

From Mirror to Fire.

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Apophatic Dimensions of Metaphors in Patristic Writings (4th -6th centuries)

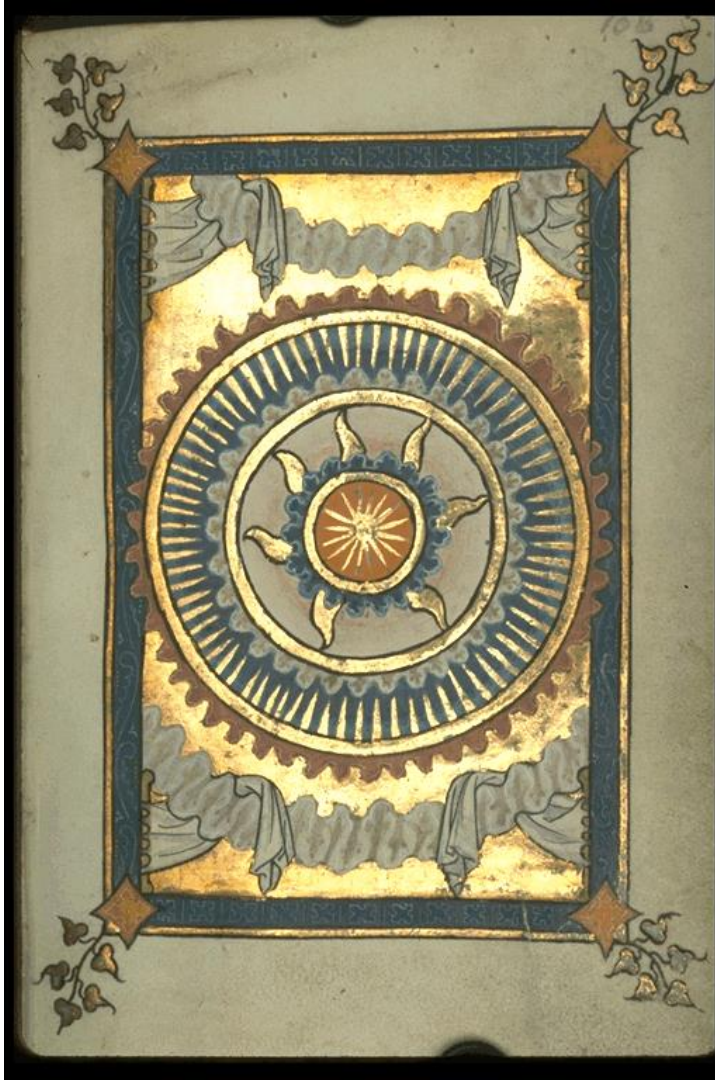
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Rembrandt,
Philosopher in
Meditation



Deus absconditus,
The Rotschild Canticles,
f.106r

From Mirror to Fire.

Outline

1. The mirror
2. The seal
3. The heart as bridal chamber
4. The “incomprehensible” fire
5. Concluding remarks

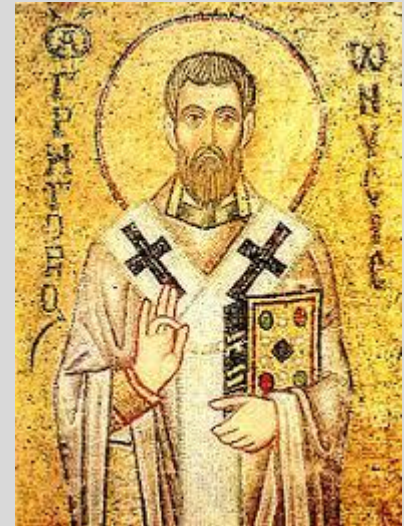


The Mirror

Gregory of Nyssa

De virginitate 11

“We see this even here, in the case of a mirror, or a sheet of water, or any smooth surface that can reflect the light; when they receive the sunbeam they beam themselves; but they would not do this if any stain marred their pure and shining surface. We shall become then as the light, in our nearness to Christ’s true light, if we leave this dark atmosphere of the earth and dwell above; and we shall be light, as our Lord says somewhere to His disciples (John 9,5; 1,9), if the true Light that shines in the dark comes down even to us”.



The Mirror

Gregory of Nyssa

De hominis opificio 12

“And as we said that the mind was adorned by the likeness of the archetypal beauty, being formed as though it were a mirror to receive the figure of that which it expresses, we consider that the nature which is governed by it is attached to the mind in the same relation, and that it too is adorned by the beauty that the mind gives, being, so to say, a mirror of the mirror; and that by it is swayed and sustained the material element of that existence in which the nature is contemplated”.



The Seal

Basil of Caesarea

On the Holy Spirit 26:

“It is fitting that when we see Christ, the Brightness of God’s Glory, it is always through the illumination of the Spirit. Through Christ the Image may we be led to the Father, for He bears the Seal of the Father’s very likeness.”



The Heart as bridal chamber

Augustine of Hippo

En. Ps. 35.5:

“And if you have found there a spouse in whose company there is no bitterness, the very Wisdom of God (See Wis. 8:16), unite yourself with her, be at peace there within your chamber (*in cubiculo tuo*), and do not allow the fumes of a bad conscience to drive you out.”



The Heart as Lamp

Augustine

En. Ps. 96.3:

“When we keep our hearts lifted high, our very hearts are lamps; they shine in heaven and are not quenched by the darkness below them. (...) Those who today are darkness will be light tomorrow if only they consent to be, and those who were darkness when they walked into this church can be light this minute if they want to.”

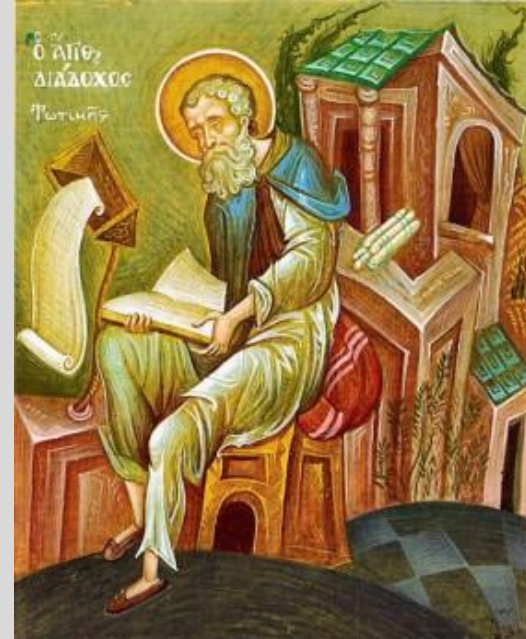


The “incomprehensible” Fire

Diadochus of Photike

Gnostic Chapters, ch. 14:

“Once he has transcended his self-love through love for God, his heart becomes consumed in the fire of love and clings to God with unyielding desire.”



The fiery prayer

John Cassian

Conferences 9.25:

“...that ardent prayer which is known and tried by only few, and which to speak more truly is ineffable; which transcends all human thoughts and is distinguished, I will not say by any sound of the voice, but by no movement of the tongue, or utterance of words, by which the mind enlightened by the infusion of that heavenly light describes in no human and confined language...”



The burning interiority

Augustine

***Confessions* 13.9.10:**

“My weight is my love. Wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me. By your gift we are set on fire and carried upwards: we grow red hot and ascend. We climb ‘the ascents in our heart’ (Ps. 83:6) and sing ‘the song of steps’ (Ps. 119:1). Lit by your fire, your good fire, we grow red-hot and ascend, as we move upwards ‘to the peace of Jerusalem’ (Ps. 121:6).”



Thank you!

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