

## II

# THE HESYCHAST METHOD OF PRAYER

One of the many fascinating interests of contemporary times is the quest for God-experience. Traditionally, expressions like contemplation, God-experience etc., have been used for talking about the elite. This is being challenged now. Everybody has a right to God-experience and the consequent calm and peace of mind. To achieve this, the general tendency today is to avoid elaborate traditional methods involving ritualism, and pursue simple forms of prayer. Hence people everywhere have turned towards the Buddhists in Japan, the Hindu Yogis in India, and the monks of Mount Athos, in their search for experience and interiority. Zen, Yoga, T.M., Jesus Prayer etc., are no longer strange words to modern man. Irrespective of their religious affiliation, people positively affirm the therapeutic and spiritual value of these methods. In the past few decades, so much has been written about these methods. The Hesychast method of prayer of the Christian East has also gained considerable attention. However what exactly is Hesychasm and Jesus Prayer, and what their relationship, is not clear to many. Through an historical and theoretico-practical survey, we make an attempt to clarify some of their aspects in the following pages.

### *Hesychasm*

Hesychasm is a monastic movement whose origins go back to the Fathers of the desert. It is Eastern Christianity's ancient tradition of contemplative mysticism. Macarius, the Egyptian, said: "to become men intoxicated with God", and to become real listeners of the Word of God, one has to calm and still one's

heart. This internal stillness, tranquillity, and consequent peace is hesychia, by means of which one attains intimate union with God dwelling in the heart. "Hesychia is that state in which the Christian through grace and his own intense asceticism, reintegrates his whole being into a single EGO that is then placed completely under the direct influence of God dwelling within him."<sup>1</sup> Hesychia is thus that state of integrated Ego-hood.

Now, as a practical method, Hesychasm consists essentially in making the intelligence descend into the heart, in order to introduce the Names of Jesus therein, by means of repeated invocation, timed to follow the respiratory rhythm, of a formula **containing this Name.**<sup>2</sup> This description combines both the original Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer, thus representing the modern trend in the Hesychast movement. The *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* defines Hesychasm as a spiritual system of essentially contemplative orientation which finds the perfection of man in union with God through continuous prayer.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the *Dictionnaire* cautiously points out the current interpretation of Hesychasm also. Today people understand by Hesychasm a certain method of prayer based on the repeated invocation of the Name of Jesus. Hesychasm is thus, identified with the Jesus Prayer.<sup>4</sup> According to Vladimir Lossky, Hesychasm is a technique of interior prayer.<sup>5</sup> This prayer is perpetual, as uninterrupted as breathing or the beating of the heart. Through this man becomes consciously conscious of the presence of God in him. It is to be noted here that Lossky has not identified Hesychasm with the Jesus Prayer, and rightly so, because Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer are two traditions, two spiritual disciplines. A fusion or merger occurred only later. It seems necessary, therefore, to trace the historical beginnings, and the development of both Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer, to remove the possible confusions in the minds of laymen.

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1. G.A. Maloney, *The Breath of the Mystic* (New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1974), pp. 21-22.
  2. J.A. Cuttat, *The Encounter of Religions* (Paris: Desclée Company, 1960), p. 87.
  3. Pierre Adnès, "Hesychasm", *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* t.8, col.384.
  4. *Ibid.* col. 381.
  5. cf. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke and Co., Ltd., 1973), p. 209.

### *The Beginning and Development of Hesychasm*

As a programme of spiritual life, Hesychasm takes its origin from the illuminative revelation received by St. Arsenius from above: "Arsenius, flee, keep silence, and remain tranquil; these are the roots of impeccability."<sup>6</sup> The third stage, remaining tranquil is the actual state of *Hesychia*: tranquillity, peace and quietude. The preceding two stages are, however, important and necessary. The first stage of *Hesychia* is solitude, the *fuga mundi et hominum*.<sup>7</sup> Solitude is a primary condition for concentration and contemplation. It was recommended even by philosophers<sup>8</sup> as a necessary pre-requisite for philosophic contemplation. Right from the beginning of monastic life, the Christian monks realized the importance of fleeing from the world, and of solitude. Evagrius of Pontus (d. 399), known as the Theologian of the desert, said that real gnosis is reserved only for the solitaries. The success of monastic life, according to him, depends on the degree of solitude.<sup>9</sup> Many other fathers of the desert have written eulogies on solitude.<sup>10</sup>

