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of Eastern Europe and Asia Minor
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Foreword

Our 5th Anniversary

This new volume of *Romanian Medievalia. Thraco-Dacian and Byzantine Romanity of Eastern Europe and Asia Minor* appears at a time when the International Congress on Medieval Studies is festively celebrating its 40th anniversary. This is a wonderful symbolic coincidence with the 5th anniversary of the affiliation of our Institute with the Institute of Medieval Studies of Western Michigan University. In fact, our celebration is by itself a distinctive part of this great event of the International Congress on Medieval Studies.

Five years ago, on July 27th 2000, we joyfully received from Prof. Dr. Paul E. Szarmach, Director of the Medieval Institute of Western Michigan University, the official address announcing the approval granted to the Romanian Institute Orthodox Theology and Spirituality of New York to propose, organize and sponsor sessions in the category of “affiliated learned societies, associations, or institutions”, beginning with the 36th International Congress on Medieval Studies, 3-6 May, 2001.

Since then, our participation in this prestigious International Congress has become a unique Romanian-American reality and gradually transformed itself into a living tradition of Romanian medieval studies in U.S.A. and Canada. Each year of our last five years of participation was a new academic challenge for all of us and papers scholarly presented in our sessions were becoming more and more relevant for the international medieval community annually gathered in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

On this solemn occasion, the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality of New York proudly informs its members and readers of *Romanian Medievalia*, that during these five years it has sponsored and organized 15 sessions having 56 registered speakers. Without any modesty, this indicates a real performance of Romanian medieval studies in America and Canada.

We have to mention that all our sponsored sessions are dedicated to the Romanian Thraco-Dacian and Byzantine Spirituality, Culture and Art of Eastern Europe and Asia Minor and also to the Thraco-Dacians of Eastern Europe and Asia Minor in the European, Culture, Literature and Art, emphasizing the role always played by the Eastern Romanity of Thraco-Dacian structure and Latin language in promoting ecumenical and cultural relations with its counterpart of Western Romanity and Europe. Our main task is to find out the existential sense of the Thraco-Dacian mysterious ethnicity and implicitly the truth of its spiritual, cultural and historic destiny in the medieval world. In a secularized society such as the one we are living in, medieval studies are revealing a new spiritual, artistic and cultural balance that is a real challenge for all of us.

However, the reasons why the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality is sponsoring and proposing to the Organizing Committee of the International Congress on Medieval Studies such topics, are based on the fact that the truth about the medieval realities of Eastern Europe and Asia Minor should be better known and studied in the light of the Eastern and Western Cultures and their specific differences, in order to avoid all the historical distortions that ideologically occurred in the last half of the 20th century. To our moral and intellectual satisfaction, these reasons have succeeded to underline the academic relevance of our sessions for the entire community of medievalists attending the International Congress on Medieval Studies.

This new volume of *Romanian Medievalia* comprises a collection of selected papers presented at the 37th, 38th, and 39th International Congress on Medieval Studies, held at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan in the years of 2001, 2002, and 2003. Thus it illustrates not only our 5th anniversary but also the 40th anniversary of the International Congress on Medieval Studies.

We take this opportunity to express our special gratitude to Professor Paul E. Szarmach and his colleagues for their tremendous effort to transform the 40th anniversary of the International Congress on Medieval Studies, and implicitly our 5th anniversary, into the most memorable event of the International Medieval Community in our times.

THEODOR DAMIAN President, and **GEORGE ALEXE**, Chairman,
Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality of New York





THE ROMANIAN – AMERICAN HERITAGE CENTER
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A Salutation

The Romanian-American Heritage Center is privileged to sponsor the publication of the second and combined volume of “ROMANIAN Thraco-Dacian and Byzantine Romanity of Eastern Europe and Asia Minor MEDIEVALIA”, published by the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality, New York, which combines in one volume the papers presented at 37th, 38th, and 39th International Congress on Medieval Studies held at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan in years 2001, 2002 and 2003.

Congratulations are extended to Rev. Prof. Dr. Theodor Damian, President, and Mr. George Alexe, Director, of the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality, who continue to enrich the spiritual and cultural tradition of Romanians in North America by organizing the participation of eminent scholars at the Annual Congress on Medieval Studies.

During 2005 the Romanian-Heritage Center commemorates thirty years since its inauguration on July 9, 1975 as the unique repository and archive of the historic record relating to the Romanian immigrant ethnic group in North America. Its library contains the most complete collection of books, periodicals and newspapers published in the United States and Canada since the inception of immigration by Romanians at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. For over two decades, the Heritage Center has published a quarterly journal, the *Information_Bulletin*, which presents the works of North American and European researchers regarding the history and experience of the immigrant group on this continent. In addition, four books related to Romanian-American issues have been published, and the center has acted at the distributor of a dozen books on Romanian historic and cultural subjects.

The Romanian-American Heritage Center will continue to support the scholarly activity of the representatives of the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality at the International Congress on Medieval Studies and of the publication, the ROMANIAN MEDIEVALIA.

