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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MIND AND HEART
IN EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, MACARIUS OF EGYPT,
AND DIADOCHUS OF PHOTICE
(SUMMARY)**

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Keywords: mind (nous), heart (kardia), deification, grace, spirituality, asceticism, mysticism, synergy.

In the context of postmodernity, marked by moral relativism, the fragmentation of spiritual landmarks, and the proliferation of fluid identities, the need for a revaluation of the Christian Tradition emerges with particular urgency—especially the ascetical-mystical heritage of the Church Fathers—capable of responding to the contemporary human being's existential thirst for meaning and communion with God. Orthodox spirituality, structured along an ascetic and theological path, offers an itinerary of inner transfiguration through the purification of the passions, the acquisition of virtues, and union with God, guiding the human being toward the fulfillment of their ultimate vocation: deification.

Throughout the history of Christian theological reflection, tensions have recurrently emerged between the tendency to reduce faith to an exclusively intellectualist approach and, in contrast, the impulse to privilege religious affect in a disordered manner. Nevertheless, patristic spirituality succeeds in harmonizing the noetic dimension and spiritual experience in a living synthesis, wherein theological knowledge is organically intertwined with the experience of divine grace.

Starting from this issue, the convergence between the "mysticism of the mind" and the "mysticism of the heart"—paradigmatically reflected in the ascetical-mystical legacies of Evagrius Ponticus and Macarius of Egypt—constitutes a theologically relevant nucleus. The two orientations, one emphasizing the role of the mind in the knowledge of God, and the other highlighting the heart as the locus of the experience of divine grace, initially appear as distinct directions, at times susceptible to being interpreted in terms of opposition. However, patristic literature clearly reveals the way in which these dimensions intertwine in a creative synthesis with profound spiritual value. This integrative vision finds its paradigmatic expression in the work of Saint Diadochos of Photike, whose fifth-century theological contribution represents an element of originality and a central theme of the present research.

The thematic itinerary assumed by this research enjoys sustained interest within both Orthodox theological space and the international academic sphere, as reflected by a number of relevant studies that have contributed to the development of reflection on the ascetical-mystical

dimension and the spiritual anthropology of the Eastern tradition. The specialized literature brings together both comprehensive patristic studies and recent analytical contributions, materialized in articles, doctoral dissertations, and critical editions, aiming to highlight the specific character of Evagrian and Macarian thought within the broader context of Orthodox spirituality.

In this context, the relevance of the topic becomes increasingly evident, since the spiritual challenges of the contemporary human being call for a theological framework capable of harmonizing the rationality of faith with the inner experience of grace. The rediscovery of the spiritual synthesis between mind and heart, articulated in exemplary fashion by Saint Diadochos of Photike, offers the premises for restoring the balance between theological thought and mystical experience. In this line of reflection, the integrative approach proposed by the present research naturally aligns with these ongoing concerns, forming the foundation for both the motivation and the direction of the doctoral thesis.

This work theologically grounds the relationship between mind and heart as defining dimensions of Orthodox spiritual anthropology, critically analyzes the tensions and convergences between the Evagrian and Macarian traditions, explores the theological coherence of the ascetic model articulated by Evagrius Ponticus, and the mystical-ascetic anthropology emphasized in the writings attributed to Saint Macarius of Egypt, and highlights the remarkable synthesis achieved by Saint Diadochos of Photike, who integrates these traditions into a coherent model of spiritual life, faithful to the Orthodox Tradition and endowed with contemporary relevance.

The research methodology is based on an integrative theological approach, combining rigorous academic analysis with spiritual sensitivity through a contextualized reading of patristic texts, attentive to their historical, philological, and spiritual dimensions. The investigation applies a comparative analysis of the Evagrian and Macarian traditions, seeking the complementarity between the spirituality of the mind and that of the heart, and valorizes patristic hermeneutics in order to transcend the apparent opposition between intellect and heart, highlighting their cooperation in the dynamics of deification. Scriptural and patristic sources are treated with fidelity to the editions established within the Orthodox Church, and the bibliography is organized according to current academic standards, employing a consistent citation and abbreviation system.

