

Love of Good

Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios

A translation of the Preface to Adhyatma Premam (Philokalia) in Malayalam

(Philokalia, the theology classic of Athos, was originally written in Greek and then translated to Russian with the name Dobrotoliubiye. This was then translated to English by a few monks. Sidhinathananda Swamiji of Sree Rama Krishna Seva Ashram translated selected portions of it into Malayalam. Rev. Francis Acharya of Kurisumala Ashram published it in the name of Adhyatmika Premam. Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios wrote a thought-provoking preface to this. Here is Gregorios Thirumeni's preface translated into English. To understand the philosophical genius of Gregorios Thirumeni, in this regard, one has to study not only the preface and full volumes of the Philokalia, but also the Vedantas and Christianity itself.)

Love the good! Nothing can be more important than this for the human beings!

But it is not that easy as it sounds. First of all, we should be able to identify the good. This ability is a special God-given gift to man. However, unless it is developed by training and meditation, this capacity won't be useful to us. Most of us fail to learn even from our own experiences that many things that appear good are really not good. Money, tasty food, alcoholic drink--all these appear good to us, but not permanently.

Unfortunately many people have the tendency to love the evil even after realizing what is good. One becomes a real lover of good (satpremi) only when he/she also develops the will power to seek the good he/she has realized. We consider such people as sidhas and saints.

How to gain the power to reject the evil and to love the good was the focus of the thought of our ancient Christian Fathers. Several good-lovers tried to compile the thoughts and sayings of the fathers related to this. Such a collection by Saint Mar Baselios (Asya in the 4th century) was named Philokalia . This is the word in Greek for "love of good" (satpremam). It was a prominent activity of the early Christian monks to collect and meditate the sayings of St. Anthonios and other such saintly monks.

This activity became stronger after the 10th century in the monasteries in Mount Athos. The slavs (Modern Russians, Yugoslavians, Bulgarians etc.) who were even more pious than the Greeks created many such compilations. Dobrotoliubiye is the word in the ancient slavonic language for Philokalia. Two such compilations have been translated from Russian to English.

The Greek Philokalia was discovered and compiled by St. Makarios of Corinth and St. Nikodimos of Athos in 1792. The Russian monk called Theophan, the Recluse, compiled the Russian one in the name of Dobrotoliubiye in 1877.

Prayer and meditation are given focus in both. Although both contain the sayings of the Christian monks of fourth to eleventh centuries, contents vary considerably. What Sidhinadhanandaji has translated here expertly from English to Malayalam is portions from the Russian one compiled by Theophan, the Recluse.

That most of the teachings of the Christian ascetics are acceptable to the Hindu ascetics should make us think. God-realization or unity with God due to God's grace as well as man's devotion is what all ascetics seek. That is why these sayings appeal to us Indians (both Christians and Hindus) even though it has reached us from Greek through Russian and then English. Sidhinadhanandaji has made a unique contribution to the spiritual tradition of Malayalam by this translation.

The philokalia compilations by the two Greek monks in 1792 was based on the compilations of Nicophorus, a monk who lived in 14th century. Nicophorus followed and taught a special way of silent meditation--a way to realize God with prayer from both the mind and the heart together.

A number of expressions and concepts in Christian thought could be unfamiliar to our Hindu friends. The idea of Satan as the enemy of good, and the idea of sacraments as the means to attain God realization--both of these are central in the thought of the Christian ascetics. It seems that Sidhinadhanandaji has attempted either to minimize or to avoid such ideas in this translation. This is quite natural for a Hindu monk to do this. However, a faithful translation of places where such ideas occur in the next edition will help us understand the original work better.

The Malayalee good-lovers are greatly indebted to Sidhinadhanandaji for this invaluable contribution. Earlier he translated The Way of the Pilgrim for us. Now he has given us an even more sublime work from the Christian spiritual treasures. I sincerely pray that God grant him enough health and spiritual liveliness to make many more similar contributions to Malayalam spiritual literature.

Many of the fathers mentioned here in this book are not in the accepted tradition of the Indian Orthodox Church. Fathers like Anthonios, Makarios, Markos, and Evagrios lived before fifth century, and were commonly accepted by the universal church. However, Fathers like Nikophorus, Gregorios of Sinai, and Calisthose (all in 14th century) are not accepted by the oriental Orthodox Churches. That does not mean that their teachings are inferior or unacceptable.

The teaching of the ascetic fathers of our ancient Eastern Church can be very beneficial to the monks of this age. The peculiarity of this specific tradition is internal silence. It is similar to the Zen Buddhist search for wisdom.