*EUGENE S. RAICA, President
Romanian-American Heritage Center
Jackson, Michigan*



George Alexe

The Enigmatic Image of Saint Peter in the Romanian Folklore

The Romanian Christianity of folkloric essence is affirming by itself its apostolic and patristic origin, especially through the Saints Apostles Andrew, Peter, Paul, Philip and their disciples. Among them, Saint Apostle Peter enjoys an indisputable preeminence. It is just amazing the massive presence of Saint Peter, expressively represented by so many hypostatic and contradictory images, in the Romanian folklore. For this reason, the chief intent of our paper is to find out, if would be possible, the real identity of the enigmatic image mythically covered up in the Romanian folklore by the biblical image of Saint Apostle Peter.

In other words to make evident, if possible by folkloristic means, how could be mythicized or even camouflaged a real personage, as Saint Apostle Peter, into an unknown mythical hero, conventionally and simply called Saint Peter, in order to discover and save the enigmatic identity of that unknown mythical personage, who has been impersonated by Saint Apostle Peter.

In fact, the real purpose of this paper is to find out some essence of the religious truth confessed and revealed by this unknown mythical image with the assumed name of Saint Peter. We believe that only the nothingness is irretrievable. For this reason, we hope that our paper will theologically contribute to the decrypting of the enigmatic image of Saint Peter in the Romanian folklore, in the light of the Romanian ethnology, philosophy of culture and history of religions.

The question where do Romanians have from so many religious legends and popular stories about Saint Peter, who never has been historically attested as preaching in Dacia and its vicinities, was answered by G. M. Ionescu almost a century ago, that all these legends and stories have been brought either from

Orient, by the existent Christians among the colonists brought to Dacia from the Thracian-Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, either from Occident, by the Christians of Rome who have known Saint Peter in Rome and, being colonized in Dacia, they brought with them these legends and stories about Saint Peter.¹

But the answer given by G. M. Ionescu, based on Alexandru Dimitrie Xenopol (1847-1920) and Petru Maior (1760-1821), is not proportionally emphasizing both the non-biblical and biblical images of Saint Peter, by giving the impression that the non-biblical images are prevailing upon the biblical images of Saint Peter.

However, as in any other syncretistic religious matter that proves to have many interwoven parts, the truth appears to be more complicated and hard to be discovered. This seems to be the case, at least for the present time, with the conjectural truth concerning the enigmatic images of Saint Peter in the Romanian folklore. Because, along with his traditional image, there are a lot of other many religious and profane images of Saint Peter that have nothing to do with his biblical biography. Certainly, all these biblical and non-biblical images of Saint Peter, in order to be well understood and interpreted, require an interdisciplinary study.

In the first place should be attentively approached the problem of the origin and historicity of this multitude of the Romanian legends, popular beliefs and profane stories about Saint Peter. Some of them are of mythological, cosmogonical, biblical or apocryphal nature and, consequently, are altogether implying the sacred and the profane history, as well as the history of religions, philosophy of culture, comparative folklore and other related disciplines to this subject.

Many of these old religious beliefs, apocryphal stories and legends have an immemorial origin, as surviving vestiges of the ancient rituals and cults, which have popularly been

¹ G. M. Ionescu, *History of the Church of Romanians in Trajan's Dacia, 44-678 A.D.*, Vol. I, Origins, Bucharest, 1905, p. 11-19. In Romanian.

Christianized throughout the centuries. Some of them, are the result exerted upon them by the ritual books of the Church and by the Christian Orthodox worship itself, as Tudor Pamfile has therein emphasized “the close relationship between Jesus Christ, our God, and Saint Peter.”² Certainly, Tudor Pamfile was particularly having in view the biblical and Byzantine hymnological and literary images of Saint Apostle Peter.

And yet, above all, should be mentioned a Romanian folkloric stratum that deserves to be pointed out, because there might be a perceptible demarcation between the biblical and non-biblical images of Saint Peter.

Everybody knows, I hope, the iconographic images of Saints Apostles Peter and Paul, who traditionally are painted together. They are annually celebrated in the same holiday, on June the 29th. To our surprise, Saint Paul and his disciples who have substantially contributed to the Christianization of our ancestors are almost sporadically mentioned in the Romanian folklore.³ To invoke the heretical sect of the Pavlicians as a reason for this relative absence of Saint Paul in Romanian folklore seems to be more than superficial.⁴

Certainly, the relationship between the Saints Apostles Peter and Paul has its inner historical and theological explanations. They will be only peripherally approached in this paper, if necessary. This time, our attention is concentrated upon a specific problem: if there could be perceived, not as an opposition between the two Apostles, but as a certain detachment popularly operated between the enigmatic image of Saint Peter from the biblical images of Saint Apostles Peter and Paul. Even if the Romanian Orthodox Church makes a clear

2 Tudor Pamfile, *Romanian Holidays of Summer*, Ethnographic Study, Bucharest, 1911, p. 15. In Romanian.

3 See: *The Acts of the Apostles*: Chapters XVI, XVII and XX; *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, XV, 19; *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, I, 1; *The First and Second Epistle of Paul to the Thesalonians*.

