

The hesychastic inward unification as expression of the relationship between the Father and the Son from the Gospel of John, described in the Neptic Literature

Fr. PhD John Lincoln Downie*

Abstract:

An investigation of the Relationship between the Father and Son in the Gospel of John through the vision of the Neptic Fathers of the Orthodox Church. The circular motion of neptic prayer is symmetrical to the Son's motion from and to the Father in the Gospel. Saints Dionysius and Maximus treat the subject most fully. The Relationship between the Son and Father is the foundation and model for Orthodox obedience.

Keywords:

Gospel; John; Neptic; Relationship between the Father and the Son; Philokalia; St. Dionysius Areopagita; St. Maximus the Confessor; exegesis.

Why the Relationship between Father and Son?

The Full title of this article could have been, *The Relationship between the Father and the Son in the Gospel of John in Neptic Literature*, but would have been too ponderous. Many modern scholars have noted that this Relationship is of great weight in the Gospel of John.¹ Several years after the doctoral studies

* Pr. Dr. **John Lincoln DOWNIE** is a parish priest at Saint Michael Romanian Church, Southbridge, MA (www.stmichaelorthodox.com), and PhD. Student at Faculty of Orthodox Theology Patriarch Iustinian, Bucharest.

¹ „This commentary points out the way the Fourth Gospel presents the God of Israel as Father, and Jesus as Son, in an all-determining relationship” Moloney, Francis J., *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina, Vol. 4, Liturgical Press, Minneapolis, USA, 1998, p. 21; Schnackenburg, Rudolf, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 2, Seabury Press, NY, USA, 1980, „The ‚Father-Son relationship’ is the key to the understanding of Jesus as portrayed by the evangelist and his words and actions as interpreted by him,” P. 172; Ridderbos,

leading to this present article had already begun, two full scale attempts to shed light on this central theme were published.² Nevertheless, those two studies have not taken the center of Orthodox theological thought, which is *nepsis*, and tried to apply it to the subject at hand. Therefore the time is ripe for an investigation of this central theme according to deepest thought the Orthodox Church has to offer on this topic: the neptic perspective.

I. The Category of Neptic: limitations and openness

The term Neptic comes from *νίφω* which means sober in koine Greek. It is used in a number of passages in the NT,³ and is associated with maintaining vigilance and seriousness. This adjective is part of the full title for the Greek *Philokalia*, *The Philokalia of the Neptic Fathers*. The Neptic fathers are those that cleansed their inner man (*nous*) through ceaseless prayer, usually specifically the Jesus prayer in a context that is traditionally referred to as *hesychasm*; translatable as either stillness or silence.

The two terms neptic and hesychastic are not synonyms, yet they are thoroughly intertwined. Hesychasm is dedication to stillness of mind, body and spirit, and *nepsis* is about cleansing the thoughts of the inner man, which leads to deeper stillness and unity of the physical senses, emotion and reason into a single thought. It is usually translated as purifying the heart, *watchfulness* and perhaps even *guarding the heart*. In the English *Philokalia* it is rendered watchfulness in

Herman, *The Gospel of John, a Theological Commentary*, Eerdmans, Cambridge, UK, 1997, "The oneness of the Son with the Father, of Christ with God, is the fundamental motif of Jesus' entire self-revelation" p. 197; Culpepper, Alan, R., *The Gospel and Letters of John*, Abingdon Press, TN, 1998, „Jesus' relationship to God as Son to Father is one of the hallmarks of John's Christology," p. 126; Dodd, C.H., *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge England, 1953, p. 381; Kostenberger, Andreas J., *John, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2004, p. 431; Westermann, Claus, *The Gospel of John in the Light of the Old Testament*, Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, p. 29; Francis Martin and William M. Wright IV, *Gospel of John*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids Michigan, USA, 2015, Pg 24; Hill, Charles E. *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 34.; "Show Us the Father, and We Will be Satisfied (John 14:8) Grail R. O'Day Semeia" p. 14. Yee, Gale, A. *Jewish Feasts and the Gospel of John*, Zaccaeus Studies: New Testament, Michael Glazier Inc., 1989, P. 30.

² Adesola Joan Akala, *The Son-Father Relationship and Christological Symbolism in the Gospel of John*, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, London, 2014; Rheaume, Randy, *Equal Yet Subordinate, an Exegetical and Theological Analysis of the Son's Relationship to the Father in John's Gospel*, Edwin Miller Press, New York, 2014.

³³ 1 Thess. 5:6,8; 2 Tim. 4:5; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 5:8

the glossary. The literal definition is *not drunk*, i.e. sober. Neptic and hesychastic activity should not be thought of as consecutive but concomitant.

Typically within the monastic tradition, those that practice this inner cleansing obtain to the unity of vision and an experience which Christ mentions when He says “if the eye of the body is good (simple/single-ἀπλοῦς) then the whole body will be full of light (Matthew 6:22).”

With some controversy, since neptic usually refers to Christians that specifically used the invocation of Christ’s name (the typical formula being: Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me) we could include an entire list of early Church Fathers to this group of neptic writers because their experience was essentially (and quite possibly exactly) the same.

Saint John Chrysostom spent many years as a hermit, St Gregory the Theologian preferred quietude and spiritual retreat to the intrigues of the patriarchal seat of Constantinople and even St Basil the great is quoted in the sayings of the desert fathers from whom the neptic tradition uncontestably stems.