In accordance with the stated premises, the research is built upon multiple lines of inquiry and is structured into four chapters, designed to support an integrated theological approach. Without claiming to exhaustively treat the subject matter, the thesis offers a substantial incursion into the synergy of the two defining dimensions of spiritual life, highlighting the internal coherence and complexity of the theme in full consonance with the assumed objectives of the research.

The first chapter of the present work, entitled *Conceptual and Terminological Delimitations*, constructs the theological foundation of this research, highlighting the concepts of mind – *nous* – and heart – *kardia* – two essential dimensions of mystical anthropology. These realities, deeply rooted in biblical and patristic thought, are analyzed beyond the frameworks of mere psychological or philosophical interpretation, emerging as living expressions of the relationship between human beings and God, and indicating the direction of their ultimate vocation: deification. The mind is presented as the organ of divine contemplation, and the heart as the epicenter of spiritual life, both being called to cooperate in the work of salvation. Through a rigorous philological and theological approach, the analysis proposed in this chapter clarifies the meaning of the fundamental concepts of mind (*nous*) and heart (*kardia*), also taking into account the terminology associated with these dimensions. The attention paid to specific vocabulary contributes to the consolidation of a solid hermeneutical framework, preparing the ground for a deeper exploration of the convergences and particularities between the Evagrian vision, focused on the purification of the mind and its liberation from the passions, and the Macarian spirituality, oriented toward the transfiguration of the heart through the working of the grace of the Holy Spirit. The detailed analysis of these terms and their related terminology facilitates a more nuanced investigation into how these two mystical perspectives meet and complement one another within Orthodox anthropology.

In Orthodox spirituality, the *nous* (the spiritual mind) transcends the sphere of ordinary analytical thought, constituting the faculty through which the human being gains access to the living knowledge of God, the place where the ultimate meaning of existence is reflected. The Church Fathers emphasize that the *nous*, once purified of the passions, becomes a mirror of divine light, the means by which the person opens to communion with God. Through the exercise of asceticism and pure prayer, the mind is freed from the fragmentation of discursive

thinking and penetrates the mystery of divine light. Its restoration through grace proves essential for regaining its original clarity and for authentic participation in the uncreated energies of God.

The analysis dedicated to the heart emphasizes its privileged status within Orthodox spirituality. The heart transcends the mere condition of being the seat of affectivity or a physiological organ, revealing itself as the inner temple of communion between human beings and God, the place of encounter between will, conscience, and spiritual discernment. Its mystical and ascetic dimension is manifested through the full operation of grace within the person, through which the entire human nature is transfigured.

Patristic theology underscores the indissoluble bond between mind and heart. The mind, illuminated by grace, descends into the heart, where communion with God is fulfilled. Philokalic doctrine emphasizes the complementarity between the restoration of the mind and the purification of the heart, converging on the path of holiness and offering an integrative model of spiritual life. The analysis extends to the way in which Greek philosophy influenced the patristic conception of mind and heart. The Platonic doctrinal foundations regarding the soul and intellect, along with Aristotelian reflections on cognitive and affective faculties, are received and transfigured by the Church Fathers into a Christocentric vision anchored in the experience of grace. In this light, the *nous* reveals itself as the inner space in which the image of God is reflected, and through the purification from *logismoi* (passionate thoughts) and illumination by grace, becomes the organ of spiritual vision. The heart, in turn, is affirmed as the space of synergy between divine grace and human freedom, the place in which the moral direction of life is shaped and where the human being experiences the transfiguring encounter with God.

The integration of the noetic dimension with the affective one naturally opens the way toward a comparative analysis of the theological visions of Evagrius Ponticus and Macarius of Egypt, the research aiming to highlight the way in which, through the synergy of the illumination of the mind and the enkindling of the heart, these two Fathers of the Eastern tradition configure an ascetical-mystical path oriented toward the perfection of communion with God.

The second chapter of this work, entitled *Evagrius Ponticus — The Intellectualist Mystic*, proposes a thorough analysis of the personality and theological work of this enlightened Father of the Egyptian desert in the fourth century (345–399/400). His theological identity is defined by a remarkable synthesis between the dogmatic rigor of Cappadocia, the hermeneutic refinement of Alexandria, and the living experience of desert asceticism. Formed under the guidance of the

Cappadocian Fathers, Evagrius integrates Trinitarian reflections and dogmatic coherence into the ascetic life lived in the Egyptian desert, where, under the influence of the great anchorites of the time, such as Macarius of Egypt and Macarius of Alexandria, he develops a mystical anthropology centered on the harmonious work of the mind and the heart in the journey toward communion with God.