4 See: Gheorghe Alexe, *The Pavlician Movement in the light of Some New Researches*, “Mitropolia Olteniei”, Craiova, 1964, No. 5-6, p. 476-492. In Romanian.

distinction between this enigmatic Saint Peter and Saint Apostle Peter, the confusion between them still persists in the Romanian folklore and also particularly in what Mircea Eliade was rightly calling the Cosmic Romanian Christianity.

Thus far, in contrast with Saint Paul, Saint Peter has always enjoyed a great popularity in the Romanian folklore. To some extent one might consider that his popularity should be partially ascribed to his brother, Saint Andrew, the Apostle of our ancestors and Protector of Romania.

The truth is that both of them are sharing, as brothers, almost the same ethnic fame in the Romanian folklore. Their common destiny seems to be folklorically related with the old religion of the Thraco-Dacians and their Christianization. Only in this process of historical ethnogeny and spiritual transition from the old religion to the new Christian religion of our ancestors, the mystery of these biblical and non-biblical images of Saint Peter could be at least presumptively disclosed by the Romanian folklore.

But what we have to pre-eminently underline is the very fact that these enigmatic non-biblical images of Saint Peter are older than his biblical image. From our point of view, it is quite possible that these non-biblical images of Saint Peter are impersonating a famous religious personage whose non-biblical images reflect the attributes or various aspects of his personality that, certainly, have popularly survived only through the biblical image of Saint Apostle Peter.

In this case, the non-biblical image of that famous personage, whose principal attributes were incorporated or assumed, by assimilation or by contamination, in the biblical image of Saint Apostle Peter, could they be identified and ascribed to whom they were belonging to? Otherwise, could there be detected a syncretistic phenomenon of popular essence, between these non-biblical and biblical images of Saint Peter?

However, there might be detected some religious similarities between this mysterious personage and the spiritual life of our ancestors or between the biography of the enigmatic image of Saint Peter and that of Saint Apostle Peter. Without any anticipation, one could even find a parallel, let say, between

the role that Saint Apostle Peter has played next to our Lord Jesus Christ, and the role this mysterious personage, now conventionally identified as the enigmatic image of Saint Peter, has played in conjunction with the supreme deity of our ancestors.

Anyhow, this intriguing question, about this mysterious personage, whose own image has been changed pretending to be Saint Apostle Peter, is still enduring. Surely, nobody knows up to now and probably will never know who might be this obsessive non-biblical Saint Peter. And more than that, who has operated this transfer of images, the personage himself, or the people around him? We are floating into a sea of hypothetical suppositions.

In any case, this enigmatic image of Saint Peter in the Romanian folklore appears to be not a substitution of any religious personage, nor a dual personality, but rather a camouflage of an enigmatic image (yet unknown to us), by using a very well known image, that of Saint Apostle Peter. Doing that, certainly under the pressure of religious circumstances, the old identity of this non biblical image suddenly became disguised and enigmatic for us, while his new identity has become a shield for his hidden image, apparently protected now by his new biblical image.

There is a kind of a religious occultation (if the expression could be permitted), a kind of a disguising of a principal religious personage, whose transparent disappearance from the view of his followers, was necessary to be metamorphosed, or better said camouflaged, by ethnically getting a new spiritual dimension and a new religious identity, in order to nominally save some of his old religious heritage by renouncing to his old mythical name.

Whatsoever, the great popularity of Saint Apostle Peter in the Romanian Christianity is symbolically more than significant and we are in the situation to seriously take into consideration the question if not, somehow, this popularity is covering up a deeper historical reality, connected, or at least related with the transition of the old religion to the new one, that was realized either through the cooperation of Saint Apostle

Peter with his brother Saint Apostle Andrew, to the Christianization of our ancestors, either, hypothetically speaking, by applying the name of Saint Apostle Peter as the identity of a central personage of the Thraco-Dacian religion, application that has been popularly operated during the Christian ethnogeny of our ancestors.

Naturally, we have to recognize that in spite of their veridical truth, the folkloric documents have a reduced force of demonstration, if they are not confirmed and supported by any other literary, archeological or historical evidence. It is hard to folklorically assume something as being true for the sake of a supposition, conjecture or hypothesis, concerning the truth of the non-biblical images of Saint Apostle Peter in the absence of a direct documentation.

Nevertheless we suppose that the real image of these non-biblical images applied to Saint Apostle Peter, could be hermeneutically presumed as true, at least until they will be retrieved, accepted, resisted or eventually rejected.

Obviously, above all the possible suppositions and opinions, as well as above all the strange, and sometimes disturbing, contradictions between biblical and non-biblical images, involved in this matter, there are two indisputable realities that could briefly and verifiably be demonstrated.

