

# Peter of Damascus and early christian spiritual theology

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Artículo

## PETER OF DAMASCUS AND EARLY CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY

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Having flourished in the mid-twelfth century, the Byzantine spiritual theologian Peter of Damascus (fl. 1156/1157) is unique <sup>1</sup>. Living somewhere in the Byzantine Empire during the twelfth century, Peter is known exclusively through the two works included in the late eighteenth-century *Philokalia* edited by Macarius of Corinth and Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain <sup>2</sup>. The two books carry several titles in the manuscripts but in the *Philokalia* they are entitled "The Book of our Holy and God-bearing Father Peter of Damascus" and "The Second Book of our Holy Father Peter of Damascus. The Twenty-Four Synoptic Discourses Full of Spiritual Knowledge". Both of these books concern themselves uniquely with the spiritual life, which Peter thinks, with great optimism, is applicable to both monks and non-monastics <sup>3</sup>. Peter, however, is a monk. Thus, a review of the Byzantine monastic landscape of the twelfth century helps situate Peter in his immediate social, historical and spiritual setting.

By the early twelfth century, Byzantine monasticism was experiencing a period of intense fervor. During the eleventh century, monasteries of note were founded, for example, by Christodoulus of Patmos, Nikon of the Black Mountain, Lazarus of Mt. Galesion and,

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<sup>1</sup> The published literature on Peter of Damascus is, at present, limited. See Gouillard, J. "Un auteur spirituel byzantin du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Pierre Damascène", *Échos d'Orient* 38 (1939): 257-278 [reprinted in Jean Gouillard, *La vie religieuse à Byzance* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981)] and Greg Peters, "Recovering a Lost Spiritual Theologian: Peter of Damascus and the *Philokalia*", *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> *Φιλοκαλία τῶν ἱερῶν νηπτικῶν. Τόμος Γ'* (Athens: Εκδοτικός οἶκος "Αστήρ," 1991).

<sup>3</sup> For example, in the introduction to "The Book of our Holy and God-bearing Father Peter of Damascus", Peter writes that "there is no object... that can prevent us from becoming what God from the beginning has wished us to be... whether we are rich or poor, married or unmarried, in authority and free or under obedience and in bondage—in short, whatever our time, place or activity" (76; 7.21-27). Throughout this article, references to Peter's works include the page number in the English translation followed by page and line number of the Greek *Philokalia* edition. English translation: G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, eds. and trans., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth*, Volume 3 (London: Faber and Faber, 1984). For Greek text, see note 2.

most importantly for this article, Timothy of the Theotokos Evergetis. This fervor of new foundations continued unabated into the twelfth century<sup>4</sup>. Based upon extant sources, the impetus for this new period of enthusiasm is, in large part though not exclusively, attributable to the influence that the Evergetis monastery in Constantinople exercised upon new twelfth-century monastic foundations<sup>5</sup>. For "The history of the foundation in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries during the height of the monastic reform is unfortunately obscure, but its impact, traceable in the adoption of its founder's *typikon* in the foundation documents of other patrons, is indisputable"<sup>6</sup>. Of the nine surviving monastic *typika* of the twelfth century, five are textually dependent on the Evergetis *typikon* and a sixth is "sympathetic to Evergetian concerns"<sup>7</sup>. Of these nine surviving *typika*, five are from imperial or royal monasteries; that is, members of the imperial or royal family established and/or wrote the founder's *typikon*<sup>8</sup>. Private individuals founding constitutionally independent houses composed the remaining four *typika*<sup>9</sup>. Since little is known biographically about Peter of Damascus, it

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of this fervor and expansion based on surviving primary documents see the chapter entitled "The Resurgence of the Monastic Life" in Rosemary Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843-1118* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 9-30 and the section entitled "Monasteries and Society" in Michael Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni, 1081-1261* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 263-382. See also section II in Ch. Bakirtzis, "Byzantine Monasteries in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (Synaxis, Mt. Papikion, St. John Prodromos Monastery)" in Anthony Bryer and Mary Cunningham, eds., *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), 47-54.

<sup>5</sup> On the Theotokos Evergetis monastery, see John Thomas and Angela Constantinides Hero, eds., *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments*, 5 Volumes (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2000), 454-506 and Margaret Mullett and Anthony Kirby, eds., *The Theotokos Evergetis and Eleventh-Century Monasticism* (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, School of Greek, Roman and Semitic Studies, the Queen's University of Belfast, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 455. It must be understood that the founder's *typikon* of the Theotokos Evergetis was not a new invention. Rather, it stands in a long tradition of such documents but it exercised a degree of influence far greater than both earlier and contemporary *typika*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 859.

<sup>8</sup> These five *typika* are: (1) the Testaments of Gregory for the Monastery of St. Philip of Fragala in Sicily; (2) the *Typikon* of Luke for the Monastery of Christ Savior (San Salvatore) in Messina; (3) the *Typikon* of Empress Irene Ducaena Comnene for the Convent of the Mother of God Full of Grace in Constantinople; (4) the *Typikon* of Emperor John II Comnenus for the Monastery of Christ Pantocrator in Constantinople; and (5) the *Typikon* of the Sebastocrator Isaac Comnenus for the Monastery of the Mother of God Savior of the World near Bera. See Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, vii.

<sup>9</sup> These are: (1) the Rule of John for the Monastery of St. John the Forerunner of Phoberus; (2) the Memorandum and *Typikon* of Leo, Bishop of Nauplia, for the Monastery of the Mother of God in Areia; (3) the *Typikon* of Athanasius Philanthropenus for the Monastery of St. Mamas in Constantinople; and (4) the

is impossible to establish whether he was at either an imperial or royal monastery, or an independent house. Monasteries of the twelfth century, despite their dependence on the Evergetis *typika*, at times either followed the Evergetis regulations or changed them to suit their particular circumstances and desires. This proves Rosemary Morris' conclusion that "Byzantine monasticism never possessed 'rules' that were common to families of houses (such as those of the Benedictines or Cistercians in the West)..."<sup>10</sup>. In short, there is no unified monastic observance in the Byzantine church in the twelfth century since "Each monastic founder organised such matters in his own way and each monastery carefully preserved its own customs, for Byzantine monasticism was highly individualistic"<sup>11</sup>. Also of importance is the lack "of clearly defined forms" of monastic life in Byzantium<sup>12</sup>. Though writing about the ninth century, Morris' comments are true for the twelfth century as well<sup>13</sup>. She writes,

An institution long considered by modern scholars to have developed over time from lavriote to the coenobitic style, had always, in fact, demonstrated an ability to adjust and adapt itself to changing circumstances. The different traditions amalgamated in a variety of ways: hermits could live in a loose, but recognisable relationship with communities; the more experienced members and even the *hegoumenoi* of houses which were clearly *koinobia* often lived a solitary life some little distance away from them. It is these very cross-fertilisations which have led to the impossibility of providing any precise semantic definitions for the various words used in contemporary sources to describe monastic houses in this period. Efforts to point fine distinctions between the terms *koinobion*, *mone*, *monasterion*, *phrontisterion* and, indeed, *lavra* are doomed to failure simply because many houses contained elements of both the eremitic and the communal life<sup>14</sup>.

In light of this cross-fertilization, Morris uses the term "hybrid' monasticism" for "the combination of elements drawn from the coenobitic and lavriote traditions"<sup>15</sup>.

