



PRAYER AND VIGILANCE: A BIBLICAL AND *PHILOKALIAN* APPROACH TO THE RENEWAL AND PROTECTION OF THE *NOUS*

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Abstract: *This article examines the biblical and Philokalian approach to renewing and protecting the nous or intellect (Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:17), proposing that prayer and nepsis (vigilance) are essential strategies for mitigating the influence of logismoi and passions. Analysis reveals that these practices are vital in cultivating authentic Christian spirituality. The Philokalia invites a reevaluation of spiritual perspectives, offering a novel framework that integrates an investigative tool, therapeutic technique, and theoretical insights into the human mind. This study highlights how these ancient practices can be adapted to modern psychotherapeutic interventions, providing a transformative approach to revitalizing our nous faculties. The findings underscore the relevance of the Philokalia in contemporary spiritual and psychological contexts, introducing innovative methods for addressing spiritual and emotional challenges in today's world. This article aims to bridge ancient spiritual wisdom with contemporary therapeutic practices, offering new insights and practical applications for enhancing mental and spiritual well-being.*

Keywords: *Philokalia, Nepsis, Nous, Logismoi, Prayer, Vigilance, Passion, Heart*

INTRODUCTION

Spirituality should not be conflated with mere contemplation of spirituality; rather, it entails the state of being imbued with the Holy Spirit, the third divine person within the Trinity. The augmentation of one's spiritual fortitude is solely achievable via the benevolence of Christ, while the Holy Spirit serves as the wellspring of an individual's spiritual vitality. In contemporary society, there is a pressing need to shed light on spirituality, as several unclean and malevolent spiritual entities are actively seeking to occupy the emptiness within individuals. Numerous literary works on spirituality emerged during the New Age Movement, a cultural phenomenon emphasizing angelic beings and the cultivation of an individualized connection with the divine. However, it is worth noting that certain individuals acquire knowledge of occult techniques that have resemblance to Christian teachings, yet are associated with malevolent entities.

During the period spanning from the fourth to the fifteenth century, a collection of writings known as the *Philokalia* was authored by spiritual leaders within the Orthodox Christian tradition. This compilation is widely regarded as a significant work of spiritual literature. In the year 1782, a publication was produced and published in Venice by two Greek monks, namely Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain of Athos and Makarios of Corinth. From 1957 through 1963, the Astir Publishing Company in Athens published a third edition consisting of five volumes. The present study makes use of the English translation of the third edition, which was produced by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware.¹

Recent discussions on spirituality and mental health have highlighted

practices such as mindfulness and meditation, which focus on mental well-being and self-awareness.² The *Philokalia* offers an alternative and complementary approach by emphasizing prayer and *nepsis* (vigilance) as means to cultivate spirituality and protect the *nous*. The *Philokalia* serves as a source of inspiration for anyone seeking to cultivate spirituality through the process of cleansing, illuminating, and polishing the intellect, ultimately leading to the attainment of a state of heightened alertness associated with holiness.³

The *Philokalia* is a revered institution dedicated to the practice of internal worship, whereby students are encouraged to advance in their faith, nurture their spiritual growth, and assess their relationship with the divine. The aforementioned source highlights the

² See Salicru, S. (2022). "Spirituality and Its Contribution to Mental Health". *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from [Psychology Today] (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/psychology-insights-new-world/202208/spirituality-and-its-contribution-mental-health>).

Jana Dubey, R., Ghosh, R., Das, G., Roy, S., Das, S., Chatterjee, S., & Benito-León, J. (2024). "Beyond Belief and Practice: An Exploratory Literature Review and Discussion of the Differential Impact of Spirituality and Religiosity on Mental Health Disorders". *Journal of Religion and Health*. Retrieved from [Springer] (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10943-024-02090-39>).

Fetzer Institute. (2024). "Study: Spirituality boosts mental health during isolation and despair". *Religion News Service*. Retrieved from [Religion News Service] (<https://religionnews.com/2024/02/study-spirituality-boosts-mental-health-during-isolation-and-despair/>).

Frontiers in Psychology. (n.d.). "Spirituality and Religion: Implications for Mental Health". Retrieved from Frontiers in Psychology. Cornell University. (n.d.). "Spirituality Can Help Protect Mental Health". Retrieved from Cornell University.

³ Kallistos Ware, "St. Nikodimos and the *Philokalia*." In *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, ed. Brock Bingaman and Bradley Nassif (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹ St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain & St. Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume 1*, ed. Kallistos Ware G.E.H. Palamer, Philip Sherrard (London: Faber and Faber, 1979).

significance of internal processes, such as the cleansing of one's thoughts and emotions, in order to facilitate the purification of the external aspects.⁴ The founders of *Philokalia* placed their emphasis on the revitalization and protection of the intellect, referred to as *nous*, as a crucial element in the process of spiritual rejuvenation. The *nous* is considered the most elevated cognitive faculty in human beings, enabling them to attain knowledge of God, as well as comprehend the essential essences and fundamental principles of created entities through direct apprehension or spiritual perception. The concept in question resides inside the profound recesses of the human psyche and represents the most intrinsic facet of one's emotional core. The term "*nous*" refers to the faculty of reflection, sometimes described as the "eye of the heart."

