

Archimandrite Zacharias Zaharou, *The Hidden Man of the Heart (1 Peter 3: 4)*, paper printed with the blessing of His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, “Basilica” Publishing House, Bucharest, 2014, ISBN 978-606-8495-53-8; Translated from English by monk Tecla; Foreword by His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of Romania

The author of “The Hidden Man of the Heart”, Archimandrite Father Zacharias Zaharou, is one of the most profound contemporaries that experienced and confessed the Orthodox faith. He is the spiritual father of the Orthodox monastery “Saint John the Baptist” in Essex, UK, being a disciple of the founder of the monastery, Father Sophrony Sakharov (1896-1993), who, in turn, was a disciple of Saint Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938).

The contents of this book include spiritual discourses delivered by Archimandrite Father Zacharias Zaharou during a visit to Wichita, Kansas, USA, in 2007. In the *Foreword* of this paper, His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel gives a brief explanation of the meaning of this book’s title: “probably would not be wrong if it were said that the «heart», as the unfathomable center of the human person and of the spiritual life, is the overriding concern of Father Zacharias’ theological thought. Hence the title of this volume contains the conclusive phrase of Saint Peter the Apostle, «The Hidden Man of the Heart»”.

The book begins with an *Introduction* entitled *Mystery of Man’s Heart* in which the author says that the heart is the “center of human hypostasis”. Scripture shows that God has molded each heart in unique and unrepeatable way as a target for Himself, as a means of His Revelation and as a place for Him to dwell into. Also, “the heart is the true «church» where man meets God”; it is “the battlefield for our salvation”. Therefore, we have a duty to cleanse our hearts of all impurity and to keep it righteous

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and just. God as a “jealous God” is not satisfied to hold only a part of our heart, but expects to give ourselves to Him with all our being. Thus, heart, transformed into the church of the Holy Ghost, becomes a means and place of fulfillment of the purpose of human life.

This paper has 256 pages and is divided into 16 chapters, showing gradual spiritual ascent of man from the time of awareness of his soul’s state of sinfulness towards the ecstatic encounter, which occurs in the heart, between the human mind and God’s Reason, through the Holy Spirit’s instilling.

The First Chapter – The Awakening of the Heart by the Mindfulness of Death – the author highlights how man can realize the seriousness of sin and its consequences, with the purpose to awaken the heart, as a starting point for launching the spiritual revival. God increases in human the fear of death, to help him to understand better the dimension of the disaster which was produced by his own disobedience. Thus, the soul receives the grace to see the dark veil of death, decay and despair that burdens the entire creation. This spiritual phenomenon, unknown to modern psychology, is called – by the ascetic Orthodox terminology – “remembrance or mindfulness of death”. Through it, man becomes able to perceive not only his personal tragedy, but also the universal dimension of the fall. He discovers his heart and learns to love, thus beginning his spiritual rebirth.

The Second chapter – The Moment of Death – is talking about the circumstances needed to acquire a right attitude towards death. For us, death is our birth into the eternal life. Whenever we suffer or go through hardships in this earthly life, we intensely feel the taste of death. All our efforts to learn how to pray, how to humble ourselves, how to trust in God have the sole purpose of preparing ourselves for the big day that we die. Our preparation for the moment of death will be successful only if we accept death as the most important and holiest event of our lives.

The next two chapters – *The Awakening of the Heart by the Fear of God (Third Chapter)* and *The Awakening of the Heart by Bearing Shame in the Sacrament of Confession (The Fourth Chapter)* – continues the line of presenting the ways of awakening the heart to induce it into a state of repentance preceding the acquisition of the divine grace of inner purification and the intensification of communion with God. At the start point of the experience with the Holy Ghost, man realizes that he is able to maintain heart strain at the high requirements of the spiritual living. This pain-

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ful finding increases in man the fear of God, which crushes and humbles his heart, thus preparing it to receive God's love. Accordingly, fear determines the soul to care about keeping within itself the divine grace, despite the opposition that the man's fallen nature exerts on it permanently. The recognition of sin in the light of grace of the Holy Ghost is absolutely necessary in the process of purification and healing of the human soul. Reaching the point to accept his defilement, man faces a dilemma: "either to hide «from the Lord God» (Genesis 3: 8) and «die in one's sins» (John 8: 24), choosing not to bear the burden of shame for his sinfulness; either to deny defiled conscience through which he justifies himself in his fall and to receive Christ's call to repentance (cf. Matthew 4: 17)". Assuming the Cross of Christ leads to "an inner light of grace, which not only guides the soul to contemplation, but also gives it the courage to make «the leap» to Confession (cf. I John 1: 9)."

Chapters Fifth – The Building Up of the Heart by Vigilance and Prayer – and Sixth – The Prayer, an Endless Creation – show the essential role of prayer in the act of awakening the heart. The prayer is a form of watchfulness that involves incessant call with one thought of the name of the Lord: "Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, have mercy on me the sinner!" Through prayer, man manifests love for God. The author believes that "the measure of our love of God is given by the extent of our prayer." The prayer of repentance unites all movements of mind and heart, so that they were able to respond properly to the love of Jesus Christ, who gave His life as a sacrifice for the salvation of man.