Concerning Peter's monastic lifestyle, from his own words we learn that he lived in a cell and that he was likely under some form of a vow of poverty since he never owned any books or "other possession" (74; 5.14

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*Typikon* of Nikephoros Mysticus for the Monastery of the Mother of God of the Altars of the Son or Elegmon. See Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, vii.

<sup>10</sup> Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843-1118*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>13</sup> See Alexander Kazhdan, "Hermitic, Cenobitic and Secular Ideals in Byzantine Hagiography of the Ninth Centuries", *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30 (1985): 482: "In the twelfth century, the paramount contrast was not that of the *koinobion* and atomized eremitic cell..."

<sup>14</sup> Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843-1118*, 33-34.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

and 193; 98.22-23) and his friends took care of his needs (74; 5.15-16). We also know that Peter was under the direction of a "spiritual father" (278; 166.24-25, 30-31). From these indicators it becomes obvious that Peter lived a form of monastic life that he, like John Climacus<sup>16</sup>, termed the "royal way". This "royal way" involved

leading a life of silence with one or two companions; these had one another as counsellors in doing God's will. And those who, after being subject to a spiritual father, were then appointed by him to take charge of other brethren, carried out their task as if they were themselves still under obedience, keeping the traditions of their own spiritual fathers (87; 16.8-12).

From the evidence, it would appear that Peter was living a monastic lifestyle like that termed "hybrid" monasticism". This being the case, Peter had an association with a particular monastery. It is also likely, though impossible to prove, that the Theotokos Evergetis legislation influenced Peter's monastic lifestyle. Yet, Peter's contribution to Byzantine monasticism is not institutional or legislative, rather, it is spiritual.

To study Peter of Damascus as a spiritual theologian, it is essential to define "spiritual theology", a phrase given prominence in 1926 by the Jesuit theologian Joseph de Guibert<sup>17</sup>. A historiography of modern studies that detail the history of Byzantine spiritual writing shows how modern authors have understood and defined "spiritual theology" and the related term "spirituality"<sup>18</sup>. This examination of modern studies reveals that the phrase "spiritual theology" can be and often is equal in meaning to the term "spirituality"<sup>19</sup>. Oftentimes, the word "spirituality" expresses the practical-experiential aspect of the spiritual life and the phrase "spiritual theology" refers to the theoretical-systematic. Yet, is not the practical-experiential possible only because the theoretical-systematic expresses it? Therefore, these words can serve as synonyms since they often function as such in modern studies of both Latin and

<sup>16</sup> *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 1. See Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell, trans., *John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 79.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph de Guibert, *Theologia spiritualis, ascetica et mystica: quaestiones selectae in praelectionum usum* (Rome, 1926). Translated into English by Paul Barrett as *The Theology of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1953). De Guibert was not the first author to employ "spiritual theology". The first use of the phrase may come from the seventeenth century work F. Simplex, *Theologia spiritualis fundamentalis* (Oliva, 1687). See Joseph de Guibert, *Leçons de théologie spirituelle* (Toulouse: Éditions de la Revue d'ascétique et de mystique et de l'Apostolat de la prière, 1946), 18, n. 31.

<sup>18</sup> See Greg Peters, "Towards a Definition of 'Spiritual Theology': A Historiography of Recent Writings on Byzantine Spirituality", *Studia Monastica* (forthcoming).

<sup>19</sup> On the analogous quality of spiritual theology and spirituality from an occidental perspective see Salvador Ros García, "Definiciones de la teología espiritual en el siglo XX", *Teresianum* 52 (2001): 303-317.

Greek spiritual texts. In fact, it is rare to find a modern historian using the phrase "spiritual theology" in reference to Byzantine spirituality. The term "spirituality" is the more common designation when speaking of an author's understanding of the spiritual life. Exceptions to this pattern often occur in authors who adopt traditional Roman Catholic categories<sup>20</sup>, which is why simply employing modern understandings of spiritual theology runs the risk of forcing Peter into molds forged well past his time. This is seen most obviously in the opening sentence of this article: "Having flourished in the mid-twelfth century, the Byzantine spiritual theologian Peter of Damascus (fl. 1156/1157) is unique". Since the Christian church and Christian scholarship function with different subdivisions within the theological disciplines, I have chosen to designate Peter as a "spiritual theologian" though Peter would have never used this phrase in reference to himself. In twelfth-century Byzantine terminology Peter is simply a θεολόγος, "one who speaks of God"<sup>21</sup>. Conversely, simply using understandings of the spiritual life found in Peter's sources runs the risk of forcing Peter into being a mere organizer of his predecessors. This perspective is seen clearly in Jean Gouillard's conclusion that since Peter is "... entirely concentrated on putting into clear formulas the teachings of the greatest contemplatives of the east, the Damascene does not invent, nor does he prepare anything"<sup>22</sup>. This article will examine Peter's sources to discover how these authors understood the concept of the spiritual life, that is, spiritual theology or spirituality. First, however, situating Peter in his theological and literary setting is necessary.

Though the eleventh and twelfth centuries were a fervent time of literary output, most of the works from these centuries are hagiographic or theological in nature. The ascetical and/or mystical works of these centuries that would most likely contain developed spiritual theologies, are instead, with the exception of Symeon the New Theologian, *florilegium*-like compilations. For example, Philip the Solitary, a monk and author who flourished around 1100, wrote two ascetical works in verse: the *Mirror* (also known as *Tears and Laments*) and the *Sylloge* or *Dialexis*<sup>23</sup>. Both of these works concern themselves with the destiny of

<sup>20</sup> Examples of "traditional Roman Catholic categories" in Charles G. Herbermann et al, eds., *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume 14 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1912) are "Dogmatic", "Moral", "Pastoral", "Ascetical" and "Mystical". See also Joseph de Guibert, *Leçons de théologie spirituelle*, 9-22.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Second Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 356.

<sup>22</sup> Jean Gouillard, "Un auteur spirituel byzantin du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Pierre Damascène", 278: "... tout appliqué à mettre en formules claires l'enseignement des plus grands contemplatifs de l'Orient, Damascène n'invente, ni ne prépare rien".

<sup>23</sup> The following is taken largely from Hans-Georg Beck, *Kirche und Theologische Literatur im Byzantinischen Reich* (Munich: Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1959), 609-662.

