

“The Knowledge of God”: Fr. Panagiotes Carras



Protopresbyter Panagiotes Carras, *St. Nektarios Greek Orthodox Church (HOTCA), Toronto, Canada, 2008*

Photo Source: Google Images

The Knowledge of God

Protopresbyter Panagiotes Carras

The Holy Scriptures and the Fathers teach that God is incomprehensible yet knowable. As our Saviour declared: *And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent* (John 17:3). In reflecting on this seeming paradox, first we will look at the nature of man and his potential for knowing the incomprehensible. Then we will examine how it is that God makes Himself known, and finally, how we participate in such knowledge.

There is a danger in intellectualizing Holy Scripture and interpreting its words as symbolic or allegorical. This fear of the literal facet of Scripture is based on the gnostic belief that all creation (including even written words) is basically evil. This fear is also the motivating force of those who seek to demythologize Scripture. A thorough knowledge of the exegeses of the Holy Fathers is necessary to distinguish between what is literal and what is symbolic, in order to understand the true meaning of Scripture.

Besides the foregoing quotation, many other New Testament passages teach that God is knowable. The following words of our Saviour clearly indicate that it is through Him that we know God:

He answered and said unto them. Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 13:11).

I am the good shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine (John 10:14).

Even the Spirit of truth; Whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you (John 14:17).

In the Image and Likeness of God

The properties of human nature make communion with God possible. Man was created with the potential and capacity to know God. In European philosophy man always appears, in the words of the late Father Justin Popovic, as a *fragmented being* (*The Theory of Knowledge of Saint Isaac the Syrian*: Boston, 1994, 117). A duality of human nature is emphasized, so that only the rational element is considered as the essence of man. Western European philosophical thought is, of course, based on Greek philosophy, which taught the necessity of liberating the divine soul from the body. Especially after the Carolingian period ended toward the close of the tenth century. Western European thinkers fragmented man into *two* opposing elements, the rational and the physical.

Roman Catholic theology taught that God could be comprehended by using the rational mind. From the outset, however, one must understand that there is a great difference between the Patristic concept of mind (*nous*) and the Western philosophical concept of the rational mind. The first Vatican Council, held in 1870, decreed that God can be known *by the natural light of human reason* (*Constitutio dogmatica de fide catholica*, cap. 11). The mind can soar to God if freed from its prison, the body, since the body by its nature looks only to the physical. If the mind were liberated from the hostile power of the body, then, through its natural ability, it would reach God. The belief that man can reach God is the sin of Adam and Eve, of the Tower of Babel — and likewise of the Papacy, exemplified in the Gothic spires of its cathedrals reaching towards the heavens. When in later European thought the striving to comprehend God by natural reason collapsed, the philosophers declared that *God is dead* and turned their attention exclusively to man and to empirical knowledge.

In the teachings of the Fathers, by contrast, there is no essential dichotomy between the body and the soul. One is not the enemy of [the other; the body is not the prison of the soul. Saint Gregory Palamas calls the body and the soul *fellow-workers* (*Triads*, 11, 2:5).

The body and the soul work together for their mutual salvation. This is in opposition to the papal teaching advocated by Saint Gregory Palamas' great opponent Barlaam, who argued that the intellect was the supreme part of man and that the rest of man was dross. Man, body and soul, was created with the potential of receiving God. No other physical nature has this potential. Using the image of combustible material and fire to refer to this potential, Saint Symeon the New Theologian notes: *Fire will never ignite any matter with which it has not come into contact* (*On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses*, 111:119; Saint Vladimir's Press, 1995). This potential is why it is possible for the human body to be resurrected. And the resurrection of the body demonstrates that man — body and soul — is saved: the whole man, not only the soul.

In the Book of Genesis the creation of man is unique. Adam was created not by a command, the way God created the rest of creation, but by the two hands of God. As early as the second century of the Church, we find Saint Justin and Saint Irenaeus interpreting *the two hands of God* as the Logos and the Holy Spirit. After his creation, Adam was placed in Paradise, where, by keeping the commandment of God, he would become a Son of God (Saint John Chrysostom, *On Genesis*, 13:4-6; Saint Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, 11, *Against Heresies* 4; praef. 4). If they had not sinned, then the *souls of Adam and Eve would have become brighter and the physical body of each altered and changed into an immaterial and spiritual one, into something beyond the physical* (Saint Symeon, 1:22-23).