In an attempt to unchain ourselves from overly fragmented modern theology,⁴ we will not limit ourselves to only the standard texts of the *Philokalia*, St Gregory Palamas, St Simeon the New Theologian, the Desert Fathers, and the *Apophthegmata* etc., but increase our range of vision to include many ancient Church Fathers and modern Saints of the Church such as Silvan the Athonite, the recently glorified Porfyrios, father Sophrony and father Aimilianos of Simonas Petras just to name a few, hence the appeal to neptic *literature* in the title.

Though we do not have space or time to develop conclusive proof in this particular work, we could presume that the invocation of the Name was inaugurated by Jesus Christ Himself (as we will see) and the earliest Christians (1Corinthians 1:2; 2; Timothy 2:22), since Christ Himself told us to pray in His name; thus establishing the tradition of invoking his presence by the repetition of His name. There is even some evidence that St John the Theologian was partial to stillness.⁵ Even modern biblical scholars such as L. W. Hurtado concede that some form of invoking Christ’s name existed from the very most ancient times.⁶

⁴ Here we can agree with Morrow, and many others in the observation that the split between Dogmatic Theology and exegesis is dangerous indeed; Jeffrey Morrow, “Work as Worship in the Garden and the Workshop: Genesis 1-3, the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, and Liturgical Hermeneutics.”, in: *Logos* 15 (4/2012) p. 159.

⁵ *The Philokalia, The Complete Text, compiled by St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth*, Vol. III, translated by H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, volumes I-IV, Faber and Faber, London, 1984, St Philotheos, p. 195.

⁶ “To judge from other NT texts in which direct invocation of Jesus’ name is attested (e.g., Acts 2:38; 3:6; 4:10; 10:48; 16:18; 1 Cor 5:4; 6:11), these Johannine statements likely reflect the specific practice of overtly invoking Jesus’ mediatorial efficacy in early

II. Issues involving John

Here one may well be wondering, why were several examples of such interpretations not from the Gospel of John, and what about the Father's relationship to the Son? Good questions. There was not as much material in the Philokalic writings about the relationship between the Father and the Son specifically in the Gospel according to John as I had originally hoped. For instance, after perusing all of the extant writings of St. Isaac the Syrian (one of the key neptic writers for the Eastern Orthodox Church), there were scant references to our topic. Two other essential neptic reference books had nearly no reference at all to this topic, the *Unseen Warfare*, and the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*. This absence made my particular task difficult. The Gospel according to John, generally recognized as the loftiest and most Christological, with few parables, has not easily lent itself to the pithy neptic interpretations that we find in the *Philokalia* concerning the synoptic Gospels. His anagogical statements are often very plainly stated. What can you add to "He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (Jn 14:9)" His disciples said to Him, "See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! (Jn 16:29)."

What we will find in the neptic fathers is that this relationship in John is typically discussed in: dogmatic discourse (use of terms from the seven ecumenical councils); the use of the Son as Logos and Only-Begotten of the Father; the symmetry between both the Son's and mankind's relationship to the Father; and an anagogic expression of the trinity based on different variations of the tri-partite division of man. And though briefly commented upon, very significantly we find that the Son's obedience to the Father is the model for obedience.

III. Different viewpoints from the neptic tradition

3.1. Mind, body, soul

Perhaps due to the soteriological scope of the *Philokalia*, a crucial expansion of the relationship between the Father and the Son comes to us in the context of its anthropology. Man is made in the image of the Holy Trinity, and so we often find

Christian prayers, a matter to which I return later in this discussion. This also certainly constitutes a distinctive prayer–practice that marks off Christian believers." *The Place of Jesus in Earliest Christian Prayer and its Import for Early Christian Identity*, L. W. Hurtado (University of Edinburgh) p. 9, <https://larryhurtado.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/jesus-in-earliest-christian-prayer.pdf>; for an elaborate apologetic for the Jesus Prayer's antiquity see Bobrinskoy's *The Compassion of the Father*, St Vladimir's Press, Crestwood, New York, 2003, p. 99-107.

various analogies of man’s powers or parts corresponding to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Here is a brief overview:

Saints Nichetas Stethatos,⁷ Gregory of Sinai,⁸ and Metropolitan Theoliptos⁹ of Philadelphia in the *Philokalia* maintain the tripartite distinction of the human soul (inherited, to a certain extent, from *Plato’s Republic* book four) and compare it to the inter-Trinitarian relationships. Saint Symeon the New Theologian speaks of this in his *Catechesis*¹⁰ and *Theological Discourses*.¹¹ Here is a small chart:

Father	Soul	House	Soul	Nous	intellect	Intelligence
Logos	Intellect (nous)	Door	Mind	Logos	Conscious ness	Intellect
Spirit	Conscious- ness	Key	Word	Psyche	spirit	Spirit

Though they use this tripartite analogy, the neptic fathers are quick to recognize that these cannot be pressed too far. For instance Nichetas states that the Holy Spirit accompanies the Logos (word) but not in the way that breath accompanies a word. It is a kind of Eros of the Begetter for the Son, and the Father and Son rejoice in each other in the Holy Spirit even before eternity.¹²

There are several texts that could show us the inter-Trinitarian relationships using this anthropomorphic model, but for the sake of efficiency I would like to note a typical, but ample quote from St Gregory of Sinai.

