

Prepositions

The title of this essay may strike the reader as a bit unusual by reason of its terseness. Before settling upon it, I had played around with several options to expand its meaning and even considered offering a subtitle to flesh it out. However, I decided to stick with the original because it spoke directly to the matter at hand. Prepositions are small words that have a mighty effect upon our how we view reality, and seldom are we conscious of them. Since they're small, I figure on keeping the title small. To appreciate their effect requires slowing down our thought processes, an increasingly difficult task to effect in a fast-paced world. A chief means of effecting this slowing-down is through contemplative prayer which will be brought into the picture shortly. Living life more slowly opens possibilities that earlier we hadn't even been aware of. For example, a greater sense of our presence within the world emerges which means we become aware of how we relate to it, and that essentially is within the wide context of up-down, left-right. Automatically there comes to mind the role of prepositions which govern our rootedness within the real world regardless of race, religion or culture. In sum, awareness of the four cardinal directions is governed by prepositions. We're either *in*, *out*, *above* or *outside* this most basic of frameworks pretty much like fish are in, out, above or outside the ocean. Later on two examples of this attentiveness assisted by prepositions will be offered with a view toward comporting ourselves in the spiritual order of things, one from Scripture and the other from St. Gregory of Nyssa, a fourth century author.

As for the essay at hand, it has nothing to do with grammar, English or otherwise, though obviously the term has its roots within that context. Before getting into why I settled upon prepositions, please allow a few pages of background material which pertain to the relationship between religions of the West (chiefly Christianity) and those of the East. The connection between that grander issue and the seemingly trivial one of prepositions might seem strange, yet there is more to this than meets the eye. Prepositions govern the way we perceive reality and have played an important though overlooked role in how theology and spiritual realities are articulated. As for religions of the East, emphasis is upon awareness or consciousness, terms we don't find in Christian texts, including the Bible itself. While prepositions must play a role in how the religious texts of the East are understood, chances are their role is more flexible and conducive to expressing spiritual realities. Such is part of their appeal to many today. This observation is more or less indirect or based more on personal contact from those engaged in meditation of the Eastern variety, not so much by exposure to sacred texts though that is included. It is that flexibility compared to the more literal interpretation and understanding of Christian texts (the Bible and various forms of spirituality that evolved from it) that is of issue here. In addition to this, the West never seemed inclined to the contemplative outlook on life and viewed it with some suspicion. A generalization, of course, but with some truth. Perhaps an appreciation of how prepositions govern Christian sacred texts in the original languages such as Hebrew and Greek can be offered as an alternative which just as eloquently expresses things spiritual that Eastern religions have been doing with their emphasis upon awareness and consciousness. And that doesn't mean adopting a scholarly approach but a lived one discussed below through the medium of *lectio divina*.

For those seeking more information as to how prepositions govern not just speech but our relation to reality, consider **The Body in the Mind** (1987) by Mark Johnson which I had read shortly after its publication and revisited some twenty-five years later. The subtitle gets to the root of the matter: "The bodily basis of meaning, imagination and reason." In it Johnson explores the ways that meaning and understanding arise from and are conditioned by the patterns of bodily experience. Right away this focus upon bodily experience offered positive signs, that the book would not be abstract but very concrete and therefore personal. By concrete and personal I mean it reflected for some time now a keen awareness of how prepositions govern the texts of the Greek New Testament, the Septuagint and Church Fathers who wrote in Greek. That will be touched upon later.

Not long ago a friend well into his eighties started a conversation about meditation, a favorite topic of his. According to him, meditation may be defined as the cessation of thoughts and images, something that can be misunderstood easily by a culture that puts a premium upon the generation of thoughts and images. In short, the more thoughts and images we crank out, the more alive we are or more accurately, the more alive we seem to be. I've been acquainted with this elderly gent's approach, well versed in Eastern meditation (especially of the Hindu variety), though he dovetails well it with Christian mediation which he has been practicing for many years. During that time he has been under the guidance of such heavyweights as St. Augustine, John of the Cross plus several classical monastic writers. While certainly fine, never have I been attracted to these authors, preferring instead the writings of those who flourished in the first four Christian centuries or what I like to call affectionately The Good Stuff. Even this gets more specific. Among the ancients are those who wrote in Syriac whose writings are virtually unknown in the West and who can hold their own (and even surpass) anything the Western tradition has to offer. As for my friend, he is savvy enough not to amalgamate the two traditions, East and West, but can see the benefits of each as well as points of incompatibility. Usually when you bring up the matter of Eastern religions, warning bells go off because people associate interest in things Eastern as falling under the banner of polytheism or Transcendental Meditation, often considered threats to Christianity if not to society itself. Thus any discussion is shut off immediately. My friend is keenly aware of this problem and hence doesn't share his thoughts freely, and I give him credit for this. Though he never shared it with me, I wouldn't be surprised if somewhere along the line he had gotten burned and had learned his lesson all too well.

Not only is the difference between East and West a cultural and religious one, but we could throw in ignorance of the languages in which the religious texts of both traditions had been written, a fact just as important as practicing what they have to offer. Without an accurate understanding of the original texts, our appreciation of them is off base. Thus to get a better handle on the matter, a long process of education is required, especially when it comes to the complexities of a major language as Sanskrit. Few have the dedication or time for such a pursuit, but the subject must be talked up, else we run the risk of stagnating. One feature I've picked upon concerning my elderly friend's enthusiasm about Eastern meditation (I believe he's into more modern Hindu writers) is that to some degree he has abandoned Western religious images and ideas. It'd be better to say not a wholesale abandonment but a shrugging-off of traditional images and practices he find no longer adequate when it comes

to prayer. That's why I mention him. He is a concrete individual in the thick of things with regard to the spiritual practices offered by Christianity and Eastern religions. This may not seem important for some folks, for it appears disconnected with Christian social involvement. However, genuine ministry rests upon incorporation of contemplative practices, and the interaction of both has had a very long tradition. By way of note, such social involvement seems more characteristic of the West than the East, a popular perception.

As for my friend, in more recent years he has developed an appreciation of the "present moment" or the "now," pretty much from reading both Christian and Eastern religious texts about contemplative prayer. I've noted the benefits of this approach in his own life, very tangible for all to see, but upon closer inspection he seems to lack a sense of history. I ran this by him once, albeit indirectly, and got the response that since the present is devoid of past and future, what good is the past and future? They simply do not exist. Right out of his mouth. On one level his words are true but tricky on another, especially over the long haul of one's praxis. That's where spiritual direction is necessary, and I believe my friend has none. I don't think you can become aware of this unless informed by someone else simply because it's too subtle to grasp all by yourself. Unintentionally and over a period of time you've backed yourself into a corner, feeling uneasy where you are but unable to put your hands upon it. This seemed to be a basic characteristic from observing other people I've known engaged in Eastern religious disciplines with varying degrees of another. Earlier many had been engaged in Christian forms of prayer but abandoned them because they deemed them inferior by reason of the East's focus upon awareness. Arguably the temptation is strong because we're dealing with an essential weakness of the West which needs to be addressed right now. For a variety of reasons Christianity had been suspect of contemplative prayer and leaned more heavily on prayer of a formal, public nature as well as formulaic ones which people could recite privately. This was backed up by a hierarchy which seemed even further removed from the spirit of prayer and was more interested in preservation of its own existence. As so the unflattering history of Christianity, out there for all to see, overshadowed people living genuine lives according to the Gospel. Such is well-known perception about the Church which gave plenty of opportunities to frown upon Christianity. From there it was a small step to consider Christianity "inferior," especially when it came to matters of the spirit which the East presented under the label of pure awareness. And so the sense of an incarnate God which lay at the heart of Christianity could be used almost as a weapon against contemplative prayer. Everyone had a duty to "get out there" and play his or her part in implementing the Incarnation through good deeds. In sum, Christianity minus contemplative prayer runs the risk of getting too bogged down in the world and lost among the demands society. There are notable exceptions indicative that other less notable ones do exist. There comes to mind people like Dorothy Day who had spent many an hour tucked away in silent prayer which was vital to her social commitments.