Firstly, the unmythicized historicity of the massive presence of the name of Saint Peter in the Romanian folklore, and secondly, the mythicized historicity of the most impressive multitude of Saint Peter's mythological, cosmogonical, biblical and non-biblical religious stories, legends, beliefs, traditions and colinde, from which we have to discover the true identity of these enigmatic images of Saint Apostle Peter in the Romanian folklore.

The task is not easy. The process of a permanent historicizing, understood as a process of a permanent demythicizing, does not really contribute to the solving of our problem which is, in some way, above of any historicizing.

The truth of these enigmatic and biblical images of Saint Peter in the Romanian folklore and also in the Romanian Cosmic Christianity, should be carefully distinguished from an

already mingled historicity that is artfully combining the truth of history with the truth of an ancient myth, without being, theologically speaking, complementary to each other.

The unmythicized historicity of the name of Saint Peter in the Romanian folklore and Christianity, is scientifically proved by the philological argument and other biblical and historical sources.

The popular name of Saint Peter in Romanian is “Sânpetru”. Linguistically it is of Latin provenience, from Sanctus Petrus, being originated in the first Christian centuries and particularly during the Daco-Roman ethnogeny of the Romanian people, long, long time ago, before the invasion of the Slavic barbarians⁵.

We may note that since the first centuries of the Romanian Christianity, this Romanian appellative of Saint Peter, Sân Petru, was folklorically transmitted from generation to generation, until our times. Tudor Pamfile clearly shows that “in the bosom of the Romanian people, the religious fast and holiday of the Saints Peter and Paul, annually celebrated at June 29th, are called with only one word: Sân-Petru, Sân-Chetru or Sân-Chetriu, Săn-Petru, Sâmpietru, Sâm-Chetru, Săn-Pătru, San-Chetru, and in Macedonia, Sâm-Chietriu.”⁶

In addition and for the same purpose, Prof. Mario Ruffini of Italy is quoting the following names of some localities in Romania: Sânpetru near Braşov and Hunedoara, Sânpetrul Almaşului, near Cluj-Napoca, and Sânpetrul de Câmpie, all of them are in Transylvania. Also, in Banat are to be found: Sânpetrul German, Sânpetrul Mare, Sânpetrul Mic and Sânpetrul Nou. It is pointed out that all these onomastic forms have their origin in the Latin Sanctus Petrus and they did not suffer the Slavic influence of “Sfânt” (from Sviati), that is true.

5 C. Diclescu, *The Antiquity of the Romanian Christianity – Philologic Argument*, Bucharest, 1910. In Romanian.

6 Tudor Pamfile, *op. cit.* p. 115.

More than that, taking into consideration all the variants of the Romanian name of “Sân-Petru”, derivated from the Latin Sanctus Petrus, Prof. Mario Ruffini affirms that they are attesting the Latin origin of the cult of Saint Peter in the Romanian Christianity, but that is not true, because this attestation does not correspond to the Roman-Catholic sense that the Italian scholar seems to discretely ascribe to the Romanian Orthodox Church, by using the word Latin with its western religious connotation, certainly unknown to our ancestors.⁷

Also, we may note that, according to Prof. Mario Ruffini, all these legends concerning Saint Apostle Peter are common to the entire Europe, where in the Middle Ages they have widely spread out of Occident to the European Orient. In his own words: “*queste leggende corsero nel medioevo dall’occidente all’oriente europeo*”.⁸

Beyond all questions, this historical opinion represents only the Roman-Catholic point of view expressed by Prof. Mario Ruffini.

For a better understanding of this important Roman-Catholic point of view, we may recommend to also be considered and correctly understood in the light of a very well documented essay, theologically and historically dealing with the presence of Saint Apostle Peter in Rome. This exemplary essay is titled: “Quo Vadis? The Presence of Saint Apostle Peter in Rome: Truth or Legend?” and belongs to His Eminence Dr. Nicolae Corneanu, Metropolitan of Banat.⁹

⁷ See: Mario Ruffini, *La Fortuna Di San Pietro nel Folclore Romeno*, in Oikoumenikon, VII (1967), Vol. II, No. 10, Quadermo 145, p. 323-347.

⁸ Idem, *op. cit.*, p. 323: “... these legends have spread in the middle-age from Occident to the European Orient...”

⁹ See: Metropolitan Dr. Nicolae Corneanu, *Quo Vadis? Theological Notes, Studies and Commentaries*, I. Quo Vadis? The Presence of Saint Apostle Peter in Rome: Truth or Legend?, Timisoara, 1990, p. 334-425. In Romanian.

In fact the cradle of all the folkloric legends about Saint Peter might be localized much better in the Orient than in the Occident, without ignoring the contribution of all the Christian nations to the preserving, promoting and ethnically enriching, with their specific creations, the cultural and spiritual patrimony of the entire Christianity, throughout the centuries. By the way, Prof. Mario Ruffini in his very interesting essay about the destiny of Saint Peter in the Romanian folklore doesn't make any reference to the same destiny of Saint Peter in the Italian folklore.