“In man there is intellect, consciousness and spirit. There is neither intellect without consciousness nor consciousness without spirit: each subsists in the others and in itself. Intellect expresses itself through consciousness and consciousness is

⁷ *The Philokalia*, vol. IV, p. 141.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 218.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 184.

¹⁰ Simeon Noul Teolog, *Cateheze. Scrieri II*, trans. Diacon, Ioan I. Ica, Deisis, Sibiu, 2003, p. 38.

¹¹ Simeon Noul Teolog, *Discursuri teologice si etice, Discursuri teologice si etice*, trans. Diacon, Ioan I. Ica, Deisis, Sibiu, 2001, p. 86.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 361 vs. 36.

manifested through the spirit. In this way man is a dim image of the ineffable and archetypal Trinity, disclosing even now the divine image in which he is created.”¹³

At this point the observant reader may have noticed that this tri-partite analogy of the human to the divine is found only in the later volumes of the *Philokalia*. It seems that this theme developed over time, even though the tri-partite division of Man was firmly grounded in the early Eastern Church Fathers. Man was viewed as Body, Soul and Spirit.¹⁴ This distinct system is not in tension with that of the later. Philokalic authors generally accepted the tripartite division of the human soul found in Plato’s *Republic*. The Fathers rendered it; to, logistiko,n, to, qumiko,n, to, e’pikumhtiko,n: the intelligent, the appetitive, and the incensive aspects of the soul.

3.2. Circular motion

This tripartite analogy which we have just covered fits in quite well with two more themes that intertwine. The movement of the soul during prayer, and the mystagogy of the Church edifice or Temple since the human is also a type of Church. The body is the pronaos, the soul is the naos and the altar is the mind/heart.¹⁵ These divisions may seem tangential to our topic, but we will see how they are extremely relevant a little later. The movement of the faithful in the Church, towards the altar is compared to the movement of the mind from the external things, gathering and unifying the senses (uniting the *logoi* of things) upon the altar (of the heart) – whereas the faithful draw near to the physical altar in the Church, and come closer to God in other people, Who rests in the altar of their hearts.¹⁶ Though Maximus didn’t develop the tripartite division of man as being a direct reflection of the Trinity in his *Mystagogy*, he does mention that the Church (and man) is in the image of the Trinity through Its unifying work.¹⁷

According to St Maximus, the first fallen man did not use the power of motion properly. He stopped moving around God, and then started moving around

¹³ *The Philokalia*, vol. IV, p. 218.

¹⁴ Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, Clarence Edwin Publisher: Grand Rapids, MI, USA, CCEL, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/rolt/dionysius.html>. p. 532; Justin martyr, *On the Resurrection*, Clarence Edwin Publisher: Grand Rapids, MI, USA, CCEL, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/rolt/dionysius.html> p. 298.

¹⁵ Sfantul Maxim Marturisorul, *Mistagogia*, trans. Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Staniloae, EIBMBOR, București, 2000, APOLOGETICUM, 2003, p. 9

¹⁶ Pr. Dumintru Staniloae, *Spiritaulitate si Comuniune in Liturgia Ortodoxa*, EIBMBOR, Bucuresti, 2004, p. 34

¹⁷ Sfantul Maxim, *Mystagogia*, p. 3.

the created, instead of unifying, dividing.¹⁸ Now he must strive to recover the correct three fold motion: into existence, to blessed existence, then to the origin (elsewhere eternal blessed existence) (*το ειναι, το ευ ειναι, το αει ευ ειναι*).¹⁹ The divine mind/thought has a threefold motion, uniting to itself in a circular motion, straight when it moves outward towards caring for things “beneath” it and in a circular or spiral motion bearing them up.²⁰ This divine motion is reflected in the movement of thought in the rational soul.²¹ These movements are seen to be outworking of the uniting power of eros, with its source in God, since God is love, and unity is founded upon this power; St Maximus quotes John 17:11 to reveal this, showing that even irrational animals feel this tendency towards union – flocks of birds etc.²²

This is a threefold circular movement. Man mirrors this movement. He disperses and wastes himself in the outside world. Then, like the prodigal son, “comes” to himself (regroups, or gathers himself) then heads for the Father Who is in the temple of his heart.²³ This divine movement is reflected in the human soul when it goes forth into the things around it, or disperses its senses into the material world (straight); then turns inward and closes its senses off from the exterior world (circular); and is lifted up while being enlightened by divine knowledge (spirally).²⁴

“Let us once more collect these powers into one and declare that there is but One Simple Power Which of Itself moveth all things to be mingled in an unity, starting from the Good and going unto the lowest of the creatures and thence again returning through all stages in due order unto the Good, and thus revolving from Itself, and through Itself and upon Itself and towards Itself, in an unceasing orbit.”²⁵

Saint Dionysius, though stipulating that God is above movement and rest, speaks about the Godhead’s movement like that of the angels. The Self-Revelation, or Bounteous Emanation which St Dionysius discusses.

¹⁸ Sfantul Maxim, *Ambigua*, Editura Institutului Biblic si de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Romane, Bucuresti, tr. Dumitru Stăniloae, 2006, p. 363.

¹⁹ St. Maxim *Ambigua*, p. 106; *Filocalia*, vol. II, p. 308, note 59.

²⁰ Dionisie Areopagitul, *Opere Complete*, p. 149.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 193.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 195.