The second stage of Hesychasm is silence.<sup>11</sup> According to the Fathers, it is silence that teaches us to pray well. And hence they exhorted the monks to observe absolute silence. There are shining examples of numerous saints and holy men of the monastic period, who, through silence, attained tranquillity and union with God.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in the Hesychast spirituality, silence has a unique place. These first two steps are actually external and, therefore, they are only a preparation for the real *Hesychia*, namely, interior peace and tranquillity. This is the quietude of the heart, the operations of which having been more or less controlled through the first two stages, devoid of all unnecessary thoughts and concerns that disturb it. The one who reaches this stage is a real Hesychast; he can control all his thoughts; and he attains that "internal sobriety—*nepsis*".<sup>13</sup>

6. P.G. 65, 88c.

7. Irene Hausherr, *Hesychasme et Prière* (Rome: Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 176, 1966), p. 177f.

8. Cf. Plato, *De Republica*, VI, 496 d.

9. Epistola 41, Frankenberg, *Evagrius Ponticus*, Berlin 1912, p. 595.

10. Cf. *Apophthegmata Patrum*, P.G., 65, 71-440.

11. Cf. I. Hausherr, *Hesychasme et Prière*, p. 199f.

12. Cf. P.G., 82, 1413f. 1427f; P.G. 31 1197f.

13. P. Adnes, "Hesychasme", *Dict. Spi.* col. 391.

One may wonder, perhaps, at the merely secular character of this sort of Hesychia. Is it really a spiritual system for God-realization? Yes, it is both an environment and a source of prayer. It does not exist but for prayer. There is thus a relationship between Hesychasm and prayer. Hesychasm aims at prayer and God-experience. It is a pre-requisite for contemplative life; strictly speaking, it is contemplative life itself. Hence a Hesychast is a man of prayer by vocation. St. John Climacus stresses this point when he defines a Hesychast in his *Ladder of Paradise*:

The Hesychast is one who aspires to circumscribe the Incorporeal in the dwelling of flesh; he is a sort of terrestrial angel who has liberated his prayer from all laziness and negligence. He is the one who can cry aloud: "my heart is ready, O Lord" (Ps. 56.8). He says: "I sleep, but my heart keeps vigil" (Cant. 5.2.). For a king, wealth and population of his country are his power. The power of a Hesychast is the abundance of prayer.<sup>14</sup>

From the Egyptian deserts, Hesychasm gradually spread to the monasteries of Constantinople, where St. Simon the New Theologian (949-1022), the author of the *Hymns of Divine Love* became the principal proponent. Later, Mount Athos became the centre of Hesychasm. There a certain Nicephorus, the Hesychast of the thirteenth century, invented a "psycho-physical method" of Hesychasm. He was greatly influenced by the idea of Evagrius, Macarius and Climacus that the heart is the centre of the psycho-physical organism. His precise problem was how to impress the Name of Jesus on the heart. The solution offered is a very practical one:

You know that we breathe our breath in and out, only because of our heart... So, as I have said, sit down, recollect your mind, draw it—I am speaking of your mind—in your nostrils; that is the path the breath takes to reach the heart. Drive it, force it to go down to your heart with the air you breathe in. When it is there, you will see the joy that follows; you will have nothing to regret. As a man who has been away from home for a long time cannot restrain his joy at seeing his wife and children again, so that spirit overflows with joy and unspeakable delights when it is united again to the soul... Next you must know that as long as your

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14. St. John Climacus, "The Ladder of Paradise", 27. P.G.88.1097, 1100a,

spirit abides there, you must not remain silent or idle. Have no other occupation or meditation than the cry of "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me". Under no circumstances give yourself any rest. This practice protects your spirit from wandering and makes it inaccessible to the suggestions of the enemy, and lifts it up every day in love and desire for God.<sup>15</sup>

Nicephorian technique is based on Macarian anthropology, which is of semitic origin. Man is therefore, understood as an indivisible psycho-somatic unity constituted of various elements such as body, soul, spirit and heart.<sup>16</sup> This is not a new invention; this has been the contention of the fathers of the Orient. Later theologians and writers also subscribed to this view and they improved upon the theory of Nicephorus. Thus the Hesychast method, in its developed form, spread all over the religious world of Byzantium, Slavic countries and Russia, and it was theologically supported by great personalities like Gregory Palamas. Four steps are found in the newly combined Hesychast method of prayer.