The conclusion regarding the unmythical historicity of the presence of Saint Apostle Peter in the Romanian folklore as well as in the Romanian Christianity, is scientifically proved by the philological argument as taking place during the Christianization of our direct ancestors, more precisely during the transition from the old religion of the Thraco-Dacians to the new Christian religion of Jesus Christ, even before their partial conquest by the Romans.

Therefore, the philological argument has played a very important role in the simultaneous process of Romanization and Christianization of the Thracians and Illyrians in Eastern Europe and Asia Minor, as it was specifically proved not only by the Romanian ethnogeny, but also by the Eastern Orthodox Romanity of Latin and then of Romanian language.

Doesn't matter to whatever extent would be, it was more than normal that in this very large framework of the Christianization and Romanization of our ancestors, the already famous name of Saint Apostle Peter was popularly and theologically becoming well known among the Romanized Thracians, Dacians and Illyrians in Eastern Europe and Asia Minor, at least since the Day of Pentecost.

We may note that among the first Christian names, eventually written in Romanian with combined letters of the Latin and Greek alphabets, was the vocative "Petre" carved on a vase discovered in the ruins of an old Thraco-Dacian city called Capidava (North of Cernavoda in actual Dobrogea). The vase

has been archeologically dated as being existent in the second half of 10th century.¹⁰

Along with the philological argument attesting the presence of Saint Peter in the Romanian Christianity and folklore, we have to acknowledge the biblical sources that also may suggest a special relationship between Saint Apostle Peter and the Thracians of Asia Minor.

These Thracians of Asia Minor, often ignored by the Romanian historians, are an ontological part of that “great racial unity” of all the Thracians and Illyrians that was strongly advocated by Nicolae Iorga.¹¹

But this “great racial unity of Thracians and Illyrians,” as it was called by Nicolae Iorga, is also indicating a great unity of its ethnic and religious traditions, legends, beliefs and popular stories, orally transmitted from generation to generation. Part of these Thracians of their Thraco-Roman provinces of Cappadocia, Pontus and Proconsular Asia, comprising the old countries of Mysia-Bithynia, Lydia, Caria and Phrygia, was present in Jerusalem, on the Day of Pentecost, listening to the words of Saint Apostle Peter, and participating in this way to the establishment of the One, Holy, Apostolical and Ecumenical Church. Certainly the event of Pentecost and the speech of Saint Apostle Peter have touched the hearts of all the Thracians present there.¹²

This incipient relationship between Saint Apostle Peter and the Thraco-Romans of Asia Minor has become stronger and

¹⁰ See: Petre Diaconu, *Nume Românești Vechi (Old Romanian Names)*, Contribuții istorice și etimologice (Etimological and Historical Contributions), p. 20-23; Also: A. Rădulescu, *Un Document Proto-Roumain à Capidava*, Communication à la Conférence Nationale d'Archéologie de Craiova, 17-21 décembre 1969, “Dacia” N.S. XIV, 1970, p. 311-323.

¹¹ Nicolae Iorga, *History of Romanians, The Seal of Rome*, Vol. I, Second Part, Text Established, Notes, Commentaries, Note on the Volume, Postface, Addenda and Index, by Virgil Mihăilescu-Bârliba, Vasile Chirică, Ion Ioniță, Bucharest, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, 1988, p. 265-266. In Romanian.

¹² See: *The Acts of the Apostles*, Chapter II.

more visible in his first general epistle, specially addressed by him to the Christians from “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.”¹³ Therefore, Saint Apostle Peter became a very important personality in the spiritual life and religious folklore of the Thracio-Roman provinces of Asia Minor. Furthermore, we have to recognize the great role performed by the Thracians of Asia Minor in spreading their ancestral traditions and Christian news about Saint Peter to their Thracian brothers across the Bosphorus in Eastern Europe. Also, we have to mention that the most part of this unmythicized historicity of the biblical sources of information concerning Saint Apostle Peter, has been scientifically demonstrated by Dr. Werner Keller, born in Germany (1909), in his very well documented book, titled “The Bible as History”.¹⁴

As has been mentioned above, along with the unmythicized historicity of Saint Peter, there are also a lot of mythological, cosmogonical, non-biblical and apocryphal sources, as well as a multitude of religious and profane, stories, legends, beliefs, traditions and colinde, that altogether constitute another indisputable reality, this time regarding the mythicized historicity of Saint Peter, that we have to carefully explore in order to tentatively accomplish our intent.

Of course, we are not dealing with a literary fiction of any imaginary universe, but convincingly with a concrete historical reality revealed through its mythicizing. Obviously, it is beyond any question, that we are not considering this mythicized historicity of Saint Peter as being submitted to a process of modern or postmodern historicity, through which the medieval persistence of the prehistoric motifs could be deprived from their content and mythical aura.

In fact, the process of this kind of historicity does not contribute to our inquiry to find out the real identity of this

¹³ See: *The First General Epistle of Saint Peter*, I, 1.

