

WHAT IS EVAGRIUS' VISION OF PRAYER, AS EXPRESSED IN THE EVAGRIAN TEXTS INCLUDED IN THE GREEK PHILOKALIA?

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Abstract

We see from what Evagrius says that one cannot exist without the other. Only true prayer is able to create theology and theology is the only evidence that attests true prayer. That is a very different vision of prayer than the academic one even if both are concerned with the mind. But in the case of pure prayer it represents its desired state.

Keywords: prayer, Evagrius, Philokalia, contemplation, psalmody, angel, demon, remedy.

In the Greek Ascetic Corpus of *Philokalia* – anthology that ties two millennia – besides the chapters about the settings of the ascetic and solitary life and about passions and thoughts, Evagrius is among the first Christian writers to provide a treatment of prayer. Prayer being one of the most important topics in his works, its inclusion within the corpus of *Philokalia* demonstrates his value and authority concerning this significant topic. Throughout his works Evagrius gives both practical and theoretical information about prayer. The vision of prayer offered is based not only on a development of theoretical principles but also on his experience of the ascetic life of prayer as a monk. Evagrius employs the term “prayer” both in a general way for comprising all types of prayer and in a specific way for referring to “true prayer”. In this paper I will argue that Evagrius has a twofold vision of prayer in all the aspects concerning the concept of prayer. Prayer can be of two types but the analyses can go deeper and show that relation between the twofold elements from which prayer is made of, its twofold aspects, its twofold manner¹, and its twofold features. Inspired by his twofold vision I will develop an argument using the same technique and present my evidence two by two. The motivation for

this type of approach is the fact that apart from the introduction to the *On Prayer*, Evagrius leaves aside the form of the prayer and engages in other aspects of it. My attempt is to break down these aspects and interpret its vision of prayer as being twofold in its every aspect. This paper will cover all four works attributed to Evagrius from the *Philokalia: Outline Teaching on Ascetism and Stillness in the Solitary Life; Texts on Discrimination in Respect of Passions and Thoughts; Chapters on Prayer: 153 Texts*.

Theoretical and practical aspects of prayer

Prayer, too, “like everything else, it has two sides or aspects”². Although – as Were argues – Evagrius doesn’t share a detailed technique in which one may be assisted in achieving non-iconic prayer³, nevertheless a twofold taxonomy can be seen in the way that he approaches prayer by exploring its practical and theoretical aspects. Even if he elaborates the practical aspects of prayer in works specially dedicated to this topic (e.g. *Praktike*) he cannot treat the spiritual aspects without making any reference to the more practical ones.

Starting with the practical and moving towards the more theoretical ones he discusses the benefits received through prayer, the time when prayer should be done, the place where it should be done and the manner in which one should pray. Through prayer, Evagrius sees that one attains divine knowledge⁴ and not only this but also the resemblance with the angels by the desire to see the face of the Father⁵. In order for one to reach perfect prayer one has to pray ceaselessly and especially after resting. The first things to do when one wakes up are to be dedicated to God by prayer⁶. And if the prayer is to be without cease then the place for the prayer to

¹ Gabriel Bunge, *Earthen vessels: the practice of personal prayer according to the patristic tradition*, translated by Michael J. Miller, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2002, p. 189.

² Gabriel Bunge, *Earthen vessels...*, p. 37.

³ Kallistos Ware, *Prayer in Evagrius of Pontus and the Macarian Homilies*, in: “An introduction to Christian Spirituality”, edited by Ralph Waller & Benedicta Ward, SPCK, Great Britain, 1999, pp. 24-25.

⁴ *On prayer* 85-86.

⁵ *On prayer* 113.

