ORTHODOX PRAYER AND BUDDHIST MINDFULNESS

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Thank you for the invitation to take part in this weeks' conference. My task is to compare the Orthodox tradition of silent prayer, or "watchfulness" (*nipsis*), as described by the Hesychasts, with the Buddhist practice of "mindfulness" (*sati*) in its various traditions, as we explore how these things may be beneficial to healing. To be done well I believe the topic would require someone who is experienced in monastic life, whether Orthodox Christian or Buddhist, or both. Unfortunately I am neither, but I offer my comments in light of an admonition attributed to St. Gregory Palamas:

> *Let no one think, my fellow Christians, that only priests and monks need to pray without ceasing, and not laymen. No, no: every Christian without exception ought to dwell always in prayer. Gregory the Theologian teaches all Christians that the Name of God must be remembered in prayer as often as one draws breath.*[1]

For Orthodox Christians our topic is in fact prayer—as different from Buddhist meditation or mindfulness as our right hand is from our left, and so opposite at every point.

Orthodox watchfulness seeks the presence and energetic gifts of God, holiness, cleansing from sin, taking on the image and likeness of Christ, even in the body. "Self-awareness" is not the goal, except in the sense of becoming aware of our need for God and of delusions which deceive us. Rather, the goal is inner stillness which allows for prayer and transformation.[2] This way of prayer is continual, involving the unity of body, mind and soul in Liturgy, psalmody, hymns and prayers, as well in disciplines of kindness and compassion.

Theophan the Recluse summarizes continual "remembrance" of God (*mnēmē theou*) in this way:

> *The essence of the whole thing is* to be established in the remembrance of God, and to walk in His presence. *You can say to anyone: 'Follow whatever methods you like—recite the Jesus Prayer, perform bows and prostrations, go to Church: do what you wish, only strive to be always in constant remembrance of God.'*[3]

By contrast, in nearly all Buddhist traditions, mindfulness-meditation has nothing to do with a personal higher Being. Rather, it begins in the precept that all thoughts, concepts, experiences, and even the self, are illusory. The goal is to enter a state of non-distraction, called *samadhi.* Ultimately, the body is left behind altogether. [4]

Therefore, allow me to make some observations which may seem obvious, but which ought to be said at the outset:

- First, in exploring the "mind-body-soul connection" we have to be aware that Orthodox Christians and Buddhists, at least in Asia, do not share underlying concepts and assumptions about mind, body and soul. For example, classical Buddhism excludes the idea of the self altogether. Hence, strictly speaking, there is no soul.[5] For Theravada Buddhism, in particular, there is no God. Personal relationship with anything "higher" than ourselves is impossible. It is not even clear that the body exists as an ontological entity. Is it illusory, or not? This single definition could be explored at great length, but we will not be able to do so here.

  Let us simply observe that Orthodox spirituality assumes a scheme in which mind-body-soul are fully integrated as "self." "Soul" involves all of the self. Within the self, a hierarchy is envisioned. Body and mind, including emotions, are at the bottom; the dianetic (rational) mind is above them; finally, at the top, the *nous* (variously translated as "mind" or "heart") is able to develop mindfulness of God.[6]

  Though *nous* is meant to be superior, it does not function in everyone. Within a spiritual person, it is opened and begins, so to speak, to control mind and body. Hesychasts describe the *nous* as the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit. Once it is fully developed, the soul begins to take on the divine image through *theōsis*—a term which cannot be translated directly, but means being "God-ified," that is, filled with the presence of God and radiating the glory of God in Christ. Thus, Orthodox prayer is about psychotherapy, that is, healing of the mind, body and soul from the effects of sin so that we might take on the divine nature.

- Second, Buddhist beliefs and practices vary, just as "Christian" sects do. Entire volumes carefully differentiate between *Mahayana* and *Theravada* especially.[7] We can touch on only a few of these practices here, so for those who are very familiar with the complexities of Buddhism, my remarks will be painfully over-generalized. However, it is safe to say that for virtually all Asian Buddhism, meditation is not directed towards better health.

- Third, Hindu and Buddhist meditation have grown in popularity in America and Europe over the last fifty years, having been introduced formally in Chicago at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893. This popularity has renewed interest in Christian contemplative prayer and therefore, in Orthodoxy, which is viewed by many Protestant Americans as "mystical." Roman Catholic scholars and contemplatives familiar with Eastern, non-Christian, contemplative practice, meanwhile, have merged Hindu and Buddhist styles of meditation with Christian contemplative practice over the last several decades.[8]

  Unfortunately, the Christian Orthodox tradition of prayer is very little understood in the West, where we have few monasteries. It has therefore also gotten mixed up in this amalgam of practices, many of which are viewed as "not religious," but are simply understood as means to better health.

  Last summer, for example, a news article described the former Archbishop of Canterbury as reciting the "Jesus Prayer" while practicing Buddhist Mindfulness meditation in order to reduce stress.[9] Additionally, a variety of publications advertise "Christian Yoga" and "Christian *tai chi"* exercises, and Yoga-groups frequently meet in churches.

  I think we must realize that the Archbishop of Canterbury is neither Buddhist nor Orthodox, and may have misunderstood both. However successfully such meditative practices may reduce stress, in reality Asian Buddhists do not understand their psychophysical practices in the ways that Americans and Europeans have appropriated them. The historic goals of Taoist meditation, Hindu *yoga* and Chinese practice of *tai chi chuan* are also very different—in some respects opposite—from those of Christian Hesychastic prayer, even though we might like to put them together, and also do not have much to do with personal health. [10]

All this simply means that we should acknowledge that new, popular versions of both Orthodox and Buddhist practice do not necessarily represent either spiritual tradition very faithfully. The same is arguably true even of new paradigms put forward by scholars and specialists, as integral to "post-modernism."[11] A challenge for the Orthodox churches today is to weigh how to respond to this revisionist phenomenon.

In this connection, several weeks ago for fun, I wrote a short blog entitled "Eating with Mindfulness" in response to an article in a health magazine called "Are You Aware of What You Eat?" The article explained how the practice of Buddhist Mindfulness while eating could improve health.[12] The article advised us to be aware of where our food comes from, how we eat it, and so on.

To be candid, I do not believe that I have ever met a Buddhist monk who cared about these things. Throughout Asia, monks beg for their bowl of rice each morning and eat it before noon. Mindfulness has little to do with it. Eating

while meditating about food seems to be an especially American obsession—something we might find in that mythical television city of "Portlandia." True Mindfulness, whether Buddhist or Orthodox Christian, is surely deeper than being aware of where our food comes from, chewing slowly and carefully, or sitting still for a few minutes to figure out who we are. It is this deeper phenomenon that we want to explore today.

THE PURPOSE OF ORTHODOX WATCHFULNESS

Several years ago I wanted to purchase a set of green vestments for Pentecost. Privately, I wanted something that looked Chinese that it could be used in a missionary context. However, I had no idea how to find such vestments. My first vestments had come from a monastery in Michigan, so I telephoned there. When a nun answered, I did not give my name, but simply said I wanted to order vestments. I am sure I did not say what color or style. The nun called Gerontissa to the telephone, and before I could speak, Gerontissa said, "Father Brendan, we do not have any green vestments here, but I can order them for you from overseas, to arrive before Pentecost."

I was startled, of course, but this is not the end of the story. When the vestments arrived, it was obvious that the brocade was from China. In gold thread, the design depicts two deer drinking from a stream. Above the deer stands a Greek cross, and above that a labyrinthine design with a cross in the center. A Christian would recognize the deer as a reference to Psalm 41 (42):1 ("As the deer longs for running streams, so longs my soul for you, O God"). In Asia, however, the two deer are immediately recognizable as a symbol which is depicted in all Buddhist monasteries of China, Tibet and Nepal. They represent the Deer Park, where the Buddha's first sermon was preached to forest animals. The labyrinth above the deer is actually a stylized version of the Chinese character *lù,* indicating prosperity and blessing. The character for "deer" is also pronounced *lù*; thus, the deer itself represents prosperity and blessing.