Working out a viable way to combine insights from East and West with respect to spirituality is a major project facing us today not so much in the forefront as in recent years due to the rise in religious conservatism. Despite this, interaction between two major halves of the globe, as far as contemplative prayer goes, will continue. In fact, it's inevitable. Perhaps it's better to work in the background and away from the limelight so that serious research and work may be carried out in conjunction with many hours of silent prayer. A quick, uninformed observation about Islam. While a major religion, it seems to lack the contemplative element

of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Despite making a lot of recent headlines, Islam remains out of the picture in this discussion despite well-known mystic elements as Sufism. Perhaps it is this lack of contemplative dimension that eventually will marginalize Islam or at least tame it over the long haul. Again, I stand corrected on the matter.

One topic my elderly friend never tires of reminding me is that most, if not all thoughts and emotions, are repetitive and fail to break out of the closed cycle they create. One feeds into the other and so forth *ad infinitum*. At the same time we're fascinated by this repetitiveness, else we would not subscribe to the cycles it begets. And so familiarity precludes failure to notice the closed nature of cycles, thereby taking them for granted. They can run the full gamut: beneficial, harmful or just plain neutral as under the guise of daydreaming and the ebb and flow of daily thoughts. Despite the simplicity of this observation, often we are surprised, even embarrassed, when we notice these cycles, especially the huge amount of time they consume. Inevitably upon our awareness of them we are full of regrets. One tried and true way to become more aware of a system which reveals itself ultimately as closed is to keep a journal. The process of jotting down thoughts on a daily basis and reviewing them allows us to see how patterns emerge and how they govern our behavior. Keeping a journal somehow slows down the process. However, it is a step in the right direction of appreciating the closed nature of those systems...modes of behavior...to which we subscribe even if we don't admit it publically. But should we throw in prayer based upon the practice of *lectio divina*, we stand a better chance of seeing more clearly the nature of thoughts and emotions. *Lectio* is crucial because it roots our minds within Scripture which is both historical and spiritual and thus is less likely to lead us astray down one path to the neglect of the other. As for the theme of *lectio divina*, please refer to various entries within this home page; here is not the place to go into this practice, just to mention it within a larger context.

For generations the role played by religion within society has been taken for granted and went unquestioned but has lost much of its appeal in the past few decades. In fact, it's remarkable how quickly religious authority lost its privileged place in society, for within living memory it had seemed so firmly established, like it would last forever. This is a matter worth considering in its own right, of how such a constant within society suddenly turned out to be so unstable (By way of footnote, **The Unintended Reformation** by Brad S. Gregory, Cambridge, Ma 2012 gives a detailed account of the roots of this problem). Just now people are coming to grips with the void left by the more dominant influence of religion but remain at a loss how to fill it, even wondering if ever it could be filled. Perhaps it can, but the way we go about this will differ, depending upon memories of that influence. In brief, the situation now is influenced on one hand by a conservative desire for the past the-way-it-was and on the other, by those attempting to interpret the Christian message with awareness that they are irrelevant within a post-Christian (or post-religious) world. Both sides are making use of technology to spread their message, but the verdict is still out as to which will have a more lasting impact. As for technology, a chief problem is that despite the wonderful ability to store treasures from the past and to communicate them, fewer and fewer people find sufficient time to do original research. And so we end up with a paradoxical situation: plenty of good stuff out there (online) but no time, let alone inclination, to think hard and deep about it.

Whether new to the spiritual life or well versed in it, you can't help but be struck by the incompatibility between your personal search and society at large which hasn't a clue as to what you're doing. This incompatibility had been tempered in the not too distant past when life was less complicated and less technological. Now it is virtually impossible to reconcile the two, so the contrast is starker than ever. Not only that, the gap will become wider. This doesn't mean the situation is hopeless; new ways of coping are required and will be developed. However, it's helpful when starting out on the spiritual path to realize that any reconciliation between one's practice and the world is impossible, just a minor truce here and another there. What makes the picture even bleaker is that the influence of the church has faded rapidly within a generation or two, and this has little to do with any recent scandals or the like. It's influence used to be fairly widespread and permeate society, an absence we can appreciate better with the passage of time. In the past, parishioners easily subscribed to the social side of the church which includes liturgical participation, church-related functions and interactions with the local community. Prayer was considered mostly in terms of recitation of formulas, public or private, with a tacit avoidance of going deeper. In fact, such deeper matters were hardly known and if they were, quickly they were swept under the rug. Still, there were people out there who practiced their Christianity quietly but seriously, using the overall atmosphere provided by the church as sacred space in which to do it. Even though they may work in relative isolation, never were they cut off from the larger church community and were supported primarily through the liturgy (chiefly the Mass but other services such as holy hours, devotions, etc.). Now that many devotions have been dropped unceremoniously, any practitioner is left on his or her own within an environment which is not especially hostile to religion but indifferent to it. In fact, if you're really disciplined, it is easy to practice your religion right out in the open where no one would have a clue as to what you're about. If we look at it this way, now is the best time to practice contemplative prayer. The best disguise is to have no disguise.

We are still reeling from the abrupt loss of church support from society and haven't come up with an adequate replacement, nor does it seem possible or even desirable to do so. Many reasons exist for this sudden departure; here is not the place to discuss them, just to note that we're in a situation unique compared to our more immediate predecessors. Such lack of support gives rise to an amazing current ignorance of the basics of the Christian faith. At the same time the number of spiritual seekers is exploding. They are not affiliated with a particular denomination (let alone major faith) and are more open to Eastern religion in a more mature way than say, in the 1960s. Then it was novel and counter-cultural. Now it's a matter of survival in a church-less world. This lack of stability presents a whole range of possibilities...a new form of evangelization...but people don't see much interested in that. Such a statement may be off the mark somewhat, but it seems people prefer learning how to philosophize in the original sense of the word, of learning how to be the friend and companion, to be the *philos* of *sophia*. Once so engaged, they're more amenable to things religious, but unfortunately this tends to be overlooked because we lack proper understanding of *philo-sophia*. Yet another issue, but no time here for it!

