin Mary (Rorem, 1993: 225; cf. Arthur, 2008: 150). Yet this was largely a Platonist phenomenon, and Plato's pupil Axiothea who wore men's clothes should again be recalled.

The hypothesis that Severus of Antioch, his mind almost wholly occupied with the Monophysite controversy, could have been the author is only slightly less absurd than that he was a woman. To posit a close relationship between Severus and Dionysius would also slightly besmirch the Christianity of the former; and yet in his younger days Severus had been criticized for being less than enthusiastic about the religion (Frend, 1972: 203).

Against the few remaining defenders of the Areopagite's genuineness the reader can turn to Norelli (2005(2): 668) who adroitly observes the numerous and sometimes amusing contradictions in the writings. Dionysius writes to John the Evangelist but elsewhere refers to his Gospel and Apocalypse as ancient tradition. Timothy, a convert of Paul's well before the historical Dionysius, he addresses as a young man. If one takes into account his quoting from Ignatius of Antioch (*Divine Names* 709B) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 81) and combines this with his writing to Timothy he has the insulting and ridiculous situation of an extremely old man addressing another extremely old man as a young man. Dionysius' patronizing tone to

Timothy was not lost on the authors of the Armenian scholia to these texts who termed him “more powerful” than Timothy who is not, it must be admitted, presented as a very formidable figure in the New Testament (Acts 16:3; 1 Timothy 4:12; 5:23) (La Porta, 2008: 132). Most decisive of all in the argument against Dionysius’ genuineness in the opinion of the present writer is his reference to the creed as being in the Mass which did not transpire until 476. Further, monasticism as he describes it did not exist in the apostolic church, though his description fits this paper’s theory of Proto-Hesychasm’s monastic bearings.

The writer has observed that at one point Dionysius calls Timothy a “fine young man” and a couple pages later refers to the apostle John in the past tense (*Eccl. Hier.* 428A, 429C-D) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 211, 214), whereas this longest living of the disciples would have clearly been alive when Timothy was young. Dionysius also writes to an evil monk named Demophilus. It is difficult to believe that his name was not suggested by the Arian bishop replaced by the Proto-Hesychast Gregory of Nazianzus. This fact, if established, would alone place Dionysius after the First Council of Constantinople (381).

In an elaborate fiction Dionysius refers to other of his works and sometimes their contents, too often in fact to be convincing. He actually speaks of not wanting to overextend his discussion which contradicts his supposed penchant for voluminous writing. It is doubtful that these writings existed, and Norelli rightly calls this ploy of his counterfeit perfection (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 671; cf. Florovsky, 1987a: 209). Not everyone has been troubled by the Areopagite’s dishonesty. Balthasar (*apud* Riordan, 2008: 30) theorizes that he had received a divine charism which took him back to the time of the apostles, a view which is somewhat laughable. Nonetheless, to Balthasar’s credit, Dionysius did not stress the historical, and in this he seems to have been an unwitting precursor of the twentieth-century preference of *Geschichte* over *Historie*. In addition to his dishonesty there is a certain arrogance in his writings which has not been sufficiently addressed. His patronizing tone to Timothy cannot be overlooked, and he is bold enough to convey to John the Evangelist the divine revelation that he will be released from Patmos, the implication being that John himself has not been given this information (*Ep.* 1120A) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 288-289). Ironically, however, the arrogance and presumption of others rubbed him the wrong way.

One should not accept without reservations the hypothesis that Dionysius was a monk as Louth (1996: 29) and Perl (in Gracia & Noone, 2003: 540) suppose; but if he was this would help position him in the Proto-Hesychast environment. He certainly refers to monks often, and his ultimate mentor Proclus has been described as presenting asceticism in its institutionalized and semi-monastic form (Kharlamov, 2009: 87). It is probably more correct to say that Dionysius belonged to a semi-monastic or Christian philosophical community, much like Augustine's Servants of God (Esler, 2000(2): 1212). Kharlamov's words (2009: 85) cannot be improved on: "The existence of this society, along with the ecclesiastical titles of some of its members, mystifies the already sufficiently enigmatic content of the corpus more than it creates a sense of real dialogue." Yet, as unlikely as it sounds, the characters of the Dionysian corpus—with the exception of Hierotheus—need not be transformed into real people. Perhaps the author lived and worked alone, and these creatures were the protagonists of his novel. The language of his novel, if such it is, is nothing if not spectacular. The author delights in puns and apparent contradictions: monkhood stands in its solitary status; the mystic Moses is united to the unknown by an inactivity of knowledge (*Eccl. Hier.* 533C; *Myst. Theo.* 1001A) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 246, 137).

6.2.2 Monophysitic Milieu?

Pelikan (in Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 13) speaks of the odyssey of Dionysian spirituality from the heretical East to the Orthodox East, but it is not completely certain that Dionysius was a Monophysite, although his writings were first admired by the group. There are parallels between his thought and that of the Monophysite Stephen Bar Sudaili, author of the *Book of Hierotheus* which has been called the extreme point in the development of Origenist mysticism (Špidlík, 2005: 10). Strothmann (in Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 225, 228) detects traces of Monophysitism in Dionysius, and his discoveries, though seemingly far-fetched, should not be ignored, namely the Areopagite's use of the word "artist" (*grapheos*), perhaps in reference to the Monophysite Peter the Fuller (*gnapheos*); and his comparison of the consecrational ointment (with its fragrant balsam overwhelming the other elements) to Jesus Christ whose divinity, for the Monophysites, overmastered His humanity.

Rosemary Arthur (2008: 175-198) confidently but wrongly views Dionysius as a Monophysite writing a polemic against stodgy conservatism in the established Monophysite church; but taking potshots at opponents, as he occasionally does, does not make a work a polemic. The derogatory nature of his gibes is actually tamer than was generally the case for antiquity and late antiquity (cf. Ferreiro, 2003: xx-xxi). Arthur sees Dionysius as, on the whole, a dedicated Monophysite whose description of the ecclesiastical hierarchy was designed for the use of Monophysite readers after the Chalcedonian persecution had passed, and claims to find in his epistle to John a reference to the eviction of the Monophysite bishops in 521: “As for those who deal unjustly with you and who wrongly imagine that they have banished the sun of the gospel, I have good reason to criticize them but, above all, I pray for them in the hope that they will abandon the evil which they are inflicting upon themselves” (*Ep.* 1117C) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 289). This sentence was probably written more to coordinate with the author’s ostensible apostolic milieu. Dionysius should be viewed as apolitical in regard to ecclesiastical politics, much as Plotinus was in regard to secular politics (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 7) (Plotinus, 1991: cviii-cix). Yet is not without bearing that he wrote pseudonymously during a time when the unbalanced Justinian was persecuting the Monophysites (Procopius, 1966: 103-104).

It is probably safest to classify Dionysius as a Monenergist with Monophysite leanings, but he was never condemned for his Monenergism as Pope Honorius was for his Monothelitism. He was attentive to the angels’ relationship to the human aspect of Jesus and made use of the Chalcedonian (Neo-Nestorian) *asynchytos*, which he may have meant to have an anti-Apollinarian rather than an anti-Monophysite intent; but he followed the cautionary strictures of Zeno’s *Henotikon* which was favored more by the Monophysites than by the Chalcedonians. He stated that Jesus performed His human actions as God. He described God as the “name which is above every name” which the apostle Paul ascribed to Jesus rather than the Father (Philippians 2:9) (*Divine Names* 596A; Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 54). He heretically referred to Jesus’ walking on water as being due to His “supernatural physiology,” albeit admitting that He had material weight (*Divine Names* 648A) (Jurgens, 1979(3): 302). He spoke of a single theandric operation in Christ, a Monenergist concept that would be censured by the Third Council of Constantinople (680-681). His impersonal description of Jesus as “the deity speaking of itself” is far removed from the world of the Monophysites and the Chalcedonians alike.

A clue as to Dionysius' theological affiliation may be found in Sergius of Reshaina who translated his writings into Syriac. Sergius studied philosophy in Alexandria and journeyed from Monophysitism to Nestorianism. If Sergius is any indication one would hardly expect Dionysius to be a Chalcedonian: the Severian Monophysites were his first admirers and the Nestorians, such as Simon Taibutheh, Isaac of Nineveh, and John the Venerable, his next (Colless, 2008: 38).

Nonetheless Rosemary Arthur (2008: 186) is too impetuous in her assertion, shared by Joseph Ḥazzaya, that Sergius of Reshaina was the Areopagite. Joseph noticed a similarity in their styles, but one tends to write like those he admires. Pseudo-Zacharias of Mitylene knew Sergius to be a person of dubious morals. The young architect Eustace of Amida accompanied him on his last journey to Rome and told Zacharias something about him which the latter felt was unprintable. He did call Sergius immoral and a lover of money (2008: 115, 121). The equation of Dionysius with Sergius made by Arthur would not, therefore, be particularly fair to the Areopagite.

6.2.3 Gnostic Milieu?

There are aspects of Gnosticism in Dionysius' thought which are due more to his Platonism and the *Chaldean Oracles*, which he probably absorbed secondhand from Neoplatonic sources. The celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies to which he has recourse are reminiscent of the hierarchy of the Gnostic Basilides (Foerster, 1972(1): 64-72). Russell (2004: 258) maintains that while in Proclus the celestial hierarchies mediate being, in Dionysius they mediate the light of divine revelation which is the case in Gnosticism. When he claims that the builders of Babel were building their tower "not to harm anyone but for their own salvation" (*Ep.* 1105B) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 282) the reader is tempted to equate Yahweh's indignation with them with that of the Gnostic Yaldabaoth.

The still small voice heard by Elijah is said by Dionysius to indicate the "divine smallness" (1 Kings 19:12) (*Divine Names* 909B; 1987: 115). This can be compared with Gnostic descriptions of the fully grown Jesus appearing at times as a child (James, 1926: 251, 323, 350; Kasser, Meyer & Wurst, 2006: 20). He also addresses a prayer to the Eucharist, a phenomenon known in the *Gnostic Acts of Thomas* (50, 133) (James, 1926: 388, 422).

Rosemary Arthur (2008: 10) draws the student's attention to Dionysius' use of such Gnostic terms as *sigē*, *archōn*, *gnōsis*, *skotos*, *zōē*, and *plērōma*, though the non-Gnostic Ignatius referred to Jesus as coming forth from silence (*Magn.* 8.2) (Ehrman, 2003(1): 249). Dionysius' use of the word *sigē*, however, stems from the *Chaldean Oracles*. Arthur rightly points out that the Chaldean angels tended to be good, as is the case with Dionysius and not with the Gnostics. Yet in Dionysius' thought a type of Gnosticism can be said to creep back into the church under the guise of a Monophysitic Chalcedonianism.

6.2.4 Platonic Milieu

Dionysius claims to have been the student of Hierotheus, a supposed disciple of Paul to whom he attributes an *Elements of Theology*, the selfsame title of a work by the Neoplatonist Proclus. His descriptions of Hierotheus have correspondences with those of Proclus as depicted in Marinus' biography (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 669). He places Hierotheus among the disciples gathered around the dying Mary and a partaker with them of a vision accompanying her death. After the vision all who witnessed it spoke some words of appreciation, but none was as mystical as Hierotheus. "He was so caught up," Dionysius writes, "so taken out of himself, experiencing communion with the things praised, that everyone who heard him, everyone who saw him, everyone who knew him (or, rather, did not know him) considered him to be inspired, to be speaking with divine praises" (*Divine Names* 681C-684A) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 70).

Dionysius credits Hierotheus with having written hymns, namely the *Erotic Hymns* or *Hymns of Yearning* (*Divine Names* 713A) (1987: 83); it is likewise known that Proclus wrote a hymn in honor of the Semitic deity Theandrites. But when he announces that Hierotheus' faith was independent of any education, one is reminded more of a student of Proclus who will shortly be considered (*Divine Names* 648B; Damascius, *Hist. Phil.* 35) (1987: 65; Damascius, 1999: 115).

Gersh (*apud* Riordan, 2008: 25-26) is convinced that Dionysius sat at the feet of Proclus in Athens. This is going too far, but, if true, it would recall the careers of the Proto-Hesychasts Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus. The hypothesis does not defy credulity if it is remembered that Proclus had Christian students, in part due to the increasing reliance of Christians on pagan philosophy and logic as an aid for navigating their way through the

Christological crises of the fifth century.

Dionysius' arrogance does not obscure a palpable reverence for Hierotheus which leads one to conclude that Hierotheus was no figment of his imagination. His respect for his teacher is a reflection of Greek thought in which the master's personality was indispensable to the pupil's advancement in learning (Arthur, 2008: 3; Dillon, 1996: xv). If Hierotheus was not Proclus himself he was an emulator of Proclus, a minor yet charismatic teacher who inadvertently left a not inconsiderable mark on subsequent Proto-Hesychasm. The teachings Hierotheus passed on to Dionysius are Neoplatonic: procession and return, the concept of God as beyond being, and the division of the angels into three groups of three ranks (Arthur, 2008: 30).

There are unmistakable parallels between Hierotheus and Isidore of Alexandria, notably their debt to Proclus, their evident charisma, and their restriction of their intake of reading (*Divine Names* 648B; Damascius, *Hist. Phil.* 35) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 65; Damascius, 1999: 115). If Hierotheus and Isidore are the same person a perusal of Damascius' *Philosophical History*, requested by Theodora of Emesa to commemorate the life of Isidore, would not be an unwise venture for the scholar of Proto-Hesychasm. Although this is a tenuous proposal, it is less preposterous than the view of Rosemary Arthur (2008: 28; cf. 189) that Hierotheus was a practitioner of Jewish Hekhaloth mysticism. The two individuals (Hierotheus and Isidore) at least breathed the same philosophical air.

Dionysius' respect for Hierotheus is suspiciously similar to Damascius' attitude toward Isidore; both of the "pupils" flourished around 500. It is unlikely that the Areopagite is to be equated with Damascius in view of the latter's fervent anti-Christianity which is spread liberally, albeit in a careful way, throughout the pages of the *Philosophical History*. Yet parallels between individuals can point to a common master, as is the case with Origen and Plotinus (Dillon, 1996: 382). Parallels between Damascius and Dionysius are their stylistic brilliance; their love of storytelling (*Hist. Phil.* 138, 142; *Divine Names* 681C-684A; *Ep.* 1097B-1100D) (Damascius, 1999: 309-311, 315; cf. 60; Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 70, 278-280); their subscription to the concept of an ineffable principle beyond God; their situating of this principle in thick darkness; their comparison of the search for God to the ascent up a mountain (though Dionysius probably found this in the Proto-Hesychast Gregory of Nyssa); and their toning down of the evil nature of matter (Arthur, 2008: 31). Syrianus was ultimately responsible for the last position, but Plotinus had given impetus to it in his treatise

against the Gnostics, reacting to them and even to an insightful statement of the Neopythagorean Numenius (*Enn.* 2.9; Calcidius, *Comm. Tim.* 113ff.) (Plotinus, 1991: 108-132; Dillon, 1996: 374).

Whether or not the Areopagite studied under Proclus or Isidore in the flesh it is clear that he cut his teeth on the former's treatises and commentaries; this is especially evident in *The Divine Names*. He tells Timothy that he accepts Hierotheus' writings second only to Scripture (681B) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 69-70), and this is something he can be accused of doing in the case of Proclus. He terms the biblical writers theologians, the closest word he can get to philosopher. Often he seems more interested in Proclus than in Scripture which he does not tend to quote at length. An exception is Romans 1:20 which he quotes while rebutting sun worship, previously indulged in by Julian the Apostate (*Divine Names* 700C) (1987: 75). His biblical interpretations were also more radical than was usual in his day (*Ep.* 1105B) (1987: 282).

Sheldon-Williams (in Armstrong, 1967: 457-458) thinks Hierotheus was a real person but one not to be identified with Proclus. This is reasonable, but not his subsequent statement that since little is known of Proclus' predecessors Dionysius may have been influenced by them rather than by Proclus. He bases his claim on the fact that Dionysius' Christian sources are from the fourth century but not the fifth century which is when Proclus lived. Against this theory it may be posited that Dionysius was little interested in the theology, as opposed to the philosophy, of his time, but that he was not completely ignorant of it is proven by his use of *asynchytos*. Hathaway (*apud* Riordan, 2008: 27-28) believes the Areopagite avoided later theologians as an act of deliberate subterfuge. Grondijs (*apud* Arthur, 2008: 30-31) has in fact shown Dionysius' dependence on post-Procline thinkers, notably in his use of the words *hyperagnōsia* and *timiotēs*. One can still therefore place him at the end of the fifth century or the beginning of the sixth.

Dionysius was not necessarily a Syrian as has been alleged, on the basis of his description of episcopal consecration, but perhaps an Egyptian or at least a Greek Egyptian. Rutledge (*apud* Riordan, 2008: 28) takes him for either an Egyptian or a Syrian. His familiarity with Neoplatonism and tendency towards Monophysitism fit what is known about the philosophical school of Alexandria as it existed under the leadership of the Neoplatonist Horapollo (Damascius, *Hist. Phil.* 120) (1999: 283-285). Horapollo's Monophysite students

included Severus of Antioch, Zacharias of Mitylene, and Athanasius II, and Pseudo-Dionysius would have been at home in the company of such spirits. As already noted, one of his first translators, Sergius of Reshaina, studied in Alexandria. There are parallels, as has been seen, between his thought and that of Damascius who spent much time in Alexandria. Didymus the Blind also noted the reverence the Alexandrians had for angels which is certainly exhibited by Dionysius (Arthur, 2008: 96). Nor would his Alexandrian origins rule out the possibility of him studying in Athens, the home of Proclus and the sometime haunt of Isidore (Damascius, *Hist. Phil.* 59, 145) (1999: 165, 319). Significantly he claims to have been in Heliopolis, southeast of Alexandria, at the time of Christ's crucifixion. It is not irrelevant that his description of the supernatural eclipse at that time derives from an Alexandrian variant of Luke 23:44-45 (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 268).

Nonetheless Dionysius' Syrian origin cannot be dismissed out of hand. Rorem (1993: 70) posits that his unawareness of the singular form of the Hebrew *šē'rāpîm* militates against his knowledge of Syriac, though it would not rule out the possibility that he was a solely Greek-speaking Syrian. He elsewhere refers, clearly in the third person, to those who know Hebrew (*Cel. Hier.* 205B; *Eccl. Hier.* 481C, 485A-B) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 161, 230, 232). Yet perhaps he was a Syriac speaker after all and this was another subterfuge. He is aware of the relationship between *šē'rāpîm* (seraphim) and *šārap* (to burn), and he refers to the deacons as cleansers which may indicate a rudimentary acquaintance with Syriac (Arthur, 2008: 13, 66).

Dionysius was eager to capitalize on the affinities between Origen and the Cappadocians on the one hand and the Neoplatonists on the other (Armstrong, 1967: 457-458), and he hence passed on, with Maximus the Confessor, a strong dose of philosophy to the Hesychasts. He did not hesitate to appropriate Proclus' ideas and writings, notably his treatise on evil in *The Divine Names* in which he changed only two things in the interest of Christian theology: he made the daemons fall and denied that evil could be attributed to animals or to matter (Proclus, 2003: 4-5). He strongly echoes Proclus in denying the independent existence of evil which is the partial absence of good, partial because if it was totally absent of good it would not even have existence. In addition to Proclus' influence one can detect an indebtedness to Syrianus and Plato's *Parmenides*. This formidable dialogue had hitherto been almost completely ignored by the Christians (cf. Ferguson, 1974: 18), but it was undergoing a renaissance thanks to the Neoplatonists. Proclus and his disciple Marinus each wrote a

commentary on it, and Damascius, as was his custom, wrote a commentary on Proclus' commentary (Damascius, *Hist. Phil.* 97) (1999: 239, 45-46).

Dionysius' dependence on Proclus cannot be overstressed. He claims that great and small, identical and different, similar and dissimilar, and rest and movement can be attributed to God, the identical claim of Syrianus and Proclus in their interpretation of the *Parmenides* (O'Meara, 1982: 67). Dionysius is the only ancient writer to have used the word *theandrikos*, a word that becomes more illuminating when Proclus' hymn in honor of Theandrites is remembered. When he spoke of "the statues that are the divine names" he had in mind the old Greek custom of carving hollow statues, without feet or hands, of Hermes and Silenus. Each statue had a door which the devotee opened to place smaller statues of the gods he most revered inside. The names of God were like the statues of Hermes, disclosing nothing to the uninitiated and concealing all their beauties within (1982: 70-71).

For Proclus as well, and for his mentor Plutarch of Athens, the divine names had replaced the statues which were being destroyed by the Byzantine emperors. Proclus witnessed the removal of the statue of Athena from the Athenian acropolis and subsequently dreamed that the goddess appeared to him with the words, "Lady Athenais intends to stay with you" (1982: 70). Dionysius was indebted to the Neoplatonists not only for his imagery of the statues but for his use of the word "henad" to describe the angelic hierarchy beneath God; while Proclus had termed the One the "Henad of the henads" Dionysius called God "the unifying Henad of all henads" (1982: 74).

In a recent study Riordan (2008: 89-90, 132) attempts to separate Dionysius from his Neoplatonist bearings. This he does by averring that he had a higher view of matter than the Neoplatonists, that his metaphysical hierarchies issue forth because of love (*erōs*) rather than necessity (*anankē*), and that God is not only one but three or, as he impersonally calls Him, the thearchical essence (*tēn thearchikēn holēn hyparxin*). As for the first point, Dionysius certainly does not devalue the material world as much as earlier Neoplatonists like Plotinus and Porphyry. He even asserts that matter is not complete chaos because it is connected with order and has the power of generation; but his position is not so much because of his theological orthodoxy as because of the fact that in later Neoplatonism there is less hatred for matter than in earlier Neoplatonism, so even this un-Platonic situation is Neoplatonic in origin. In his use of *erōs* Dionysius was imitating Proclus and, as with Proclus, the term

tended to be somewhat metaphorical and obfuscating, meaning only that God is “constitutively present” to His creatures, “providing them with all that they are as the differentiated manifestation of himself” in Perl’s words (2007: 45). Regarding the last point, while Neoplatonism did not accept the Trinity it certainly had three initial hypostases which seem to have inspired Dionysius’ thinking on the subject of the ultimate more than the Trinity itself did.

Riordan also fails to stress the influence Neoplatonic theurgy had on Dionysius. No Christian writer before or after him used the word *theourgia* to the extent that he did. Even a pagan work like Iamblichus’ *De Mysteriis* employs it less than the Dionysian writings. Dionysius uses the word *theourgia* or one of its derivatives forty-eight times (Kharlamov, 2009: 135). He even terms the Eucharistic rites the *theourga mystēria*, the mysteries by which one is made godlike. His use of the idea and terminology of theurgy can be linked with the *Chaldean Oracles* whose author is termed *theourgos*, though his use of Oracular language probably came from the school of Proclus. An instance of this language is his description of Jesus and the Holy Spirit as flowers and lights above being (O’Meara, 1982: 71-72; cf. *Chal. Or. Fr. 1*; Dillon, 1996: 393).

Anyone who tends to doubt the impact of theurgy on Dionysius’ age need only consult Damascius’ *Philosophical History* which is full of the occult and the magical. Two illustrations will suffice for now. Damascius says that he attended a paranormal session in which a young woman poured water into a glass cup and explained the prophetic images she saw there. It is likely that Damascius’ colleague Asclepiodotus the Younger had recourse to such divination before he chose to leave Alexandria for Aphrodisias and so escape Christian persecution (*Hist. Phil.* 129, 95) (Damascius, 1999: 293, 233). Damascius also relates that he was privileged to see a baetyl, a heavenly stone or meteorite, alternately resting in the hands of its guardian Eusebius, hiding in his clothes, or moving through the air. Eusebius had found the baetyl near a mountain at night, and the baetyl had informed him that it was the possession of the Heliopolitan god Gennaios. The stone was usually white but sometimes purple and was covered with vermilion letters which Eusebius could interpret as he could the whistling of the stone when it ran into walls (*Hist. Phil.* 138) (1999: 309-311; cf. Yeats, 1962: 44). This can be compared to Dionysius’ use of multicolored stones (white, red, yellow, and green) to describe the angels (*Cel. Hier.* 336C) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 188, with some dubious exegesis of Revelation 4:3; 21:19-21). In line with all this is the Orthodox scholar Florovsky’s (1987a:

210) assertion that Dionysius' terminology recalls that of the Greek mysteries.

Porphyry had said that theurgy and virtue were mutually exclusive paths (Smith, 1974: 60-61), but there is a strong moral message in Dionysius. He was acquainted with a saint, a Cretan named Carpos, who instead of interceding for the restoration of two apostates prayed for their judgment. One night his bedroom seemed to be split in two from the roof down until he stood in an open space. Jesus and the angels were above him, and below him was a chasm at the top of which the apostates struggled to free themselves from serpents who were attempting to drag them down into the pit. Carpos, in his righteous indignation, tried to aid the serpents, but Jesus descended from His throne and took the apostates to Himself, asking Carpos if it was not possible that he deserved to live with the serpents rather than with God and His angels (*Ep.* 1097B-1100D) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 278-280).

A pagan reader might have noticed a similarity between this story and that of the judgment and rescue of Miltiades in the *Gorgias* (516) (Plato, 2007: 289). But it is also a foreshadowing of the Hesychastic exaltation of compassion. Dionysius' words about Carpos' later career are a prophecy of another Proto-Hesychast, Symeon the New Theologian: "He never began the holy sacraments of the mysteries without having a propitious vision first appear to him in the preliminary sacred prayers" (*Ep.* 1097B-C; Symeon the New Theologian, *153 Pract. and Theol. Texts* 153) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 278; Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 62-63).

This brings up the importance of prayer in Proto-Hesychasm. The activity does not as a rule play a great part in the Proto-Hesychasm of Dionysius, but he opens his *Mystical Theology* with a prayer and speaks of the chain of prayer whereby the initiate is lifted upwards to God (*Divine Names* 680C) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 68). The analogy is not unrelated to the concept of the chain of being, known by the Platonists and the Aristotelians, and to the golden chain, a metaphor for a kind of apostolic succession that was prominent in Neoplatonic circles and which would affect the monastic thought of Symeon the New Theologian (Alfeyev: 2000a: 141-142) as well as a pronouncement of the bishops of Chalcedon (Leo, *Ep.* 98) (Price & Gaddis, 2005(3): 121). The first use of this metaphor was in the *Iliad* when Zeus warned the other gods against interfering in the Trojan war (8.20-24) (Homer, 2004: 176; cf. Uždavinys, 2004: ix).

6.2.5 Philosophy

6.2.5.1 Platonism

Dionysius probably thought of himself as a Christian and so should not be condemned as an apostate. Yet Perl (2007: 2) well observes that whether scholars praise or condemn him it is because of his disassociation with or association with Neoplatonism. His use of Greek philosophy was of course typical of Proto-Hesychasm, though not in its flagrant excess. In his system Neoplatonism threatens to overrun Christianity of which little use is made except its terminology. Cherniss's words about his fellow Proto-Hesychast Gregory of Nyssa, that he merely applied Christian names to Plato's doctrines (*apud* Quasten, 1986(3): 284), are more accurate about Dionysius than Gregory.

Dionysius clearly had not only Proclus but also Plotinus under his belt and even absorbed some of his style, as a comparison of a section from each of the authors reveals. From Plotinus' *Enneads*: "This is the life of gods and of the godlike and blessed among men, liberation from the alien that besets us here, a life taking no pleasure in the things of earth, the passing of solitary to solitary" (6.9.11) (Plotinus, 1991: 549). From Dionysius' letter to John: "They are completely free from all evils and are stirred by a divine longing for all good things. They love peace and holiness. In this life they look forward to the coming life. Free of all passion they live like angels among men" (*Ep.* 1117B) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 289).

In the early church Platonism often took the form of anti-anthropomorphism. Dionysius is even more adverse than Origen to using anthropomorphic images in reference to God and the angels. He seeks to go beyond the lowly symbols for God, for instance the biblical language about God's womb, heart, mouth, bosom, drinking, sleep, anger, and grief. God, he is convinced, does not have hands, feet, a crown, a throne, or a drinking cup. Dionysius is almost Protestant when he urges on his reader a relationship with someone whose name and appearance are unknown. The angels are neither fiery nor winged; the bronze, electrum, and precious stones associated with them symbolize incorruptibility, splendor, and youthful vitality (*Cel. Hier.* 336B-C) (1987: 188). On the human side, longing for God, thought to be described in the Song of Solomon, was for Dionysius written in a language fit only for prostitutes (*Ep.* 1105B) (1987: 282). This can be compared with Theodoret's excoriation of Theodore of Mopsuestia for his literal understanding of that book.

Without endorsing the Anthropomorphism of the anti-Origenist monks of Egypt, one can nonetheless detect in Origen, Nyssen, and Dionysius an increasing abandonment of the Christian position. Origen is more of a Christian philosopher than Nyssen; Nyssen is a Christian theologian but barely a Christian philosopher; and Dionysius is neither. This situation is due to the fact that Origen was influenced by the Middle Platonists, Nyssen by Plotinus (and the Middle Platonists), and Dionysius by Proclus (and Plotinus). Platonism was traveling in a direction towards greater irrationality and suprarationality and was therefore moving further away from Christianity. The Proto-Hesychast Gregory of Nazianzus, who had not been conversant with Platonic philosophy after the Middle Platonists, said that the Platonists thought the best about God and were the nearest to the Christians (*Orat.* 31.5) (Armstrong, 1967: 440). This was no longer true. The danger posed by later Neoplatonic and especially Procline philosophy to Christianity was that it tended to form, with polytheism and occultism, a powerful witches' brew. It is instructive that when the Aristotelian Ammonius succeeded Horapollo at the school of Alexandria he was seen as a welcome relief by the Christian authorities (1967: 478). Nonetheless Neoplatonism would pass, in a transformed way, from Dionysius to Symeon the New Theologian and the Hesychasts.

Dionysius' teacher Proclus, likely "introduced" to him by Hierotheus, portrayed the One, the supreme principle, as beyond being and as the foundation of being. It existed in three simultaneous stages: it was absolute potency; it was absolute act; and it was the tension between these. All beings share this triadic structure to which Proclus gave the names *monē*, *proodos*, and *epistrophē*, that is permanence in the One, procession from the One, and return to the One (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 669). These terms should be thought of, as is the way in Neoplatonic thought, in a nontemporal sense. As Russell (2004: 258) has shown, Dionysius was dependent on Proclus for the concepts of God as a transcendent unity, procession and return, the emanational or irradiational nature of the chain of being, the ascent of the soul towards the One, and its final union with nonbeing. He however made union with the One less intellectualistic than was the case with Proclus, and transformed the latter's godlike henads into the attributes of God, though for both thinkers, whether speaking of henads or attributes, these entities were nothing more than the differentiated presentations of divinity (Perl, 2007: 68).

Dionysius' God is transcendent as *monē* and immanent as *proodos*. These two concepts signify unity and diversity, and *epistrophē* the return to God. Dionysius finds an echo of the concept of procession and return in the priest's censing procession and return to the altar (Rorem, 1993: 100). Following the Proto-Hesychast Gregory of Nyssa he describes *epistrophē* by the pagan word *erōs*, desirous love, as opposed to the more Christian *agapē*. He is adamant that *erōs* and *agapē* are synonymous and quotes Ignatius' *Epistle to the Romans* to prove his point (*Rom. 7.2; Divine Names 709B*) (Ehrman, 2003(1): 279; Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 81). He also employs *erōs* on the strength of the Septuagint and pretends it has a nonsexual meaning, but when David speaks of his love for Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1:26 he uses *agapē*, a fly in Dionysius' ointment. Proclus himself had redirected the pagan understanding of *erōs* along Christian lines: love has both a downward and an upward movement: there is an *erōs pronoētikos* as well as an *erōs epistreptikos* (Rist, 1964: 218-219; Riordan, 2008: 93). Thanks to Proclus and Dionysius *erōs* was allowed to find a safe home in Hesychasm and Proto-Hesychasm.

For Dionysius the three aspects of the divine triad are reflected in the three parts of his philosophical system: the mystical, the cataphatic, and the symbolic. The cataphatic is the science of God as the cause of the Forms, the symbolic is the science of God as reflected in sensible and intelligible symbols, and the mystical is the science of God as unknowable, a science bequeathed to Dionysius by the Cappadocians and especially Nyssen who, together with Philo of Alexandria, was a formidable influence on him (Armstrong, 1967: 460; La Porta, 2008: 73). The cataphatic concerns the Forms, and the symbolic the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies, including the rites of the church which are for Dionysius theurgic, the Eucharist in particular being the gateway to the intelligible world. It is the symbolic which gives the mystic his only access to the inaccessible deity (Gracia & Noone, 2003: 547).

6.2.5.2 The Celestial and Ecclesiastical Hierarchies

Dionysius coined the word hierarchy (*hierarchia*) (Evans, 2001: 41; Perl, 2007: 65). He derived it from the preexisting word *hierarchos*, referring to a priest or leader of a sacred rite. Stephen Bar Sudaili, almost certainly writing after Dionysius (*pace* Arthur, 2008: 15-19), used the Syriac word *kūmrūtā* (priesthood) for "hierarchy." Dionysius' interest in the human hierarchy was restricted not to the family or society but to the church (Rorem, 1993: 21, 23), the closest situation he could get to the esoteric pagan milieu that so fascinated him. One is

reminded, in a reverse way, of Julian the Apostate's attempt to emulate the ecclesiastical trappings of Christianity in order to revive paganism. The word *hierarchia* was of course to wield an immense influence on the later history of Western thought. So too was *supra naturam*, Erigena's translation of another Dionysian neologism (1993: 19). It can be added that he coined the phrase "darkness (or cloud) of unknowing" (*Myst. Theo.* 1001A) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 137) which would become famous in the mystical tradition of medieval England.

Dionysius (*Cel. Hier.* 164D) (1987: 153) defines hierarchy as "a sacred order (*taxis hiera*), a state of understanding and an activity approximating as closely as possible to the divine." He speaks of two moments in the hierarchy: participation (*metochē*) which describes the relationship of an inferior being to a higher one, and distribution (*metadosis*) which is the solicitous care of the higher beings for the lower beings (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 670). The hierarchy bestows likeness to God on each of its members who receive purification, illumination, and perfection from the entity above them before they can transfer this to a lower being of the hierarchy in an act which Dionysius calls initiation. Gregory of Nyssa had used this word to describe Moses guiding the children of Israel through the desert. Of all the Proto-Hesychasts Dionysius was the most indebted to Gregory.