1. The striving towards a state of total rest or quiet which excludes reading, psalmody, meditation etc.
2. The repetition of Jesus Prayer.
3. Practices designed to help the concentration of mind such as physical immobility, control or suspension of breathing, fixation of the eyes on the heart, stomach and the navel in order to "let the mind go back into the heart". This helps total concentration and keeps the Name of Jesus in the heart.
4. The feeling of an inner warmth and physical perception of a divine light or "the light of Tabor".<sup>17</sup>

The Light of Tabor represents the glorious Jesus who transfigured on Mount Tabor so as to be seen and experienced. The "Taboric experience" they had, is the goal of the Hesychast also.

15. Nicephorus, "On Guarding the Heart", P.G., 147. 961-966.

16. Theophane the Recluse (1815-1894) a Russian ascetic in his famous book "What is prayer", elaborates the orthodox anthropology according to the semitic and hesychast tradition. Cf. Timothy Ware (ed.), *The art of Prayer, an Orthodox anthology* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1966), p. 17-20

17. Cf. A monk of the Eastern Church, *Orthodox Spirituality, an outline of the Orthodox ascetical and mystical tradition* (New York: The Macmillan Company 1945), pp. 19-20

A total union with the Risen Lord is the end-result of a systematic practice of Hesychasm.

### *The Jesus Prayer*

The Hesychast method of prayer integrated into itself the ancient prayer formula known as the Jesus Prayer. As noted above, total integration came only with Nicephorus in the 13th century. Still Jesus Prayer has a value of its own and it is an appealing prayer-form both in the East and in the West. As a technical expression in the Oriental spirituality, it designates the invocation of the Name of Jesus either by itself or in a traditional formula. The known formula, accredited falsely to St. John Chrysostom, reads: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner". This formula is highly esteemed in the Orthodox tradition, so much so that some of the Orthodox people daresay that it can substitute even for the Divine Office. Brief in form, it leads the soul to concentration and sets it face to face with God. Its aim is union with the Person of Jesus.

### *Historical Development*

The scriptural instruction "pray always" (Lk. 18.1), "pray at all times" (Eph.6.18), and "Pray without ceasing" (I Thess. 5.17) was literally understood by the Fathers of the desert. They proposed many ways to put this instruction into practice. "To live with right intention", "Ora et Labora", "Evagrian intellectual prayer", "Ejaculatory prayers", "Remembrance of God", and "Jesus Prayer" are some of the methods used by them to attain their goal.<sup>18</sup> In course of time, Jesus Prayer attracted the attention of the desert monks, and got established among them as the favourite method of conversing with God.

In its primitive form, the Jesus Prayer seems to be the *Kyrie eleison*. When Macarius, the Egyptian (born c.300), was asked by his disciples as to how one should pray, the old man replied: "There is no need to waste time with words; it is enough to hold

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18. Cf. *Dict. de Spirit.*, t. 2. col. 1860-1862; 2286-87; t. 7. col. 392-393; also Cf. H. Bacht, "Meditatio in dem ältesten Mönchsquellen", in *Geist und Leben*, 28 (1955), 360-373.

out your hands and say: 'Lord according to your desire and your wisdom, have mercy'. If you are hard pressed in the struggle, say: 'Lord save me'. He knows what is best for you and He will have mercy on you'.<sup>19</sup> The Macarian formula, historically, took the shape of *Kyrie eleison* and found its way into all the Oriental liturgies.

The most important centre for the diffusion of Hesychasm after the fifth century was the famous monastery of Mount Sinai. In the thought of the founders of the monastery, the Sinaitic vision of Moses is linked to the theophany of Mount Tabor; and experiencing the "Light of Tabor" is regarded as the goal of their spirituality.<sup>20</sup> The great Sinaitic doctor, St. John Climacus, gave a clear orientation to the spirituality of the monks of Sinai through his famous work *The Ladder of Paradise*.<sup>21</sup> The core of the mysticism of "The Ladder" is invocation of the Name of Jesus. "May the Name of Jesus be united with your breath; then you will understand the value of solitude". Thus he asks us to combine our breathing and the recitation of the Jesus Prayer, so that the "memory of Jesus" may be unceasingly present to our heart. The constant presence of Jesus in the heart will give us an experience of the luminous vision of Mount Tabor. Simon the New Theologian, Nicephorus the Hesychast, Gregory Palamas, and others, consolidated and propagated the tradition of Jesus Prayer through their works and examples. By the end of the fourteenth century, it penetrated into the Slavic Orient, and Russia. It was Nilus Sorsky (1433-1508) who popularised it among the monks and common people of Russia.<sup>22</sup> The publication of the *Philokalia*,<sup>23</sup> and its translation into various modern

19. *Petite Philocalie*, (French translation: Gouillard) Paris: Edition des Cahiers du sud, 1953, p. 58.