Adam was created *in the image and likeness* of God. This special creation bestowed the potential to become Christ-like. In his Epistles, Saint Paul refers frequently to our Saviour as *the image of God* (II Cor. 4:4; cf. Rom. 8:29, II Cor. 3:18, Col. 3:10). We humans, then, are *the image of the image*. Adam was created in the image of Christ, receiving the seed that would make him Christ-like. We are called to the fullness of that image, or as Saint Paul says: *seeing that ye have ... put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him* (Col. 3:10; cf. Rom. 8:29, I Cor. 15:49, II Cor. 3:18).

Adam was created in the image and likeness of God. Throughout the writings of the Fathers we notice that a distinction is made between the terms *in the image* and *in the likeness*. In brief, *in the image* refers to the capacity or potential to become Christ-like, and *in the likeness* is the actual becoming.

Spiritual growth was possible because Adam was vested with the glory of God and knew God. In the Old and New Testaments the phrase, *the glory of God*, refers to the presence of God. In paradise Adam conversed with God daily. By transgressing God's commandment, he became naked, that is, he lost the grace of God. *The wild beasts and all the animals of the earth saw him stripped of his former glory and, despising him, immediately turned savagely against*

him (Saint Symeon, 1:29). Yet the Saints, who put on Christ, were not hated by the animals but were loved even by the fiercest of them, as we see in the lives of Saint Mamas, Saint Seraphim of Sarov, and many others. The human potential to become Christ-like, as taught by the Holy Fathers, follows the doctrine Saint Paul expressed in I Corinthians:

All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds (15:39).

The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly (15:45-49).

Saint John of Damascus speaks of the *paternity of God* Who created man for deification (*On the Orthodox Faith*, 12). In the earliest writings of the Fathers, we see the above words of Saint Paul repeated. When Saint Irenaeus speaks of the *recapitulation (anakephalaiosis)* of Adam in Christ, he is speaking of the whole Adam, not just the soul being restored in Christ. We can think of this as a second creation. Just as the body of our Saviour came from the pure body of the Theotokos, in like manner the body of Adam came from virgin soil: *there was no man to till the earth* (Gen. 2:5). Our Lord suffered bodily death because, through the body, death had gained mastery over man (Saint Irenaeus, *Proof*, 31). In Christ, the whole Adam, body and soul, is recreated, the image is restored, and the likeness is again activated.

It is because of the paternity of God that the whole man, body and soul, knows God. Saint Gregory Palamas, following the words of Saint Paul, *your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you* (I Cor. 6:19) and *ye are the temple of the living God* (II Cor. 6:16), denounced Barlaam's teaching that the soul had to leave the body to come to higher knowledge (*Triads i*, 2:1 ff., *Classics of Western Spirituality*, 1983).

Saint Gregory Palamas defined and formulated the Orthodox teaching that man was created to know God. Starting with the Old Testament, Saint Gregory quotes the Psalmist: *My soul hath thirsted for thee, how often hath my flesh longed after Thee* (Ps. 62:1) and *My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God* (Ps. 83:1-2). He brings together the teachings of Holy Scripture and of the Fathers that man, body and soul, was captive to death, but that no part of man is intrinsically evil and unable to receive the knowledge of God. Drawing extensively from such great ascetics as Saint Macarius the Great, Saint Isaac the Syrian, and Saint Symeon the New Theologian, Saint Gregory shows that our ascetic striving is directed toward bringing the soul and body together in a united struggle against the captivity of sin and death, which hinders man from coming to a full knowledge of God.

The emphasis Saint Gregory places on the necessity that the whole man know God is summarized in the following quotation, in which he criticizes the mystical ecstasy or out-of-body experiences popularized in the West by such post-schismatic Roman saints as John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila: *To make the mind 'go out,' not only from fleshly thoughts, but out of the body itself, with the aim of contemplating intelligible visions — is the greatest of Hellenic [i.e., pagan Greek] errors, the root and source of all heresies, an invention of demons (Triads i, 2:4).*

The Divine Light and What Is Known

We know that God is incomprehensible; this, however, does not mean that He is unknowable. As emphasized above, throughout Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers we are instructed that man was created to come to know God. We will see that there is an essential difference between knowing God and comprehending Him.