²³ Archimandrite Zacharias, *Remember Thy First Love*, p. 129-130.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 75.

²⁵ Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*. Rolt, Clarence Edwin Publisher: Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/rold/dionysius.html>. p. 82.

“—yea, as being His own Self-Revelation and the Bounteous Emanation of His own Transcendent Unity, a Motion of Yearning simple, self-moved, self-acting, pre-existent in the Good, and overflowing from the Good into creation, and once again returning to the Good. And herein the Divine Yearning showeth especially its beginningless and endless nature, revolving in a perpetual circle for the Good, from the Good, in the Good, and to the Good, with unerring revolution, never varying its centre or direction, perpetually advancing and remaining and returning to Itself. This by Divine inspiration our renowned Initiator hath declared in his *Hymns of Yearning*, which it will not be amiss to quote and thus to bring unto a holy consummation our Discourse concerning this matter.”²⁶

St Thalassios also states in his Fourth Century, "paradoxically, the One moves from itself into the Three and yet remains One, while the Three return to the One and yet remain Three."²⁷ Here we have the typical Orthodox distinctions of the divine hypostasis begotten, unbegotten and sent forth. Of course only the Father is considered unoriginated.

We can come to a conclusion that the motion the Father and Son share, is the working of their energy and not the motion of their essence. This conclusion can be solidified with a quote from St Gregory Palamas,

God is participable, for that which in God is visible in some way, is also participable. But the great Denys has also said: "The divine intelligences move in a circular movement, united to the unoriginate and endless rays of the Beautiful and Good." It is clear, therefore, that these unoriginate and endless rays are other than the imparticipable essence of God, and different (albeit inseparable) from the essence.²⁸

Though the circular motion of the Son's relationship with the Father is not openly stated, it is clear that this motion takes place in John's Gospel. From the very prologue we find *πρὸς* which already hints at movement towards.²⁹ John uses *καταβαίνο* seventeen times, more often than any other gospel, eight times specifically for coming down from heaven, the majority of which are during His Eucharistic discourse in chapter six. It is not surprising that *ἀναβαίνο* is used almost exactly the same number of times – sixteen also the most out of all the Gospels. The Son did not use the word *ascending* as often in an explicit way, but

²⁶ Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*, p. 79-80.

²⁷ *The Philokalia*, Vol. III, p. 331.

²⁸ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, ed. John Meyendorff, Paulist Press, 1983, p. 98.

²⁹ Aimilianos, *The Way of the Spirit*, "All His 'momentum' was towards the Father; the entire movement and flow of His life, we might say, was directed towards the Father", p. 148-149.

seven times it is used in referring to going up to Jerusalem for a feast implicitly and occasionally explicitly in the Temple. So the Son has descended from the Father, and ascends to the Temple, His Father's House, and eventually His Father's Eternal dwelling where He was before. His departure to the Father is a central theme, so this circular motion is embroidered throughout the Gospel. Here are just a few tidbits.

(Jn 3:13) *Καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀναβέβηκεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, εἰ μὴ ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὁ ὢν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ.*

No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

(Jn 16:28) *Ἐξῆλθον παρὰ τοῦ πατρός, καὶ ἐλήλυθα εἰς τὸν κόσμον· πάλιν ἀφίημι τὸν κόσμον, καὶ πορεύομαι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα.*

I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.

This previous verse encapsulates the circular cycle nicely.

(Jn 20:17) *Λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Μὴ μου ἅπτου, οὐπὼ γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου· πορεύου δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου, καὶ εἰπὲ αὐτοῖς, Ἀναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν, καὶ θεὸν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν.*

Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"

We also have motion in the work that the Son and Father do together. The New Theologian himself states that God is still the same now as He has ever been, including His works and His liturgical rituals, quoting *Ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἀπεκρίνατο αὐτοῖς, Ὁ πατήρ μου ἕως ἄρτι ἐργάζεται, καὶ γὰρ ἐργάζομαι* (Jn 5:17).³⁰ This is extremely relevant, because it harkens back to an ancient interpretation of the Garden of Eden; the work of Adam being liturgical service. Hence the Son's work is, at least partly, the liturgical service as the High Priest, spilling his life-blood, breath.³¹ His work is making the Father's name known (the work of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement) and gathering the chosen to be with Him in His Father's House to see the Glory that He had before the foundation of the world.

³⁰ God is the same „întru toate, și în lucrările Sale și în riturile liturgice, cum se arată atunci- Tatăl lucrând pururea în Fiul și Fiul lucrând pururea în Tatăl (Jn 10:38, 14:10-11) prin Duhul spunând acestea – „Tatăl Meu până acum lucrează și Eu lucrez (Jn 5:17)”. St. Simeon Noul Teolog, *Cateheze. Scrieri II*, p. 302.

³¹ Dominic Rubin, *Russian cosmism, the Temple, and the Eucharist in the Gospel of John.*, http://www.templestudiesgroup.com/Papers/RussianCosmists_Rubin.pdf, p. 6.

3.3. Going to the Father

3.3.1. Leaving Created things behind

In this context Nichetas states, “The glory of the intellect is its power of ascent, its constant movement upwards...”³² which is reminiscent of the Son’s ascent to the Father.

As we will see, though certain Neptic saints perceived both the coming of Christ from the Father (his descent) and His going to the Father (his ascent), many authors emphasized the Son’s departure from this created world and His going to His Father.

