HOW THE PHILOKALIC TRADITION
CAME TO MODERN AMERICA —
AND WHAT AMERICA MADE OF IT

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1. ANCIENT FOUNDATIONS: WHAT THE PHILOKALIA WAS

The word *Philokalia* first appeared in Christian literature in the hands of Clement of Alexandria,¹ where it means what it literally suggests to first sight: “the love for what is beautiful” (or good). It was a philosopher’s term for seeking the good life, and elevating canons of beauty to entice the development of the mind and soul², replacing the material goods sought after by the baser desires of human nature. In patristic times it was also a word for scholarly research.³ But the word also bore a different set of resonances which applied from patristic times, and which certainly carried over into the minds of the 18th century compilers of what we know today as a famous collection of ascetical texts. It means in this instance no more and no less than a “compendium.” And while the Philokalia that we know today is perhaps the most famous collection of eastern monastic literature, it certainly was not the first, and has not been the last. A Philokalia is more or less, then, a portable “Library of the Fathers,” but since this was compiled by monastics of the post classical ages, it is a library swung away from patristic dogmatics, toward the Fathers’ words on ascetical living, the mastery of the soul’s inner peace, and the doctrine of prayer.

The collection of texts follow a broad but generic master theme: the correlation of the search for inner stability (what we might call the anthropological aporia) with the quest for the transcendental vision of God (which we might call the theological aporia). This was the classic concern of most ancient sophistic theoria, Christian or not, from Plato onwards. The ancient Christians have a profound philosophy of prayer, and actually used their experience of spiritual consciousness to advance the ancient world’s longstanding religious attempt to correlate anthropology and theology. This deep and distinctive philosophic position grew out of the major epistemological problematic left by Plato’s inheritance—and its successive revisionings. The early Christian monastic sophists, stood in a long line of psychological taxonomists of the ancient world. The Christian sophists, of course, relied not on the texts of the philosophers’ scholae (though most of the greater fathers certainly continued reading them) but more on the sacred texts of
the bible, and the growing body of “patristic” literature known to the monastics as the Paterika or the Niptic fathers. Engagement with the text, therefore, was always an integral part of the ascetic Christian experience. Not applicable to all, at all times, but always a part of the mental and spiritual “struggle” (ascesis, or podvig) of the intelligentsia among the monastics, those who would, over the course of the centuries, emerge as the veritable leaders and shapers of the ascetic movement. This same age-old juxtaposition of the love of patristic texts and the love of the ascetical life which they reveal can be seen much to the fore in all of the most notable Philokalic revivals of the early modern and contemporary ages: St. Paisy Velichovsky’s dissemination of the Russian Philokalia, known as the Dobrotolyubie; St. Nicodemos and St. Macarios’ collation of the Greek Philokalia, the advocacy of the literature in the Way of the Pilgrim, and that modern Philokalian, Father Dumitru Staniloae, who has made of the Romanian Philokalia an even larger collation than any of his more famous predecessors. The combining of the love of the scholarly life with the love of the monastic traditions of prayer has carried on in all of the modern translators of the Philokalia—especially that English rendition of the Astir edition by Palmer, Sherrard and Ware, which has given the Philokalic collection perhaps its widest ever exposure in history.

Let me end this preliminary section on ancient roots on a brief but rather dense note—which I don’t want to develop here this evening or we might never emerge from it. But what I refer to as the epistemic aporia left behind in the ancient world by Plato and his commentators, was critical to the early Christian ascetics. It concerns the nature of the soul’s knowledge: namely its own knowledge of the self, and its knowledge of true reality, and thus its potential awareness of absolute reality. In terms of its knowledge of the self Plato had already suggested the necessity of a distinction between a higher and a lower soul. Christians, as can be seen in the trajectory from Origen, Didymos the Blind, and Evagrios, through St. Maximus Confessor, developed this dyadic epistemology into a triadic division of the soul, and thus also of its epistemic range: a body-soul awareness, a psychic level of awareness, and ultimately a noetic sensibility. In the lower range this
concerned existential rootedness and sensibility; in the middle level it concerned theoretical deduction; and in the higher level it concerned spiritual intuition. This important Byzantine contribution to the history of philosophy has been ruined in translation, unfortunately, by the incapacity of English language literature to recognize its seminal innovation in the history of ancient psychology, and its consuming vice of habitually making reductivist synonyms of the different key terms; particularly the fundamental epistemic differentiations of human awareness at the somatic, the psychic, the logical, and the noetic levels. Anglo Saxon, frankly, does not have enough sophistication in its semantic vocabulary to chart the finesse of the ancient distinctions in cognitive theory.