Holy Scripture uses the words glory, light, and spirit to signify how God makes Himself known to man:

And the glory of the LORD abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights (Exod. 24:16-18).

Lift up your gates, O ye princes; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting gates; and the King of glory shall enter in. Who is this King of glory? . . . The LORD of hosts. He is the King of glory (Ps. 23:7-10).

It has often been said that the Church has its own language and that the words it uses derive their meaning from the Church. To understand this language, then, one must be within the Church, living the life of the Church and experiencing that which the language describes. This is why the Holy Scriptures are unintelligible to those outside the Church.

The words *light*, *glory*, and *spirit* are used in Holy Scripture extensively and interchangeably to signify *the presence of God*, and *the knowledge of God*. These are their meanings when the Prophet Moses describes the revelation of God on Mount Sinai. The same significance, for example, is attached to these terms in the Gospel descriptions of the Holy Transfiguration and the martyrdom of Saint Stephen in Acts. Likewise, these words form a common thread linking the Old and the New Testament descriptions of knowing or seeing God (*cf.*, Isa. 6:3; Matt. 13:43; Luke 9:31ff; John, 12:41; Acts 7:2; 1 John 10:5; Rev. 22:5). In the words of our Saviour, this glory that is received and seen is God Himself, and it is through this glory that we come to know Him:

The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me. Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me (John 17:22-4).

Saint Paul speaks of knowing God in terms of coming to a knowledge of the glory of God: *Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (II Cor. 4:6). This knowledge of God is limited by our capacity to know, although there is individual progress. That capacity can be described with terms such as *growth, degree, level*. Saint Paul expresses this progress in II Cor. 3:18: *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

Throughout Holy Scripture we find the use of the word *light* to express the knowledge of God. In II Cor. 4:6, Saint Paul speaks about this light: *For God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* Revelation 21:23 refers to our Saviour as the light of the heavenly Jerusalem: *And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.* This will be the fulfilling of the prophecy of Prophet Esaias: *The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory* (Esa. 60:19). The word *shine*, note, fails to convey the powerful image of the Greek verb *lampro*, which denotes an intense flash.

When we read Holy Scripture, it appears that the terms *incomprehensibility of God* and *knowledge of God* are contradictory. These expressions are in fact no more contradictory than the terms *one* and *three* as used to speak of God. Saint Gregory Palamas tells us that, just as God is both one and three, *the divine essence is both incommunicable and, in some sense, communicable* (On Divinity," P.G. 150:932D).

When speaking of the *communicability of God*, Saint Gregory has in mind the Scriptural use of the words *koinonos* and *metobos*. Saint Paul, in I Cor. 10:16-21, uses these words interchangeably in his teaching on the mystery of the communicability of God. The King James translators rendered this

passage as: *For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers (metoboi) of that one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers (koinonoi) of the altar?*

But when these same translators rendered II Peter 1:4 as *that ye might become partakers (Koinonoi) of the divine nature*, they would have done better to render the word *koinonoi* as *communicants*. The semantic difference between the English terms is that *partaking* implies a unilateral action, whereas *communicating* implies a dual operation, in this case between God and man. God communicates His grace, thus making man His fellow and allowing *man* to share in divinity. Thus, in Psalm 44:7 the word *metobos* is correctly translated as *fellows* or *companions, those who share together*. in the Psalmist's words: *Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; wherefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness more than thy fellows (metobos)*. In Heb. 6:4, we find the same usage: *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift and were made fellows (metoboi, sharers) of the Holy Spirit*. The word *koinonos* has the same meaning in many passages (cf. Ps 118:63, Prov. 28:24, Esa. 1:23, Luke 5:7-10, Heb. 3:14,10:33, and I Cor. 1:7).