In Evagrius's vision, the relationship between the mind (*nous*) and the heart (*kardia*) unfolds in an organic interdependence that sustains the entire dynamic of spiritual life. The mind, as the organ of contemplation and bearer of the image of God, becomes vulnerable after the fall, being disturbed by the *logismoi* (passionate thoughts), which cause inner fragmentation. Through a demanding ascetic path, marked by *hesychia* (profound stillness), the mind is purified and descends into the cleansed heart, where divine grace works in a transfiguring way.

In Evagrian thought, the heart reveals itself as a privileged space of encounter between divine grace and the personal freedom of the human being. Once freed from the burden of the passions, the heart becomes the fertile ground of divine energies, the place where the human person directly experiences the saving work of grace. The mind, purified through ascetic practice, descends into the heart, consolidating the living unity between these two centers of spiritual existence, and in this inner encounter, its radiance becomes the expression of God's presence in the depths of the heart, revealing the full communion between the illumination of the mind and the spiritual transparency of the heart.

Evagrius emphasizes the importance of the stability of the mind and the purification of the heart, considered fundamental conditions in the ascending path of contemplation. A mind dominated by worldly concerns loses its steadfastness, and a heart devoid of peace diminishes its capacity to remain in the presence of God. The restoration of interior balance requires a rigorous ascetic discipline, oriented toward detachment from earthly attachments and the redirection of the entire being toward spiritual realities. Within this dynamic, the heart acquires spiritual transparency, becoming the altar of contemplation, while the mind, freed from scattered thoughts, opens itself to the vision of divine light.

A central dimension of Evagrian spirituality is the analysis of spiritual progress, structured in three distinct stages: purification from the passions (*praktike*), illumination through knowledge (*gnostike*), and contemplative union with God (*theologia*). This structuring of spiritual life is interpreted as an essential contribution to the foundation of a spiritual

methodology that would decisively influence Eastern monasticism and the Philokalic literature. The spiritual triad formulated by Evagrius becomes one of the interpretive keys for the entire theological and ascetic project he proposes.

The reflection within this chapter highlights the influence of Alexandrian hermeneutics and Origenist thought in Evagrius's theology, as well as its ambivalent reception in Orthodox spirituality, marked by doctrinal controversies and by the condemnation of certain Origenist influences at the Fifth Ecumenical Council. Nevertheless, his ascetic and mystical-Philokalic legacy has been assimilated in an essentialized form, purified of ambiguities, contributing significantly to the shaping of Byzantine monasticism and the development of Eastern mystical theology. His writings, appreciated for their practical clarity and teaching on the stages of spiritual life, have remained a constant reference for Orthodox monasticism and continue to inspire contemporary theological reflections on the path of deification.

*The third chapter, entitled Saint Macarius of Egypt – The Sentimental Mystic, offers an in-depth analysis of the spiritual and theological universe of Saint Macarius of Egypt, a prominent figure of fourth-century monasticism. Born in Egypt (295/300–392 AD) and formed in the proximity of the great ascetics of the desert, such as Saint Anthony the Great and Saint Pachomius, Saint Macarius of Egypt exercised an undeniable influence on the development of Eastern monasticism. Nevertheless, the reconstruction of his biography remains difficult, due to the absence of an authentic *Vita Macarii*, the main sources being *The Lausiak History* by Palladius and *The Monastic History* by Rufinus of Aquileia.*

The issues concerning the authorship of the writings attributed to Saint Macarius of Egypt are approached with caution, given the lack of certainty in the patristic tradition regarding their direct attribution. Nevertheless, the analysis treats these texts as faithful expressions of the spirituality associated with the name of Saint Macarius, acknowledging their lasting influence on Orthodox thought and on the formation of the ascetical-mystical tradition. For reasons of terminological consistency and in light of the traditional authority these writings enjoy within Orthodox spirituality, reference to Saint Macarius of Egypt as their author is maintained, without insisting on the term “Pseudo-Macarius,” frequently used in specialized patristic research.