⁶ *On prayer* 126.

be done is anywhere possible as long as you are not seen by your neighbour⁷. The way in which prayer should be done is fitted, calmly and if it is by way of psalmody then with understanding and rhythm, ending in a high level of prayer⁸. Even if one didn't reach the pure prayer he shouldn't pray with a loose heart and despair because in perseverance he will receive it⁹. There is no space for hatred in prayer¹⁰. What authenticates prayer is the freedom from thoughts and representations¹¹. For the pure prayer one should be detached from worldly thoughts and physical world. The eyes are to be kept downwards and the body and the soul forgotten¹². The mind has to "stand deaf and dumb"¹³ and not to speak by way of thoughts to this world and not to leave opened the doors by which demons enter the mind, planting new thoughts in it. Freed from the attention given to the body by entrusting its needs to God all what is left is space for the spiritual prayer¹⁴. Especially against the enemies that want to attack us a good way of praying is "with fear, tremble, effort, with inner watchfulness and vigilance"¹⁵.

In term of the theoretical aspects, Evagrius touches explicitly and discusses what prayer is and what forms it can embrace. For Evagrius, spiritual prayer can be either a prayer of confession, one of thanksgiving or the most important one – the pure prayer and, in order to be as explicit as possible in defining prayer, he uses metaphors. Prayer is the mind's engagement and communication with God¹⁶ and the most natural thing that the mind can make.

⁷ *On Discrimination in Respect of Passions and Thoughts* 3.

⁸ *On prayer* 82.

⁹ *On prayer* 88.

¹⁰ *On prayer* 128.

¹¹ Julia S. Konstantinovskiy, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Making of a Gnostic*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2009, p. 82.

¹² *On prayer* 110.

¹³ *On prayer* 11.

¹⁴ *On prayer* 129, 152.

¹⁵ Evagrius Ponticus, *Outline Teaching on Asceticism and Stillness in the Solitary Life*, in "Philokalia: the complete text / compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth; translated from the Greek and edited by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware with the assistance of the Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Brookline) ... [et al.]", volume 1, Faber and Faber, London, 1979, p. 37.

¹⁶ *On prayer* 3.

Then, because in prayer mind seeks God alone, after it issued the joy¹⁷, prayer becomes the ultimate joy¹⁸. For Evagrius, each of man's parts receive their proper food¹⁹. From here, Evagrius concludes the most suited food for the mind is the prayer because the mind is the part that can get the closest to God.

Dualistic elements of prayer

In the first sub-section of this paper I will discuss four categories of elements related to prayer that fall under the category of "either/or".

Compatibility and incompatibility with prayer

First aspect of prayer that falls under this category is represented by the elements that distract and facilitate prayer. Aiming to reach the goal of the prayer there are some things that are acknowledged to be compatible with prayer and some not. The incompatible things are the ones that distract and trouble the prayer. Evagrius makes a list with the elements needed for praying and another one with those that are "opposed"²⁰ to it. Things that are not only compatible but also needed are: impassioned thought²¹, tears²², attentiveness²³, and, not least, God²⁴. I placed God last because – as Driscoll argues – "He also represents a necessity"²⁵. The mind cannot know God if God Himself doesn't reveal to the mind. It is a necessity because He cannot be known if He does not want to. The elements incompatible with prayer are: cares²⁶, passions²⁷,

¹⁷ *On prayer* 15.

¹⁸ *On prayer* 153.

¹⁹ *On prayer* 101.

²⁰ *On prayer* 65.

²¹ *On prayer* 54, 55; C.C.H. Cook, *The Philokalia and the inner life: on passions and prayer*, James Clarke, Cambridge, 2011, p. 33.

²² *On prayer* 5, 6, 78, 79

²³ *On prayer* 149.

²⁴ *On prayer* 58, 59, 62.

²⁵ Jeremy Driscoll, OSB, *The "Ad monachos" of Evagrius Ponticus*, in "Studia Anselmiana", 104, Ugo Detti, Roma, 1991, pp. 294 and 299.

²⁶ *On prayer* 9, 70, 105.

