



Sts. Theophan The Recluse and Ignatius Brianchaninov Studies

Issue #1

Sts. Theophan the Recluse and Ignatius Brianchaninov Study Groups

For Opening The Study Group With Prayer

O Heavenly King...

St. Theophan the Recluse - commemorated January 10

Troparion, Tone 8

Instructor of Orthodoxy, Teacher of Piety and Purity,
Ascetic of Vysha, divinely-wise hierarch Theophan:/
In thy writings thou hast expounded the Word of God/
indicating to all the faithful the path to salvation.//
Beseech Christ God that our souls may be saved.

Kontakion, Tone 4

As the namesake of the appearing of God,
Oh hierarch Theophan,
with thy teachings thou hast illumined many people./
Now standing with the angels before the throne of the Holy
Trinity,//
pray without ceasing for us all.

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov - commemorated April 30

Troparion
Tone 8

You were shown as the chosen beloved of Christ,
united to Him by many afflictions and unceasing prayer;/
and having received the grace of the Holy Spirit,
you were an exemplary teacher for the people./
Remember us, O holy hierarch Ignatius, God-bearer of
Russia,
that by your teachings and prayers, we may find saving
repentance,//
and with heartfelt love, be found in Christ.

Kontakion
Tone 8

While traversing the path of this earthly life, O hierarch Ignatius, /
nonetheless, unceasingly you observed the laws of eternal life, /
which you taught to thy disciples. //
Wherefore, O holy Father, pray that we may follow them as well.

Purpose and Format for Group Study

The purpose of a Sts. Theophan and Ignaty Study Group is to promote practical knowledge and experience of the Christian way of life as understood and taught by St. Theophan and other Modern Holy Fathers. We want to learn St. Theophan's answer to the question, "What is spiritual life and how may we attain it?". More than that, we want to attain to that same life in Christ to which he and all the saints attained. St. Theophan is especially important to us in this regard since, standing very close to us in time, he has handed down the ancient and living Tradition of Christian life in a manner which is most readily suited to the spiritual condition and needs of our own generation.

The English word "tradition" derives from the Latin "traditio", the rough equivalent of the Greek "paradosis" which means "precept, ordinance, transmission". As the Greek text of 1 Cor. 11:2 makes clear, the same root may be used to make both verb and noun forms, thereby encompassing both act and content in a single concept: "Now I praise your brethren, that you remember me in all things, and keep the traditions [paradosis-transmission] as I delivered [paradidomi-to transmit, deliver up, hand down] them to you."

The goal of our study groups is not only to become familiar with the content of the Tradition, but to receive it, to follow it and to stand within it, which is to say, to be in Christ and have Christ in us - the only authentic basis of spiritual life. To know Christ in any other way is to know him "after the flesh" as St. Paul says.

The basic idea of the study group is threefold:

1. to read St. Theophan's writings (and those of other recent holy instructors such as St. Ignaty Brianchaninov) and strive to understand them
2. to strive to put his teachings into practice in our own lives
3. to keep, each one, a private journal of our struggles and experience in practicing these teachings

The function of the group is to strengthen one another in this simple spiritual discipline or podvig by agreeing together to undertake the instructions and disciplines given by St. Theophan as our rule of prayer and guide to spiritual life.

General Directions For Group Members and Leaders

1. Bring a notebook or journal to each session in which to write down all directions and instructions
2. Read the assigned text or portion of text to be discussed at least once during the week prior to the meeting.
3. Reread the assigned text at least once each week between meetings to keep the material clearly in mind.
4. Record your efforts and experiences daily in a journal - if possible immediately following prayer time. Record failures and successes, inspirations, insights, questions and difficulties. Journal entries are strictly private and should not be made the focus of group discussion.
5. Above all be honest with yourself and others about everything relating to the discipline, especially in your journal notes. God knows our hearts, therefore we fool no one but ourselves if we are dishonest. The world teaches us to be dishonest, but those who would draw near to God must be ruthlessly honest with themselves
6. Read through your journal entries prior to each meeting and at other times to gain a sense of how you are progressing and to keep yourself inspired
7. Always bear in mind that it is St. Theophan who is teaching the group. This is equally true whether you are the group leader or simply a participant. Our first task is to strive to understand his teaching and then to strive to practice it. We are less likely to go astray with this approach.
8. This is a study group, not a discussion group. Perhaps this is a fine point, but all too often discussion means simply letting everyone spout off their opinions whether they have read the text or not. In such cases everyone returns home confirmed in their own opinions, all the while believing that these opinions are "The Truth." This is the exact opposite of our goal as Christians, which is to suspend our own opinions at least long enough to hear the Gospel (in this case the teachings of St. Theophan on spiritual life) and then to let go of our opinions and conform our thinking to the Truth revealed there.