Dionysius' celestial hierarchy is clearly prefigured by Proclus' intelligible gods, supercelestial gods, cosmic gods, angelic choruses, good daemons, and heroes (Kharlamov, 2009: 142). In the case of Dionysius the hierarchy is composed of angels. He does not exaggerate when he calls himself a lover of angels, and he can be unveiled as an observant reader of the Proto-Hesychast Gregory of Nazianzus on this score. It would not be far wrong to aver that the main facets of his thought are dark mysticism and angelology. Angels have "the first and most diverse participation in the divine" (*Cel. Hier.* 180A) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 157), which causes the Armenian scholia to compare their relationship with God to the more transient relationship between a wife and her husband (La Porta, 2008: 107). In a strongly Procline passage Dionysius writes that an angel is "an image (*eikōn*) of God . . . a manifestation of the hidden light (*phanerōsis tou aphanous phōtos*) . . . a mirror (*espotron*) pure, bright, untarnished, unspotted, receiving, if one may say so, the full loveliness of the divine goodness and purely enlightening within itself, as far as possible, the goodness of the silence in the inner sanctuaries" (*Divine Names* 724B) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 89). Angels are evil only in their meting out of punishments, and that is the fault more of those who

deserve the punishments. It is the objective of men to live like angels, to be free from evil, unholiness, falsehood, strife, passion, and anger.

Dionysius is repelled, in an almost Origenistic way, by the animalistic descriptions of the angels in the Old Testament. Twice in the career of Elisha are encountered horses of fire which may be angelic beings (2 Kings 2:11; 6:17). Isaiah 6:2 speaks of the seraphim as possessing three pairs of wings, for covering their faces, for covering their feet, and for flying. In Ezekiel 1:4-14 are glimpsed the four living creatures (*ḥayyôî*) who have four faces (a man's, a lion's, an ox's, and an eagle's), four wings, feet like calves' hooves, and with their entire bodies full of eyes. In Ezekiel 10:14 a cherub's face is even equated with an ox's. Dionysius is, however, convinced that angels are utterly simple and heavenly, recalling Origen's hypothesis that the post-resurrection body would be nonmaterial and spherical (Chadwick, 1966: 78-79, 151).

Scripture's use of animalistic terminology is designed firstly to convey heavenly realities and secondly to hide these realities from the uninitiated. (The Jews, as Origen knew, prohibited the reading of Ezekiel's vision by neophytes.) This "deformed imagery," as Dionysius queasily calls it, also serves to prevent the reader from thinking of angels as the glorified winged men presented elsewhere in the Bible (Daniel 9:21; 10:5-6; Matthew 28: 3) (*Cel. Hier.* 141A-B; Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 150). Dionysius' reaction seems to be a common one to Ezekiel's angels, which is not shared by the present writer. Propp, for instance (2006: 518), speaks of them as "human-bovine-aquiline-leonine winged monstrosities."

There are nine ranks of angels in the celestial hierarchy, of which only the last is strictly speaking angelic. The number nine in reference to the angelic ranks was used as early as the fourth century and is found in the writings of Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, and the *Apostolic Constitutions* (Arthur, 2008: 45). This number is considerably lower than that of Stephen Bar Sudaili's two hundred forty-three ranks whose occupants, one imagines, are less than the sum total of the Mandaean uthras, a thousand thousand of whom sit in each of a myriad of myriad shekinahs (2008: 17; Foerster, 1974(2): 154).

If the idea of nine angelic ranks did not originate with Dionysius, the idea of three groupings of them did. The concept of three triads of supersensual objects was Neoplatonic and is implausibly reflected in the architecture of the cathedral church of Edessa which had nine steps leading to the altar, with three on each side of the dais, and representing the nine celestial ranks (Arthur, 2008: 13). This fact would be a useful one for those convinced Dionysius was a Syrian.

Dionysius' ranks of angels are the seraphim, cherubim, thrones; dominions, virtues, powers; principalities, archangels, and angels. It is ironic that St. Paul's thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers are generally a reference to evil angels, although Hellenistic Judaism did not see them as such (2008: 44; Goodenough, 1935: 344). All the beings of Dionysius' celestial hierarchy can be called angels because angels have those properties, and only those properties, that all the beings of the celestial hierarchy possess. He presents the angels of the first triad as being in the anteroom of the divinity (a Procline idea) and as ceaselessly circling around the Good, a concept which he contradicts when he pictures Isaiah 63:1-4 as a stationary conversation between Jesus and the first triad. In the first verse he imagines the angels, somewhat like the disciples, asking questions among themselves (*Cel. Hier.* 209B-C) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 164). The Armenian scholia would go further and state that the angels did not have the audacity to ask Jesus a direct question until the second verse (La Porta, 2008: 99). The utterances of the first triad are like the sound of many waters as they proclaim the Trisagion and other hymns which are the celestial forerunners of the unceasing prayers of the Hesychasts. Symeon the New Theologian would in fact experience a mystical vision while praying the Trisagion (*Disc.* 16.3) (1980: 200-201).

The angels of the second triad are transmitters, relaying information from the first triad to the third. Their revelations are clearer to men than those of the first triad but vaguer than those of the third. The angels are in charge of the nations. In the Old Testament and the Apocrypha each nation was viewed as possessing its tutelary angel (Daniel 10:13, 20; Sirach 17:17). The Old Testament scholar Propp (1999: 121-122) compares these with the seventy divine sons of the Ugaritic goddess 'Aṭīratu. For Dionysius all the angels are good, but only Israel listened to its angel, Michael, who is therefore presented as being in the last rank of angels. Dionysius does not think the last triad is properly speaking composed of heavenly powers although it is correct to call them so. He finds an illustration of hierarchal workings in Zechariah 2:3-5 where the reader is confronted with an angel of superior rank giving orders to an angel of

inferior rank. In the Septuagint translation of Ezekiel 9:1-7 the angel of the previous chapter gives orders to an angel clothed in a sapphire girdle and a long robe, representing priestlike qualities of purification and absolution, who in turn commands certain angels with axes. The *Shepherd of Hermas* also describes angels of inferior status bringing stones to help other angels build a tower (12.1-2) (Ehrman, 2003(2): 203).

The ecclesiastical hierarchy continues the celestial hierarchy; at its top are the bishops who can themselves be called angels, as in the letters to the seven churches of Revelation (*Cel. Hier.* 292C) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 175). The bishops perfect, enlighten, and purify; the priests beneath them enlighten and purify; the deacons simply purify. The subsequent order is composed of monks, the faithful, and the catechumens. The monks are, as one would anticipate in a Proto-Hesychast environment, the highest in this order. One of the last Proto-Hesychasts, Nicetas Stethatos, would place above these two clerical triads a higher triad of patriarchs, metropolitans, and archbishops (Rorem, 1993: 31).

In addition to the two hierarchies there are three rites, which are sometimes situated between the ecclesiastical and celestial hierarchies: baptism, the Eucharist, and consecration. There had been important work done on the liturgy before Dionysius, notably by Cyril of Jerusalem and Theodore of Mopsuestia, and there would be important work done after him by Maximus the Confessor and Germanus of Constantinople. None of these figures, however, were as affected by Neoplatonism in their discussions of this intricate phenomenon (1993: 121). The liturgy tended in fact to act as a theurgical substitute for Dionysius. His interpretation of baptism, condensed by Rorem (1993: 98-99), is practically obsessive-compulsive in the significance it attaches to ritual:

The hierarch's generous teaching and welcome to all symbolize God's own generosity and forgiveness, while the candidate's eagerness and indirect approach through a sponsor indicate appropriate self-examination and proper hierarchical order. The disrobing and westward renunciation are plainly the first half of one's conversion, as completed by turning to the eastern light and professing new faith. The initial anointing with oil is compared with an athlete's preparation, while the triple immersion itself indicates burial, including Jesus' three days in the tomb.

It is, however, the Eucharist which particularly enralls the Areopagite. He quotes Hierotheus on the feast being the sacrament of sacraments and addresses a prayer to it. His fascination with Communion is evident in his story of the specious rescuing of the Eucharistic elements by the rash Demophilus (*Ep.* 1088B-C) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 272).

There is a degree of unity, and deification, in the Eucharist. Gregory of Nazianzus was the first Proto-Hesychast to use the word *theōsis*, but Dionysius was the first to bring it into prominence. Kharlamov (2009: 72) posits that Damascius may have gleaned the word from Dionysius, but this is to forget the former's anti-Christianity. Both thinkers were, however, indebted to Proclus. *Theōsis* is for Dionysius "the attaining of likeness to God and union with him so far as possible" (Russell, 2004: 248). He speaks of it mainly in relation to the sacraments, and this quotation is appropriately from *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. Those who eat the same food and drink from the same cup have been united with one another and with what they partake of, namely God. Bernhard Brons denies that the appendix to *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, on funeral rites, is authentic because it defies the triadic structure of the rest of the work (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 249). In reality if one were pretending to be the Pseudo-Areopagite he would conform to the triadic structure incessantly demanded by him.

The hierarchy is central to Dionysius' thought in an almost elitist way. He wants to deny that God spoke directly through Moses and affirm that He spoke through the angels as in Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:38, 53; cf. Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 2:2). It was the angels and not God who guided the Old Testament patriarchs; it was Gabriel who brought the evangel to Mary, and other angels to Joseph and the shepherds. Even Jesus was, according to the Septuagint of Isaiah 9:6, an angel, specifically the angel of great counsel (*Cel. Hier.* 181D) (1987: 159). He disclaims that it was a seraph who purified Isaiah: either an angel of the lowest order was called a seraph or the angel attributed his revelation to a seraph (Isaiah 6:6-7). Because the hierarchy was so significant he takes the monk Demophilus who defied a priest to task for attacking a higher member of the hierarchy. Such an act was wrong, even if it could be shown that the priest was irregular (*Ep.* 1092A-D) (1987: 274-275). For the same reason he condemns the Hebrew kings Saul and Uzziah who infringed on the high priestly office and were no different than the demons of the Gospels who proclaimed Christ's deity, something that was not in their prerogative (1 Samuel 13:11-14; 2 Chronicles 26:16-21; Mark 3:11-12) (*Ep.* 1089B-C; 1987: 273-274). Uzziah looms large both in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and in the letter to Demophilus.

Dionysius' frequent recourse to the hierarchy was largely a cover for his monism. The monistic rhetoric of the Proto-Hesychast Maximus the Confessor would be more extreme than that of Dionysius, but ultimately their philosophy was the same, the only difference being that Dionysius envisioned the future unification as existing now. He was less elitist than he appeared. An angel is really no more special than a man; everything that exists participates in God and is therefore similar. God is not only Word, Mind, and Being but a lion, a stone, and a worm (Psalm 22:6) (Perl, 2007: 103). This helps account for his sporadically favorable stance towards matter. All the members of the hierarchy participate in the deity of the One; their mere presence in the hierarchy is reflective of Proto-Hesychastic *theōsis* in its most extreme expression. The scale of being is “a bacchic revel whose members ecstatically share in divinity” according to Perl (2007: 80).

6.2.5.3 Dark Mysticism

Dionysius' mysticism begins with the cataphatic method which recognizes God's participation in being. It is here that he discusses the names of God, a preoccupation of the last Neoplatonists (Smith, 2005: 205) and one which he takes somewhat more seriously than Gregory of Nyssa. Among these names is the One. There is a possibility that the perfect unity of the One transcends the Trinity in a manner forecasting Meister Eckhart's concept of the Godhead behind the Creator of this world (cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 30). This unity is largely impersonal and betrays the influence of the Peripatetic Unmoved Mover (Moore, 2005: 115, 120).

Another of the divine names is the Good which causes Dionysius to digress on the nature of evil. His language about evil is similar to Plotinus' language about matter: it is weakness; impotence; deficiency of knowledge, belief, and desire for the Good (*Divine Names* 736A; Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.6.6) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 96; Plotinus, 1991: 52). Like Proclus he holds that if evil were totally absent of good it would be nonexistent, and yet he praises nonexistence as aspiring towards existence and even as an aspect, along with existence, of the Good. Those who are evil are in some ways not evil. “Even the person who desires the lowest form of life still desires life and a life that seems good to him; thus he participates in the Good to the extent that he feels a desire for life and for what—to him at least—seems a worthwhile life” (*Divine Names* 720C) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 87). Demons are evil only because of weakness in their natural activity. To be sure they are abominable, but they are at bottom

confused creatures who cannot act as they wish (Kharlamov, 2009: 222; cf. Romans 7:15-20). In Dionysius is therefore encountered an attempt to whitewash the demons which will have its fullest expression in the Proto-Hesychasm of Isaac of Nineveh. This attempt had a prehistory in the apostle Jude's warning against a pre-Gnostic sect that was slandering celestial beings (Jude 8-10).

Three of the divine names are Wisdom, Power, and Peace, which are also the names of three Constantinopolitan churches and which reflect the triad of *monē*, *proodos*, and *epistrophē*: God is Wisdom because He is the source of being and nonbeing; He is Power because everything issues from Him; and He is Peace because He restores all things to Himself in the end (Armstrong, 1967: 461-462). But the cataphatic stage must be forsaken for the apophatic which transcends the rationalism of the cataphatic and recognizes God's participation in nonexistence. Paradoxically it is at the lowest levels of being, with gross and monstrous things, that apophatic theology, what God is not, is most understandable. Dionysius takes Nyssen's emphasis on dark mysticism to its logical conclusion; he says that nothing can be said or denied about God; it cannot even be said that He is good. For him, as for Plotinus, one cannot speak about the supreme being, and although he attempts to name Him he rests with the Angel of the Lord: "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?" (Judges 13:18). The Angel of the Lord is to be equated with God, but only angels can speak about God, although at one point he writes that even "the leaders among the front ranks of the angels" are as far away as humanity is from adequately expressing or thinking about the Incarnation (*Divine Names* 648A) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 65).

The apophatic stage passes on to *agnōsia*, unknowing, in which one frees himself from sensation and intellect, and then to *henōsis*, a superintelligible union with God that is not unrelated to Hesychastic union with the Taboric Light. Louth, Rorem, and Vanneste (*apud* Arthur, 2008: 162) do not believe that Dionysius experienced, or even thought he experienced, union with the divine. The present writer finds this a difficult assertion to make about the author of these angelic, inscrutable, and manna-like discourses. Like Plotinus and unlike Plato he believed that such union was possible now, a belief that anticipates the Hesychasts' notion that they could participate in the divine light during their earthly existence.

Agnōsia is primarily ecstasy and love at the thought of God's unknowability. Sheldon-Williams (in Armstrong, 1967: 470) compares *agnōsia* to a treasure chest which can be possessed but never unlocked and whose treasure is possessed only in the possession of the chest itself. An illustration of *agnōsia* is Hierotheus's being "caught up" and "taken out of himself" at the dormition of the Virgin Mary (*Divine Names* 681C-684A) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 70). Rorem (1993: 147) relates such ecstasy to the Neoplatonic concept which would reappear in Isaac of Nineveh, another Proto-Hesychast who shared Dionysius' delight in paradoxical discourse.

Agnōsia and *henōsis* imply one another; *agnōsia* is no failure of the intellect but a coalescence with God or rather an intimation of the coalescence that is *henōsis*. Like Gregory of Nyssa, though he is more suprarational than Gregory, Dionysius introduces the figure of Moses in the *Mystical Theology* which is the shortest of his books but yet boasts the most rhapsodic period in his writings. Moses is purified by the ecclesiastical rites, hears the many-voiced trumpets and sees the variegated lights, "pure and with rays streaming abundantly." Alone, or all but alone, he ascends the summit of the divine and muses on

the holiest and highest of the things perceived with the eye of the body or the mind. . . . But then he breaks free of them, away from what sees and is seen, and he plunges into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing. Here, renouncing all that the mind may conceive, wrapped entirely in the intangible and the invisible, he belongs completely to him who is beyond everything. Here, being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united to the completely unknown by an inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing (*Myst. Theo.* 1000D-1001A) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 137).

It is instructive to observe that the darkness which Moses plunges into is more luminous than light. Dionysius may therefore be shown to emphasize darkness less than Nyssen. The present writer believes Rosemary Arthur (2008: 86) is too dogmatic on this point, but she should be quoted as revealing the difference between Gregory's and Dionysius' understanding of darkness, a difference which can be ascribed to the impact of Pseudo-Macarius on the latter: "Dionysius' darkness . . . is not really darkness at all, but an excess of light, which only seems like darkness to us because the intensity of the light is such that we can see as little as if it were actually dark." Dionysius (*Ep.* 1073A) (1987: 265) in fact speaks of "superabundant clarity" (*hyperechousan phanotēta*).

Yet his emphasis on negative theology is more extreme than Nyssen's. He does not aver, as did Gregory, that the mystic can only say what God is not: God is beyond all affirmation and negation alike. But Dionysius is not an atheist: to deny God's existence is to consider Him as a being and then to deny that there is such a being (Perl, 2007: 15). In the end his God is neither being nor nonbeing but transcends them. He remains real, but He is not an object of either knowledge or ignorance. He is not an object at all but, like the Neoplatonic Nous, a world filled with objects or rather non-objects. When the mystic describes Him he can only use the prefix *hyper* which transcends significance, hence his use of such terms as supra-good, supra-unknown, supra-inexpressible, supra-existing, supra-radiant, supra-god, supra-bright darkness, and supra-existing existence (Armstrong, 1967: 469; Alfeyev, 2000a: 167).

6.2.6 Conclusion

This section has helped advance the central theoretical argument that the Proto-Hesychasts were important largely as precursors of Hesychasm. It has done this by meeting a secondary objective of the thesis, namely the ascertainment of Hesychastic elements in Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite. Dionysius continued the mystical work of Gregory of Nyssa, stressing (1) God's unknowability but not the imagery of darkness. Gregory had acknowledged a certain brightness in the divine darkness but not to the extent of Dionysius for whom the divine darkness outshone earthly light. He actually spoke of Jesus as a dark ray (*skotous aktina*) (Riordan, 2008: 155). Dionysius' (2) "hidden light" and his language of angelic brightness anticipated the Uncreated Light of the Hesychasts (*Divine Names* 724B) (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 89). One thus finds in him a tension between the dark mysticism of Gregory and the light mysticism of Macarius, with the former triumphing to a degree. Other elements of Proto-Hesychasm in his thought are (3) his honorable positioning of monasticism within the ecclesiastical hierarchy and (4) his description of henotic union with God which, along with his understanding of the Eucharist, is related to the concept of *theōsis*. His (5) emphasis on compassion is illustrated by the story of the vengeful Carpos and even by his somewhat rash attempt to whitewash the demons. The (6) unceasing hymns of his first angelic triad can be compared to the unceasing prayers of the Hesychasts and the Proto-Hesychasts. This section has also drawn attention to Dionysius' arrogance, his remote kinship with Gnosticism, his possible Egyptian locale, and the supposition that his revered Hierotheus was Isidore or at least a charismatic student of Proclus.

Together with Maximus the Confessor, Dionysius was an important philosophical, as opposed to ascetical, influence on Hesychasm. His system is unthinkable without the prior example of Proclus, just as Gregory is unthinkable without Plotinus, and Origen without the Middle Platonists; but unlike Origen and Gregory, Dionysius does not deserve to be regarded as a Christian thinker and transformer of non-Christian thought. He nonetheless occupies a lofty place in the development of Eastern Orthodox mysticism and, less relevant to the purpose of this study, Nestorian mysticism. It is his fellow Proto-Hesychast philosopher, Maximus the Confessor, who will now be taken in hand.

6.3 Maximus the Confessor

6.3.1 Life

The Proto-Hesychast speculations of Dionysius were continued by Maximus the Confessor, the greatest philosopher of the seventh century. He has been called the last independent thinker of the Eastern church, a designation that should, in the opinion of the present writer, be accorded to Gregory Palamas but which points out the Western nature of his mind. There are two chief sources for Maximus' life, a dyophysite one and a Monothelite one. The Monothelite life claims he was the adulterous offspring of a Samaritan man and a Persian slave girl (Louth, 1996: 6). Such birth-related deprecations were common in the ancient world, as in the Talmud's assertion that Jesus was the result of an affair between the Virgin Mary and a Roman soldier (*Sanh.* 104b) (Rubenstein, 2002: 169-170).

Maximus was initially chief secretary to the emperor Heraclius, but while still a young man he renounced his secretariat for the monastic life, entering the monastery of Chrysopolis across the Bosphorus from Constantinople; he remained there for six years before moving to the monastery of St. George at Cyzicus (Sabo, 2008: 139). He is thus well positioned in the monastic milieu of Proto-Hesychasm. When the Persian threat became more pronounced Maximus and his fellow ascetics traveled first to Cyprus, then to Crete where he disputed with Monophysite bishops, and lastly to Carthage where he lived for fifteen years. At first he was sympathetic to Monenergism and Monothelitism, as evidenced by his letters to John the Chamberlain and his early *Ambigua*, but he came to alter his views, probably at the urging of Sophronius, his ascetic master at the Eucratas monastery, a sort of Byzantine monastery in exile (Maximus the Confessor, 1955: 10-11). Sophronius hailed from Alexandria and would

become bishop of Jerusalem and a thorn in the side of the Monothelite prelate Sergius. He was succeeded at the Eucratas monastery by a certain Conon who was Maximus' abbot during the time he engaged in a public debate with Pyrrhus, the exiled patriarch of Constantinople whom he temporarily converted to Dyothelitism. The Monothelites postulated one will and one activity in Christ and were, according to the easily excitable author of the Maximian *Commemoration*, the new Epicureans (Allen & Neil, 2002: 169).

Maximus was the driving force behind the Lateran Synod of 649 which was convened by Pope Martin I and which defied Constans II's *Typos* that commanded silence on the Monothelite controversy. Martin's predecessor Theodore had already issued an indictment of the Monothelites signed with ink commingled with Eucharistic wine, a practice that would be repeated two centuries later with the condemnation of the patriarch Photius (Gibbon, 1932(2): 843; Chadwick, 2003: 168). The acts of the Lateran Synod, which were in Greek, were edited by Maximus. The assembled bishops anathematized Theodore of Pharan, Cyrus of Alexandria, and the Constantinopolitan patriarchs Sergius, Pyrrhus, and Paul as well as the *Typos*. Constans was exempted from the anathematizations for political reasons and told that he had been deceived by his Monothelite prelates (Sabo, 2008: 140). Nonetheless the emperor had the pope arrested, and his soldiers arrived at the Lateran basilica with lances, swords, and arrows (Wilken, 2003: 134). Martin was taken to Constantinople where his pallium was publicly stripped from him and replaced with an iron chain. He was imprisoned and treated so cruelly that the floor of his cell was stained with blood (Norwich, 1997: 100). At the interposition of Paul, the dying patriarch of Constantinople, Martin's sentence was commuted to banishment and he was sent to an outpost on the Black Sea where he died six months later.

The trials of Martin and Maximus need to be understood in terms of both Constans II's emotional instability and the new Arab threat. Constans' coins depict a man with a prominent mustache and beard (Haldon, 1990: 54, 414). He forced his brother into the diaconate and then murdered him, for which he gained the epithet the second Cain, and he would himself be murdered by his own bath attendant (Gibbon, 1932(2): 871-872; Haldon, 1990: 59-61). As for the Arab threat, Maximus was explicitly charged with having betrayed Egypt, Alexandria, Pentapolis, Tripolis, and Africa to the Saracens (Allen & Neil, 2002: 49). The linking of theological disloyalty to traffic with Islam was repeated with the condemnation of John of Damascus, called Mansur, by the Iconoclastic Pseudosyllogus of 754: "Anathema to Mansur,

who has an evil name and Saracen opinions! To the betrayer of Christ and the enemy of the empire, to the teacher of impiety and the perverter of Scripture, anathema!” (Schaff, 2004(II, 14): 546). One should also recall that the Turkish incursions in Europe would be used to sully Luther’s theological reputation (Oberman, 1989: 195).

Although he had never urged others to follow his example Maximus had refused to communicate with the church of Constantinople, and to the Byzantine officials his example spoke as eloquently as if he had actively campaigned against church membership (Allen & Neil, 2002: 67). The account of his trial was compiled by the brothers Theodore and Theodosius. During it Maximus referred to the supersubstantial God (*hyperousiou Theou*), a Dionysian term that was probably over the officials’ heads. The bursar who presided was particularly moved by hate, speaking “with much anger and passion” (*Trial of Maximus* 1) (Maximus the Confessor, 1985: 17). It turned out that he resented Maximus’ love for the Romans and hatred for the Greeks. Maximus explained that he was obligated to hate no one and that he loved the Romans who shared his faith and the Greeks who shared his language (1985: 26). The abbot Menas accused him of being an Origenist which the patrician Epiphanius realized was a lie. The patricians were generally more sympathetic to Maximus than the clergy. Troilus and the eunuch Sergius visited him in prison and tried to get him to accept the *Typos* for his own safety; they claimed to have obtained spiritual profit from their discussions with him (Allen & Neil, 2002: 65). Epiphanius, however, would do an about-face, probably under imperial pressure; yet the vehement nature of his later language, in which he rejoiced that Maximus would be spat on by actors and prostitutes, seems unwarranted (2002: 111, 113).

The trial of Maximus made extensive use of false testimony (Sabo, 2008: 141). One of the witnesses was Sergius Magudas who accused him of having publicized a dream in which the heavens in the east and the west were crowded with angels, and those in the West (the domain of the usurper Gregory) prevailed over those in the East. The dream seems to be related more to the political propaganda of Constans II than to Maximus’ nocturnal excursions (Allen & Neil, 2002: 23, 51). Another accuser was a certain Constantine who pretended to be a priest or a monk but was in reality a stage soldier who had been acquainted with Maximus during his North African sojourn and who kept loose women with him, claiming either that they were his sisters or that he needed them by him to prevent them from communing with the heretical church of Constantinople (*Trial of Maximus* 12) (Maximus the Confessor, 1985: 25). If this

was Constantine's true opinion of the church he had clearly changed his mind. According to Maximus' disciple Anastasius it was a shame for anyone with a decent reputation to be seen with Constantine. Anastasius had been with Maximus for almost forty years, and during the trial Maximus was protective of him, being more disturbed when Anastasius was falsely accused than when he himself was. His concern did nothing to prevent Anastasius from receiving a beating (1985: 21-22).

At the age of seventy-five Maximus was exiled to Bizya in Thrace. One of his military escorts alleged that he blasphemed the Virgin Mary, but others hung on his words (Allen & Neil, 2002: 115, 117). The following year he was exiled to Perberis, also in Thrace. His refusal to be convinced of the wisdom of Monothelism by the bishops who were sent to get him to change his mind resulted in his second trial six years later. The *Commemoration* claims that the emperor decided his punishment in a grip of passion (*mania*) (2002: 150). Together with Anastasius his tongue and right hand were amputated, and he was paraded around Constantinople, a fate spared even criminals. The fact that the confessors survived their mutilation without astringents astonished the patrician Lebarnikios and the protosecretary Theodore who was, unflatteringly, "the director and superintendent of matters like these" (2002: 153).

The confessors were subsequently exiled, and Maximus was imprisoned in the fortress of Schemarum in Scythian territory (Sabo, 2008: 141). He continued writing with the aid of two twigs attached to the stump of his right hand, though one assumes it would have been easier to train himself to write with his left hand. Maximus died, as he had predicted, on August 13, 662. At night his tomb was said to be surrounded by three lights (Allen & Neil, 2002: 153). The sixth ecumenical council raised his Christological opinions to the status of orthodoxy, but his name was not mentioned since his persecutor, Constans II, was the father of the emperor who convened the council.

6.3.2 Philosophy

The patriarch Photius claimed that Maximus' writings were unclear and difficult to interpret; and yet the empress of Alexius I Comnenus (r. 1081-1118) spoke of their sweetness (Louth, 1996: 81). For Thunberg (1995: xvi) his sentences are "like Chinese boxes which have to be opened slowly and with undisturbed attention." Whatever the case, he is the most staid and

tedious of the Proto-Hesychasts surveyed in this paper, mainly in his style but to some extent in his thought, and his style has been diligently absorbed by Maximian scholars.

Maximus was no narrow Chalcedonian of the pre-Justinian variety. In view of his strong stance against Monothelitism it is paradoxical to hear him talking like a Monophysite at times, or at least the most Cyrillian of Chalcedonians, for instance in his claim that God is passible (1995: 35). Moore (2005: 188) is nonetheless outrageous when he calls him a Monothelite at heart. He had a thorough training in the writings of all his predecessors, especially in the Cappadocians and the Byzantine scholastics, themselves influenced by the Aristotelians and the Stoics (Armstrong, 1967: 492). He can thus be shown to follow the Cappadocians and anticipate the Hesychasts in making use of pagan philosophy. The Byzantine scholastics were grounded in Proclus' and Iamblichus' commentaries on Plato's dialogues; one detects in them, as in Talmudic Judaism and certain schools of Shiism, a penchant for the study of commentaries on commentaries and even of second commentaries on the same dialogues (Arthur, 2008: 152; cf. Ajami, 1986: 76). In Maximus' theology, which owes much to them, there is an emphasis on theotic mysticism, but it is a mysticism that places a greater stress on Christ's possession of a human nature. *Theōsis* lay at the heart of his theology, and it explains why he entered so fully into the Monothelite controversy. He leads into the Eastern Orthodox type of mysticism, the mysticism of the Hesychasts who were not against the body.

Maximus accepted the doctrine of Christ's human nature existing as an *enhypostaton* in His divine nature and was indebted to the Alexandrian hermeneutical tradition, hence his acknowledgment of the *skandala* or obstacles in Scripture and the need to see Scripture's deeper mysteries (Maximus the Confessor, 2003: 23). This outlook went back to Origen who had, like Philo before him, been embarrassed by portions of the Old Testament. Maximus in fact concentrated on the literal interpretation of Scripture even less than Origen. He interpreted the "neither male nor female" of Galatians 3:28 as neither anger nor concupiscence (cf. Bruce, 1988: 189), and equated the coat Elijah gave Elisha with the mortification of the flesh that is the ground of all true morality (Sabo, 2008: 140). The Jordan River which Elisha crossed dry-shod represented the flowing nature of reality and the craving for matter (2 Kings 2:13-14). For Maximus, as for Heraclitus and Origen, bodies of water symbolized instability (Heraclitus, Fr. 91) (1987: 55).

His tendency to allegorize led him to some startling observations. He finds the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19) as teaching that there can be no divine offspring in the mind (as Abraham exhibited) if it is attracted to the enslaved seed of the flesh (Isaac) (Russell, 2004: 279). The fact that all shepherds are an abomination to the Egyptians (Genesis 46:34) means that the most spiritually advanced of Christians (the gnostics in Clement of Alexandria's phrase) are an abomination to Satan (*Chs. on Love* 2.55) (Maximus the Confessor, 1985: 54-55). When Moses, in the Septuagint of Leviticus 7:30, orders that the fat, kidneys, liver, and breast of the sacrificial animal be cut off he refers, according to Maximus, to the cutting off of the respective activities and entities of the libidinous and spirited aspects of the irrational soul (Louth, 1996: 151). The disciples in the Upper Room locked the doors out of fear of the Jews "of Galilee" in order to signify fear of the demons and the closing of the doors of perception which enables the ascent to divine contemplation (John 20:19) (*Chs. on Knowl.* 46; Maximus the Confessor, 1985: 157).

One of his most labored allegories is of the story of Jonah in which he has recourse to the patristic technique of breaking down Hebrew words in order to exhibit manifold possibilities. Joppa is said to signify "a vision of joy, a powerful joy, and a wondrous beauty." Just as Adam forfeited paradise human nature, like Jonah, flees Joppa which is the habitude of virtue and knowledge (Jonah 1:3) (*Ad Thalys.* 64; 2003: 146-147). This allegory can be compared to one of Mark the Monk's (*De Melchis.* 7) (2009: 207-208). Sometimes Maximus was less allegorical but no less perceptive. The wind felt by Elijah is said to be a sign of zealous faith (1 Kings 19:11) (Plested, 2004: 238).

Prime influences on his philosophy were Pseudo-Dionysius, Evagrius, and Stephanus of Alexandria, a pupil of John Philoponus (Moore, 2005: 97). According to Pelikan (*apud* Allen & Neil, 2002: 30) his interpretation, or reinterpretation, of Dionysius was his main contribution to Christian thought. This statement is hard to deny when held up to scrutiny. While the Cappadocians had disseminated and sanitized Origen's teachings Maximus strove to do the same for Dionysius, but he had a more delicate project on his hands than the Cappadocians did. He was forced, in addition to eliminating Dionysius' Monenergism, to restore Christ and the Trinity to his philosophy. He nonetheless refers to Dionysius as "very holy" and as "the most holy and divine interpreter" and speaks of his writings as having been "divinely worked out" (*The Church's Mystagogy* 23, Intr., Concl.) (Maximus the Confessor, 1985: 206, 184, 213). He had perhaps convinced himself that this elusive and enigmatic

figure was a theologian. His conflicted attitude toward his predecessor can be seen in the *Ambigua* where on the one hand he speaks of Dionysius as great and inspired, and on the other he excoriates his Procline term “henad” (*Ambig.* 7.10-11) (2003: 54-55). His interpretation of the church’s mystagogy, which purports to contain the wisdom of a blessed old man, perhaps his mentor Sophronius, is the most outwardly Dionysian thing he wrote (1985: 183-214).

The scholia on the Dionysian canon were once thought the work of Maximus, but though he did produce glosses on Dionysius these are rather to be credited to John of Scythopolis who preceded Maximus in his effort to purify Dionysius’ dark mysticism. John shepherded the Areopagite away from the excesses of later Neoplatonism and in so doing made him more Christian and Chalcedonian (Armstrong, 1967: 476-477). John Philoponus, a Christian albeit a Monophysite philosopher, was another predecessor of Maximus. He did not attempt to sanitize Dionysius but his thought has the tendency to do so by attacking Proclus’ ideas of emanational hierarchies and the divinity of the universe (1967: 478). Maximus’ glosses on the Dionysian canon reveal his knowledge of what he was getting into, or at least that he was engaged in a full-scale spring-cleaning project: “Do not let this chapter disturb you,” he writes of the fifth chapter of the *Mystical Theology*, “and do not think that this divine man is blaspheming” (Roem, 1993: 213). But, by refusing to disentangle himself from the Proto-Hesychastic yet theologically suspect Dionysius, he would ultimately fall victim to an irrationalism at least rhetorically more extreme than his.