In the spiritual anthropology of Saint Macarius of Egypt, the mind (*nous*) and the heart (*kardia*) constitute the central axis of the process of spiritual restoration of the human being. The mind is understood as the seat of spiritual knowledge and as the guiding principle of the soul,

metaphorically described as the “eye” within that requires purification from the passions in order to contemplate the divine light. The heart is recognized as the existential nucleus of the person, the deep space of communion with God, where all the forces of the soul converge and where the mind finds its dwelling place, guiding the inner life through discernment and openness to the heavenly. In this context, the union of the mind with the heart under the working of grace becomes essential for the restoration of inner integrity and for the fulfillment of the human vocation to become a “throne of Divinity.”

Saint Macarius constantly emphasizes the synergy between the working of grace and personal effort, as an essential condition for the full purification of the mind and the heart. Grace descends into the heart, illuminating and transfiguring it, and this illumination reflects upon the mind, granting it the capacity to discern between the divine and the earthly. The mind, through the fulfillment of the commandments and meditation on the divine Word, becomes the guide of inner openness, contributing to the transfiguration of the heart into a living temple of divine presence.

In the Macarian corpus, the relationship between the mind (*nous*) and the heart (*kardia*) is expressed in a complementarity in which the mind, illuminated by grace and purified from passionate thoughts, enters the transfigured heart, the place of authentic communion with God. The descent of the mind into the heart becomes the path for the restoration of the entire being, through which the person participates in the transfiguring dynamic of grace. The felt presence of God, manifested through tears of repentance and burning love, confirms the work of grace, while the living synergy between mind and heart takes concrete shape in an ascetical-mystical path, sustained by unceasing prayer and the struggle against inner fragmentation.

A defining feature of the theology of Saint Macarius is the emphasis placed on the inner feeling of divine presence; any act of virtue remains external unless it is accompanied by this inner dynamic of spiritual life, in which the prayer of the heart becomes the driving force of the entire existential restoration. This perspective does not oppose but providentially completes the mysticism of the mind proposed by Evagrius Ponticus, offering a unified vision of the path of deification. The purified heart and the illumined mind collaborate organically in the human ascent toward likeness with God, anticipating the synthesis later accomplished by Saint Diadochos of Photike.

Looking at the directions of research developed in the third chapter as a whole, the emphasis naturally falls on deepening the integrative dimension of Orthodox spirituality. In this continuity, the final chapter of the thesis extends the horizon of analysis, directing the research toward a mature and balanced theological synthesis. Thus, the perspective is opened for evaluating the way in which Saint Diadochos of Photike succeeds in harmonizing the two major spiritual traditions previously presented—Evagrian and Macarian—into a coherent and illuminating vision of the union between mind and heart.

*The concluding chapter, entitled *Diadochos of Photike – A Synthesis of Evagrian and Macarian Mysticism*, proposes an in-depth theological analysis of the synthesis accomplished by Saint Diadochos of Photike between Evagrian mysticism—centered on the purification of the mind and ascetical discernment—and Macarian mysticism—grounded in the feeling of grace within the heart and the living experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The central theme of this synthesis is the synergy between mind and heart, essential in Orthodox spirituality, which Diadochos develops into a coherent and unifying vision, going beyond a mere juxtaposition of the two traditions. Faithfully drawing on patristic sources and contemporary interpretations, the research highlights how Diadochos outlines an integrative pneumatological anthropology, in which the rational dimension of the soul is organically interwoven with the experience of grace, and spiritual discernment is exercised through the illumined mind and the purified heart.*

The first section of the chapter analyzes the theological and spiritual context in which Saint Diadochos of Photike elaborates the synthesis between Evagrian and Macarian mysticism, highlighting the complementarity between the purification of the mind, apophatic knowledge, and sobriety of thought—characteristic of the Evagrian tradition—and the experience of grace in the heart, specific to the Macarian tradition. By integrating these orientations, Diadochos outlines a spiritual model in which pure prayer, spiritual discernment, and burning love for God converge in the mystagogy of Baptism and in the practice of the prayer of the heart. The descent of the mind into the heart, the awakening of the awareness of the divine presence, and the unceasing working of grace transfigure the human being, while the continuous invocation of the Name of Christ becomes the living expression of this mystical synthesis, shaping a harmonious theological vision, faithful to the patristic heritage and open to the depth of spiritual life.