The authors whose literary works are encompassed under the *Philokalia* are frequently referred to as the "*Nepsis* Fathers" due to their notable emphasis on vigilance and mindfulness in the realm of spiritual existence. The *Philokalia* posits that *nepsis*, which encompasses alertness, watchfulness, and attention, is a key aspect of *theosis*.⁵ *Nepsis* is considered to be the most essential form of inner effort. The concept of spirituality in the *Philokalia* centers on the principles of *nepsis* and *nous*, which pertain to the practice of self-awareness and the cultivation of the intellect, respectively.

This paper aims to analyze the topic of renewing and protecting the *nous* as presented in the *Philokalia*. What is the authentic procedure for the renewal of the *nous*? Furthermore, what measures may be taken to safeguard the intellect with the aim of rejuvenating our

intrinsic human qualities? This paper aims to address the aforementioned inquiries, offering insights into the application of *Philokalian* practices in contemporary spiritual and mental health contexts.

RESEARCH METHODS

The methodology for this study employs a qualitative approach, focusing on a detailed textual analysis of the *Philokalia* and relevant New Testament passages. The first step involves the selection of texts from the *Philokalia* that specifically address the themes of *nous* renewal and protection. This includes writings from key *Philokalian* authors such as Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain of Athos and Makarios of Corinth, among others. These texts are chosen based on their direct relevance to the topics of prayer, *nepsis*, and the *nous*, as well as their potential to provide comprehensive insights into spiritual rejuvenation.

The next phase is the textual analysis, where selected texts will be closely read to extract themes and teachings related to the *nous*. This involves identifying key concepts, metaphors, and practices recommended by the *Philokalian* fathers. Concurrently, relevant New Testament passages will be analyzed to identify corroborating or complementary spiritual principles. This comparative analysis aims to synthesize a unified understanding of the renewal and protection of the *nous*, highlighting commonalities and differences between the *Philokalia* and New Testament teachings.

In the interpretation and synthesis stage, the findings from the textual analysis will be compared and contrasted to highlight their significance. The analysis will also consider the historical and cultural context of the texts, assessing how these teachings can be applied to contemporary spiritual practice. By integrating these insights, the study seeks to develop a therapeutic framework that incorporates the

⁴ Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume 1*.

⁵ Anthony M. Coniaris, *Confronting and Controlling Thoughts: According to the Fathers of the Philokalia* (Minneapolis: Light & Life Publishing Company, 2004).

principles of prayer and *nepsis*. This framework aims to offer practical strategies for modern spiritual and psychological practice.

Finally, the applicability of the *Philokalian* teachings in today's context will be evaluated, proposing adaptations where necessary to enhance their relevance and effectiveness. This methodological approach ensures that the analysis is thorough, systematic, and relevant to both historical and modern contexts. By following this methodology, the study aims to provide a comprehensive elucidation of the renewal and protection of the *nous*, offering insights that can be readily applied in contemporary spiritual and mental health practices.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section has been structured with clearer subheadings to guide the reader through the main findings and insights from the analysis of the *Philokalia* texts. The aim is to explain how these insights contribute to understanding spiritual renewal and potential practical applications.

Renewal of the *Nous*

The concept of *nous* in the *Philokalia* is deeply rooted in the Pauline Epistles (see Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:17) and continued to the Eastern Orthodox theology. This includes the belief that humans are created in the image and likeness of God, inherently capable of knowing and communing with Him. The renewal of the *nous* is seen as a return to this original state of purity and divine connection. The *nous* is understood as the highest faculty of the human soul. It enables direct, experiential knowledge of God, transcending rational thought to engage in a form of knowing that is deeply intuitive and contemplative. Unlike intellect, which is associated with logical reasoning, the *nous* involves the entire being, integrating mind, heart, and

soul.⁶ The *nous* allows for an immediate and personal connection with the Divine. This connection is not mediated by intellectual reasoning but by a direct, intuitive perception of divine truths. The *nous* is often referred to as the "eye of the heart" or the spiritual faculty that perceives divine realities.⁷ This perception is akin to a spiritual sense, allowing one to experience God's presence directly.

In the *Philokalia*, the renewal of the *nous* is a dynamic and ongoing process, beginning with baptism, which symbolizes the initial purification and enlightenment of the soul. However, this initial transformation must be continually nurtured through practices such as prayer and vigilance (*nepsis*). These practices help to guard the *nous* from distractions and corruptions, maintaining its focus on the divine.