As for the religious tradition that has permeated Western culture and societies since their

beginning, the briefest of all outlines runs as follows. The Old Testament is an account of how humanity interacted with the divine, and that gave birth to the sense of history...a linear, unrepeatable chain of events with a culmination laying in the future. The New Testament continues this theme but focuses more intensely upon one of three divine persons who became incarnate, Jesus Christ. That brings the divine very close, provided you subscribe to what Christianity teaches. Shortly afterwards Christianity came into contact with the larger Hellenistic world within the Roman Empire. It employed insights from Greek philosophy, notably Plato and Aristotle, and advanced for several centuries afterwards until the fall of Rome. For some centuries after Rome (the so-called Dark Ages) monastic libraries kept alive scripture and some writings of the earlier Church Fathers until Aristotle was brought to light, chiefly be preserved by the Arabs. Next followed Thomas Aquinas' use of Aristotle which gave birth to a world view to which the Catholic Church had subscribed up until or around the Second Vatican Council. And a few centuries after Aquinas came the Reformation which threw a different slant on everything (again, see Gregory's **The Unintended Reformation** noted above). While scholasticism is still adhered to in some quarters, it is not as dominant as it once had been. Some decades after VC II there arose a desire to recover some practices perceived as having been jettisoned, mostly traditional forms of worship, and that brings us pretty much to the present. Obviously this summary is as brief as any could be and has a specific goal in mind, the background from which perhaps something new might emerge not tainted by catch-all words as conservative, liberal or the like. As for what could emerge within the near future, a possibility or two will be touched upon shortly.

Building upon what had just been outlined, in more recent decades (more specifically the 1960s when society underwent a major upheaval) contacts were made with Eastern religions, that is to say, Hinduism and Zen Buddhism. That gave rise to a popular misunderstanding of these religions being either polytheistic or atheistic, an image which unfortunately has lingered into the present. In the United States, however, such interest has a longer, relatively unknown history which stems all way back to the Transcendentalists including Thoreau, Emerson and lesser known people like Margaret Fuller. Apparently it thrived within some academic circles though petered out for one reason or another. Later with the Second Vatican Council a few monastic and spiritual authors made more serious contacts, but that seems to have faded considerably. Thomas Merton remains an exception whose writings remain widely read today. Nevertheless, suspicion hangs over him chiefly because he, a religious Westerner, decided to look outside the "fulness of truth" claimed by some with Catholic circles. Such suspicion is of the familiar variety ranging from accusations of polytheism to the even more dangerous phrase "emptying the mind" which unfairly characterizes Buddhism. Now put this interest face-to-face with mainline Christianity and you have some major problems. At the same time more thoughtful persons within the Western tradition sensed they had not as much their arsenal compared with the East, though that's an unfortunate mis-perception. The tools are there but few seem to know how to access them.

The uncomfortableness just recounted in some ways highlights the current difficulty Christianity has in relating to modern culture as well as to other religions with strong contemplative elements. Its cherished biblical stories had been familiar to everyone but are such to a lesser degree today because they are relegated more to the realm of myth and

quaint tales from the past. The same disregard as well as ignorance is more profound when it comes to church history and in more recent years, ignorance of the faith's fundamental practices. At the same time awareness has been growing quietly here and there that new input is required to renovate the Christian tradition. The more recent attempts to hearken back to pre-VC II days is one but probably won't have much of a shelf life except in isolated quarters. So the main source of inspiration for the future appears to lie with Eastern religions despite the misconceptions involved. A parallel is worth noting. Any efforts to enhance the Christian message probably will follow the same creative pattern Christianity enjoyed when it came upon the legacy of Athens and to a lesser degree, Rome. Contacts from both helped formulate its doctrine and mission. So instead of taking the position that Christianity cannot move forward without adopting elements of Hinduism and Buddhism, it's more accurate to shift the emphasis. That is, we can examine how these ancient religions explore human awareness or consciousness. From there parallels may be seen in Christian spirituality. Eastern religions have exceptionally advanced texts, words and phrases (notably in Sanskrit) to which the West can't even come close. Furthermore, the East has highly developed programs or disciplines relative to contemplative prayer based upon these insights. While the West has its own venerable traditions, peoples of that society have been less inclined to contemplative prayer, preferring action instead. Those who do this prayer in the West have been few in number down the centuries but seem to be growing. Often they have to struggle along as best they can. However, they have tools comparable to Eastern emphasis upon awareness of which they seem generally ignorant.

And so the difference between the two general cultures and religions are thrown into sharp contrast, so sharp that they end up not being able to speak face-to-face. Instead, one is either speaking down or up (preferably the former) to the other. Obviously I am writing this from the Western perspective and am uniformed if those in the East suffer from similar biases and preconceptions; most likely the answer is yes, but I suspect they might not be as hostile. As for the Christian theological background of the West, there are two categories always difficult to deal with and hover in the background: the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ and the other two Persons of the Trinity, of how they relate to each other. Not only are they difficult to grasp in and by themselves but more so when confronted with other religious traditions. The doctrine we have inherited today has been hammered out in controversies and councils of the first few centuries. Anyone who has taken up a book dealing with such matters quickly will become frustrated at the complexity of the entire saga. This abated somewhat after the creativity of the Patristic period and settled into fixed doctrines which have come down into modern times. Our heritage, however, remains colored by the Greek influence and later taken over by the Latin tradition with little import from other Christian sources. One such source outside the Western Mediterranean world is the Syriac one, worthy of close study, and as providing a bridge between the Greco-Roman world and the East, notably as represented by the country of India. Expanding that requires considerable effort and, of course, familiarity with the original texts unfortunately untranslated.

As for the difference between the Western and Eastern approaches to life, some questions are, of course, bound to arise. One consisted in the West's preoccupation with concepts as substance, essence and person. Use of these terms can be confusing and make the

inexperienced reader despair of understanding their significance. Nevertheless, I felt a lack existed somewhere, one I knew existed but couldn't quite put my hands upon. Then I mused, what would have happened if the Judeo-Christian revelation came into contact with Buddhism instead of Greece and Rome? Or more specifically, what would have happened if this revelation had to deal with a religious-philosophical system which put premium upon human awareness and the subtle ways of talking about it, especially within the context of meditation? Admittedly I'm on shaky ground because I lack sufficient knowledge of Buddhism, let alone Hinduism. However, this does not preclude offering some conjectures on the matter at hand, that ways of discussing human awareness have value as a vehicle to express elements of Christian revelation. Pitfalls must exist. Yet I get the sense that ways of talking of how Jesus Christ related to the Father and Holy Spirit (plus how all three persons related among themselves) and how he was both man and God, might be thrown into different light. Contrast that with the familiar theology-speak of the patristic period and beyond which sometimes sounds like an attempt to arrange blocks in this square first and then in another square. Obviously we're dealing with the familiar subject of God which is bantered about as though we know what we're talking about while failing to admit we don't know what this term means. So if pressed further, we end up with a definition of God as that which is unknowable. That's it in a nutshell, no alternative. A tough way of putting it to Westerners but perhaps less for to the East because of the more flexible concepts and insights belonging to awareness.