The second section of the chapter explores how the theological legacy of Saint Diadochos of Photike has been integrated and valorized in the development of Orthodox ascetical-mystical

spirituality, emphasizing the impact and continuity of his teachings in the patristic tradition and in later monastic currents. At the heart of the research lies his essential work, *The Ascetical Discourse in 100 Chapters*, which stands as a formative reference in Eastern monasticism. This legacy is faithfully preserved and transmitted, notably through the Romanian *Philokalia*, translated and commented on by Father Dumitru Stăniloae, where the balance between the intellectual and affective dimensions, between ascetic striving and the working of grace, is maintained as a formative model of spiritual life. The delayed reception of this work confirms the doctrinal and formative value of Diadochian thought, offering solid points of reference for understanding the trajectory of Orthodox spirituality. The analysis highlights the assimilation and deepening of the fundamental themes of Saint Diadochos's work within the hesychast tradition, especially through the development of a theology of grace felt in the heart and lived as a personal experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The research brings to light the continuity of essential ascetical themes from Diadochos's writings, which are subtly developed in the thought of Byzantine hesychasts. The impact of Diadochian theology extends also to monastic forms of life, with echoes in the East and, to a certain extent, in the West, where Latin translations and Western mystical references reflect the influence of his thought, adapted to different local contexts.

The third section of the chapter examines the contemporary reception of the theology of Saint Diadochos of Photike, focusing on the interpretations formulated by twentieth- and twenty-first-century Orthodox theologians. The analysis centers on the contributions of key figures such as John Meyendorff, Vladimir Lossky, Father Dumitru Stăniloae, Andrew Louth, and Jean-Claude Larchet, who articulate converging perspectives on the relevance of Diadochian spirituality. John Meyendorff highlights the deeply Christocentric character of Diadochos's theology, expressed in the orientation of prayer toward the Person of the incarnate Word, emphasizing the personalist nature of mystical experience. Vladimir Lossky underscores the paradigmatic value of Diadochos's synthesis, identifying in his writings a genuine doctrine of the spiritual senses, by which the soul comes to perceive the divine energies. Father Dumitru Stăniloae emphasizes Diadochos's vision of the synergy between divine grace and human freedom, highlighting the transfiguring power of divine love in the process of deification—a dimension already delineated in the thought of Saint Diadochos.

The analysis expands upon the recent contributions of theologians Andrew Louth and Jean-Claude Larchet, who bring renewed attention to the contemporary relevance of Diadochos's work. Andrew Louth integrates the thought of Saint Diadochos into a broad historical and theological framework, emphasizing the originality of his approach and his fidelity to the patristic heritage. Jean-Claude Larchet, from the perspective of therapeutic anthropology, interprets Diadochos's teachings as a spiritual guide for the healing of the contemporary soul—from the illumination of the mind through grace to the purification of the passions through prayer and ascetic struggle. The research highlights the growing recognition of Saint Diadochos as a father of the hesychast tradition, noting the recent re-evaluation of his theology through new editions, translations, and the integration of fundamental principles—such as the prayer of the heart, the awareness of baptismal grace, and the primacy of love—into spiritual life.

The final part of the chapter deepens the complexity of the heart's itinerary in the thought of Saint Diadochos of Photike, illuminating the way in which he constructs a unifying pneumatological anthropology, in which the operation of the mind and the experience of grace are interwoven in a coherent spiritual journey. The research follows the integration of essential elements from the Evagrian and Macarian traditions, articulated by Diadochos in a theological vision where the communion of mind and heart opens the way to deification.

The central themes of reflection — *the sensing of the mind in the depths of the heart, the image as the rational movement of the soul, baptism and spiritual dynamics, the path of the mind into the depths of the heart toward the Invisible One, the importance of silence and humility, the prayer of the heart, and the formative role of Holy Scripture* — are thoroughly illustrated in the writings of Diadochos and are brought to life through the interpretations of contemporary theologians.