Baptism is seen as the gateway to spiritual rebirth, but it is through persistent spiritual practices that the *nous* is continuously renewed and aligned with divine truth.⁸ This process involves a constant return to a state of purity and openness to God's presence. The *nous* must be kept free from the influence of *logismoi*, which are the evil thoughts and temptations that can cloud and divert it from its true purpose.

Logismoi and Passions

Evil thoughts, known as *logismoi kakoi* in Greek, refer to cognitive processes that are either divinely inspired or influenced by demonic

⁶ Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain and Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text Volume 1*, ed. translated by G. E. H. Palmer; Philip Sherrard; and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 300.

⁷ Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain and Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text Volume 1*, ed. translated by G. E. H. Palmer; Philip Sherrard; and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 300.

⁸ Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, ed. Archimandrite Jerome (Newville) and Otilia Kloos (South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary Press, 2002).

forces. *Logismoi* can be seen as a cognitive representation that exists inside the realm that lies between imagination and abstraction. *Epithumia sarkos* refers to the inclination towards carnal desires, which arises from malevolent cogitations and the innate passionate disposition of the human body. Another term for this concept is *pathos*. *Pathos* refers to a profound emotional state or desire that has a dominant influence over the human psyche. The passions are regarded as intrinsically malevolent by many Greek Fathers, who perceive them as a malady afflicting the soul.

According to the perspective of the Greek Fathers, passions are regarded as innate human impulses bestowed by God, possessing inherent goodness, despite their present state of corruption due to sin. These impulses should be educated rather than eliminated, modified rather than suppressed, and employed in a constructive manner rather than in a detrimental way.⁹ If these *fronema* and *logismoi* are subject to the influence of the physical body or *sarkos*, they give rise to *epithumia sarkos*, which refers to the need for physical desires. When this desire is indulged and fulfilled, it can lead to the manifestation of sinful actions or behaviors that are driven by the pursuit of fleshly desires. The renewal of the *nous* is essential in counteracting these influences, guiding the heart and mind back towards divine alignment and holistic spiritual health.

Nous in the heart: renewing the new human

The *nous* is intricately connected to the heart in *Philokalian* spirituality. The heart is seen as the seat of both emotional and spiritual life, and the *nous*, as the "eye of the heart," guides and enlightens it. The renewal of the

nous, therefore, involves a holistic transformation that encompasses both the mind and the heart. This transformation is facilitated by the practices of prayer and vigilance, which help to align all aspects of one's being with divine truth.¹⁰ Prominent early Christian figures, such as Mark the Ascetic, stress the importance of taking responsibility for one's thoughts and actions. They argue that physical actions leading to sin are merely the outward expressions of inner decisions made by the *nous*.¹¹ Thus, the renewal of the *nous* is crucial for genuine spiritual growth and moral integrity. This renewal of the *nous* is not just about personal transformation; it is integrally linked to the concept of *theosis*.

Theosis

Theosis, or divinization, is the process by which humans become partakers of the divine nature.¹² This involves a synergistic effort where individuals actively collaborate with divine grace to achieve spiritual renewal. The renewal of the *nous* is a key aspect of *theosis*, requiring both divine initiative and human participation.¹³ Through prayer and vigilance, individuals can cultivate a Christ-like intellect and spiritual disposition, aligning their entire being with the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul exhorted the members of the Philippians' Church to engage in the practice of contemplation, specifically focusing their thoughts on concepts characterized by authenticity, nobility, justice, purity, aesthetic appeal, and commendation. *Logizomai* is

¹⁰ Hendi Hendi et al., "Personhood in Biblical and Patristic Thought A Journey from Natural to Spiritual Man," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 23, no. 1 (2024): 614, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol23.iss2.art4>.

¹¹ Hierotheos S Vlachos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, ed. Esther Williams (Levadia: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1994).

¹² Vladimir Lossky, "The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church," Cambridge: James Clarke & Co (2005).

¹³ Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*.

⁹ John the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, ed. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (London: SPCK, 1982).

believed to exhibit compatibility with the Holy Spirit, and the state of *fronema pneumatosis* is generated by the use of *fronew* in relation to things pertaining to the Holy Spirit. *Epithumia pneumatosis* refers to the passionate inclination of the Spirit, while the fruit of the Spirit encompasses qualities such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.¹⁴

The battleground of the *Nous*

The faculties of reason and self-control are crucial in combating irrational thoughts and the impulses of the physical body. In his writings, John Cassian elucidates the manner in which demons assail the cognitive faculties and affective states of individuals, employing a metaphorical framework derived from the domain of warfare.¹⁵ Conversely, Gregory of Sinai expounds upon the concept of engaging in a spiritual battle on behalf of the divine inside the realm of the *nous*.¹⁶ According to Origen, the renowned theologian, it is asserted that shameful feelings find their roots in the presence of negative thoughts, commonly referred to as *logismoi*.¹⁷ Origen further expressed the necessity of eliminating these distressing thoughts by metaphorically severing the brush of evil ideas that plagued his mind.¹⁸

According to the Church fathers of the *Philokalia*, the concept of *nous* serves as a metaphorical battleground whereby individuals initially confront the presence of sin. According to psychologists, the human mind is responsible for regulating various cognitive processes such as emotions,

consciousness, free will, and mental faculties.¹⁹ It is believed that in instances where individuals fail to maintain control over these processes, there is a potential for negative influences, such as the potential for external forces to exert control over their physical bodies. Satan possesses considerable spiritual might, although his capacity to inflict harm upon individuals is limited to the assault on our *nous*, the one aspect of our being that falls within his grasp. The significance of this matter cannot be overstated for those engaged in the pursuit of virtue, truth, and holiness.