5

A certain holy Father said: *I will know just as I am known*. And for our part, we can say that knowing God is *knowing that I am known*. These words express the Apostolic belief that, when our Lord uttered the words *I in them (John 17:23)*, He was referring to the reality of union with God. We are, however, unable to be united either to the essence of God or to any of His hypostases, for this would make us gods by nature. This contradiction, which is found throughout Holy Scripture, leads us to believe that in God there exists an ineffable distinction other than that between His essence and His hypostases. This is the distinction between the essence of God and His energies or divine operations, often described as *the sending of the Holy Spirit*. In the words of Saint Gregory Palamas: *The divine and deifying illumination and grace is not the essence but the energy of God (Capita 69, PG 150:1169C)* The knowledge of God, then, is not a comprehension of His essence but rather a communication of His presence. These energies of

God are, as Saint Paul says in Romans 1:19, *those things that can be known of God*. That is, they are that part of God which can be known. The terms *glory* and *light* are used to protect us from falling into the error that God can be known in His essence.

God's presence in His energies must be understood in a literal sense, for these energies are not expressed poetically or symbolically. They are, however, neither created essences nor products of the imagination. The uncreated energies of the Holy Trinity are also called *light unapproachable* (1 Tim. 6:16), that which man may not approach but which God bestows. This is the unapproachable light of Divinity that shone through the humanity of Christ and was bestowed upon the disciples on Mount Tabor. This is the uncreated grace of the Holy Trinity, of which the righteous become participants and *shine forth as the sun* (Matt. 13:43). It is, therefore, through the *uncreated grace of the Holy Trinity* that we come to know God.

Knowledge as Communion

Knowing God means to be a communicant (*koinonos*) of the uncreated light of the Holy Trinity and to share His warmth. Following the tradition of the Fathers, Saint Gregory Palamas uses the imagery of the sun to refer to the light of the Holy Trinity: *As the sun communicates light and warmth without diminution to those who share in it, and possesses light and warmth as its innate and substantial energies, so the divine communications that exist without diminution in Him Who bestows communion, are His natural and essential energies* (Capita 92, PG 150:1189D).

Knowledge of God comes through *sharing* (metohe) in His uncreated grace, says Saint Gregory Palamas in *Triads* i, 3:24. The divine Light is not a mere illumination of the reason, a mere rational apprehension, for this would deprive the word *light* of any real content, making it simply an allegory. In this connection, Saint Gregory defends the patristic use of the term *enhypostatic* in reference to the divine Light in order to emphasize its *real existence* (*Triads* III, 1:9-18). The term *enhypostatic* does not mean that the

uncreated energies of God have their own hypostases, as do the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, for that would change God from a Trinity to a myriad. Rather, enhypostatic is used in contrast to *anhypostatic*, which means *nonexistent*. Being a communicant of this deifying grace transforms us much as a mirror becomes light by reflecting light. The communicant is like the iron that, when put into a fire, becomes fire and yet remains iron.

The grace of God is not static but brings forth a change. The creature becomes *God by grace*. In explaining verse 1:11 of the Song of Songs, which declares: *My spikenard sent forth the odour of Him*, Saint Gregory of Nyssa comments that grace is like a fragrance which reveals the existence of an aromatic substance (*On the Song of Songs, PG 44, 1092CD*). The fragrance is not something other or imaginary, it is real; but it is not the substance itself. Becoming a communicant of this fragrance — that is, of the uncreated energies of God — we not only become aware of the presence of God but we also become that fragrance. For this reason Saint Paul can refer to himself as *the good odour of Christ* (II Cor. 2:15).

As noted above, the communication of the grace of God is often expressed as *the sending of the Holy Spirit*. This reveals not only its divine nature but also its deifying nature, as is seen in John 14:17, where our Lord says: *The Spirit of truth dwelleth with you, and shall be in you*. It is not the hypostasis of the Holy Spirit that is sent into the world to dwell in man but the one grace of the Holy Trinity; from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. This is expressed by Saint Paul: *But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His* (Rom. 8:9). Again, in *Ephesians 6:23*, the Apostle writes: *Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.*

The ability to receive the knowledge of God is limited by the diminished capacity of the image of Christ found in us. But as the image of Christ becomes brighter, our capacity to receive the grace of God is increased.

This can be better understood by examining the spiritual progression of our Lord's disciples. All the disciples, shortly after they were chosen, were given the grace of God to heal all illnesses and to expel demons (*Mark* 3:15). Later the Saviour told His disciples that some of them would see the Kingdom of Heaven coming in power (*Mark* 9:1). That is, some would receive more grace than they previously had.