²⁷ *On prayer* 72, 37, 131, 18, 73, 116, 40, 24, 26-27.

admission of the enemies' thoughts²⁸, prayer against one's neighbour²⁹, if you grieved anyone³⁰, routinized prayer³¹, and the images of the Deity³². These incompatible things "make the mind too heavy to"³³ concentrate on its natural task. These elements that are either compatible or incompatible with prayer prove that there is a need "to be firmness to this condition"³⁴ of the prayer in order to advance in its purpose.

Private and common function of the prayer

Secondly, in terms of who is the receiver of the benefits of prayer Evagrius argues that the prayer can be either for oneself or for the others. What is needed for God to do is to cleanse the passions³⁵, and deliver one from ignorance and forgetfulness and from all temptation, trial, dereliction³⁶, or for the gift of the power to do God's will³⁷. We see from this personal list that all three things for which one should pray are very closely related only to one subject (i.e. the one who prays). However, Casiday also argues that prayer cannot be a "private business" but prayer always has a common character³⁸. Evagrius say that "it is right to pray [...] also for your entire race" as the angels do³⁹. Praying for the others is also evident from the fact that man has to become like the angels who are constantly helping the man. As Casiday argues "prayers build up society on a cosmic scale" establishing a connection between man, between man and God, and between man and angels⁴⁰. A strong relation between man and angels presupposes a great resemblance

²⁸ *On prayer* 81.

²⁹ *On prayer* 103.

³⁰ *On prayer* 20, 21.

³¹ *On prayer* 41.

³² *On prayer* 67, 68, 69, 74, 114-116.

³³ Jeremy Driscoll, *The "Ad monachos"...*, p. 95.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 264.

³⁵ *On prayer* 39.

³⁶ *On prayer* 38.

³⁷ *On prayer* 31, 32, 89.

³⁸ Augustine Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology of Evagrius Ponticus: Beyond Heresy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, pp. 144-145.

³⁹ *On prayer* 39.

⁴⁰ Augustine Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology...*, p. 142.

between the state of the human person and that of the angels. Nonetheless, we cannot overpass that one needs to pray because he has his personal needs that do not coincide with those of the rest of the people (i.e. thoughts, passions etc.). Moreover, Evagrius clearly states that prayers should be made “also for your entire race” – proving that there can be two beneficiaries from the prayer. Not being only egocentric but also having a social character thus prayer can have a double receiver.

Angels and demons

In the third place there are two types of spiritual creatures that fight over man. The angels are the ones that help man to pray and the demons the ones that look to distract him and forget about prayer. Even the angels have double role in prayer. Their first role is the one of mediators between God and man. They bring from God the grace that “instils the knowledge of the true prayer”⁴¹. The second is to escort, stand beside and guard us during prayer⁴². But, as we saw at the previous point, Evagrius discusses one more aspect of the relation between angels and man. He says that they are a model for the man of praying for the others. The opposed category to angels is the demons. They cannot stand when someone is praying and try to attack⁴³, stop the prayer⁴⁴, change the mind’s focus to the worldly things⁴⁵, arose images for one to pray to⁴⁶, and generate passions⁴⁷. The demons have the ability to interfere with the human brain and manipulate in order to drag it as far as possible from speaking with God. Thus, they are able to interact with the human temperament. Touching the brain in a particular way they produce fantasies and give them shapes⁴⁸. Demons have no moment of quiet but attack one constantly and they would do anything to

⁴¹ *On prayer* 75, 76; Luke Dysinger, OSB, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, p. 103.

⁴² *On prayer* 80-81, 96.

⁴³ *On prayer* 48, 91, 95, 97-99, 106-109, 111, 134, 138,139.

⁴⁴ *On prayer* 50, 112.

⁴⁵ *On prayer* 69.

⁴⁶ *On prayer* 73, 92, 94.

⁴⁷ *On prayer* 90.

⁴⁸ *On prayer* 68, 72, 73.

deceive one and even pretend that they have been defeated. Therefore, it can be argued that the angels and demons are two permanent external factors that influence prayer in opposite directions.