According to the teachings of Mark the Ascetic and other prominent figures in the early Christian church, individuals are advised against attributing their immoral actions only to their physical bodies, as these actions are sometimes influenced by the presence of sexual hormones that give rise to desires.²⁰ Alternatively, it is suggested that individuals direct their accountability towards their conscience, as the physical actions leading to transgression would not have been executed had the mind not initiated them. The concept of the mind, referred to as *nous* and *fronew*, has been described as a battleground. The internal cognitive deliberation within an individual's mind is the decisive factor in determining the outcome of conflicts.

The Apostle Paul exhorted the members of the Philippians' Church to engage in the practice of contemplation, specifically focusing their thoughts on concepts that are characterized by authenticity, nobility, justice, purity, aesthetic appeal, and commendation. It is believed that *logizomai* exhibits compatibility with the Holy Spirit, and the state of *fronema pneumatosis* is generated by the use of *fronew* in

¹⁴ Hendi et al., "Personhood in Biblical and Patristic Thought A Journey from Natural to Spiritual Man." 630.

¹⁵ Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.

¹⁶ Anthony M. Coniaris, *Confronting and Controlling Thoughts: According to the Fathers of the Philokalia*, 50.

¹⁷ Coniaris.

¹⁸ Coniaris.

¹⁹ Anthony M. Coniaris, *Confronting and Controlling Thoughts: According to the Fathers of the Philokalia*, 55.

²⁰ Vlachos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy*.

relation to things pertaining to the Holy Spirit.²¹ *Epithumia pneumatos* refers to the passionate inclination of the Spirit, whereas the fruit of the Spirit encompasses qualities such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Vlachos asserts that no existing statute proscribes these actions.²² The cultivation of the fruit of the Spirit presents a number of challenges, largely due to the inherent characteristics of the human psyche. In order to achieve this objective, it is essential to engage in the process of crucifying the body, relinquishing any associated desires, *epithumia*, or *pathema*, as articulated by the Apostle Paul in his writings (Gal. 5:24). The act of crucifying the body and its associated desires enables the generation of Christ's cognitive faculties, which are known as *fronew*. This process is accompanied by the formation of *fronema pneumatos* and *logismo pneumatos*. The notion of 'epithumia pneumatos' signifies the evolution of 'karpos pneumatos', which denotes the metamorphosing process of harmonising our nascent identities with the attributes of Christ.

Coniaris posits that the concept of being an adult in Christ entails the relinquishment of the negative aspects associated with childhood. In order to achieve complete spiritual development as a Christian, it is necessary to attain a level of maturity that is equivalent to that of Christ. The lifelong process is facilitated by the Holy Spirit through the consistent practice of repentance and the maintenance of trust in baptism. An individual who has attained spiritual maturity within the Christian faith does not actively pursue love; rather, they assume the role of a provider of love. The individual demonstrates comprehension, exhibits forgiveness, assumes accountability, engages in self-regulation, displays humility, and

acknowledges their inherent dependence on a higher power. In his writings, the Apostle Paul asserts that love is a fundamental element of both personal growth and spiritual development. According to Paul, achieving a state of godly maturity involves embracing the indwelling presence of the Holy Trinity within oneself.²³

The role of prayer and vigilance

The *Philokalia* provides various strategies for mitigating the influence of *logismo* and passions, emphasizing the importance of prayer and vigilance. Prayer is a means of opening oneself to divine grace, while *nepsis* (vigilance) involves maintaining a constant state of spiritual alertness. These practices are essential for the renewal and protection of the *nous*, helping individuals maintain spiritual purity and alignment with divine truth.

The Protection of *Nous*

To foster spiritual growth in Christ and facilitate the renewal of our brains, it is advisable to maintain vigilant introspection and engage in prayer. The importance of *nepsis* and prayer was emphasized by the *Philokalia* Fathers, who saw them as the rulers of our inner world and the guides and leaders of our intellect. Prayer serves as a spiritual guide, imparting the teachings of Christ to our innermost being, including both the heart and the mind. It is imperative that one's focus and devotion to prayer be as integral to their spiritual practice as the inseparable connection between the body and the soul. According to Vlachos, in order to effectively eliminate and erase negative concepts, it is imperative that prayer be coupled with attention, as attention alone is insufficient for this purpose.²⁴

Jesus instructed His disciples on the need of cultivating inner attention, also known as *nepsis*, which served as a

²¹ Vlachos.