So one way of considering how Christianity may be advanced in the near future is by taking cues from the various modes of awareness presented by Eastern religions and seeing if a counterpart in the West exists. Western terms roughly paralleling the East along this line are mind, soul, perception and the like. While valuable in their own right, they appear to fall short of the highly flexible nature of awareness by reason of representing rather static definitions. To a degree, this paucity allows some in the West, especially of a more conservative bent, to raise barriers more easily since the clarity traditionally offered by these concepts are more conducive to support such a clearly defined position. Furthermore, they are justified in doing this from negative experiences they have witnessed, namely, people who have adopted Eastern religions and ways of thought with little or no preparation. They may have started out well but succumbed to an unaccustomed introversion that finds itself at odds with common Christian religious practice. Unfortunately caricatures of this abound not just among conservative-minded folks but among a larger audience. So the task before us is a huge one with many challenges, the strongest objections arising from within our own tradition. That will not preclude pioneer work from continuing here and there until some one like Thomas Aquinas will step forth and take the bold step of seeing how Eastern thought can be made compatible with Christianity. Given the collaborative nature of such a project, it's likely not one individual will be responsible but a team. As noted above, baby steps in that direction have been taken already by some monastic experimenters, Thomas Merton among them. Someone like the original Thomas Aquinas who had read Aristotle in Latin translation, a familiar language to him, had it easier. In contrast, the task at hand today will be more complex since it requires familiarity with ancient Eastern languages, especially Sanskrit. So instead of sitting back and waiting for someone to come on the scene and undertake this giant task, already tools are at our disposal. The only problem is that no one has taken them up because they don't know how to set about the task at hand.

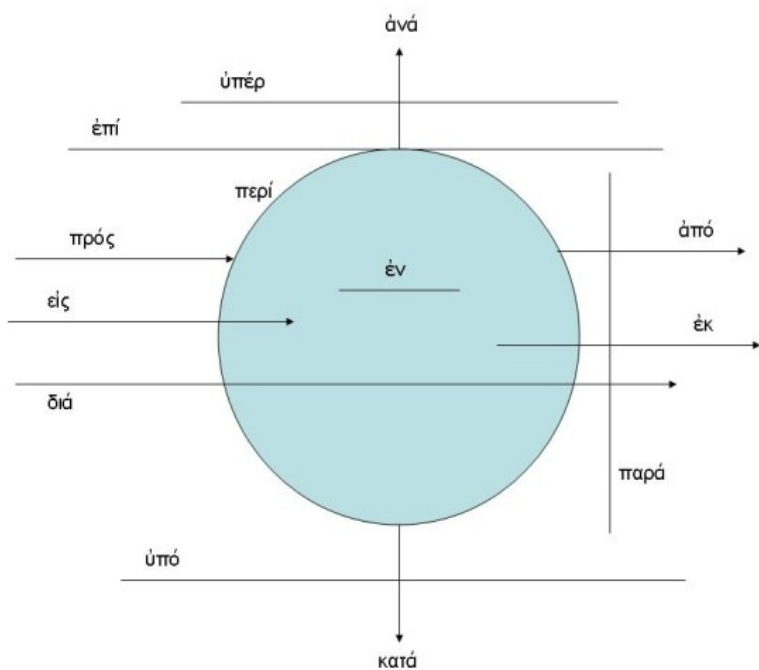
One of these tools goes back to the roots of our Christian tradition or to be more specific, *lectio divina*, which translates as divine reading. At first you'd think *sacra* (sacred; feminine gender of *sacer*) would be used, for the adjective *divina* applies directly to God, not so much to objects or practices. This little fact may not have been known by the person or persons who had invented the phrase, for if *sacra* had been chosen, we'd end up with "sacred reading" as opposed to "divine reading." The latter is a kind of reading God himself by reason of association with the divinity. And so we have a major difference between reading stuff which is sacred and stuff which is divine, the latter pertaining to the Divinity himself. As for the practice of *lectio*, it is unstructured and may be called trans-intellectual which helps make it accessible to a wide variety of people. The chief qualification for engaging in *lectio*? Most importantly, where one stands on the scale of educational background is irrelevant. A person must be earnest in pursuing a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ through contemplative prayer which means learning how to quiet one's mind and therefore one's thoughts. Since *lectio divina* deals with what's transpiring within us, it leans more to that awareness of which Eastern religions consider as primary. For this reason anything done in the spirit of *lectio divina* can't be systematized but remains unstructured, and that gives the illusion *lectio* is inferior to doing theology. A person doing *lectio* may or may not know how to do exegesis on the scriptural passage he or she is working with, let alone know the definition of exegesis. Instead, he or she is concerned primarily about how that passage leads to contemplative prayer and union with God. This is a realm beyond thought (putting it somewhat exotically) while certainly not beyond the access by most people. In sum, I'd say that humility is a prime requisite for really getting into *lectio divina*.

Doing *lectio divina* in the original languages of Scripture over many years gave rise to a feeling that our Western tradition had been lacking something. It was an insight that didn't start out big but small; it grew little by little or in proportion to how my understanding of these languages deepened as vehicles for expressing things divine. To begin with, Christianity possesses a wealth of knowledge and wisdom that stands heads and shoulders above most traditions. It is a wealth rooted within Scripture and later built upon the traditions of Greece and Rome while obviously resting upon the foundation of Judaism. For me, this was sufficient; to go beyond this point would have been biting off too much. This became abundantly clear when I had spent about a year learning Sanskrit (the language). I could have done so provided I abandon other interests, clearly not a realistic option. At the same time I was aware that notably in the last two centuries the wealth of our own Christian tradition got locked up in a pure intellectual or scholarly approach as opposed to the original intent of making it real in the lives of people. Unfortunately we are still closed off from those sources despite efforts to the contrary with the exception of a door opened here and another there. Perhaps baggage from that approach continues to hinder well intentioned people who've come to believe that the so-called scholarly approach was the only option out there. That excluded quite a lot of serious Christians who lacked access to such sources. Even though valiant effort has been made and is still being made, the perception remains that the tradition is only for experts or intellectuals. So once Scripture and tradition got into universities, both were locked away so permanently that to speak of an approach other than the intellectual one was looked down upon with disdain or at least with mild tolerance. The situation has deteriorated so much that many doubt a recovery is possible with the exception of a

conservative approach. However, that won't work because ultimately behind its appeal an "us" against "them" approach exists, at odds with the spirit of Scripture and tradition or rather, the at odds with the Spirit which doing the inspiration.

I've digressed somewhat concerning the apparent advantage Eastern religions have vis-a-vis the West due to their focus upon awareness or consciousness in order that we may appreciate better the subject of this essay. And that subject is those tiny, often overlooked words known as prepositions. They wield an influence we seldom stop to pause and appreciate and can apply to a more wholesome grasp of the contemplative dimension of life. Recognition of this arose from two facts that had been at work for some time: contact with people practicing Eastern meditative techniques or more accurately, those who formerly practiced Christian meditation and more directly by personal reading of both the Old and New Testaments in Hebrew and Greek. Later this included some of the earlier Church Fathers who had written in the same language as the New Testament. While I had been familiar with the highly flexible use of prepositions in Greek and realized that no translation could approximate the subtlety they offered, it took a while to absorb so that I could bring to bear upon the text a more expanded meaning when it came to expressing things of the spirit. New Testament Greek or Koine is relatively simple (St. Paul's epistles are more complex due to their technical nature) which doesn't mean the New Testament is "not that spiritual." Then when moving into those Church Fathers who wrote and thought in Greek, I appreciated how they were able to comment upon a given text all the while employing their native language's flexibility to the max. At the same time many of them were engaged in the defense of Christianity, still a relatively new religion, so some of their writings lack attunement to matters of a more subtle nature. Nevertheless, they wrote about more directly spiritual matters where we can see how they grasped intuitively the use of prepositions both as free standing and as prefixed to nouns and verbs. Chances are they weren't aware of this outright...it seemed inbuilt to them...but a glance at their writings shows the wide range of meanings derived from prepositions put at the service of describing things spiritual. So it turned out that these Christian texts offer an unparalleled basis for meditation through *lectio divina* and equal to anything from the East.