the soul and eschatological questions. The *Mirror* in particular became popular in the fourteenth century. Another writer who flourished around 1100 was Nicholas of Kerkyra, the author of a lengthy commentary on the thought of Maximus the Confessor. Also connected to the name of Maximus the Confessor is the *Melissa*, "a sacro-profane FLORILEGIUM compiled probably in the 10th or 11th C. in two books and 176 *logoi* (chapters). The author drew upon an interpolated copy of the 10th-C. *florilegium* of pseudo-Maximos the Confessor"<sup>24</sup>. The *Melissa* may be the work of an ascetic named Antony though both the author's name and the title of the work may be inventions<sup>25</sup>. Another work of interest is the "spiritual compilation" of a Byzantine abbot named Isaiah dated to either the end of the twelfth century or the beginning of the thirteenth century<sup>26</sup>. This work was written by Isaiah, the spiritual father of the nun Theodora, who appears to be the daughter of Emperor Isaac II Angelus. The text consists of an anthology of *apophthegmata* of early Christian women and men; lives of Melania the Younger, Syncletica and Theodora, wife of Justinian I; various maxims or counsels; five spiritual letters; and an address "en dodécasyllabes"<sup>27</sup>. Hausherr says that Isaiah represents "a little light during the period of transition between the school of Symeon the New Theologian and Palamism"<sup>28</sup>. Gouillard qualifies this judgment by saying that Isaiah "represents only a mentality of preparation and an age of waiting"<sup>29</sup>. The final ascetical/mystical author of note is Elias Ecdicus, a writer who flourished in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. His main work is a *florilegium* entitled *Other Chapters*, a dense presentation of Christian holiness influenced, it appears, by the thought of Symeon the New Theologian. Much of the theological output of the eleventh and twelfth centuries concerned itself with the two theological controversies that dominated the Byzantine church: the azymes controversy and questions concerning the *filioque* and the natures of the Son of God. "Azymes" was the term for the unleavened bread used by the Armenian and Latin churches in the Eucharist whereas the Byzantine church used leavened bread.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth M. Jeffreys and Alexander Kazhdan, "Melissa", in Alexander P. Kazhdan and Alice-Mary Talbot, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 3 Volumes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1335. For an edition of one recension of the *Melissa* see Étienne Sargologos, *Un traité de vie spirituelle et morale du XIe siècle: Le florilège sacro-profane du manuscrit 6 de Patmos* (Salonika: Asprovalta, 1990).

<sup>25</sup> Jeffreys and Kazhdan, "Melissa", 1335.

<sup>26</sup> See I. Hausherr, "Le Métérikon de l'abbé Isaïe", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 12 (1946): 286-301 and Jean Gouillard, "Une compilation spirituelle du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, 'Le livre II de l'abbé Isaïe'", *Échos d'Orient* 38 (1939): 72-90.

<sup>27</sup> Gouillard, "Une compilation spirituelle", 75.

<sup>28</sup> Hausherr, "Le Métérikon de l'abbé Isaïe", 286: "... un peu de lumière sur la période de transition entre l'école de Syméon le nouveau Théologien et le palamisme".

<sup>29</sup> Gouillard, "Une compilation spirituelle", 89-90: "... représente seulement une mentalité de préparation et une pierre d'attente".

Controversy between the Byzantine church and the Latin church on this subject began in the eleventh century and culminated in 1054 with the excommunication of Patriarch Michael I Cerularius by the Latin Cardinal Humbert. Many Byzantine writers wrote works concerning this topic. Nicetas Stethatus made one of the most important contributions. John II, metropolitan of Kiev in the late eleventh century, addressed a letter to pope Clement III with a treatise on the azymes attached to it. A short irenic treatise condemning the use of azymes is attributed to Symeon II (d. 1098), patriarch of Jerusalem<sup>30</sup>. Of greater importance is the contribution of Leo of Ohrid, an eleventh-century polemicist. Leo was the spokesman of Patriarch Michael I Cerularius between the Byzantine and Latin clergy in southern Italy. Though he addressed many issues, his main argument against the Latin church concerned their use of azymes in the Eucharist. Leo addressed at least three letters to Rome about this issue, the first of which received a sharp answer from Cardinal Humbert, initiating a series of exchanges that ultimately led to the Patriarch Michael's condemnation in 1054. Finally, Theodore of Smyrna, who engaged in discussions with the Latin theologian Peter Grossolano in Constantinople in 1112, also wrote a theological tract on the azymes that remains unpublished.

In addition to the azymes controversy, authors also concerned themselves with the natures of Christ and the Son's relationship to the procession of the Holy Spirit. Eustratius of Nicaea, a philosopher and theologian who flourished around 1100, wrote a treatise on the *filioque* as did the theologian John Phournes who rejected the *filioque* and emphasized the monarchical principle of the Godhead. As well, he stressed the equality of the Son and the Holy Spirit, referring to them as "the two hands of the same substance and of the same power"<sup>31</sup>. Eustratius also held that the Son and the Holy Spirit were the hands of God the Father. Nicholas IV Mouzalon, patriarch of Constantinople who died in 1152, addressed a treatise to Emperor Alexius I on the procession of the Holy Spirit. In this treatise he refuted the concept of the *filioque*. Similarly, Nicetas of Maroneia, archbishop of Thessaloniki from 1132/1133 on, wrote six dialogues between a Greek and a Latin on the procession of the Holy Spirit. In these dialogues he defended the Latin point of view though he refused to make a corresponding addition to the text of the creed as done in the Latin Church.

When compared to the extant writings of his contemporaries, Peter's literary corpus is unique among the eleventh- and twelfth-century works since it is more creative than a *florilegium* and it is not a work concerned with contemporary theological problems. In Alexander Kazhdan's

<sup>30</sup> See B. Leib, "Deux inédits byzantins sur les azymes", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 2 (1924): 177-239.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander Kazhdan, "Phournes, John", in Kazhdan and Talbot, *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1671.



estimation "the most original and innovative period in Byzantine history... [was] the eleventh and twelfth centuries"<sup>32</sup>. An examination of the dogmatic, juridical, poetic, exegetical, homiletical, hagiographical and spiritual literature of these centuries reveals the breadth and depth of the Byzantine intellect during this period<sup>33</sup>. As I argue elsewhere, the Petrine corpus is a well-developed spiritual theology of the Christian life<sup>34</sup>. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine Peter's early Christian sources to discover how the authors of these sources understood the concept of spiritual theology.

There are one hundred and fifty quotations or paraphrases in the literary corpus of Peter that have either been attributed to a specific author by Peter or have been located by his modern editors and translators in the extant works of those to whom the quotation or paraphrase is attributed. The authors identified are Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite, Dorotheus of Gaza, Evagrius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Isaac of Nineveh, John Cassian, John Chrysostom, John of Damascus, John of Carpathus, John Climacus, Pseudo-Macarius, Mark the Ascetic, Maximus Confessor, Nilus, Palladius, Paul Evergetinus, Philemon the Ascetic and various desert fathers. Furthermore, there are one hundred and twenty-four references in the Petrine corpus attributed to ecclesiastical figures that Peter's editors and translators are unable to locate in the extant works of these authors. In addition, there is one quotation that is simply attributed to "one of the fathers" (124; 45.26). Peter attributes thirty-one of these unidentified references to Basil and twenty-six to John Chrysostom –accounting for nearly half of the unidentified sources. In light of this, it is difficult to proceed with a proper examination of Peter's sources if, in fact, the authenticity and historicity of these very sources are open to debate. Since Peter misquotes or misattributes his sources one must progress carefully when examining these sources. Whether these quotations were garnered from a *florilegium*<sup>35</sup> that also

<sup>32</sup> A. P. Kazhdan, "Innovation in Byzantium", in A. R. Littlewood, ed., *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music: A Collection of Essays* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1995), 6. See also Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143-1180* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 316-412.

<sup>33</sup> See Robert Browning, "Byzantine Scholarship", *Past and Present* 28 (1964): 13-16.