The point of the story is that Gerontissa somehow knew about our years in China even though I had not told her about it. She also could not have known that our publishing and art studio is named Spring Deer Studio, in remembrance of our years in China.

This story illustrates a deeper effect of watchfulness as we sometimes find it among Hesychasts: namely, their ability to know things which logically they could not know, to understand things beyond visible evidence, or to foretell the future. These phenomena are among the "gifts of the Spirit" described by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:7-9, though many Americans might associate them more with pseudo-Buddhist characters in the movies, like Yoda in *Star Wars*. They also beg the question whether the purpose of deeper contemplative practice is to develop extraordinary abilities such as clairvoyance, healing, the

working of miracles, visions of the saints or of light, or even levitation and so on, in either the Christian or Buddhist traditions.

The Christian saints say with one voice that it is not the purpose of contemplative prayer to gain supernatural powers or to have visions or even to be fully self-aware. Supernatural powers, known in Hinduism and Buddhism as *siddhis* (or *iddhis*), are also generally discouraged by Buddhist spiritual guides.[13] More to the point, Orthodox saints emphasize that the practice of silence, or Hesychasm, is not a technique for gaining a better knowledge of ourselves, or for merging with all that exists, or even for discovering Christ within. It is also not a means to better health, whether physical or mental (in fact, many of the saints were not actually in very good health, presumably because of their poor diet and rigorous asceticism). In fact *it is not a technique at all*.

If Hesychasm has a purpose, it is to prepare us for prayer, and it *is* prayer. Of course by "prayer" we do not mean asking God for things, but becoming aware of the eternal love and presence of God. Ultimately, this kind of prayer leads us into communion with God so that we begin to take on the divine nature. This requires quieting the mind so as to receive God. The Hesychasts say that the "mind descends into the Heart." In other words, the active, logical mind is quieted so that the mind is no longer trying to figure things out or to act on them. This process involves controlling, or suppressing, the so-called Passions.

In the Orthodox understanding, "passions" are not primarily the physical feelings that drive us, like lust or hunger, or as in the Buddhist analysis, desire. Rather, they are thought-forms that chiefly involve fear of the past and fear of the future. We become mentally imprisoned by such fears, which may indeed have arisen from bodily discomfort in the past, and they can dominate our lives. So the Christian practice of inner silence involves calming such fears ("passions") by determining that we cannot by ourselves solve the problems of life. Then we can rest in the presence of God without excitement or distress. This is to discover the proper use of the mind. St Gregory Palamas writes,

> *St Neilos [of Sinai] says, …'If you wish to see the intellect's proper state, rid yourself of all concepts, and then you will see it like sapphire or the sky's hue. But you cannot do this unless you have attained a state of dispassion, for God has to cooperate with you and to imbue you with His co-natural light.'*[14]

The phrase, "rid yourself of all concepts" may sound like Buddhist advice to the modern reader, and in a sense it is—but it is also Orthodox, as we see here. In the Christian context, however, the meaning is different from what it is in Buddhism. In the Orthodox context it means that the highest purpose of the mind is to know God in prayer. In attempting to pray it often happens that our ideas *about* God can impede true knowledge of God. Thus the Hesychasts do not mean that we should not use the mind at all, or that we should not have

any concepts, or that all concepts are illusory; but that we should not allow our ideas to impede prayer and the reception of the energetic presence of God.

This leads us to consider some points of apparent similarity and difference between Orthodox and Buddhist psycho-physical experience.

POINTS OF SIMILARITY

There are many practices and concepts in Orthodox Christianity which also appear in Buddhism, particularly in monastic life. Even the Greek *anteri* and the gray robe of a Chinese Buddhist monk look almost identical, and there are famous hermits in both traditions. Other similarities include the following:

- In both traditions there is the recognition that the whole world seems to be in the grip of evil (Buddhist, *mara*) or delusion, which manifests itself as suffering. Buddhism refers to an "ocean of suffering" (*samsara*)*;* and to anxiety/distress/illusion (*dukkha*) which affects everyone. This is the Buddha's First Noble Truth. Christians, of course, understand this as the fall into sin. The Hesychasts also warn about a state of distress, or depression or illusion (Greek *accidie,* Slavonic *prelest*) which can affect especially those who undertake contemplative life.
- Both traditions teach that we cannot live well if we are caught up in desire or "attachment," which cause suffering. This is the Second Noble Truth in Buddhism. For Orthodox, the concept is so important that it appears in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom just before the consecration of the elements, when the priest says, "No one bound by worldly desires and pleasures is worthy to approach, draw near or minister to You, the King of glory," *etc*. Buddhists therefore speak of the need to achieve "dispassion," and Orthodox use the same word (Greek, *apatheia*), although ultimately (as should become clear later on) the implications of these terms are different.
- To achieve a state of dispassion, both traditions recommend focussing the mind in "mindfulness" (*sati*) or, in Orthodoxy, "watchfulness" (*nipsis*), a kind of alert awareness. For the Buddhist this implies awareness of all that is happening at the present moment in terms of feelings, thoughts, and sensations. For Orthodox, it does involve an awareness of ourselves, but more importantly, keeping before the mind the love of God in the Person of Jesus Christ.
- Both traditions describe true awareness as accepting what *is*, without judging or condemning. This is called "not judging" in Buddhism, and of course it is made explicit by Christ as well as the apostles (*cf.* Luke 6:37).
- Both Buddhists and Orthodox Christians practice ways of achieving a state of mindfulness or non-judgment with the body as well as the mind. Practices include sitting (for Buddhists, in "lotus" position, usually on a

cushion; among Orthodox monks, on a low stool), kneeling or standing still for long periods of time; walking briskly to clear the mind; gazing at a *thang-kha* or at an icon; reading with attention; gardening; writing icons; doing hand-work; calligraphy and illumination; and even eating with mindfulness (though not focussed on the food). Orthodox monks eat while listening to readings from the Scriptures or the Church Fathers, while Buddhists may listen to *sutras* or eat in silence. Central to all this for Orthodox Christians is the celebration of the Eucharist.

- In the Liturgy or at prayer, Orthodox Christians stand, cross themselves, bow, and make prostrations, which are somewhat equivalent to *mudras* (hand-gestures), bows and postures in Buddhism. These activities, or non-activities as the case may be, are not limited to monks in either tradition.

- Monks and laity in both traditions abstain from eating meat or fish, at least on certain days; and monks generally eat only once a day. Total fasting is also practiced, and in the case of some Orthodox saints, as reportedly among certain Buddhist and Taoist hermits in western China, there are individuals who seem to eat very seldom in any given week or month, or even who subsist on grass, roots or pine needles. Monks in both traditions typically also "fast" from sleep and from too much speech.

- Simplicity of life is stressed in both traditions, which means renunciation of acquisitiveness or, for monks, of owning any property at all.

- In Hesychasm, as in some forms of Buddhist and Hindu practice, short prayers or recitations are linked to the breath. In Orthodoxy this typically involves saying the "Jesus Prayer" in rhythm with the breath, or more anciently, repeating short prayers of two or three words or the name of Jesus.[15] Many Buddhists, like Hindus, recite *mantras* such as the ubiquitous *Om Mane Padme Hum* in Tibet ("Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus," the mantra of Chenrezi, the Buddha of Compassion)[16]; or in Japan, *Namo Amitabha Buddhaya* (the Nambutsu, "I take refuge in the Buddha of infinite life and light"); or *Namo Myōhō Renge Kyō* ("Hail to the sutra of the supreme Lotus-Law") in Nichiren Soshu Buddhism.[17]

  Some of the practices seen in Asia are not particularly familiar in the West. Americans tend to bypass the recitation of *mantras* or the use of *mudras* (hand-gestures) or postures, or fasting and the like, even though these are central to Asian practice.

- In conjunction with recitation of mantras or prayers, both Buddhists and Christians use prayer-ropes. Buddhist prayer-ropes are usually of small wooden beads, while the Orthodox *komboskini* consists of a series of knots on a woollen rope. Depending upon the purpose of the chanting, Tibetan beads may be in different shapes (*e.g.,* curses might be accompanied by skull-shaped beads). Tibetans also famously spin "prayer-wheels."