Let it suffice to say what most of the monastic theorists are aiming at is the very specific sense of allowing noetic awareness to emerge in the graced human consciousness after somatic and psychic levels of awareness have been ordered and stilled, so the difficult third and highest level can be coaxed into action. The epistemic point here is that the human organism strains after awareness, rises over great ages of historical and cultural achievement to higher and higher levels of consciousness, refined and refining, until the dawning (noetic) awareness that subjectival personhood is enhypostatized in the divine: namely, finds its ground of being and its co-inherence within the Godhead which originated it, and to which it naturally strives to return. From God we came. To God we go. To put it another way (and the idea thus stands as the gold-etched sentence at the core of this evening’s talk: Spiritual (noetic) consciousness is the evolutionary goal (telos) of our species. It is odd, therefore, to have to note that today it is perhaps the most neglected aspect of our intellectual endeavours.

The shorthand for this profound doctrine of prayer (which is at one and the same time a radically new Christian epistemic theory) is the “Prayer of the Heart.” The Jesus Prayer, which is the focus of many of the later Philokalic writings is but one instance of the wider tradition of this “Prayer of the Heart.” Let me conclude this dense summation by pointing out the connection of the Jesus Prayer to this epistemology: for the theory of the prayer (simple enough for a child, and complex
enough never to master in a lifetime) was that the recitation of the words and the physical posture gave a skeletal structure to somatic consciousness; the *theoria* contained in the content of the words (being a summation of the entire Gospel of salvation) gave a matrix for the psychic consciousness; and the progressive stilling of both these levels of *aisthesis* by the repetitive cycles of recitation would allow for the emergence, in its wordless and imageless character, of that elusive dove—the *noetic* consciousness, whereby the human soul might awake in its upper levels of sensibility into the unmediated presence of God.

2. EASTERN CHRISTIAN PRAYER AND ITS TEXT TRADITIONS: PATERIKA COLLECTIONS

The Philokalia as we know it today from its two 18th century iterations, the Athonite Philokalia, and the Slavonic *Dobrotolyubie,*\(^5\) is not a new phenomenon. It lies within a tradition that reaches back to the very foundations of Christianity. It is the most renowned of a much larger body of literature known in Orthodoxy as the *Paterika,* or collections of the writings of the fathers. The Paterika collections were always a matter of monks collating and editing: building collations of the “best of” out of existing manuscripts that were circulating on the basis of personal recommendations. It was chiefly a matter of monks individually copying and soliciting manuscripts: for this was all in the age before print. Often the copyists were the monastic librarians. The emergence of the 18th century Philokalias is exactly co-terminous with the end of the age of manuscript copying, and the dawn of the age of print. The earliest instances of Paterika were popularized in the fourth century as the monastic movement took shape. First at this formative era was the *Apophthegmata Patrum,* the sayings and deeds of the desert Fathers. The genre was very popular in classical Byzantine times. In the 12th century the *Evergetinos* (originating at the large Constantinopolitan monastery of Theotokos Evergetes) amounted to a large multi-volume Paterikon that had a massive distribution and subsequently formed generations of Orthodox in the “tales and deeds of the saints.” From the 10th century onwards there was an explosion of Russian, Romanian, and Serbian Paterika collections.
The Philokalia and Dobrotolyubie are, therefore, simply the two most famous examples of this ancient genre of Paterikon, as it entered printed format. Their story begins, as does so much else concerning the post-Byzantine reshaping of Orthodox experience, on Mount Athos. The modern Philokalia, therefore, has two versions; the first was published second (because its editor largely worked in manuscript copying modality) and the second was published first, because it was designed for mass print format. Our first is St. Paisy Velichovsky’s Dobrotolyubie (whose feast day this is tonight); our second, the Philokalia of St. Nikodemos the Athonite and St. Makarios of Corinth.