Maximus replaced the Procline and Dionysian triad of *monē*, *proodos*, and *epistrophē* with the Porphyrian triad of *ousia*, *dynamis*, and *energeia* (being, potentiality, and act) which was equivalent to beginning, middle, and end. While the Dionysian system begins with rest, in *monē*, and progresses to two different aspects of motion, Maximus’ system connects the two different kinds of rest—being and its fulfillment—with potential motion and thus avoids making the physical world unstable and the intelligible world coeternal with God (Armstrong, 1967: 492-493).

Under the rubric of *ousia* the Porphyrian triad takes the form of *einai*, *eu einai*, and *aei einai* (being, well-being, and ever-being). In postulating this secondary triad Maximus was involved in a dialogue with Origenism which had been exceedingly popular in certain monastic circles and which held a particular interest for him because of his monastic

background. The Monothelite biography of Maximus even claims he was an Origenist. He certainly accepted some of Origen's thought but in a critical way; his approach to Origen was thus a unique one in Greek patristic literature as Louth (1996: 25) aptly points out.

For the Origenists the soul enjoyed repose (*stasis*) in its preincarnate state, but through satiety it endured a fall (*kinēsis*) which led to its corporeal existence (*genesis*). Maximus inverted the Origenist triad of *stasis*, *kinēsis*, and *genesis* with the ascending but not completely analogous triad of *einai*, *eu einai*, and *aei einai* which was reflected in the life of the Christian (the birth of the soul and the body, baptism, and resurrection); in the life of Christ (His birth, baptism, and resurrection); and in His work as the Logos (His figurative incarnation in Scripture, His historical incarnation, and His spiritual incarnation in the Christian) (Armstrong, 1967: 495-497; Russell, 2004: 274). He also related the triad to the last three days of creation and to the three laws: the natural law, the written law, and the law of grace (Thunberg, 1995: 369).

Ousia is apophatic while *dynamis* and *energeia* are cataphatic. The goal of Proto-Hesychastic mysticism is union with God and especially Christ, a union made more possible if Christ is viewed as possessing a full human nature, including a will. Christ's possession of a human will ensures the salvation of even this aspect of the human nature. Maximus refers to a blessed inversion (*kalē antistrophē*) in which man becomes God thanks to God becoming man in Christ (1995: 32). The Christian, he believed, would eventually participate in the very nature of God. Sometimes he defined *theōsis* as being made God by God. It was an identification of one's will (*gnōmen*) with the deity's and a rationalization of the irrational faculties of his soul by "bringing them through reason to Nous," "changing the spirited to love (*agapēn*), the libidinous to joy (*charan*)." The Baptist knew such joy when he leaped in his mother's womb, and David when he danced before the Ark of the Covenant (*Ambig.* 1.2) (Armstrong, 1967: 504).

Christ leads the Proto-Hesychast to union, namely to the rectification of the divisions of male and female, paradise and the inhabited world, heaven and earth, the intelligible and the sensible, the Creator and the creature (*Ad Thalas.* 48; *Ambig.* 1.38) (1967: 503). The division between the sexes is due for Maximus to the Fall, recollecting the pagan fascination with the sacred androgyne, a fascination that is reflected alike in Jewish and Islamic mysticism (Thunberg, 1995: 373; Rushdoony, 1978: 70); the *Gospel of Thomas* where every female who makes herself a male is promised the kingdom of heaven (114) (Meyer, 2007: 153); and the

Acts of Thomas where Mygdonia longs to be in the presence of God where there is neither male nor female (129) (James, 1926: 421; cf. Galatians 3:28). For Maximus the rectification of the division between male and female is the first stage in the return to God. Sex is both a unification of the division and, in a way reminiscent of Socrates' discourse in the *Symposium*, a weak echo of God's love (208-212) (Plato, 2007: 166-167; Moore, 2005: 166).

In the rectification of the last division, that between the Creator and the creature, the soul achieves its oneness with the eternal energies in a moment which Maximus called rapture (*analēpsis*) but which might better be understood as a *Liebestod*. In this moment not only the upper part of the soul but also the lower part of the soul and the body are absorbed. He hints of this absorption in his discussions of unceasing prayer which are important documents on this most Proto-Hesychastic of phenomena. The mind which dies on the heights of prayer lives where God is (*Chs. on Love* 2.62) (Maximus the Confessor, 1985: 56). More than that it passes outside the world and becomes completely without form or matter. Maximus can therefore be shown to have run wild with the Chalcedonian *asynchytos* (without separation), and his philosophy can be shown to be more destructive of human nature than that of Plotinus for whom only the higher soul took part in union with the One. As opposed to Plotinus, who considered the possibility of Forms of particular human beings (*Enn.* 5.7) (1991: 406-409), Maximus lost sight of the concept of the individual person as a unique, unrepeatable entity. Moore (2005: 188) has done Proto-Hesychast studies a great service by stressing this. Balthasar (*apud* Moore, 2005: 168) calls this tendency of Maximus's "Asiatic."

Florovsky's (1987b: 232) attempt to exonerate Maximus from the charge of monism does not strike one to the quick. Maximus' own *Ambigua*, which clearly express the idea of union, help discredit Florovsky's argument. In the future, according to the *Ambigua*, every angel and human being will be permeated with the fullness of God "as the soul permeates the body." "Things that are by nature separated from one another [will] return to a unity as they converge together" (*Ambig.* 7.3-4) (Maximus the Confessor, 2003: 63, 66). Ultimate unification is no less apparent in the *Questions to Thalassius*, really the answers to the questions of Thalassius, which exhibit the Proto-Hesychast technique of *erōtapokriseis*. Maximus writes that God "is bringing about the assimilation of particulars to universals," though he elsewhere states that the Creator will stop short of a complete identification of His essence with the creature's (*Ad Thalass.* 2, 22) (2003: 99-100, 116).

Maximus (*apud* Russell, 2004: 282) speaks of “the whole [creation] wholly interpenetrated (*perichōrēsas*) by God, and become completely whatever God is, save at the level of being, and receiving to itself the whole of God himself, and acquiring as a kind of prize for its ascent to God the most unique God himself.” Except for Stephen Bar Sudaili this was the most radical statement of *theōsis* ever offered up in the orthodox and semi-orthodox circles of the Christian East. Stephen, the author of the *Book of Hierotheus*, envisioned an inseparable commingling (*ḥābīkūtha*) of all things with God, a complete identification with the divine essence which transcended the sensory, the name of God, the ideas of lover and loved, and even unification itself (Colless, 2008: 80-81; Russell, 2004: 325). Moore (2005: 187), ever wary of the trends to which Maximus’ thought ultimately leads, draws a distinction between *theōsis* as understood by St. Peter and *theōsis* as understood by Maximus: “As St. Peter declares, our salvation will consist of our sharing in the divine nature, not in a loss of our own nature. And the loss of our own nature is precisely the conclusion to be drawn from Maximus’ eschatology.”

In Maximus’ thought, unlike Origen’s, or at least Origen’s as it was understood in his day, there is a final consummation, but Maximus did not accept the universal restoration of all humanity. Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite probably did, based on his avoidance of hell and atonement (Arthur, 2008: 156), but the anti-Origenist animus of the Second Council of Constantinople (553) was still making itself felt in Maximus’ time. Like the Proto-Hesychast Gregory of Nyssa he believed that man’s desire for God will never be satisfied, but he did not fully enter into Gregory’s apophaticism: the angels may not know God as God knows Himself, but they do know Him. When he speaks of demons, which is rare, he does so in an almost Dionysian way, claiming that they are not evil by nature but have become so by misusing their natural faculties. He thereby adumbrates the Proto-Hesychasm of Isaac of Nineveh.

6.3.3 Ascetic Thought

According to Louth (1996: 43) Maximus’ entire philosophy has an ascetic foundation. Conversely, according to Moore (2005: 150), his ascetic doctrine has a philosophical basis, namely the reducibility of human act to divine function. The position of either scholar underscores this paper’s theory of Proto-Hesychasm’s monastic slant.

The apocrisiary Anastasius, to be distinguished from Maximus' disciple of the same name, claimed that his *Four Hundred Chapters on Love (agapes)* shine forth "as precious objects to those who are supremely authoritative" (Allen & Neil, 2002: 175). They owe something to the Proto-Hesychasts Gregory of Nazianzus and Pseudo-Dionysius but also to the Origenist Evagrius, although Maximus' view of love is more dynamic than that of Evagrius for whom contemplation, as in the case of the Middle Platonists, was the ultimate goal of the philosopher (Berthold in Maximus the Confessor, 1985: 87). To Evagrius he owes his belief in the power of evil memories. He writes that men carry about with them the voluptuous images of the things they have experienced. It is hard to believe that this statement does not reflect his time in political office, as would his urgent advice not to strike a brother lest one be unable to escape the reproach of his conscience and so be unable to pray with happiness and familiarity with God. The Christian gnostic comes to the frontier of *apatheia*, by which he means love more than the dispassion of the Stoics, when the objects of passion are present and neither their presence nor their subsequent memory have any hold on him.

Maximus speaks of the slime of impure passions (Louth, 1996: 181). He accepted with the Stoics four cardinal passions: desire, lust, fear, and grief. For him these passions were introduced in man after the Fall but could still be used for good (Thunberg, 1995: 152). Two of his preoccupations are lust and anger, of which memory is the immediate cause of both. His pronouncements on these subjects are redolent of the Hesychasts and even certain Neo-Hesychasts such as Nil Sorsky. Against lust he recommends solitude, contemplation, prayer, and desire for God; against anger, which is harder to overcome, long-suffering, the forgetting of offenses, and meekness (*Chs. on Love 2.47*) (Maximus the Confessor, 1985: 53). This does not prevent him from indulging in an anti-Semitic outburst in one of the *Questions to Thalassius* or from elsewhere speaking of the Jews as hateful, admittedly a commonplace (Allen & Neil, 2002: 57). Lust is, however, his primary concern; it can be eliminated by asceticism and exacerbated by associating with women and by intemperance in eating and drinking. One learns to overcome lust by weakening his body, greed by being content with what he has, and the desire for fame by doing good things in secret. The one who so despises lust, greed, and fame will never hate anyone (*Chs. on Love 4.49*) (Maximus the Confessor, 1985: 80). At his trial Maximus himself can be seen as a prime exemplar of this.

Maximus inherited the legacy of the Proto-Hesychast Pseudo-Macarius, transferred largely by Diadochus of Photike (Plested, 2004: 215); this included both light and heart mysticism. Like Macarius he speaks of the workshop of the heart. The apostle Paul states that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3), and Maximus deduces from this the fact that since Christ is in the heart the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are as well. This treasure is hidden in the field of the heart but out of laziness is forsaken for thorns and briars (*Chs. on Love* 4.71) (Maximus the Confessor, 1985: 83). Like Macarius he is not naive: the friends of Christ love everyone but are not loved by everyone. And if loving all men is too high of a calling for his reader he urges him to at least not hate them. The ascetic life is undoubtedly too hard for some, but no one has an excuse not to practice love, forbearance, meekness, self-mastery, and prayer.

Despite his eventual abandonment of the soul Maximus has advice for each part of it in *The Four Hundred Chapters*, which shows how sincerely the Christians accepted Plato's (and Posidonius') tripartite soul, largely through the influence of Clement of Alexandria (Thunberg, 1995: 107). For the rational part he recommends reading, meditation, and prayer; for the spirited love; for the libidinous temperance and self-mastery (*enkrateia*) (*Chs. on Love* 4.49) (Maximus the Confessor, 1985: 80). He compares the mind that does not possess *apatheia* and which is unable to understand heavenly things, to a sparrow whose foot is tied by a cord and is powerless to fly. Likewise the one who relinquishes worldly possessions can become a monk of the outer man, but it is a far greater honor to become a monk of the inner man and to live every day in Christian compassion, confident that he is in the hands of a jealous and loving God (*Chs. on Love* 4.50) (1985: 80-81).

6.3.4 Conclusion

In verifying the Proto-Hesychasm of Maximus the Confessor this section has met a secondary objective of the thesis. It has additionally helped to establish the paper's central contention that the mystics of the period under discussion are important primarily as precursors of fourteenth-century Hesychasm. Maximus was the first Proto-Hesychast to make intelligible the almost unintelligible language of the Byzantine scholastics who had intervened between himself and Dionysius. Although he appeared to correct the excesses of the Areopagite he in other ways surpassed him in irrationality. His lasting contribution to Eastern Orthodox mysticism lay in his transmission of the Dionysian system to the Hesychasts who also took

from him his refusal to deny Christ, and therefore the Christian, a complete human nature. For Alfeyev (2000a: 45), in an observation that should be taken more seriously, he was a link between his predecessors and Symeon the New Theologian.

The (1) doctrine of *theōsis* was central to Maximus, in a more radical way than was generally the case in Proto-Hesychasm, and it was facilitated for him by (2) the reality of Christ's humanity. As a pupil of Dionysius he subscribed to (3) Gregory's dark mysticism, tempered with (4) Macarian light. Other elements of Proto-Hesychasm in his thought are (5) his monasticism, (6) his employment of pagan learning, and his pronouncements on (7) the heart and (8) unceasing prayer. The (9) idea of compassion is present in his work both in his exhortation to brotherly love and his continuation of Dionysius' attempt to whitewash the demons.

This chapter has examined Proto-Hesychastic elements in Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor who are viewed as important forerunners of the Hesychasts. Both of these characters are representatives of the philosophical font of Hesychasm. They achieved this distinction by taking aspects of Procline Neoplatonism and Christianizing them to one degree or another (cf. Armstrong, 1967: 425-426). To these thinkers the Hesychasts were devoted for their core philosophical ideals. To such monastic thinkers as Dorotheus of Gaza, John Climacus, and Isaac of Nineveh they owed their ascetic ideals, and it is now time to turn to these representatives of the second major font of Hesychasm.

7.0 PROTO-HESYCHASM IN THE EASTERN CHRISTIAN ASCETICS

7.1 Introduction

As in the case of the previous chapters the present chapter will attempt to advance the central theoretical argument that the Proto-Hesychasts' main function was in their role as precursors of Hesychasm. Specifically it will identify Hesychastic elements in Eastern Christian ascetics like Isaiah of Scetis, Dorotheus of Gaza, John Climacus, and Isaac of Nineveh. These figures are chosen by virtue of their being the key monastic players of the sixth and seventh centuries, and they will be approached by a consideration of their lives and thought.

The aforesaid ascetics seem to interrupt the logical flow from Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite to Maximus the Confessor, but they bequeathed a distinctive aura to the Hesychastic paideia and were in fact one of the two fonts from which Hesychasm immediately sprang, the other of which was the philosophical. These fonts, meeting and merging as they do in the Hesychasts, illustrate what Plested (2004: 70) calls "the classical Byzantine approach . . . of synthesis." The ascetic school lent to Hesychasm chiefly an emphasis on compassion and *penthos*, ideas that can, as with so much else, be traced back to Pseudo-Macarius. The chapter will commence with Isaiah of Scetis and the ascetic school of Gaza which was both indebted to him yet clearly distinct from him. Both exhibited a somewhat sterner kind of asceticism than the desert fathers had exercised, but while Isaiah looked back to this golden age the school of Gaza was conscious that it was making fresh tracks (Chryssavgis, 2004: 9).

7.2 Isaiah of Scetis

7.2.1 Life and Thought

Isaiah was a Monophysite ascetic whose teachings were accepted by the Orthodox, a situation that is identical to that of the Nestorian Isaac of Nineveh. Isaiah would be embraced even by the Nestorians because of his enjoinder of asceticism. The Syrians, it should be noted, had been drawn to asceticism since the days of the Encratite Tatian. Isaiah originally hailed from Scetis and, fleeing fame, went to Beit Daltha, a village near Gaza where he died around 491. Isaiah introduced Egyptian monasticism to Palestine much as Cassian did to the West (Penkitt & Chryssavgis, 2001: 20). He must have been taught humility by Abba Ammoes. It

is recorded in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* that when he compared Ammoes to an angel, Ammoes replied, “You are like Satan. Even when you say a good word to me, it is like steel” (Ward, 1984: 30). Isaiah was aware of Proto-Hesychast light mysticism in the form of fire. Once when he served a pot of lentils he had just brought to a boil and a monk told him they were not cooked, he replied that it was enough to have seen the fire, an anecdote that sounds similar to stories of the Pre-Socratics (1984: 70; cf. Plutarch, *Comm. Not.* 1084-1085; Aristotle, *De Part. Anim.* 645a17) (Xenophanes, 1992: 202; Heraclitus, 1987: 174).

His disciple Peter compiled his ascetical discourses or *Asketikon* which exhibits the question-and-answer technique of the Proto-Hesychasts (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 642). Isaiah maintained contact with the outside world only through Peter, an eccentricity that would be emulated by Barsanuphius of Gaza. Isaiah had another disciple named Peter, Peter the Iberian, who was a Monophysite, as was Severus of Antioch who was for a time a monk near Maiuma. Maiuma, Tawatha, and Beit Daltha were three of the towns clustered about Gaza. The monks of Gaza, as opposed to the monks of Judea, tended to be Monophysitic, and in this they were following the lead of the monasteries of Egypt such as those along the Taenia Ridge (Hevelone-Harper, 2005: 17; Finneran, 2005: 112).

As against Draguet (*apud* Plested, 2004: 183) who is hypercritical but probably wrong, Chrissyavgis and Penkett (in Isaiah of Scetis, 2002) maintain that Isaiah was the author of the *Asketikon*, although allowing for the incorporation of earlier and later material, including that of Peter. Isaiah is clearly the matrix that holds the collection together, and it is therefore correct to speak of the *Asketikon* as his. Draguet, whose work on the subject resembles the vagaries of higher biblical criticism (cf. Blenkinsopp, 2000: 73-74), alleged that there were several Isaiahs, a hypothesis which the present writer will follow insofar as it concerns the twenty-fifth discourse of the Greek original (*Logos G25*). A commentary was produced on the *Asketikon* in the seventh century by Dadisho Qatraya (of Qatar), a Nestorian of wide learning.

According to Isaiah God gave man the senses which became corrupted after the Fall. The redemptory work of Christ restored man to his pre-fallen state. Desires are not evil but, as has been seen in the theology of Gregory of Nyssa, they become evil because of sin. Isaiah extols penance, the observation of the commandments, and manual labor, in his case basket-weaving. His rebuke of monks who retained their slaves provides a valuable glimpse

into his times.

The ongoing spiritual struggle of the Proto-Hesychast monk was change, variation, measure, heartache, progress, and violence (Penkett & Chryssavgis, 2001: 5). Isaiah gave several listings of the vices, a favorite habit of Christian writers on asceticism since Evagrius. He speaks of the lust of the eyes, ears, mouth, and touch, excluding only the sense of smell (cf. 1 John 2:16). The principal evils that afflict the sons of Adam, and which also serve to fuel sensual pleasure, are gain, honor, repose, pride, beautification of the body, and the wearing of fine clothes (Isaiah of Scetis, 2002: 141). The soul is defiled by four things: not guarding the sight, being friends with a woman, being friends with “those who are glorious in this life,” and conversing with one’s parents. Four things elicit fornication: sleeping too much, eating too much, talking frivolously, and adorning the body (2002: 82). Lust for women is to be countered by remembering the stench of the body and the death of past women.

Isaiah speaks of the “branches of malice” which can be illustrated by his definition of fornication: the taste of the body’s finery, distraction, laziness, the talk of the fool, and shameless peeping. The opposite of the branches of malice is what might be called the branches of Christ whose “burden” is “purity, the absence of anger, kindness, gentleness, the joy of the Spirit, continence of the passions, love toward all, discernment, holiness, steadfast faith, patience in tribulations” (2002: 228, 230). Love is the climax of the virtues.

The image of Christ on the cross is for Isaiah a curative one, like the bronze serpent of Moses (Numbers 21:8-9; John 3:14-15). More central to his thought is the metaphor of ascending the cross, a devotion to and contemplation of the cross which is the next step after bearing one’s cross. Jesus Himself allows the Proto-Hesychast to ascend the cross by resurrecting his intellect from carelessness, although he is discouraged from mounting the cross prematurely since this will attract God’s wrath. The idea of ascending the cross is original with Isaiah, but there had been a foreshadowing of it in Pseudo-Macarius for whom the Christian was to be nailed to the cross.

Humility was another key theme in Isaiah’s theology. His definition of humility was the reckoning of oneself as a sinner who did nothing good before God. For Dadisho Qatraya this was an expansion of Macarius’ (actually Poemen’s or John Kolobos’) shorter definition of humility as supposing oneself the least and most insignificant of men (Plested, 2004: 201).

The monk was a sinner less respectable than a prostitute, and his righteousness was like a woman's menstrual cloth (Isaiah 64:6). He was to remember that he was only dust, ashes, putrefaction, and worms (Isaiah of Scetis, 2002: 223). In a long series of woes Isaiah calls himself and his monks the voluptuous and ephemeral ones who are destined to be decomposed, who fear neither the fire nor the worm, whited sepulchers that "are aroused by carnal actions of an iniquitous manner." Finally he bursts out with, "Woe to the writer of these lamentations! I am prey to everything I write and have not the slightest sigh of regret!" (2002: 235, 241).

Despite his humility Isaiah threatened to run off those who did not obey his rule which was nothing if not formidable. The monk's knees were to be close together when he ate. He was not to open his mouth widely when he laughed (2002: 48). He was to be cheerful towards visiting monks and to wash their clothes if they were dirty. He was not to look around inquisitively if he was in another person's house (2002: 51; cf. Xenocrates *apud* Plutarch, *De Cur.* 521A; Dillon, 2003: 96). He was not to lean against the wall or stand on one leg while resting the other on his knee in aboriginal fashion. He could drink up to three glasses of wine (which was cut with water in late antiquity) but was to realize that wine expelled the fear of God from the soul. He was to walk without swinging his arms. He was not to look at the clothes of a woman, and if a woman bade him good-day he was to answer only in his heart. He was not to wonder during the day what it was that made him have a nocturnal emission the previous night (cf. John Climacus, *Sc. Par.* 15) (1982: 178-179). He was not to look at himself with disrespect when putting on his clothes. He was to give his body the food and rest it needed because it was the temple of God. He was to be gentle to others. He was not to touch anyone or eat outside the appointed hour. The monk who did all this was following Jesus' "holy footprints" (Isaiah of Scetis, 2002: 141).

Plested (2004) has correctly downplayed Isaiah's indebtedness to Pseudo-Macarius, though some degree of influence is evidenced by heart mysticism, light mysticism, and the concept of the Christian going in fear until death. The soul is at the center of the heart and can be infected by it. The monk is therefore instructed to not let go of his heart while he is in the body. Proto-Hesychast light mysticism is illustrated by his statement that prayer is the light of the soul as well as by his contentions that the devil's darkness is horrifying and that the fire of hell is itself dark (Isaiah of Scetis, 2002: 243-244). Light mysticism is opposed to the Gospel metaphor of that which is hidden in darkness (*krypton*) (Luke 8:16-17; 12:2-3). God cannot

become fire for the Proto-Hesychast mystic until he has purified himself. Isaiah illustrates this by the story of Elijah drenching the altar with water before God's manifestation as fire to the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:33-38) (2002: 66).

As for the Christian going in fear until death the monk was not to believe he had remained faithful to God until his last breath. The monk who performed his ascetic labors without protecting himself from the passions was like a house without closed doors and windows into which reptiles could enter (2002: 124). The study of the Psalms helped guard against captivity and defilement. Also to be recommended were the remembrance of hell, sin, and death, the last of which was passed on to the Proto-Hesychast John Climacus and the ascetic school of Sinai. When the monk's soul left his body it was its past good deeds rather than the angels which protected it (2002: 119-120).

Isaiah refers to tranquillity (*hēsychia*) which is achieved by separating oneself from the world. The Proto-Hesychast doctrines of *theōsis*, *penthos*, and unceasing prayer are discernible in his work. He describes Christ as living in the Christian, but he tends to disdain the view that the Eucharist leads to *theōsis*, at least in the one subject to the passions. *Penthos* is combined with unceasing prayer which is said to bring peace and illuminate the heart. Prayer is like a city under siege, and it should not be abandoned in a reckless sortie against the enemy.

The influence of the *Asketikon* was widespread and was first felt by Barsanuphius and John who explicitly mentioned Isaiah four times. Isaiah's anger that is according to nature, to be directed against the demons and the passions, is paralleled by their doctrine of violence in all things. In monastic circles, according to Hadot (1995: 135), demons were the personification of the passions, but this thought would not have been shared by the monks themselves for whom they were real entities.

The *Asketikon* was translated into Arabic, Armenian, and Syriac and memorized by monastic speakers of these languages, most notably Rabban Bar Idta who could repeat it "from end to end" (Isaiah of Scetis, 2002: 36). Isaiah also influenced another Nestorian, Isaac of Nineveh, although the latter tended to shun manual labor, in an almost Messalian way, as interfering with spiritual work, but he emphasized that prayer should not be used as an excuse for slackness (*On Prayer and Outward Posture* 19) (Brock, 1987: 291). The Hesychasts

Nicephorus the Monk and Gregory of Sinai drew directly on the *Asketikon* for their theories of prayer, and Gregory, probably inaccurately, attributed the breathing techniques of the last Proto-Hesychasts to Isaiah. Finally the *Philokalia* of Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain commenced with a digest of the *Asketikon*.

7.2.2 Pseudo-Isaiah of Scetis

This would be the proper place to mention what has become known as *Logos G25*, a Palestinian document that was almost certainly not by Isaiah of Scetis (following Draguet *apud* Plested, 2004: 183) but by an individual whom the present writer would call Pseudo-Isaiah. Pseudo-Isaiah wrote less well than Isaiah, and he was more indebted to Macarius, mainly in his imagery. He was likely once married, on the basis of his comparison of the soul to a neglectful young woman living with her husband (Isaiah of Scetis, 2002: 184); a man does not notice his mother's negligence so much as his wife's. The discourse begins with a distinction between God and mammon. It degenerates into a somewhat inelegant comparison of Old Testament figures and concludes with an exhortation to obedience. The soul, like a neglectful housewife, is urged to be submissive to the intellect (*nous*), an idea that is distinctly Neoplatonic.

Pseudo-Isaiah makes use of both the imagery of the siege and of Proto-Hesychastic fire mysticism which burns up the Christian's noetic enemies. Like Macarius, he urges the mystic to strip off his clothes, in other words perishable things, if he is in danger of drowning (2002: 207). *Theōsis* is in evidence in the discourse; its fruits are love, empathy, peacefulness, humility, patience, generosity, modesty, and fearlessness. On the negative side the theotic monk is not materialistic, judgmental, quarrelsome, or lustful (Penkett & Chryssavgis, 2001: 11-12).

7.2.3 Conclusion

This section has advanced the central argument of the thesis that the Proto-Hesychasts were important largely as precursors of Hesychasm. It has done this by observing Hesychastic elements in Isaiah of Scetis. Isaiah stood solidly in (1) the monastic milieu of Proto-Hesychasm and introduced Egyptian monasticism to Palestine. His subscription to (2) light and especially fire mysticism can be shown by his comment to another ascetic that it was enough to have seen the fire as well as by his recourse to the story of Elijah and the prophets

of Baal in which God manifested Himself as fire. Isaiah was also an exponent of (3) Proto-Hesychast heart mysticism and urged the monk to not let go of his heart while he was in the body. Other foreshadowings of Hesychasm at work in his thought are (4) *theōsis* and (5) his use of the word *hēsychia*. He combines (6) *penthos* with (7) unceasing prayer which brings peace to the heart, and Gregory of Sinai would go so far as to say, mistakenly, that it was Isaiah who originated the Proto-Hesychast breathing techniques. Isaiah's immediate inheritors, the ascetics of the school of Gaza, will now be considered.

7.3 The School of Gaza

7.3.1 Barsanuphius and John

7.3.1.1 Lives

Scholars are only beginning to realize the importance the school of Gaza held in the development of Eastern Christian mysticism, and for this they may thank Derwas Chitty and John Chryssavgis (Hevelone-Harper, 2005: ix). Gaza was situated between the monastic centers of Jerusalem and Egypt and had been visited by, and received, Egyptian ascetics fleeing both nomadic raiders and Patriarch Theophilus' crusade against the Origenist monks (c. 402). Other reasons for the influx of monks into Palestine were the deterioration of the Pachomian monasteries and, in tandem with this, an increase in the number of visitors to them. Monasticism in Gaza was a development of Egyptian monasticism, but it placed more emphasis on the relationship between the disciple and his father who often tended to be harsher than his Egyptian counterpart.

The Palestinian monks, according to Cyril of Scythopolis, were more literate than most (2005: 24). Many ethnic groups lived in the area: Copts, Jews, Syrians, Persians, Arabs, Greeks, Romans, Armenians, and Georgians. The oldest extant manuscripts of the letters of Barsanuphius and John are in fact Georgian translations from the tenth century (Barsanuphius & John, 2003: 51). Barsanuphius himself was a Copt from Egypt and lived in a cell in the hills of Tawatha, about two miles southwest of Gaza.

There are few clues about his life prior to this time. When he was a young man he was plagued by lust, but he continually meditated on the fires of hell, and after five years his temptations passed away (*Ep.* 258) (2006(1): 263). Silouan the Athonite would employ a similar strategy, remembering Christ's words in a vision, "Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not" (Sophrony, 1991: 42). It is known, in a story worthy of the Greek philosophers, that Barsanuphius once came to the hippodrome to see the competitions and said to himself that if the servants of the devil strove to race against one another so eagerly, how much more should the heirs of the kingdom strive to be victorious in the spiritual life (*Ep.* 453) (Barsanuphius & John, 2003: 137-138).

Because of the sparse archaeological work done in Gaza the Proto-Hesychast scholar must go to Judea and Egypt to envision Barsanuphius' cell. Such cells usually had two rooms, one for sleeping and one for prayer and both with wall niches in which to place books or lamps (Hevelone-Harper, 2005: 32-34). Barsanuphius' advice was frequently sought by Seridos, the hegumen of a nearby and unnamed monastery. As a young monk Seridos mistreated his body so that he was "terribly wounded" (*Ep.* 570C) (Barsanuphius & John, 2007(2): 149). He was cautioned against this by Barsanuphius who, it must be admitted, occasionally beat him. This disquieting new phenomenon is unheard of in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and would be criticized by John Climacus. Barsanuphius' guilt for his treatment of Seridos may be the reason he does not consider the possibility, as John the Prophet would, that Seridos was a less than stellar abbot.

Seridos' monks wrote letters to Barsanuphius to which he replied, always through Seridos. With the exception of one incident, Seridos's was the only face he would see for forty years (Dorotheos of Gaza, 1977: 33). At one point in his correspondence he mentions that he has not been sick for awhile, probably because of his isolation. Barsanuphius said he was forbidden from writing letters with his own hand, apparently the commandment of God (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 643). In any case the technique he and the monks employed illustrates the Proto-Hesychast method of asking and answering questions (*erōtapokriseis*) which has been observed in the writings of Basil the Great, Maximus the Confessor, and Isaiah of Scetis.

John the Prophet, who had probably shared a cell with Barsanuphius in Egypt, arrived ten years after his friend and found himself in a similar position; his mouthpiece was first Seridos and then Dorotheus of Gaza (2005(2): 643). It is ironic that John was called the Prophet while Barsanuphius is the one who is singled out as having the prophetic gift. The monks of the Serideum, as it could be called, knew Barsanuphius as the Great Old Man and John as the Other Old Man. They were in reality hermits who acted as abbots beyond the abbot and between them produced over eight hundred letters. Their attempt to live the anchoritic life while helping cenobitic monks had been prefigured by such earlier Egyptian characters as John the Hermit, Paphnutius, and Nephros (Hevelone-Harper, 2005: 21).

Barsanuphius was the more dominant of the two, and John the Prophet went so far as to compare him to God the Father and himself to Jesus Christ, both in his submission to him and in the unity of their pronouncements. Barsanuphius ate only three loaves of bread a week and in addition to his letters sometimes gave the monks his bread and clothing. He writes to one monk that he would give his life for him, and the reader tends not to doubt this (*Ep.* 353) (Barsanuphius & John, 2007(2): 3). John was less warm, less prophetic, less impatient, and less domineering than Barsanuphius, though he was sometimes capable of a harsh word. He allowed a sick monk separate clothing for winter and summer, and permission to drink as much as two full cups of wine a day; keeping a tidy cell was also acceptable.

The fact that three spiritual elders were associated with the Serideum meant that a monk often attempted to bypass one or more of them in order to find an elder who would rubber-stamp his whims, but the system was overall an efficient one. Besides the monks, laypeople and clerics wrote the old men. Among the latter was Peter of Jerusalem who asked for advice on ministering to pagans who had been forcibly converted to Christianity by the laws of Justinian (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 644). The clerics of late antiquity were similar to the Levitical priesthood, and the monks were like the company of the prophets, another instance of early Christian borrowing from Judaism.

Seridos was a well-intentioned but somewhat negligent abbot. He often procrastinated in his duty of visiting neighboring ascetics. One of his monks, John of Beersheba, cruelly upbraided him and repeatedly told him that he washed his hands of him, which almost devastated Seridos. He also gave aid and comfort to other discontented monks. The abbot told John of Beersheba that he followed the advice of Barsanuphius, and John replied, “The old man lets

you walk according to your own will,” which at least gives one some insight into the old man’s *modus vivendi* (*Ep.* 48) (Barsanuphius & John, 2003: 72). When Barsanuphius dictated a letter for John his face was said to shine like fire, and the dedicatee reformed. This was not only a metaphorical statement but a reflection of Proto-Hesychast light mysticism.

Everything afflicted John of Beersheba. Barsanuphius discerned that there were many things boiling in his heart, yet he was fond of him and called him his soul-mate (*homopsychō*) (*Ep.* 7) (2006(1): 28). Once he had to console John after a stone fell on his foot. He wrote that he was a coheir of his gifts and urged him to drive anger from his heart (*Ep.* 10) (2006(1): 30). John of Beersheba was skilled in drawing up the measurements of buildings and may have been a carpenter in his former life. When some of the monks added to blueprints he made for the monastery he was choked with fury. John and Seridos disputed over passages of Scripture, with thinly disguised patience. But they were one in spirit when it came to their desire to tighten the monastery rule, which Barsanuphius urged them to do only gradually (*Ep.* 25) (2006(1): 45).