The writings of Saint Diadochos present a spiritual pedagogy in which the grace received through Baptism initiates a new life, consolidated through ascetical effort and the anchoring of the mind in the heart. The mind, watchful and illumined, penetrates the depths of the heart to preserve the purity of thoughts and to open the soul to the work of grace, while the heart, purified through prayer, becomes the space in which the divine presence is tangibly perceived. The prayer of the heart, accompanied by the unceasing remembrance of the Name of Christ, sustains this interior movement and cultivates the vigilance of the soul. Humility and contemplative silence safeguard the believer's inner life, maintaining the balance between the feeling of grace and the

conscious operation of the mind. In this spiritual pedagogy, discernment becomes the key to preserving the authenticity of mystical experience, offering an integrative model of spiritual life.

This section proposes a systematic and organic reading of the theology of Saint Diadochos, in which Orthodox anthropology, mystagogy, and mystical theology are unified. Without claiming to be exhaustive, the study highlights the synergy between mind and heart in the context of deification, as well as the essential role of Saint Diadochos in articulating an Orthodox spirituality rooted in truth and love. His thought remains a constant point of reference, offering a coherent theological framework in which inner experience and dogmatic fidelity are harmoniously interwoven, guiding the human being toward the fulfillment of the divine vocation.

The academic undertaking of this research aims to rigorously and integratively outline the relationship between the mind (*nous*) and the heart (*kardia*) in Orthodox spirituality, with the remarkable synthesis elaborated by Saint Diadochos of Photike at its center. Beginning with the Evagrian emphasis on the purification of the mind through vigilance and contemplation, along with the profound sense of grace cultivated in the tradition of Saint Macarius of Egypt, the research demonstrates how Diadochos coherently articulates these two fundamental dimensions of the person. Through this theological and spiritual convergence, the mind and heart are united in a synergistic work, oriented toward the transfiguration of the inner person and the perfection of communion with God.

Within this theological analysis, Saint Diadochos of Photike stands out through the refinement with which he integrates the mysticism of the Evagrian intellect—dedicated to the contemplation of divine mysteries—harmonizing it organically with the Macarian mystagogy of the heart, centered on the experience of grace in the depths of the human being. The comparative-synthetic approach adopted in this research seeks to clarify the way in which Evagrius Ponticus and Macarius of Egypt, while emphasizing distinct dimensions of spiritual life, converge in a profound complementarity, revealed with theological finesse through the vision of Saint Diadochos.

This exposition offers a reasoned dismissal of any apparent antinomy between the mysticism of the mind and the mysticism of the heart, outlining a living convergence of these two perspectives, united in a coherent path of deification, in which theological knowledge enlightens burning love, and consuming love continually nourishes the illumination of the mind. Through this perfected complementarity, Saint Diadochos offers the Church a solid theological

framework, suited both to the demands of Orthodox spirituality and to the academic rigor of contemporary theological reflection.

The present work, elaborated with full awareness of the complexity of the theme addressed, aims to offer a contribution—even if modest—to the development of a theological hermeneutic oriented toward the rediscovery of the fullness of the human being’s spiritual vocation, under the living guidance of Orthodox spirituality rooted in the Tradition of the Church.

The research shows that the unified articulation of the two mystical paradigms—one of noetic orientation, reflected in the theology of Evagrius Ponticus, and the other of affective emphasis, expressed in the spirituality of Saint Macarius of Egypt—constitutes an essential theological undertaking for the foundation of a coherent spiritual anthropology. Through the intertwining of doctrinal analysis, historical perspective, and spiritual reflection, an integrative vision is formed regarding the person called to deification, in which the mind, illumined by the knowledge of grace, and the heart, enkindled by divine love, collaborate in an inner synergy that defines the ascetical and mystical journey of communion with God.

Authentic Orthodox spirituality, as it emerges from the conclusions of this research, presupposes an integrative approach in which the entire personal reality—mind, heart, and will—is engaged in a synergistic work of salvation, eschatologically open toward the Kingdom of Trinitarian love and capable of responding to the aspirations of the contemporary human being, who thirsts for the fullness of spiritual life, revealed and cultivated by the patristic wisdom of the Church, continuously actualized in the lived experience of liturgical and ascetical life.