<sup>34</sup> Greg Peters, "A Treasury of Divine Knowledge and Wisdom: The Twelfth-Century Byzantine Spiritual Theology of Peter of Damascus" (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Michael's College, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> There were two *florilegia* that Peter would likely have known: the *Evergetinon* of Paul Evergetinus (compiled before 1054) and the *Interpretations of the Commands of the Lord* (or *Pandektes*) of Nikon of the Black Mountain (compiled ca. 1059-1067). Comparisons of Peter's sources with both of these *florilegia* show that Peter did not use either collection. For the Greek text of the *Evergetinon* see Macarius of Corinth and Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, eds., *Εὐεργετινός ἤτοι Συναγωγή τῶν θεοφθόγων ρημάτων καὶ διδασκαλιῶν τῶν θεοφόρων καὶ ἁγίων πατέρων*

misattributed a text to Basil or John Chrysostom, or whether Peter was simply relying on his memory is not as important as the fact that Peter understood himself to be quoting from Basil and the other writers accurately and correctly. Therefore, although modern scholarship has demonstrated that these quotations are either spurious or misquotations, this does not lessen the value and emphasis that Peter placed on these authors. One must treat Peter's "Basil the Great" as the real life Basil the Great to properly see how Peter utilized the tradition of Eastern Christian spiritual texts in his own spiritual theology. For the purposes of this article, Peter's attributions are accepted.

When reading texts like those penned by Peter of Damascus, it is good to work with the assumption that Peter employed a literary technique now known as intertextuality. This technique, as defined by Julia Kristeva, is the theory that "Every text builds itself as a mosaic of quotations, every text is absorption and transformation of another text"<sup>36</sup>. Elizabeth Clark expands on this by writing, "Intertextuality thus stands *against* the notion of a book or poem's authorial 'originality'<sup>37</sup> and *for* that of a text's productivity. Texts are here seen as synchronous: whether as allusions or as explicit citations, intertexts stand on the same temporal plane as the passage-at-hand"<sup>38</sup>. In short, the theory of intertextuality says that all written texts contain either explicit allusions to or echoes of earlier texts. Mikhail M. Bakhtin says that, ultimately, a writing "cannot fail to be oriented toward the 'already uttered', the 'already known'... Only the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world with the first word, could really have escaped from start to finish this dialogic inter-orientation with the alien world.... Concrete historical human discourse does not have this privilege"<sup>39</sup>. In light of this, readers of Peter today should expect to find him quoting from and anonymously drawing from his predecessors. Peter does this in at least two ways. Again, following Clark, "In its simplest form, a form that barely merits the label of 'intertextuality', texts are placed next to each other to reinforce a point"<sup>40</sup>. Peter does this throughout his treatises as is well attested to by

(Venice, 1783). There is still no critical Greek edition of the *Pandektes*. For a list of manuscripts containing the *Pandektes* see Marcel Richard, "Florilèges spirituels grecs", in Marcel Viller et al., eds., *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique: doctrine et histoire*, Tome V (Paris: Beauchesne, 1964), col. 504.

<sup>36</sup> Translated by and quoted in Jeanine Parisier Plottel, "Introduction", in Jeanine Parisier Plottel and Hanna Charney, eds., *Intertextuality: New Perspectives in Criticism* (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1978), xiv.

<sup>37</sup> Clark is quoting from Plottel's "Introduction".

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 123. Italics in the original.

<sup>39</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 279. Cited in Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 122-123.

<sup>40</sup> Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 125.

the extensive list of his identified sources. Another way that Peter employs intertexts is by pushing a "suggestive" text in a more definitive direction. For example, Peter quotes Anthony the Great from the *Apophthegmata patrum* five times in his two books. In one use, while commenting on discernment, Peter uses Anthony to say that a believer who attains bodily virtues but neglects his intellect accomplishes nothing (153; 67.16-18). Yet, Anthony actually says that he who lacks discernment is "far from God"<sup>41</sup>. Thus, Peter alters the original meaning and intent of Anthony's words to say something much more absolute than Anthony intended. Similarly, Peter also alters a saying of Sisoës from the *Apophthegmata patrum* regarding how often ascetics eat. Peter states that "those who have attained a state of dispassion, they often do not eat for days on end" and continues by saying "St Sisoës was such a person" (151; 66.7-9). If Peter had stopped here then his use of Sisoës as a dispassionate person who did not eat regularly would be accurate. Yet, Peter pushes the discussion a step further by saying that "in the ecstasy of his love for God [Sisoës] asked to take communion after he had eaten" (151; 66.9-11). However, nowhere is this detail recorded in the *Apophthegmata patrum*, which reads, "Abba Sisoës' disciple often said to him, 'Abba, get up, and let us eat'. And he would say to him, 'Have we not eaten, my child?' He would reply, 'No, Father'. Then the old man would say, 'If we have not eaten, bring the food, and we will eat'"<sup>42</sup>. From these examples, one concludes that, at times, Peter pushed texts to say something more definitive than they originally said. In essence, he constructed an intertextual interpretation. For, as Clark remarks, "Intertexts, whether overt or hidden, have the ability to reinforce or to constrain the text in ways that produce new textual meaning"<sup>43</sup>. Again, a reader of the Petrine corpus should expect to hear reminiscences of the Byzantine spiritual authors who wrote before Peter; however, saying something definitive about Peter's respecting the intention of the authors he quotes is impossible. Until manuscripts that provide attributions are examined, it is impossible to do an exhaustive study of intertextuality in Peter since it is imperative to know whom Peter believed that he was quoting. Similarly, once Peter's sources have been exhaustively identified, it is then necessary to determine where Peter found his quotation; that is, was a quotation taken directly from an author's works or from another intermediate work. If the quotation came from a *florilegium*, for example, then it is necessary to determine if Peter altered the original text or if he simply restated an already altered quotation. In other words, did Peter provide the intertext or did he simply quote an existing intertext? For now, unfortunately, this question must remain unanswered.

<sup>41</sup> Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Desert Christian: Sayings of the Desert Fathers, The Alphabetical Collection* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1975), 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>43</sup> Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 125.

Since Peter does not place the same emphasis on each ecclesiastical figure that he uses, a modern interpreter of Peter should not do so either. This article will limit its investigation to those authors used by Peter who also influenced the general development of Byzantine spiritual writings. Although they may not have employed these exact words themselves Evagrius, Pseudo-Dionysius, Dorotheus of Gaza, John Climacus, Maximus the Confessor and Isaac of Nineveh understood and defined the concept of spiritual theology. Each of the authors to be investigated below were, like Peter, monks. They were writing as monks, viewing the primary purpose of monasticism as progress in the spiritual life<sup>44</sup>. Regardless of the apparent western origin of the term "spiritual theology", they were theologians of the spiritual life and, thus, spiritual theologians.

Nowhere in the Petrine corpus does Peter name Evagrius directly<sup>45</sup>. Instead, Peter attributes quotations from Evagrius' works to Nilus of Sinai, *hegoumenos* of a monastery in Ancyra who died about 430. Of the five Evagrian quotations attributed to Nilus, two are from Evagrius' *On Prayer* (*De oratione*)<sup>46</sup>, two are from his *Centuries on Knowledge* (*Kephalaia gnostica*)<sup>47</sup>, and one cannot be located in Evagrius' extant works. Evagrius' concept of the spiritual life is summarized in his well-known maxim from his treatise *On Prayer*: "If you are a theologian [*θεολόγος*] you truly pray. If you truly pray you are a theologian"<sup>48</sup>. Yet, to appreciate fully the spiritual theology behind this saying, one must understand Evagrius' tripartite division of the spiritual life<sup>49</sup>. In another work, the *Praktikos*, Evagrius claims that "Christianity is the dogma of Christ our Savior. It is composed of *praktike* [*πρακτική*], of the contemplation of the physical world [*φυσική*] and of the contemplation of

<sup>44</sup> See Jeremy Driscoll and Mark Sheridan, eds., *Spiritual Progress: Studies in the Spirituality of Late Antiquity and Early Monasticism* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1994).