Obviously prepositions govern how we deal with people, things and concepts. The important point about their usage in Greek with respect to theological and philosophical texts is that they are far more subtle than their English counterparts and for this reason have the ability to reflect the flexible nature of consciousness which Eastern religion and meditation practices excel at describing. They are not part of God, if you will, but simply handmaids (albeit important ones) to assist us in our life with him. Such was the reason for the digression above. So if this innate flexibility of Greek prepositions is so special, why not see if they have any relevance to a more specific Christian meditative practice? Should we be open to this yet are restrained by awareness of our sinfulness and defects, there is hope. Sinners, saints and the rest of humankind all function under the purview of prepositions. No other environment exists. Starting with physicality is the best place of them all. If we now can see a few examples of prepositions in action, we might value their role in *lectio divina* as a preparation for contemplative prayer. With this in mind, consider the following diagram with respect to Greek prepositions. I had incorporated it earlier within one or two other essays on this home page; the same diagram or similar ones can be found easily on the Internet in different guises:



Thirteen Greek prepositions are spread about the circle, the most basic symbol of all. The circle itself is intriguing because it's so inclusive, just sitting there and staring out at us as it represents the whole of reality...an image of the universe...including ourselves. In English the prepositions run counter-clockwise as: above, over, upon, around, towards, into, through, under, beneath, away from, from (out of), beside and in. Of course, more than one preposition may be operative in a given sentence; also it's common for one preposition to be prefaced to a verbal root while another governs this verb. To communicate this seems like an exercise in the obvious, and that's precisely what this is about. The problem, however, is that we're not tuned into how these prepositions, always under our nose, operate and govern our behavior. That's why the prepositions here are isolated, first to see their spread in the "natural" world that we may appreciate the same spread in the "supernatural" world. Despite the circle being so inclusive, the prepositions divide it into manageable parts. This emphasis upon prepositions makes us more aware of our reliance upon physicality (up, down, etc.) as a means to see how awareness fluctuates. We do this each day whether we're conscious of it or not. Thus the task at hand is to become aware of how we function in the world according to these thirteen ways and transfer them over to the spiritual realm. Texts pertinent to this realm such as prayer and theology employ the same prepositions from our familiar world but in a wholly different sense. And that realm has no up, down, in nor out but freely employs these prepositions. Since we have to talk about things spiritual in accord with these thirteen modes based upon daily experience, it's a matter of learning how to make an adjustment from the physical to the spiritual worlds. Once sensitized, we are more aware of their correspondence within the non-material realm all the while appreciating the fact that this analog is not distorting either side beyond recognition.

The only way to make palatable the fairly abstract, general information above is to offer two

examples of spiritual texts which reveal the inner dynamics of what's going on. First comes the simpler one from Colossians followed by the more complex and lengthy text from Gregory of Nyssa, a Church Father who wrote in Greek during the fourth century. The process of outlining the texts is laborious, to be sure, but to anyone who sets his mind to it will discover riches that perhaps wouldn't have come to light otherwise. So let's start with the Colossians text (chapter 3, verses 1 and 2) in Greek followed by the translation from the **Revised Standard Version**:

Εἰ ὡς ἀνὰ ἡμᾶς ἐγενήθητε μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀναζητεῖτε τὰ ὀπίσθια, οὐκ ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενος· ἀναζητεῖτε, μὴ τὰ ἐπιτῆρα.

"If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth."

This verse, based upon a schemata which is fundamentally up-down, is broken down as follows with emphasis upon key prepositions:

- if you have been raised [*sunegeiro*] with Christ [dative case].
- seek [*zeteite*] the things that are above [*ta ano*] where Christ is.
- seated [*kathistemē*] at [*en*] the right hand of God.
- set your minds [*phroneite*] on things that are above [*ta ano*], not on things that are on [*epi*] the earth.

Thus we have the sequence of prepositions (free-standing as well as prefaced to words; from now on the former will be designated with a hyphen as in the case of *sun-*) as *sun-*, *ano*, *kata-*, *en* and *ano* or which reads as with-above-according to (or down)-in-above. Another way of putting it runs "risen with" or *sun*, "seek that which is above" or *ano*, "seated according to (*kata* prefaced to the verb *histemi*, to place, to stand), at or *en* (in) the right hand of God" and finally, "set your minds on things that are above" or *ano*.

Here is another way of putting this sequence, that is, in four steps:

-First comes "If you have been raised" or raised-with (takes dative case here). That means a person has come from below to above, from the purely physical and sensual world to the wholly other domain of Jesus Christ and now is there with (*sun-*) him. Despite the transference, memory of the former is transferred over to the latter.

-Secondly comes "seek thing that are above" or a seeking (*zeteo*) from the newly established position *sun-* (with) Christ which intimates that attention should not remain on that level. If so, you can become overly self-conscious and subject to the possibility of falling back to the

place from which you have been raised-with Christ. That's where transference of memory noted in the last paragraph is vital, in other words, to keep you *sun-* Christ. Those things which are *ano* or above can be taken mistakenly as abandoning the rising-with or *sun-* Christ for something higher. However, *ano* suggests continuous upward movement of that plane...a lifting up, as it were, of both Jesus Christ and the person who has been raised-with him. More specifically, the text has *ta ano* or "those above things," that is, we have a plurality of *ta ano* relative to a singular Christ ('where Christ is'). Here the visualization of the image becomes more difficult to grasp because we tend to take it literally. At the same time there is a physical basis to this *ta ano*, otherwise we would not perceive its spiritual implications.

-Thirdly comes a sitting of Jesus Christ which is in accord with (*kata-*; prefaced to the verbal root *histemi*, to stand, to take one's position). That means his stationary position is in accord with a given order, one that had been established already before the person so-raised had perceived it. And that eternal order rests upon having been risen-with Christ and being engaged in the process of seeking those things that are above. Actually it is a sitting at or *en* which more specifically means "in" with respect to the right hand of God. It is as though Jesus is physically present in (in the sense of pervades it) the right hand of God.