²² Vlachos.

²³ Vlachos.

²⁴ Vlachos.

recurring subject of discussion among His followers. The individual expressed that the designated day of the Lord has started, and His arrival will be unforeseen, like to a robber appearing during the nighttime. However, He will also come in the role of the bridegroom, symbolizing a profound connection with our innermost beings. Additionally, the speaker underscored the need of maintaining attention and attentiveness, as these qualities prevent malevolent ideas from overpowering one's inner being and facilitate the ability to focus on the core objective. In Coniaris's interpretation, the sentry represents the vigilant guardian stationed over the inner Jerusalem, symbolising the alertness of the intellect. The concept of watchfulness implies a focus on the divine, while the hegemonikon, also known as the intellect or *nous*, serves as a protector of the spiritual realm.²⁵ The sacrament of holy baptism places emphasis on the divine force of God. In the teachings of Jesus, he metaphorically referred to the mind as the "eye" of the soul, suggesting that when the mind is unified and focused, it brings about a radiant transformation in the body. Coniaris posits that if the sight is morally corrupt, it will engender a pervasive sense of darkness and despair within the body. Jesus espoused the notion that the practices of prayer and mindfulness are intrinsically interconnected. He asserted that the efficacy of prayer is contingent upon the infusion of divine strength. Furthermore, he proposed that the concept of *prosoche*, which refers to the act of paying attention, might be seen as the fundamental basis for the practice of *proseuche*, which pertains to prayer.²⁶ In his teachings, Jesus placed great emphasis on the interconnectedness of awareness and prayer in the spiritual

struggle against impure thoughts and demonic forces. Prayer is not merely a conduit for benefit; rather, it is an arduous undertaking that necessitates attentiveness, vigilance, and discernment, as evidenced in Proverbs 4:23.

The idea of *nepsis* involves protection the heart and *nous* against the influence of *logismoi*. According to Saint Isaiah the Solitary, it is imperative for an individual to exercise vigilance over their heart, like to a farmer who cannot be assured of a successful harvest until it is securely stored in the granary. According to Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, it is imperative for an individual to continuously engage in prayer to seek assistance and grace from God for as long as they are alive.²⁷ What is the significance of the heart? The figure often referred to as Satan persistently presents us with temptations (*peirasmos*), and these temptations have a profound influence on our emotions and desires (Acts 5:3; 1 Pet. 5:8; Eph. 6:11), resulting in the emergence of malevolent ideas (*logismoi*) from within our minds (Mrk. 7:21; Matt. 15:19). Isaiah the Solitary posits that it is prudent to remain watchful of one's adversaries and to exercise restraint in matters pertaining to one's emotions. It is a commonly held view that engaging in immoral actions does not yield positive outcomes. In a statement regarded as a cautionary advice, the figure known as Our Savior urged the maintenance of a state of alertness. As documented in the Gospel According to Matthew 7:14, this pronouncement underscores the arduous nature of the path that leads to a meaningful and fulfilling existence. The passage implies that only a select few are capable of identifying and navigating this path.²⁸

²⁵Coniaris, *Confronting and Controlling Thoughts: According to the Fathers of the Philokalia*.

²⁶Coniaris.

²⁷Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume 1*.

²⁸St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain & St. Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume 3*, ed. and Kallistos Ware G. E. H. Palmer Philip Sherrard, *Faber & Faber*
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The *logismoi* are an integral component of the intellectual faculty known as *nous*. The malevolent thought process described below has the potential to incite one's inclination towards want or passion, commonly referred to as *epithumia*.²⁹ Should this inclination be permitted to progress unchecked, it will inevitably culminate in the engagement in sinful behavior, as elucidated in the book of James 1:14-15. The eradication of malevolent ideas can be achieved via the practice of alertness, engaging in prayer (particularly the Jesus Prayer), studying sacred texts, and reciting the Psalms.

How do we preserve our hearts? Protecting our *nous* is the same as defending our emotions. Isaiah the Solitary states that when the intellect develops, it prepares to seek the love that quenches all physical passions and prevents anything opposed to nature from taking over the heart. The intellect then distinguishes what is against nature from what is in agreement with nature by battling against what is against nature.³⁰ Only prayer and *nepsis* were capable of protecting our *nous*.