<sup>45</sup> Those quotations attributed Nilus that are actually from Evagrius are an exception to the above argument for accepting Peter's attributions.

<sup>46</sup> Greek text in PG 79:1165-1200. Translated into English by John Eudes Bamberger in *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos, Chapters on Prayer* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1972). All quotations are from this translation.

<sup>47</sup> Syriac text and French translation in Antoine Guillaumont, *Les Six Centuries des "Kephalaia gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique. Édition critique de la version syriaque commune et édition d'une nouvelle version syriaque, intégrale, avec une double traduction française* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1958). Partial English translations by David Bundy, "The Kephalaia Gnostica", in Vincent L Wimbush, ed., *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) and Michael O'Laughlin, "Origenism in the Desert: Anthropology and Integration in Evagrius Ponticus" (Th.D. diss., Harvard Divinity School, 1987).

<sup>48</sup> *On Prayer* 60; Bamberger, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos, Chapters on Prayer*, 65. On the significance of this maxim see Irénée Hausherr, *Les leçons d'un contemplatif: Le Traité de l'oraison d'Évagre le Pontique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1960).

<sup>49</sup> Evagrius authored a three-part spiritual theology corresponding to his tripartite division of the spiritual life: the *Praktikos*, the *Gnostikos* and the *Kephalaia Gnostica*. See Bamberger, *Evagrius Ponticus*, lx.

God [θεολογικὴ/θεωρητικὴ]<sup>50</sup>. The highest level in the spiritual life, then, is the contemplation (θεωρία) of God. Therefore, the goal of godly living in Evagrius' spiritual theology, according to *On Prayer*, is summarized as follows: If you contemplate God, you truly pray and if you truly pray, you contemplate God. Evagrius gives a more extended and nuanced division of the Christian life in the *Centuries on Knowledge*<sup>51</sup>:

2.4: The transformations are numerous, but we have received knowledge of only four: the first, the second, the last and the penultimate. The first is, as has been said, the passage from evil to virtue, the second the passage from impassibility to the second natural contemplation, the third is the passage from this to the gnosis which concerns the *logikoi*, and the fourth is the passage from all of these to the gnosis of the holy Trinity.

6.49: Egypt signifies evil, the desert πρακτικὴ, the land of Judah the contemplation of the bodies, Jerusalem that of incorporeal things, and Zion is the symbol of the Trinity.

3.61: The virtues show the *nous* the second natural contemplation, this makes it see the first and the first in turn makes it see the Holy Unity.

1.27: There are five major kinds of contemplation, under which all acts of contemplation can be classified. One says that the first is the contemplation of the beloved and holy Trinity, the second and the third, the contemplation of those which are incorporeal and the bodies, the fourth and the fifth, the contemplation of judgement and providence.

1.70: With God one says that he is first who knows the holy Trinity, after him is he who sees the intellections of the intelligibles, third is he who sees the incorporeals, fourth is he who knows the contemplation of the worlds, and he who possesses impassibility of the soul will truly be called the fifth among these.

With the aid of a diagram, it is possible to discern Evagrius' tripartite division of the spiritual life, though his vocabulary is not consistent.

<sup>50</sup> *Praktikos* 1; Bamberger, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos, Chapters on Prayer*, 15. Greek text in Antoine and Claire Guillaumont, eds. and trans., *Évagre le Pontique: Traité Pratique ou le Moine, Tome II* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1971), 498.

<sup>51</sup> The following quotations from the *Centuries on Knowledge* and diagram are from O'Laughlin, "Origenism in the Desert", 134-136.

|                      |    | 2.4                        | 6.49                                | 3.61                      | 1.27                                | 1.70                                |
|----------------------|----|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Praktike             | 1) | Evil                       | Evil                                |                           |                                     |                                     |
|                      | 2) | Virtue                     | πρακτικῇ                            | Virtue                    |                                     |                                     |
|                      | 3) | Impassibility              |                                     |                           |                                     | Impassibility                       |
|                      | 4) |                            |                                     |                           | Contemplation of Providence         |                                     |
|                      | 5) | Contemplation of Judgement |                                     |                           |                                     |                                     |
|                      | 6) | 2nd Natural Contemplation  | Contemplation of the Bodies         | 2nd Natural Contemplation | Contemplation of Bodies             | Contemplation of the Worlds         |
|                      | 7) | Gnosis of the Logikoi      | Contemplation of Incorporeal Things | 1st Natural Contemplation | Contemplation of Incorporeal Things | Contemplation of Incorporeal Things |
|                      | 8) |                            |                                     |                           |                                     | Contemplation of Intelligibles      |
| Contemplation of God | 9) | Gnosis of the Trinity      | The Trinity                         | The Holy Unity            | The Holy Trinity                    | The Holy Trinity                    |

Also discernible from the chart is the further progression within the first two stages. In the stage of *praktike*, one eradicates evil through the acquisition of virtues via grace and discipline: "The second renunciation is the abandonment of evil, which happens by the grace of God and by the diligence of the person"<sup>52</sup>. Within the contemplation of the physical world, one begins with contemplating the "earthly" creation while moving up to a contemplation of the "heavenly" creation, resulting ultimately in the third stage-contemplation of the Holy Trinity. We conclude, consequently, that Evagrius' understanding of spirituality in *On Prayer* and the *Centuries on Knowledge*, the two Evagrian works certainly known by Peter, consists in seeing a person's spiritual life as a movement through three stages culminating in one's contemplation of the Holy Trinity in prayer.

Of the six quotations from Pseudo-Dionysius in the Petrine corpus, the editors identify five: three from the *Divine Names* (*De divinis nominibus*)<sup>53</sup>, one from the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (*De ecclesiastica hierarchia*)<sup>54</sup> and one from the *Celestial Hierarchy* (*De coelesti hierarchia*)<sup>55</sup>. In view of Peter's use of these texts, it is likely that he was familiar with the entire Dionysian corpus even if he does not quote from

<sup>52</sup> *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.79; Bundy, "The Kephalaia Gnostica", 184.

<sup>53</sup> Greek text in PG 3:585-984 and Beate R. Suchla, ed., *Corpus Dionysiacum, Bd. 1: Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. De Divinis Nominibus* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990). Translated into English by Colm Luibheid in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 49-131. All quotations are from this translation.

<sup>54</sup> Greek text in PG 3:369-569 and Günter Heil and Adolf M. Ritter, eds., *Corpus Dionysiacum, Bd. 2: Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. De Coelesti Hierarchia, De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia, De Mystica Theologia, Epistulae* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991). English translation in Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 195-259.