3. PAISY’S DOBROTOLYUBIE

Saint Paisy Velichkovsky, lived from 1722-1794. He was a Ukrainian by birth. But the locus of his major life’s work, and his spiritual reputation, have established him as one of the greatest “honorary” Romanian Orthodox saints, because of his base at Neamt. He is a major Orthodox master of the early modern age who can rank with the great saints of the past. His life, written immediately after his funeral on the last four blank pages of the monastery’s Menaion, made its way, by 1847, along with his collation of patristic ascetic texts, to the great centre of Optina hermitage, where through the 19th century it established Paisy’s reputation in Russia. Ordained in 1758 as a young priest monk on Mount Athos after several years as a solitary, St. Paisy established a community focused on the Prayer of the Heart, with an extensive typikon featuring long hours of the Jesus Prayer. This drew harsh criticism from other Athonites (especially from the archimandrite of the Kavsokalyvia Skete, Abbot Athanasius) for whom this spiritual approach was “untraditional”: by which they meant that reliance on Byzantine hesychastic writers was seen as odd in the age of Orthodoxy’s Babylonian Captivity. Scouring the libraries on Athos Paisy tried to make a collation of the ancient Paterika on prayer, largely because he thought there was no longer a tradition extant of sufficient living elders to induct his monastics into the secrets of this form of prayer rising through the degrees of spiritual consciousness. He often complains of the
difficulty of finding sufficient manuscripts to work from; and the labour involved in rendering everything into Slavonic out of the Byzantine Greek.

In 1764 Paisy and 64 of his monks set sail for Moldavia and came to the Dragomirna monastery in Bucovina. Here Paisy blended the great monastic rules of Sts. Basil, Theodore the Studite, and Nil Sorsky. Great emphasis was placed in his synthesis on spiritual attentiveness (*prosoche*), obedience to the elder, and the fervent Prayer of the Heart. At Dragomirna his work of translating manuscripts was redoubled. The community at Dragomirna grew to 350 monks and in 1779 settled at Neamt where it expanded to 700. It was at Neamt that Paisy’s literary project of the Dobrotolyubie really took off. Different to all the Paterika that had preceded him (which generally stressed the life of prayer and the need for ascetical struggles) the Neamt collection gave precedence to the concept of the Prayer of the Heart as the chief guide and goal of the monastic life: indeed the apex of a Christian life, whether lived in the world or in the monastery. Having again roused loud opposition from self-styled Orthodox traditionalists for this preference of the Prayer of the Heart, St. Paisy produced a considered apologia in 1793 addressed to the brethren of the Poiana community. In this final work he again turns to the witness of the fathers and adduces 35 of the ascetical writers to demonstrate that his teaching is at one with the ancient doctrine of the greatest Orthodox spiritual writers.

St. Paisy was anticipated in the actual publication of a Philokalia by the Greek saints Macarius and Nicodemus. When he heard of their edition at its appearance in Venice in 1782, he lost no time in making a Slavonic version of a large portion of it: 24 of the original 36 texts, but with added collations of awn from his own sources too. His editorial choices were guided by a decision to omit the more “difficult” fathers such as Maximus the Confessor, and even Gregory Palamas. This was sent to press at St. Petersburg in 1793, and also at Iasi. As it happened, the Greek Philokalia had very little impact in its first edition. It appeared “before its time” in the Greek Orthodox world, as it were. It was destined to be Paisy’s Slavonic version, the Dobrotolyubie that set fire to the Russian Orthodox world
and brought about a veritable Philokalic revolution: changing the face of modern Orthodox spirituality.

Paisy died on November 15, 1794, aged 72 years. He was buried somewhere in the monastery at Neamț. (It may be his relics which erupted a spring of water on the death of the dictator Ceaucescu in 1997 in the graveyard there). A new and posthumous development of the Staret's mission came about when Neamț monastery established its own printing press and distribution center in 1807. The press issued many Romanian editions of the Fathers in the early 19th century and in 1822 a second edition of the Slavonic *Dobrotolyubie* appeared, amplifying the first with further texts taken from the Greek *Philokalia*. The majority of the original Paisian manuscript translations were never set into print form, but at the beginning of the 19th century they were collated into a vast manuscript codex of 1,004 pages, which is now lodged as Ms. 1455 in the Library of the Romanian Academy.

4. THE GREEK PHILOKALIA: STS. NIKODEMOS AND MAKARIOS

To describe this part of the tale we must begin again, as it were, for the three great figures of the Philokalic tradition, Nikodemos, Makarios, and Paisy, were all once living close together on Athos, but never seem to have met. After Macarios failed to connect with Paisy and enter his Skete, he decided instead to emulate his hero’s work on Athos by diverting funds to direct St. Nikodemos to gather manuscripts for printed dissemination. St. Nikodemos from the outset saw that his was the age of print. He was an indefatigable writer, and from the time he started to gather materials he had his eyes fixed on the Greek printing houses in Venice, which, he hoped, would bring out his labours in good and sellable editions.