The holistic person coalesces inside a deep cognitive center. It is imperative that the focus remains fixed on Jesus. The concept of sincere prayer entails the act of being fully engaged and attentive to the presence of Christ. The cultivation of inner attention necessitates a deep commitment to one's spiritual connection with God throughout the act of prayer. Theophan said that individuals should approach their prayers with a mindset of novelty and sincerity, as if they were engaging in prayer for the first time. According to Staniloae, the actions

a man engages in with his attention define his character.³¹ Ilias the Presbyter made an observation on the intellectual aspect that becomes enclosed inside the mind during the act of prayer, drawing a comparison to a bridegroom engaging in conversation with the wife within the confines of the bridal chamber.³²

Isaac the Syrian posits that it is advisable to refrain from engaging in discourse with thoughts that originate from a malevolent entity. This phenomenon can be attributed to their superior intellectual capabilities, which enable their thoughts to persist in one's consciousness, even in the event of one's victory. The initial approach mitigates potential consequences and emotional turmoil by circumventing any form of discourse. According to Ware, divine intervention is the sole source of assistance. As per the perspective of Kallistos Ware, the concept of watchfulness entails maintaining a state of presence in one's current spatial location and temporal moment.³³ Many individuals tend to excessively dwell on either past events or future possibilities, rather than focusing on the present moment. Consequently, the individual characterized as neptic is so introduced to the contemporary era. The individual in question effectively capitalizes on the opportune time, known as the *kairos*.³⁴

As outlined by John Climacus, the practice of vigilance encompasses a range of techniques, including the suppression of desire, emancipation from illusory fantasies, shedding tears of remorse, cultivating empathy, controlling one's thoughts, restraining one's emotions, disciplining one's behaviour, regulating one's speech, and

(London, 1984),
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203119389>.

²⁹ Hendi et al., "Personhood in Biblical and Patristic Thought A Journey from Natural to Spiritual Man." 635.

³⁰ Nikodemos of The Holy Mountain and Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume 2* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981).

³¹ Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*.

³² Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume 1*.

³³ Kallistos Ware, "St. Nikodimos and the Philokalia." In *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*.

³⁴ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, New York: Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986).

banishing unfounded imaginings. In accordance with The Ladder, the *Philokalia* offers insights into the challenging mental discipline of *nepsis*. He strategically situates it at the threshold of his innermost being, thereby enabling him to discern and apprehend commendable ideas upon their arrival, to attentively perceive their actions, and to fully grasp the intentions and visual representations being projected by these intellectual intruders. Symeon the New Theologian underscored the importance of prayer and alertness. The symbiotic relationship between vigilance and prayer is analogous to the inseparable connection between the corporeal and ethereal realms, insofar as the absence of one renders the other incomplete. Vigilance can be conceptualised as an early defence mechanism against sin, analogous to the role of a scout in military strategy. The act of prayer effectively eliminates and eradicates all malevolent ideas that vigilance has been actively combating, as attention alone is insufficient to achieve this outcome. According to Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, the impact of Symeon on subsequent hesychasts is commonly seen as being mostly retroactive in nature. Despite the absence of any prayer texts composed by Symeon, John McGuckin refers to him as a precursor to the hesychast movement of the fourteenth century.³⁵

Evagrius the Solitary posited that in accordance with the apostle's teachings, those who experience discouragement should engage in prayer, as stated in James 5:13. Engage in prayer with a sense of apprehension, trepidation, earnest effort, caution, and focused mindfulness. Due to the malevolent nature of the adversary, it is imperative to engage in prayer in this manner. They exhibit a willingness to

engage, provide support, and discourage preoccupation with prayer only in response to witnessing our expressions of sorrow. The objective of this approach is to captivate our cognitive faculties, so rendering our practices of meditation and prayer devoid of purpose and significance. It is said that prayer lacks efficacy and value unless it is undertaken with a sense of apprehension, caution, and conscientiousness.³⁶

According to Hesychios, the practice of watchfulness and the Jesus Prayer are interconnected and support one another.³⁷ This is due to the fact that maintaining a high level of attention is consistent with engaging in continuous prayer, which is characterised by a state of attentive observation and a focused intellectual awareness. Forgetfulness has the potential to diminish our vigilance over our intellectual faculties, in a manner analogous to how water extinguishes fire. Nevertheless, the repeated recitation of the Jesus Prayer, coupled with a state of heightened alertness, effectively eliminates forgetfulness from the inner self. As posited by Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, the practice of the Jesus Prayer requires a state of vigilance analogous to that of a candle for a lantern.³⁸

The state of *nepsis*, also known as "alertness," can be attained via the deliberate regulation of one's senses, such as through the recitation of the Jesus Prayer. The efficacy of prayer is maximized when it is conducted with a heightened level of concentration. This is due to the fact that, in the absence of the spiritual fortitude derived from prayer, individuals are unable to properly sustain their focus. It has been said that attention serves as the precursor to *proseuche*, which refers to the act of prayer. Jesus issued a cautionary admonition to his disciples, urging them

³⁵ St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain & St. Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume 4*, ed. Kallistos Ware G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard (London: Faber and Faber, 1995).

³⁶ Corinth.

³⁷ Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume 1*.

³⁸ Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume 3*.

to exercise vigilance and engage in prayer in order to avoid succumbing to temptation. The act of vigilance and prayer is intricately connected in the unseen battle against impure thoughts and malevolent entities.