20. Cf. John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (U.S.A.: St. Valdimir's Seminary Press, 1974), p. 31.

21. For the content and detail of *The Ladder*, Cf. Gueric Couilleau, "St. Jean Climaque", *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, t.8, col. 369-389; J.R. Martin, *The Illustration of the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus* (Princeton, 1954); W. Völker, *Scala Paradisi, Eine Studie zu Johannes Climacus und zugleich eine Vorstudie zu Symeon dem neuen Theologen* (Wiesbaden 1968).

22. Cf. "St. Nilus Sorsky, the Teacher of Spiritual Prayer" in *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality*, ed. by G.P. Fedotov (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), pp. 85-133.

23. *Philokalia* literally means "The love of spiritual beauty". It is an anthology of the mystical and ascetical writings by the fathers of the Eastern Churches over a period of eleven centuries, edited by Macarius of Corinth and Nicodemus Hagiorite at Venice in 1782.

languages,<sup>24</sup> made the Jesus Prayer still more popular. The appearance of the Russian spiritual classic *The Way of a Pilgrim* in the nineteenth century is another landmark in the history of the Jesus Prayer.<sup>25</sup>

### *The Practice of Jesus Prayer*<sup>26</sup>

Briefly, the practice of Jesus Prayer, according to the teachings of the ascetics, has three steps and aspects. The first step consists in the repeated oral recitation of the words: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner". According to *The Way of the Pilgrim*, one has to say this prayer, first 3000 times, then 6000 times and later 12000 times per day. The pilgrim describes vividly his initial difficulties in finishing the number 12000:

"...This ceaseless saying of the Prayer brought a certain amount of weariness; my tongue felt numbed, I had a stiff sort of feeling in my jaws..."<sup>27</sup>

But once he finished the prescribed number, he found great pleasure and satisfaction in it. The Pilgrim used a sort of Rosary to count his prayers. This is a general tradition in Russia. Another traditional practice, following Jesus Prayer, consists of acts of inclination and prostration. But what is essential and constant throughout the Prayer is attention to and concentration on the meaning of the words through a deliberate act of the will.

In course of time, the Prayer becomes more inward, and the mind repeats it without the movement of the lips or tongue.

24. In Russian, *Philokalia* is known as "DOBROTOLYUBIE". Theophane the Recluse published a new and elaborate edition of *Dobrotolyubie* in five volumes between 1877 and 1913. This accounts for the wider popularity of *Philokalia* in Russian.

25. *The Way of a Pilgrim*, translated from the Russian original by R.M. French and published by SPCK., London, 1941, is a story of a Pilgrim's learning, practising and teaching a Way of praying. The original Russian title of this book rendered in English as *The Candid Narratives of Pilgrim to his Spiritual Father*.

26. For the details of the practice of Jesus Prayer. Cf. Pierre Adnes, "Jesus (Prière a)", *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*. t.8. col. 1126-1150; A monk of the Eastern Church, *On the Invocation of the Name of Jesus* (London: St. Basil's House, 1949); I. Hausherr, *Noms du Christ et Voies D'oraison* (Roma: Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 157, 1960).

27. *The Way of a Pilgrim*, p. 14.



With this increasing inwardness, the Prayer gradually acquires a rhythm of its own, at times singing within us almost spontaneously, without any conscious effort on the part of the will.<sup>28</sup> This is the second stage of Jesus Prayer. The *Pilgrim* speaks about this second stage of the Prayer in the following words:

After no great lapse of time, I had the feeling that the Prayer had, so to speak, by its own action passed from my lips to my heart. That is to say, it seemed as though my heart in its ordinary beating began to say the words of the Prayer, within, at each beat. Thus for example, one, "Lord", two, "Jesus", three, "Christ", and so on. I gave up saying the Prayer with my lips. I simply listened carefully to what my heart was saying. It seemed as though my eyes looked right down into it... Then I felt something like a slight pain in my heart, and in my thoughts so great a love for Jesus Christ... Further, there came into my heart a gracious warmth which spread through my whole breast...<sup>29</sup>