By calming down the thrust of the waves of our inner thoughts and emotions and by achieving the internal purity and holiness like the surface of the still water and like a mirror, man reaches God's presence -- this is the basic idea of the silent monasticism of Hesychia. Silence is the beginning of the purification of the soul; the ultimate aim of silence is peace from all mental disturbances. Freedom from all objects, unceasing and untiring meditation, internal liveliness that no one can steal-- these three are the main constituents of the silent meditation.

Not only should one stop talking with mouth, but he must also stop the internal conversation of thinking. The mind has to become transparent like a clean glass and the heart has to become spotless like a mirror. The inner being must meditate the name of Jesus. There should not be any worry or anxiety. There should not be any want. All emotions have to be controlled by the soul. Peace, love, and prayer have to be found in harmony in a monk.

The Hesychast movement, or the monasticism in silence, opened an angry exchange of words between the Greek Orthodox and the Latin Catholics in the 14th century European Church. Later on the Latinos ridiculed this monasticism by calling it quietism. If someone wishes to attain fullness he has to discard his will-power, achieve complete inactiveness, fully eliminate I-ness, surrender everything to God, not even wish for heaven or hell, not long for good or evil, attain not only non-desire, but also non-action and immerse himself in love of God, presence of God and activities of God -- this theory is called quietism. In 1687, the Pope of Rome, Innocent 11, banned this movement with an official declaration.

As far as spirituality, whether Eastern or Western, is concerned, here we face an issue which should be of special concern to those who long for serving God, whether they are Hindus, Moslems, Buddhists or Christians. If I attain fullness, all other problems will be automatically solved -- this way of thinking is found in Vedantas as interpreted by Sri Sankaracharya.

Om Purnamadah purnamidam
Purnath purnamudachyathe
Purnasya purnamadaya
Purnamevavashishyathe.

According to the teaching of Sankara, since the cause for all miseries is awareness of plurality, the problem is only at the level of consciousness and when the knowledge Aham Brahmasmi (I am Brahman) arises in the consciousness, all other problems, as far as an emancipated soul is

concerned, will vanish by themselves. It is difficult to keep Sankara's teaching along with the Sarvodaya or Anthyodaya teachings which say that the uplifting of all en masse to prosperity is good.

The Christian traditional approach is that these two are equally necessary. Christ, the Lord, prayed the whole night silently, but from sunrise to sunset he worked hard, fed the poor, healed the sick, and taught the ignorant. He taught his disciples also the same thing.

These two must happen in the Church, which is the body of Christ. There should be silent meditations and unceasing prayers on one side and untiring service to humanity on the other side. In the Church, which is the body of Christ, some people are called specially for the service of prayers and some people are called for serving the human needs. But definitely it is not a division of labor. It does not mean that those who are giving importance to prayers need not do any human service. It is also not taught that those who are giving importance to human service need not pray.

The example for Christians is only Christ himself. Prayer and human service has to work like the two hands of a person. St. Paul, the Apostle, says that there is no use for your prayer and service if there is no love.

In the Hesychast movement, much importance is given to love. This can be found in the book *Philokalia*. There is no doubt that the Hesychast movement, which was developed by the monks of the holy mountains of Athos, had shown the path to the realization or awareness of God. The inner spirit of this movement is very close to that of the teaching of Sankara's Vedanta. But, in today's India, it is doubtful whether the teaching of Sankara of 8th century and the teaching of Athos monks of 14th century can be adopted as such.

What is behind this doubt is the same question which was asked by Pilate, "What is TRUTH?" According to the definition of Sankara's Vedanta, truth is that which does not undergo change in subsequent experiences. If anything that is changing is not truth, then the universe and history as a whole can become false.

Sankara's Vedanta tries to solve this issue by distinguishing the transcendental reality (Paramarthika satta) and phenomenal reality (vyavaharika satta). But if the Brahman which is the transcendental reality, only appears as phenomenal reality because of the projection of the cosmic power of illusion (mayavikshepam) and the veil of ignorance (avidyavaranam), then history, time, and the world as a whole turns out to be false. Because once Maya and Avidya (ignorance) are removed, nothing of these will be found.

More or less, this is the basic idea of Hesychasm or monasticism of silence. Now in every

religion the biggest question facing spirituality is to connect the transcendental reality (paramarthika satta) and the phenomenal reality (vyavaharika satta) to the truth, and to mutually connect the temporal and permanent truths. A religion which doesn't have any such mutual connection can mislead people.

Let this book lead to good discussions and prayerful meditations in this regard.

Translation from Malayalam to English: Dr. Cherian Eapen & John Kunnathu