Material and immaterial prayer

Finally, another twofold classification of prayer is form and formless prayer. One of the dangers for the one that reached a more advanced level of spiritual is to try to help himself by using images of the divinity created either by his senses or suggested by the demons. This is an inappropriate thing to do because the human mind has no means by which it could conceive truthful images of God; the less the demons would want to do such a thing for the man. That is why Evagrius is deeply reserved towards “visionary experiences of God”⁴⁹. The idea is that in pure prayer there is no place for intermediaries between the mind and God. Even if Evagrius does not depicts directly form filled prayer we can identify it from the information given about how the pure prayer should be like. Form filled prayer is the prayer where our thinking is employed and God is dissected and analysed using material patterns. He is perceived and seen as having form or shape, mainly because of the passions⁵⁰. This is a misconception since God has no body and no form⁵¹. In other words, it is idolatry because by that the mind is concerned with the “material” and does not wish to advance and to overpass its condition in order to reach true and form free contemplation with God. Man is satisfied with its “mental representations” and starts contemplating them⁵².

Formless prayer is the passage from knowledge to God who has no form⁵³. Formless contemplation of God is for Evagrius the final stage that can be reached by the mind and for this to be possible every thought and image has to be abandoned, or, in other words, transcended⁵⁴. It is very clear that Evagrius employs the

⁴⁹ Kallistos Ware, *Prayer in Evagrius...*, p. 15.

⁵⁰ *On prayer* 4.

⁵¹ *On prayer* 67.

⁵² *On prayer* 70.

⁵³ *On prayer* 48.

⁵⁴ Columba Stewart, *Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus*, in *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 9/2, 2001, p. 184.

platonian description of the mind: thinking (*dianoia*) and intellection (*noesis*); therefore, only the intellect can reach divine contemplation and have knowledge of God whereas the thinking can only reach natural contemplation and have knowledge about God⁵⁵. As Konstantinovsky argues, “in Evagrius nomenclature, to know ‘God’s essence/nature’ is to gain unmediated knowledge of God or the knowledge of God Himself”⁵⁶. This type of prayer functions by approaching the “immaterial immaterially” and results in understanding⁵⁷. The immaterial represents the most suitable way in which God can be approached. Thus, in apophatic terms the higher level of prayer should be “non-iconic”, image free and conceptual thinking⁵⁸. However, Evagrius argues in favour of “mental representation that come from him”⁵⁹, thus he uses a form prayer. Nonetheless, the representations in favour of which he argues are good for the mind to communicate with God and only a temporary stage. The progress from the former to the later means the return to the primordial unified knowledge⁶⁰ or, in other words, to “the ‘naked’ intellect”⁶¹. Even when it is about divine light⁶² that comes in prayer, itself a representation, he argues that we should not give it any shape whatsoever.

Complementary elements of prayer

If in the precedent section we looked at the elements that Evagrius sees under the pattern of either/or for what comes next I purpose to discuss and evaluate the elements that he sees by the pattern both/and. Therefore, we deal with a complementarity between the two sides that comprises prayer.

⁵⁵ Kallistos Ware, *Prayer in Evagrius...*, p. 16.

⁵⁶ Julia S. Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus...*, p. 61.

⁵⁷ *On prayer* 66.

⁵⁸ Kallistos Ware, *Prayer in Evagrius...*, p. 15.

⁵⁹ *On prayer* 94.

⁶⁰ Columba Stewart, *Imageless Prayer and ...*, p. 182.

⁶¹ Kallistos Ware, *Prayer in Evagrius...*, p. 19.

⁶² *On prayer* 73, 74, 114-116.

Physical and spiritual prayer

According to Evagrius prayer can have a double nature: outward and spiritual. In this way he “tends to equate the whole of Christian life with the life of prayer”⁶³ due to the worlds that are comprised in man: physical and spiritual. As he describes the man (body and soul) while is praying, the body is also engaged in this action together with the spirit. Therefore, we have two types of prayer: one that pertains the practical aspect and one the spiritual one⁶⁴.