- Recitation of scriptures, together or individually, is important in both traditions, although historically Chinese monks often did not know what they were reciting. This is because, although *sutras* had been translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva in the early fifth century A.D., they were not chanted in translation, but using characters that sounded like the original Pali or Sanskrit words—with the explanation that the sounds of the words themselves were more important than their meaning.[18]

- Both traditions teach the importance of having a spiritual guide (or *guru*) to provide direction. Otherwise the unwary student can experience dangerous side effects, including depression, heightened anxiety, madness or even death (*e.g.* by accidentally stopping the heart) due to unguided or misguided psycho-physical practice.

- In both traditions, teachers stress that if a student believes he or she has reached enlightenment or some exalted state, or has visions, it is probably delusion. In Japan the well-known saying is, "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him." Similarly, St. Gregory of Sinai warns,

  > *But you, if you are truly practising silence hoping to be with God, and you see something either sensory or spiritual, within or without, be it even the image of Christ or of an angel or some saint, or if an imaginary light pervades your mind, in no way accept it. The mind has itself a natural power of dreaming and can easily build fantastic images….*[19]

  Echoing the Buddhist precept, Theophan the Recluse says:

  > *Know that true success is achieved within, unconsciously, and happens as imperceptibly as the growth of the human body. Therefore when you hear an inner voice saying 'Ah! Here it is!' you should realize that this is the voice of the enemy, showing you a mirage rather than the reality. This is the beginning of self-deception. Stifle this voice immediately… .*[20]

  Adepts in both traditions do however report experiencing visions of light. In Orthodoxy there is the "uncreated light" described by St Gregory Palamas and others, in the experience known as *theōria*. Among Buddhists, there are the "many-colored lights of the Buddha," similar to the colors of the *chakras* in Hindu teaching. The problem in both traditions is to discern which visionary experiences are genuine and which are delusional; and to understand their source.

  Orthodox saints would regard many paranormal experiences as delusional or as having outright demonic origin, and in any case as not particularly helpful, even if in the context of prayer. Buddhist masters, similarly, find a difference between genuine visions of gods at the time of death, for example, and a novice's experiences of lights while meditating.[21]

- Both traditions emphasize that ultimate Reality (which Christians locate in God, Buddhists, in the Absolute or "Suchness") cannot be understood; it is beyond-thought. Mindfulness or watchfulness begins with a recognition of this fact. In other words, we cannot successfully "think about God" or, in Buddhism, even about what truly exists. Thus, a goal in meditation is for reasoning thought to stop. In the Orthodox view, this means making ourselves open to receiving the presence of God. In the words of St Hesychios the Priest,

  > *Watchfulness is a continual fixing and halting of thought at the entrance to the heart.*[22]

  and

  > *A second type of watchfulness consists in freeing the heart from all thoughts, keeping it profoundly silent and still, and in prayer.* [23]

In addition, western publications stress the importance of "not judging." This sometimes appears to be a criticism of Christianity, perhaps because of a popular impression that Christians are judgmental in condemning sinners, pointing out sin, and so on.[24] Orthodox can respond that the historic Church has set the penitent publican rather than the judgmental Pharisee as the standard for Christian practice.

At the same time, we should note that a linguistic problem exists here, since the English verb "to judge" can mean both "to condemn," and "to exercise discernment." Both Buddhist and Christian traditions teach not to condemn others, but both traditions recognize that *discernment* is helpful and even necessary. In Christian tradition, both in East and West, discernment (Greek, *diakrisis*; Latin, *discretio*) is the subject of many writings both of the western medieval mystics and the Orthodox *niptic* saints.[25]

Discernment is precisely what "watchfulness" or "mindfulness" is about. To avoid confusion, we might generalize in this way: Buddhist mindfulness and Christian watchfulness involve being fully aware of what is happening at the moment, both within and outside ourselves, *but without forming opinions about it and without acting on it*. Perhaps a better way to understand "not judging" might be, "neither thinking nor not-thinking." The mind is both alert and active, and yet receptive and not concerned to act upon what passes through it.

For the Christian, this means complete trust in God, as opposed to the notion that we, ourselves, can solve things or even understand them well. For the Buddhist, it is the recognition that everything we can see or think or experience is impermanent or illusory. Thus we have two very different ways of handling the disturbances of the so-called "passions," illusion or suffering (*dukkha*), or in Christian understanding, of sin.

For Christians, these observations beg a question: By practicing silent meditation, could we unintentionally open ourselves to auto-suggestion, demonic activity or even what Christians call demonic possession? The Orthodox answer is "yes," absolutely. That is why discernment is so important. The stories of the great Desert Fathers and Mothers are full of accounts of saints discerning the assaults of demons from within and without. St. Paul instructs us to deflect these with the shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16).

It is interesting that a first step in the Buddha's enlightenment was also to reject the advances of Mara, the embodiment of evil and seduction. However, ultimately Buddhism puts trust in the mind itself (meditation is, after all, self-*awareness*) even though, paradoxically, the Self is said not to exist.

Thus the Christian state of Watchfulness or non-judgment can be understood as heightened faith. Fears are suppressed and the person of prayer is "standing before God" without any sense of urgency, desperation, or vindictiveness. Thoughts may pass before us, but we commend them to God. The thoughts become prayers: we are not thinking, but neither is the mind empty; it is full of Christ. St. Hesychios the Priest therefore writes,

> *Attentiveness is the heart's stillness, unbroken by any thought. In this stillness the heart breathes and invokes, endlessly and without ceasing, only Jesus Christ who is the Son of God and Himself God*.[26]

A Different Posture

Now it is appropriate to look at additional differences, both in intention and even in physical attitude, between Christian Watchfulness and Buddhist Mindfulness.[27] Some of these differences were outlined by St Gregory Palamas in the 14th century, when he and his monks were accused of practicing something like Eastern meditation or Yoga—specifically, of gazing at their navels in order to achieve some sort of alternative mental state.[28]

St. Gregory seems to have been familiar with non-Christian meditative practice, most likely, Muslim *dikhr* which was influenced by Hindu Yoga;[29] and he contrasts this with prayer as practiced by his monks. To understand St. Gregory on this point, we must first realize that in both Hindu and Buddhist psycho-physical practice, primary importance is given to posture. Typically, the student sits in lotus position with the back perfectly erect. The reason for this is to allow for the unimpeded rise of warmth and energy (power) upward through the spine, and out the top of the head.[30]

In Hindu practice, this movement upwards is conceived as the unfurling of the *kundalini*, envisioned as a cobra uncurling through the *chakras* (from the anus to the sexual organs, through the belly, the chest, and the forehead and finally, manifesting from the top of the head). In Buddhism and Taoism, the energy or power (Chinese *chi/qi*) is said to be located in the lower belly. Through concentration and control of the breath, the *chi* rises up through the body,

circulating in the chest and then the head, to burst from the head (depicted in statuary as the red spot on the top of the Buddha's head) or even from the hands or feet.[31]

In meditation, Ch'an (Zen) Buddhist students practice "close-sitting," which involves sitting in "Lotus position" immediately in front of a wall (usually only inches from the face), with hands laid loosely upon the crossed legs, breathing through the partially-open mouth, with eyes half-closed. This attitude is prominent in statues of the Buddha in meditation. Since the posture produces pain in the muscles, especially of the legs and back, a master or guide will strike the student with a bamboo pole to cause an alternative sharp pain. This is meant to return the student to alertness rather than thinking about bodily discomfort.

St Gregory contrasts this practice with that of his Orthodox monks. He refers to "direct" (erect) posture in (non-Christian) meditation, in contrast to "circular" posture among the Orthodox. By this, I believe he means that Hindus and Buddhists sit still and erect, in the Lotus position, while the Orthodox monk prays "in the shape of an omicron," seated on a low stool, curled up, bowing forward, sometimes with hands outstretched in the form of a cross, and with the eyes open.[32] This posture would be unthinkable for either Hindu or Buddhist adepts.