Though direct references are sparse, there is consistent citing throughout the *Philokalia* and Neptic tradition revealing a deep interpretation of the Son’s final approach towards the Cross, His farewell Speech (High Priestly Prayer). The Son’s process of ascent is viewed as an archetype for the ascetic’s abandonment of worldly things, so that his mind can dwell with the Father in contemplation/prayer. This is especially related in St Maximus, but there are other significant texts.

“The Lord does not ascend to the Father for those who explore divine truth with their faculties as they are in their fallen state; but He does ascend to the Father for those who seek out the truth in the Spirit by means of the higher forms of contemplation. The Logos came down out of love for us. Let us not keep Him down permanently, but let us go up with Him to the Father, leaving the earth and earthly things behind, lest He say to us what He said to the Jews because of their stubbornness: ‘I go where you cannot come’. For without the Logos it is impossible to approach the Father of the Logos.”³³

The Son’s approach to His Father, is in fact His death and it is mindfulness of death which helps the ascetic abandon created things and soar up towards contemplation of the Father.

“So long as we are manfully engaged in the holy warfare of ascetic or practical philosophy we retain with us the Logos, who in the form of the commandments came from the Father into this world. But when we are released from our ascetic struggle with the passions and are declared victor over both them and the demons, we pass, by means of contemplation, to gnostic philosophy; and in this way we allow the Logos mystically to leave the world again and make His way to the Father. Hence it is that the Lord says to His disciples: ‘you have loved Me and have believed that I come from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world; and again I leave the world and make My way to the Father (16:27-28).’ By the world He meant perhaps the hard task of practicing the virtues; by the Father, that intellectual state which transcends the world and is free from all

³² Simeon Noul Teolog, *Discursuri teologice și etice*, p. 141, vs 8.

³³ *The Philokalia*, Vol. II, p. 148-9, ch. 47

material propensity. When we are in this state the Logos of God enters into us, putting an end to our battle with the passions and the demons.³⁴

3.3.2. *Entering the unified one*

We also see in Neptic literature a very deep interpretation of John 17:11-22. The Son prayed the Father that all His disciples could be as one, even as He and the Father are one. Saint Porphyrios mentions this several times in His spiritual autobiography, *Wounded by Love*. His interpretation of this text is ontological. For him this is not just expression or metaphor, but an actual description of a state that is experienced by those that have been granted great grace from God.³⁵ This unity is before the ages. Much is made of the Son's (and our) sharing in the Glory of the Father before the foundation of the world (Jn 17:5) in the *Philokalia*.³⁶ Father Aimilianos makes the point that there is only one Principle, so in the end we must become one.³⁷

The theme of One, as nearly all of John's other themes, comes to a climax in the farewell speech, he uses the term (the neuter ἐν) precisely seven times in the Gospel, five of which are in chapter 17, emphasizing that this unity is in the Glory that the Son had with the Father from before the world was, the apophatic heavenly house/temple of the Father. This dovetails nicely with John 1:14: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt [tabernacled] among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14* Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν- καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός- πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.

The theme of unity in John is closely related to a topic that has become known as Temple theology, for this unity is acquired (on an economic level) in the Son's process of returning to the Father's House, beyond this realm into the heavenly Holy of Holies. It is complicated by the fact that the Son's own body is also the new Temple.

3.4. *Maximus the Confessor*

According to my search, the most comprehensive treatment of our theme in Neptic literature can be found in the second volume of the *Philokalia* where St Maximus deals curtly but with great depth and knowledge of the Gospel of John. The bulk of our germane material comes from the *Second Century on Theology*.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, ch. 94, p. 162.

³⁵ St Porphyrios, *Wounded by Love*, p. 88-89, 94, 180.

³⁶ *The Philokalia*, vol. III, p. 48; vol. IV p. 46; etc.

³⁷ Aimilianos, *The Way of the Spirit*, p. 140.

In his *Century of Spiritual Texts* there are several pages which reveal his in-depth knowledge of the relationship between the Father and Son in John. Yet as heavily influenced by the apophatic approach to theology, even before the peak of his discourse on this subject, he makes some disclaimers. He states that God is...

“...infinitely beyond every kind of relationship.”³⁸

And that “God transcends the category of relationship.”³⁹

and more profusely:

“If you theologize in an affirmative or cataphatic manner, starting from positive statements about God, you make the Logos flesh, for you have no other means of knowing God as cause except from what is visible and tangible. If you theologize in a negative or apophatic manner, through the stripping away of positive attributes, you make the Logos spirit or God as He was in His principal state with God: starting from absolutely none of the things that can be known, you come in an admirable way to know Him who transcends unknowing.”⁴⁰

Expanding on this principal state with the Father our saint says, “although He embraces the models of the truth of all things in a distinct and naked manner, He does not contain within Himself parables, symbols and stories needing allegorical interpretation...But when He draws near to men who cannot with the naked intellect come into contact with noetic realities in their naked state, He selects things which are familiar to them, combing together various stories, symbols, parables and dark sayings...”⁴¹

In St. Maximus, like many other Philokalic writers, we find segments where we are given a brief lesson in Orthodox dogmatic theology. Such discourse can be found in his explanation of the Lord's Prayer. It is the incarnate Logos of God that feels the Father and the Holy Spirit in Himself; since the whole Father and the whole Holy Spirit are essentially and perfectly present in the whole incarnate Son. The Father and the Holy Spirit approved of the Incarnation but they Themselves did not become incarnate. There is also a brief summary of Trinitarian theology at the outset of his *Second Century*, along with a few others scattered throughout his texts. But since Trinitarian dogmatics are well known, we will not dwell on them.