Treating in the first fifty chapters the aspect of the practical life in relation with true prayer Evagrius argues that prayer has a physical dimension. He sees a conceptual progression *praktikê-theôria-theologia* starting with “subjects integral to more practical and bodily asceticism”⁶⁵. Being part of the ascetic practices prayer has an ascetic aspect through the physical experiences suffered by the body. When in an assembly one is “praying with the brothers”⁶⁶ – an outward form of prayer – the body is also engaged in the praying process performing the visible forms of prayer. He however doesn’t argue that body also has the capacity to reach contemplation but he says the one should not “adopt only the outward forms of prayer”⁶⁷. Though this form of prayer is essential for the monk’s progress⁶⁸, it doesn’t represent the final stage. It should be seen as a stage of preparation that opens the way for true prayer. Then, having its roots in the virtues, prayer has both a practical aspect and a moral one and supports “a properly Christian outlook on life”⁶⁹. Being compatible with prayer, tears become an outward form of prayer⁷⁰. They express and carry physically the emotional

⁶³ Evagrius Ponticus, *The praktikos Chapters on prayer*, trans. by John Eudes Bamberger, OCSO, in “Cistercian Studies Series” IV, 1981, Michigan Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, p. 47.

⁶⁴ Jeremy Driscoll, *The “Ad monachos”...*, p. 88.

⁶⁵ Julia Konstantinovskiy, *Evagrius in the Philokalia of Sts. Macarius and Nicodemus*, in “Philokalia: A classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality”, ed. by Brock Bingman & Bradley Nassif, Oxford University Press, New York, 2012, p. 184.

⁶⁶ *On prayer* 41.

⁶⁷ *On prayer* 28.

⁶⁸ Robert E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, Oxford University Press, , Oxford, 2006 p. 185.

⁶⁹ Augustine Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology...*, p. 149.

⁷⁰ *On prayer* 6.

charge of the spirit. Another example – one that Evagrius treats at a large extent – is praying with the words of the Scriptures as in the case psalmody. The purpose of the practical manner is “to provide the ‘spirit’ of the ‘contemplative manner’ with precisely those *means* that it requires in order to become a reality in the person who prays”⁷¹. Thus, prayer presupposes a synergy between body and spirit for the mind to reach its unity with God.

The spiritual prayer takes place at an inner level where it has its own life, where thoughts come to life, live, and afterwards die, where the choices between passion and virtue are made and where the closest connection with God is established. The pure prayer (also called spiritual contemplation, fiery prayer, theology, perfect prayer) is the communion of the mind with God, more divine than all the other virtues, and therefore the goal of the ascetic life. As I showed in the section dedicated to the immaterial prayer, at this point of spiritual level everything that is concerned with material forms, contemplation of the natural or thoughts are left behind so that nothing to mediate anymore the understanding that comes from the communication between the mind and God⁷². The ideal monk for Evagrius is only that one who reached contemplation⁷³. This is what theology is⁷⁴. Not doctrinal and faithful understanding of God but a personal encounter and knowledge of Him⁷⁵.

For another evidence of this twofold prayer we should look at his own life of prayer. In the beginning I argued that his vision of prayer is deeply rooted in his monastic life. Therefore, as a monk, he observed bodily the customs of the monastic life of prayer and as a learned man he explored the meaning of the spiritual prayer. As Casiday argues, “his theological principles and his monastic practice merge”⁷⁶ in his teaching on pure prayer. These two forms are not contradictory but rather one develops into the other. It is not enough for the prayer to be done only by the body but also by the mind, the latter being the desired one.

⁷¹ Gabriel Bunge, *Earthen vessels...*, p. 190.

⁷² *On prayer* 66.

⁷³ Evagrius Ponticus, ‘The praktikos ...’, p. 46.