Why this difference in posture? St Gregory gives several explanations. First, evidently he was aware of the Eastern idea of "fire" or energy in the belly. He says that the Christian monk strives to suppress this energy rather than encourage it, because ultimately it is the source of lust. The monk bows forward to push the lustful "heat" downward in order to receive within himself the Holy Spirit, Who is to remain in the Heart. The monk's eyes might be fixed initially on the chest or the belly, which St. Gregory defends as deliberate:

> *…If the power of the noetic demon resides in the navel of the belly, since there the law of sin exercises its dominion and provides him with fodder, why should we not establish there also the law of the intellect that, armed with prayer, contends against that dominion (Romans 7:23)?...." [he then points out that baptism expels the noetic demon]*.[33]

Second, this unusual posture—curled up, head downward—is an attitude of humility and repentance. Repentance is necessary for prayer even to begin. It is an acknowledgement that we are *not* divine, that the icon of Christ in us has been distorted, and that we require forgiveness. These are not Buddhist concepts and are also more or less opposite the Hindu notion of a divine nature (*atman*) located within ourselves.

For the Christian, the point is to be aware, not simply of ourselves, but of God. The noetic mind (the "heart") seeks to stop the wandering of the logical mind and to focus all attention on the divine Reality and presence. When the soul is thus quieted, the Holy Spirit enters in and delusion is replaced by knowledge of God.

Further to this point, St. Gregory emphasizes that among Christians, nothing is being expelled from the body, but rather, the Holy Spirit is invited to enter in and to remain there.[34] The Spirit is "contained" within the Heart. This attitude prevents delusion and a wandering of the mind:

> *When, then, someone is striving to concentrate his intellect in himself so that it functions, not according to the direct form of movement but according to the circular, delusion-free form, how could he not gain immensely if, instead of letting his gaze flit hither and thither, he fixes it upon his chest or his navel as upon a point of support? Outwardly curling himself—so far as is possible—into the form of a circle [omicron], in conformity with the mode of action that he tries to establish in his intellect [i.e. keeping it within the heart]*…"[35]

There are many passages in the *Philokalia* about this attitude of prayer, but a charming paragraph from Callistus the Patriarch will have to do:

> *If you wish to pray as you ought, imitate the dulcimer player; bending his head a little and inclining his ear to the strings, he strikes the strings skilfully, and enjoys the melody he draws from their harmonious notes.*
>
> *Is this example clear to you? The dulcimer is the heart; the strings — the feelings; the hammer—remembrance of God; the player—mind… The dulcimer player perceives and hears nothing but the melody he enjoys. So the mind, during active prayer, descends into the depths of the heart with sobriety and can no longer listen to aught but God*…[36]

MEDITATION *VS* PRAYER

We have now come to a key point of divergence between the practices of Buddhist mindfulness, and Christian watchfulness. In analyzing the teaching of a modern Tibetan master Chogyam Trungpa, founder of the Karma Dzong Meditation Center in Boulder, Colorado, Emma Layman has observed:[37]

> *In explaining Buddhist meditation, Chogyam Trungpa states first that it differs from the meditation of Christianity…in not involving a concept of some 'higher being' with which one tries to communicate. Rather, since there is no belief in a higher outside power in Buddhism, there is no seeking for something higher, but rather seeking* to see what is.

Christians may seize on this point to say that Buddhists and Christians have little in common: Christians pray, Buddhist do not. However, the reality is more nuanced. Perhaps a better question, at least in the context of Mahayana practice, is "To Whom do we pray?"

Strictly speaking, it is true that in Buddhism there is no "higher being" to contact in prayer (following the teaching of the Buddha, who said that about the existence of God, he could not say anything at all). Certainly there is no thought of a personal relationship with a loving God. Theravadist tradition

adheres more strictly to agnosticism, so that the purpose of mindfulness, as for example in in Vipassana meditation, is to be alert simply to the illusion of Reality itself. However, in practice, Mahayana does indeed involve intentional prayer, especially to figures such as Avalokiteshvara (who appears in China as Kwan-Yin and in Japan as Kanon), the Taras, and to the Buddha. This is evident throughout Asia in popular Buddhist devotion, and it is exactly what gives Mahayana (the "Greater Vehicle") its name. Orthodox Christians, on the other hand, pray in the name of Jesus, to the Creator of All—a Creator Who is entirely unknown in Buddhism.

In both instances, however, the practitioner of prayer or silence is seeking to be aware of Reality, "that which is," without suffering from delusion or illusions. The difference is that Buddhists do not seek to *define* ultimate reality and in any case do not locate it in a Creator-God. Christians, on the other hand, locate Ultimate Reality, or Being, in the mystery of Christ, the eternal Son of God, one of the Holy Trinity. Thus the Orthodox blessing at Great Vespers is, "Blessed is *He Who Is,* Christ our True God*…."*

REALITY, IMPERMANENCE AND EMPTINESS

We should underscore that for both Buddhists and Orthodox Christians the nature of ultimate Reality is altogether beyond our grasp. Buddhist awareness of "that which is" involves the conviction that all thoughts, concepts, and perceptions, even about ourselves, are ultimately illusory. The Absolute, *tathata* ("suchness" or "thatness")*,* is entirely impersonal. The Chinese translation of this term is literally, "reality," but is understood to mean "that which does not relate to anything." This is a central thesis of the Buddha's teaching as seen, for example, in the *Diamond Sutra.*[38]

Orthodox Christians would agree that our perceptions are colored by sin and that all things we see in this life are impermanent; but we insist that God has created us and all that exists, that it is quite real, and that all of this is loved eternally by God. However, we cannot grasp the full nature either of reality or of God, precisely because we are not God.[39] Hence the stress in Orthodoxy on apophaticism (negative theology) with regard to the essence of God, the Trinity. The Trinity is finally mystery which cannot be understood. God is Being which is beyond-being.[40]

Buddhism teaches that to understand the fundamental illusory nature of all that is seen and experienced, is to achieve a state of "emptiness" (*sunyata*). To enter this state fully is to enter *nibbana* (Nirvanha). Literally, *nibbana* means "blowing out the candle." This definition sounds nihilist, and many Buddhists understand it that way. However, scholars in some schools of Buddhism insist that this "emptiness" is meant to indicate a state of being, or of non-being, or above-being, which we simply cannot conceive. In this latter view, *nibbana* does not precisely mean non-existence, but rather that whatever it is, this mode of existence cannot be grasped. Orthodox Christians would certainly

avoid any kind of nihilistic concept of God, ultimate Being, the Self or the after-life, but we agree that God is beyond-thought and beyond-being (*e.g.,* the works of Dionysios the Areopagite on this theme).

Orthodox kenotic (self-emptying) theology can also come very close to Buddhism on the practice of "emptiness" (Chinese, *wu*, Greek *kenosis,* "pouring out").[41] The Apostle Paul writes that Christ has "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). The Orthodox saints affirm that God's strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9), which is emptiness of self. This concept is attractive to Buddhists, for whom bamboo is a symbol of strength precisely because it is empty inside.[42] Christians differ however in that we see *kenosis* as applying particularly to the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, who became man for our sakes. As followers of Christ, emptiness involves self-giving on our part, and ultimately, the loss of personal ego, but not of the Self.

As mentioned, Orthodoxy teaches that the true nature of reality has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ. We do not say, therefore, that we know nothing about the nature of God as Trinity, nor about creation, nor about the state of "that which is"; we do not say that the mind knows nothing at all. Rather, we say that we cannot fully *understand* what has been revealed to us in Christ, although we can participate in divine Love and the energetic gifts of God.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the purpose of watchfulness in the Christian tradition is not simply to be aware of ourselves (although it includes a kind of self-awareness), but to be aware of the grace and presence of God in Christ. Ultimately the goal is immersion in Christ, which is finally to share energetically in the mystery of the Trinity. While this can seem like a radical departure from the insights of Buddhism, it can also be a point of entry for Buddhists into Christian faith and experience. Buddhists can appreciate the Orthodox understanding that God is ultimate Mystery and that meditation (prayer) is to participate somehow in that Mystery.[43]

THE SELF

In Buddhist mindfulness meditation, a goal is to become "one" with that-which-is, without differentiation. The self is like a wave travelling across the sea. But is there one wave which travels forward? Or is the idea of individual, identifiable waves an illusion, in which energy pushes water along, and we perceive this forward motion as individual waves? It is in this sense that Buddhism teaches that the self is ultimately illusory: we are simply a wave of energy pushing through time.