Yet by the time we get to his central discourse we discover that we have a great commentator on our hands. We see repeated use of the word, logos in his theology, revealing his great dependence on John. But we also find all of John's major themes being referred to in these chapters... glory, ascent/descent from and to the Father, Christ being sent from the Father, and love. In the second volume of

³⁸ *The Philokalia*, Vol. II, p. 115, vs 7.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 127, vs. 68.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 147.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 151.

the *Philokalia*, in his *Second Century* we find an entire set of themes and quotes from the Fourth Gospel.⁴²

Anyone familiar with St. Maximus's theology knows that the Logos plays a major role in his thought. Comparing the Logos with the Father in Colossians 2:9, he says that the entire fullness of the Godhead dwells in the Logos in a manner according to essence. At a culminating point, he mentions that the thought which springs from the intellect is "a messenger of the intellect's hidden activity."⁴³ In this illustration St Maximus says that the Logos knows the Father just as a thought knows intellect which formed it. This Thought reveals the Father and no person or created being could approach the Father without Him. It is very crucial that here St Maximus quotes Isaiah 9:6 and he calls the Logos the Messenger of great counsel. And goes on to say, "The great counsel of God the Father is the unspoken and unknown mystery of the divine dispensation. This the only-begotten Son revealed through His incarnation, when He became the Messenger of the great pre-eternal counsel of God the Father."⁴⁴ This reference reveals that St Maximus was aware of the Eastern Orthodox theological tradition of interpreting many of the so-called typologies in the Old Testament, or angelic appearances as actually being the presence of the pre-incarnate second person of the Trinity, which he explains elsewhere too.⁴⁵

Replete with allusions to the Gospel according to John about Christ being the way, the door, the life, the truth and the resurrection, he moves on to say that the Logos of the Father is mystically present in each of His Commandments, and that the Father is entirely present without division in "His entire divine Logos."⁴⁶ This means that the one who receives a commandment of God and does it receives The Logos Who is in it; and he who receives the Logos receives the Father who is present in Him. St Maximus summarizes this elucidation by quoting John 13:20 "... He that receives whomever I send receives Me: and He that receives Me receives Him that sent Me." And in this way, St. Maximus says that one receives the entire Trinity.⁴⁷

In paragraph 72, St Maximus continues and develops the idea of what it entails to do the Commandments of God. He explains that faith is not enough but one should bear the hardships and sufferings that come along with seeking virtue so that God can be glorified in the ascetic person. He again summarizes this theme

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 142.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 142.

⁴⁴ *The Philokalia*, Vol. II, St. Maximus *The Second Century*, p. 143.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, see: *The First Century on Theology*, paragraph 97, p. 134.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 154.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 154-155.

by using John, this time 13:31-32, "now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself: and He will glorify Him at once." So in as much as an ascetic suffers the cross, God is glorified in that person. Yet more specifically, God is glorified in them "through the dispassionate illumination of divine realities perceived during the contemplation."⁴⁸

St Maximus has grounded this train of thought so thoroughly on the Fourth Gospel that at this point a lengthier quote is in order:

"So long as we only see the Logos of God as embodied multifariously in symbols in the letter of the Holy Scripture, we have not yet achieved spiritual insight into the incorporeal, simple, single and unique Father as He exists in the incorporeal, simple, single and unique Son, according to the saying, 'He who has seen Me has seen the Father... and I am in the Father and the Father in Me (John 14:9-10).'"⁴⁹

And now we're arriving at the close of St. Maximus's thoughts concerning the Father and the Son. Again using John 1:14 and first Corinthians 13:9 he states that the two saints (John and Paul) perceived the Logos' energies and not his essence which is not accessible to Angels or humans. Again I quote,

"...for not as God in His essence and as co-essential with God the Father was the only-begotten Son given to us; only inasmuch as by virtue of God's providential dispensation He became a man by nature and, for our sakes made co-essential with us, He was given to us who have need of such grace."⁵⁰

So for nearly twenty one paragraphs St Maximus basis himself on the Gospel of John for his explanation of the mystical life, the life of contemplation. The center of this discourse is his teaching on the logoi of the Logos, yet even this subject is in the structure of a movement outward or descending and ascending. An essential part of this treatise is the relationship between the Father and the Son, completely dominated by quotes from the Gospel of John. We find the essential unity between the Father and Son and the fact that the Son is the one through whom the Father is revealed. The Son's incarnation was not a necessity for God, but for us. And the Son clothes Himself in the natural world, in the Father's Commandments, and in the words of the Holy Scriptures in order to reach out to the level of each spiritual striver. He is the Sent One of Isaiah, synthesizing John's unique lemma of the sent one, and grounding it in the ancient Church's vision of pre-incarnate Christophany. In these paragraphs St. Maximus nearly always summarizes his thought with a quote taken from the Gospel of John.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 155.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 155.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 155-156.

As would be fitting for a Father Son relationship, in the Fifth Century of Various Texts in paragraph 84 St Maximus speaks of the divine as an erotic force, that which is intensely longed for and loved. It moves in the sense that it "produces an inward state of intense longing in those that are receptive." But it doesn't only create movement in others but also compels itself towards those inferior to it also through love. Also the Cause of all things goes out Himself in his providential care for all of creation.