⁷⁴ *On prayer* 60.

⁷⁵ Jeremy Driscoll, *The “Ad monachos”...*, p. 30.

⁷⁶ Augustin Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology...*, 150.

Psalmody and prayer

A distinct but complementary way of praying introduced by Evagrius is the one using the words of the Psalter⁷⁷. Psalmody is regarded as a way of praying and not something opposed to it. Psalmody is not just a way of praying but it is interwoven with prayer and it is sustaining it. Psalmody is a very useful way to keep the mind far from the evil thoughts⁷⁸ and attain “freedom from various passions”⁷⁹; thus, it has a limited effect that is to prepare the mind for making progress in prayer. Psalmody works in pair with prayer: the former calms the intemperance of the body and the later puts the mind back on the tracks that lead it to pure prayer⁸⁰. Therefore, between prayer and psalmody is also an alternation⁸¹. Another reason for this is that patience is recommended for both and both aim towards the same target – God. Psalmody brings knowledge about God as Creator. It offers to man the possibility to contemplate God through His creation⁸² which is diverse and for this Evagrius says that psalmody brings “multiform wisdoms”⁸³. Psalmody opens the way for the mind to step into the level of non-corporeal knowledge by “awakening the nous”⁸⁴. Therefore, the only distinction that can be made between these two types of prayer is between psalmody and pure prayer but even so they complete one another; psalmody can function as bridge to pure prayer.

Good and bad quality prayer

Then, in terms of quality you can have a good quality prayer and a bad quality one. The reason why this variation exist is for the man to “seek [it] all the more”⁸⁵. This variation has a cause – the way in which we use our thoughts. A wise use of the thoughts helps prayer and a bad use of them becomes a “hindrance in

⁷⁷ *On prayer* 82, 83, 85, 87.

⁷⁸ C.C.H. Cook, *The Philokalia and...*, p. 289.

⁷⁹ Luke Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer...*, p. 87.

⁸⁰ *On prayer* 83.

⁸¹ Luke Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer...*, p. 197.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 185.

⁸³ *On prayer* 85; Luke Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer...*, p. 151.

⁸⁴ Luke Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer...*, p. 104.

⁸⁵ *On prayer* 29.

prayer”⁸⁶. Prayer is seen as having a relative quality varying from times when one can pray well to times when this goal is not reached. That can be seen also from the fact that the angels have a great contribution raising the quality, too⁸⁷. Praying with a mind that “still wonders” is of a lesser quality (i.e. “secular” quality) than praying as it ought to have true prayer (i.e. angelic quality)⁸⁸. The work to reach pure prayer facilitates pedagogically the one who is praying that through perseverance he gains even more of it⁸⁹. The “pedagogical device” is provided by God⁹⁰. Perseverance itself shows that one “proceeds slowly”⁹¹ from the former to the later, from bad quality prayer to quality, the reverse being also possible. The end is also twofold, for the one who attained perfect prayer, the ultimate joy⁹², and for the one that did not, sadness.

Remedy and weapon

Evagrius sees prayer as having a twofold application. One is considered to be a remedy in healing⁹³ the soul and the other as a weapon fighting against passions. For Evagrius, prayer frees and protects one from anger, sadness and discouragement and issues joy, gentleness and thanksgiving; praying helps recovering from dishearten. A very good example of this concept in action is the use of psalmody as a spiritual remedy. It has a general effect on the person calming both the body and the spirit⁹⁴. Therefore, if the practical prayer has this capacity, the pure prayer can do much more. Also, prayer can be used as a “spiritual arsenal” for fighting against pride, the demon of un-chastity and the stray of the intellect. A very good example where prayer functions as a weapon is against temptations: “use a short and intense prayer”⁹⁵. In its fight

⁸⁶ C.C.H. Cook, *The Philokalia and...*, p. 288.

⁸⁷ *On prayer* 30.

⁸⁸ *On prayer* 43 and 113.