¹⁴ See: Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*, Translated from German by William Neil 2nd Revised Edition and with a postscript by Joachim Rehor, New Material translated from German by B.H. Reasmussen, New York, Ellian Morrow and Company, Inc., 1981, 414 p.

mythical personage, who deliberately has been disguised by his faithful followers into the biblical image of Saint Peter. On the contrary, through this kind of modern historicity, the old mythical beliefs, traditions and legends are gradually becoming desecrated or demythologized, if not irretrievable, to be finally disintegrated into our modern and postmodern times. In such a case the possibility of identifying this enigmatic image of Saint Apostle Peter in the Romanian folklore will be lost forever.

In striking contrast to a very impressive documentation concerning the presence of Saint Peter in the Romanian folklore and Romanian Cosmic Christianity, we may remark the absence of any tentative to identify especially the enigmatic non-biblical images of Saint Peter. Even if this seems difficult to understand the lack of interest to discover the real identity of these enigmatic images of Saint Peter, though there are two excellent essays trying to systematize, in certain categories, all the Romanian folkloric documents, along with their popular meanings and eventually mythical correlations about Saint Peter. Indeed they are very informative and stimulating, but without any intent to answer the problems raised by these enigmatic images of Saint Peter.

The first essay, which was already quoted in this paper (See: Notes, No. 7), is written by Prof. Mario Ruffini from a discrete Roman-Catholic point of view. The second essay, entitled: "Saint Peter in the Traditions of the Romanian People," was written by Dr. Dimitrie C. Amzăr, certainly from a Romanian Orthodox perspective, by making all the necessary delimitations between the primacy of Saint Peter in the Roman Catholic Church, and the folkloric primacy that Saint Peter is enjoying in all the Eastern Orthodox Romanian traditions and legends ascribed to him.¹⁵ In these essays, Saint Peter is one and the same personage in which the Romanian people have folklorically bestowed upon him all his known mythical and religious attributes. Surprisingly enough, in both essays no word

¹⁵ See: D. C. Amzăr, *Saint Peter in the Traditions of the Romanian People*, Extras din "Buletinul Bibliotecii Române", Vol. II, October 1954, Romanian Library, Freiburg i.Br. (Germany) 1954. In Romanian.

is referring to the enigmatic non-biblical image of Saint Apostle Peter.

Even Mircea Eliade, who was aware of the folkloric significance of Saint Peter, has left in suspense such inciting religious problems, though he has scholarly recognized that “the religious heritage of Thracians was preserved, with inevitable changes, in the popular customs and folklore of the Balkan peoples and the Romanians”.¹⁶ His exercising precaution is commendable because at that time, according to him, the analyses of European folklore traditions from the point of view of the general history of religions still was in its beginning. However, in his prestigious comparative studies concerning the religions and folklore of Dacia and Eastern Europe,¹⁷ Mircea Eliade has creatively synthesized the mythicized history of the essential myths, beliefs and legends of our ancestors. His authoritative opinions and suggestions are definitively leading to reach unexpected conclusions for the unsolved problems concerning history of religions or philosophy of culture in Romania. In the light of his synthesis, the mythicized image of Saint Apostle Peter could be, at least, conjecturably configured.

For the benefit of our paper I personally tried to classify the biblical and non-biblical traditions, beliefs, legends, and the Romanian colinde about Saint Peter in three categories, each one being centered around the popular and official holidays ascribed to Saint Apostle Peter and prescribed by the Romanian Orthodox Church ecclesiastical calendar.

Thus, the first category of traditions, beliefs and legends, is related to the popular holiday called “Sân-Petru-de-Iarnă”, Saint Peter of Winter, celebrated on January 16th, along with the celebration of our ancestors: “Moşii de Iarnă – Forefathers of

¹⁶ Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, Vol. II: *From Gautama Buddha to the Triumph of Christianity*, Translated from the French by Willard R. Trask, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, Paper edition 1984, p. 172.

¹⁷ See: Mircea Eliade, *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan, Etudes comparatives sur les religions et le folklore de la Dacie et de l'Europe Orientale*, Payot, Paris, 1970.

Winter. It is also called “Sân-Petru–Lupilor,” Saint Peter of the Wolves. This popular holiday of January 16th, is coinciding with the “Veneration of the Precious Chains of the Apostle Peter”, which certainly is a Church holiday.¹⁸

The second category emphasizes the Romanian traditional Colinde, so to say the Romanian Ritual of Christmas and New Year Carols that also are biblically and non-biblically remembering Saint Peter in the great framework of these Eastern Orthodox Holidays such as Christmas, Palm Sunday and Easter.

The third category is referring to the popular holiday: “Sân-Petru-de-Vară,” Saint Peter of Summer, celebrated on June 29th and corresponding with the Church holiday dedicated to the Saints Apostles Peter and Paul. In the same holiday the Romanians are also celebrating “Moşii de Vară” – the Forefathers of Summer.