In the Buddhist view, to stop this energetic movement, which is due to *karma* (the natural law of action/reaction), one must dissolve into the Ultimate, the Absolute or "thatness," which is impersonal. The illusory self melts into the wave of infinite space/time, characterized as salt melting into the sea. A Zen question, therefore, is, "Who is chanting the name of the Buddha?" This is

understood to mean, "Who was I before I was born?" The answer to this mind-defeating question is, "Emptiness" — in other words, that the self is an illusion; it does not exist.

Enlightenment (Buddha-hood), then, is to achieve a state of no-self. The ultimate goal is *sunyata*, nothingness. Indeed, enlightenment begins with the recognition that the self is an illusion. Among some Buddhists, particularly in Japan, "emptiness" seems to imply the loss of ego, rather than the non-existence of the self. Even so, the purpose of meditation is the dissolution of individual identity. From a Buddhist point of view, therefore, it is odd for Westerners to meditate in order to "find themselves." This is not a Buddhist goal.

In this regard, the goal of Christian prayer is opposite. It involves discovery of self for the first time. Christian prayer relates to God, who is ultimate Person. If I am "in Christ," then I become more myself. The more I empty myself, the more I *am.* This is not an egoistic experience—far from it. Rather, a sense of smallness and sinfulness dominates the soul in the presence of the infinite, almighty and holy God. One prays to be absorbed by the Light so as to be filled with Light; but we do not pray to *become* God or to disappear.

Finally, in the Orthodox view, focus on the self in meditation can be dangerous. St. Symeon the New Theologian warns that the attempt to observe everything that is in the mind (a process which he calls "mind on mind") is ultimately a struggle with the passions that cannot be won. It will lead to vainglory, judgment of everyone, and ultimately, insanity. Of the monk who meditates in this way, he writes:

> *Falsely imagining that he is concentrated and attentive, he falls victim unawares to self-esteem. Dominated and mocked by it, he despises and criticizes others for their lack of attentiveness*…[44]

This is a topic which deserves long and careful discussion, particularly about the Christian paradox of becoming self-less even as we become more "ourselves" in Christ, and I hope that we can pursue it another time.

SPACE AND TIME

Apprehension of space/time is also different in the two traditions. A contemporary Vietnamese Buddhist contemplative and pacifist is the Venerable Thíc Nhất Hạnh. He famously teaches the experience of no-time, that is, of living fully and only in the present. He says, "In the now I am, in the present I dwell." He has also taught unequivocally, "There *is* no past, no future, only the present." Nyogen Senzaki, an early 20th-century Zen missionary to America, put it very clearly:

> *[When one's meditation is mature] There is neither relativity nor absoluteness. You are now far above both sameness and difference… . There is no time—no space—just one eternal now*.[45]

However, in Orthodox experience, something else is taking place: *all* space and time become present in the "now"—all the past, all the future, are focused in this present moment, through the presence of the Logos who created space and time and Who cannot be contained.[46]

Specifically, the epicentre of the Christian experience is the Holy Eucharist. Here, in the lifting up of the chalice, we recognize all space/time taking place before our eyes at once. To enter into communion with Christ is to encounter the One who both made time and entered into it. Thus, contemplative prayer literally involves an expansion of consciousness forward and backward in time, all at once.

Consummation of time is depicted for Orthodox in the icon of the Descent into Hades, or Resurrection, in which past and present meet in the risen Christ. On His right hand, St John the Forerunner embodies the past, alongside David the Prophet and Solomon the Wise; on His left, the Apostles, who witness the resurrection with awe, are accompanied by the later Church. These embody the future. Beneath the risen Christ, Adam, Eve, and Hades have passed out of time but are equally present to Him.

Perhaps it is for this reason that Hesychasts sometimes "see" into past and future and may forget where they are located in time. In prayer they have been shown what will happen, but for them it has already happened or is part of the "now" in prayer. Hence, to the observer it appears that their consciousness has been altered: they are experiencing a foretaste of the things to come. But for them, there is simply the presence of Christ which contains all things.

The Role of Suffering

Fundamental to all Buddhism is the idea that suffering is due to desire or "attachment" (the Second Noble Truth): if ignorance and desire could be eliminated, there would be no suffering. This is the whole point of seeking to achieve a state of non-being (*nibbana*) or beyond-being, and indeed, of meditation itself.

In contrast, Christianity acknowledges suffering as part of the reality of a fallen world. However, the world has been redeemed by the suffering of the Son of God. The term "redemption" is not used lightly here. It means that God has entered into the state of suffering in order to make suffering a positive experience, one which leads ultimately to a final re-creation and to the experience of eternal joy and life.

Beyond this, Orthodoxy teaches that if we follow Christ, we enter into His suffering. Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). The Christian goal in watchfulness or silent prayer is precisely to embrace suffering: to become a partaker in the cross of Christ, so that we might become partakers in the divine

nature. Prayer produces a godly grief, not merely for our own sins but for the entire world. We cannot know divine nature apart from this suffering.

Consequently, suffering is an integral part of the actual experience of Hesychastic prayer. It appears as a "soreness in the heart" which is to be expected and embraced. St. Theophan the Recluse advises:

> *Try to acquire a kind of soreness in the heart. Constant effort will achieve this quickly. There is nothing peculiar in this; the appearance of this pain is a natural effect. It will help you to collect yourself better*.[47]

Furthermore, if the person of prayer does *not* experience pain in the heart, the prayer is not beneficial because it is not really prayer but a kind of meditation:

> *Many people have worked and continue to work without pain, but because of its absence they are strangers to purity and out of communion with the Holy Spirit, because they have turned aside from the severity of suffering*.[48]

This pain in the heart is also experienced as a kind of warmth, which gives joy and is said to burn away the Passions. However, it has to be distinguished from other pains in the chest which can occur with a false kind of meditation. St. Gregory of Sinai advises,

> *The true beginning of prayer is the warmth of heart that scarifies the passions, fills the soul with joy and delight, and establishes the heart in unwavering love and unhesitating surety. The holy fathers teach that if the heart is in doubt about whether to accept something either sensory or conceptual that enters the soul, then that thing is not from God but has been sent by the devil*.[49]

The experience of joy accompanying the pain is very important. If it is not there, or if the person of prayer is not in obedience to a humble and experienced guide, the whole meditative process should be broken off:

> *When you sit in stillness…you may find that…your body and heart begin to feel pain because of the intense concentration with which you unceasingly invoke the name of Jesus, with the result that you no longer experience the warmth and joy that engender ardour…. If this is the case, stand up and psalmodize…or occupy yourselves with meditation on some scriptural passage or…with manual labour…preferably standing up so as to involve your body in the task as well.*[50]

Traditional Buddhism does not have room for the idea that suffering could be a positive experience or redemptive.[51] During a small-group discussion at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1993, the Dalai Lama was asked if there were any Christian doctrine which he found especially compelling, for example through his dialogues with the Catholic contemplative Thomas Merton. In my recollection he answered, "If I could understand how suffering can be redemptive [as Christians teach about the cross of Christ], I could not be Buddhist." This was a profound statement.