⁸⁹ *On prayer* 34.

⁹⁰ Simon Tugwell, O.P., *Ways of imperfection, An exploration of Christian Spirituality*, Templegate Publishers, Springfield, Illinois, 1985, p. 30.

⁹¹ Simon Tugwell, p. 28.

⁹² *On prayer* 153.

⁹³ *On Discrimination in Respect of Passions and Thoughts* 13.

⁹⁴ C.C.H. Cook, *The Philokalia and...*, p. 289.

⁹⁵ *On prayer* 98.

prayer always has to be accompanied by helpers like ascetic practices, spiritual reading, vigils and advancing in contemplation. Psalmody is also a “spiritual armament to be used in adversarial circumstances”⁹⁶ like “refuting evil thoughts”⁹⁷. Therefore, prayer has a double use both as cure and as weapon.

If I can speak about remedy and weapon then we can say that Evagrius sees that prayer has a double use, to fight in the war against demons and to bring peace to the mind. In order for someone to win the battles of this war one has to know how to fight, how the mind works, what kind of help he can get, what are the strategies of the enemy, and what gains the victory brings. And this is exactly what Evagrius aims to discuss in these works. As any war, this one too is double sided. Stretching by prayer to reach the contemplation of God the “soul is in a continuous warfare against demons”⁹⁸. But the demons also carry a war against one’s soul, especially if it is one that searches God. They will try all kinds of “tricks and stratagems”⁹⁹ to gain power over it. Man fights against his thoughts and evil spirits to keep the mind clean in order to meet God while demons fight for the mind against the good intentions of the man and the angels that come in his help. In this spiritual war man is called to be the soldier of Christ on the battleground of the mind¹⁰⁰. As opposed to warfare, peace is when the mind found its balance and harmony. The mind acquires this state only when it is in direct relation with God by true prayer. Now it sees the light and reaches the ultimate joy.

Metaphorical contrasts

Trying to make himself better understood, Evagrius makes use of metaphorical contrasts in order to illustrate the concept of prayer. He calls it the “ascent of the mind towards God”¹⁰¹. This ascent is a movement between two points. The departure point is

⁹⁶ Augustine Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology...*, p. 117.

⁹⁷ C.C.H. Cook, *The Philokalia and...*, p. 289.

⁹⁸ Luke Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer...*, p. 132

⁹⁹ Robert E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus...*, p. 186

¹⁰⁰ *Evagrius Ponticus, 'Outline Teaching on...'*, p. 32; Julia Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius in the Philokalia...*, p. 188.

¹⁰¹ *On prayer* 35.

the spiritual state corresponding to the quality of prayer that each one reached. This ascent finishes when the destination point is met, represented here by the undistracted prayer. Evagrius compares the one that makes this journey with the eagle soaring high in the heavens¹⁰². Another metaphor employed by Evagrius is that of the light as symbolism for the union of mind with God which is the very essence of prayer for Evagrius. The word "light" is used metaphorically and attained only when God alone is in focus and the intellect is free from any disturbance¹⁰³. The part that sees that light is neither the body nor the soul but the intellect because it is something immaterial and only by the immaterial it can be grasped. During pure prayer, in contrast with smoke¹⁰⁴, the mind encounters God Who is light. Therefore, Evagrius uses the metaphors of the ascent and light to show the contrast between what it represents pure prayer and a so-called prayer.

In conclusion, in this paper we saw that the same twofold pattern for classifying the prayer in practical and contemplative used by Evagrius at the beginning of his *Chapters on Prayer* can be also applied in other aspects concerning prayer. The results of this interpretation can be classified in two groups: one group containing the dualistic twofold components and one complementary for the ones that have a shared relationship. All this underlines the idea that Evagrius vision of prayer is a twofold one.

¹⁰² *On prayer* 82; Luke Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer...*, p. 88-89

¹⁰³ Julia S. Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus...*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁴ *On prayer* 68.