Immediately following this, at *Mark* 9:2, we see Saints Peter, John, and James chosen to progress in divine knowledge by being present at our Lord's dazzling Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. Even though they now were able to behold our Lord's Divinity, they had not yet been freed from death by Christ's suffering and resurrection and were thus unable to be communicants of the outpouring of uncreated grace to the same extent as they would be at Holy Pentecost. Their spiritual capacity increased as the image of Christ within them became brighter.

Saint Gregory Palamas tells us that the light of Mount Tabor, which he also calls *the light of divine grace* (*Akyndinns*, PG, 150: 816), *is given by measure and admits of a greater or lesser degree, being indivisibly divided according to the merit of those who receive it* (*On the Holy Transfiguration*, PG 151:4488). The grace that the disciples received on Mount Tabor and in the Upper Room was essentially the same. During the Transfiguration of our Lord it was described as light, whereas during Pentecost it was described as the Holy Spirit. The difference between the Holy Transfiguration and Pentecost was the spiritual progression of the disciples from glory to glory.

The events that took place on the road to Emmaus after the Resurrection of our Saviour further illustrate the activity of grace in relation to the intensity of the image

7

of Christ within us. Between Holy Transfiguration and Pentecost our Saviour had destroyed death, and the capacity of the disciples to receive the Kingdom of Heaven had thereby increased. Death and the fear of death no longer limited the capacity of the disciples to bear the knowledge of

God. As the image of Christ became brighter within them, they were transformed from disciples to Apostles. After the Resurrection, while the disciples Luke and Cleopas were walking to Emmaus, our Lord appeared to them but they could not recognize Him. In other words, they received our Saviour but could not see Him.

These two disciples certainly had received divine knowledge before the Resurrection. Now, on the road to Emmaus, their level of this knowledge was increased, for they had our resurrected Saviour conversing with them. The divine knowledge, however, imparted to them at the beginning of this theophany at Emmaus still was not sufficient for them to recognize the grace they bore within them selves. The image of our Saviour in them was not yet of the bright ness needed for them to see the divine light. Their capacity t(receive this knowledge had not yet been reached. Our Lord did no abandon them but remained by their side, leading them to knowledge of God and finally granting them the light that would enable them to see the Light (Ps. 36:9). Finally, their eyes -were opened and they were able not only to recognize our Saviour (*Luke 24:31*) but also to recognize the Kingdom of God that was within their hearts *did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?* (*Luke 24:32*)

Saint Gregory Palamas, following Saint Gregory of Nyssa's explanation of Saint Paul's term *from glory to glory* (II Cor. 3:18) says that *the knowledge of God has a beginning, and something follows on from this beginning, more or less dark or clear; but then is never an end, since its progress is infinite* (*Triads n, 3:35*). The communication of the grace of God is the source of our knowledge of God. Saint Gregory of Nyssa teaches that the growth in the love of God has no end. This contrasts to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the *Beatific Vision*, where all movement stops.

This knowledge can be received by all, since all men were created in the image and likeness of God. To become communicants however, requires us to open our hearts. Saint Gregory Palamas writes: *Even as the light of the*

sun is inseparable from the sun's ray or from the warmth which it carries, yet, for those who receive them, if they be blind, the light will remain uncommunicated and they will receive only the warmth of the ray, since it is quite impossible for those who are eyeless to receive light (Capita 94, PG 150:1188CD).

When we read about the knowledge of God in the Holy Fathers it quickly becomes evident that the theological nature of their writings is the fruit of their life in Christ. What they teach is born from their spiritual labors. Theology is not a product of any school of philosophy, it is the fruit of asceticism. This explains why we find interwoven with the Fathers' teachings on the knowledge of God step-by-step instruction on the struggle enabling us to receive God.

In the Patristic writings there is no evidence of the typically Western, depersonalizing, ecstatic state, where human consciousness is lost in the contemplation of an impersonal divinity. The Fathers follow the same literalness that we find in Prophet Job:

I know that my Redeemer liveth and at the last day He will restore this skin, which is fallen into corruption, and in my flesh shall I see God. I shall see Him/ or myself, my own eyes and not those of another will see Him (Job 19:25-27). I have heard the report of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye hath seen Thee (Job 42:5).

As we saw in Emmaus, there are many degrees of seeing and hearing God. In each of them we behold God informing man and man responding.

