

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

THE MONKS KALLISTOS AND IGNATIOS XANTHOPOULOS

Kallistos, who bore the name of Xanthopoulos and was patriarch of Constantinople, lived during the fourteenth century under the reign of Andronikos II Paleologus. A disciple of St Gregory of Sinai (whose biography he wrote many years later), he was a monk on Mt Athos, at the skete of Magoula opposite the Philotheou monastery. He spent twenty-eight years there with his disciple, Mark. Equally, he was a close friend of Ignatius, who shared with him the name of Xanthopoulos, and they were between themselves almost one soul in two bodies. Having become Patriarch, and making a journey to Serbia, where he intended to assist with the unity and order of the Church, he happened to stop along the way at the Holy Mountain. There, St Maximos Kapsokalyvitos made about him a prediction tinged with humour, saying: 'This old man will not see his wife again'. In the event, having arrived in Serbia with some difficulty, St Kallistos exchanged this corruptible life for the incorruptible.

In his chapters on the deifying prayer, St Symeon of Thessalonica says on the subject of these men:

'Our Father among the saints, Kallistos, by the grace of God Patriarch of the second Rome, and the fortunate Ignatius who lived a life of asceticism with him, have written during our time on this prayer, providing us with comprehension of it in one hundred texts. Sons of Constantinople, they left that city behind, in order to lead a life of submission to celibacy and solitude, so as to attain by asceticism the heavenly and indivisible state. To a remarkable degree they protected the union with Christ (that union which Christ prayed the Father to give to us) and they were like the light which brings the word of life into the world. For, more so than many others who have been sanctified, they attained that degree of union and love of Christ, such that there was never any trace of a difference of direction or bearing, nor any trace of sadness. This is almost impossible among men. Having become as it were angelic, they fulfilled the self-imposed demand, of acquiring and guarding the peace of God within, which is Jesus Christ our peace, He who made one out of two and whose peace passes understanding. Moreover, partaking of this peace, they enjoyed the serenity when raised up, and saw despite everything in total purity the Jesus who they loved with all their soul, and who they had truly sought for. They are one with Him. They had a share of the divine and gentle Light, of which they received a pledge even in this life, purified as they were by contemplation and actions preparatory to it. Like the Apostles, they knew the divine light of Mt Tabor. Many were witnesses of this fact. Their faces

were seen to shine like that of St Stephen, so much grace abounding not only in their hearts, but even in their physical bodies. That is why, like Moses, they revealed the transfiguration (and those who saw it attested to it), when the form of their bodies streamed with light like the sun. So, having given signs of beatitude, and having understanding of the experience, they give clear representation (in their writing) of the divine light, of the energy and natural grace of God, of the sacred prayer, confirming what they say by testimonies of the saints.'¹

¹ St Symeon of Thessalonica, *Treatise on Prayer: An Explanation of the Services Conducted in the Orthodox Church by Symeon of Thessalonike*, 295; P.G. 155: 544A-D; E.T., trans. H.L.N. Simmons, *On divine prayer, Archbishop Iakovos Library of Ecclesiastical and Pastoral Sources* 9 (Brookline, MA, 1984).