The majority of scholars, who should not be gainsaid (*pace* Hevelone-Harper, 2005: 38-44), hold that John of Beersheba is to be distinguished from John the Prophet. Even accounting for a reformation on the former’s part, the two men have entirely contrasting personalities. John the Prophet was probably from Egypt, John of Beersheba from Palestine. Barsanuphius is described as the Old Man when he writes to the apparently young John of Beersheba, and it is unlikely that John aged physically and spiritually overnight into the Other Old Man. It would also be unusual for him to be in a position of subservience to Seridos and then to become his master. Barsanuphius’ description of John of Beersheba as his soul-mate proves nothing in this regard since he addresses other monks by this term. Hevelone-Harper (2005: 42) claims that in John of Beersheba and John the Prophet are witnessed “an unusually well documented transition from rebellious newcomer to senior spiritual guide.” In reality no transition is documented: only the newcomer and the spiritual guide are described. The only convincing evidence that the two Johns are the same person is John the Prophet’s desire to die after Seridos. The close relationship implicit in this desire could have conceivably been forged during their early but short-lived enmity.

Another correspondent of Barsanuphius was the monk Theodore who was distressed at having left his wife for the monastic life. The former explained that his distress was because of the fact that his own flesh had been cut off from him (Genesis 2:24) (*Ep.* 129; Barsanuphius & John, 2006(1): 151). Theodore wanted to see Barsanuphius, and Barsanuphius replied that he would someday appear to “the unbelievers in Judea.” Afterwards, when Theodore publicly doubted there was anyone such as Barsanuphius, the old man entered the refectory and washed all the monks’ feet in silence before returning to his cell (*Ep.* 125) (2003: 88).

Eventually plague struck Gaza, and Seridos was smitten. After his death Barsanuphius went into complete seclusion, and if he was afterwards seen by anyone it is not recorded. The monks of the Serideum were traumatized when ulcers broke out over the dying abbot’s body. They asked John the Prophet the reason for this and were told that it was in order to prevent his deification by the populace (*Ep.* 599) (2007(2): 175).

Seridos’ will contained a list of monks whom he recommended as possible successors, but they all declined and the layman Aelianus, who had considered retiring to the community, was tonsured and made the new abbot. In his letters he expressed his concern about an elderly woman. Since he was near retirement age this was probably his wife rather than his mother (*pace* Hevelone-Harper, 2005: 120).

John had prophesied that he would die within a week of Seridos’ death, but Aelianus asked him to hang on for a fortnight in order to receive his guidance. Among other things he asked John whether he should offer his hand to be kissed by the brothers (Yes) or whether he should touch the heads of the kneeling monks (No), questions which remind one that this individual, so suddenly thrust into a position of monastic leadership, had no previous experience in the monastic life (2005: 128). Because he was an outsider he would have been above any rivalries in the monastery, but he would not have, as the previous abbot did, the authority of the old men to advise and support him. John’s consolation to Aelianus was, “We believe in God, that he will do more than when we were among you” (2005: 138). Whether this hope was fulfilled it is impossible to say since nothing more is heard about the monastery after the death of John.

The present writer does not believe it is correct to speak of Aelianus as the leader of the next generation as Hevelone-Harper (2005: 119) does, but if he was in his sixties, as could be proffered, he may have been in charge of the monastery for as long as twenty years. When his end drew near John the Prophet broke with his radical seclusion and summoned the monks of the monastery to his deathbed and blessed and dismissed them. He would never achieve the fame of Barsanuphius. So great was the latter's renown, today eclipsed by Dorotheus's, that he was portrayed with St. Anthony and Ephrem the Syrian on the altar frontal of the Church of Holy Wisdom. In the mid-sixth century the Jerusalem patriarch Eutychius ordered that Barsanuphius' abandoned cell be opened. Flames leaped out of the cell and scorched some of the bystanders, evidence of both Proto-Hesychastic fire mysticism and the old man's own impatience (Dorotheos of Gaza, 1977: 58).

7.3.1.2 Thought

Barsanuphius and John remained aloof from the Chalcedonian-Monophysite controversy that was racking the area and in fact the whole of the Christian East. Barsanuphius had Monophysite sympathies, as was natural for a Copt and which can be detected by his frequent appeals to the Monophysite mantra of Nicaea plus nothing, but he advised his disciples to be loyal to their Chalcedonian bishop. He was thereby following the pacific strictures of Isaiah of Scetis. In a similar vein John the Prophet urged against the anathematization of Nestorius since the Christian should mourn over the sins of his fellow men rather than curse them. He also permitted drinking Jewish wine because God's rain fell on Jewish and Gentile vineyards alike (*Ep.* 686) (Barsanuphius & John, 2003: 178-179). Related to this was his prohibition of informing on a murderer unless one was asked to testify against him in court.

As for monastic Origenism, John allowed the monks to read Evagrius despite the fact that Origen's teachings led to an evil kind of fire. Barsanuphius' list of the passions was Evagrian, but he was an avowed anti-Origenist. To a monk who was reading Origen and Evagrius, albeit critically, Barsanuphius wrote, "I bear witness before God that you have fallen into a pit of the devil and into ultimate death" (*Ep.* 600) (2007(2): 182). He tells the same brother that he has stopped weeping for his own sins because the monk's are so grave. Despite the harshness of his tone it must be admitted that he did not send this monk out to pasture. He did not in general recommend theological reading and regarded Origenism as contaminating to a degree the thought of the Cappadocians (*Ep.* 604) (2007(2): 187). He believed that men

would rise “with their bones, nerves, and hair . . . although they shall be brighter and more glorious” (*Ep.* 607; cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Anim. et Res.* 10) (2007(2): 191; 1993: 112, 114). There is evidence of Proto-Hesychastic *theōsis* in his subsequent claim that even in the present body some individuals are God-bearers.

Barsanuphius and John employed the Gospel metaphor of violence in all things, to be directed primarily against the passions (Matthew 11:12) (Barsanuphius & John, 2003: 28-29). They hence accepted the Stoic concept of *apatheia* (dispassion). Their disciple Dorotheus of Gaza would equate violence in all things with the cutting off of the will. Barsanuphius urges a monk to cut away not only his will but his pretense to rights and his desire to please people (*Ep.* 237) (2006(1): 242). For Plotinus, likewise, seeing the Supreme was possible only if the adept cut away everything (*aphele panta*) (*Enn.* 5.3.17) (Plotinus, 1991: 386). Barsanuphius calls the monastic life bearing in one’s body the death of Jesus, laying down his life for the brothers, and wrestling unto death (2 Corinthians 4:10; John 15:13) (*Eps.* 6, 9, 138; Barsanuphius & John, 2006(1): 27-29, 163). The last metaphor was used for the martyrs of the early church and would be adopted by the Proto-Hesychast John Climacus.

The old men are of course indebted to earlier writers. As with Diadochus of Photike, legal action is sinful. As with Isaiah of Scetis, the monk mounts the cross with Christ. Among the issues their letters address are lust, nocturnal emissions, vainglory, gluttony, scrupulosity, and what is now called posttraumatic stress disorder. Nocturnal emissions were an increasing preoccupation of the Proto-Hesychasts. Barsanuphius recommends humility to triumph over them, and John is certain that the perfect do not experience them, “for they have quenched every natural movement, having rendered themselves spiritual eunuchs for the heavenly kingdom” (*Eps.* 360, 169) (2007(2): 7; 2006(1): 185). Humility is a foremost theme. It is defined as enduring “insults, rebukes, and everything else that our teacher Jesus suffered” (*Ep.* 150) (2006(1): 172). Barsanuphius gives an example of humility: a saint who had the gift of prophecy but attributed it to the demons. Barsanuphius calls himself “an odorous worm, nothing but earth and ashes,” and John refers to himself as a dead person who has long been stinking in the tomb (*Eps.* 125, 532) (2003: 89, 151). Barsanuphius acknowledges that he does not give thanks to God enough which is another illustration of humility.

It must be said, however, that Barsanuphius in particular has a tendency to be patronizing. At one point he refers to John the Prophet as his child (*Ep.* 188) (2006(1): 198) which does not indicate that they were of different ages, as in the case of Julius Africanus' similar language about Origen (*Ep. Or.* 1) (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(4): 385). Hand in hand with this condescension is Barsanuphius' description of three men perfect in God who have received authority to bind and loose; they are John in Rome, Elias in Corinth, and an unnamed individual in Palestine who was likely Barsanuphius himself (*Ep.* 569) (Barsanuphius & John, 2003: 154).

Barsanuphius writes that it is permissible to ask another spiritual elder a question if one's own elder is unable to help him but not to let the latter know that he is going for a second opinion so he will not become envious. He affirms that it is impossible for the demons to do good to anyone. The devil's "good" leads to vainglory while God's leads to calmness. Visions can come from either God or Satan. The devil can take the form of Christ or the Eucharist in dreams, but he cannot take the form of the cross by which he was vanquished. When therefore a cross appears in a dream, the dream is from God (*Ep.* 416) (2007(2): 49). Recurring dreams are not prophetic. In one case, receiving a letter from a monk who has had dreams of wild animals and is suffering from an illness, Barsanuphius writes that his dreams are from the devil and his illness is from God to strengthen him (*Ep.* 78) (2003: 80-81). Nonetheless he does not condemn medicine, though it is not sought by the one perfect in faith, an echo of a pronouncement of Diadochus of Photike's (*On Spiritual Knowl.* 53-54) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 268-269).

The old men directly influenced the Proto-Hesychasts John Climacus and Symeon the New Theologian, and as such they forcefully anticipate Hesychasm, especially in Letter 207 where the saints are spoken of as having arrived where there is "no agitation or distraction, becoming all intellect, all eye, all life, all light, all perfect, all gods" (Barsanuphius & John, 2003: 25). It is perhaps not inappropriate to note that Plotinus compared the Nous, with which union was possible, to "a globe of faces radiant with faces all living" (*Enn.* 6.7.15) (Plotinus, 1991: 485). The imagery of the saint being "all eye" derived from Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim and first appears in monastic literature with the desert father Bessarion (Ezekiel 10:12) (Ward, 1984: 42; cf. Gregory Palamas, 1983: 38). It was thought to be especially applicable to religious leaders insofar as it pleased the conscience and detected that which was to be corrected in others (Gregory the Great, *On Pastoral Care* 3.4) (Stevenson &

Glerup, 2008: 39).

The above excerpt from Barsanuphius is evidence of Proto-Hesychastic light mysticism. He and John quote Christ's words: "I am come to send fire on the earth" (Luke 12:49). Barsanuphius quotes from the Psalms (39:3): "My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned," and claims that Christ's love burns within him "like a flame of the fiercest fire" (*Ep.* 186) (Barsanuphius & John, 2006(1): 193). Children of God are illuminators, and the hegumen guides the monk towards the light. Against the divine fire is the fire of desire which is burned up by the former. In the devil there is only apparent light which reveals itself as darkness in the end.

The monk is something like an angel. This is particularly true of the monastic priest who, in a rhapsodic passage, "assumes the face of the Seraphim in proclaiming the doxology and in fanning the hidden mysteries as with their holy wings, recalling through these wings the levitation from this earth and from things material, while crying out ceaselessly with his intellect in the temple of the inner self the victory hymn of the magnificent glory of our God" (*Ep.* 241) (2006(1): 248).

Proto-Hesychast heart mysticism wielded a powerful spell over Barsanuphius and John. The heart is once called the land of Judea. Barsanuphius urges a bishop to grope in the darkness of his heart, and John tells a correspondent to awake the Jesus that sleeps within him (*Eps.* 838, 182) (2003: 26). A key idea in the letters is the hermits' authority over and assumption of responsibility for the monks, although their advice leaves much room for give-and-take. The monk must obey his abbot even if the matter appears sinful (*Ep.* 288) (2006(1): 283); the disobedient monk, by contrast, becomes a devil. A comparison can be made between this emphasis on the spiritual father with the attitude of the contemporaneous Pseudo-Dionysius toward Hierotheus. This was a relatively new development, not that obedience to the spiritual father was unimportant to Basil the Great. Anthony's insistence that the monk must share every step he takes and every drop he drinks with his elder should also be noted (Penkett & Chryssavgis, 2001: 16).

Barsanuphius and John stress silence, unceasing prayer, and *penthos*. *Penthos* is half joyful and half sad, or rather both joyful and sad: sad at the innocence lost and joyful at the prospect of paradise regained; it is said that John the Prophet always wept when he took communion. Weeping “wipes away one’s former faults and washes away all spots” (*Ep.* 461) (Barsanuphius & John, 2007(2): 75). Laughter is condemned by an appeal to Sirach (21:20): “A fool lifteth up his voice with laughter; but a wise man doth scarce smile a little.”

The Jesus Prayer of the Hesychasts is foreshadowed by Barsanuphius’ recommendation of such prayers as “Jesus, help me” or “Lord, have mercy,” even if the petitioner is already in a state of tranquillity. According to François Neyt (*apud* Bitton-Ashkelony, 2003: 220), the use of the Proto-Hesychast Jesus prayer by the school of Gaza complements their theology of the heart. At one point Barsanuphius states that remembering God in one’s heart is more powerful than saying His name. Remembrance of death is present in the letters and is reinforced by quotations from Sirach (28:6; 41:1). Barsanuphius’ counsel for being saved “in Christ” is waking from slothfulness and lifting up the intellect towards heaven.

7.3.2 Dorotheus of Gaza

Dorotheus of Gaza is probably responsible for the preservation of Barsanuphius and John’s writings. He was born in Antioch at the beginning of the sixth century to a Christian family and was an avid reader from a young age. He gained a classical and medical education, either at Antioch or Gaza which housed a daunting philosophical school (Armstrong, 1967: 484). Hevelone-Harper (2005: 62) plausibly speculates that he may have been destined for the work of a physician. As a student he so wore himself out with his studies that he needed to take frequent baths. Yet he abandoned his secular pursuits and entrusted himself to the Serideum where he distributed his possessions, though the old men allowed him to keep his library for a time. In a decision that forces one to rethink his preconceptions about Proto-Hesychast monasticism, John allowed Dorotheus to retain two warm short-sleeved garments, one long-sleeved winter garment, two light short-sleeved garments, one long-sleeved summer garment, a woolen garment, a coat, a cowl, a summer cloak, a winter cloak, a heavy blanket, a light blanket, and a woolen cover and pillow (*Ep.* 326) (Barsanuphius & John, 2006(1): 301). This probably indicates the affluence from which the novice had graduated and would be weaned, but it is quite different from the rule of Pachomius (c. 320): “It is not allowed to have in one’s cell any material goods, not so much as

a thread, except a mat, a sheep skin, a tunic and what you wear; if possible, [do not have] even a podium under your feet” (*apud* Alfeyev, 2000a: 112).

As a young monk Dorotheus battled against temptations, including gluttony and homosexual lust (Barsanuphius & John, *Eps.* 258, 328) (2006(1): 262-263, 302). He preferred to go for help to Barsanuphius and John rather than the abbot who he believed would be unable to cope with his confessions. Neither of the two old men were fazed, but he ultimately found John more congenial than Barsanuphius. Interestingly he received John’s permission to close his eyes during church services since this allowed him to concentrate more.

Seridos promoted Dorotheus because of his intelligence and high education. He was first porter and master of the guesthouse, being given the task of receiving visiting monks and cameleers, and was eventually made administrator of the monastery infirmary, a building that was financed by his biological brother. Dorotheus was intelligent, idealistic, nervous, and socially inept. The other monks perceived that he was different, and the lowest of them verbally abused him, emptied their flea-ridden mats at the entrance of his cell, and urinated on him in his sleep (Hevelone-Harper, 2005: 66).

Seridos entrusted Dorotheus with the charge of other monks, including an obsessive robber, but his first disciple was Dositheus. The sources for Dositheus’ life are Dorotheus’ discourses as well as a biography of Dositheus partly based on them. Dositheus was the young page of a general and knew nothing about Christianity. He wanted to visit the holy places, which his master allowed, and at Gethsemane he saw a painting of hell. He also dreamed that the Virgin Mary, who wore purple but whom he did not recognize, lectured to him on death and judgment (2005: 70). Eventually, with his master’s permission, he entered Seridos’ monastery. The abbot wanted to keep him away from the other monks, probably because of his youth, and placed him under Dorotheus’ jurisdiction in the infirmary.

Dorotheus first taught him to eat half a loaf of bread a day until he was down to only one-ninth of a loaf. From there he taught him not to become attached to anything, for instance a beautiful knife with which to cut his bread, since he wanted him to be the slave of God rather than of the knife (2005: 70). He also introduced him to a rudimentary Jesus prayer. When Dositheus prided himself on his ability to make comfortable beds for the infirmary patients, Dorotheus said, “You are then a good servant. You are a good worker. But are you a

good monk?” (2005: 70). Dorotheus was a mild master, but Seridos once slapped Dositheus in order to teach him spiritually. This is reminiscent of the apparently irrational koans employed by the Zen master.

The monks seem to have been fond of Dositheus and often made him cry in order to admire his sensitive conscience. Working in the infirmary was an unsanitary job, and it is not surprising that Dositheus, undernourished and of a weak constitution from the beginning, soon developed tuberculosis and began to spit blood. The monks asked the Great Old Man to pray for his life. Barsanuphius said that death would be better for him than life, and the monks thereafter prayed for his death. Dositheus himself asked Barsanuphius to pray for the end of his sufferings. Barsanuphius replied, “Go in peace! Stand by the Holy Trinity and intercede for us” (2005: 71). Despite their love for Dositheus the monks did not believe he was a saint until a visiting father told them he had seen a vision of the youth in heaven. After Dositheus’ death Dorotheus celebrated him for his obedience in all things and consonant surrender of his will (Dorotheos of Gaza, 1977: 44).

After the deaths of John and Seridos, Dorotheus founded his own monastery between Gaza and Maiuma, although Wheeler (in Dorotheos of Gaza, 1977: 69) believes, perhaps fancifully, that he never left Tawatha but took on Barsanuphius and John’s old position, with an approach that was at once gentler and more involved. He numbered among his later disciples a murderer who would turn himself over to the authorities to be executed.

Dorotheus was posthumously accused of Monophysitism which is not surprising since he was a pupil of Barsanuphius. He was strongly influenced by Evagrius but disavowed Evagrius’ idea that one passion can drive out another, a thought which he corrects with Abba Poemen’s insight that evil never took away evil. He may reasonably be suspected of Origenism. He gives an Origenist analysis of the garb of his monks: a tunic with short sleeves and a purple insignia, a deerskin belt, a scapular, and a cowl. The short-sleeved tunic represents the severing of the grasping hands, the purple insignia represents the King whom the monk serves, the belt symbolizes mortification, the scapular on the shoulders signifies the cross, and the cowl abasement (1977: 86-87).

Dorotheus was to a degree affected by Greek thought and adopted the Proto-Hesychast method of “spoiling the Egyptians” in the matter of pagan philosophy. The royal road of the saints is for him the Aristotelian mean (1977: 166). He resembles the Stoic Epictetus when he suggests that the monk should examine his progress over a day, a month, and a year (Epictetus, *Disc.* 2.18) (1926(1): 353).

His *Instructions* are similar to the *Conferences* of John Cassian. His theology is like that of the old men of Gaza but more systematic; they after all only wrote letters. He inherits from them their stress on the importance of the spiritual father which would be passed on to the Proto-Hesychast John Climacus and, through him, to Symeon the New Theologian. Nothing is more dangerous than not to have a spiritual director. Dorotheus quotes from the Septuagint of Proverbs (11:14) to show that those without a spiritual guide are like autumn leaves. The spiritual father is so essential that he commends a monk who prays not to God but to the God of his superior. With this attitude could be compared the story of Mark, the disciple of Abba Silvanus, who was writing calligraphy when his superior called him. He was in the process of writing an omega when he was called and immediately left off his exercise so that it appeared he had written an upsilon (Ward, 1984: 145-146; Goldfrank, 1970(2): 279-280).

Isaiah of Scetis’ cross imagery was a potent shaper of Dorotheus’ ascetic thought. For him the cross is “complete mortification achieved through faith in Christ” (Chryssavgis, 2004: 76). He speaks much of liberating oneself from the passions; monasticism, as might have been expected, is the best way of going about this. Self-indulgence is the most dangerous vice because it drives away fear of the Lord. Remembrance of death, an important concept especially in later Proto-Hesychasm, leads to fear of the Lord. The monastic life involves not only the renunciation of the passions but the renunciation of the world, parents, wealth, possessions, and business dealings. He highlights *apatheia* which is the result of the annihilation of the will. The conscience is implanted in man at his creation and is energized by keeping the commandments. These include non-judgment. One is not to judge others or even be suspicious of their good intentions. He gives an example of a man waiting on a street at night. Three people passed him. The first thought he was waiting for a prostitute, the second thought he was a thief, and the third thought he was waiting for a friend to join him for prayers at church (Dorotheos of Gaza, 1977: 246).

Nothing is more powerful than humility to which guilt is of course related. In his study of the writings of Evagrius, Cassian, and Dorotheus, Augustine Kelly (1984: 82) notes that Dorotheus emphasized guilt the most of the three writers, quoting with approval Abba Theophilus' formula for spiritual success: "in everything to blame oneself." Humility protects the soul from all temptations and passions. Dorotheus distinguishes between two kinds of humility. The first is to rank oneself lower than everyone; the second, and greater form of humility, includes this and adds to it the attribution of all of one's good deeds to God. Only the humble can bear spiritual fruit, in the same way that barren branches cannot bear fruit unless they are tied to stones and bowed down. The humble Proto-Hesychast is able to practice unceasing prayer mainly because he knows he is in need of help.

Dorotheus often turns to the Old Testament to illustrate humility. Abraham called himself dust and ashes in Genesis 18:27, a verse that was quoted by all three representatives of the school of Gaza (Barsanuphius and John, 2007(2): 7, 71; Dorotheos of Gaza, 1977: 99). David allowed Shimei to curse him and prevented harm from befalling him; here is observed the paradox of a secular king being an example for the Proto-Hesychast monk (2 Samuel 16:9-12) (1977: 147; cf. Mark the Monk, *Disp. with an Attorney* 2.3; 2009: 242). He also quotes the self-deprecating words of Abba Moses: "Dirty ash heap, not a man, why do you come among men?" (Dorotheos of Gaza, 1977: 204). Finally he refers to himself and his monks as "we who can be saved, and do not even desire it" (1977: 173). Humility was the cement which held the virtues together and was itself a virtue greater than love. Not that Dorotheus was against the last virtue. He approvingly quotes John the Prophet's words to him, "Once for all, brother, may God preserve you in love" (1977: 117).

The Proto-Hesychast doctrine of *penthos* is also evident in Dorotheus' thought. Tears are said to attract Christ's compassion, a novel idea in Proto-Hesychasm. He does not tell his reader much about his spiritual experiences, but one episode should be recounted since it displays the period's fascination with light and heart mysticism. He once saw an angel in the guise of a bishop at the church of Seridos' monastery. After his prayer the bishop turned and came towards him and tapped him on the chest (the place of his heart), intoning Psalm 40:1-2 as he did so. When the angel departed light flooded his soul and he never afterwards knew sorrow or fear (1977: 128).

7.3.3 Conclusion

In this section the central contention of the thesis that the Proto-Hesychasts were important mainly as precursors of Hesychasm has been advanced. This has been done by an evaluation of Hesychastic elements in the ascetical school of Gaza. Here are encountered many of the dominant themes of Hesychasm including (1) monasticism, (2) heart mysticism, (3) *penthos*, (4) compassion, (5) unceasing prayer, and (6) the use of pagan learning. For the ascetics (7) *theōsis*, as was becoming the fashion, tends to be related to (8) light mysticism rather than dark mysticism; the saint is said to have arrived at a place which is, among other things, all light. Thus is discerned the victory of Macarius' light mysticism over Gregory's dark mysticism, a victory that would be consolidated by the Hesychasts despite their acceptance of the latter's apophaticism. It was perhaps inevitable that light mysticism would triumph. In the New Testament and particularly the Gospel of John (1:5; 3:19; 13:30), God is equated with light and the powers of evil with darkness.

7.4 Abba Philemon

Abba Philemon was an Egyptian monk of the early seventh century. For a time he lived as a solitary in the desert where he was tempted with terrible temptations and was able to cope only by putting his trust fully in God (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1981(2): 351). He afterwards lived as a cenobite, keeping the thought of death in his mind and weeping when he went to the monastic church. He was an ordained priest, but though he was often a communicant at the Eucharist he was rarely a celebrant. He never spoke except to answer spiritual questions, and he would not communicate on any day he had spoken. When the priest intoned the words "Holy things to the holy" he became full of fear, knowing that the church was then filled with the angels and God Himself. Whenever he went into the city to sell the small baskets he made he pretended to be a half-wit so as to avoid talking to anyone, and his buyers paid him whatever they thought was fair (1981(2): 357).

For Philemon the spiritual life is unthinkable without monasticism. God does not enter the Proto-Hesychast's heart until he has endured bodily suffering and purified his soul. Philemon does not appear to have been as opposed to sleep as Isaac of Nineveh would be, but he urges the monk to steel himself for this necessary evil by a regular regimen of prayer (1981(2): 348). One suspects that this may have been said more for the benefit of his disciples, as

Philemon often recited the Gospel of John to prevent himself from falling asleep. The Proto-Hesychast doctrine of *penthos* is never far from his mind. The fire of desire, the evil counterpart of light mysticism, can be overcome only by tears of contrition.

According to Philemon God does everything; the only thing the monk needs to do is pray. He is the first figure to have recorded the Proto-Hesychast Jesus prayer in the formula through which it would later gain fame: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me” (1981(2): 348). He also explicitly quotes the apostle Paul’s command to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). He looks forward in another way to Hesychastic and especially Neo-Hesychastic prayer theory in his account of an elder who was able to pray the Lord’s Prayer without thinking. This phenomenon appears in the nineteenth century with the author of *The Way of a Pilgrim* whose heart prayed the Jesus Prayer automatically (*Rass. Stran.*, Second Meeting) (Smith, 1999: 68-69). In Abba Philemon, therefore, are encountered Hesychastic elements which help advance the central argument that the Proto-Hesychasts were important largely as forerunners of Hesychasm. These include (1) monasticism, (2) *penthos*, and (3) unceasing prayer. Philemon’s recommendation of the Jesus prayer is the closest link between him and the major figure of John Climacus who will next be taken in hand.

7.5 John Climacus

7.5.1 Life

Asceticism in the Sinai was influenced by both Egyptian and Palestinian monasticism, and both sources are discernible in the Proto-Hesychast John Climacus. John was the writer of the *Klimax tou Paradeisou*, usually translated *Ladder of Divine Ascent*. It was originally styled the *Spiritual Tablets* and became one of the most diligently studied books in the Eastern church after the Bible and the *Philokalia* (Hunt, 2004: 55; John Climacus, 1982: 1). It was the Orthodox *Imitation of Christ* and was illustrated in the eleventh century (Angold, 1995: 271). John, who seems by virtue of his use of maritime metaphors to have spent his early years near the sea (Hunt, 2004: 54), preferred a middle way between anchoritism and cenobitism, the practice of small groups living under the supervision of a father. For three years he followed this way until he was twenty and his spiritual father Martyrius took him to the chapel at the top of Mount Sinai in order to be tonsured. There they met the abbot Anastasius who

prophesied that John would himself become abbot. Afterwards he lived for forty years as a not completely solitary anchorite at Tholas, five miles from the mountain. Ware (in John Climacus, 1982: 1-2) alleges that while John waged the ascetic life at Sinai he would have been acutely aware of the mountain's association with Moses as well as the monastery church's mosaic of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. This may be going too far, but it is an interesting point in view of the Hesychasts' fascination with the Taboric Light.

John slept and ate little, though he ate everything permitted by the rule for the sake of his strength. Many monks came to him for advice, but when his enemies claimed he was a gossip he said no word for a year, agreeing to speak only when his slanderers begged him to end his self-imposed silence. He once visited a monastery in Alexandria which housed a prison to which fallen monks could consign themselves, and he stayed there for a month. Some of the monks in the prison wanted their bodies thrown into the wilderness after they died, as the Neo-Hesychast Nil Sorsky would also request (*Sc. Par. 5; Testament 2*) (1982: 126; Nil Sorsky, 2003: 136). With some insight Hunt (2004: 239) notes that John's world was one of extremes, with the prison of the penitents placed in contrast to the ultimate welcome into God's love.

Towards the end of John's time as an anchorite he took on a disciple. Afterwards he was elected abbot of the Sinaitic monks against his will. On the day of his installation, according to Anastasius of Sinai, six hundred pilgrims arrived at the monastery, lorded over by an old Jewish man who on his disappearance was revealed to have been Moses (Duffy, 1999: 5). Before his death John chose as his replacement the monk George who prophesied that he would die a year after him.

7.5.2 Thought

The *Ladder* was written at the request of John of Raithu, an abbot who lived southwest of Mount Sinai, but John warned him that he was still among the learners. Its style comes as a relief after the ornateness of the Cappadocians. Chryssavgis (2004: 12) correctly describes it as terse, aphoristic, and uncoordinated. Some of the first languages the *Ladder* was translated into were Syriac, Arabic, and Georgian. Theologically it looks forward to the work of Symeon the New Theologian and the Hesychast Gregory Palamas. Its central metaphor is comparable to the ladder of Jacob's dream with angels moving upwards and downwards; the

levels are referred to as steps rather than rungs. Sometimes the metaphor is abandoned for the Gospel metaphor of the narrow way. He describes the path to the narrow way as mortification of the appetite, nightlong toil, a ration of water, a small amount of bread, and “the bitter cup of dishonor” (*Sc. Par.* 2) (John Climacus, 1982: 83).

The imagery of the spiritual ladder was not new to Eastern Orthodoxy. Origen, John Chrysostom, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus had already spoken of the spiritual life as a ladder, and the Proto-Hesychast Gregory of Nyssa (*Hom. Beat.* 5-6) (1954: 130, 150) had compared both the spiritual ascent and the Beatitudes with Jacob’s ladder. Aphrahat the Persian Sage had written that Jacob’s ladder was a symbol of Jesus Christ “in that by means of him the just ascend from the lower to the upper realm” (Špidlík, 2005: 207; cf. John 1:51). But John’s ladder was so influential that soon after his time its imagery began to appear in icons, frescoes, and illuminated manuscripts, often with John standing off to the side and pointing to the ladder.

The ladder has thirty steps, helpfully categorized by Ware (in John Climacus, 1982: 12-13), which represent the years of Christ’s life before His baptism; the thirty-first step is *The Shepherd*, the title of another treatise John addressed to John of Raithu. The previous thirty steps are divided into three sections. The book resembles the *Odyssey* in that the first and last sections are shorter than the middle. The first concerns the break with the world and speaks of renunciation, detachment, and exile. The second concerns the active life, in other words the practice of the virtues, and is divided into obedience, penitence, remembrance of death, sorrow, the uprooting of the passions (anger, malice, slander, talkativeness, falsehood, despondency, gluttony, lust, avarice, insensitivity, fear, vainglory, and pride), and the cultivation of the higher virtues, namely simplicity, humility, and discernment. The uprooting of avarice and the uprooting of insensitivity take two and three steps respectively. The final section concerns the contemplative life and is composed of stillness, prayer, dispassion, and love. John’s discussion of stillness and prayer are strongly anticipatory of Hesychasm. In treating the passions he often gives their definitions at the beginning of the step, and at the end he asks the vice to name its parents and offspring.

John drew on Isaiah of Scetis, the school of Gaza, and Pseudo-Macarius, the last mainly through the intermediacy of Mark the Monk and Diadochus of Photike. He owed his description of temptation and some of his phraseology to Mark, and to Diadochus his suspicion of dreams, his concept of prayer without mental images, the invocation of Jesus' name, *apatheia*, the spiritual senses, and the withdrawal of divine grace, although he may have well gleaned the invocation of Jesus' name from Barsanuphius (Chryssavgis, 2004: 37-39).

John's anthropology has been treated by Chryssavgis (2004) in one of the most competent recent books on Proto-Hesychasm. The evidence of *To the Shepherd* is that he accepted the tripartite (and Platonic) division of the human soul into the rational, the spirited, and the libidinous. He often used heart (*kardia*) and soul (*psychē*) interchangeably, though the former had a more religious connotation than the latter, being called God's bridal chamber; but the *nous* was clearly the intellect which he described as the helm of the soul by which God piloted the ascetic (2004: 118). Except for monastic reasons he was not against the body which was the soul's image.

John usually termed the ascetic life a wrestling school and employed the metaphor of wrestling, a Pauline concept (Ephesians 6:12) which had been used in ante-Nicene times to describe martyrdom, even in those cases when the martyr was a woman. He does not know any member of this school who, despite their great ages, suffered from senility. In reading the *Ladder*, whenever one questions John's wisdom continued reflection proves him right. He is stern, which would be expected from someone who lived alone for forty years, but there is an underlying current of humor to his words, and Hunt (2004: 236) forgivably finds him avuncular. Concerning *penthos* he writes, "The man who takes pride in his tears and who secretly condemns those who do not weep is like the man who asks the king for a weapon against the enemy—and then uses it to commit suicide" (*Sc. Par. 7*) (John Climacus, 1982: 141). He also has this bon mot in his discussion of the seventh step: "A man who has heard himself sentenced to death will not worry about the way theaters are run" (*Sc. Par. 7*) (1982: 143-144). Nonetheless he urges his reader to avoid those who tell jokes or their jokes will come back to him when he is praying, as they doubtless did for him.

He has much to say about the three modes of monastic living which were all to be found in the Sinai. The monk living in a community was under the authority of the abbot or hegumen; the monk following the middle way was under the authority of the *gerōn* or old man. John recommends the middle path because it avoids excessive solitude while at the same time being quieter than life lived in the community. The solitary life leaves room for personal freedom, but it is harder psychologically. It can be undertaken by only a few, and it is unable to teach the virtue of obedience which is open to the monk living in a community. At times John seems to disparage the solitary life and agrees with the author of Proverbs, and with Evagrius and Cassian: “A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgment” (Proverbs 18:1, NKJV). It is still not surprising to find him praising the anchorites of Scetis over Pachomius’ monks (*Sc. Par.* 27) (1982: 265).