Of course, in Mahayana, it is acknowledged that a Bodhisattva may return from Western Paradise to be reincarnated, putting off entry into Nirvanha in order to teach *dharma* and thereby "rescue" individuals from the bad fruit of *karma*. Suffering itself, however, is always negative. Moreover, there is a sense in which the Bodhisattva is not actually "there"; even that presence is illusory.[52] Significantly, there is no concept of suffering unjustly or of forgiving the sins of our persecutors. To this we may contrast the Buddhist concept with words of St Gregory Palamas to the Nun Xenia:

> *Unless we bear with patience the afflictions that come to us unsought, God will not bless those that we embrace deliberately… . Not only will you forgive those who afflict you, but you will be grateful to them and will pray for them as for your benefactors*.[53]

It is perhaps for this reason, more than any other, that Orthodox masters of prayer may grow silent when they hear a novice speak excitedly about "finding myself" and "becoming peaceful" and (to use a phrase from the 1960s) of being "blissed out" through meditation. It is not our goal to be "blissed out." It is our goal to enter fully into Christ, even into His suffering, so that as I forgive, I may be forgiven; so that as He suffered, I suffer, not for myself but on behalf of the world.[54]

Divine Love

"God is Love." This concept is central to the Christian faith. Orthodox Christians understand Christ to be the embodiment of a divine, kenotic (self-emptying) Love, defined by the ontological relationship among the Persons of the Trinity, each being found in and only with the others. Therefore, in the practice of silence and watchfulness, the Orthodox Christian reaches out to receive divine love. Hence, Love is not a feeling or an emotion, but a permanent state which defines what it is to be "person." We become persons through involvement in the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Love, therefore, defines what it is to exist.[55] Since Love is identical with ultimate Reality, in this view, it does not disappoint. To love means, then, not to seek reward, but to be self-giving.

Historically, just as Buddhism was agnostic with regard to the existence of God, so Buddhism also taught that what is called "love" is simply another form of attachment/desire. Love always ends in disappointment or, even in the best of circumstances, in loss through death. Similarly, the Buddhist understanding of compassion (from Latin *cum* + *passio*) is not the Christian one; essentially, it means to propagate *dharma* rather than to suffer with another. Furthermore, Buddhist compassion seems to be practiced largely in order to overcome the "bad fruit of *karma*" by doing good works.

Nevertheless, Buddhists do not fail to love or to propagate love and compassion. At an interfaith conference, "A Meeting of Diverse Spiritual Traditions of India," convened by HH the Dalai Lama this past September, he called for the world to replace self-centeredness with "warm heartedness."[56]

Because so many religious groups have held grudges against other ones, he said, we must transcend religious traditions in order to encourage dialogue and concern for others, and not ourselves alone. He also concluded that practicing forgiveness and compassion leads to better health.

Similarly, Dr. Heng Monychenda, former Cambodian monk and founder of Buddhism for Development, has worked for decades to bring healing to his homeland of Cambodia through the practice of kindness and love. In an interview posted on-line, he said that the purpose of the monk is "to spread love all around." In a conversation in Japan with the author, he asked to talk about Jesus Christ and the nature of compassion. He stressed his fondness for the Gospel of John because it is the "gospel of love," and in the Person and teachings of Christ he found a model for his own work in Cambodia.

An interesting question is whether the Gospel of John has here influenced or expanded a Buddhist understanding of compassion, perhaps even for the Dalai Lama. I believe that it has. And this, incidentally, is precisely the reason for Christians to engage in interfaith dialogue or mission—to expose non-Christians, in this case Buddhist monks, to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

In these reflections we have seen that the practice of Orthodox Hesychastic prayer and Buddhist mindfulness meditation are similar in some respects. Nevertheless, they are entirely different exercises, with different types of mental activity and different purposes in mind. The goal of Buddhist Mindfulness is to recognize the essentially illusory nature of the self and the world around us, so as to escape desire or attachment; while the goal of Orthodox prayer is to receive the Holy Spirit of God and thus to interact in love and compassion with God and the very real world

Furthermore, neither practice has been understood historically as a means to better health. Clinical studies may be able to demonstrate whether or not Orthodox prayer or Buddhist mindfulness practice are in fact beneficial for either physical or mental health. We can say, however, that great Hesychasts such as St. Symeon the New Theologian warn unequivocally about the psychological dangers that are posed by certain types of prayer or meditation. Specifically, these involve attempts to govern autonomic activities of the body, such as the rhythm of the heart; and intense self-reflection, which St. Symeon characterized as "mind on mind."

For spiritual health, including mind, body and soul, the Fathers suggest that we focus instead on Christ, whether through the testimony of the Scriptures, or in the sacraments, or in acts of compassion and love. We should begin in true repentance, anchored in liturgical and scriptural witness to Christ, and in obedience to a humble spiritual guide. We can say that Orthodox silent prayer is a response to divine Love. We grow silent and still in its presence. We ask to become vessels of Light and Love, in the grace of Jesus Christ. We do not take

refuge in the Buddha, the *dharma* and the *sangha*, but in Christ, His teaching, and His holy Church.[57] Perhaps for us, the highest meditation is to see the form of Christ in all people. Here we find healing, as through the ministrations of the sacraments, of prayer, chant, the Liturgy as a whole, and above all, in the Body and Blood of Christ, the "medicine of immortality."[58]

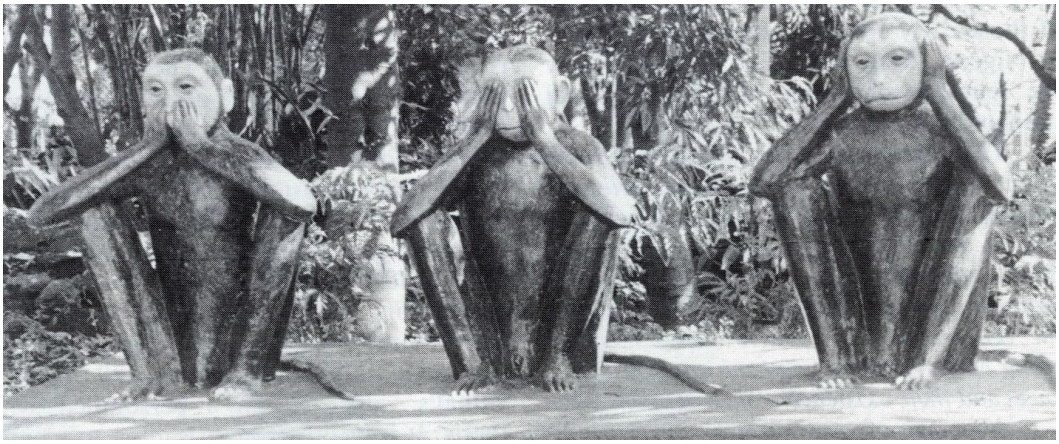
Fr. Brendan Pelphrey studied patristic theology, ethics, and Christian medieval spirituality at New College, the University of Edinburgh, where his principal teachers were the Very Rev. T. F. Torrance, a renowned Patristics scholar; Dr. John Zizioulas (now His Eminence Metropolitan John of Pergamon); and Br. Roland Walls, a Roman Catholic contemplative hermit. For nearly a decade Fr. Brendan taught theology, liturgics and ethics in Hong Kong at the largest Protestant seminary in Asia, as well as the Southeast Asia Graduate School of Theology, where many of the students were former Buddhist monks.

Under the auspices of the Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre in Hong Kong, the Scandinavian Christian Mission to Buddhists and the Dialog Centret in Åarhus, Denmark, he participated in international dialogues with Buddhists in Hong Kong, China, Nepal, Tibet, Japan, Mongolia, and the United States. Among those with whom Fr. Brendan has had personal dialogue were the Ven. Heng Monychenda (honored internationally for his work with Cambodian refugees in Thailand) and HH the Dalai Lama.

Special mentors with regard to Buddhist concepts were Master Liang Tao-Wei, a Zen master who became a Christian hermit and who lived near the Pelphrey family in the New Territories of Hong Kong; and Shigeto Oshida-San, a Dominican monk and former Zen master who founded Takamori contemplative community in Japan. Any errors in representing either Buddhist teaching or Orthodox perspectives are the author's.

Orthodox liturgical vestments depicting the Spring Deer image below a Greek cross, with the Chinese symbol for Prosperity/Blessing (lù) above.

Tibetan women holding prayer-beads, with which they repeat the mantra, "Om, mane, padme, hum." (Photo by Ernst Harbakk in Fra Nanking til Tao Fong Shan, *Den Nordiske Kristne Buddhismisjons, Oslo, 1987.)*



"See no evil, hear no evil" monkeys are actually practicing Kechari Mudra *meditation, the goal of which is to shut out all bodily experiences. A fourth monkey covers the genitals. (Photo by Anders Blichfeldt in* Arepoagus, *Spring/Summer, 1988.)*

HH the Dalai Lama greets the author at the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1993. Br. Wayne Teasdale is standing between them. Monks in the background represent Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Tibetan and Vietnamese Buddhist traditions.