This may seem to some rather speculative, but St Maximus grounds this in the Gospel word by referring to God the Father as the begetter and the one that stirs things into motion towards Him. This union takes place in the Holy Spirit. He states that this erotic impulsion pre-exists and that it is simple and self-moving proceeding from God and returning to God; it has no beginning or end.⁵¹

In my efforts to determine the Neptic view of the relationship between the Father and Son, the different strands seem to come together. This motion (we could say beyond motion) is reminiscent of Son's descent and ascent to the Father. The Logos becomes clothed in the material world, and through His ascetic journey He moves back to the Father, leaving behind all worldly cares, all out of love.

"...You have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father" (Jn 16:27-28). By the world He meant perhaps the hard task of practicing the virtues; by the Father, that intellectual state which transcends the world and is free from all material propensity.⁵²

Just a few lines earlier, he describes how we allow the Logos in us to mystically leave this world and ascend to the Father in contemplation after we have defeated the demons and passions.

3.5. Spiritual Father and Son - Obedience

Though there are sections where the standard description of the relationship between the Father and the Son are given, coessential, coeternal indivisible etc.,⁵³ as we have seen, the Philokalia is not primarily interested in Dogma, but neither is dogma separated from spiritual themes or spirituality. It should not be surprising then that the overarching theme in the Gospel of John, the relationship between the Father and the Son, when met with in the Philokalia, is seen as a model for our relationship with God, the Holy Trinity, the brunt of the Philokalia having its primary interest our relationship with the Holy Trinity, not the inter-relationships of the Divine Hypostases.

⁵¹ *The Philokalia*, vol. II, p. 280-283.

⁵² *Ibidem*, Vol. II, p. 192. Paragraph 94.

⁵³ *The Philokalia*, Vol. IV, p. 140.

Upon examination, we can see that the Philokalia is the embodiment of the Orthodox monastic tradition. Though we do not find it referred to repetitiously, we definitely find the Son's obedience to the Father as the grounds for each person's being obedient to his or her own spiritual father. What is quite important here to remember, though not particularly stated in these texts is that all Orthodox faithful should have a father confessor or a spiritual father. This obedience is a spiritual rebirth, but it does not denote inferiority versus superiority or subjection of one will to another, but a true and free assumption out of love of the Father's will, modeled after the Son's toward the Father's.

Father Aimilianos sees the monastery as the center of God's activity- as the Father's house Jn 15:26 from Whose "paternal bosom the Son came into the world" Jn. 1:18.⁵⁴

This is an amazing topic but since it is not our specific purpose to develop it here we will limit ourselves to just a few quotes.

Nickitas Stethatos writes, "If you are not obedient to a spiritual father in imitation of the Son who is obedient to the Father even unto death and the cross you cannot be spiritually born anew."⁵⁵ Saint Gregory Palamas is succinct and clear stating that the Father is called our Father because he "confers on us a new birth."⁵⁶

Saint Nickitas Stethatos states that if Christ only does the will of the Father and the Holy Spirit doesn't speak of His own accord, "who can think he has attained such heights of virtue that he does not need anyone to initiate him into the mysteries?"⁵⁷

The rebirth of man has several different elements. Baptism is rebirth from the Father, obedience to the Father, and obedience to a spiritual father. Saint Philotheos says we must make great efforts to abandon our own desires and will, which we often resent, and force ourselves to do God's will. This he says basing himself on John 6:38 (*Ὅτι καταβέβηκα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, οὐχ ἵνα ποιῶ τὸ θέλημα τὸ ἐμόν, ἀλλὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός με*). The saint interprets Christ's words as being condescension to us, so we could understand, and that He here is referring to the will of the flesh in distinction to the will of the Father. He states that the will of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one and constitute a single nature. Obedience is a natural attribute of the Son, through which we also can become sons of God by Grace, our flesh being consumed.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Aimilianos, *The Way of the Spirit*, P. 97.

⁵⁵ *The Philokalia*, Vol. IV, p. 121-2.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 409, vs. 132.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 274 vs. 15.

⁵⁸ *The Philokalia*, Vol. III, p. 84.

This obedience is essentially summarized by abandoning attachment to sensible things and ascending to the Father in His heavenly realms, just as Christ did.⁵⁹

Saint Philotheos praises the mindfulness of death as a great virtue. Christ's relationship to the Father reveals itself in that from the beginning He knew He had to return to the Father Who was not of this world, and that His hour would come.⁶⁰

Furthermore, Nichetas Stethitos summarizes the grandeur of this spiritual fatherhood stating that the saint begets the logos in people and "recreates like new heavens the souls akin to it... it becomes a creator both of the noetic world and of the macrocosmos..."⁶¹

St Dionysius also chimes in, who, if Golitzin is correct, would have been a monastic author, which this quote suggests strongly.