-Fourthly and finally comes a setting of your minds on that which is above (*ta ano*). This is the second time *ano* is mentioned, the first being "where Christ is." That is to say, *phroneo* implies being prudent, to be wise as well as to have purpose with respect to *ta ano*. It is a development of *zeteo*, of seeking *ta ano*. Despite the loftiness of this ascent, St. Paul cautions not to *phroneo* what is upon (*epi*) the earth. In sum, we have the two verbs (in bold) centered around *ta ano* or "those things which are above:"

sunegeiro <-**zeteo**-> *ano*

kathistemi with *en*<-**phroneo**-> *ano*

Yet another way of summing the Colossians text runs as follows. A key condition for *zeteo* (to seek) is first to have been risen with (*sun-*) Christ which gives birth to the seeking that which is above. As for *phroneo* (to set one's mind on something), a key condition is first to have realized where Christ is, that is, seated according with (*kata-histemi*) and in (*en*) God's right hand, and that, in turn, is followed by those things which are above or *ta ano*. The verb "are risen with" gives way to "seek" which gives way to "setting" one's mind (*phronesis*: purpose, intention which comes from *phroneo*). "Are risen" is in the past tense whereas the verbs "seek" and "set your minds" are in the present.

The second passage is not biblical and is longer and more complex. It comes from Gregory of Nyssa's **Commentary on the Song of Songs** where first we have the Greek text followed by the English translation containing transliterated Greek words of interest. The reason for choosing this passage is chiefly due to its dynamic character of forward movement, a kind of spiritual restlessness as well as growth, which is not unlike the just cited Colossians verses:

dia\ tou=to pa/ntote toiíj eñmprosqen e)pekteinome/nh ou) pau/etai kaiì a)po\ tou= e)n
 %Ò e)stin e)ciou=sa kaiì pro\j to\ e)ndo/teron ei¹sduome/nh e)n %Ò ouñpw e)ge/neto kaiì to\
 pa/ntote qaumasto\n au)tv= kaiì me/ga faino/menon katw\teron poioume/nh tou= e)fech=j dia\ to\
 perikalle/steron pa/ntwj eiànai tou= prokateilhmmenou to\ a)eiì eu(risko/menon.

"Therefore [*dia touto*] such a soul never ceases [*pauo*] to stretch forth [*epekteino*] to what lies
 before [*emprosthen*], going out from [*exiemi*, with *apo*] her present stage [*apo tou en ho
 estin*] to what lies ahead [*eisiemi*, with *pros*]. Anything great and marvelous [*thaumastos*]
 always seems [*phaino*] inferior [*katoteros*] in comparison to what succeeds [*ephexes*] it since
 what the bride has found seems more beautiful [*kallos*] than her earlier discoveries
 [*prokatalambano*]." Jaeger, 366.14

As with the Colossians verses, the passage at hand contains the transliterated Greek
 prepositions which have been abstracted in order to get a handle on how the text proceeds
 and shows our advancement in the spiritual life:

-*Dia touto*: therefore; literally as through this. Due to the frequency of this phrase, it does not
 really count as far as the intent at hand. However, it indicates the author's intent to focus
 upon through-ness when introducing a subject.

-*Emprosthen*: before, in front of; consists of *em* or *en* (in) and *pros* (signifies direction
 towards-which).

-*Epekteino*: the two prepositions *epi* and *ek* (upon and from) prefaced to *teino*, to extend, to
 stretch forward. Thus we have a stretching first which upon followed immediately by one
 which is from.

-*Exiemi*, with *apo*: the verb *iemi* (to be) is prefaced with the preposition *ex* (from) and used
 with the preposition *apo* (from).

-*Pros*: direction towards-which, that is, in the direction of *endoteron* or within.

-*Eisduno*: to get into, to enter with *eis* prefaced to the verb *duo* (to enter, to put on as with
 clothes).

-*Katoteros*: that which is inferior or below (*kata*-).

-*Ephexes*: in order, in a row, in succession.

-*Dia* with *to perikallesteron*: literally as through that which is more beautiful around (*peri*-).

-*Prokatalambano*: to attain before; the verbal root *lambano* (to take, to receive) is prefaced
 with two prepositions: first *pro* or before followed by *kata* or according to or down. Thus we
 have first a taking before followed immediately by one which is according to or down.

By way of a further abstraction, the transliterated words are strung out as follows:

Dia touto-pauo-epekteino-emprosten-exiemi with apo-eisiemi with pros-endoteros-eisduoen. Thaumastos-phaino-katoteros-ephexes-perikallos-prokatalambano.

If one were to take this **Song** excerpt literally, that is, lose one's attention in the prepositions with all their complicated movements, the text would be too complicated to follow and board upon meaninglessness, ending up with a jumble of incoherent movements. However, this does not preclude from the value of the outline. It allows us to approach the text in the spirit of *lectio divina* where the prepositions automatically serve to slow us down, thereby compelling us at critical junctures to absorb each word in and by itself as well as the way prepositions modify them. By paying close attention quite another picture emerges that at first glance. Instead of dissecting the text, focus upon prepositions invites us to look at the words one way and then another, all without distorting the original sense of the Greek text. As they are, the elements comprising this sequence lack coherency but taken together, are very rich indeed. We observe a wonderful process here: while reading through the passage, the text has an uncanny way of slowing us down first mentally and then physically. All this is deliberate and effects a paradox. Instead of slowing us down and keeping us there, a process which admittedly can be painful, we discover that we are now "accelerating," spiritually speaking. It's an experience available to direct perception should we engage in *lectio*, an intuition which transcends reflection because based upon sense perception, it is the field where prepositions work best. And so from this somewhat involved elaboration from Colossians and Gregory's **Song Commentary** we make our way, albeit unconsciously, from a static way of perceiving the sentences to the more fluid shades of awareness which are mirrored in the complex interaction of prepositions and the words they govern. In short, a way of describing spiritual reality.

An elaboration worth mentioning with regard to the **Song Commentary** is centered around the verb *epekteino*, to stretch forth. From it derives the noun, *epektasis* which is defined as a stretching forward, a reaching out towards something before us. In other words, *epektasis* is synonymous with moving both in space and in time and is built on a concept especially appealing to us moderns, progress. Gregory of Nyssa is celebrated for making this term a hallmark of his spirituality, having lifted the idea from St. Paul: "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" [Phil 3.14]. Actually, *epektasis* seems to be an exclusively Pauline term, quite rich in its own right, and related to forgetfulness as the verse reveals: "forgetting what lies behind." Gregory backs up this verse with another (it lacks the actual noun *epektasis* or the verb but implies them), "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another" [2 Cor 3.18]. As noted above, embedded within the term *epektasis* is the preposition *epi* (on, upon). It's attached to the root-verb is *teino* (to stretch, to strain). Thus we end up with a stretching-upon as if to signifying an attempt to overtake a goal (as the one mentioned in the Phil 3.14 quote above).