John discloses much wisdom gathered in the school of the desert, including advice for married men in sentences which are quoted here because they read like the rule for a holy order and so remind one of the monastic yet inclusive mindset of Proto-Hesychasm: “Do whatever good you may. Speak evil of no one. Rob no one. Tell no lie. Despise no one and carry no hate. Do not neglect the Eucharist. Show compassion to the needy. Do not be a cause of scandal to anyone. Stay away from the bed of another, and be satisfied with what your own wives can provide you. If you do all this, you will not be far from the kingdom of heaven” (*Sc. Par.* 1) (1982: 78). As for the monk himself John counsels him to choose his elder with care and after that to rigorously obey him. If he obeys only occasionally it is as though he alternated between putting medicine and quicklime in his eyes. It is better to sin against God than against an elder because if the elder is angry he cannot intercede with God for the monk.

The monk should not leave his spiritual father even if he is guilty of fornication; he will be helped in this if he continually remembers his good deeds. For John the spiritual father undertakes great responsibility for his disciple and has to answer for him at the day of judgment. John is indebted here to the monastic school of Gaza, as he is in his discussion of the Jesus prayer, a precursor of the formalized Jesus Prayer of the Hesychasts (1982: 42, 47). That he was influenced by this school, as well as by Isaiah of Scetis, and that he had disciples from Palestine may provide a clue as to his origins, although, because of the paucity of evidence, one should not be too dogmatic on this score.

John sees an ideal elder in the abbot of the Alexandrian monastery whom he calls a light of lights. Despite the imperiousness of this abbot he once told John about a disciple who had kneeled before his own “wretched feet.” John provides examples of more likeable elders, including one who had a novice lay his hand on his neck and attribute to him the blasphemous thoughts with which he was plagued so he would cease thinking about them, an early example of treating what is now called obsessive-compulsive disorder (*Sc. Par.* 23) (1982: 213). John gives other techniques for coping with this disorder. If obsessive, blasphemous thoughts come to the monk when he is praying he is to ignore them rather than fight against them, since otherwise they will become stronger. “The beginning of prayer,” he writes, “is the expulsion of distractions from the very start (*ek proimiōn autōn*) by a single thought (*monologistōs*)” (*Sc. Par.* 28) (1982: 276).

John seems to have never recovered from the spell of the Alexandrian monastery. A certain Isidore had come there before he arrived; he had been a member of the ruling class and was cruel and proud. His superior devised a strange penitence for him: he was to stand at the gate of the monastery for seven years and bend his knee to everyone entering with the lying words, “Pray for me, father, for I am an epileptic.” At first Isidore did penitence with bitterness, thinking that he was nonetheless suffering justly for his sins, but from bitterness he passed to meditation on his eternal reward and then to a feeling of unworthiness for the monastic life (*Sc. Par.* 4) (1982: 97-98).

The abbot of the monastery sometimes mistreated his monks so they would be patient and so earn heavenly reward. Promising John that he would show him an example of holy prudence he forced an eighty-year-old priest to stand at his table while the abbot and John took their meal. Afterwards John asked the priest what he was thinking while he stood there and was told that the commandment of the abbot was the commandment of God and that love for the abbot was like love for God (*Sc. Par.* 4) (1982: 98-99). However an abbot’s mistreatment of a cenobite could sometimes get out of hand. John knew of an elder who so abused a subordinate that he died. The elder, who had not intended his death, was tormented by guilt and built his cell next to the dead monk’s tomb.

John cannot recommend remembrance of death (*mnēmē thanatou*) highly enough and urges the monk to pray near tombs (*Sc. Par.* 18) (1982: 193). An ascetic of Tholas had a near-death experience and never spoke to anyone afterwards, asking to be shut up in his cell to which his comrades brought bread and water. Only before his death did he allow the monks to visit him, a decision that reminds one of the career of the Proto-Hesychast John the Prophet. He begged their forgiveness and added that no one who had acquired the remembrance of death would be able to sin (*Sc. Par.* 6) (1982: 134). John has recourse, in the Proto-Hesychast way, to certain Greek philosophers who described philosophy as a meditation on death, and he quotes a gem from Sirach (7:36): “Remember only thy last things, and thou shalt not sin forever.” This can be compared with Epictetus’ words, “Let death be before your eyes every day, and you will never have any abject thought nor excessive desire” (*Ench.* 21) (Hadot, 1995: 131). The Isaiah of Scetis of the *Philokalia* had a variation of this, not linked to remembrance of death: “Whatever you are doing, remember that God sees all your thoughts, and then you will never sin” (*On Guarding the Intellect* 27) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 28).

There is a hint of *theōsis* in John’s story of the monk Menas whose body gave off a sweet odor after he died (*Sc. Par.* 4) (John Climacus, 1982: 102). He also placed much emphasis on *penthos* which was becoming steadily prominent in Proto-Hesychasm. No higher praise of the phenomenon could be apparent than in the following words: “When we die, we will not be criticized for having failed to work miracles. We will not be accused of having failed to be theologians or contemplatives. But we will certainly have some explanation to offer to God for not having mourned unceasingly” (*Sc. Par.* 7) (1982: 145). The Alexandrian prison which he described and admired was the apotheosis of penthic asceticism, but it was penthic asceticism run wild. The denizens of the prison prayed to become demon-possessed, epileptic, blind, or paralyzed. One need not share Gibbon’s elaborate scorn (1932(2): 362-364) of Symeon the Stylite to be repulsed by this abode, which many of John’s original readers doubtless were.

John recalls the Proto-Hesychast Pseudo-Macarius when he writes that the tears which follow baptism are greater than baptism itself because they wash away the sins committed after baptism. In his eyes mourning is not an offspring of despondency but rather a gratefulness for forgiveness which mingles with gladness like honey with the honeycomb, a statement which Hunt (2004: 73) plausibly believes to be an allusion to Psalm 19:9-10. *Penthos* arises from either fear, mercy, or love, and is proof that the Proto-Hesychast’s prayers have been received

by God. The one perfect in mourning does not condemn sinners and is “inordinately compassionate” (*Sc. Par.* 7) (John Climacus, 1982: 136). Isaac of Nineveh, John’s younger contemporary, also regarded tears highly, placing them on the frontier between this life and the life to come; but neither John nor Isaac would go as far as the last Proto-Hesychast, Symeon the New Theologian, for whom only those who have wept can be truly repentant.

One of the reasons for John’s disbelief in the complete efficacy of *penthos* was his presence at the deathbed scene of the monk Stephen who had the gift of tears and had raised a leopard by the hand. Stephen, delirious in his final hour, was heard to answer an interrogator’s questions. Sometimes he was falsely accused. At other times he would say, “Quite right; I have no excuse, but God is merciful” (*Sc. Par.* 7) (1982: 142). What particularly distressed John, and what makes one lose some respect for him, was his opinion that this judgment was final, that Stephen, who had passed away not knowing whether or not he had been forgiven, was perhaps unforgiven.

John, taxing himself with insensitivity, found that tears are easy for some but not for others, and he would be followed by Anastasius of Sinai. Yet insensitivity, which he calls a “stinking tyrant,” would explain his ability to live the anchoritic life for forty years (*Sc. Par.* 18) (1982: 192). He pens what he believes is a self-portrait in his discussion of the insensitive man which is an insightful glimpse into this humorous, inimitable, and uniquely humble Proto-Hesychast (*Sc. Par.* 18) (1982: 191-192; cf. Romans 7:15-20; Hultgren, 2011: 288-289; Colless, 2008: 131-132). He also taxed himself with vanity. Once when he was thinking of leaving the monastic life, a group of visitors came to his cell and praised him for his example, and his vanity, the “three-horned demon,” stood up against the other demons that were urging him to leave (*Sc. Par.* 27) (John Climacus, 1982: 267-268). He warns the monk that if he dresses too well or, for ascetic reasons, too shabbily he will alike be susceptible to vainglory. This had already been noted by the Proto-Hesychast Isaiah of Scetis (2002: 51-52).

John defines anger as the insatiable desire for dishonor and calls the angry man a voluntary epileptic who through an involuntary tendency breaks out into convulsions. He believes, with Basil the Great, that such anger should be turned against the demons. He strongly condemns lust but thinks that nocturnal emissions, the scourge of the desert fathers, are no reason to feel guilt; they are rather permitted by God so the monk can learn humility. He views touch as the vilest of the senses, as it was also for Proclus and Isidore for whom it was the sense most

bound to the earth and to generation (Damascius, *Hist. Phil.* 12) (1999: 89); but for John sight tends to be the most dangerous sense when lust is in question, so much so that hearing profane tales, although unprofitable, is less perilous than witnessing them. He describes physical love as the longing of the clay for the clay, of the worm for the worm, and says it is fortunate that women are naturally shy and do not run after men or no man would be saved (*Sc. Par.* 15) (John Climacus, 1982: 174, 181).

It is characteristic of the lustful, he observes, to enthuse about everything, not only women but even inanimate objects; but he has known instances of lust being turned upwards as when Nonnus of Heliopolis, seeing a prostitute of great beauty, was led immediately to praise her maker (*Sc. Par.* 15) (1982: 179). A passion which might have led to evildoing was thus driven out by a virtue. Sometimes the opposite can occur, as when hospitality invites gluttony. He compares this phenomenon to bringing up a frog when drawing water from a well. But he is also aware, with Evagrius, of the possibility of one vice expelling another, as when malice drives out desire.

In short, lust is not the only sin, as this missive, from George Arsilaite, the one-time director of John's "useless soul," reveals: "I have observed that the demons of vainglory and concupiscence usually attack us in the morning. In the middle of the day the attack comes from the demons of despondency, gloom, and anger; and it comes in the evening from the dung-loving demons of the miserable stomach" (*Sc. Par.* 27) (1982: 269). Gluttony, a vice associated with the medieval monk's need to solace his celibacy, was almost unknown among the Proto-Hesychast monks. When John speaks of gluttony he means the desire to eat one's food and the enjoyment of it. For him money is the root of all evil in the world, and gluttony is the root of all evil in the monastic life.

People who are sensual are often humble, merciful, flatterers, and lovers of beautiful faces. They should undertake the solitary life, but that life is not to be recommended to the angry man unless he is so angry he is a danger to his fellow monks. John provides a revealing and disquieting account of such solitaries raging in their cells (*Sc. Par.* 8) (1982: 148). In general the communal life fuels gluttony and the solitary life anger and boredom. Tedium is the constant companion of the solitary. It "smiles at the sight of a hermit's cell and comes creeping up to live nearby" (*Sc. Par.* 13) (1982: 162). Fear of darkness is also a danger to the solitary, a fact that was also addressed by the Proto-Hesychast John the Prophet and the

Nestorian Dadisho Qatraya (Barsanuphius & John, *Ep.* 131; *Disc. Sol.* 7) (2006(1): 153; Colless, 2008: 92). The danger and fear of night of course has biblical parallels as two recent commentaries have demonstrated (Propp, 1999: 392; Blenkinsopp, 2000: 437). John urges the solitary to emulate the fearlessness of thieves and grave robbers. He should enter the dark places that most terrify him and pray the Proto-Hesychast Jesus prayer with outstretched arms (*Sc. Par.* 21) (John Climacus, 1982: 200). Neither the cenobite nor the anchorite is ever forsaken. The cenobite is helped by his brother, and the anchorite is helped by the angels. John himself once saw an angel, and he accepted Pseudo-Dionysius' belief that the seraphim were the highest of the angels.

John is reluctant to speak of the contemplative life out of humility and because of the pressing importance of the ascetic life (*Sc. Par.* 27) (1982: 261). Though he openly disowns the Origenist Evagrius he follows him on the distinction between the active and contemplative life, the classic examples of which were Martha and Mary, or sometimes Leah and Rachel. He does not agree with Evagrius on everything, believing that love rather than contemplation is the ultimate step in the Christian ascent. Like Maximus the Confessor and Isaac of Nineveh he sets love on the highest pedestal and so looks forward to the Hesychasts. The Eastern Christian monks were often more compassionate than the Western monks, perhaps to atone for the cruelty of their secular rulers.

The contemplative life deals with dispassion (*apatheia*) and stillness (*hēsychia*). Dispassion is a spiritual heaven within the heart (Turner, 1990: 179-180; cf. Philotheus of Sinai, *On Watchfulness* 27; Symeon, *Eth. Disc.* 4) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1984(3): 26; Symeon the New Theologian, 1996(2): 36). He states that no one possessed it more than Ephrem the Syrian who prayed, “Spare me from the waves of your grace” (*Sc. Par.* 29) (John Climacus, 1982: 283). He defines *hēsychia* as worshipping God unceasingly and waiting on Him. The Proto-Hesychast longs for God and generates “fire by fire, love by love, desire by desire” (*Sc. Par.* 27) (1982: 263). He is like an angel on earth, and a single word from him reveals his entire inner man. *Hēsychia* refers to both the solitary life and inner prayer, endeavors which should be attempted only when the struggle against the passions has been victoriously waged. John recommends brief prayer and so foreshadows the Jesus Prayer of the Hesychasts—“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me”—though the prayer he recommends is from the Psalms—“Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak” (Psalm 6:2) (*Sc. Par.* 15; 1982: 184). Abba Philemon, as has been seen, used a Jesus prayer, as did John's

follower Hesychius, but the prayer itself, together with its breathing techniques, did not originate until the late thirteenth century. John nonetheless strongly anticipates this prayer, which he urges especially before falling asleep, when he writes, “*Hēsychia* is worshipping God unceasingly and waiting on Him. Let the remembrance of Jesus be present with your every breath. Then indeed you will appreciate the value of stillness” (*Sc. Par.* 27) (1982: 269-270). Here he not only uses the word *hēsychia*, but the prayer he advises is both unceasing and united with one’s breathing, as it would be for the Hesychasts.

7.5.3 Conclusion

This section has helped to establish the central contention of the thesis that the Proto-Hesychasts were important largely for their role as precursors of Hesychasm. It has done this by meeting a secondary objective of the thesis, namely the evaluation of Hesychastic elements in the Eastern Christian ascetic John Climacus. John endorsed his predecessor Gregory of Nyssa’s (1) apophaticism, rejecting any definition of God except that He was love (*Sc. Par.* 30) (1982: 286). But, as was becoming the fashion in Proto-Hesychasm, he was less of a dark mystic than (2) a light mystic, believing that the divine is revealed as uncreated light and that one can partake of this light with his body and soul. He spoke of an abundance of unspeakable light and defined the monk as “unfailing light . . . in the heart” (Chryssavgis, 2004: 96). He was thus clearly influenced by the Proto-Hesychast Pseudo-Macarius, largely through Mark the Monk and Diadochus of Photike. As did Macarius he attributed the unity of the individual human being to (3) the heart. He accepted Nyssen’s idea of infinite progress; God would always remain elusive, although present, to the mystic; but his imagery of angelic glory owed more to Nazianzen. Even the angels made progress, he believed, and added glory to glory and knowledge to knowledge. Other reflections of Proto-Hesychasm in his thought were (4) his monasticism, (5) his use of the word *hēsychia*, and (6) his employment of pagan philosophy. Like the Hesychasts he stressed (7) love and (8) weeping for sin, and he practiced (9) a rudimentary Jesus prayer; but, perhaps because of the animus of the Palestinian school, he did not extol compassion for the demons. The Hesychasts, particularly Gregory of Sinai and Gregory Palamas, were much affected by John as was the Neo-Hesychast Nil Sorsky (2004: 235-236). John’s later contemporary, the Syrian Isaac of Nineveh, will now be considered.

7.6 Isaac of Nineveh

7.6.1 Life

The Nestorians passed out of Orthodox knowledge sooner than the Monophysites, in part because they were centered in East Syria and Persia while the Monophysites flourished in West Syria and Egypt. Nestorianism was violently persecuted by the Chalcedonians and the Persians but survived on the strength of its liturgy and hierarchy. Barsumas, the bishop of Nisibis, was something of the black sheep of the Nestorians. He organized massacres of Monophysite presbyters and strove to completely disentangle Nestorianism from Chalcedonianism, even to the point of recommending marriage for the higher clergy and himself wedding a nun. Barsumas founded a theological school and was eventually murdered by vengeful Persian monks in 493 (Douglas, 1978: 107).

Isaac of Nineveh demonstrated a softer side to Nestorianism, a faith from which he was later thought to have drifted, a position refuted by Alfeyev (2000b: 49-60) in another competent recent book on Proto-Hesychasm. The fact that Alfeyev is Orthodox and an admirer of Isaac but still believes him to be a Nestorian is a strong argument in favor of his view. Isaac was so admired even by the Monophysites that they published an edition of his ascetical discourses, albeit excising the names of Mar Theodore and Mar Diodore whom he quoted (*mār* = lord). For the Nestorian catholicos Yuhanna ibn Barsi, Isaac spoke “the language of the heavenly beings” (2000b: 28). The Russian thinker Ivan Kireevsky (*apud* Alfeyev, 2000b: 13) claimed he embodied the essence of Orthodox spirituality and that his theology was more profoundly thought through than that of any of the other fathers. This statement should be taken with a grain of salt, as the recollection of such Proto-Hesychasts as Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor will make clear, but it draws the student’s attention to the systematic nature of Isaac’s thought (*pace* Hunt, 2004: 135), hidden beneath a deceptive veneer of Syrian simplicity and a complete hostility to non-Christian philosophy rare among the Proto-Hesychasts.

There are two main biographies of Isaac, one in a collection of biographies by Isho’denah of Basra, and the other a sympathetic Monophysite life. He was born at Beit Qatraya (Qatar), a stopping place on the trade route to India (Isaac of Nineveh, 1998: 10). An Arabic source has him a monk from his youth which places him solidly in the Proto-Hesychast climate. In any

case he practiced monasticism in Qatar until the Nestorian patriarch George (Giwargis), a translator of Aristotle, lured him to Mesopotamia and consecrated him bishop of Nineveh in the monastery of Beth Abe which had previously housed Sahdona. He resigned from this post after five months, either because it did not suit his temperament or because of his controversial views on the final judgment (1998: 11-12). A Nestorian document suggests that he left in disgust over a dispute between two of his parishioners on money matters (Alfeyev, 2000b: 27). It is also likely that, like Barsanuphius before him, he refrained from Christological controversy (Isaac of Nineveh, 1990: 10). He would later warn against reading polemical literature, even anti-Jewish and anti-Monophysite literature, which aimed at causing schisms (Alfeyev, 2000b: 176). Hunt (2004: 131) reminds the reader that during this time there was intense political tension between the bishops of Qatar and those of the Tigris-Euphrates region which may shed light on Isaac's decision. But Isho'denah of Basra was the most correct in stating that the reason for his resigning from his post was known only to God (2004: 131).

Isaac ultimately resided at the monastery of Rabban Shabur where his diligent study of Scripture led to his premature blindness and need for a stenographer, hence he was sometimes called the second Didymus. Once his brother asked him to visit him, but he replied that he would not leave the monastery because of the perils of the world. In his letter he claimed to suffer from spiritual abscesses which if they were without bandages for only one day would become infested with worms.

Isaac ate three loaves of bread a week with uncooked vegetables. He befriended the animals who are said to have smelled in him the odor of Adam before the Fall, a reminiscence of one of his own comments on the humble man (Isaac of Nineveh, 1990: 69; Ouspensky, 1992(1): 189). It would likewise be said of John the Venerable that the animals smelled the scent of their Creator on him (Colless, 2008: 97). Similarly Enkidu, in the *Gilgamesh Epic*, has friendship with the animals until a woman “[takes] away his scent” (1.173) (Propp, 2006: 163). Closeness to animals was considered a sign of saintliness as has been seen in the Proto-Hesychast John Climacus' story of the penitetic monk Stephen (*Sc. Par.* 7) (John Climacus, 1982: 142).

7.6.2 The First Two Mystical Stages

Like Plotinus Isaac was reluctant to commit his thoughts to paper (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 3) (Plotinus, 1991: civ-cv; Hunt, 2004: 132). In his writings he inherited the Syrians' vivid imagery which ultimately went back to the Gospels: "I do not wish to count milestones, but to enter the marriage chamber." "O name of Jesus, key to all gifts, open up for me the great door to your treasure-house, that I may enter and praise you with the praise that comes from the heart in return for your mercies which I have experienced in latter days." (Alfeyev, 2000b: 12, 204). Yet he was often long-winded, and his writings filled five to seven volumes (Hunt, 2004: 134). He was influenced by Evagrius, Theodore of Mopsuestia ("the Blessed Interpreter"), Pseudo-Macarius, Ephrem the Syrian, the *Book of Steps*, and the Monophysite John the Solitary who emphasized the division of the human being into body, soul, and spirit (Isaac of Nineveh, 1998: 17-18).

To Macarius he owed his Proto-Hesychastic emphasis on *penthos* and humility, and to Theodore his anti-Origenist belief in two ages (*katastaseis*) not necessarily susceptible to fall (1998: 21-22). He is the only mystic to be treated in detail in this paper who wrote in Syriac, and he hence refers to the angels as watchers, a Syriac habit that derives from Daniel 4:10-23. The Orthodox scholar Florovsky (1987a: 230) too hastily regards him as more Alexandrian than Antiochene, particularly in his exegesis, but Isaac's indebtedness to Evagrianism, which the present writer would classify as monastically applied Origenism, was shared by other Nestorian ascetics despite their avowed repudiation of Origen himself. This indebtedness led certain Monophysites to associate Nestorianism with Origenism. However Wensinck (*apud* Hunt, 2004: 129-130) also views him as deeply indebted to the Alexandrian school, particularly in his scriptural exegesis, so Florovsky's view should not be rejected out of hand.

Isaac's system is thought to have influenced Sufism (Brock, 1987: xli; downplayed by Hansbury in Isaac of Nineveh, 1998: 22), particularly in its stress on loving God more than fearing hell, a thought not unrelated to the Proto-Hesychast Mark the Monk's warning (*Ep. Nich.* 2.5, 4.1-6, 11.1-2) (2009: 86) that the hope of eternal reward is insufficient for those living the spiritual life. Something akin to *penthos* at least appears to have penetrated Islamic mysticism (Hunt, 2004: 18). Isaac approaches the nearest, of the other Proto-Hesychasts in this study, to the paradoxical and occasionally absurdist comments of the Sufis: "He is blessed who has withdrawn from the world and from its darkness, and listens to himself

alone” (in Florovsky, 1987a: 232). “Reckon as dreams all the good and evil things which happen to the body.” “Be at peace with your soul and heaven and earth will be at peace with you. Endeavor to enter the treasury within you and you will see the treasury which is in heaven” (*De Perf. Rel.* 1.38, 2.9) (Isaac of Nineveh, 1998: 32, 34). It is startling to find such paradoxical and cryptic mysticism as Isaac’s among the Nestorians whose theology seems to have been more sublunary than that of the Chalcedonians and the Monophysites, but it is also present in Simon Taibutheh and John the Venerable.

Throughout Isaac’s writings the Proto-Hesychast technique of *erōtapokriseis* is discernible. His system employs the tripartite structure that is characteristic of Syrian theology and which would pass into Byzantine theology via the Greek translation of his discourses. As with Joseph Ḥazzaya, the three stages of the mystical ascent are the way of the body, the way of the soul, and the way of the spirit. In the first stage the aspirant forsakes all bodily passions—love of riches, the accumulation of possessions, gluttony, carnal desire, love of honor, envy, administration of government, the pomp and pride of power, elegance, popularity, ill-will, and fear for the body—by means of the three bodily works of fasting, vigils, and psalmody (1998: 13). In the second stage he turns his thoughts from created objects and things foreign to the soul to the incomparable wisdom of God. The quest of the second stage is purity, and it results in the heart’s limpidity or clearness (*šapyûthā*) (1998: 14). Used of water *šapyûthā* denotes transparency (cf. Arabic *šufūf*); used of the mind it means serenity and purity (Colless, 2008: 41). This concept was ultimately influenced by the sixth beatitude, “Blessed are the pure in heart” (Matthew 5:8), and had been employed by such Syrian Christians as Aphrahat, Philoxenus of Mabbug, and Abraham of Nathpar. The Beatitudes in their entirety were a strong inspiration for the Syrian ascetic tradition (cf. Sahdona, *De Trin.* 2.4) (Brock, 1987: 200).

Isaac’s third stage, observable neither to humans nor demons but only God, discards the ladders of knowledge and even prayer once the pure light of faith has been attained (Isaac of Nineveh, 1998: 14-15). This does not mean that prayer plays a minor role in the second stage. Prayer is to a monk what stars are to a sailor, and constancy in night vigils leads to a mind clothed with light. Here is evidence of the unceasing prayer and light mysticism of the Proto-Hesychasts.

Initially, as in the case of Symeon the New Theologian, Isaac is strict on the outward forms of prayer, with the typical exceptions for elderly and sick monks. Sometimes he jettisons the external rules and forms of prayer for the simple act of lying face down before the cross. The cross was an object especially revered by the iconoclastic Nestorians (Gutmann, 1977: 52, 60; Alfeyev, 2000b: 163-174) but apparently not only by them (Barsanuphius & John, *Ep.* 416) (2007(2): 49). Isaac's arguments supporting the veneration of the cross were similar to the contemporaneous arguments of the Byzantine Iconodules against the Iconoclasts. Although the Nestorian cross did not bear an image of Christ it was so powerful to Isaac that he speaks of the monk seeing Christ with his intellectual eyes when raising his physical eyes to the cross (Alfeyev, 2000b: 172). According to him the cross possessed the same power that dwelled in the Ark of the Covenant (Numbers 10:35-36; Joshua 7:6; 1 Samuel 4:7) (2000b: 164-165).

Isaac speaks much of light (*nûhrā*), though this is generally an inward phenomenon due to prayer and ascetic activities rather than, as with the Hesychasts, God's direct gift to the mystic. Light is of course more predominant in his thought than darkness, and though he speaks of the "dark cloud" of the eternal mystery, he also refers to the "hidden light" mentioned by the Proto-Hesychast Dionysius the Areopagite (*Divine Names* 724B) (1987: 89; Alfeyev, 2000b: 202-203). Other reflections of light and fire mysticism in his thought are his comments that the Holy Spirit kindles all the parts of the soul with fire, that the mystic is himself clothed with fire, and that fire awaits fire as holy things befit the holy (2000b: 302). He contrasts those whose movements are burning fire with the ungodly whose movements are limited by their gross nature (2000b: 212). This tends to recall Plotinus' condemnation (*Enn.* 3.4.2) (1991: 167-168) of the torpidly gross to reincarnation into plant life, not that Isaac was directly acquainted with his writings. Against such light and fire mysticism is the fire of desire which afflicts the monk on seeing women or hearing stories about them. He therefore praises a desert father who refrained from entering a monastery which housed a monk with a womanish face.

The second tripartite scheme in Isaac, the division of the human being into body, soul, and spirit, which is related to the mystical scheme, should be further clarified. The soul is composed of both the mind and the heart. The mind is a sense of the soul, but the heart (*libā*) is the highest part of the soul and is its root just as the mind is its branch. If the branch of the mind is holy it means nothing if the root is unholy. The mind is purified by the study of

Scripture, fasting, and tranquillity, but it is easily defiled. The heart is purified by suffering, detachment from the world, and complete mortification, and it is not easily defiled (*De Perf. Rel.* 3.11) (Isaac of Nineveh, 1998: 50-51). The heart is situated midway between the physical and the psychic and is the core of the outer and the inner man alike.

Isaac shares the Proto-Hesychast Maximus the Confessor's concern for the body's dignity, thanks to the fact that Christ shared in humanity, a central doctrine for the Nestorians. He quotes an elder who claimed that the body, including the physical heart, must participate in every prayer or else the prayer will be an abortion. That *libā* implied the physical heart is clear from the writings of the Nestorian mystic Simon Taibutheh (the Graceful) for whom the left ventricle was the seat of the lower soul (Colless 2008: 86). This all tends to verify the breathing techniques of the Hesychasts. Yet Isaac is wary of the body in ways that reflect the late antique disparagement of matter (Hunt, 2004: 135). The soul which is covered by the curtain of the flesh has no faith. The body's natural propensity toward gluttony leads to all manner of sins, including nocturnal emissions. As he puts it, the vapor rising from the stomach obscures the knowledge of the divine (Isaac of Nineveh, 1969(1): 91).

Though sleep can vouchsafe visions to the saint, it also incites him to impure cohabitation with women and therefore to conception which is the root of all the boons and, more importantly, all the evils in the world. Hence the monk is encouraged to stand praying the whole night in order to sleep as little as possible. He includes an anecdote about Abba Arsenius in which he enlisted two monks to keep watch over him so that he would not sleep, but the monks fell asleep and even he did so for awhile. The Proto-Hesychast John the Prophet had advised a monk not to sleep at night and only a little during the day (*Ep.* 147) (Barsanuphius & John, 2006(1): 169). Psalm 13:3—"Give light to my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death"—appears to have been used as a rationale for avoiding sleep. It is not irrelevant that the Nestorian holy woman Shirin, the mentor of Sahdona, tried to prevent herself from sleeping (Colless, 2008: 85). Sleep was a knotty issue for the early Eastern Christian monks; the Palestinian monks attempted to resolve the problem by sleeping sitting up, as Hevelone-Harper (2005: 46) has shown. In the fourteenth century the Hesychasts Nicephorus the Monk and Gregory of Sinai would attack monks unduly devoted to sleep deprivation (Krausmüller, 2006: 109).

In line with the monastic milieu of Proto-Hesychasm Isaac urges his reader to persecute himself. Evil thoughts do not come to an end without the desert (*madbār*) and solitude (*šalyûtha*). *Šalyûtha* denotes not only solitude but is the Syrian counterpart of *hēsychia*, a concept Isaac would have found in Evagrius. The preferred addressee of his writings is the *yihîdāyā*, the anchorite or solitary (cf. Hebrew *yāhîd* and Arabic *wahîd*), as opposed to the *dêrāyā*, the cenobite (Alfeyev, 2000b: 61). Such solitaries live “on mountains, in caves, in ravines, cliffs, rugged and desolate places” (2000b: 205). They are hidden from the world and known only to God, and their cells are like the cave in which God spoke to Moses (Exodus 33:22; 34:6-7).

Isaac compares the ascetic to the solitary stork and to the equally lonely pearl diver. As a native Qatari he would have been intimately acquainted with pearl diving. He describes in minute detail the diver bringing up a pearl from the ocean, the waves beating against him as he eludes sharks and holds his breath until he nearly dies (2000b: 95). His recurrent allusions to the metaphors of the pearl and the robe (2000b: 282) ultimately stem from the Gnostic *Hymn of the Pearl* which was not unsusceptible to orthodox interpretation if Colless (2008: 5-21) is correct.

The Proto-Hesychast monk is to love all men but to keep distant from them. Isaac relates a story in which Abba Arsenius, having been successfully cornered by an archbishop, said, “Whenever you hear that Arsenius is found, do not draw nigh to that place” (Alfeyev, 2000b: 66). Usually Isaac says that solitude is more important than almsgiving, but he includes the story of Abba Agathon who encountered a stranger lying in the street sick. He hired a house and served him for six months until he recovered (cf. Luke 10:25-37). He also commends the same father for wishing that he could find a leper and give him his healthy body in return for his diseased one (Isaac of Nineveh, 1969(2): 381).

Silence is next to godliness. Isaac, as has been seen, frequently refers to Abba Arsenius who took a vow of silence, and he recommends putting a stone in one’s mouth to prevent loquacity, as the Sufi Abu Bakr is known to have done. He condemns zeal and urges humility which is characterized by a moderated voice, mean speech, self-deprecation, poor raiment, an unpompous gait, a lowered gaze, mercy, tears, solitude, and contrition. Humility covers the monk like clothing and protects him from all external dangers (Alfeyev, 2000b: 117, 121). Like the “circle” of John Climacus, which will presently be considered, Isaac concentrates on

remembrance of death: “When you approach to your bed, say to it, ‘This very night, perchance, you will be my tomb, O bed; for I know not whether tonight instead of a transient sleep, the eternal sleep of death will be mine’” (2000b: 271).

Hannah Hunt (2004: 134) understandably terms Isaac a “complex and intense exponent of the Syrian mourner.” His subscription to the Proto-Hesychast concept of *penthos*, a key element in the second mystical stage, can be illustrated by his words to the monk, “As long as you have eyes, fill them with tears before that hour when dust will cover your black clothes” (Alfeyev, 2000b: 85). He recommends that tears be mingled with the monk’s reading, prayer, office, meditation, food, and drink. *Pace Colless* (2008: 90) the present writer does not believe this means he will literally drink his tears with his meals, yet he should doubtless be envisioned as weeping even at mealtimes. Isaac includes the physiological observation, unique among the Proto-Hesychasts, that *penthos* makes the marrow feel injured.

In his discourses Isaac calls the world a harlot. Major causes of sin, though not sins in themselves, are wine, women, riches, and health. The monk, so far as Isaac is concerned, makes a covenant with God not to look at a woman’s face, magnificent people, luxurious clothing, or society, nor to hear the converse of worldly people or ask questions about them (Alfeyev, 2000b: 82). He claims it is better to eat poison than to eat with a woman, even if she is a nun (Hunt, 2004: 129; cf. Mark the Monk, *Ep. Nich.* 11.2; Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 157-158). Like the Proto-Hesychast Maximus the Confessor he has counsel for the monk who cannot become a saint: “If you do not have a pure heart, at least have a pure mouth” (Alfeyev, 2000b: 79). He emphasizes Scripture reading and yet, as would Symeon the New Theologian after him, entertains the existence of a state in which no reading is necessary (2000b: 183; Symeon, *226 Pract. and Theol. Chs.* 3.100; 1982: 103).

Even though he warns the monk against the attractions which glitter before his eyes, this is only so he might not deprive him of the joy of the Spirit. He is certain that if wine warms and delights the body the Word of God warms and delights the soul. He urges the Proto-Hesychast to “thirst for Jesus, that He may intoxicate you with His love; close your eyes to the precious things of the world that you may deserve to have the peace of God reign in your heart” (*De Perf. Rel.* 3.38) (Isaac of Nineveh, 1998: 55). Sober intoxication is a concept found in Plotinus as well as in such early Christian writers as Gregory of Nyssa, Ephrem the Syrian, Dadisho Qatraya, and Simon Taibutheh (Alfeyev, 2000b: 248).

Although, like Macarius, Isaac has known of miracle-workers who have fallen into fleshly lust after doing noble work for God (Pseudo-Macarius, *Hom.* 27.14-16) (1992: 180), it does not seem impossible to him that the saint will never lose heart over his ascetic endeavors because the angels always descend from heaven to comfort him. The angels visited the desert fathers “because their modes of life were so similar” (Alfeyev, 2000b: 230-231; cf. Budge, 1977(4): 458). Here again is encountered the Proto-Hesychastic fascination with angels who were regarded as the monk’s heavenly counterparts. Following the Areopagite, Isaac accepts nine ranks of angels (though he reverses Dionysius’ ordering for the first hierarchy) as well as their role as mediators between God, themselves, and mankind. Demons are like angels, but instead of being bearers of divine light they are bearers of darkness.