The internal conflict experienced by an individual Symeon the New Theologian received significant praise for his endorsement of the practice of *nepsis*, which aimed to regulate and control our cognitive processes. It is important for individuals to maintain a constant state of awareness, enabling their consciousness to discern and acknowledge the influx of negative thoughts originating from malevolent sources. By cultivating this discernment, individuals may effectively repudiate such thoughts, protection the integrity of their souls. This should be feasible at all times. The cultivation of faith, humility, and love within one's heart is of utmost importance. One should not succumb to fear or avoid engaging in conflict, since there is no inherent goodness in a situation devoid of confrontation.³⁹ The execution of *nepsis* is inherently challenging. The task necessitates consistent and unwavering exertion. The narrative provided by the Fathers pertains to a monk who engaged in prayer, beseeching the divine for a swift resolution to the conflict at hand. The individual's mentor advised him to engage in prayer to request divine intervention in the restoration of conflict, as it is through adversity that the soul acquires skill and achieves victory. Rather than requesting the removal of the struggle, it is more appropriate to pray for the Lord to grant patience in the face of hardship.⁴⁰

Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain posits that the infiltration of malevolent thoughts and desires into the heart occurs through the process of meditation

and the engagement of the senses in various activities. In order to prevent the ingress of filthy insects into the Temple of Salomon, a transparent netting was installed across the windows. Neilos posits that those who seek to maintain their cognitive faculties as a pristine and untainted sanctuary should engage in the practice of contemplating the gloomy prospects of impending judgment. This contemplative exercise serves to prevent the infiltration of any impure mental imagery.⁴¹

In the opinion of Philotheos of Sinai, it is of the utmost importance to assiduously pursue a spiritual practice within the context of sacred Scripture when confronted with mental conflicts. This should be done with a view to restoring and nurturing our cognitive well-being. It is of the utmost importance that we exert our utmost effort to achieve this objective. At the onset of daybreak, it is imperative to exhibit unwavering fortitude as we position ourselves resolutely at the entrance of the innermost being, fostering a genuine remembrance of the divine and maintaining an unceasing supplication for the intercession of Jesus Christ inside the essence of our being. Concurrently, it is incumbent upon us to metaphorically eradicate all those who engage in transgressions within our societal realm, as alluded to in Psalm 101:8, while remaining vigilant in our cognitive faculties.⁴² Coniaris employs the metaphor of the spider as a means to elucidate the significance of attentiveness. The author elucidates that prayer serves as a vigilant force at the core of one's being. When a tremor-like sensation indicates the existence of an adversary, prayer eradicates it. Ceasing to engage in prayer might be interpreted as relinquishing one's stance, so creating an opportunity for intruders to pilfer

³⁹Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume 2*.

⁴⁰Coniaris, *Confronting and Controlling Thoughts: According to the Fathers of the Philokalia*.

⁴¹Coniaris.

⁴²Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume 4*.

important possessions.⁴³ According to Paul Evdokimov, the state of alertness allows individuals to identify malevolent forces before succumbing to their influence. The metaphor employed by the enlightened masters is the depiction of a snake entering a confinement facility and thereafter being rendered unconscious by a forceful strike to its cranium. According to Ware, this measure serves to mitigate the escalation of the conflict.⁴⁴

Macarios provides an account of how Adam was lured into disobeying God by the utilisation of his sensory faculties. Adam was created by God in a state of absolute purity with the purpose of serving God. Conversely, the devil approached him and engaged in conversation, marking the initial acceptance of his presence by the external world. Subsequently, the malevolent entity infiltrated his innermost being and permeated every aspect of his existence, resulting in his complete moral degradation.⁴⁵ Evagrius' advice entails assuming the responsibility of protection the gateway to one's heart, therefore exercising caution in permitting any idea to enter without prior scrutiny. Each idea queries, "Do you align with our faction or with our opponents?" Furthermore, individuals may experience a profound sensation of tranquility and serenity while engaging with texts authored by Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware.⁴⁶ Hesychios imparts the insightful understanding that the use of harmful meals might

potentially impede bodily functioning, however those who partake in such foods may temporarily enjoy pleasure and remain unharmed until the onset of discomfort. The aforementioned message and its accompanying facts were presented to the audience through the manifestation of divine benevolence. When an intelligent entity perceives the presence of anger, it frequently exhibits a strong inclination to suppress the associated cognitions and finally eradicate them.⁴⁷

Maximos warns us that if we let our guard down, the adversary will take Christ away from us. He encourages us to keep vigil in the tomb of our souls for him, allowing him to slumber there, sleep there, and rise from the dead there. This will help us discern if someone came while we were asleep and removed Him.⁴⁸ Being more aware helps us make better decisions, and spiritual taste can set us apart from others by knowing the difference between good and evil, meaningless and important, and devil-inspired fantasies and heavenly archetype-marked visions.⁴⁹

Linking Theory to Practice

The *Philokalia's* teachings on prayer and vigilance can be seamlessly integrated into contemporary spiritual and therapeutic practices. The principles of prayer and *nepsis*, when incorporated into modern psychotherapy, can significantly enhance mental health interventions. This approach promotes mindfulness and cognitive control, aligning mental well-being with spiritual growth. It provides a comprehensive framework for addressing both psychological and spiritual issues,

⁴³Coniaris, *Confronting and Controlling Thoughts: According to the Fathers of the Philokalia*.