Now known as St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, Nicholas Kallivourtsis was born in 1749 on the island of Naxos. He studied at Smyrna and then made his way to Mount Athos in 1775 where he was tonsured as monk Nikodemos in the Dionysiou monastery. He died on Mount Athos on July 14 1809, aged 60, after a lifetime
of scholarly activity as a canon lawyer,\textsuperscript{13} a hymnographer,\textsuperscript{14} and translator of numerous spiritual works. He was canonized by the Greek church in 1955. His relics rest at Karyes (his own Skourtaios skete), on Mount Athos. St. Nikodemos was a leading member of the Athonite Kollyvadic movement,\textsuperscript{15} a monastic movement that sought a renewal of Orthodoxy’s ancient spiritual and liturgical traditions. It was from their immersion in this movement that both he and Makarios of Corinth first understood the need to “rescue” patristic spiritual theology from the dust under which it had disappeared in early modern Church life.

Makarios Notaras was also one of the leaders of the Kollyvadists on Mount Athos, where he retreated after short time as the bishop of Corinth.\textsuperscript{16} St. Makarios was born into a rich family of the island of Hydra in 1731. He tried as a youth, against the wishes of his father, to enter the Mega Spelaion Monastery in the Peloponnesus, but was forcibly brought back home, where he embarked on a deep and prolonged study of Church fathers and mystical texts. In 1764, he was appointed as bishop of Corinth by Patriarch Samuel I of Constantinople. Here he began a reformist educational program. The Russian-Turkish war in 1768 caused him to flee with his family for safety, and by the time he was able to resume residence in Corinth, the Phanar had confirmed the appointment of another bishop to his place; giving Makarios licence to take up residence anywhere he chose “without canonical hindrance.” In 1777, aged 46, he first came to the Holy Mountain and made contact with the 28 year old monk, Nikodemos, giving him the paid commission to collate and arrange a good edition of the Patristic texts he himself had assembled from manuscripts lodged at Vatopedi monastery.

Makarios funded his Philokalic project by the philanthropy of the Moldo-Wallachian Voivode John Mavrogordatos; and subsequently in 1783, the year after the \textit{Philokalia} appeared, he persuaded the Greek merchant John Kannas to fund the publication of the multi-volume Paterikon, \textit{Evergetinos}.\textsuperscript{17} Makarios retired to Ikaria and Patmos for a while, and after 1790 finally took up residence in a hermitage on the island of Chios. Here he wrote works of encouragement
for Greeks to resist the Turkish yoke, and composed a *New Martyrology*. He died there in 1805.

Nikodemos’ role in this large set of works was not simply that of a printer’s assistant. He it was who arranged all the material chronologically, writing introductions to the whole, and to the various books, and adding notes in the process. The modern English Philokalia has purposefully omitted all this material. Nikodemos added extra source materials, amplifying Makarios’ original idea, and carrying it through to completion in the bishop’s absence. To this extent, both the bishop and the monk were authentically joint collaborators.

The Greek Philokalia gathers fathers of the hesychastic tradition from the fourth to the 15th centuries. The juxtaposing of the ancient writers (Evagrios Pontike, and Maximus Confessor, for example) is meant to make the intellectual claim that the Byzantine Hesychastic fathers of the tradition of Gregory Palamas and Gregory of Sinai, were in faithful continuity with the patristic writers, and indeed that the earlier monastic writers, at their very best, were harbingers and “prophets” of the later hesychastic teachings. The Palamite hesychastic school, of course, had several themes of its own, that were reflective of late medieval conflicts over the issue of the knowledge of God. These arguments came to a head in the time of the Byzantine civil war of the 14th century, and are synopsized in the conflict between Gregory Palamas (defending the Athonite traditions of mystical prayer) and Barlaam of Calabria, a Byzantine theologian who had accused the Athonites of heresy for claiming that they could see God’s own uncreated light in the time of prayer. Nikodemos organized all this material on prayer chronologically. It seems obvious to us moderns to do it that way, but in earlier times such matter had usually been arranged alphabetically or topically. His choice was deliberately launching a large hypothesis: that all the valid line and spiritual pedigree of patristic teachings on prayer ran up to and through the Hesychastic fathers, to culminate in the neo-hesychastic tradition of the Prayer of the Heart. This was the tradition to which the Kollyvadic revival belonged. The making of the *Philokalia* was, for Nikodemos and Makarios, as much as it had been for
Paisy, a strong defence of their own authenticity as Orthodox monastics: a brave apologetic against the current status quo on the Holy Mountain and elsewhere in the Orthodox corridors of power (such as Russia and Ukraine for example) where heavily westernized scholastic patterns of thought were in the ascendancy.