Emphasis upon the details of these two texts has the advantage of avoiding religious-doctrinal phraseology while remaining within the bounds of traditional church teaching as well as being present to the texts themselves. That means by being attentive to the use of

propositions we can find unexpected riches right under our very noses or within the concreteness of our physicality. Christian theology, you think, would offer the best solution because of the Incarnation. However, this is not true because over centuries much of its language has become couched in doctrinal, philosophical and theological language. The religion may not have started out that way, but nowadays we're stuck with a long tradition favoring rather involved mental approach. I say mental instead of the more familiar intellectual because the former is applicable to the constant multiplication of thoughts and ideas, good or bad, and is symptomatic of how many of us in the West comport ourselves. Still, that does not affect the underlying reality of Christ's Incarnation. Taking a somewhat literal approach, the presence of Christ in the physical world has two sides: on the one hand his divinity and on the other, his humanity and all the other stuff that's out there. Divinity is tossed about with some abandon because it continues to remain a familiar concept. However, a closer look shows that nobody has a clue about what it means. It was true in the past and is true today. The only advantage the past had was respect for divine unknowability whereas today such respect is lacking. It isn't because people don't care; they just haven't been introduced to it and need to be re-introduced to it. Thus divinity is equivalent to what is unknown, taking it in the total sense. We are certain of one thing. If that which is unknown assumes a physical body, that physical body is bound to be unusual despite its normal appearance and functioning. The difference is not so much in outward physicality but indirectly, by the manifestation of virtuous behavior. But this isn't the subject at hand...physicality is. Attunement to physicality (strange and primitive as it sounds) is more inclined to lead to virtuous behavior simply because it is natural and pre-moral. At the same time—and this is the best part—it's fun to do. All the struggles of the past two thousand years have done their best to take away this sense of fun which surely God intends. Perhaps if it were more prevalent, the modern world be open to what Christianity has to say making it unnecessary to seek spiritual nourishment elsewhere.

That's why a book like Johnson's **The Body in the Mind** sparked interest in how we perceive reality through our very physicality, not propositionally, as the author maintains throughout. The latter consists in offering explanation, theories, etc. about our experience where most of us Westerners dwell. Our physical bodies are present before our mind within the real world, if you will, and most of the time take care of themselves quite well minus mental (and I might add spiritual) interference. This fact is so obvious that it's overlooked. And so the dichotomy between body and mind is growing with the rise of more portable and powerful technological devices which lean towards reality of the virtual type. That's a whole different subject and some claim it's the way we're going. However, our physicality had been around a long time and sooner or later will catch up with us. To stop and consider our basic orientation within the world is a way to start. Even a being we call divine (i.e., unknown to us) had to do this in a physical body starting from the crib. Just the fact that this being is comprised of two wholly other realities without coming apart is amazing. It's common understanding that Jesus had begun his short public ministry after having spent approximately thirty years in obscurity. Even if he had begun at the age of thirty, that was relatively late, given the short life expectancy of the time. These "hidden years" are open to all sorts of pious speculation, but if we stick with Jesus as divine (and that again is defined as completely unknowable), we can see it took almost an entire life span to acclimatize, if you will, the two realities and make them function smoothly. You could almost look at these thirty years as one of practice. From it the

three year ministry period, vital as it is, remains secondary because it's an automatic overflow of the "hidden" thirty year time span. Just the fact that the unknowable is walking around in a body means that it is extending far beyond that particular body. How? Because the reality of un-know-ability and a human body coming together has no precedent.

Easily one can subscribe to the union between the divinity of Jesus Christ which comprises that which is unknowable and his human body as a matter of faith informed by reason. Plenty of brilliant minds informed by prayer have articulated this union over the past two thousand years by theological reflection, prayer coupled with social activity. While reflection is valuable, it remains secondary because it is done usually minus consideration of the physicality of our bodies. In fact, it's well known that some practices scorn the body and discipline it in order to subject it to certain ends. So with this long and venerable tradition in mind, another approach may be offered, albeit a modest one. It is built around the fact that we can access the divine (i.e., unknowability) as manifested through Jesus Christ by paying close attention to the elements which comprise our corporeal existence. That means our physicality, common to every person on the planet regardless of any distinction you wish to offer, is the focus of our attention. Even more disconcerting, details of our physicality appear as the last place you'd want to look for the basis of spirituality. However, this has biblical echos: "But it is not the spiritual (*pneumatikos*) which is first but the physical (*psuchikos*), and then the spiritual" [1Cor 15.46]. St. Paul is very clear as to the order of appearance, posting the *psuchikos* first and the *pneumatikos* second or that which is proper to the *psuche* and then the *pneuma*. First comes the animal life (*psuche* being its principle) and then the *pneuma*. More specifically, Paul is speaking of the resurrection.

As for a clue to this order, Paul continues a few verses later: "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" [vs. 49]. Note the distinction between "we" and the two types of images (*eikon*), as though the former were separate from the latter two. Nothing is said of this first person plural (which is pretty much the same as the first person singular) except it stands apart from the *psuchikos* and *pneumatikos*. A clue as to its identity, so fundamental to being human that it defies all description, lies in the fact that "we" is the agent of bearing (*phoreo*) the two different types of images. Certainly it is not a *tableau rasa* onto which anything can be inscribed. So to get insight into this "we" which resists all direct perception, attention should be upon the *phoreo* which implies not just a carrying-about but a carrying that is done unceasingly, not unlike the wearing of clothes which, if fact, is one of this verb's meanings.

The first *phoreo* is that which is *psuchikos* meaning we have to spend a lot of time pondering what this bearing of the physical involves. It isn't done with grim effort nor with heavy-duty thinking or by ransacking theological books but becoming attuned to the native lightness natural to this realm. Fortunately it is so because as we all know, the physical is marked by a fluidity which is inescapable. Practically speaking—and this may sound a bit undignified—our pondering consists of paying close attention to how we walk, raise our arms and watch the chewing of food after which we swallow it and finally is topped off by being fascinated with the movement of a toothbrush in our hands as we brush our teeth. Here we have no

intellectual effort as it's commonly understood, just pure, natural acts that are wholly *psuchikos*. Yet try it out for an extended period of time and see how difficult it can be. Or better put, we have the ability to focus upon one action for a few minutes but quickly allow our mental life to take over. This phenomenon is familiar to people devoted to meditation and is the bane of many spiritual authors through the ages. Yet we should acknowledge it as signaling an innate craving for some kind of mediating element between us and reality. The prospect of focusing attention on bodily functions for a longer than customary period can be enough to turn you off because they are so commonplace...not just to everyone but to most animals as well. Coming back to these functions, even if it is time and again, leads to an awareness that they have a life of their own, that is, independent of our mental constructs. It requires lots of faith in sticking with this attention to physical actions, for their banality is the furthest thing away from what we desire. For this reason coming to terms with the realm of the *psuchikos* requires courage and insight simply because other people aren't doing this or that's how it looks to us. Also we don't find documentation and literature associated with the *psuchikos* realm thereby tempting us to think we're headed down a dead-end road. Since we are so acclimatized to place value on non-temporal things, even in this materialistic society (for they are an end to obtaining material goods), instinctively we're drawn elsewhere. It is precisely this elsewhere that needs to be knocked down and is brought about only by continued focus upon the *psuchikos* realm. That's how ingrained our preference is, to get away from it as quickly and as effectively as possible.