<sup>55</sup> Greek text in PG 3:120-340 and *Corpus Dionysiacum, Bd. 2*. English translation in Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 145-191.

all of the Dionysian works that are extant. Since the *Mystical Theology* (*De Mystica Theologia*)<sup>56</sup> summarizes the *Divine Names* and previews the teaching of the *Celestial Hierarchy* and the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*<sup>57</sup>, a Dionysian understanding of spiritual theology can be gleaned from its pages. Pseudo-Dionysius begins the *Mystical Theology* with a summary of his understanding of the spiritual life, addressed to his "fellow-elder" Timothy:

For this I pray; and, Timothy, my friend, my advice to you as you look for a sight of the mysterious things [μυστικά], is to leave behind you everything perceived and understood, everything perceptible and understandable, all that is not and all that is, and, with your understanding laid aside, to strive upward as much as you can toward union with him who is beyond all being and knowledge. By an undivided and absolute abandonment of yourself and everything, shedding all and freed from all, you will be uplifted to the ray of the divine shadow which is above everything that is<sup>58</sup>.

For Pseudo-Dionysius the spiritual life consists in leaving behind everything, both material and immaterial, in order to be united with God, who is the "Transcendent One"<sup>59</sup>. Through abandonment one takes "flight upward" in order to "plunge into that darkness which is beyond intellect" (i.e., God)<sup>60</sup>. Pseudo-Dionysius further summarizes his understanding of the spiritual life in the prayer that begins the *Mystical Theology*:

Trinity!! Higher than any being,  
                   any divinity, any goodness!  
 Guide of Christians  
                   in the wisdom of heaven!  
 Lead us up beyond unknowing and light,  
                   up to the farthest, highest peak  
                   of mystic scripture,  
 where the mysteries of God's Word  
                   lie simple, absolute and unchangeable  
                   in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence.  
 Amid the deepest shadow  
                   they pour overwhelming light  
                   on what is most manifest.  
 Amid the wholly unsensed and unseen  
                   they completely fill our sightless minds  
                   with treasures beyond all beauty<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> Greek text in PG 3:997-1048 and *Corpus Dionysiacum*, Bd. 2. English translation in Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 135-141.

<sup>57</sup> On this division of the Dionysian corpus see Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* 133, n. 1 and 140, n. 17.

<sup>58</sup> *Mystical Theology* 1.1; Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 135.

<sup>59</sup> *Mystical Theology* 1.3; Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 137.

<sup>60</sup> *Mystical Theology* 3; Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 139.

<sup>61</sup> *Mystical Theology* 1.1; Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 135.

That is, in less poetic terms, Pseudo-Dionysius prays that God would lead humankind beyond the knowledge of him that comes through the written Scriptures. Instead, Pseudo-Dionysius asks that humankind be led directly to the Word, the Son of God himself. Finally, Pseudo-Dionysius explains to Timothy that the reason he writes theology is to make his teacher Hierotheus' teachings more understandable to the less theologically advanced<sup>62</sup>. Thus, for Pseudo-Dionysius, spiritual theology is also the explication of the means of attaining union with God.

Dorotheus, the sixth century founder of a monastery in Gaza, often appears in discussions of Byzantine spirituality. Initially influenced by the great ascetic and letter writer Barsanuphius, Dorotheus, in turn, influenced Peter, who quotes the Palestinian archimandrite eight times. Of the seven that have been identified all come from the *Instructions* (*Διδασκαλῖαι*)<sup>63</sup>. In the first instruction "On Renunciation", Dorotheus provides a survey of salvation history including his understanding of the spiritual life. According to Dorotheus, humankind was created by God, adorned with every virtue and placed in paradise where he "was provided for... in prayer and contemplation in the midst of honor and glory"<sup>64</sup>. Furthermore, humankind was "perfect in his nature as he was created"<sup>65</sup> since he was in the likeness of God. After the first sin, however, humankind was "thrown out of paradise and fell from a state in accord with his nature to a state contrary to nature, i.e. a prey to sin, ambition, to a love of the pleasures of this life and the other passions.... There was no more piety [θεοσεβεία], and everywhere was ignorance of God"<sup>66</sup>. After a brief overview of Israelite history, Dorotheus writes that "at last the good, man-loving God sends his only begotten Son... [and]... he renewed man in his nature, restored the depraved senses and sensibility of human nature to what it had been in the beginning"<sup>67</sup>. The result of Christ's incarnation and his restoration of humankind to their prelapsarian state is that now humankind can again live virtuous, spiritual lives. Precepts on how to live virtuous lives are contained in the Holy Scriptures, "the Man [God] gave us instructions, as I said, which purify our passions and those evil dispositions which come from our inner man". As well, God gave humankind the ability to obey his commandments, "He instilled into man's inner conscience the power to judge good and evil; he woke it from sleep"<sup>68</sup>.

<sup>62</sup> *The Divine Names* 3.2; Luiheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 69.

<sup>63</sup> Greek text in PG 88:1611-1842 and Lucien Regnault and Jacques de Préville, eds., *Dorothee de Gaza: Oeuvres spirituelles* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1963). Translated into English by Eric P. Wheeler in *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1977). All quotations are from this translation.

<sup>64</sup> *Instructions* 3; Wheeler, *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings*, 77.

<sup>65</sup> *Instructions* 3; Wheeler, *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings*, 77.

<sup>66</sup> *Instructions* 3; Wheeler, *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings*, 77.

<sup>67</sup> *Instructions* 1; Wheeler, *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings*, 79.

<sup>68</sup> *Instructions* 1; Wheeler, *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings*, 80.



For Dorotheus baptism sets us free from our sins and gives us the power to do good "if we desire to"<sup>69</sup>. Obedience to God's commands keeps humankind from falling into these sins again; however, although the "commandments were given to all Christians and it is understood that every Christian observes them"<sup>70</sup>, Dorotheus writes that the commandments are observed best in the monastery. He sums up his theology of the spiritual life with an encouragement to his monks,

Let us lead a life in agreement with our appearance [σχήμα], as the Fathers say, lest we take on a character alien to it. But as we have given up the great things let us give up the little things; as we have renounced the world, so let us give up passionate attachment to it. For through certain small and worthless things our inordinate desires bind us again to the world without realizing it. If, therefore, we desire to be set free and to enjoy perfect freedom, let us learn to cut off our desires and so, with God's help, in a little while, we shall make progress and arrive at a state of tranquillity [ἀπροσπάθειαν]. For nothing helps men so much as to cut off self-will, for thereby a man prepares the way for nearly all the virtues<sup>71</sup>.

According to Dorotheus, spiritual theology is the whole of one's life lived in response to the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The commandments of the Holy Scriptures guide the Christian on their path of "being united to God"<sup>72</sup>.

Peter's fondness for the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* (*Scala paradisi*)<sup>73</sup> of John Climacus is typical of many Eastern Orthodox spiritual writers<sup>74</sup>. Quoting from the *Ladder* twenty-nine times, Peter often relies on the Sinaite abbot to assist him in his discussion of various subjects. Like Evagrius, Climacus has a tripartite understanding of the spiritual life. This is visible most clearly in the "Introduction" to the English translation where Kallistos Ware diagrams the structure of the *Ladder*, emphasizing these three stages<sup>75</sup>. If Ware is correct, and I believe that he is, then the

<sup>69</sup> *Instructions* 1; Wheeler, *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings*, 80.

<sup>70</sup> *Instructions* 1; Wheeler, *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings*, 84.

<sup>71</sup> *Instructions* 1; Wheeler, *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings*, 88.

<sup>72</sup> *Instructions* 4; Wheeler, *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings*, 111.

<sup>73</sup> Greek text in PG 88:632-1208. Translated into English by Colm Luibheid and Normal Russell in *John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982). All quotations are from this translation.