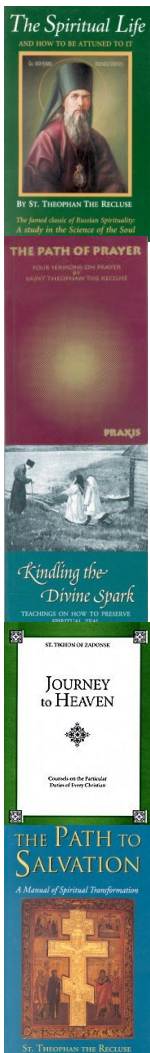
The best approach we have found is for the group leader to read through the assigned text aloud, pausing to make remarks or encourage discussion of certain points that will bring out the meaning of the text. This means that the leader must spend more time in preparing beforehand than the other group members, focusing his creative energy on discovering and bringing out the meaning of the text (not on developing novel teachings of his own). Within this context, discussion can be a positive

tool for deepening our understanding of the teaching of the Saints.

9. The frequency with which your group meets should be tailored to the needs of the group. Experience suggests that more than three weeks between sessions results in a loss of group energy. Meeting weekly or bi-weekly is ideal.

A Suggested Reading List and Plan of Study for a St. Theophan the Recluse Study Group

There are many different types of study that one may do in a Church setting, with different purposes. The purpose of a St. Theophan Study Group is geared, not so much for academic or informational purposes, but rather for praxis - the practical application of patristic principles to life, so that one may labor effectively with the Lord's help to preserve the proper spirit of zeal, dispose oneself to practice the Gospel commandments and war against the passions. If these things are difficult for monastics, they are more so for people in the world, yet God has raised up holy ones in the midst of the world in all times and generations, as well as in the desert. The path is basically the same, although often through different means. Fortunately, we have good spiritual literature which instructs us how to adapt ourselves to the spiritual life regardless of the circumstances of our lives. The writings of St. Theophan the Recluse are particularly helpful for people in the world in modern times, since St. Theophan is closer to our own time, and has understood many of the problems facing us now, who seek to preserve ourselves in the midst of a world of vanities. Here, then is a list of materials in English by St. Theophan and those close to him in spirit, which can be genuinely useful (Ordered somewhat by degree of difficulty):



The Spiritual Life and How to be Attuned to It by St. Theophan the Recluse

This book was the result of a correspondence between a young lady of the upper middle class and St. Theophan the Recluse. In this compilation of his letters of spiritual direction to her, St. Theophan strives to make sure that this young soul would be able to keenly hear the right "tone" of spiritual life. This tuning of the soul is necessary for the soul to be in harmony with the voice of God's Providence, which echoes in the instrument of the heart. This book covers many important topics and is written in an accessible style, appropriate for catechumens as well as advanced readers.

The Path of Prayer by St. Theophan the Recluse

This book contains 4 short sermons on prayer by St. Theophan which are profound and yet simple. Unfortunately, the publisher (non-Orthodox) is generally interested in "esoteric" spiritual ideas, so while the translations of the sermons are mostly OK, the front materials, advertisements, etc. should be disregarded (see study guide by Fr. Philip Tolbert for details). This is now available in better translation online.

Kindling the Divine Spark by St. Theophan the Recluse

"The book contains twenty homilies covering both individual and community endeavors, as well as pointing out the lives of particular saints as role models. Even though the homilies were originally given to sisters living in a convent, as they address interior life, the applications are appropriate to anyone working at living the true faith daily."

-From a review in *Orthodox America*

Journey to Heaven by St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

St. Theophan's labors to impart Patristic Spirituality to the average person was largely inspired by St. Tikhon of Zadonsk who also labored to do this. A nice sampling of St. Tikhon's writings are contained in this volume.

The Path To Salvation by St. Theophan the Recluse

This classic textbook and of spiritual life, now being offered in its entirety for the first time in English, seems to have been sent directly to today's readers by the great Russian recluse himself. Every line breathes his profound psychological understanding, his intricate experience in spiritual struggle, and above all his love, compassion and all-consuming desire that every person might be saved. Inspiring the reader with a sober longing for acquiring the Kingdom of Heaven, St. Theophan provides an infallible system for taking the Kingdom by force, in a Christian life of grace and repentance.

Also:

Selected writings of St. Ignaty Brianchaninov

Selected writings of "modern Holy Fathers" on the spiritual life for lay people (in process).

Unseen Warfare by St. Theophan the Recluse

The Art of Prayer compiled by Abbot Chariton of Valaam

Selections from St. Theophan's commentary of Psalm 118 (in process)