It's unfortunate that Paul's statement about the necessity of the *psuchikos* preceding the *pneumatikos* hasn't been spun out more clearly because the best part about the former is that we can experience it directly with little or no effort. Time and space are not restrictions but form the very substance of our experience. And should we take insight into that which is physical a step further, as to how more specifically the bearing (*phoreo*) of it works, we find that those small, often overlooked words called prepositions are essential for the job. Perhaps the most inclusive arena—and this is both the realm of *psuchikos* and *pneumatikos*—in which prepositions operate is our awareness of containment, of being enveloped within some kind of environment in which we function. The beauty of containment comes from being all-inclusive. Most likely the well known image of life as a stage where we perceive ourselves as actors before an audience comes from it. This image is quite persistent and has various shades of meaning to validate that while the perception of containment is general, affects us profoundly. Take an example within this essay that didn't come to light until now. Several pages above is posted the diagram of a circle depicting Greek prepositions with the circle representative of containment. What else could it mean? It enables the thirteen prepositions to function, if you will, by their going in, through, above, around and so forth, the verb "going" being a generic example where any other verb may be used.

The unique part of this sentiment of containment (and I call it sentiment because it's something we feel, pre-rationally) is that we become connected with reality minus the mediation of mental reflection. Obviously some type of shift has to be made to get away from this reflection to the sentiment at hand. It isn't done by compulsion but by discovering the attractiveness of physical (*psuchikos*) elements in our lives whether they be part of us or external to us. Actually some practice at doing this reveals quickly that internal-external no

longer applies which turns out to be a joyful discovery. This experience is pre-mental, if you will, as well as pre-spiritual not unlike what Paul had said in 1Cor 15.49. Because it's so important I present here a second time: "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven." Pay attention to the "just as" and "also" which in Greek are rendered respectively as *kathos* and *kai* ('and' is the most common usage). More often than not, *kathos* is suggestive of what had happened in the past which here is *psuchikos*. Since the sentence would be left uncomplete without *kathos*, another of its features, of wanting to complete a statement, it begs for a resolution. The trick, if you will, is to hold this tendency toward completion in abeyance so as to comprehend that to which *kathos* is headed. That goal, signified by *kai*, is *pneumatikos*. Temporally speaking the abeyance under consideration is a long one. Long in that due to conditioning, we require considerable training in perception of the *psuchikos* which assumes the forms of attentiveness to (for example) those common bodily functions noted above. In actuality, however, the notion of an abeyance is an illusion. Both *psuchikos* and *pneumatikos* form one reality but our perception of it does not. Our attention is split not by nature but by conditioning and training, so the task at hand is one of un-training or in more traditional spiritual jargon, one of detachment. However, that's a term best left alone due to the freight associated with it.

So let's say we have familiarized ourselves with the nature of the *psuchikos* realm, all the time keeping in mind this is an enjoyable venture, not a grim "spiritual" discipline. "Familiarize" is a paradox of sorts because that's where we have lived and moved since the day of our birth. The major difference now is that we live and move as aware of our living and moving. This is so close to the common living and moving of everyone else on the planet yet far removed from it. Obviously such moving is governed by prepositions. Normally we don't move but move in, out, toward, upon and so forth. Being aware of the variations upon our moving allows us to become aware of them and shortly afterwards withdraw a bit from the compulsive this-worldly nature of what is *psuchikos*. The only verification is to try it out here and now. Perhaps one hindrance laying in the background is a vague though persistent feeling that we have a duty to suffer which somehow is thought as bound up with spiritual advancement. While suffering may enter the picture, the task at hand aimed more at recovery of our original nature as made in God's image and likeness. Actually the Greek translation (Septuagint) has for "in" the preposition *kata* which means according to and therefore opens up a whole new way of understanding what this means: instead of "in the image of God" we have "according to the image of God." This had been touched upon in another article which is posted on the home page.

As for the practice just discussed, it's exactly opposite to the familiar out-of-the-body experiences where we shed familiar, compulsive attitudes and behavior but remain clueless as to what comes next. However, should we obtain some proficiency in our practice as revealed by the application of prepositions within the *psuchikos* realm, we should be able to shift it over to the *pneumatikos* realm: a similar pattern but a wholly different reality requiring different interpretation. The chief danger of physicality is that it fades away quickly, a fact that can be quite disconcerting for the beginner. But keeping in line with the Corinthians quote, we may call this application of prepositions a bearing, a *phereo*, applicable to both realms. While *phereo* in the physical side of things may be difficult at worse and boring at best, just

focusing upon the phereo in and by itself is the place to start. Since we're dealing with a *phereo*...a physical action...that means our actions will be impinged upon from many sides which means that prepositions will be the agents by which *phereo* is revealed. Focus upon *phereo* prior to the imposition of prepositions prepares us for how we will comport once these prepositions govern our lives. In actuality this is a very lightsome and enjoyable task because it's pre-rational and nothing burdensome is imposed. It avoids exhortatory situations which counsel us to do this and not do that which signal we're being set up for a fall. Modern people can pick this out easy as pie and are turned off by the exhortatory nature of religious practice. In its place this discussion as to *phereo* first perceived in the physical realm and then intuited in the spiritual realm allows us to shed preconceived ideas or better, the tendency to have ideas...thoughts...in the first place.

So after we've sensitized ourselves to how prepositions govern our behavior within the physical realm, does this mean we can do it in the spiritual realm automatically? Yes, provided our willingness and ability to sustain attention without getting bogged down in the *psuchikos* realm. Such a question, however, is not suitable because it implies manipulation. What is at issue is the ability to return again and again to the practice. This may sound like an advertisement for pain, but the pain released isn't from the practice in and by itself. Rather, it's from our attachment to what is physical, an attachment that often surprises us by its staying power. Ask any practitioner of the spiritual life. The spiritual realm never can be manipulated compared with the physical, and we realize how different the two are from our attachment. Perhaps, too, the relative unfamiliarity of this practice contributes to our difficulty since we find there are so few people, if any, with whom we can share our insight.

Please allow two footnotes in the form of two paragraphs which bear upon this essay.

At the time of writing this article I have been reading **Gottes Sohn als Mensch** by Felix Heinzer (Freiburg, 1980). Its subtitle expresses the subject: *Die Structur des Menschens Christi bei Maximus Confessor*. Here we have a book in German (not the easiest language in the world) about a theological subject of considerable complexity, the union between Christ's divinity and humanity. The Council of Chalcedon finally resolved the issue, and Maximus Confessor developed Chalcedon in a fairly sophisticated manner. This is my second read of the book. While I can't grasp everything Heinzer says, something says to keep pushing on with a re-read of key sections here and there. One thing is certain. Of all the patristic-related books I've read, Heinzer's comes closest to articulating in the best way possible the unity of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ, that is, as presented by Maximus Confessor. The Greek theological terms are at their most subtle. Sometimes I wonder what direction his theology would take if exposed to the ways Eastern religion speak about awareness. That might have made Maximus' theology, fine as it is, even better. Such is an un-informed opinion in an attempt to understand this mystery.

Also I refer to an article posted on this home page entitled *Some Reflections upon Chalcedon* which discusses the important preposition *kata* often translated as according to. There *kata* is

considered in light of the two natures of Jesus Christ: "*kata* his divinity" and "*kata* his humanity." In brief, I argue for interpreting this preposition as a means of setting up a whole scheme way of considering both Christ's divinity and humanity as they flow according to their respective orders. Another feature of *kata* is that is essential for telling a story. Take the reading of the Gospel at Mass: "The Gospel *according to* St. Matthew." That is, *kata* serves to grab our attention and get ready for the narrative about to follow.

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