Another classification that might be taken into consideration is stressing another set of three folklorical categories that are better giving expression to the enigmatical and biblical images of Saint Peter. They are: I. Beliefs and traditions about Saint Peter; II. Stories and legends about Saint Peter; and III. Romanian Colinde about Saint Peter.

At this point, before going further, a few remarks are to be underlined as characterizing the Romanian Christianity, especially concerning the celebration in the same time of the popular and Church holidays dedicated to Saint Apostle Peter. In fact both celebrations are venerating through popular ceremonies and religious services the same Saint Apostle Peter, even if the popular ceremonies dedicated to the enigmatic Saint Peter seems to be unintentionally forgotten. But they really don't. More than that, a religious synthesis of all these contradictory elements of mythical and biblical origin proves to be excluded from the very beginning. At the most we may take into consideration a Christian transposition of these popular

¹⁸ A Church Holiday, based on: *The Acts of the Apostles*, XII, 1-19.

beliefs of mythical essence than a religious amalgamation of them.

There appears to be a real mystery of Saint Peter in the Romanian folklore that could be only ethnically revealed. If Saint Peter of Winter is one and the same personage with Saint Peter of Summer, and certainly with Saint Apostle Peter, who is then the Saint Peter of the Wolves? His legendary presence does not disturb the Christian hagiography, nor diminish the worship of Saint Apostle Peter. On the contrary it makes more popular the cult of Saint Apostle Peter among all the Romanians. More than that, this confusing camouflage of the non-biblical Saint Peter with the biblical Saint Apostle Peter is lacking of any elements of festive carnival.

We have to clearly assert the very fact that Romanian Popular Christianity does not dissociate or make any difference between the real Saint Apostle Peter and this unknown mythical personage of Christian folk mythology who, evidently, is continuing under the name of Saint Apostle Peter, his ethnic heritage and legendary existence, now apparently Christianized, or better said Christianly transposed, in the large framework of the Romanian Christianity, at least as an essential factor of the Romanian Thraco-Dacian ethnogeny.

It is really amazing this lack of any religious disturbances in this particular case, where both celebrations, of the unknown mythical personage conventionally called Saint Peter and Saint Apostle Peter, paradoxically and simultaneously appear to be something very normal and, at the same time, very abnormal, because there we found no rite of passage, let say a popular rite of transition, from the profane to the sacred, from the mysterious unbiblical image to the biblical image of Saint Peter. There seems to be something natural pertaining rather to the so called Romanian “datina”, that means an ancestral “datum,” traditionally inherited and ritualistically observed such as, by excluding any apparent antinomy.

That is why, all of these images, biblical and unbiblical, are equally belonging to the same personage and they are antithetically coexisting in the same time, doesn't matter if this time is profane or sacred, by sharing together the same popular

eneration. But what is really astonishing is the very fact that in the Romanian traditional folklore, the same personage is simultaneously enframing two opposite images, mythical and biblical, and bearing the same biblical identity, that of Saint Apostle Peter.

However, we have to be aware by the truth that in the Romanian Popular Christianity never took place a metamorphosing process by transforming a real biblical personage into a mythical one, or an illusory mythical personage into a real biblical personality. Although in our specific case there are two distinct personalities, who are not camouflaging or misrepresenting each other, both of them are not to be identified as a duality, but as a single identity belonging to the same religious universe, being equally venerated by the Romanian popular piety and official religious devoutness.

In this confusing situation, the question who is represented or misrepresented by this enigmatic image of Saint Apostle Peter remains one of the most enduring in the history of the Romanian Christianity. But we have to hope against hope, because only continuing our hope will never be in vain but to succeed.

Fortunately, here are some clues that may lead to a solving solution of this enigmatic image of Saint Peter in the Romanian folklore. From among of the so many hypostatized non-biblical images of Saint Peter, we have carefully selected only three of them, that I have considered worthy to approach and eventually disclose the truth of this unknown mythical personage with a biblical apotheosis, who is transcending the Romanian folklore, from the illusoriness of the mythical time to the reality of the biblical eternity.

In other words, the enigmatic image of Saint Peter was not mythically metamorphosed or even anthropomorphized in the Romanian folklore, but he has been popularly apotheosized as the biblical image of Saint Apostle Peter. Again, there is not a kind of any deification of this presumptive mythical Saint Peter, whose enigmatic identity we don't know yet, but rather a kind of a popular mythologizing of Saint Apostle Peter, whose

biblical identity is very well known to everybody. However, this is not a conclusion, nor anticipation of a conclusion or of a supposition. Because there is something else that is quite different, even more than an alter ego. In the ending, there seems to be only a confusing process between these two popular personages we are talking about, so to say between the enigmatic Saint Peter and Saint Apostle Peter.