There is much within the collection of Philokalic texts, then, that is not simply identifiable as the tradition of the Prayer of the Heart. The Jesus Prayer as such is not often mentioned in the texts. But it is equally true that, issued with a view to it being a library of reference for practitioners of the Jesus Prayer, the entire corpus could be seen to offer a progressive movement from the ancient fathers, through the Byzantine masters, direct to the door of the Prayer of the Heart revival with its stress on spiritual eldership (Starchestvo). Such was, surely, its intent. Such has been its effect ever since it was published. Today the Philokalia has escaped from the monastery; for good or ill. The context the Athonite and Paisian monks had always in mind, namely that these texts would direct the spiritual life under the close advisement of a monastic Elder, has now disappeared also: but the compensation is the immeasurably greater familiarity that so many people now have with the classics of Orthodox ascetical tradition. Paisy, Makarios, and Nikodemos, could hardly have dreamed that their labours, so often against the grain of 18th century Orthodox attitudes, would lead to such a revival; lead to such riches enjoying their greatest exposure ever in the course of the long ages of history. But soon after the first appearance of the texts a controversy arose about the wisdom of allowing these delicate traditions about manipulating consciousness to circulate without the supervision of an Elder. This question leads us down the road of controversy in two steps to today. The first is the delivery of the 19th century Russian mystical tradition to Paris after the fall of the Tsar; and the second step leads from post 1917 Paris to 1960s America: how the Philokalic tradition came to these shores.
5. THE PHILOKALIA IN AMERICA

Stage 1. Paisy’s Russian Emulators

St. Paisy’s work was taken up by a powerful school after him. Many of his first disciples became spiritual masters in their own right, and took his teaching back to Russia and the Ukraine after their Elder’s death, thus enabling his readers in the next generation, and especially in the early 19th century, to assume his mission at one remove. This included great saints such as St. Seraphim of Sarov, the Optina Startsi, and (later) Bishop St. Ignatius Brianchaninov and St. Theophan the Recluse (1815–94).

St. Theophan (Govorov), was a learned Russian monk who had spent time at the Kiev Mohyla Academy and at Jerusalem before becoming the rector of St. Petersburg Theological Academy. He was consecrated as bishop of Tambov in 1859, and then transferred to Vladimir, but in 1866 he abruptly renounced public office in the Church and was allowed by the Holy Synod to become a recluse at Vichenskii monastery. After 1872 he devoted himself more and more to strict seclusion, seeing no-one but the higumen and his confessor, but acting as a guide to many who sought his counsel in writing. He used his state episcopal pension to help many of the poor, and also built a small hermitage chapel where he celebrated the liturgy daily. His chief form of ascesis became the translation of patristic texts. In the course of his labors, between 1876 and 1890, he made a new translation in the Russian language of the four volume Slavonic Dobrotolyubie. It was a translation to which he added many extra texts, making it a vastly amplified form of Paisy’s work. It issued in print in five volumes between 1877 and 1905. Theophan was closely aware of St. Nikodemos’ works. Theophan restored to the vernacular Russian Dobrotolyubie collation St. Maximus the Confessor and St. Gregory Palamas, both of whom had been omitted by St Paisy; and he added extracts from the Sinaitic Fathers, and St. Isaac of Niniveh which both Philokalic versions had omitted, expanding the texts from St. Symeon the New Theologian.

The Optina fathers were (also) important disseminators of the Dobrotolyubie
tradition. Paisy’s reputation among them as a master of the Prayer of the Heart, and as a model Higumen needed no introduction. The image of St. Seraphim of Sarov, as practitioner of the Prayer, one who so luminously showed its effects in changing the elect disciple into a radiant icon of Christ, was high on their spiritual horizons. The Optina Pustyn was located at Kaluga south of Moscow, and throughout the 19th century it was the major locus, for Slavic Orthodoxy, of promoting the Philokalic movement. The mid-19th-century Metropolitan Filaret Drozdov of Moscow actively encouraged Higumen Moses’s ambitious publishing program there, disseminating Russian translations of Patristic works. Until the forced closure of the Pustyn in 1923 by the Soviets, Optina was a centre of living elders (especially notable among them, saints Leonid, Macarius, and Ambrose). Their hesychastic spirituality and particular stress on spiritual elder-ship attracted numerous leaders of the wider so-called Slavophile movement, as well as writers and intellectuals such as Turgenev, Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Leontyev. Dostoevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov* reflects much of what he had observed in the Optina Elder Macarius.