<sup>74</sup> Luibheid and Russell, *John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Luibheid and Russell, *John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 12-13. Ware acknowledges on page 12, n. 37 that "[t]his scheme is taken, with some modifications, from G. Couilleau, *Dictionnaire de S[piritualité]* viii (1972), col. 373".

I. *The Break with the World*

1. Renunciation
2. Detachment
3. Exile

II. *The Practice of the Virtues ("Active Life")*

(i) *Fundamental Virtues*

4. Obedience
5. Penitence

entire organization of *The Ladder* is Climacus' theology of the spiritual life. Thus, Climacus' spiritual theology involves three steps: (1) making a break with the world; (2) practicing the virtues (including struggling against the non-physical and physical passions); and (3) achieving union with God. Climacus sums up the teaching of the *Ladder* regarding the spiritual life in his conclusion to Step 29 "On Dispassion":

Friends, let us break through this wall of separation (cf. Eph. 2:14), this wall that in our disobedience we built to our own harm. Let us look there for the forgiveness of our sins, since there is no one in hell who can pardon us. Brothers, let us commit ourselves to this, for our names are on the lists of the devout. There must be no talk of "a lapse", "there is not time", or "a burden". To everyone who has received the Lord in baptism, "He has given the power to become children of God" (John 1:12). "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 45:11) and am "Dispassion", He says. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Blessed dispassion raises the poor mind from earth to heaven, raises the beggar from the dunghill of passion. And love, all praise to it, makes him sit with princes, that is with the holy angels, and with the princes of God's people (cf. Ps. 112:7-8)<sup>76</sup>.

Climacus envisions the spiritual life as a struggle against the passions that desperately attempt to hinder one's ascent to union with

- 
- 6. Remembrance of Death
  - 7. Sorrow
  - (ii) *The Struggle Against the Passions*
    - (a) Passions That Are Predominantly Non-physical
      - 8. Anger
      - 9. Malice
      - 10. Slander
      - 11. Talkativeness
      - 12. Falsehood
      - 13. Despondency
    - (b) Physical and Material Passions
      - 14. Gluttony
      - 15. Lust
      - 16-17. Avarice
    - (c) Non-Physical Passions (cont.)
      - 18-20. Insensitivity
      - 21. Fear
      - 22. Vainglory
      - 23. Pride (also Blasphemy)
  - (iii) *Higher Virtues of the "Active Life"*
    - 24. Simplicity
    - 25. Humility
    - 26. Discernment
  - III. *Union with God (Transition to the "Contemplative Life")*
    - 27. Stillness
    - 28. Prayer
    - 29. Dispassion
    - 30. Love

<sup>76</sup> *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 29; Luibheid and Russell, *John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 285.

God. Theologically, and practically, we overcome these obstacles by practicing the virtues, resulting in an abiding "with holy angels" in the presence of the Holy Trinity.

Of the seventeen references that Peter makes to Maximus Confessor, the editors located eleven and all come from either the *Chapters on Love* (*Capita de caritate*)<sup>77</sup> or the *Chapters on Theology and Economy* (*Capita theologica et oeconomica*)<sup>78</sup>. Irénée-Henri Dalmais has written two substantial articles examining the spiritual theology of Maximus<sup>79</sup> and he organizes the spiritual teaching of Maximus under three headings: (1) Adam or the divided human ("Adam ou l'homme divisé"); (2) Christ or the reconciled human ("le Christ ou l'homme réconcilié"); and (3) the way of divinization ("la voie de la divinisation"). According to Dalmais, meditation on the human condition and the Adamic drama holds an important place in the earliest works of Maximus. For Maximus, the passions are not evil in and of themselves; but because of Adam's choice to commit sin, the passions "are from now on deeply rooted in the egoistic love of oneself (φιλαυτία)"<sup>80</sup>. This is clearly explained in the *Centuries on Love*: "Self-love, as has frequently been said, is the cause of all passionate thoughts", and the "beginning of all passions is love of self"<sup>81</sup>. In love, the virtues find a unifying principle and in it is found the perfection of dispassion (ἀπάθεια): "The one who is perfect in love and has reached the summit of detachment knows no distinction between one's own and another's, between faithful and unfaithful, between slave and freeman, or indeed between male and female"<sup>82</sup>. Hence, for Maximus it is self-love that causes one to give in to the passions and commit sin, whereas true love is the greatest and the highest virtue, and it is true love that leads one back to the prelapsarian state of ἀπάθεια<sup>83</sup>. However, love was not sufficient alone.

Concerning Christ and the reconciliation of humankind, Dalmais writes,

<sup>77</sup> Greek text in Aldo Ceresa-Gastaldo, ed. and trans., *Massimo Confessore: Capitoli sulla carità* (Rome: Editrice Studium, 1963). Translated into English by George C. Berthold in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 35-87. All quotations are from this translation.

<sup>78</sup> Greek text in PG 90:1084-1173. English translation in Berthold, *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, 129-170. All quotations are from this translation.

<sup>79</sup> Irénée-Henri Dalmais, "L'oeuvre spirituelle de s. Maxime le Confesseur", *La Vie Spirituelle* Suppl. 21 (1952): 216-226 and the article "Maxime le Confesseur" in Marcel Viller et al., eds., *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique: doctrine et histoire*, Tome X (Paris: Beauchesne, 1980), cols. 836-847. The following relies on the more abbreviated treatment in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*.

<sup>80</sup> Dalmais, "Maxime le Confesseur," col. 843: "... elles se trouvent désormais enracinées dans l'amour égoïste de soi (φιλαυτία)".

<sup>81</sup> *Chapters on Love* 3, 56-57; Berthold, *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, 69.

<sup>82</sup> *Chapters on Love* 2, 30; Berthold, *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, 51.

<sup>83</sup> See Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, Second Edition (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), 231-248 and 309-322.

Bound in the endless dialectic of pleasure (ἡδονή) and pain (ὀδύνη), the human being is inescapably doomed to death which the mercy of God granted him as a deliverance and from which he vainly attempts to escape; as a consequence of the culpable attraction to pleasure to which he has yielded, the 'mode of birth' (τρόπος τῆς γεννήσεως; *Ambigua* 42, PG 91, 1317d-1320a) no longer corresponds to what should have been the norm of his coming into existence (λόγος τῆς γενέσεως). The Incarnation of the Logos of God will 'paradoxically' carry out an 'innovation of natures' which restores to human nature the ancient beauty of incorruptibility<sup>84</sup>.

For Maximus, it is the assumption by the divine Logos of a human nature that makes it possible for humankind to rise again to the state of incorruptibility. Selfless love may be the vehicle to God, but the incarnation of the Logos builds the road upon which love travels. The state of incorruptibility to which all of humankind strives is divinization (θεώσις). In Christ, human nature assumes the "subsistence of a divine person"<sup>85</sup>, without undergoing any change. According to Maximus, the spiritual life is that process of divinization, made possible by the incarnation of the Logos. Through the virtues (especially love), one overcomes the self-love that incites the passions, which in turn causes sin. The attainment of ἀπάθεια is the end of the process of divinization: "The one who keeps untarnished the way of virtue with religious and upright knowledge and does not fall away will discover the presence of God in him through detachment [ἀπαθείας]"<sup>86</sup>.