NOTES

[1] In *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, 87.

[2] A summary of the practice of inner stillness or watchfulness may be found in the address, "Do Not Resent, Do Not React, Keep Inner Stillness" by Abbot Jonah Paffhausen (Metropolitan Jonah), 2011, available online (*eg*, silouanthompson.net).

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 98. Emphasis is in the original.

[4] On this point, Buddhist and Taoist meditation have different goals. The historic goal of Taoist masters is to attain a deathless body, while the Buddhist goal is to abandon the body, as illusory.

[5] The Buddha's second sermon, after the exposition of the Four Noble Truths at Benares, expounded the "non-existence of the self," in which the idea of a permanent self is viewed as *skandha* (illusion). However the notion of "self" evolved in Mahayana Buddhism, eventually to accommodate different levels of "self." Ultimate Self (the "great self") is impersonal because it has merged with the Absolute. However, some schools in Japan seem to approach the idea of self as "person" (Raguin, "Karma, the Self, and Human Responsibility," 40 ff.).

[6] Following a terminology derived from Plato, some Hesychasts describe the soul itself as tripartite with intelligent, incensive, and appetitive powers, which include five "senses": intellect, reason, noetic perception, intuitive knowledge, and cognitive insight . *Cf.* Gregory Palamas in "Letter to the Most Reverent Nun Xenia," 29; Nikitas Stithatos, "On the Practice of the Virtues," 9-15.

[7] The principal schools of Mahayana practice in China can be classified as Three Treatise, Mind-Only, Precept, Heaven, Ch'an (Zen), Pure Land, T'ien Tai, and Tantric (Porter, 89), of which Ch'an and Pure Land are meditation schools. Tibetan Tantra is sometimes classified separately, with the principal schools being Nyingmapa, Sakya, Kargyupta (together called "Red Hat"), and Gelugpa ("Yellow Hat"). Kargyupta stresses stillness and solitary meditation, as well as Tantric practices, while Gelugpa stresses intellectual development.

[8] Among the most influential Catholic contemplatives to advocate a "meeting of East and West" were Br. Thomas Merton (many publications); Dom Bede Griffiths of the *Shantivanam* Christian ashram in India (many publications); William Johnston, author of *Christian Zen: A Way of Meditation*; Br. Thomas Keating; Br. Wayne Teasdale, a personal friend of the Dalai Lama and of Bede Griffiths; and Fr. Anthony de Mello, a Jesuit priest and psychotherapist in India.

[9] John Bingham, "Rowan Williams: how Buddhism helps me pray," in *The Daily Telegraph,* July 2, 2014. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/10942056/Rowan-Williams-how-Buddhism-helps-me-pray.html

[10] This assertion will be challenged in America, but probably not by Asians. In summary, the ultimate goal of Patanjali Yoga (the "yoking" of mind and body) is not better health but *moksha*, the liberation of the soul from the body altogether and "realization" of the divine Self. A step towards achieving *moksha* is to stop up all the

senses so that there is no bodily sensory experience at all, through the practice of *Kechari Mudra* meditation. This is symbolized by the little statue, popular with tourists, of the three monkeys—"see no evil, hear no evil, smell/taste no evil"—covering eyes, ears, nose and mouth. Traditionally there is a fourth monkey covering the sexual organs and anus.

Tai chi on the other hand is preparation for battle: the movements imitate a cosmic conflict between the Dragon (cobra) and the Phoenix, dark and light, male and female, West and East. *Tai Chi Chuan* means "ultimate great fist." The practitioner seeks to avoid blows and to penetrate defences by seeking a harmony of opposites in a "dance" with the opponent. When sped up, the movements are those of *kung fu* martial arts in combat. This is very different from the popular notion in America that *tai chi* is intended to aid the circulation or calm the mind, though these might be side-effects of continual slow practice. (Note that the Chinese character usually rendered as *chi* here, means "ultimate" and is not the same as *chi/qi* indicating heat/energy in the body.)

[11] The issue whether new paradigms are now being formed in the meeting of Christianity and Buddhism was discussed at an historic dialogue in Hawaii in 1984, which included well-known scholars Masao Abe, Hans Küng, Paul Ingram and Michael von Brück. Ingram accused Von Brück of having misunderstood both Buddhism and Christianity in his comparison of Buddhist *sunyata* with Christian Trinity. Ironically, Ingram, on the other hand, attempts to invoke Orthodox doctrine of the Trinity and fails to understand Orthodoxy altogether on this central point, apparently viewing the Trinity in modalistic terms. Ingram's essay is in *Buddhist Emptiness and Christian Trinity,* 70.

[12] "Are You Aware of What You Eat?" by Julia P. Bolick, MS, RDN, CD, CLS, FNLA, in *LIVe Well* (*sic*), Spring/Summer 2014, p. 37.

[13] Not, however, by Taoists, and certainly not in the practice of *kung-fu* or *chi gong*. Chinese movies make much of this, and what may appear as "special effects" to the western viewer is sometimes very real power exhibited by the actor or master. Supernatural power should not be confused with mastery of the body, for example in learning to lie on a single rope as if on a bed, or to jump many feet into the air or somersault through the air over an opponent.

[14] In "To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia," 60, in *The Philokalia* Vol. IV, 317.

[15] A careful documentation of the history of these short prayers in Christianity is in *The Name of Jesus* by Irenee Haussherr, SJ.

[16] It should probably be pointed out that the "Jewel in the Lotus" is a reference to the *thang-kha* of "Wisdom and Compassion in Divine Embrace" or *Vajrasattva,* which is a depiction of sexual intercourse. In *tantrayana* the "jewel in the lotus" is the penis in the vagina, similar to the Hindu symbol of the *yoni-lingam*.

[17] There are thousands of mantras, with a long history stretching back into ancient Hinduism. Vajrayana (Tantric) Buddhism is variously known as Mantrayana owing to the emphasis on recitation. Many traditional mantras are the names of divinities, so that to chant a mantra is actually to call upon the divinity. Some schools, such as Nichiren Soshu in Japan, teach that the frequent recitation of the mantra, even if it has

no meaning, brings with it power or "good luck" to the practitioner, while in other schools (such as in Tibetan Tantrayana) mantras are understood as prayers to Bodhisattvas. Tibetans sometimes say that they are chanting to obtain personal power, for example over an enemy.

[18] A similar phenomenon may be seen today in some Orthodox churches where the Liturgy is chanted in liturgical language not understandable to the participants. The author has heard the explanation that it is not important for anyone to understand the ancient words, since the sounds alone carry spiritual benefit. It is interesting in this connection that the Sanskrit *ōm,* the most sacred of the mantras representing the cosmic sound of the planets, stars, *etc*., is linguistically related to the Greek *ōn*, "being." In icons of Christ it is inscribed in the nimbus over the head of Christ ("He Who Is," *ó ōn*) and is pronounced in Orthodox blessings, recalling the Name of God as revealed to Moses at the burning bush.

[19] "Instructions to Hesychasts," 7, in *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart,* 81.

[20] Cited in *The Art of Prayer,* 116.

[21] Commenting on apparitions at the time of death, Namkhai Norbu writes, "The appearance of…divinities, however, only arises for those who have…received transmission from a master… . For an ordinary being there arises only the manifestation of 'sounds, rays, and lights', which may last only for an instant, and most often are a cause of alarm." In *Dzogchen: The Self-Perfected State, 27.*

[22] "On Watchfulness and Holiness," 6, in *The Philokalia Vol. 1,* 163.

[23] In "On Watchfulness and Holiness," 7, in *The Philokalia Vol. 1*, 163.

[24] Protestant Christian missionaries have given a negative impression in China, too. A popular Cantonese saying is *góng yéhsò*, which literally means "speak/preach Jesus," but which is slang for "talking nonsense" or being annoying.

[25] See Evagrios the Solitary, "Texts on Discrimination in respect of Passions and Thoughts," in *The Philokalia Vol. I,* 38 ff.