And, finally, the Prayer enters into the heart dominating the entire personality. Its rhythm is identified more and more with the movement of the heart, until at last, it becomes unceasing. What originally required painful and strenuous effort is now an inexhaustible source of joy and ease. The Jesus Prayer continues within even though we are engaged in other activities.<sup>30</sup> This stage of the Prayer cannot be adequately expressed in words. It is a foretaste of that final stage where God becomes all in all (I Cor. 12.6). But to arrive at this stage of intimate union with Jesus, one has to undergo some purifications through asceticism and practice of virtues. The *Pilgrim* speaks also about the trials and purifications he had undergone to reach this stage. Once it is attained, the Prayer becomes quite natural, an urgent need:

I felt as it were hungry for prayer, an urgent need to pour out my soul in prayer...I felt as though there were in my heart a sort of flood struggling to burst out and flow through all my limbs. To hold it back caused me severe, even if comforting, pain in the heart, a pain which needed to be calmed and satisfied in silence of prayer. And how I saw why those who really practise interior self-acting prayer have fled from

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28. Timothy Ware, *The Art of Prayer*, p.28.

29. *The Way of a Pilgrim*, pp.19-20.

30. Timothy Ware, *The Art of Prayer*, p.28.

the company of men and hidden themselves in unknown places.<sup>31</sup>

The Pilgrim who reached this last stage of the Prayer has undergone a total transformation because of his intense union with God. Now he sees and experiences the Name of Jesus everywhere. The whole nature becomes for him a divine milieu, which enkindles in him zeal, thankfulness, and love for the Name of Jesus. He explains the consequences of such a state:

The Prayer of my heart gave me such consolation that I felt there was no happier person on earth than I, and I doubted if there could be greater and fuller happiness in the kingdom of Heaven. Not only did I feel this in my own soul, but the whole outside world also seemed to me full of charm and delight. Everything drew me to love and gratefulness to God: people, trees, plants, animals. I saw them all as my kinsfolk, I found in all of them the magic of the Name of Jesus. Sometimes I felt as light as though I had no body and was floating happily through the air, instead of walking. Sometimes when I withdrew into myself I saw clearly all my internal organs, and was filled with wonder at the wisdom with which the human body is made. Sometimes I felt as joyful as if I had been made the *Tsar*. And at all such times of happiness, I wished that God would let death come quickly, and let me pour out my heart in thankfulness at His feet in the world of spirits.<sup>32</sup>

We may conclude this part of our study by pointing out certain specific characteristics and advantages of the Jesus Prayer:

1. It is short.
2. It is meant to be frequently repeated.
3. It is addressed to Jesus Christ.
4. It refers to his various titles.
5. It implores His mercy.
6. It calls the supplicant "a sinner".<sup>3</sup>
7. It consists in a secret activity of the heart.
8. Above all, it is a means to arrive at the goal of our

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<sup>31</sup>. *The Way*... p.98.

<sup>32</sup>. *The Way*... pp.105-106.

interior life, namely, union with God through continuous prayer.<sup>33</sup>

### *The Theology of Hesychast Prayer*

As a psycho-physical method of prayer, Hesychasm is rooted in the tradition of the Greek Fathers and the early Church. Still the Nicephorian techniques can be—and in fact it has been—misunderstood and misinterpreted, as a mere physical exercise. It was Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) who gave a theological interpretation to Hesychasm and really positioned it in the ecclesial context. Hence Palamas is known as the Theologian of Hesychasm. He always upheld the biblical concept of man, of integral man. By reason of incarnation, the whole man is enabled to receive the grace of God, and his life is fulfilled only when he, the whole man with all his bodily being, achieves full participation in the life of God. Hesychasm is a way to gain this full participation. Since “we are the temples of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us” (I Cor. 6. 19), God is to be sought and found within and not outside. The light of Tabor, which is the ultimate goal of Hesychasm, must be experienced within. The “Taborite light” with which Hesychasts always describe their experience of God, is the light that appeared to the Lord’s disciples at His transfiguration on Mount Tabor.<sup>34</sup> The disciples experienced the light of Tabor only because of the presence of the “Transfigured or the glorious Lord.” Now Hesychasm makes the presence of the glorious Lord, Jesus Christ the Son of God, actual and concrete through its psycho-physical technique and the invocation of the Name of Jesus. It should be remembered here, however, that it is not the technique that automatically produces the effects, but the presence of Jesus. Jesus’s personal presence makes even the “material body” holy and divine.