All the Fathers affirm that all men may reach the knowledge of God through the Holy Mysteries and the keeping of the commandments of God. Saint Cyril of Alexandria teaches: *Perfect knowledge of Christ is obtained by Baptism and the Illumination of the Holy Spirit (On Exodus, n)*. The body is not evil, but the sinful desires that have enslaved it are evil. By Baptism, the image of God that had been obscured by sin is restored, and by keeping the commandments, man is illuminated by the Holy Spirit and become; Christ-like. The grace of God becomes part of us as it strengthens our

struggle to make this transformation. When Saint Gregory Palamas teaches that the flesh is not evil but what dwells in it is and that the flesh also partakes of grace (*Triads* i, 2:1), he is following Saint Paul's teaching on *the law of sin* (Rom. 7:23).

Augustine of Hippo believed that man was depraved and therefore could not respond to the grace of God; and over time, this notion permeated Western religious thought. This teaching was opposed by Saint John Cassian and many other contemporary Orthodox ecclesiastical writers in Gaul, who taught that man receives the grace of God and responds to it. This path will lead many to *see* this grace while they are still in the body. Knowledge of God is granted not only to those who have reached greatly advanced spiritual levels. Rather, it is the fruit of keeping the commandment of God that leads towards *impassivity*. According to Saint Gregory Palamas, impassivity is not a mere mortification of the physical passions but the attaining of new and habitual energy or condition. The body shares in the soul's life of grace not only in the world to come but even now. *If then the body is to share with the soul in those good things no tongue can name, there can be no doubt that it will share in them now according to its possibilities . . . and it will experience the Divine once the passions of the soul in accord with the body have been changed and sanctified, though not deadened* (PG 150:1233C).

This uncreated divine light, immaterial and suprasensible as it is, does not always remain a merely inward *divine illumination mysteriously and unutterably communicated* (*Homilies*, K. Sophocles 176-77). In many cases, the knowledge of God does remain unperceived, but in other cases it becomes, so to say, an objective apparition, acquiring some of the properties of visible light. Without changing nature and becoming physical, it can manifest itself. We have many examples of this. The radiance of this light on the face of the protomartyr Stephen was unbearable to the Jews who looked on it. The same uncreated light dazzled Saint Paul on the way to Damascus. On that occasion its action, despite its immaterial nature, blinded his bodily eyes and was seen by some of those present.

Theodoret describes the experience of an ascetic who looked out his window and saw a light *not of a lamp or of man's making but God-given* (PG 82:1328BC). This same thought is found in Saint Gregory Palamas. He refers to the Old Testament usage of the term *the glory of God: When Adam before the fall was sharer in this divine illumination and radiance, he was not naked but was in very truth clothed in raiment of glory* (PG 150:220A). He also refers to *the light which shone from the face of Moses, whose glory the children of Israel could not behold* (*ibid.*, 1168D). This knowledge of God described as vision of the divine light is also depicted in Nicholas Motovilov's *Conversation with Saint Seraphim* (Trans. Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston).

Saint Gregory Palamas explains that the eyes of the Apostles were transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit at the time of the Holy Transfiguration. *The light of the Transfiguration of our Lord neither comes into being nor ceases to be and cannot be circumscribed by or subjected to any power of sense, even if it has become visible to the bodily eyes . . . but through a changing of the senses, the Lord's initiates passed over at that moment from the flesh to the spirit* (*On the Transfiguration*, PG 151:429A and 433B).

That great mystery known as *coming to the knowledge of God* is the basis of our existence as Christians. It is the goal of all Christian instruction. This is why the Church exists. As Saint Gregory Palamas says: *This is why we set ourselves against the 'law of sin,' and drive it out of the body, installing in its place the oversight of the mind, and in this way establishing a law appropriate to each power of the soul, and for every member of the body, for the senses we ordain the object and limit of their scope, this work of the law being called 'temperance.' In the affective part of the soul, we bring about the best state, which bears the name 'love.' And we improve the rational part by rejecting all that impedes the mind from elevating itself towards God. This part of the law we call 'sobriety'. He who has purified his body by temperance, who by divine love has made an occasion of virtue from his wishes and desires, who has presented to God a mind purified by prayer, acquires and sees in himself the grace promised"* (*Triads* 1, 2:1).