The next four chapters – *The Building Up of the Heart by the Grace of Repentance (The Seventh Chapter)*, *About Repentance (The Eighth Chapter)*, *About Repentance and the Struggle with Vices (The Ninth Chapter)*, *About Repentance within the Body of the Church (The Tenth Chapter)* – refer to the most significant stage of Christian asceticism, the stage that precedes the flooding of the heart by the light of divine grace, namely, repentance or change of mind. Repentance is abstinence from sins and unification with God. Moreover, Christ's Gospel begins with a call to repentance: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 4: 17). This exhortation resumes the dialogue between God and man, dialogue which was interrupted in heaven because of the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Man's natural birth from bodily parents is followed by a second birth, the spiritual birth, which is celebrated in

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the Sacrament of Baptism, reflected, reinforced and completed by a third birth, which is accomplished by the tears of repentance. Commenting on the text of the Apostle James (1: 21), Father Zacharias Zaharou believes that through repentance we receive once again the “breath of life” of the Lord, “just that breath that man was made of after the image and likeness of God”. Also, Saint John of the Ladder says that on the Judgment Day we will have to justify ourselves for not having wept enough for our sinfulness. We come to repentance by the grace of God, sprung out from the Cross through the Resurrection of Christ. Repentance is the means by which the soul purifies itself and the image of God renews in us, gradually ascending the human nature to reach the likeness of God. The spiritual struggle for the purification of the soul takes into account the effort to rediscover the seal of the Holy Ghost’s gifts which we received in the Sacrament of Baptism, through Chrismation, but which we buried within us, because of the mismanagement of our free will. However, renewed covenant of baptism is the sacrament of confession, by which the Church gives us, once back inside of it, naked and helpless, but fully repentant, its treasure of holiness, which we could never gain ourselves.

In *The Eleventh Chapter – The Building Up of the Heart by the Crucifixion of the Mind* – the author offers as a model the perfect obedience of Christ to the Father’s will, in order to make an introduction to the presentation of the stage that follows the repentance state during the ascent of man towards the likeness of God, i.e. overcoming the passions. According to the teaching of the Fathers, there are two stages in the crucifixion of man: detachment from the world and from the passions and uprooting of the passions and of the worldly desires from the man’s very heart. This second stage makes the Apostle of the Gentiles to exclaim: “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6: 14).

The Twelfth Chapter – Go In and You Will Find Rest – acquaints the reader with spiritual riches which those who engage with daring and holy boldness in the mysteries of hesychastic practice are discovering. Saint Gregory Palama says that those who cultivate their own heart do not have time to talk, even with those close to them, but not because of pride, but being enslaved by their inner work, they understood that human life can not be fulfilled except through this kind of work. Also, Father Sophrony Sakharov gives a definition to hesychasm, saying it is a spiritual tireless

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endeavor of man to “go in and find rest”, i.e. to acquire the grace and to forward it to the spiritual children as a new birth.

The Thirteenth Chapter – The Depth of the Heart, New Energies and the True Humbleness – makes a new foray deep inside the human heart, which, as a result of humility, enjoys the increasing outpouring of brightness of the divine energy. Father Zacharias Zaharou claims that “there are three keys that open the door to the heart, to unleash the energies locked there: research of the gospel’s teachings, calling the name of the Lord and the Holy Communion”. Through them, we draw in our humble soul the Christ’s saving power.

The Fourteenth Chapter – The Word of God, the Divine Inspirations and the Prophetical Life – shows how the mysterious and silent Word of God is made known to the soul, preparing it for His gracious plentiful presence in which it occurs the prophetical action. Lord takes possession of the soul and it makes to “be born again, not of corruptible but of incorruptible seed, through the word of God, which lives and remains forever” (I Peter 1: 23). This rebirth of the soul through “the word of truth” (Ephesians 1: 13) then becomes source of all divine inspirations, defined by Fr. Sophrony as carrying inside the power of the Holy Ghost. This power enrolls the spiritual man in the rigorous ascetic path of the great prophets.

In *The Fifteenth Chapter – About the Gift of Speaking in Tongues* – the author draws a parallel between the ability to speaking in tongues and the Jesus’ Prayer. He says: “The Holy Ghost was sent down to Pentecost to teach people to pray in spirit, i.e. inside «the hidden man of the heart» (I Peter 3: 4).” Praying in spirit coincides with praying in tongues when the human spirit becomes aware of the “invasion” of God in its life. Later, the Church discovered how to invoke the name of Jesus Christ and gradually the Prayer of the Heart replaced the gift of speaking in tongues. In this regard, Father Zacharias states that “speaking in tongues or praying in spirit means to plunge your mind into the ocean of the Spirit”.

The Sixteenth Chapter – Meeting of the Lord Sermon on Leave-taking – establishes the conclusion of this book. Simeon and Prophetess Ana, the two people who met Christ at the Temple, are truly living parables. Full of hope, they were waiting for the consolation of Israel, just as we, people of the New Israel, wait for the terrible day of the second coming of the Lord. Father Zacharias Zaharou urges us to keep our hope that “Parousia” will find us ready, having our mind and our whole being united with the heart,

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in which our spiritual senses fully strained could receive the whisper of the Holy Ghost, Who invites us to have a dialogue with the Son and Who inflames us with the Son's love for the Heavenly Father. "Those who loved the Lord's coming in the flesh – says Fr Zacharias – long after His second coming in glory. But they do not live in a passive waiting, but rather run towards the Second Coming, so great is their desire to see the Lord". This kind of hope and desire we should express in our turn, having in mind the example of the spiritual fathers and, of course, the Name of Jesus Christ's prayer and His heavenly glory.

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