"Just so far can the powers of our minds attain as to see that all spiritual paternity and sonship is a gift bestowed from the all-transcendent Archetypal Fatherhood and Sonship both upon us and also upon the celestial Powers: whereby Godlike Minds receive the states and names of Gods, and Sons of Gods, and Fathers of Gods, such paternity and sonship being perfected in a spiritual manner (i. e. incorporeally, immaterially, and invisibly) because the Divine Spirit setteth above all invisible Immateriality and Deification, and the Father and the Son, supernaturally transcend all spiritual fatherhood and sonship."⁶²

"Obtain perfect rest, discover what He endured and renounce your will in all things. For even He said he did not descend from heaven to do His will "but the will of my Father who is in heaven (Jn. 6:38)." Herein lies humble thoughts: in bearing shame and judgment and whatever our Teacher Jesus suffered. And perfect prayer lies in speaking without dallying (in thought) to God; in gathering all of your thoughts in an un-scattered way together with the senses. This will lead one to have the will to die to all peers and to the world and to all things in it."⁶³

⁵⁹ *The Philokalia* Vol. III, p. 61 vs 113.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 23-25.

⁶¹ *The Philokalia* Vol. IV, p. 143, vs 12.

⁶² Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*, p. 75.

⁶³ *Filocalia*, vol. XI, p. 245 author's translation into English: cîștiți desăvîrșita odihnă află ce a răbdat El și răbdă și tu, taie voia ta în toate. Căci și El a spus că nu s-a coborît din cer ca să facă voia Sa, „ci voia Tatălui Meu care este înceruri", (Jn 6:38). În aceasta stă smerita cugetare: în a purta ocări și osîndiri și cite le-a pătimit Învățătorul nostru Iisus. Iar rugăciunea desăvîrșită stă în a grăi lui Dumnezeu nehoiărind (cu gîndul), în a-ți aduna toate gîndurile în chip neîmprăștiat împreună cu simțurile. La acesta îl conduce pe el voința de a muri oricărui semen și lumii și tuturor celor din .

IV. Conclusions

Though the Relationship between the Father and Son is not heavily treated in what we have defined as neptic literature, we have discovered a substratum and a structure that was used and expanded by many neptic fathers. We have discovered that neptic literature should be a broad category, broad enough to overcome at least part of the compartmentalization that has been so damaging to modern theology. The outer periphery of this delimitation is currently problematic, but this should not discourage or keep us from appealing to it since it is the heart of Orthodox experience. As a consequence, this study has not been exhaustive, and much neptic literature could still exist which I have not appealed to that touches on our topic.

In neptic literature the relationship between the Father and Son was heavily used to shine light on man's inner condition and the relationships between the mind, soul and spirit, and inversely to try to illustrate to those that have not had direct experience with the living God, what the relationship is like in the Divine Hypostases.

St Dionysius the Areopagite's *On the Divine Names* is quite anchored in the Gospel of John. Carrying the torch several centuries later, St Maximus the Confessor used the Fourth Gospel the most in this respect, incorporating many of the Gospel's key themes in his own discourse: the Father's love for the Son; this love as entailing motion (beyond motion); the Son's descent from and ascent to the Father; the Son's being sent from the Father as connected to the Mal'ak Yahweh of the OT; and more. We noted that the Divine threefold motion (circular –uniting to self); (straight when reaching out to things lower than Itself) (spiral- when lifting those things up to Itself) corresponds to man's motion of repentance. Man's attention first moves outward through the senses to the created world like the prodigal son (straight). He then "comes to himself" or regroups (circular), then heads for the Father in the temple of his heart, which is also in heaven (spiral). This threefold motion is evident in the Fourth Gospel. The Son is sent into the world (descends - straight) gathers those that the Father has given Him (circular) and prepares a place, the Father's eternal House, for them and begins to lift them up to be where He is (spiral) so they can see the glory He shares with the Father. It is a movement of energy not essence. This also parallels the liturgical motion of the Orthodox Church.

Expanding a bit beyond what is technically neptic literature, we found fertile terrain in the connection between three interlocking historical realities. The repetition of the Name of Christ, the revelation of His pre-eternal Glory (which He shares with the Father in the heart of the neptic (saint)); and how the neptic's heart corresponds to the Ark of the Covenant or the Holy of Holies in the Temple.

We can see that the Fourth Gospel is neptic itself, even if not technically enrolled in the neptic movement, we can see it is in a neptic spirit, and there are

even a few pieces of evidence that hint that there may have been a very early practice of some sort of invocation of the Holy Name of the Son for interior cleansing. The evangelist himself had the most profound and direct relationship possible with the Son, and therefore the Father as well. If the Gospel of John is not neptic, there is no such thing as neptic literature.

And lastly, we have discovered that the Father and Son Relationship in the Gospel of John is seen as the primary model for spiritual fatherhood and sonship. This is an extremely important aspect for all of Christendom because it clearly anchors this tradition in the Son who is not subordinate in any way, but assumes His Father's will out of love. There could be plenty of material here in the *Apophthegmata* concerning the relationship between spiritual Father and disciple, but since there was a paucity of direct references to the Fourth Gospel, we did not attempt to contour this theme. And conversely, the wild love of the Father for the Son excludes any kind of self-aggrandizement or domination in an earthly sense. Hence, the Orthodox tradition is justified biblically, and also clarified in terms of the spirit in which it needs to operate in order to be functional. This of course spills out into all of the Church, in which each living member should be a loving and obedient child and have a spiritual father. It also clarifies the humble role of a spiritual father whose role of spiritually giving birth to others is not based on superiority but upon being sent by the Son. All the Son's authority, which has been given to Him by the Father, He confers to the Apostles; this is a great and wondrous Mystery that the Divine Hypostases honor us so.