The monk has intimate acquaintance with the spirit world, both in its good and evil aspects. Isaac believes in demons, but Satan is for him not generally a being but the state of the will’s deviation from the truth. He speaks of the various strategies of the devil. When all else fails he sends the ascetic images of beautiful women in his dreams so he will give up the monastic life. The non-Christian sees angels and demons with his physical eyes, but the Proto-Hesychast mystic sees them with his spiritual eyes, a point that would be reiterated by the fourteenth-century Hesychasts in contradistinction to the New Messalians. Isaac sees two stages in divine revelations: the first are perceptible visions, the second are the visionless revelations of the mind that characterize spiritual prayer, which will shortly be considered. In connection with this it may be noted that “insights” (*sūkālē*; cf. Hebrew *śekel*) is one of his preferred terms. These can be either personal or communal. The latter, which one is tempted to compare with the collective unconscious, concern revelations imparted to a Christian that were earlier given to other church members (Alfeyev, 2000b: 215).

Isaac recalls the Proto-Hesychast Pseudo-Macarius when he commands his reader to honor all men, whether Jews, infidels, or murderers. The monk who accuses his brother will be accused by God. He is not to distinguish between people of different classes, to reprove those who are in need of soothing words, or to despise those who are imperfect or who suffer from “foul diseases” (*De Perf. Rel.* 5.85) (Isaac of Nineveh, 1998: 97). He must not even show anger on his face. There is a place for hatred in Isaac’s theology, but only towards sin, not sinners or demons. The monk is not to hurt anyone, even the evil one. He is to “cover” the sinner with his mantle (1969(2): 235) and to pray that God will send comfort to all who are constrained by hardship. The neighbor is to be honored beyond his worth and his hand and

foot are to be kissed, an illustration that goes back to the *Book of Steps* (Colless, 2008: 53). The righteous will even attribute beautiful things to him, both to his face and to others, so that he will be encouraged to become good and so that when he irritates the righteous man the latter will only need to gesture humbly and he will receive the rebuke with grace (*De Perf. Rel.* 5.86) (Isaac of Nineveh, 1998: 98). He urges the Proto-Hesychast monk to precede his almsgiving with kind words, which are a greater gift than alms.

Humanity is most human, and godlike, when it shows mercy (Hunt, 2004: 160). Isaac's definition of a merciful heart is in accordance with Maximus' and John Climacus' stress on brotherly love. A merciful heart is a heart "burning . . . unto the whole creation, man, fowls and beasts, demons and whatever exists" (Isaac of Nineveh, 1969(2): 341). The presence of demons in Isaac's list would of course have been controversial for Chalcedonians, Nestorians, and Monophysites alike. While Origen and Gregory had spoken of demons being forgiven, no one had gone so far as to urge compassion for them. Not surprisingly Isaac believed in the apocatastasis, the final forgiveness, and thought of hell (*gīhanā*) (cf. Matthew 5:22, 29-30; Mark 9:43-48) more as a kind of purgatory, hence he has been labeled, perhaps too enthusiastically, "a mystic for our time" (Hill, 2006: 112). Against Dionysius, the hierarchical nature of reality will also be abolished because everyone will know God (cf. Jeremiah 31:34). A grain of sand does not counterbalance a load of gold, and God's justice does not counterbalance his mercy (Alfeyev, 2000b: 41). No mention is made of justice in the Gospels, only mercy. God's nature as love (*ḥūbā*; cf. Hebrew *'ah^abā* and Arabic *ḥubb*) and mercy (*rahmē*; cf. Hebrew *rah^amīm* and Arabic *rahma*) is a central theme of Isaac's thought, and it well plays into the stress on compassion that has been observed in the Proto-Hesychasts in this paper.

Fear is paradoxically said to precede love (cf. Proverbs 1:7). The torments of *gīhanā* are terrible and unbearable (2000b: 296), but the greatest torment of all is due to the love of the damned for God which he compares to the acute suffering engendered by a lovers' quarrel. But love also results in joy and is equated with the wine of the Psalmist which "makes glad the heart of man" (Psalm 104:15) (cf. Wright, 2005: 185).

7.6.3 The Third Stage

However, as against John Climacus, love is only one of the goals for the Proto-Hesychast mystic; the other is spiritual prayer, the third stage of the mystical ascent. Isaac stresses that it is to be distinguished from prayer and is given the name of prayer only because it is granted at the time of prayer (*Disc. 22*) (Brock, 1987: 259-260). The path to spiritual prayer (*ṣlūtā rūḥānāyā*) is unceasing prayer or pure prayer (*ṣlūtā dāḥīta*) which is defined, after Evagrius, as the purity of the intellect which is produced with dread only from the light of the Holy Trinity (Isaac of Nineveh, 1969(1): 118). Pure prayer was also known to the Proto-Hesychast Mark the Monk (*On Those Who Imagine* 162) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 140). But the ascetic is unable to come to the spiritual world with unceasing prayer alone. Prayer must be combined with tears which, unexpectedly, cease the closer one draws near to the spiritual world. For John Climacus also, monks who had reached the ultimate stage of the divine ladder no longer had recourse to *penthos*.

Intellectual apperceptions during unceasing prayer sometimes produce the color of the sky or a sapphire, a phenomenon noted by Evagrius (Colless, 2008: 24). Yahweh's throne and the floor of his throne room are described in the Old Testament as being like sapphire or lapis lazuli (Exodus 24:10; Ezekiel 1:26). Likewise the Canaanite storm god possessed a palace of lapis lazuli, and the Babylonian god Bel-Marduk a throne of lapis; in both cases, according to Propp (2006: 296-297), this was likely the firmament itself.

When the mystic has abandoned prayer for spiritual prayer his mind gazes "in ecstasy at the unattainable things which do not belong to the world of mortals" (Isaac of Nineveh, 1969(1): 118). For this kind of prayer the recollection of God is alone sufficient, and the Proto-Hesychast spends his nights on bended knees though without praying. Was this Isaac's interpretation of "groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26)? Sometimes his definition of even pure prayer is broader than what one would expect and encompasses any consideration of a good mind about God. There is a foreshadowing of spiritual prayer in the story of Dositheus. As he lay dying he confessed to his master that he could no longer pray, and the latter replied that he should instead keep God in his mind and think of Him as present with him (Turner, 1990: 156).

Only one man in ten thousand achieves spiritual prayer. Isaac writes as though it were permanent, an attainment more for this Proto-Hesychast than for Proto-Hesychasm in general; at any rate he still refers to it as prayer. The monk who practices spiritual prayer does not know whether he is in the world or not (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:2-3). Proto-Hesychast dark mysticism is in evidence in his description of spiritual prayer during which the mind enters the Holy of Holies and the darkness which dulls the vision of the seraphim (Florovsky, 1987a: 238). The most detailed description of spiritual prayer comes not from Isaac himself but from his fellow Nestorian Joseph Ḥazzaya (the Visionary) (Colless, 2008: 145).

Isaac's similarity to non-Christian mystics and especially Plotinus is striking. The life of the godlike among men, according to Plotinus, was a life of "liberation from the alien that besets us here" (*Enn.* 6.9.11) (1991: 549). The life of prayer, according to Isaac, is a life of "liberation from the evil things here" (Isaac of Nineveh, 1969(1): 113). Both thinkers stress the soul's disdain for terrestrial things when it has reached the state of blessedness. Also Plotinian is Isaac's metaphor of sober drunkenness and his statement that if God did not limit the mystic's moments of ecstasy no one would willingly return from this state, a concept also found in Pseudo-Macarius (*Hom.* 8.4) (1992: 82; cf. Brock, 1987: 356). He maintains that those who have tasted the divine sweetness are lifted from the present life just as the desert bird can take a man's life by the sweetness of its singing. This can be compared to the Talmud's view (*Sanh.* 95b) that the soldiers of Sennacherib were killed when their ears were opened to hear the singing of the *ḥayyôt*, the heavenly living creatures, or to stories of Sufis who died in ecstasy on hearing a verse from the Qur'an (Philo of Alexandria, 1981: 313).

Those who draw near the final stage of purity perceive angels and holy men in their dreams, and these dreams serve to comfort them throughout the day. One of the manifestations of spiritual prayer is a supposed senility that is actually a childlikeness which results from reaching perfection and serenity. One such father, Isaac writes, had forgotten all worldly things and often had to ask his disciple whether he had eaten or taken communion. One suspects that this was at least a mild form of senility, but he should remember John Climacus' assertion that none of the desert fathers suffered from this condition.

7.6.4 Conclusion

The above section has met a secondary objective of the thesis by observing Hesychastic elements in the Eastern Christian ascetic Isaac of Nineveh and thereby advances the paper's central contention that the main function of the Proto-Hesychasts was their role as precursors of Hesychasm. Isaac was a minor figure only on the surface, and he found an enviable place in the Russian *Philokalia* (Cross & Livingstone, 2005: 853). He stands with Pseudo-Macarius, in whose wake he followed, as one of the most powerful anticipators of Hesychasm. His (1) endorsement of *penthos* was greater than that of John Climacus but less than that of Symeon the New Theologian. Other aspects of Proto-Hesychasm in his thought were (2) his monasticism, (3) his light and (4) heart mysticism, and (5) his emphasis on unceasing prayer and (6) the Holy Spirit. (7) *Theōsis* is present in his thought, though not as pervasive as in the case of the other mystics in this study. As did Gregory of Nyssa he identifies the saint by his likeness to God. He also speaks of God's union with the world as a mingling (*hūlṭānā*) which is somewhat less extreme than Stephen Bar Sudaili's talk of God's inseparable commingling (*ḥābīkūtha*) with the world. His (8) attempt to whitewash the demons, already in evidence in Gregory and Dionysius and to a lesser extent in Maximus, remains one of the most difficult aspects of Eastern Orthodoxy for a Western Christian to accept. With Isaac it owed more to his theology of compassion than to Gregory's concern with absolving God from any implication in evil. Isaac's approach in this area would be resisted by the last protagonists of the chapter who comprise the "circle" of John Climacus.

7.7 The "Circle" of John Climacus

By John's "circle" is meant his followers at Sinai, namely Hesychius and Philotheus who together with him represent the Sinaitic school of asceticism in contradistinction to the Palestinian school whose history was traced above. The Sinaitic school, drawing the wisdom of the Egyptian and Palestinian streams to itself, provided a key background to fourteenth-century Hesychasm. Hesychius and Philotheus actually postdated John by two to three hundred years. In them can be detected a receptiveness to John's stern, humorous, and worldly-wise pronouncements; the former referred to him as a sage, and the latter called him divinely inspired and spiritually perfect. They stress silence, prayer, the tripartite soul, and watchfulness (*nēpsis*) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1984(3): 15).

7.7.1 Hesychius the Priest

Hesychius was the abbot of the flamboyantly titled Monastery of the Mother of God of the Burning Bush. He was also a priest and as such is one of the few monastics of the time between Basil the Great and Symeon the New Theologian to discuss the Eucharist in any detail. He may have once been a shepherd, as Moses had been when he saw the burning bush. He compares the Christian and the demons to a wild beast fighting a pack of hounds. He says he has seen a spirited dog attacking wolves and sheep alike, and he remembers lambs running towards a stray dog, the only benefit being that they are forewarned by its “stench and foulness” (*On Watchfulness* 144) (1979(1): 187). One should note here the late antique revulsion for matter which often manifested itself in violent terminology.

Hesychius’ treatise on watchfulness, contained in the Orthodox *Philokalia*, or the *Philokalia of Neptic Saints*, was dedicated to Theodoulos whose name means Slave of God and whom he compares to Paul’s disciple Timothy. He claims his own name does not apply to him though it may have been given to him by God (*On Watchfulness* 203) (1979(1): 198). He avers that the monk should use the rational part of the soul to influence the spirited part against Satan and the libidinous with desire for God. Like Macarius he equates the heart with the intellect, and, basing himself on the Septuagint of Exodus 28:22, he speaks of the gold disk of the heart, more accurately the gold breastplate of the high priest (*On Watchfulness* 195) (1979(1): 197). He links the Proto-Hesychast Jesus prayer to the heart and, to a lesser extent, the breath. Just as it is impossible to find the Red Sea among the stars so it is impossible to purify the heart without invoking Jesus. The invocation of Christ’s name gladdens “the earth of our heart” just as rain softens the earth (*On Watchfulness* 41) (1979(1): 169).

The heart is also related to his central theme of watchfulness (*nēpsis*). In the Greek *nēpsis* is the opposite of drunkenness. It is “a continual fixing and halting of thought” at the heart’s entrance (*On Watchfulness* 6) (1979(1): 163). Hesychius illustrates its importance by his hyperbolic command to never sleep. He has recourse to five different kinds of *nēpsis* which he compares to five doorkeepers that block the entrance of evil thoughts: scrutinizing every mental image; freeing the heart from all thoughts, keeping it profoundly still, and praying; continually calling upon Jesus; keeping the thought of death in one’s mind; and fixing one’s eyes towards heaven. In line with this is his use of the metaphor of the siege. The Proto-Hesychast’s thoughts and the fantasies of the demons join up to destroy his heart like

Agamemnon and Menelaus did Troy, and it is not inappropriate for him to turn his anger against them. The Jesus prayer is a particularly useful weapon against the demons, the mystic's "intelligible enemies," those "brigands [who] are always at work" (*On Watchfulness* 62, 78) (1979(1): 173, 175). The invocation of Jesus' name scourges and sears the enemy and makes him scatter like dust before the wind. It requires *nēpsis* as a lantern requires a candle; Hesychius' thought on this issue tends to codify and expand John's allusions to the Proto-Hesychastic Jesus prayer. *Nēpsis* also leads to the vision of God in which the mystic bathes "in a sea of pure and infinite light, touching it ineffably and living and dwelling in it" (*On Watchfulness* 171) (1979(1): 192).

Like Maximus the Confessor, Hesychius extols the monk of the inner man (Maximus, *Chs. on Love* 4.50) (1985: 80-81). This is no contemptible profession since such a monk must overcome his body, a "slavish nocturnal thing of perishable clay" (*On Watchfulness* 33) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979(1): 168). It is the nature of a snake to bite, and it is the nature of the body to defile whomever indulges it. Whenever it is the cause of sin, the body should be whipped mercilessly. Avarice, self-esteem, and lust are the cause of all the evils that afflict men, and the Proto-Hesychast is encouraged to fight against them. He must be so humble that he will regard himself as a cur, and he is to be wary of losing spiritual ground and so sinking to the level of a dog returning to its vomit (2 Peter 2:22). Hesychius uses canine imagery frequently and always with negative connotations. The only exception to this is his statement that a diligent intellect ready to destroy its enemy is like a hound foraging for food.

Proto-Hesychast light mysticism permeates the treatise. He speaks of the radiant light of Jesus and compares His body to a divine fire which will destroy the monk's sins. Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father and floods the soul of the saint with light. Light mysticism is combined with the Proto-Hesychast Jesus prayer: "The name of Jesus should be repeated over and over in the heart as flashes of lightning are repeated over and over in the sky before rain" (*On Watchfulness* 105) (1979(1): 180). In a way that reminds one of Climacus, Hesychius concludes by enumerating the children of self-love (self-praise, self-satisfaction, gluttony, unchastity, self-esteem, jealousy, and pride).

7.7.2 Philotheus of Sinai

Philotheus' treatise on watchfulness, written some hundred years after Hesychius's, stays closer to its subject and is both philosophical and incredibly dense for its size. Watchfulness is to be equated with inner attentiveness and the guarding of the intellect; it purifies prayer and vice versa. It is of binding importance for the ascetic because the devil fights night and day against the (Platonic) tripartite soul and because the body, a compound of humors, blood, and phlegm, tends to gravitate downwards (*On Watchfulness* 12) (1984(3): 19). Philotheus distinguishes between watchfulness and noetic work. Watchfulness leads to the kingdom within the monk, and noetic work transforms the intellect to a dispassionate state; it is like "a window full of light through which God looks, revealing Himself to the intellect," a thought that would be repeated by Joseph Volotsky in regard to icons (*On Watchfulness* 3) (1984(3): 17).

Philotheus is often allegorical and calls watchfulness the noetic Jerusalem and remembrance of death the daughter of Adam. "I have always longed," he writes, "to have her as my companion, to sleep with her, to talk with her, and to enquire from her what will happen after the body has been discarded" (*On Watchfulness* 6) (1984(3): 18). He thereby stresses remembrance of death even more emphatically than Hesychius who recommended thinking about one's deathbed. As in the case of John Climacus, remembrance of death leads to *penthos*. It is also the only remedy against pride, the sin Gregory of Nyssa claimed hurt men more than any other. The pagan sages approached perfection with the exception of humility because they did not keep the remembrance of death in their minds. This is precisely speaking untrue (Epictetus, *Ench.* 21) (Hadot, 1995: 131). Opposed to remembrance of death, in Philotheus' thought, is forgetfulness, "the devil's murky daughter" (*On Watchfulness* 6) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1984(3): 18).

Philotheus employs some of the Macarian imagery of fire, an aspect of Proto-Hesychast light mysticism: Jesus, when invoked, promptly burns everything up, and He is the light for which the intellect longs. He claims to have been wounded by experiences of the light. The intellect grows bright with divine contemplation especially at night (*On Watchfulness* 27) (1984(3): 27). This can be compared to the Middle Platonist Alcinous' pronouncement (*Didask.* 18.1) (1993: 28) on the light of the eyes smoothing and dissolving the internal movements at night.

Inside the monk's heart is the kingdom of heaven: the seed, the pearl, and the leaven of Jesus' words. But there is also evil there. Like Nyssen he looks back to the *Phaedrus*: the mystic must take care not to let the spirited part of the soul take over the reins from the rational part (*Phaedr.* 253-256) (Plato, 2007: 128-129). When the spirited part of the soul takes over, the mouth spills forth all the evil things contained in the heart. The one who is adept in watchfulness, by contrast, has in his heart "a spiritual heaven with sun, moon, and stars" (*On Watchfulness* 27) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1984(3): 26). In a similar way Symeon the New Theologian would compare his master to the evening sky and his heart to the moon (*Eth. Disc.* 4) (1996(2): 36). Watchfulness makes the conscience lucid, a concept reminiscent of Isaac's translucent heart.

Philotheus' asceticism is closely linked to his emphasis on the heart since a slender body is said to reduce the strain on the heart. The monk should evoke his past sins (1 Timothy 1:13) and remember the details of the Passion. This will result in *penthos*. Unceasing prayer is irksome (an unusual confession in Proto-Hesychasm), but it brings about the illumination of the heart by Jesus (*On Watchfulness* 29) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1984(3): 27). Here is seen the dense nature of Philotheus' thought as unceasing prayer, light mysticism, heart mysticism, and Jesus are all united in one sentence. He compares prayer to a warm fire hurting the eyes yet giving them light and gladness. The scattered intellect can be concentrated by the remembrance of Jesus, recalling Climacus' behest to remember the Savior's name. Related to this is Philotheus' comment that the mystic should breathe God. He counsels animosity against the demons, a Climacian idea and an issue that would never be fully resolved in Proto-Hesychasm. One was apparently left with his choice between the extreme of John on the one hand and that of Isaac of Nineveh on the other.

7.7.3 Conclusion

The verification of Proto-Hesychastic elements in the circle of John Climacus meets a secondary objective of the thesis and helps to establish its key contention that the main function of the Proto-Hesychasts was their role as precursors of Hesychasm. The Proto-Hesychasm of John's circle was expressed primarily by (1) monasticism, (2) light and (3) heart mysticism, (4) *penthos*, and (5) unceasing prayer. Philotheus and Hesychius each possessed a tendency to disparage matter and the body which placed them closer to Gregory of Nyssa than to Maximus the Confessor who would be the ultimate arbiter of this issue for

the Hesychasts.

In the foregoing chapter Eastern Christian ascetics like Dorotheus of Gaza, John Climacus, and Isaac of Nineveh were regarded as anticipating major aspects of fourteenth-century Hesychasm. Together with the philosophical school of Proto-Hesychasm represented by Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor their thought led up to that of the last and most flamboyant Proto-Hesychast, Symeon the New Theologian, whose immediate influences will be the next focus of investigation.

8.0 PROTO-HESYCHASM IN SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN

8.1 Introduction

The present chapter will attempt to advance the central theoretical argument that the Proto-Hesychasts' main claim to fame, as it were, was in their role as precursors of Hesychasm. It will do this by meeting a secondary objective of the thesis, namely the establishment of Hesychastic elements in Symeon the New Theologian and his immediate influences and inheritors. Symeon is chosen primarily by virtue of his distinction as the last of the Proto-Hesychasts, and he and his associates will be approached by an evaluation of their lives and thought. According to Karl Holl (in *Symeon the New Theologian*, 1982: 24-25), Hesychasm was the recapitulation of Symeon's philosophy. Although this is strictly speaking untrue Symeon combined the best and most characteristic aspects of his predecessors and bequeathed them to the fourteenth-century Hesychasts who tended to not acknowledge his ascendancy. The ensuing study of this charismatic figure will begin with Symeon's controversial teacher Symeon the Pious.

8.2 Symeon the Pious

Symeon the Pious (Eulabes) is of interest chiefly because of his impression on his student. His cognomen was probably given to him by his disciples in allusion to the biblical Simeon (Luke 2:25). He was more than a mystic: he was a prototype of the *yurodivi* or holy fools of medieval Russia, practicing exhibitionism and seeking out the company of prostitutes and tax collectors, though never in concert. Hunt (2004: 188-189) believes his exhibitionism may have meant either that he attended the baths or that he subscribed to a loose interpretation of 1 Corinthians 6:15. He was clearly more restrained than his contemporary Phantinos who preached to women while he was naked (Ivanov, 2006: 182). There had been holy fools in Byzantium before Symeon, and there would be more after him, notably Leontius of Jerusalem who ran around the streets of Constantinople with burning coals in his hands and entered the furnaces of the bathhouses, apparently without suffering physical harm (Angold, 1995: 359). Holy fools are present in Rabbinic Judaism and Sufism, but they are predominantly a phenomenon of the Eastern church, although even there they have been approached with caution. A Western saint could commit sins only before he became a saint (Ivanov, 2006: 375; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17); the holy fool, by contrast, sinned or apparently

sinned in a perverse display of Christian humility.

The Proto-Hesychast Isaac of Nineveh had earlier described something very much akin to holy foolery: “Others, lest they be glorified for the virtuous state they have hidden within them, have pretended to be lunatics, while in truth they were so permeated with divine salt and so securely fixed in serenity, because of their uttermost perfection, that they had holy angels as heralds of their deeds of valour” (Alfeyev, 2000b: 127). Isaac himself attempted to indulge in holy foolery but was dissuaded by his spiritual father.

According to Nicetas Stethatos, Symeon the Pious feigned passion in order to disguise his dispassion. He was a saint posing as a dirty old man, or vice versa. Ivanov (2006: 187-188) insinuates, probably too strongly, that the Pious may have committed fornication in his guise as a holy fool, as certain yogic “ascetics” of India are known to have done. It is difficult, at any rate, to reconcile his flamboyant lifestyle with his statement that “the monk must be in the monastery as one who is, yet is not, does not appear, and is not even known” (Symeon the New Theologian, *Disc.* 6.5) (1980: 124). Rydén (*apud* Turner, 1990: 63) is probably nearest to the truth when he calls Symeon a “part-time holy fool.” His nudism puts him in dubious association with the Gnostics. In the *Gospel of Thomas* Jesus tells the disciples that He will be revealed to them when they take off their clothing without being ashamed (37) (Meyer, 2007: 144). Holy fools, especially in Byzantium, were often in danger of becoming Gnosticized libertines like Baanes the Filthy (fl. 800) (cf. Turner, 1990: 66-69).

Symeon the Pious’s ascetical discourse, contained in the *Philokalia*, was intended for monks, reminding the scholar once again of the monastic milieu of Proto-Hesychasm. It was addressed to a single brother (*adelphé*) whom Alfeyev (2000a: 102), in one of two important studies on the Proto-Hesychasts, plausibly suggests may have been the New Theologian. It is not astonishing that the first sentence deals with wet dreams. Wet dreams, the Pious asserts, sometimes occur because of fear they will, for instance if a priest is planning to celebrate the liturgy the next day, or they may transpire after one has seen a lovely face during the day which he then remembers before falling asleep (*153 Pract. and Theol. Texts* 119) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 51). The Pious himself was at great risk of this because of the company he kept. He warns the monk that he should strive to not feel special love for anyone, even spiritual love since this will degenerate into physical love. This is the opposite, it should be noted, of the progression envisioned by Plato in the *Symposium* (208-212) (2007:

166-167).

The Pious is aware of demonic as well as divine activity during prayer and gives three illustrations of this: fear, supernatural noise, and a light shining around the monk. This demonic light, experienced by Silouan the Athonite (Sophrony, 1991: 24), is to be distinguished from the Proto-Hesychast light since it does not fill the mystic with joy, *penthos*, or yearning for the divine. The Pious's emphasis on mourning is not to be underestimated. The monk should weep every time he partakes of communion, a directive that was generally viewed with derision but would be rigorously accepted by the New Theologian, as would his emphasis on unceasing prayer.

Proto-Hesychast *penthos* is related to the mystical experience. If the mystic believes he is a greater sinner than anyone, illumination will enter his mind like a ray of light (*153 Pract. and Theol. Texts* 140) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 56). If he contritely prostrates himself before the monks of the assembly, he will be able to foretell the future, although such a gift can also be given by the demons. Priests who are required to be busy with other people's lives will lose the ability to foretell the future. The author of the *Book of Steps* had also spoken of the mutual exclusivity of mysticism and the holding of ecclesiastical office (Colless, 2008: 55). As did Basil and Dorotheus, the Pious recommends self-examination at the end of the day, specifically as regards lust, disobedience, laziness, judging, hurting, and scandalizing. He also suggests deceit and vanity as a means of leading the monk to a better life, as in the abbot's empty promises to ordain him for the priesthood.

The Pious urges the monk to be respectful to all priests, which is ironic in view of the fact that the New Theologian would not be. Surprisingly, it is permissible for the monk to complain to his superior, although only once, about the dilapidated condition of his cell. As would the Neo-Hesychast Nil Sorsky (*Ustav* 5.3) (2003: 73), he does not want the monk to reject any kind of food, but he counsels moderation in matters of diet. He himself drank wine, which was not out of place in Proto-Hesychast monasticism, though it generally was for the desert fathers: Poemen said that the monk should not drink wine, and Macarius the Great drank wine if someone offered it to him but the next day refrained even from water. The Pious recommends the physically ill monk to eat raw vegetables and olives, probably for medical reasons (*153 Pract. and Theol. Texts* 145) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 59). His disciple Symeon the New Theologian will now be taken in hand.

8.3 Symeon the New Theologian

8.3.1 Life

Symeon brings together the two Proto-Hesychast streams, the philosophical and the ascetical, into his own person and thence directs them towards Hesychasm. Hannah Hunt (2004: 171), in a much needed reminder, describes him as a typical Byzantine of his time: “conservative, political, complex and controversial.” He was born to a Byzantine nobleman in 949, and his given name may have been George (*Disc.* 22.2) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 243). He describes himself in his younger years as handsome and of ostentatious dress, manner, and bearing. His maternal uncle, a patrician, wanted to present him to the brother emperors Basil and Constantine Porphyrogenetes, but Symeon baffled his relatives by his refusal to pursue a higher education (1980: 6). This was because of his meeting with Symeon the Pious at the age of fourteen. The elder Symeon had given him the writings of the Proto-Hesychasts Mark the Monk and Diadochus of Photike, and the Theologian was never the same afterwards. He also gave him a commandment, probably the secret occupation (*kryptē meletē*) his student sometimes spoke of. Krivocheine (1986: 86) views this as a mental prayer consisting of repeated invocations. Symeon is known to have prayed at least one version of this, almost identical to the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me,” though Krivocheine (1986: 90) speculates that he may have preferred shorter and what he too confidently terms more ancient prayers, ones that concentrated, for instance, on the word “Lord” (but see Romans 8:15; 1 Corinthians 12:3).

Symeon wanted to follow the Pious’s monastic example, but the older man counseled him to be patient. He embarked on a political career while spending his evenings in prayer and meditation. He initially became chamberlain of the bodyguard (*spatharokoubikoularios*), originally a sword-bearer but at that time a court dignitary, a position once but no longer held by eunuchs, as will become obvious (Hunt, 2004: 175). He soon became disillusioned with politics, perhaps because of the “extraordinary” and possibly politically inspired death of his uncle (Alfeyev, 2000a: 29-30). This was, as McGuckin reminds the reader (in Symeon the New Theologian, 1982: 12-13), a time of great intrigue centering around the young empress Theophano whom Gerbert of Aurillac xenophobically but aptly described as “the fair blossom from the luxuriously poisonous garden of Constantinople” (*apud* Reston, 1998: 236).

It is a commonplace that disillusionment with politics leads to the forsaking of the world. Symeon often prayed standing until midnight, “as though he were a statue or an incorporeal spirit,” showing how literally he took the Proto-Hesychast doctrine of unceasing prayer (*Disc.* 22.3) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 245; cf. Florovsky, 1987b: 209). This, together with his later instructions on bodily attitude during prayer and the exact positioning of the monk’s hands and feet, prefigures the body-conscious techniques of the fourteenth-century Hesychasts (Alfeyev, 2000a: 80).

In one of his earliest visions, which he believed came in answer to the prayer of his master, Symeon saw a light and was lifted up into heaven where he saw a greater light and near it the one “who had given him the commandment and the book,” Symeon the Pious who was still in his body on earth (*Disc.* 22.4) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 246). This oddity would not have surprised Plotinus who could be in the body and yet, while united with the One, ensure the well-being of the universe. The vision ultimately convinced Symeon to become the Pious’s disciple (Turner, 1990: 24) and additionally looked forward to the Hesychasts’ interest in the Taboric Light.

During his time of waiting for the monastic life originally denied him, Symeon reentered the political fray and became a member of the state senate (*synklētos*). For all his misgivings, politics was in his blood. Ivanov (2006: 183) describes him as self-possessed, strict, and aloof. Yet in other ways he was even more suspect than his master. In *Hymn 24* he wrote, “I have been a murderer . . . but in what way I will not say. . . . I have also been an adulterer in heart and a sodomite in deed and desire. I have been a lecher, a magician, a slayer of infants, swearer and perjurer, greedy thief, liar, shameless, grasping . . . insulting” (71-79) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1997(3): 26-27). Some scholars theorize that many of these sins were committed by Symeon after he had fallen from grace during the time he held political office, while others were illusory, an attempt at a humility so flamboyant it was a manifestation of arrogance. Symeon’s “sodomy in desire” may be reflected in his illustration of the king and his servant whose affection for one another is distastefully physical (*Eth. Disc.* 10) (1995(1): 150-151).

Symeon sank so low during this time that he was embarrassed by his association with Symeon the Pious, which he still maintained (*Disc.* 22.10-11) (1980: 251-252). He later described himself as having fallen into a mire of shameful deeds and thoughts. If this is true he serves as a living reminder of the Proto-Hesychast Pseudo-Macarius' belief that the one who has experienced divine things can lapse into sin. He later thanked God that "by thine ineffable judgements thou didst deliver me from kings and rulers who desired to use me as a dishonoured vessel in the service of their own wills," an almost anarchic statement in medieval Byzantium (Turner, 1990: 22). Yet his time at court gave him much needed metaphors for his later writings (Hunt, 2004: 175).

Shortly before he became a monk Symeon visited his family to set his affairs in order and remained deaf to his father's pleas for him to reconsider the monastic life. His father and mother, so he thought, had never loved him anyway. He read his family's copy of the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* and was strongly taken both by its teaching on *penthos* and its view of the spiritual father (Nicetas Stethatos, *Vit. Sym.* 6) (John Climacus, 1982: 67). The book also impelled him to pray at the tombs (Hunt, 2004: 176). At the age of twenty-seven he entered the monastery of Studium where he not unpredictably took the name Symeon. He was under the nominal direction of an abbot but under the actual supervision of Symeon the Pious for whom he was prepared to throw himself into the fire or sea (Turner, 1990: 197). He slept under the stairs of his cell and viewed the place where he stood in prayer as the holy of holies and often kissed it (Theophan the Recluse, *Vit. Sym.* 4) (Symeon the New Theologian, 2001: 25; Hunt, 2004: 176; Turner, 1990: 215). He still experienced moments of discouragement. Once, during a time when he had been fasting, he visited the Pious's cell, and the latter commanded him to eat and even ate more than he himself wanted to in order to get his disciple to eat. The younger man, overcome with contrition for his past sins, fell at the Pious's feet and felt a divine warmth. The two Symeons wept, and the elder bade the younger rise from his feet (*Disc.* 16.2, 35.6) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 200, 363). Symeon later gave thanks that he had been found worthy to perform such prostrations (Turner, 1990: 215). This affair preceded yet another vision of the light in which he was vouchsafed a revelation of his death.

Symeon recounts an even stranger story, redolent of Proto-Hesychastic light mysticism. It is impossible to know whether it describes a supernatural event, whether it is to be taken metaphorically, or whether it is a combination of these. The Pious commanded Symeon to light a fire for him to pass into and not to follow him if he was harmed by it. Once he was safely inside the fire he urged Symeon to come to him, but Symeon was persuaded only with difficulty. When he was inside the fire the Pious embraced him and kissed him with a holy kiss (*philēmati hagiō*) while exhaling a fragrance of immortality (Krivocheine, 1986: 98-99).

Symeon later had a vision, while praying before an icon of the Theotokos, in which his heart was temporarily transformed into light and which led to his perpetual recognition of the divine light within him. One cannot help but observe a parallel here to the Sufi's perpetual remembrance (*ḍikr*) of the divine light which never goes out (Eliade, 1965: 65-66), although he would have distinguished, like the Hesychast Gregory Palamas, between Christian and non-Christian experiences of the light.

Symeon's seriousness nettled the hegumen Peter, and not only his seriousness but his viewing the Pious as his real spiritual guide and consequent rebellion against Peter. He was compelled to move into the monastery of St. Mamas after having been at the former monastery for less than a year. His monasticism helps identify him as a Proto-Hesychast. After he entered Mamas his father, together with some of his senatorial friends, tried to again dissuade him from a monastic career. It was at Mamas that the Pious tonsured him and clothed him in "the tunic of gladness," ironically a dark garment (Turner, 1990: 31). Here he read the lives of the saints and practiced calligraphy.