This great movement of hesychastic elders that came after St. Paisy passed on the tradition of the Jesus Prayer by also freeing it from the confines of the monastic life; handing it as a precious heritage to a vast range of Orthodox lay devotees. It is a hesychastic tradition that has shown itself capable of dynamic adaptation: from the cell of the hermit, to the busy life of the layperson: the invocation of the Holy Name being a healing, and a stilling, and an enlightenment in a world where the traditional supports of Orthodox life (the village church, the nearby monastery) are today few and far between. The several authors of the narrative that finally became the *Way of the Pilgrim*, had contact with this circle too. Such texts deliberately tried to put into popular and accessible form these deeply monastic secrets. Although the Optina encouragement of lay disciples, allied with Theophan’s Russian vernacular translations, had also encouraged the widening of the availability of the Jesus Prayer among Christian laity, there were still conflicts at play between those who felt such a tradition could not make the
transition to the world without strict supervision of an elder. Ignatii Brianchaninov, and the Optina elders generally disapproved of making the Jesus Prayer public. Starets Amvrosii Grenkov (1812-1892) at Optina was a strong opponent of the *Way of the Pilgrim*, a textual conflation of the works of Archimandrite Mikhail Kozlov (1826-1884) and Hieromonk Arsenii Troepol’skii (1804-1870). The Pilgrim tradition—more properly the *Rasskaz Strannika—Candid Tale of a Pilgrim to his Spiritual Father*, has been valued from its first English appearance for its allegedly artless simplicity of being written by an unlettered peasant. But I am sorry to have to prick the bubble for it was nothing of the sort—emerging as it did very consciously from two Russian mystics and clerical litterateurs. The Pilgrim tradition was really arguing two important things: first that the Jesus Prayer changed the ascetical consciousness; and secondly that the Philokalic texts could stand in for the lack of a useful supply of living elders. Both things greatly alarmed the Optina monks. But even so, by this trajectory (accelerated by the translation of the Pilgrim and other Russian writings on prayer into English after the First World War by the Paris exiles, and culminating in the translation into English of the Greek Philokalia), the greater Philokalic tradition truly began its voyage out of the monastic world into the global village. And nowhere is that global village more epitomized than New York, where we touch down for our last act in the hip 60s of the 20th century.

**Stage 2. The Religiously Plural Village: America’s New Awakening**

It would be important in this context for a fuller picture, to speak of the arrival of the Zen master TD Suzuki in California, and the rapid popularization of an American form of neo-Buddhism in the latter half of the 20th century. This movement rapidly disseminated key texts of the Asian religious tradition in English and was an integral part of the consciousness-raising horizons of the 60s. It made mysticism acceptable despite the frowns of the ascendant Christian establishment. But we do not have time for that here—except to mention, for those who already know of it, the significance of the Advaita Vedanta tradition underlying Asian religious metaphysics of consciousness. This means non-dualist consciousness.
For those who do not know it, it will be enough to offer a terribly clichéd synopsis to the effect that from the 60s onward, Asian religion taught Americans that interiority was mystical, pacific, desirable, and cool. But when they looked at their Christian structures they found things that were decidedly not that. Enter the novelist JD Salinger. Not only a famously popular writer on the wave of the beat generation, but a serious student of Advaita. It was Advaita consciousness from an outside observer that brought forward the shy maiden of Orthodoxy as a viable Christian advocate of mystical consciousness; and the medium chosen was the apparently simple Russian peasant Pilgrim.

Salinger’s *Franny and Zooey* comprises his Manhattan-based short story about a sister, Franny Glass, and her brother Zooey, both in their early twenties, and hyperintelligent. They symbolically stand as a cipher of the seer in our myopic age—where the seer may not exactly be gifted with clear sight, let alone clairvoyancy. The two works first published in the *New Yorker* in 1955 and 1957 appeared together as a novella in 1961. Franny’s story revealed to a very large reading public the existence of the *Way of the Pilgrim*, which became for American Protestants and Catholics a major road into Orthodox spiritual practice: and actually introduced many Orthodox to the traditions of the Jesus Prayer for the first time in their living memory.