Since Jesus Prayer or the invocation of the Name of Jesus is found at the centre of the Hesychast spirituality, we now turn to the theological meaning and content of Jesus Prayer. We may begin with the words of the *pilgrim* himself. When a question was put to him, “which is the best, the Prayer of Jesus or the Gospel?” he replied:

33. Hausherr, *Noms du Christ et Voies D'oraison*, p.125.

34. John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, p. 116.

It is all one and the same thing. What the Gospel is, that the Prayer of Jesus also is, for the divine Name of Jesus holds in itself the whole Gospel truth. The holy Fathers say that the Prayer of Jesus is a summary of the Gospels.<sup>35</sup>

These words articulate for us the whole meaning of the Jesus Prayer. The Prayer itself is composed of biblical words, taken from different biblical passages: the first part of the prayer is from Mt. 14. 33; 16. 16; 26. 63; Acts 16. 31; and the second part i.e., the prayer for mercy is from Mt. 20. 31; Mk. 10. 46; Lk. 18. 38; Lk. 17. 13; Mt. 15. 22; Lk. 18. 13; etc. The title given to Jesus in the Prayer, elicited out of these texts, place a strong accent on the transcendence of Jesus: He is the Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God. Through this Prayer, therefore, He is given the worship and adoration which is due to the divine Majesty. The invocation of the Name actually brings Jesus to our mind. The Name is the symbol and bearer of the Person of Christ. The name both signifies Jesus' presence and actualises its reality. This is the motivation behind the adoration given to Him... "God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend" (Phil. 2. 9-10). Hence, to pronounce thoughtfully the Name of Jesus is to know the exalted state of Our Lord; and in this knowledge we adore and worship Him.<sup>36</sup>

Secondly, the Jesus Prayer brings home to us that we are sinners and are in need of His mercy. What St. James said: "Realize that you have sinned" (James 4.7), points to this existential exigency in Christian Life. Only a sin-consciousness and a felt-need for forgiveness will lead us to a Saviour-God. The Jesus Prayer does it excellently. In it we are invoking the Name of Jesus, which means Saviour, and we ask for salvation. Forgiveness and salvation come only through Jesus, because "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other Name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts. 4. 12). Thus the Name of Jesus is already a mystery of salvation. The invocation is a way of appropriating this mystery. And this appropriation brings with it the fundamental experience of divine forgiveness and reconciliation.

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35. *The Way...* p.29.

36. A monk of the Eastern Church, *On the Invocation of the Name of Jesus* (London: St Basil's House, 1919). p. 9.

### Conclusion

The Hesychast Method of Prayer is not merely a mechanical technique to achieve a certain spiritual condition. It has been, unfortunately, presented in this form by some authors.<sup>37</sup> The aim of exterior discipline is very clear; that of assisting concentration. But the whole attention must be given to the words of the Jesus Prayer. This actually makes the heart ready for the permanent indwelling of grace by constantly guarding its interior purity.<sup>38</sup> Thus Hesychasm is not merely a psycho-physical method or an ejaculatory prayer. It is a way of life, as natural as breathing. It enables us to have a real encounter with the Person of Jesus at the core of our heart, an encounter that is transforming and divinizing. Even without its techniques, the invocation has much more value than an ejaculatory prayer. Though its form is short being an ejaculatory prayer, its content is originally biblical and its significance theological. It always maintains in the hearts of men, the thoughts and habitual sentiments of the presence of the Saviour's mercy.

One should also be aware of the dangers inherent in Hesychasm. The amount of strain and automatism involved in the Hesychast method may tend to curtail our inner spiritual freedom. Consequently, when the technique apparently fails to produce the desired result, the aspirant abandons all spiritual effort and technique, without ever trying to surrender himself to the divine will. Secondly, to follow the techniques of the Hesychast method properly, one should have a spiritual instructor. The availability of a spiritual director for every common man is not always guaranteed. If one begins the "techniques" with little knowledge and without proper guidance, he may run the risk of total failure and face terrible disappointment. A later complaint of his "technical inadequacy" for the apparent silence of grace, is no justification for the failure of his spiritual life.

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37. Vladimir Lossky complains that Jugie and Hausherr maintained the view that Hesychasts are ignorant monks of a grossly materialist turn of mind, who imagined that the seat of the soul is the navel, and who thought that the Holy Spirit of God was contained in our physical breathing etc. This evidently is only a caricature: cf. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 210. M. Jugie has his scholarly work, *Theologia Dogmatica Christianorum Orientalium*, 5 vols. Paris, 1935.

38. Lossky, *Ibid*, p. 211.