Like Maximus, as well as Evagrius and John Climacus, Isaac of Nineveh (the Syrian) also has a tripartite understanding of the spiritual life. Peter employs Isaac twenty-seven times throughout his corpus – fifteen of the uses are from Isaac's ascetical works<sup>87</sup>. However, there is no evidence that Peter read Syriac; he likely used the ninth-century Greek translation of Isaac's works made by the monks Abramius and

<sup>84</sup> Dalmats, "Maxime le Confesseur," col. 843: "Enchaîné dans la dialectique sans fin de la volupté (ἡδονή) et de la souffrance (ὀδύνη), l'homme est inéluctablement voué à la mort que la miséricorde divine lui concède comme une délivrance et à laquelle il tente vainement d'échapper; en conséquence de l'attrait peccamineux pour le plaisir auquel il a cédé, le 'mode de naissance' (τρόπος τῆς γεννήσεως) ne correspond plus à ce qu'aurait dû être la norme de sa venue à l'existence (λόγος τῆς γενέσεως; *Ambigua* 42, PG 91, 1317d-1320a). L'Incarnation du Logos de Dieu va 'paradoxalement' réaliser une 'innovation des natures' qui restitue à l'humaine nature l'antique beauté de l'incorruptibilité".

<sup>85</sup> Dalmats, "Maxime le Confesseur," col. 845: "... la subsistence d'une personne divine".

<sup>86</sup> *Chapters on Theology and Economy* 2, 98; Berthold, *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, 169.

<sup>87</sup> There is no uniform title for Isaac's ascetical treatises so I will use that of Paul Bedjan, *De perfectione religiosa*. The original Syriac text of the ascetical works is located in Paul Bedjan, ed., *Mar Isaacus Ninivita, de Perfectione Religiosa* (Paris/Leipzig, 1909). The treatises have been translated into English from the Syriac by A. J. Wensinck in *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh* (Amsterdam, 1923; repr. Wiesbaden, 1969). All quotations are from this translation.

Patricius, of the Lavra of St. Sabas in Palestine<sup>88</sup>. Isaac's understanding of spiritual theology influenced Peter. Isaac divides the spiritual life into three stages: repentance (bodily), purification (psychic) and perfection (spiritual)<sup>89</sup>. These stages are not necessarily sequential and are not always easily separable. Isaac defines repentance as the "continual mournful supplication in contrite prayer, offered to God for the forgiveness of previous sins; and petition to be guarded against future ones"<sup>90</sup>. Also in this stage one combats the passions by exterior or "bodily" exercises. Repentance and "bodily" exercises, in turn, lead to purity of the soul (the restoration of the soul to its proper nature) via a path of purification from the passions which are "parts of the usual current of the world.... They are: love of riches; gathering of possessions; fatness of the body giving rise to the tendency towards carnal desire; love of honour which is the source of envy; exercising government; pride and haughtiness of magistracy; folly; glory among men, which is the cause of choler, bodily fear"<sup>91</sup>. The purification of the soul occurs in two stages: first, purification of movements toward corruptible things occurs; and secondly, the soul turns away from exterior things. Finally, through constant purification and asceticism, one reaches the third stage, perfection (i.e., union with God). Isaac summarizes his understanding of the spiritual life in a chapter entitled "Exposition concerning the degrees of the path...":

Bodily discipline in solitude purifies the body from the material elements in it. Mental discipline makes the soul humble and purifies it from the material impulses that tend towards decaying things, by changing their affectible nature into motions of contemplation. And this will bring the soul near to the nakedness of the mind that is called immaterial contemplation; that is spiritual discipline. It elevates the intellect above earthly things and brings it near to primordial spiritual contemplation; it directs the intellect

<sup>88</sup> Edited by Nikephoros Theotokes and published at Leipzig in 1770 and republished at Athens in 1895 by Joachim Spetsieris. See Élie Khalifé-Hachem, "Isaac de Ninive" in Marcel Viller et al., eds., *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique: doctrine et histoire*, Tome VII (Paris: Beauchesne, 1971), col. 2052 and Sebastian Brock, "Syriac into Greek at Mar Saba: The Translation of St. Isaac the Syrian", in Joseph Patrich, ed., *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 201-208. Spetsieris' edition is available in a reprint as *Τὸ ὅσιον πατὴρ ἡμῶν Ἰσαὰκ ἐπισκόπου Νινευί, τοῦ Σύρου, τὰ εὐρεθέντα ἀσκητικά* [The ascetical homilies of the holy father Isaac, bishop of Nineveh, of Syria] (Thessaloniki: Εκδότικὸς οἶκος βας. Πηγοπούλου, 1977). This Greek edition has been translated into English by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery (especially Dana Miller) as *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian* (Boston, 1984). Miller acknowledges his indebtedness to the Syriac original since parts of the ninth-century Greek translation are unintelligible.

<sup>89</sup> *De perfectione religiosa* 74; Wensinck, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Ninevah*, 341. See Khalifé-Hachem, "Isaac de Ninive", cols. 2043-2050.

<sup>90</sup> *De perfectione religiosa* 73; Wensinck, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Ninevah*, 337.

<sup>91</sup> *De perfectione religiosa* 2; Wensinck, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Ninevah*, 13.

towards God by the sight of unspeakable glory and it delights spiritually in the hope of future things, [thinking of] what and how each of them will be<sup>92</sup>.

Isaac views the spiritual life as a progression towards union with or contemplation of God. Spirituality for Isaac, then, is the whole process of approaching God through repentance and purification. The "spiritual" (or perfect) life is the "unspeakable glory" of being united with God.

Peter's contributions to spiritual theology are both doctrinal and literary. His spiritual program was open to all persons—both monastics and non-monastics. Kallistos Ware affirms this when he writes, "Although writing for monks, he insists that salvation and spiritual knowledge are within the reach of everyone; continual prayer is possible in all situations without exception"<sup>93</sup>. This openness is seen in statements such as "marriage is natural" (83; 12.31); "if someone wants to be saved, no person or no time, place or occupation can prevent him" (83; 13.2-5); and "For we should all, as Christians, keep the commandments" (195; 100.7-8). As the above survey of eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantine theological literature revealed, there was much ink used to combat theological problems and to pen hagiographical *vitae*. Texts on spiritual theology, however, are few and are most often *florilegium*-like<sup>94</sup>. Thus, Peter's literary contribution to Byzantine spiritual theology is not difficult to understand. Peter's works make their greatest contribution as texts on spiritual theology that is more than a *florilegium* and more than a commentary on the thought of a previous author, though he makes extensive use of early Christian spiritual theologians.

#### ABSTRACT

This article investigates the spiritual theology of the early Christian sources that influenced the twelfth-century Byzantine spiritual writer Peter of Damascus. In addition, attention is given to the state of twelfth-century monasticism as well as to contemporary literature to situate Peter in his historical, social, religious and literary environment. A brief explanation of intertextuality is also given with suggestions for how this literary technique may help modern scholars profitably read the works of Peter.

<sup>92</sup> *De perfectione religiosa* 40; Wensinck, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Ninevah*, 202.

<sup>93</sup> Palmer, Sherrard and Ware, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, 72.

<sup>94</sup> On Byzantine spiritual *florilegia* see Marcel Richard, "Florilèges spirituels grecs", cols. 475-512. The Petrine corpus differs in style and intended audience from the three types of *florilegia* described by Richard.