[26] In "On Watchfulness and Holiness," 5, in *The Philokalia,* Vol. 1, 163.

[27] In the following I pass over tantric (occult, sexual) practices found in Tibet, Nepal and Mongolia, that are obviously incompatible with Christian practice. These seem to go largely unacknowledged in the West—they are seldom mentioned in Buddhist-Christian dialogue—and are not generally described in books for western readers precisely because they are *tantra* (secret). They are part of what is called "the dark side of the moon" or "left hand" in Buddhism. In Tibetan practice they may be integral, however, to the so-called "lightning path" towards enlightenment.

As described to the author by students in Nepal, *Gurus* or Masters who have achieved enlightenment sometimes follow rituals which involve a deliberate reversal of all the precepts normally followed by any monk or faithful Buddhist. These are performed in special rooms in the middle of the night, at the dark of the moon, and involve such things as ritualized rape, drinking alcohol and body-fluids, eating raw meat, and so on.

Young Americans—especially college students—have more recently become fascinated with Tantric practice, as is evident in hundreds of "pop" books and websites about Tantric sex, evidently because of the sexuality involved. However, websites and conversations with the author suggest that Americans do not really know about (and might be repulsed by) actual tantric practices in Tibet or Nepal.

[28] St. Gregory defends his monastic practice in multiple essays, but see especially, "In Defence of Those Who Devoutly Practice a Life of Stillness" as published in the *Philokalia* (Palmer, *et al*, Vol. IV).

[29] *Dikhr* involves reciting, usually the names or attributes of Allah, in rhythm with the counting of wooden or stone beads.

[30] There are of course many other poses that are adopted in Yoga, designed to channel *prana* ("life-force" or "breath") to various parts of the body along with the practice of *pranayama* or breath-control. They are not typical of Buddhist practice. The practice of *tai chi* is sometimes called "Buddhist [or Chinese] Yoga," but is actually has nothing to do with Yoga, is associated with martial arts, and would be closer to Taoist thought than Buddhist.

[31] This "energy" can be manifested in paranormal events such as starting a fire with bare hands, throwing chopsticks through plywood, levitating or bi-location. Striving for paranormal powers is generally discouraged in monasteries. It is, however, an integral part of popular Taoism, even today. For a description of meditational practice among Taoist hermits in China, see *Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits* by Bill Porter.

[32] St. Symeon the New Theologian describes three methods of prayer, in which the first involves standing with the hands raised, longing for heaven. This method of prayer can lead to delusion, hearing voices, even suicide or possession. The second involves examination of thoughts, but can also lead to great harm. The third involves keeping watch over the heart, in which the person at prayer is seated on a stool, head resting on the chest, with the gaze fixed on the belly, *etc*. ("Three Methods of Prayer," *Philiokalia* Vol. IV, 67 ff.) See also note 43, below.

[33] "On Those Who Practice a Life of Stillness," 8, in *The Philokalia* Vol. IV, 338.

[34] St. Gregory quotes St. John of the Ladder, "A hesychast is one who tries to enshrine what is bodiless within his body" ("Those Who Practise A Life of Stillness," 6, in *The Philokalia* Vol. IV, 336).

[35] *Ibid.,* 8, 338.

[36] "Texts on Prayer" in *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart,* 271.

[37] Cited in *Beyond Buddhism: A basic introduction to the Buddhist tradition*, 92. Emphasis added.

[38] It has been argued that in Theravada (Hinayana) the central point is Impermanence, whereas in Mahayana it is Emptiness (*Buddhist Emptiness and Christian Trinity*, 46).

[39] On this point Fr. John Romanides taught, "Westerners…believe that, as time goes by, the Church reflects more deeply on its dogmas and improves the understanding of

dogmas. But they have not paid due attention to what Gregory the Theologian says, 'It is impossible to express God and even more impossible to conceive Him.'" (Hierotheos, *Empirical Dogmatics,* 115).

[40] Compare the prayer of the priest during the Divine Liturgy, at the Holy Anaphora: "…You are God, beyond describing, beyond comprehending, neither to be seen nor conceived, ever existing, forever the same… ."

[41] An introduction to the Russian "kenotic" saints is *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality* by George Fedotov.

[42] See Masao Abe's essay, "Kenosis and Emptiness" in *Buddhist Emptiness and Christian Trinity*, 5, with its response by Hans Küng.

[43] The Christian doctrine of the Trinity can be explained in the Buddhist context as a *ko-an*, that is, a construct or doctrine which is central to the teaching, but which may defy logical explanation. A *ko-an* is a saying or recitation of doctrine, similar to our Nicene Creed.

[44] In "The Three Methods of Prayer,"in *The Philokalia* Vol. IV, 68-69. An alternative translation from the Russian text is "Three Methods of Attention and Prayer" in *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart,* 154-155.

[45] From a sermon, "Three Pictured Fans," quoted in *Eastern Spirituality in America*, 151. Emphasis is in the original.

[46] This mystery is affirmed in the censing at the end of the Orthros, and also following the Great Entrance in the Divine Liturgy when the priest says, "…[You were] in the tomb bodily, in Hades with the soul as God, in Paradise with the thief, and on the throne, O Christ, with the Father and the Spirit, filling all things O boundless One."

[47] In "The Fruits of Prayer," *The Art of Prayer,* 127.

[48] Theophan the Recluse in "The Jesus Prayer," in *The Art of Prayer*, 117.

[49] In "On Stillness," 10, in *The Philokalia* Vol. IV, 270. St. Gregory of Sinai points out that there are two kinds of warmth which are experienced differently: "In every beginner two forms of energy are at work, each affecting the heart in a distinct way. The first comes from grace, the second from delusion. St. Mark the ascetic corroborates this when he says that there is a spiritual energy and a satanic energy, and that the beginner cannot distinguish between them" ("On the Different Kinds of Energy" in *The Philokalia* Vol. IV, 261). In this analysis, it can be concluded that the circulation of *chi* (energy) in the body as experienced by the Buddhist or Taoist contemplative, is not at all the same as the warmth of the Holy Spirit as experienced by the Christian Hesychast.

[50] *Ibid.*, 9, *269.*

[51] Self-inflicted suffering is practiced by some Buddhist monks in China, in which incense is used to burn holes into the scalp or arms, or cuts are made in the arms or body. This is done when the practitioner is especially suffering from guilt because of past deeds (resulting in "bad fruit of *karma*"). There is no sense of forgiveness, and although self-harm looks like a form of offering, there is technically no god to whom it is offered.

[52] Buddhism has the concept of *tulku*, an emanation or manifestation of a Buddha. Although a Buddha is said to have reincarnated, there is also a sense in which he or she is not actually "there" in our western sense of flesh and blood; rather, the manifested Buddha *appears* to be present in space and time, like a hologram. Hinduism has the similar concept of *darshana*, the appearance (manifestation, "glimpse") of a god on earth. In interfaith dialogue an important question is whether Christians regard Jesus of Nazareth as *tulku*/*darshan*, on the one hand, or as actual flesh in space and time, on the other.

[53] "To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia," 46, in *The Philokalia* Vol. IV, 312.

[54] In dialogue with Buddhist contemplatives, the question was raised whether Christian monks are therefore all *bodhisattvas*; or, at least, whether this is not the goal of all spiritual Christians. Since Buddhists often view Christ as a *bodhisattva*, it makes sense from the Buddhist perspective that Christians are attempting to realize their own "Christ-nature" (similar to "Buddha-nature") through various means such as good deeds, meditation, *etc.* Note the Buddhist assumption that, like a *bodhisattva*, the "enlightened" Christian has turned from Heaven and is reincarnated in order to teach the gospel.

[55] A seminal work is *Being as Communion* by John Zizioulas (Metropolitan John of Pergamon).

[56] The web link for the Dalai Lama's remarks, which were broadcast live on September 20, is http://www.dalailama.com/live-interfaith.

[57] *Dharma* (*Damma*) is the teaching of the Buddha; the *sangha* is the gathered community of followers of the Buddha.

[58] This famous phrase was coined by St Ignatios the Martyr in his "Letter to the Ephesians."

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