The hegumen Anthony was more understanding about Symeon's need for the Pious to be his spiritual director than Peter had been, but despite or because of his tolerance his monks were described by Symeon's biographer as spiritually neglected (*ageōrgētos*) (1990: 31). Three years after Symeon's arrival Anthony died, and the Theologian was chosen his successor and ordained a priest. When he was ordained, and with the service book placed on his head, he claimed to have seen the Holy Spirit, without form except as light, rest on him, and heard Him say, "Thus have I appeared to all the prophets and apostles, and to those who are now the saints and the elect of God." This vision, though not its words, repeated itself whenever he celebrated the liturgy (*153 Pract. and Theol. Texts* 153; cf. Dionysius, *Ep.* 1097B-C) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 62-63; Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 278).

Six years later the Pious died, and Symeon felt himself “an utter orphan, utterly isolated, utterly without help from anybody, while yet . . . the leader and shepherd of a flock” (Turner, 1990: 32). One is reminded of Aelianus of Gaza after the death of the Proto-Hesychast John the Prophet. Although he was the spiritual father of his monks, Symeon regarded the Pious as the spiritual father of them all. Turner (1990: 94) helpfully elucidates this situation by explaining that although he was a hegumen he had not left behind the role of apprentice. He composed hymns in honor of the Pious, had his icon painted, and celebrated a yearly feast in his honor, indulging in what Hunt (2004: 177) superbly calls a contentious cult of his master.

Mamas was in ruins physically and spiritually, but it would be transformed by the New Theologian who eventually boasted among his disciples a former Catholic bishop, accidental homicide, and occasional holy fool named Hierotheus (Ivanov, 2006: 175-177). The abbot attracted strong devotion and strong animosity in his monks. Mamas was a worldly monastery, and many of its inhabitants were there only because they wanted free food and a stressless occupation. Although they had left the world they loved cloaks, girdles, gold-embroidered garments, and scapulars, and some of them wandered about the city (*Disc.* 29.8) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 315). Angold (1995: 265, 271, 307) reminds the reader that monastic life in medieval Byzantium was often a solution for divorcés, misfits, criminals, eunuchs, and debtors.

Symeon compared his monks to stray dogs looking for bones or pieces of old leather, licking up the blood of slaughtered cattle, and fighting over carrion. He described them as jealous, slandering, bickering, contradicting, lying, doing what they pleased, swearing oaths, and stealing from the monastery (Krivocheine, 1986: 153). The rebellious monks often asked Symeon if they had come to the monastery to be someone’s slave or to be insulted (*Disc.* 3.3) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 63). In some ways their discontent was forgivable. Symeon wanted them to break completely with their families, to take communion frequently, and to always do so with tears. One wonders whether this last command was even possible and can sympathize with those monks who said they would no longer be able to partake of the Eucharist. Symeon himself confesses that he was an abbot of untamable zeal (*zēlōtēn manikōtaton*), and he has his own zealots today, among them Krivocheine (1986: 393) who condemns his detractors as small-souled.

Eventually the situation came to a head, in Symeon's forty-sixth year. The abbot, true to form, had given his monks ample fuel, complaining bitterly of them in his sermons and calling them heretics and antichrists. At one point they attempted to lay hands on him while he was delivering his morning sermon. They rose against him like enraged dogs—so his biographer relates—but they fell back at the evident power surrounding him. Nicetas claims that he looked at them smiling which recalls an episode in the apocryphal *Acts of Andrew* (18) (James, 1926: 342). The monks ran out of the church, breaking its windows and even the lock of the monastery gate on their way (Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 9; Krivocheine, 1986: 40-41). This can all be compared to Plotinus' invincibility when a former friend of his attempted to destroy him by star spells (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 10) (Plotinus, 1991: cx). The similarities between Symeon and Plotinus are indeed striking. Both had an arduous time finding a mentor, both entered their chosen professions in their late twenties, both were mystics who compared the mystical state to the intoxication of wine, both were spiritually invulnerable, and both had arrogant streaks, although in the case of Plotinus this was far less pronounced.

The rebellious monks complained to the patriarch Sisinnios who took Symeon's side and expelled them. An epilogue to the story states that Symeon, overflowing with forgiveness, sought out the wretches, who were now living like vagrants in the city, and brought them back to the monastery. Despite some unlikable aspects of his personality Symeon had so thoroughly trained himself in the Christian love extolled by the Proto-Hesychasts that, like Moses, he often prayed to be condemned with his fellow men rather than to be saved alone. There is no reason to doubt his sincerity when he addresses his monks as "my youngest sons, my dear ones whom I have acquired," nor does one doubt his statement that he wept for them (*Disc.* 23.1, 19.2) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 254, 227-228).

Symeon's bipolar attitude toward his monks can be seen by a comparison of his treatment of Arsenius and Anthony. Two stories about Arsenius reveal how much stricter Symeon treated his monks than the Pious had treated him (cf. Turner, 1990: 132, 141). Arsenius had initially fasted too rigorously, against the New Theologian's directives, and had fainted during a church vigil. Symeon, foreseeing this outcome, had provided for him to be revived with bread and wine but profusely rebuked him afterwards (1990: 131). Another time, when Arsenius had killed crows that were eating the monastery's supply of grain, Symeon punished him by hanging them about his neck and having him run a sort of psychological gauntlet through the

monastery (1990: 148-149). Yet his compassion toward his charges is illustrated by his own account of the death of the monk Anthony (*Disc.* 21.1-3) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 238-240), an account that is worthy of Dostoevsky. Anthony, he believed, did not defile his flesh or soul even by sinful thoughts from the day he set foot in the monastery. As Anthony lay dying Symeon sat next to his bed weeping, and Anthony himself wept, illustrating the Proto-Hesychastic ideal of *penthos*. After promising Symeon that he would not forget him or his monks in heaven, he arranged his hands in the form of a cross and “fell asleep in profound peace” (*Disc.* 21.3) (1980: 240).

Symeon’s confrontation with his rebellious monks, sketched above, was only the beginning of his troubles. The patriarchal chancellor Stephen of Nicomedia, finding something suspicious in his work, asked him to vindicate his orthodoxy, namely whether the three persons of the Trinity were to be distinguished in thought (*epinoia*) or fact (*pragmati*) (1997(3): 33). There was, in reality, a heretical feel to his writings. He called the deity, in a phrase found only in the apocryphal Acts, the God without pride (*ho anyperēphanos Theos*) (Krivocheine, 1986: 241). He blatantly stated that no one could understand the Trinity on the basis of Scripture alone (1986: 279). And he believed that the one who had progressed far in the spiritual life did not need to read the Bible but became an inspired book for others (226 *Pract. and Theol. Chs.* 3.100) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1982: 103; cf. Alfeyev, 2006: 183). This at least had the precedent of the desert father who sold the very book that told him to sell everything he owned.

Stephen of Nicomedia had a good opinion of his own worth which was apparently shared by others. In 976, thirty years earlier, he had been chosen by the emperor as his representative in an unsuccessful embassy to the rebel general Bardas (Krivocheine, 1986: 45). Symeon replied to Stephen’s theological request with his abrasive *Hymn 21*, insultingly addressed “to a monk” and written in a burst of white-hot inspiration. His ad hominem attack on Stephen should be partly quoted to show his culpability in the affair. The Holy Spirit has not been sent to the unbelieving, Symeon writes, “nor to the patrons of glory, nor to actors, nor to scholars, nor to those who have studied the pagan writings, nor to those who do not know our Scriptures, nor to those who have played a role on the world’s stage, nor to those who utter abundant, mannered speech, nor to those who have made a great name, nor to those who have succeeded in being friends with famous people” (54-61) (1986: 48). Symeon then breaks out into an impassioned appeal which is both overbearing and reflective of Proto-Hesychast light

mysticism. He concludes that the chancellor's proper attitude is not presumption but humility and mortification, a thought he himself could have found much to chew on. This hymn, in such poor taste, assured Symeon's doom. On the recommendation of Patriarch Sergius, Symeon stepped down as abbot in favor of his disciple Arsenius, though he continued to live at the monastery and probably exercised some authority there. He had cited as his reason for stepping down his need to escape the day-to-day running of St. Mamas, but problems with Stephen also no doubt influenced him.

Having failed to dislodge Symeon, the chancellor tried another tack, bringing the clerical hierarchy's attention to Symeon's canonization of his mentor. Official canonization was not yet obligatory, but the Pious was a sufficiently suspect character that the patriarch felt obliged to summon the New Theologian to Constantinople. As it turned out, Sergius was satisfied by Symeon's defense of his master and even promised to send candles and perfume for the yearly feasts in the Pious's honor (1986: 49-50). Stephen bristled when he discovered the patriarch's leniency and mounted a full-scale attack against the memory of the Pious whom he dubbed a sinful man, an accusation that was easy to make because of the Pious's manner of life, if not necessarily easy to prove. Eventually the patriarch asked Stephen for harder evidence against the Pious and was regaled with stories of his nudism and the company he kept. The patriarch summoned the New Theologian to Constantinople a second time and asked Symeon to moderate the "Eulabic" feasts, which Symeon refused to do (1986: 51).

An unsuccessful search for gold, supposedly from Symeon's former life, was conducted at St. Mamas (Hunt, 2004: 177). Monks who were hostile to Symeon stole the monastery icon of the Pious and gave it to the patriarch. Symeon defended himself by quoting from one of John of Damascus' treatises on the holy icons. This was an obfuscating maneuver since icons were not an issue in the situation, only the icon of Symeon the Pious. His prayer to the Pious, in the presence of the patriarch, ably presented his point of view: "O saint Symeon, you became like an icon of our Lord Jesus Christ through participation in the Holy Spirit! Give me strength to suffer for you and your icon, or rather for Christ Himself!" (Alfeyev: 2000a, 141). Stephen advised that the word "saint" be removed from the icon, and after this was done it was returned to Mamas. Nonetheless the patriarch ordered that icons of the Pious be taken down around Constantinople. According to the subjective report of Nicetas, "murderous hands cut some of the icons of the holy man into pieces with an ax, hitting the image on the breast or on the head in unbridled fury. They did not cease until they had reduced all of them to dust"

(Krivocheine, 1986: 52).

Symeon was tried before the patriarch and the holy synod in 1009. The Pious's icon was destroyed, and his disciple was exiled to Paloukiton on the Asiatic coast of the Bosphorus without even being given a day's provisions. Symeon wrote Stephen a sarcastic letter which Ivanov (2006: 190) masterfully calls an example of great self-abasement mingling with great pride. Stephen responded by confiscating his books and clothing that still remained at St. Mamas, and Symeon replied with another ironic letter which also prayed for God's mercy on his persecutor. With the help of the patrician Genesisios and the pious layman Christopher Phagura, Symeon founded a new monastery around the ruined chapel of St. Marina (Turner, 1990: 34). As at the first monastery he ruled, he organized his monks and then retreated into his cell to write and pray.

When Genesisios brought the patriarch a defense Symeon had prepared, Sergius agreed to review his case. He stated that he had exiled Symeon because of his pigheaded refusal to compromise on the honoring of his spiritual father (Krivocheine, 1986: 54). Symeon was summoned to Constantinople, this time with an offer for a bishopric, but he again refused to moderate the splendor of the Eulabic feasts. Since he promised not to return to Mamas the patriarch set him at liberty, albeit remarking that his underling had proven "an absolute rebel" to his commands (1986: 56). Symeon chose to remain at the new monastery. Many Constantinopolitans traveled to St. Marina to celebrate the feasts and see the New Theologian who performed healings and whom Nicetas described as an old man, walking slowly and peacefully and leaning on a staff (1986: 59). During this time Symeon visited his deceased father's house which is rather unexpected in view of his stipulation that the monk break completely with his family; perhaps he had moderated his stance on this issue.

Nicetas was not at St. Marina during Symeon's last days and heard about his end from the monk Nicephorus. The Theologian had been ravaged by dysentery, and his monks had to turn him over in his bed by means of a windlass (1986: 60). Despite his visions nothing could prevent him from dying a painful death, but his end was not completely ignominious. Nicephorus awoke one night to find him suspended in the air by six feet, praying and surrounded by light. One day he ordered his disciples to sing the funeral hymns, and he died halfway through them. His relics were transferred to Constantinople in 1052 (Angold, 1995: 269).

8.3.2 Reputation and Immediate Influence

A saint is one who sees evil in himself and rejects it. It is because Symeon did not have this gift that, despite his official status, he was not a saint. His insistence that Christians who have not had visions are suspect, though not necessarily unsaved, shows how far Christianity had sunk since the days of the church fathers. The number of Christians who have not had visions far outnumber those who have (cf. John 20:29). Symeon claims that the desert fathers had seen Christ, even in cases where there was no evidence for this, for instance in the careers of Anthony and Arsenius. (Yet Pambo is said to have seen Christ enter Abba Cyrus' cell and kiss him. See Budge, 1977(4): 386.)

Symeon was a mass of contradictions. Pretending to be compassionate he was pugnacious; pretending to be dispassionate he used the language of lechery; pretending to be holy he approached blasphemy; pretending to pray all day in his cell he wrote solipsist treatises; pretending to praise peace and chastity he was a volatile, reformed homosexual. There was an inhuman streak to his personality, and one is not shocked by his ability to form a complete break with his relatives. Yet it was his experience that when the monk rejects his family they turn on him viciously and reveal that the pain of separation they felt beforehand was demonically inspired (*153 Pract. and Theol. Texts 7*) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 26).

His arrogance and divisiveness came to the fore in his claim that priests were not worthy to be confessors: they could only celebrate the sacraments, and even then only on probation. This last statement sounds more heretical in the Western church, schooled in Augustine's anti-Donatist polemics, than in the Eastern church. The liturgy of Basil the Great even contains the line: "May not my sins prevent the grace of the Holy Spirit from [descending upon] these Holy Gifts" (Alfeyev, 2000a: 200). As far as lay confession, one should remember that the Proto-Hesychast Barsanuphius of Gaza absolved sin even though he was not a monk and that the priests in general lost much spiritual ground to the monks during the Iconoclastic crisis of the eighth century, a situation that recalls the Old Testament prophets' condemnation of worldly priests (McKenzie, 1968: 208-209; Blenkinsopp, 2003: 296).

The popular resentment against the priests during the Iconoclastic period lived on in Symeon. For him priests became priests only in order to win honor from men or have a secure job. In *Hymn 58* he says they are “wicked perverts” and that their souls are worse than mud, dirt, and poison (120-122) (Krivocheine, 1986: 328). One should contrast this with the attitude of the Proto-Hesychast Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite (*Ep. 1089A-1092A*) (1987: 273-274). Yet Symeon never denied his own sins. “I have sinned in Your sight, even more than all the irrational beasts and the reptiles,” he wrote (Krivocheine, 1986: 84) in a quotation which shows the low light in which reptiles were held during this period (cf. Isaac of Nineveh, 1969(2): 341).

Symeon’s prickly attitude can partly be blamed on the depraved energy of his foes as well as his own loneliness, a phenomenon which he was one of the few Proto-Hesychast monastics to complain of. He compared the spiritual quest to a hound chasing a hare, and he often gave utterance to an enthusiastic but solitary mysticism that resembles “The Call” by the Metaphysical poet George Herbert: “Come, my breath, my life . . . my joy, my glory, my unending gladness” (Krivocheine, 1986: 275). Despite his admittedly flawed personality his books contain impressive insights. If Maximus is the most tedious of the writers surveyed in this paper, Symeon is the most exciting, the most colorful, and the most compelling. Scholars should therefore be the first to forgive him his zealous and conflicted personality.

Not surprisingly, a cloud of controversy continued to hang over him even after his death. He was, it seemed, a wild man with his hand against every man and every man’s hand against him. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries Theodore of Blachernae and Constantine Chrysomallus were anathematized for their sympathy with his beliefs (Symeon the New Theologian, 1997(3): 179-180). Like Symeon, Theodore emphasized Proto-Hesychast *theōsis* and supernatural visions which gave the monk a greater authority than the priest. He was accused of Messalianism, was brought before the emperor, urged to recant, refused to do so, and was condemned by the patriarchal synod. Constantine, who believed that everyone could experience the divine light (Krausmüller, 2006: 103), was posthumously condemned as a Bogomil. The Hesychast Gregory Palamas, though he termed Symeon’s life “almost entirely a miracle” (Alfeyev, 2000a: 277), would refrain from quoting his works. The Orthodox Church has limited his place in the religious calendar to a bare minimum, his liturgy was not composed until the seventeenth century, his feast usually passes unnoticed, and only one monastery has ever been dedicated to him (Krivocheine, 1986: 391, 394;

Alfeyev, 2000a: 286).

Symeon was generally well received in monastic circles. The hegumen Cyril Phileotes, founder of the monastery bearing his name, was introduced to his writings by Nicetas. He afterwards had a vision of the Theologian and, on his advice, visited his tomb at Chrysopolis where he obtained his icon and more of his writings (Angold, 1995: 270). The importance of the spiritual father in Symeon would be transferred to the monastery of the Theotokos Euergetis, founded thirty years after his death. The abbot of this monastery was expected to hear confessions at two different intervals per day. The *typikon* of the Theotokos Euergetis monastery, composed after Symeon's canonization, stressed both monastic confession and light mysticism (1995: 347). St. Sava studied at this monastery and so helped spread Symeon's ideas to Serbia. By 1200 the important monastery of St. John at Patmos would contain writings by Symeon (1995: 364).

Symeon's influence, particularly in the form of Proto-Hesychast light and fire mysticism, would make itself felt even outside the monastic milieu. A mural of the emperor Alexius I Comnenus (r. 1081-1118) reports him as saying, "Only by fire shall I be saved" (1995: 284). There was of course a downside to the New Theologian's ascendancy. Eustathius of Thessalonica, writing after 1180, complained that the monks of his diocese were no respectors of bishops. Around the same time the Latin theologian Hugh Eteriano claimed that in Byzantium confession had passed from the bishops to the monks (1995: 379).

8.3.3 Theology

Symeon was the culmination of Proto-Hesychasm. He quotes or directly alludes to the Cappadocians, Mark the Monk, Dionysius, Maximus, and John Climacus, and he almost imperceptibly gathers their systems into his own. Krivocheine (1986: 9) plausibly opines that his thought is less abstruse than that of Gregory Palamas but less easy to assimilate, probably because of its unsystematic nature. Though Symeon has become known to the West only recently, all his major works have been translated into English. He was heavily indebted to the Neoplatonists and especially Plotinus, but his borrowings were indirect and came through the medium of earlier Christian mystics. Of pagan authors he quotes only Aelian which reflects his incomplete education (Turner, 1990: 37-39). His analogy of the prison cell is similar to Plato's analogy of the cave in the *Republic* (VII 514-517) (2007: 388-389). He asks

his reader to imagine a man raised in a dark prison from birth. If a lamp illuminated a few things in the prison he would know a little more of the real world than he does, and he would know still more if the roof were taken off his prison. The prison is the material world, and the real world is the spirit world (*Eth. Disc. 1*) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1995(1): 75-76).

Symeon's chief influence was of course Scripture. He read it every day before matins and the liturgy, and from evening until midnight. While he read he claimed to feel and see Christ. It has been estimated that his writings contain one biblical allusion for every three to four lines; most of his direct quotations come from the Gospels, but the Pauline corpus is in conspicuous evidence (Alfeyev, 2000a: 52). Over thirty times he alludes to 1 Corinthians 2:9: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Another of his favorite verses was 1 Timothy 6:16: "who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto."

Symeon was familiar with the Proto-Hesychast Dorotheus of Gaza's treatment of the Fall (Turner, 1990: 40-41), somewhat of a preoccupation with him, and Krivocheine (*apud* Turner, 1990: 50) has found stylistic similarities between him and Pseudo-Macarius. With a backward glance at Macarius, Symeon claims that the second baptism of the Spirit, usually manifested through *penthos*, is more important than the first baptism of water. He resembles Macarius when he avers that there is no alternative to winning or losing: one must always wage the spiritual life. As in the case of Macarius, the Christian cannot be sure of his final salvation (1990: 236; cf. Chadwick, 2001: 413). Proto-Hesychast light and heart mysticism, often related to the Spirit, are much in evidence in his work. Describing one of his visions he speaks of a vehement pain "kindled like a fire" in his heart (*Disc. 16.4*) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 201). The Spirit, when He descends on the monk, is compared to a pool of light which encompasses him in an unutterable manner. The joy of the one who is filled with the Spirit is "like wine that has been strained and is held up against the sun shining brilliantly and showing its color more clearly" (*Disc. 23.4*) (1980: 258). The Spirit in the saint becomes a pearl, a mustard seed, leaven, water, fire, bread, drink of life, a living fountain springing forth, a river flowing with spiritual words, word of divine life, a lamp, marriage bed, wedding chamber, bridegroom, friend, brother, and father (Krivocheine, 1986: 264). He interprets Christ's parable of the mustard seed by explaining that the field is the heart of man, the seed the Holy Spirit, and the tree the kingdom of God (*Eth. Disc. 3*) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1995(1): 118-119).

Many of Symeon's stories remind one of Pseudo-Macarius. To illustrate the soul's longing for God he asks his reader to imagine a pauper who loves a princess. When he comes to her chamber she opens her door for him and extends her gold-covered hand which he kisses while he thinks of her beauty and of the fact that they will one day reign together, but when the princess withdraws her hand he is inconsolable (*Eth. Disc. 4*) (1996(2): 40). Another story is similar to the parable of the prodigal son. An emperor urged the servant of his enemy to change sides and receive honors from him, but the servant continued to work against him. Finally he thought better of it and came before the emperor, but instead of demanding honors as he thought he would he embraced the emperor's feet and wept with contrition. The emperor raised him up and ordered that a crown, a robe, and sandals be brought for him (*Eth. Disc. 10*) (1995(1): 150-151).

Symeon did not believe that Adam's sin was shared by the human race and claimed that everyone was free to choose for himself between right and wrong. This set him against Western theologians like Augustine, but he believed, with Augustine, that God was the one who initiated the salvation process. If predestination were true, he asks, why would the Creator command men to repent? There would be no reason for Him to say anything other than, "Do not repent, for I will not accept you" or, "Repent, because I knew you beforehand" (*Eth. Disc. 2*) (1995(1): 84). He pictures the parishioners of the predestinationists lying on their beds of pleasure and glibly quoting the apostle Paul: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate" (Romans 8:29). His reply is harsh in the extreme: "Indeed He truly knew you beforehand as inattentive and disobedient and lazy, but this is certainly not because He ordered or foredained it that you should have no power to repent yourself nor . . . get up and obey" (*Eth. Disc. 2*) (1995(1): 87-88).

Symeon states that man's fall from paradise was cataclysmic. The sun, the moon, and the stars did not want to shine. Springs of water did not want to well up, rivers to flow, or the air to provide sustenance. The sky yearned to fall on Adam, and the beasts turned against him (*Eth. Disc. 1*) (1995(1): 29). But the Christian can, in a small way, get back to paradise. Symeon visualizes three worlds which change whether he is approaching the situation from the perspective of the Old Testament or the entire Bible. In the former case these are the worlds of Adam, Noah, and that lasting from Abraham to Christ (*Eth. Disc. 1*) (Keselopoulos, 2001: 18). (One is reminded of Ephrem the Syrian's three woods: the wood of the tree of knowledge, the wood of Noah's ark, and the wood of the cross. See Hill, 2006: 112.) In the

latter case, however, these worlds are the fallen world, Israel, and the church.

Israel was in many respects an improvement on paradise: instead of the Garden of Eden it had the Promised Land and instead of the Tree of Life the jar of manna. But the church was more precious still because it had the Theotokos and Jesus Christ (*Eth. Disc. 2*) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1995(1): 101). Had Adam and Eve repented, Symeon states (*Hom. 66.3*) (2001: 114-115), man would have regained paradise but nothing else. This is different from the view of Basil who held that if Adam and Eve had grown in holiness God would have given them robes of glory. The Proto-Hesychasts can thus be shown to have approached the problem of Romans 5:20-6:2 in two different ways.

Symeon thought, like the Platonists, in terms of a “golden chain” running from the church fathers to his own day, and no link was more resplendent than that of Symeon the Pious (Alfeyev: 2000a: 141-142; Hunt, 2004: 176). Symeon often turned to him to illustrate the ascetic life, and it was with him in mind that he wrote that the saint in his own lifetime is like the evening sky and his heart like the moon, a simile that recalls one of Philotheus’s (*Eth. Disc. 4; On Watchfulness 27*) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1996(2): 36; Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1984(3): 26). He was convinced that Symeon the Pious was so holy he could do what most monks could only dream of doing. He spoke with prostitutes and embraced anyone who came to him in distress, a practice which led to ugly rumors.

Symeon’s ideal Proto-Hesychast knows that gold is only something that comes from the earth, that precious stones are clay, that silk robes are the dung of worms. The sentiments, though not the theology, are the same as John the Evangelist’s in the Latin version of the *Acts of John* who promises two of his backsliding disciples that for a time they will “shine like the rose which showeth its fragrance and redness and suddenly fadeth away” (16) (James, 1926: 258). The Proto-Hesychast pities those who desire wealth and seek honor. He lives in a great city as though alone in the world. He lives with men as if he were living in a wilderness and knew no one. He sees beautiful women and remembers their end or at least the deft work of their Imaginer. He is dispassionate while he converses with them and walks through the city filled with singers, guitar players, and dancers. Maximus the Confessor (*Chs. on Love 2.87*) (1985: 59) had also spoken of the ability of the perfect monk to look at women with detachment.

The soul of the saint glancing at “the swamp of passions and ugliness” is not sullied (*Eth. Disc. 6*) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1996(2): 73). Symeon maintains that the saint cannot be soiled by associating with other men any more than the sun can be soiled by shining in a swamp. He goes even further: “Even if such a man were to be confined with tens of thousands who were unbelieving and impious and debauched, and his naked body were to be in contact with their naked bodies, he would not be injured in his faith, nor estranged from his Master, nor forgetful of His beauty” (*Eth. Disc. 6*) (1996(2): 71).

In some discussions of the New Theologian such dispassion (*apatheia*) is accepted as the ultimate aim of his theology. Symeon sometimes anthropomorphized *apatheia* as Philotheus did with remembrance of death (*On Watchfulness 6*) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1984(3): 18). *Apatheia* embraces him and gives him pleasure. This should be contrasted with the Stoic idea of dispassion which possessed less concrete and solely negative connotations (Krivocheine, 1986: 358). An example of a dispassionate saint, besides Symeon the Pious, was Symeon Salos of the sixth century. Although he had obtained a high education he pretended to be mentally unbalanced and deliberately sought out compromising situations in which to be humiliated (Walsh, 2007: 550). Symeon does not mention him but speaks instead of the martyr Chrysanthus who was immovable to physical violence (2007: 123-124).

Despite his praise of dispassion, Symeon counsels the novice to look down even when speaking to an older man lest one notice his rudimentary comeliness and his mind stray to other comely things. He is also paradoxical in condemning anger while writing bitterly against his opponents, but that is because they have slandered his teacher. The Pious’s enemies had directed the same slander against him that the Pharisees had directed against Jesus. They accused him of being a glutton, a drunkard, and a friend of sinners; but Symeon saw in him an angel instead of a man, and the saints of the early church. He was, as Alfeyev’s study (2000a: 138) makes clear, opposed to the growing tendency towards the “archivization of saints” and believed that in the Pious he had found a “latter-day saint.”

Obedience and loyalty to one’s spiritual father were all-important for Symeon. A father could be too harsh or, more dangerously, too lenient and was therefore to be chosen carefully and with much prayer (Turner, 1990: 84). Symeon thought a disciple could be sent to his father accompanied by a divine revelation (*mystikōs*) (1990: 87). A pagan illustration of this is encountered with Socrates’ “discovery” of Plato (Diogenes Laertius, *Vit. Phil.* 3.5) (1925(1):

281). Symeon's emphasis on the novice's reverence for his spiritual guide goes back to John Climacus and, through Dionysius the Areopagite, to the Neoplatonists.

The spiritual father is both a substitute for Christ and the monk's physician (Turner, 1990: 99-104). This should be compared with Lithargoel in the quasi-Gnostic *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles* who, when he appears in Nine Gates, is dressed like a physician (8) (Robinson, 1977: 268). The father is the lamp which passes its flame to the lamp of the monk, a metaphor that had previously been employed by Plotinus. The abbot was not only responsible for his monks' spiritual welfare but was under obligation to lay down his life for them if necessary. He was to be obeyed even if he was guilty of fornication, drunkenness, or badly ruling his monastery. Think only of his good qualities, Symeon advises the monk. Weep for his sins as though they were your own, and remember that your eyes are deceitful (*Disc.* 20.3) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 233). If he urges you to go with him to the city do so and you will be greatly instructed. If he eats with publicans and sinners remember that he is becoming all things to all men. Fall at his feet but not on his breast even though the apostle John did so (John 13:23) (*Disc.* 20.4; 1980: 234).

Being with his spiritual guide is for the monk tantamount to being with Christ. Turner (1990: 215, 192) helpfully draws the Proto-Hesychast scholar's attention to Eastern and Western Christian parallels to this concept: Dorotheus treated the door of his spiritual father's cell as though it were the cross; St. Charles Borromeo's confessor "was with him in retreat; and as he passed through his chamber, while he was yet sleeping, he would make a reverence to him, in honour of our Lord, whom he regarded in his person." The spiritual father was like an icon, almost but not quite identical to that which it depicted.

For Symeon the father was, after God, the monk's guide and master until death, and he was to strive to be crucified with him if possible. When the monk argued with his father the demons rejoiced, while the angels marveled when he was obedient to him as Jesus was to His Father. It is ironic that Symeon had been disobedient to his own abbot at Studium, but that is because he viewed the Pious as his real abbot. He allowed rejection of the abbot only when he said something not in accordance with the writings of the fathers, but even this rejection was only mental (*153 Pract. and Theol. Texts* 33) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 30-31). Here one may note that he did not stress obedience quite as much as the Proto-Hesychast John Climacus, though that is not saying a great deal.

Symeon cannot urge the monk to forgive his enemies strongly enough which again identifies him as a practitioner of the compassion extolled by the Proto-Hesychasts. As with Isaac the monk should hate the sin but love the sinner. For Symeon there are three levels of forgiveness, each higher than the next. The first is the act of forgiveness; the second is tranquillity about the wrong done to one; the third is non-remembrance of the wrong and the treatment of one's enemy as though he were his friend. The one perfect in love (*agapē*) will be mistreated and not be perturbed either inwardly or outwardly. The monk who repays insults, by contrast, allows the ancient serpent "to pour its venom into his heart and to feed mercilessly on his guts" (*153 Pract. and Theol. Texts* 31) (1995(4): 30), a phenomenon which Symeon must have experienced firsthand.

The true monk must learn to cultivate virtues such as love and forgiveness. Merely taking vows of poverty will do him no good if he does not make a complete break with evil. He would then be like an emperor who had smeared his face with soot before giving his money to the poor (*Disc.* 5.2) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 91-92). He carries Christ's teaching against lust to the point of condemning all mental sins. If a man who looks at a woman lustfully can be said to commit adultery with her, he who loves money is covetous even if he possesses nothing, he who hankers after food is a glutton even if he eats only bread and water, and he who criticizes his superior in his heart is a slanderer (*Disc.* 3.6) (1980: 66).

As important to Symeon's theology as love is the Proto-Hesychast concept of *penthos* (Hunt, 2004: 173). Isaac of Nineveh wrote that tears were on the frontier between this life and the life to come, but he did not emphasize their importance as much as Symeon who believed that only those who have wept can be truly repentant. While *penthos* is a gift, everyone can receive it. The monk attains it by singing hymns and reading the Scripture with his "whole heart" (*Disc.* 4.12) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 84). *Penthos* leads to light, the kingdom of heaven, and union with the Holy Spirit. It is as essential to the soul as food and water are to the body. According to Nicetas, Symeon prayed a Proto-Hesychast form of the Jesus Prayer with burning tears. The tears of repentance are for Symeon, as they would be for Gregory Palamas (*Triads* 2.2.7) (1983: 50), not painful but sweeter than honey. He maintains that the monk who does not weep destroys his soul, and, as Barsanuphius had done, he contrasts the defiling nature of seminal emissions with the purifying nature of tears which alone can soften the heart. He assures his monks that just as a garment soaked in mud can be cleaned only with water, so the garment of the soul can be washed only by tears (*Disc.* 4.10)

(Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 81). Silouan the Athonite would echo his thought: “My soul yearns after the Lord, and I seek Him in tears” (Sophrony, 1991: 269).

8.3.4 The Uncreated Light

Like the other Proto-Hesychasts Symeon highlighted *theōsis*, not only in eternity but also in time, and defined it as becoming entirely God by grace (226 *Pract. and Theol. Chs.* 3.59) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1982: 89). He puts these telling words into the mouth of Christ: “Yes, I am He, God, Who for your sake became man; and behold, I have made you, as you see, and shall make you, god” (*Eth. Disc.* 5) (1996(2): 54). Yet he believed that while the Christian could attain unity with God he could not share His nature, and he contrasted God’s uniting with man essentially with His remaining God superessentially; in this way he did not confuse the being of God with the being of man. The Hesychast Gregory Palamas would later make a more accurate distinction: man can participate in God’s energies (*energeiai*) but not His essence (*ousia*) (Hill, 2003: 120). There are for Symeon three stages of *theōsis*: the divinization of the Christian in time, the divinization of the Christian after the resurrection, and his increasing, infinite divinization which is akin to Nyssen’s idea of unending perfection (*ateleptos telos*) (Krivocheine, 1986: 386).

Not unexpectedly Symeon relates *theōsis* to light mysticism: “The resurrection of Christ re-occurs in each of us, the faithful, and that not once but at every hour, when Christ the Master arises in us, resplendent and flashing with incorruption and divinity” (1986: 303). *Theōsis* also leads Symeon down less exalted paths. In *Hymn 15* God becomes united with even the mystic’s sexual organs. Pontanus’ Latin translation of 1603 excised this reference, not, as Krivocheine (1986: 368) rashly asserts, because of the prudishness of the translator but because of the potentially blasphemous nature of the hymn. Symeon speaks of the union of Christ with His psychic brides as a sexual union in which the virginal bride is not deflowered and in which brides previously deflowered, as by sin, are restored to their virginity. The use of nuptial imagery to describe the mystical quest was not unique to Symeon. It was used by Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Macarius, Pseudo-Dionysius, and John Climacus and was inherent in the patristic commentaries on the Song of Solomon. None of these sources, however, went as far as Symeon in the brashness of their assertions (1986: 370; cf. Mechthild of Magdeburg, *Flies. Licht* 2.23; Grundmann, 1995: 175).