Franny is having an existentialist crisis in her campus town during the weekend of the Yale game. She has seen through the self-centredness and superficiality of all life around her, and existence has turned to ashes on her tongue. She returns to mother Bessie’s living room in Manhattan and as well as collapsing, like many young drop-outs, on the sofa (during which time her mother becomes increasingly worried about her) she constantly recites the Jesus Prayer which she learned from the raggedy Pilgrim who casting aside all her other text books—all of which elevates the anxiety of her mother, for whom religious zeal such as this denotes incipient madness. In this Bessie is a cipher of that earth-motherly common sense which classifies religious perception as incipient lunacy. Franny has learned from the raggedy Pilgrim who
recited the prayer thousands of times a day, that this may indeed be a passport through a toxic world—and so her mind, in existential overdrive, turns to this deep slow burn of mental focus in the prayer in order to inoculate herself. She is rescued by the precocious Zooey who tries his best to solace her with brotherly love and advice, but in the end after his phone-in masquerade pretending to counsel her in the persona of his own elder brother, he has to pass her on to the actual elder Buddy (cipher for the starets—the truly wise oracle; Buddy as the *anam cara* or soul-friend) who by telephone lances the boil of the young woman by exorcising the ghost of their mutual eldest brother Seymour, psychologist and erstwhile spiritual guru of the family, who had committed suicide some years earlier (himself a cipher of the existential pain that causes us to turn from the world in anguish at its ugliness). The Jesus Prayer which Franny has been clinging to—suggested as the only proper response to existence rightly perceived, namely that a soul should cry out “Lord have mercy!” (like to a Bodhisattva’s anguished cry of compassion)—is first revealed to be a false solution for young Franny, before being suggested to the attentive reader as perhaps the only true solution to the pain of existence that tempers us to despair. Elder Brother (Starets Buddy) reveals to her the resolution in the shifting of the emphasis of the prayer from a cry of pain: “Lord have mercy” in the sense of, “Lord have mercy on us in this unspeakable mess!” to a cry of deeper trustfulness, in the sense of, “Lord have mercy on us who trust in you for help that is sufficient to our needs.” This resolution is given in Salinger by the image which Buddy distils from Seymour’s teachings to the family (and I ask to be excused from Salinger’s “sexist size-ism” here) that there is always a “Fat Lady” present in every sophisticated gathering. This is meant in the text as a symbol of the person at the back of the parish hall who asks really dumb questions at every event that aspires to be culturally sophisticated, and Seymour’s point is that instead of wishing to silence, or despise that person, it is this voice which is actually that of Christ; and until one is able to make that perception one cannot understand what true wisdom is; because one cannot define and perceive wisdom except through the lens of compassion. “There isn’t anyone out there who isn’t Seymour’s Fat Lady,” Buddy
concludes for Franny’s sake. We are all the Fat Lady at the back with the dumb questions, whom we began by despising. And Christ himself is the Fat Lady; and it is no less than this double insight that rescues Franny. None of us are cool. Being uncool is OK: it allows us to have mercy on ourselves and on other people, because we understand that God only relates to us through his compassion. Mercifulness is love. Love is the true fabric of existence. Whether or not her new insight allows her to see that this is the same wisdom which is contained in the Jesus Prayer, and her unbalanced exegesis of it is another matter we do not learn in Salinger. We suspect however that Franny may be all right now—even if she would be well advised to dump her campus boyfriend Lane Coutell.

Being a curious philosophic student of Advaita Vedanta, Salinger slyly inserts this as Zooey goes into his room before phoning Franny—for he preps himself by rehearsing all the philosophical wisdoms of the ages that he and Buddy have written aphoristically on the back of his bedroom door. Our novelist also quite clearly recognizes, at a time very few professional theologians had, that the Byzantine tradition of the prayer of the heart, as he found it in the Pilgrim, was clearly akin to this tradition of Advaita insight, but that this (unlike all other inroads to it) was truly an occidental experience, at the core of ancient Christianity, not an alien importation. This is quite remarkable, for Salinger wrote at a time when few commentators, if any, had recognized that this is the epistemic heart of Plato’s aporias about the knowledge of the soul: something Evagrios and St. Maximus are much concerned with.