⁴⁴ Kallistos Ware, "In the Image and Likeness": *The Uniqueness of the Human Person*, in *Personhood: Orthodox Christianity and the Connection between Body, Mind, and Soul*, ed. John T. Chirband (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1996).

⁴⁵ Coniaris, *Confronting and Controlling Thoughts: According to the Fathers of the Philokalia*.

⁴⁶ Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume 2*.

⁴⁷ Corinth, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume 3*.

⁴⁸ E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer eds, *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, ed. E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer (Faber & Faber, 1977).

⁴⁹ Ware, *The Orthodox Way*.

creating a holistic path to healing.⁵⁰

Through the act of crucifying the body and its desires, Christ's cognitive faculties, known as *fronew*, are generated. This process is accompanied by the development of *fronema pneumatos* and the transformation of *logismoi pneumatos*. This leads to the formation of *Epithumia pneumatos*, which is essentially the fruit of the Spirit, or *karpos pneumatos*. This transformative process aligns our newly formed identities with the characteristics of Christ, facilitating a profound spiritual renewal.

Connections to Existing Literature

Recent discussions on spirituality and mental health have highlighted practices such as mindfulness and meditation, which focus on mental well-being and self-awareness.⁵¹ The *Philokalia* offers a complementary approach by emphasizing prayer and vigilance. These practices can enrich contemporary spiritual and psychological practices, providing a deeper layer of understanding and application.

Integrating *nepsis* and prayer into therapeutic settings equips individuals with tools to manage their thoughts and emotions more effectively. This method bridges the gap between spiritual practices and psychological health, offering a dual approach to holistic well-being. It underscores the importance of both spiritual and mental health as interconnected aspects of overall wellness.

Practical Applications

Engaging more deeply with *Philokalian* texts and focusing on the concepts of *nous* and *nepsis* provides

valuable insights into the renewal and protection of the *nous*. These findings enhance our understanding of spiritual renewal and offer practical applications for both personal spiritual practice and modern therapeutic approaches.

Integrating these principles into daily routines can help individuals maintain a state of spiritual alertness and purity. This ongoing practice leads to a more profound sense of peace and alignment with divine will. Embracing the teachings of the *Philokalia* can foster an environment of continuous spiritual and mental growth.

The *Philokalia's* teachings on *nous*, prayer, and vigilance offer profound insights into the process of spiritual renewal and protection. By integrating these practices into contemporary spiritual and therapeutic contexts, individuals can achieve a deeper sense of peace and alignment with divine will. This study underscores the enduring relevance of the *Philokalia* and provides practical strategies for enhancing spiritual and mental well-being.

The *Philokalia* tradition has offered several methods to assist individuals with heart and mind ailments, including practices such as *nepsis* and prayer. Examining these practices within the discourse of Christian spirituality encourages a critical reassessment of how we interpret and understand spirituality. This comprehensive framework provides an investigative tool, therapeutic technique, and theoretical understanding of the human mind. It aims to revolutionize psychotherapy, revitalizing the individual's psyche and promoting holistic well-being.

CONCLUSION

The *Philokalia* tradition has provided several methods to assist individuals with heart ailments, including practices such as *nepsis* and prayer. These methods warrant substantial consideration within the discourse on

⁵⁰ Hendi et al., "Personhood in Biblical and Patristic Thought A Journey from Natural to Spiritual Man." 636.

⁵¹ Salicru, 2022; Dubey et al., 2024; Fetzer Institute, 2024; Frontiers in Psychology, n.d.; Cornell University, n.d.

genuine Christian spirituality. *Nepsis* and prayer have been recognized as effective strategies for mitigating the influence of *logismoi* and passions. The *Philokalia* encourages a critical reassessment of how we interpret and understand spirituality. This approach offers a comprehensive framework that includes an investigative tool, a therapeutic technique, and a theoretical understanding of the human mind. It aims to promote treatments that can bring about revolutionary changes in psychotherapy, thereby revitalizing the individual's psyche. By integrating the teachings of the *Philokalia* into modern Christian practice and therapeutic approaches, we can develop a holistic method that addresses both spiritual and psychological dimensions. This integration has the potential to enhance mental health treatments, offering individuals a path to healing that aligns with their spiritual beliefs. Ultimately, the insights from the *Philokalia* provide timeless wisdom that remains relevant in fostering spiritual and mental well-being today. By bridging ancient teachings with contemporary practices, this study highlights the potential for transformative impacts on both personal spirituality and mental health care.

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