Symeon gives less controversial illustrations of Proto-Hesychast union with God: the disciples seeing the transfigured Christ on Mount Tabor, Moses seeing the back of God on Mount Sinai, the Eleven meeting Christ in the Upper Room, the sinful woman washing Jesus' feet, and Thecla listening to the apostle Paul for days on end. He calls this union the mystical cup, the fatted calf, the living bread, the drink of life, the lamb without spot, and the manna of the intellect. During such unions the soul becomes a flame and its radiance spreads even to the body so that the body is to the soul what molten iron is to fire (*Eth. Disc.* 6) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1996(2): 68). Elsewhere he writes that the Proto-Hesychast emanates rays of divine fire and causes the demons to flee (*153 Pract. and Theol. Texts* 51) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 34). The fire imagery looks back to Pseudo-Macarius even as it gazes forward to the Taboric Light.

Although he rarely used the imagery of darkness Symeon was both a dark mystic and a light mystic. He can be shown to have stressed God's unknowability, for example in his statement that even the seraphim cannot behold Christ. Alfeyev traces his occasional apophaticism to Nazianzen, but Dionysius was another clear influence. Symeon refers to mystical contemplations as "invisible contemplations of the supra-bright and supra-unknowable glory and Godhead of the Son and Word of God" (Alfeyev, 2000a: 160), and like Dionysius he avers that there is no name which can define God since all names came into being at His command. In the Jewish, and magical, tradition knowing a person's name gives the knower power over him (Propp, 2006: 174; Smith 2005: 205). Jacob, Moses, and Manoah all asked God to tell them His name. God does not appear to have replied to Jacob, and if so it is not recorded (Genesis 32:29). To Moses He replied with the equivocal I Am That I Am (Exodus 3:14). And to Manoah He said only that His name was wonderful (Judges 13:18). It should also be noted that Lithargoel in the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles* says that His name means "light gazelle-like stone" which is only a description of the pearls that are distributed in His city (5) (Robinson, 1977: 267).

Apophaticism, however, plays less of a role in Symeon's mysticism than cataphaticism and especially Proto-Hesychast light mysticism. He uses the traditional names for God, found in Nazianzen and Dionysius, but creates some of his own, which predictably have an emphasis on brightness: "lustrous crown," "crystalline belt, sparkling with precious stones," "inaccessible sandal" (Alfeyev, 2000a: 162-163). The Uncreated Light is a light which the Christian can partake of with his body and his soul. He sometimes uses the metaphor of wine

and even drunkenness which combines the cataphatic and apophatic approaches to God (cf. Pseudo-Macarius, *Hom.* 8.4) (1992: 82; Brock, 1987: 356). As with Gregory of Nyssa this drunkenness is related to the concept of ecstasy. *Ekstasis* was used in the Septuagint, often for the horror engendered by visions (Genesis 15:12; Daniel 10:7). Symeon's predecessors Dionysius, Maximus, and Climacus duly noted the importance of ecstasy which was characterized by the withdrawal of the mind and the loss of bodily sensation. Visions of the Uncreated Light are for Symeon accompanied by ecstasy. He describes this light as the tree of life, the flowers of paradise, the crown which Adam lost in Eden, the shimmering pool of water, the ineffable sea of glory, and the infinite ocean (Symeon the New Theologian, 1997(3): 88-89). God is so bright that the novice cannot even look at Him but, overcome with fear and trembling, must look down at his own feet (Hill, 2003: 114).

To understand the operation of light mysticism in Symeon one should be aware of the Old Testament word *kābôd* which was normally translated *doxa* in the Septuagint. *Kābôd*, from the root *kbd* meaning heavy, connotes glory, natural splendor, and even luxury (Propp, 1999: 36, 512). It is often associated with fire ('ēš) (Jenni & Westermann, 1997(1): 186). God's *kābôd* led the children of Israel out of Egypt in a fire and a cloud; it caused fierce lightning on Mount Sinai; it made Moses' face shine; it took the lives of Aaron's sons Nadab and Ahibu; it was seen by Isaiah in the Temple; and it killed Uzzah when he touched the Ark of the Covenant (Golitzin in Symeon the New Theologian, 1997(3): 95). Ezekiel pictured the divine *kābôd*, which left Solomon's temple and reentered the new temple, accompanied by the cherubim, riding on a throne, possessing human shape, and imbued with light (Kittel & Friedrich, 1985: 179). *Kābôd* was also a key concept in the apocalyptic vision of 2 *Enoch* (Orlov & Golitzin, 2001: 283).

Symeon linked the kabodic language of the Old Testament both to the Spirit's manifestation as tongues of fire at Pentecost (Acts 2:3) and to his own mystical experiences of the light (Symeon the New Theologian, 1997(3): 97). In his *Ethical Discourses* he gives perhaps the clearest Proto-Hesychast explanation of the relationship between light and fire. The day of the Lord spoken of by the apostle Paul, a key writer for him, is not an event but the manifestation of the glory of the divine Christ who is both the light of heaven and the fire of hell. It already lives in the righteous, but to the unrighteous it will be terrible and burning (*Eth. Disc.* 10) (1995(1): 142-170; cf. Isaiah 50:10-11). Something very similar to this had been stated by Maximus the Confessor (Florovsky, 1987b: 244).

Symeon's visions of the Uncreated Light began when he was twenty and left him wanting to hide deep in the earth, in the cave of the heart as it were, removed from the world and seeing only his Creator. And yet God told him that his visions, compared with the coming glory, were like a description of heaven on paper (*Disc.* 36.10) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 375). Here is how he describes one of them: "The walls of my cell melted away and the whole world vanished. I think it was fleeing before [God's] face. I remained alone in the presence alone of the Light. And . . . I do not know if I was still in my body or carried outside it. I completely forgot that I even have a body. I felt such great joy within me—and it is still in me now—great love and also great longing—and I wept streams of tears" (*Eth. Disc.* 5) (Hill, 2003: 114; Symeon the New Theologian, 1996(2): 54). Symeon's phrase "alone in the presence alone of the Light" was an echo of Plotinus' sixth *Ennead*: "There is no vision, no union, for those handling or acting by anything other; the soul must see before it neither evil nor good nor anything else, that alone it may receive the Alone" (*Enn.* 6.7.34) (1991: 502).

Symeon's visions were visions primarily of the light, though he was sometimes vouchsafed visions of heaven in which he suffered an intense feeling of acrophobia by virtue of its immense height. Krivocheine has done Proto-Hesychast studies a great service by distilling all of his descriptions of the divine light into a single chapter which makes for overwhelming reading. Everything to do with God, Symeon asserts, is light. He describes a vision of Christ's face intermingled with a fluid luminosity. Once his entrails were lit up by the divine light. Another time the light burned him and he could smell seared flesh. He compares the radiance of the light to that of the moon (Krivocheine, 1986: 237-238); in other words while the light is stronger than the sun it has something of the moon's whiteness (cf. Mark 9:3). After his visions Symeon rolled on the ground in ecstasy. Moses was considerably calmer after his encounters with the deity; but the Proto-Hesychast Gregory of Nyssa, it is true, had described *theōsis* as a frenzy of the mind (Florovsky, 1987c: 159), and Symeon's experience can be compared with that of Joseph Hazzaya who fell to the ground because of the ardor of the divine love (Colless, 2008: 27). In the aftermath of his visions Symeon knew joy, but if he went for a long spell without them he was unutterably sad. In a similar manner the Neo-Hesychast Seraphim of Sarov, when he felt abandoned by God after a divine manifestation during the liturgy, stood a thousand days and nights on bare stone imploring God for mercy (Zander, 1975: 9, 19; cf. Alfeyev, 2000b: 250).

It has been seen that for Symeon God's face was sometimes seen within the light. This provides another parallel with the life of Seraphim and one which enables the reader to appreciate Symeon's visions. Seraphim's disciple Motovilov writes:

Imagine in the centre of the sun, in the dazzling light of its midday rays, the face of a man talking to you. You see the movement of his lips and the changing expression of his eyes, you hear his voice, you feel someone holding your shoulders; yet you do not see his hands, you do not even see yourself or his figure, but only a blinding light spreading far around for several yards and illuminating with its glaring sheen both the snow-blanket which covered the forest-glade and the snow-flakes which besprinkled me and the great Elder (Hill, 2006: 371).

Symeon relates light mysticism to the Eucharist and says that the Eucharistic bread is fire. The liturgy was generally more important for him than for the other Proto-Hesychasts, excepting of course Pseudo-Dionysius. The holy feast is something the priest should be wary of approaching, especially if he is unworthy and not privy to visions. Symeon's view of the Eucharist is nothing like the more nonchalant view current in the West today. It has more in common with the biblical understanding of the Tabernacle, which itself housed sacred bread and which Propp not incongruously likens to a nuclear power plant, "channeling cosmic power from Heaven to Earth." Like a power plant, the Tabernacle was tended by personnel wearing protective garb who dealt with contamination crises and who could not breach protocol without courting disaster (Leviticus 10:1-2) (Propp, 2006: 689-690). The same was true of the Temple later on (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). Likewise the apostle Paul warned against disorderly celebrations of the Eucharist and blamed them for the weakness, sickness, and death of his parishioners (1 Corinthians 11:29-30). Symeon's theology of the Eucharist should be approached with these biblical parallels in mind.

As opposed to monastics, men and women living in the world must not communicate until their repentance has been confirmed (Krivocheine, 1986: 120). Yet those who communicate daily are continually purified as Isaiah was by the burning coal (Isaiah 6:6-7). Symeon's view on the frequency of communion went back to Theodore of Studium and would be enthusiastically embraced by the Kollyvades of the eighteenth century (Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, 1989: 11). He himself attended church services every day for fifty years (Alfeyev 2000a: 73).

The body, as has been noted, takes part in visions of the light. In a highly poetic imitation of the Beatitudes, Symeon blesses those who have received Christ's coming as light, those who have put on His light, and those who have seen Him in the body (*Eth. Disc.* 10) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1995(1): 166-167). This concept was not without worthy antecedents. So one reads of Moses' face shining (Exodus 34:29-35) and the high priest Simon emerging from the temple "as the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and as the moon at the full" (Sirach 50:6). Such bodily participation in the supernatural was possible because, as the Proto-Hesychast Maximus the Confessor had clearly explained, Christ united human nature to God by becoming man. Symeon is not ignorant of the doctrine of Christ's humanity which would be so imperative for the Hesychasts, and this allows him to occasionally take a favorable stance towards man's material nature. He admired Mark the Monk's concept of praying physically and alleged that many of the sins which are viewed as fleshly are actually the fault of the soul since the body does not perform them when it is dead. He acknowledged that the mystic who participates in the Spirit is not separated from his bodily needs and wrote that when men are united with God they will no longer be ashamed of their bodies.

Nonetheless Symeon's emphasis on Christ's humanity is overstated by Keselopoulos (2001: 46-47). He tended to stress Christ's deity over His humanity, and he shared late antiquity's disparagement of matter. He spoke of God's resurrection rather than Jesus' resurrection and claimed that the Beatitudes were spoken by God (*153 Pract. and Theol. Texts* 73) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 39; cf. Neyrey, 2004: 148). Sometimes, in Gnostic fashion, he called the body (*sōma*) a tomb (*sēma*) (Cook *et al*, 1965: 467), and he praised one of his visions of the light precisely because it exorcised material denseness and bodily heaviness from him (*Disc.* 16.3) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 201).

8.3.5 Conclusion

This section has helped establish the key contention of the thesis that the Proto-Hesychasts were important largely for their role as precursors of Hesychasm. It has done this by meeting a secondary objective of the thesis, the verification of Hesychastic elements in Symeon the New Theologian. Symeon is often wrongly classed with the Hesychasts, but this classification at least shows what a strong influence, albeit unacknowledged, he had on them. For Holl, Hesychasm was nothing more than a recapitulation of his thought. Although Symeon comes after the patristic age he is in a sense the last church father of the East, where

antiquity lasted longer than it did in the West (cf. Oden & Hall, 1998: 269). He bequeathed to Hesychasm the various mystical strands that came before him. He exhibits (1) asceticism, (2) dark mysticism, (3) light mysticism, (4) heart mysticism, (5) *theōsis*, (6) *penthos*, (7) unceasing prayer, (8) compassion, (9) an interest in the Holy Spirit, and in fact every aspect of Hesychasm including (10) its emphasis on Christ's humanity, although he does not as a rule stress this as much as he does the glory (*doxa*) which shone from Christ. He was indebted to Nyssen's apophaticism but more to Macarius' light mysticism whose fullest and most logical development was the Taboric Light of the Hesychasts. Symeon's circle will now be considered.

8.4 Symeon's Circle

8.4.1 Nicetas Stethatos

Nicetas Stethatos was a disciple and biographer of Symeon the New Theologian and the editor of his writings. He became a monk of Studium at the age of fourteen, the same age his master had wanted to become a monk. Sometime after Symeon's death he was plagued with thoughts of immorality (*porneia*) and was visited by Symeon who revealed that their cause was arrogance (Turner, 1990: 142). He later had a vision that Symeon urged him to finish editing his work, a project which had lapsed, and he duly obeyed (Nicetas Stethatos, *Vit. Sym.* 14) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1997(3): 21-22). Similarities between the New Theologian and Plotinus have already been observed. Now it is appropriate to note parallels between their respective disciples. Like Porphyry, Nicetas was his master's biographer and editor and yet not particularly close to him. Like Porphyry he concerned himself with the posthumous fate of the soul, his writings were considerably drier than those of his predecessor, and he was more opposed to matter. Finally he was unable to witness his hero's death and had to rely on other testimony to describe it.

Nicetas received the cognomen Stethatos, Courageous, because of his opposition to Constantine IX's affair with his mistress Sclerena (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 76). He predictably aligned himself against the Latins during the Great Schism of 1054, attacking especially their use of *azyma* or unleavened bread, but he is said to have made peace with Cardinal Humbert, a major figure on the Western side of the controversy. At the end of his life he became abbot of Studium, no small honor. He wrote on angelology and against the

Jews and the Armenian Monophysites. Prominent in his thought, as the apocalyptic scholar Alexander Golitzin (2001: 131) has observed, are characteristics redolent of apocalyptic literature, albeit transformed. These include the communication of heavenly mysteries, including instruction on angelology and eschatology; the apocalyptic ascent; and participation in the angelic liturgy. The work that will be examined here is his *Three Centuries of Practical, Physical, and Gnostic Chapters*. The chapters are both long and dull.

Nicetas follows the Evagrian triad of the practical, the physical, and the gnostic, though he also uses Dionysius' terminology of purgative, illuminative, and mystical; at other times he has recourse to the Proto-Hesychast Isaac of Nineveh's scheme of carnal, psychic, and spiritual. As has already been intimated, the Greek tendency to think in terms of a threefold progression was intensified by the translation of Isaac's ascetical discourses.

Penthos is deeply at work in Nicetas' thought. He distinguishes between tears of repentance (*metanoia*) and tears of compunction (*katanyxis*) and in this matter follows John Climacus rather than Symeon (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 77-78). *Katanyxis* is more joyful, but the two concepts also overlap. Compunction results in sweetness and light, so much so that Nicetas refers to the phenomenon as intoxication. Compunction is a spring from Eden and a shower of rain from the Holy Spirit. While sensual indulgence corrupts the body, tears purify it. Often in dealing with Symeon and his circle, especially in regard to tears, one misses the level-headedness of Climacus. Yet a description of Ephrem the Syrian by one of his disciples likewise boggles the mind: "There was never a day or night, or part of a day or night, or any moment, however short, when his vigilant eyes did not appear bathed in tears" (Alfeyev, 2000a: 210).

Proto-Hesychast light and fire mysticism are equally evident in the chapters. The mystic participates in the divine fire and causes the demons to fear (*Cent.* 1.20) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 84). The one united with Christ is described as incandescent. Nicetas subscribes not only to light mysticism but to the divine darkness of Pseudo-Dionysius who was in many respects more of an influence on him than the New Theologian (1995(4): 77). As did both of the Symeons he accentuates the monk's relationship to his spiritual father, though he believes the mystical life is possible for all Christians and not only monks. Like the Pious he ranks love higher than prayer and speaks of the soul being wounded by love for God.

While holiness was for Isaac of Nineveh unthinkable without the desert, Nicetas is wary of the isolated life and quotes from Ecclesiastes (4:10) for his support: “Woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.” The monk needs both his fellow monks and a leader experienced in unseen warfare. Alone he will not recognize the attacks of the demons or the passions. When blasphemous thoughts enter his mind he is to ignore them and continue praying or chanting the Psalms. Those engaged in spiritual warfare are deserted by God for one of three reasons: arrogance, the censuring of others, and self-righteousness. The self-righteous monk is as guilty as the passionate worldling and will not see the courts of peace (*Cent.* 1.49) (1995(4): 91). Judging others is a universal phenomenon, but it is a dangerous pit to fall into. Men accuse those who are downcast of arrogance and anger, and those who have cheerful countenances as being prone to pleasure. A person’s physiognomy, he concludes, is a poor arbiter of his character.

Nicetas has more distrust of the body than Symeon. At one point he commends hatred of materiality (*Cent.* 3.53) (1995(4): 155). The body is the monk’s enemy and has a downward pull which is detrimental to the spiritual life. As it was for Proclus and Isidore, touch is an extremely suspect sense (Damascius, *Hist. Phil.* 12) (1999: 89). Sleep is also dangerous, but the mystic who participates in the Holy Spirit is wrapped all night in an illumination of fire (*Cent.* 3.38) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 149). Nicetas concludes with a discussion of the nine angelic hierarchies already outlined by Dionysius. The importance angels held for the Proto-Hesychasts can again be remarked. One should recall the New Theologian praying “as though he were a statue or an incorporeal spirit” (*Disc.* 22.3) (Symeon the New Theologian, 1980: 245) and his observation that the mystic, like the angels, bears God in his soul even in the present life (*Eth. Disc.* 3) (Keselopoulos, 2001: 121). The supreme accomplishment of the first angelic triad is for Nicetas “the godly hymn of EI,” that of the second the Trisagion, and that of the third the Alleluia (*Cent.* 3.99) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 172). The study will now turn to that other member of Symeon’s circle, Pseudo-Symeon.

8.4.2 Pseudo-Symeon

The Three Methods of Prayer, once attributed to Symeon the New Theologian, is probably not by him but by a disciple who is sometimes given the name of Pseudo-Symeon (1995(4): 64). The methodist openly cites his debt to the Proto-Hesychasts Mark the Monk, Isaiah of Scetis, John Climacus, Hesychius, and Philotheus. He emphasizes the guarding of the heart which he defines as the location where the powers of the soul reside. It should be remembered that for the Proto-Hesychasts the heart signified not only the physical heart and the emotions but the entire person including body, soul, and spirit (1995(4): 431).

Pseudo-Symeon sees no danger in the method he is proposing, really the last of the methods he discusses. The first two, however, are horses of a different color. He would seem to have forgotten Mark the Monk's stricture that there are many different methods of prayer and that no method is harmful (*On the Spiritual Law* 19) (1979(1): 111). In the first method the mystic raises his hands and eyes upwards and fills his mind with images of heaven and the angels. This method can lead to the sensation of seeing physical light, smelling supernatural smells, hearing voices, and, at worse, demon-possession and suicide. The demonic danger had already been noted by Isaac of Nineveh (*On Prayer and Outward Posture* 19) (Brock, 1987: 288-290), and there exists an illustration of suicide with Assuana the Hymnographer (Špidlík, 2005: 213). In contrast to Pseudo-Symeon, Symeon the New Theologian never doubted the divine nature of his visions which distinguishes him from both the methodist and his own spiritual guide. Curiously, an illustration of scent mysticism is found in the ninth-century life of Theophanes the Confessor who is said, along with his bride, to have pursued Christ by focusing on his sense of smell. In Krausmüller's words (2006: 107), the pair "imagine him as fragrance and are eventually rewarded with the miraculous manifestation of 'real' fragrance to their noses." The sense of smell has in fact played a prominent role in explorations of the supernatural and occult worlds (Krivocheine, 1986: 210; Yeats, 1961: 15).

The second of Pseudo-Symeon's three methods is to be preferred to the first as a moonlit night is preferred to a moonless and starless night (*Three Methods* 2) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 69), but he still cannot recommend it. In this method the mystic withdraws his intellect into himself when he prays and attempts to drag his thoughts back to prayer when they wander. Isaac of Nineveh and Joseph Hazzaya appear to have employed this second method without harm, but according to the methodist it can lead to arrogance and spiritual

blindness.

In a brilliant but flawed study Krausmüller (2006: 106) views the second method as a caricature of the teachings of Hesychius the Priest which is unlikely in view of the methodist's avowed respect for this thinker. He takes *The Three Methods of Prayer* as a conspiracy against proponents of the second method which snatches their guiding light, Hesychius, away from them. The methodist's alleged dislike of Hesychius, however, comes under question with Krausmüller's acknowledgment that Pseudo-Symeon's third, preferred method is highly indebted to this representative of the Sinaitic school of asceticism.

In the third method the Proto-Hesychast's beard touches his chest before the commencement of prayer, and he gazes towards his navel, slows his breathing, and mentally searches for the place of his heart. Why is his gaze directed towards his navel and not his heart as in certain documents from the fourteenth century which synchronize the physical sight with the intellect? The present writer would speculate that this was in order to put less strain on the eyes and because of the importance of the navel in earlier pagan mysticism. When the mystic focuses his intellect on his heart he discovers at first darkness and "an impenetrable density." But after days and nights of this task he finds an open place in his heart and sees himself as "entirely luminous and full of discrimination" (*Three Methods* 3) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 73). For Krausmüller (2006: 107) this third method is akin to the first and Pseudo-Symeon's attack against the first is mere lip service paid to those who were concerned with the possibility of demonic deceit. But Pseudo-Symeon was clearly apprehensive about this possibility, especially since for him, as for Macarius, demonic thoughts dwell within the mystic's heart as well as outside it (*Three Methods* 3) (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1995(4): 74).

The third method, then, is the chosen prayer technique of a monastic thinker of Symeon's circle. The Eastern church has to a large degree abandoned the Hesychast and Proto-Hesychast body postures. When enjoined these, together with the breathing techniques, are accompanied by the gravest of warnings (1995(4): 65-66).

8.4.3 Conclusion

The above section has met a secondary objective of the thesis by observing Hesychastic elements in the circle of Symeon the New Theologian and thereby advances its central contention that the Proto-Hesychasts were important largely for their role as precursors of Hesychasm. Nicetas and Pseudo-Symeon are the main barometer for ascertaining the direction Symeon's mystical tendency initially led. In them are detected such Proto-Hesychast phenomena as (1) monasticism, (2) dark mysticism, (3) light mysticism, (4) an emphasis on the heart as man's spiritual center, (5) *penthos*, (6) unceasing prayer, and, especially in Nicetas, a pronounced inclination towards angelology. Nicetas seemed to gravitate more to Pseudo-Dionysius than to Symeon, and a stronger dose of dark mysticism than is usual in later Proto-Hesychasm is encountered in his thought as well as a certain scorn of materiality that was not shared by Pseudo-Symeon. Having evaluated the last Proto-Hesychasts the time has come to assess the findings of the entire investigation.

9.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

9.1 Summary

The aim of the present study was to ascertain whether the mystics from Basil the Great to Symeon the New Theologian were important primarily as precursors of Hesychasm. The objectives were to identify the significant contributions of previous students of Proto-Hesychasm, to establish the tendencies of fourteenth-century Hesychasm, and to verify a Proto-Hesychastic mentality in the five “hubs” of the Cappadocians, Pseudo-Macarius, the Eastern Christian philosophers, the Eastern Christian ascetics, and Symeon the New Theologian. In this way it was hoped that the central argument of the thesis would be established, namely that the chief contribution of the mystics from Basil the Great to Symeon the New Theologian was to prepare the way for Hesychasm.

The study found that, despite excellent previous research on Proto-Hesychasm, especially by Alexander Schmemmann, no scholar clearly regarded the Proto-Hesychasts as a distinguishable group and none addressed them in terms of their culmination in Hesychasm. The study then presented eight characteristics which were predominant in the Hesychasts: monasticism, dark mysticism, light mysticism, an emphasis on the heart, *theōsis*, the humanity of Christ, *penthos*, and unceasing prayer. These characteristics were discerned in the Proto-Hesychasts in addition to other attributes typical of Hesychasm, notably an interest in compassion and the Holy Spirit.

The study revealed that in the Cappadocians monasticism was set down as the dominant milieu of Proto-Hesychasm, so much so that Basil the Great was called the true founder of monasticism in Asia Minor. Dark mysticism was one of the chief contributions of the Cappadocians to the Hesychastic paideia, facilitated by their reaction to the radical Arianism of the Anomoeans, particularly that of Eunomius, and it would be developed into an almost exact science by Gregory of Nyssa. Unceasing prayer and some intimation of *penthos* were also discernible among the Cappadocians together with an earnest subscription to *theōsis*, the inheritance of St. Peter and the early fathers.

Despite the unsystematic nature of his thought Pseudo-Macarius was something of a giant within Proto-Hesychasm, granting to it its interest in light and heart mysticism, ultimately gleaned from the Bible and Syrian theology. For the Hesychasts his light mysticism would become the Uncreated or Taboric Light that Christ burned with when He stood with His disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. Macarius was not unexpectedly a practitioner of (probably Messalian) monasticism. He also exhibited such Hesychastic strains as *theōsis*, *penthos*, and unceasing prayer. He emphasized man's material nature as would his distant disciple Mark the Monk who also stressed the humanity of Christ which Macarius himself did not tend to.

Hesychasm had two main fonts which became apparent in the fifth and sixth centuries, the philosophical and the ascetic. The chief representatives of the former were Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor who passed on to the Hesychasts a formidable example of generally unacknowledged Platonism. It has been claimed that Dionysius was not a Christian, but his system was corrected by Maximus at key points, despite the latter's susceptibility to a Neoplatonic monism that informs his eschatological thought. Notwithstanding their highly intellectual *modus vivendi* Dionysius and Maximus displayed such typical Proto-Hesychastic tendencies as dark and light mysticism, asceticism, *theōsis*, and unceasing prayer. There was in Maximus an additional emphasis on the humanity of Christ, exhibited especially in his anti-Monothelite writings and one which would correlate with the Hesychasts' refusal to disown the mystic's material nature.

The ascetic font of Hesychasm was outstandingly illustrated by John Climacus and Isaac of Nineveh, the latter of whom was a Nestorian who would be accepted by both the Orthodox and the Monophysites. John owed much to the Palestinian school of asceticism, represented by such figures as Barsanuphius and John the Prophet, and he would gain his own disciples who comprised the Sinaitic school of asceticism, namely Philotheus and the aptly named Hesychius the Priest. John and Isaac evidenced the Hesychastic trends of dark and light mysticism, heart mysticism, asceticism, and *penthos*. The importance prayer held for them was shown by John's rudimentary Jesus prayer, paralleled by that of Abba Philemon, and Isaac's distinction between pure prayer and spiritual prayer. There were traces of *theōsis* in John's story of the dead monk Menas, and in Isaac's referring to God's union with the world as a mingling (*hūlṭānā*).

Symeon the New Theologian was essentially the last Proto-Hesychast and has in fact erroneously been labeled a Hesychast, though he predated the movement by three centuries. He displayed all eight of this paper's criteria for establishing the Proto-Hesychastic mindset and added to this a preoccupation with compassion and the Holy Spirit. Though he adhered to the doctrine of Christ's humanity he tended to stress more the glory (*doxa*) with which He shone on the Mount of Transfiguration. It was therefore not surprising to find his pupil Nicetas entertaining a somewhat low view of matter, a heritage of the Platonism of Dionysius which would be rejected by the Hesychasts themselves.

9.2 Conclusion

The present thesis has expanded the understanding of Proto-Hesychasm first of all by regarding the Eastern Christian mystics between Athanasius and Gregory Palamas as inhabiting a philosophical "no-man's-land," and secondly by identifying these mystics as important largely for their role as precursors of fourteenth-century Hesychasm. The Hesychasts would combine an emphasis on the body, learned from Maximus the Confessor, with the otherworldly mysticism of Symeon the New Theologian who at least gives one the impression of being indifferent to matter. They therefore made some distinctive changes to the system of Symeon, who had embodied the best of his predecessors, and produced the last word in Orthodox theology and mysticism.

The thesis has disproved Krausmüller's contention (2006: 125) that the Hesychasts "were able to subvert, appropriate or suppress well-established alternative models of spiritual life and . . . present themselves as the only true representatives of orthodox monasticism." The Hesychasts did not present themselves as such but were in fact so. *Pace* Krausmüller (2006: 125-126), Gregory Palamas' victory over Barlaam the Calabrian was not also a victory over Maximus the Confessor. Gregory and Maximus were firmly in the Orthodox tradition, Barlaam a Westerner and an outsider.

There remains a need for further studies on the Proto-Hesychasts, both to confirm the conclusions of this paper and to stand as studies in their own right. In-depth investigations of concepts like heart, light, and fire in the Proto-Hesychasts—as well as certain metaphors such as "all eye"—could profitably be undertaken. These might address the subtle distinctions between light and fire mysticism in Proto-Hesychasm. The clearest Proto-Hesychast

explanation of the relationship between light and fire was given by Symeon the New Theologian in his *Ethical Discourses* (10) (1995(1): 142-170). The period's use of the metaphor "all eye," encountered strikingly in Barsanuphius and John the Prophet (2003: 25), was shown to be present in Plotinus, Bessarion, and Gregory the Great. A study could therefore be commenced on the history and significance of this metaphor in the Neoplatonists, the desert fathers, the Proto-Hesychasts, and certain Western churchmen.

It would also be instructive to examine how much the Proto-Hesychasts were acquainted with their spiritual predecessors and how much they were absorbing them secondhand from other writers or even from the words of their own masters (cf. Dillon, 1996: xv). Equally rewarding would be an inquiry into the influence of the Greek philosopher Proclus on the Hesychasts through the medium of Pseudo-Dionysius, even though this would call their orthodoxy somewhat into question, and an investigation into the relationship between the Proto-Hesychasts and Syrian Christianity, especially by students of Syriac. This would preferably include an analysis of the distinct and complex anthropology of Isaac of Nineveh who divided the human being into body, soul, and spirit, related these to the three stages of spiritual progress, and divided the second aspect, the soul, into the mind and heart.

Hesychasm flourished in the Slavic world and in Romania; it influenced Paisy Velichkovsky (1722-1794), Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (1749-1809), and Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833), to name only three of the most outstanding examples (Hill, 2006: 157). It would not be too much to say that Eastern Orthodoxy is Hesychasm. Everything in its history can be viewed as either an anticipation or a reflection of Hesychasm. In Nil Sorsky, in the late fifteenth century, are found the same warnings against lust and anger and the same stress on detachment in prayer that is already present in Maximus the Confessor. If it is thus safe to equate Hesychasm with Orthodoxy, the Proto-Hesychasts are essential to an understanding of Eastern Christian mysticism.

10.0 ANNEXURE A: CHRONOLOGY

Aphrahat (fl. 337-345)
Ephrem the Syrian (306-373)
Pseudo-Macarius (fl. 363-400)
Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389)
Basil the Great (330-379)
Gregory of Nyssa (335-394)
Evagrius (346-399)
Isaiah of Scetis (fl. 431-491)
Diadochus of Photike (400-486)
Proclus (412-485)
Philoxenus of Mabbug (440-523)
Mark the Monk (fl. 485)
Isidore of Alexandria (fl. 488)
Damascius (460-538)
Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite (fl. 500)
Pseudo-Isaiah of Scetis (fl. 500)
Stephen Bar Sudaili (fl. 500-543)
Barsanuphius (fl. 525-543)
John the Prophet (fl. 525-543)
Sergius of Reshaina (fl. 527-536)
Dorotheus of Gaza (506-570)
Abba Philemon (fl. 600)
John Climacus (579-659)
Maximus the Confessor (580-662)
Sahdona (fl. 635-650)
Simon Taibutheh (fl. 650)
Isaac of Nineveh (fl. 676-700)
Dadisho Qatraya (650-700)
Joseph Ḥazzaya (710-786)
Hesychius the Priest (fl. 800)
Philotheus of Sinai (fl. 900)

Symeon the Pious (917-986)

Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022)

Nicetas Stethatos (1005-1085)

11.0 ANNEXURE B: GLOSSARY OF SEMITIC WORDS

Arabic

<i>ḍikr</i>	remembrance
<i>ḥubb</i>	love
<i>raḥma</i>	mercy
<i>sakana</i>	to dwell
<i>šidda</i>	violence
<i>šufūf</i>	transparency
<i>wahīd</i>	lonely

Hebrew

<i>'ah^abâ</i>	love
<i>'ēš</i>	fire
<i>ḥayyôt</i>	living creatures
<i>kābôd</i>	glory
<i>lēb</i>	heart
<i>'ôr</i>	light
<i>rah^amîm</i>	mercy
<i>rûaḥ</i>	spirit
<i>šārap</i>	to burn
<i>šekel</i>	insight
<i>š^erāpîm</i>	seraphim
<i>š^ekînâ</i>	dwelling
<i>yāḥîd</i>	lonely

Syriac

<i>dêrāyā</i>	cenobite
<i>gîhanā</i>	hell
<i>hūltānā</i>	mingling
<i>ḥābîkūtha</i>	commingling
<i>ḥûbā</i>	love
<i>kūmrûtā</i>	priesthood

<i>libā</i>	heart
<i>madbār</i>	desert
<i>mār</i>	lord
<i>mṣalī</i>	to pray
<i>napsānûthā</i>	souliness
<i>nûhrā</i>	light
<i>pagrānûthā</i>	bodiliness
<i>rahmē</i>	mercy
<i>rûhā</i>	spirit
<i>rûhānûthā</i>	spirituality
<i>sūkālē</i>	insights
<i>ṣlûtā dāhīta</i>	pure prayer
<i>ṣlûtā rûhānāyā</i>	spiritual prayer
<i>šalyûtha</i>	solitude
<i>šapyûthā</i>	clearness
<i>šī`da</i>	demon
<i>yihîdāyā</i>	anchorite

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