6. EPILOGUE

So there we have the Philokalic tradition, and how it came to America. What have we done with it? Well, we have not even started to unpack it. When there comes a time when we begin to understand the link between this great prayer and the Byzantine epistemic theory that lies behind it, we may start to begin to unravel its more profound mysteries. In the meantime, we need to take to heart the
American icon of Franny, and be wary of using the endless cycles of the repetitive “Lord Have Mercys” to make us even more neurotic than we presently are. I have heard this prayer said in such a way as to give me a headache. The latest twist in the mutations of the Jesus Prayer in modernity is the growing practice, one advocated by my own spiritual father Archbishop Serafim Joanta, and the monastery of Starets Sophrony in Essex, of practicing the Jesus Prayer in common. In such a case the leader of the recitation must set a tonality of deepening peace and slowness. In such a case too the form of words has to be changed slightly, omitting “me a sinner,” in favour of “have mercy on us” (since one cannot attribute sin to anyone other than the self); and certain clarification has to be made that the processes of breathing and heart rate associated with the combination of the individually voiced prayer of each person has to be carefully detached from that of the public leader’s. The Jesus Prayer is designed for a singular alteration of the individual consciousness and must, sooner or later, even in a public recitation, descend into a personal rhythm. In regard to this aspect, when Christians begin to explore the actualities of the differing levels of consciousness of the soul, it is wise to remember the strong sense of the Optina hermits, that this process needs an experienced guide; even while admiring the courage of many great devotees of the prayer, who still insisted that it ought to have wide and public dissemination. Salinger gave us a cheeky wink in his novella that here was a Christian Pranayama. Truth to be told, there is something here even greater still.
1 Christ The Pedagogue. 3.7.

2 St. Gregory the Theologian uses the verb Philokaleo in the sense of, “what one is really enthusiastic about.” Gregory The Theologian. Epistle. 33.

3 Epiphanius of Salamis. Against All Heresies. 16.1; Cyril of Scythopolis. Life of St. Saba. 66; St. Neilos. Epistle. 3.25.


6 “Dobrotolyubie” is a Slavonic calque of Philokalia. St. Paisy Velichovsky called his edition of 1793 this, echoing the Philokalia of Sts. Nikodemos and Makarios, which had been prepared on Athos and had recently appeared in print at Venice. But Paisy’s work was not wholly dependent on that of the Athonites.


8 1847, 1890, 1892. The Biography of Platon was edited by AE Tachiaos, and included in his study: (in Greek) The Revival of Byzantine Mysticism among Slavs and Romanians in the 18th century. Thessalonica. 1966; and was also issued in English by the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood from Platina California, under the mistaken impression that it was the Biography of Metrophanes, under the title: Blessed Paisius Velichovsky.

9 A term signifying the long early modern period where scholastic modes of thought from Kiev and Poland had heavily reorganized Orthodox dogmatics, displacing biblical and patristic modes of theology.


13 He assembled the influential collation of Greek canon law known as the Pedalion or Rudder, adding much commentary of his own.

14 He composed 50 liturgical hymns.
The title Kollyvadists was an ironic slight against them from their opponents. They had advocated a return to stricter more authentic standards of Orthodox theology, liturgy, and spirituality. Opponents tried to fasten on one aspect only, so as to caricature them—their claim that the Kollyva (boiled wheat) memorials for the dead ought to take place only on Saturdays. Among the leading Kollyvadists apart from Nikodemos, was Makarios of Corinth his collaborator in the Philokalia project, and Athanasios of Paros.


It is clear, therefore, that the modern edition of the *Evergetinos* was designed from the beginning as the companion study to the Philokalia. The *Evergetinos* has now finally had a fine English translation in four volumes prepared by Archbishop Chrysostomos and Monk Patapios, issued in 2009. To date the English translation of the Greek Philokalia remains incomplete.

If they could see it with their material eyes, he argued, it could not be the (immaterial) uncreated light. The apparently abstruse point masked a much wider set of related ideas: was it possible to know God directly in this life. Out of the argument came Palamas’ distinction of the Essence and energies of God. While God was Unknowable and Unapproachable in his essence, he was discernible and close to his Church through his (Uncreated) Energies. In touching the energies of God, however, we touched the authentic God, wholly and immediately.

1762-1867. Important and scholarly Metropolitan of Moscow from 1821.

Its leaders were Kireevsky and Aksakov. Its most notable religious thinkers included Kho- myakov, Berdiaev, and Soloviev.