This specific process of hypostatization in the Romanian folklore, of these two distinct existences, mythical and biblical, apparently ascribed to the same personage, in which the illusory mythical existence is accredited with a real biblical existence, could be eventually explained by using the method of analogy. That means to analogically identify who's who this enigmatic Saint Peter who is appearing, in his double identity, mythical and biblical, under the same name, so to say appearing not only as an Apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ, but also as the companion and adviser of God before and after the creation of the world, by finally becoming popularly celebrated as the leader and protector of the wolves, and then as the patron of the weather and the atmospheric phenomena, to name only a few of his principal mythological attributes still observed until our times.

Taking all these facts into account, we have to keep in mind this fundamental distinction, that these two analogous Saint Peters, one mythical and the other one biblical, apparently embodied in the same being and identified such as in the same personage, have in common at least the same name and some distinctive similarities, but certainly not the same functions, because there is a strong opposition and dissimilarity between the mythical and biblical activities.

In this particular case, the similarity of the same personal name, surprisingly shared by the enigmatic Saint Peter and the real Saint Apostle Peter, does not legitimize the same personal identity, because there is indeed a nominal similarity but without the same identity. Again, there paradoxically seems to be a kind of a single identity ascribed for two personal identities, based only on the same name and on some pale similarities, but ontologically separated and confused by their

different origin and structure, as well as by their own personal identities.

Here seems to be ignored the very fact that this strange identity is popularly based on the same name and only in some respects, but not in all its respects in order to be considered a legitimated identity. In this two cases, the analogy of being based on the relation of similarity between the two partial identities embodied in different levels of being, one eventually claiming similarity in some respects, and the other, in other respects, cannot pretend to have a full identity of a perfect being, because there obviously are two distinct personal identities, not complementary but analogous to each other.

For many, such a fragmented identity, partially similar in some (mythical) respects and dissimilar in other (biblical) respects, based only on the same name and less similarities, appears to be as a non sense, if not a monstrosity. Anyhow, without having enough similarity between these two personal identities, in order to support a unique identity, then there might be perceived the so called fallacy of a false analogy. But such a possibility is excluded by itself, since the analogy is not called to demonstrate or to prove but to analogously suggesting the essential truth.

In fact, according to all the probabilities, the presence of this unknown mythical image that conventionally was called the enigmatic image of Saint Peter in the Romanian folklore, has been not simultaneously existing with the biblical presence of the Saint Apostle Peter, as they are now tacitly coexisting with each other, most likely in the motivation of their successiveness than in their parallelism, in spite of their similarities and identical name.

Allegorically speaking, there seems to be a kind of a musical syncopation, where that means to rhythmically transfer in the same movement the accent from a weak time to a strong time, without modifying the existential continuity of the unknown mythical personage who has becoming in the Romanian Folklore the enigmatic image of Saint Peter. Anyhow, there was a real passage, by syncopation, from the unknown mythical image (weak beat or time) to the enigmatic

image of Saint Peter (strong beat or time) in the Romanian folklore.

Therefore, by analogical means we have to find out the time that marks the passage from the real name of this enigmatic mythical image to the authentic name of Saint Apostle Peter. Otherwise, to approximately find out the date when the real identity of this enigmatic image has ceased to be celebrated and remembered under his former mythical name and, by then, continuing to be celebrated in the Romanian folklore under the new biblical image and name of Saint Peter.

This folkloric passage, from this unknown mythical identity to the very well known identity, that of Saint Apostle Peter, is clearly denoting that there never have been two parallel enigmatic identities, but only one of each other successively continuing the same similar, or better said, the nearly similar religious destiny.

In the light of what has been said above, we have to determine the name of the former mythical personage, still unknown to us, and the time when his own name had ceased to be celebrated and remembered, by being replaced with the name of Saint Peter. Searching for the correct answer, we have to deal with two different analogous identities, in succession one after another, eventually corresponding in the same function, but not in their own structure and origin. From these two identities, only one is known, that of Saint Apostle Peter, while that of the mythical predecessor of Saint Peter is still unknown.

In spite of their different origin and structure, both of them have been popularly identified as if they always were one being, under the same name and religious destiny. So it was created this dilemmatic identity. We must recognize the full difficulty of identifying the enigmatic image of the unknown mythical predecessor of Saint Peter. Presumptively, this mythical predecessor has been ethnically sealed in the Romanian folklore under the name of Saint Peter, certainly for ever, since the complex involvement of his cosmogonical and mythical attributes was apostolically apotheosized, by being permanently and fervently celebrated, even now in the Third Millennium.

Metaphorically speaking, even Saint Peter himself became a mystery in the Romanian folklore, because of the mystery inherited from his unknown mythical predecessor. No wonder why, that Saint Peter and his mythical predecessor were popularly united in the same sacred mystery, becoming throughout the millennia a Christianized symbol of the ancestral Faith of our ancestors.

Consequentially, I consider that a logical conclusion might be found only in the mysterious light of this mythical and biblical aura, in which we have to contemplate the similarities between the ancestral religion and the new Christian religion of our ancestors, as they have been believed, testified and lived, one after another in proper order, by both the mythical predecessor of Saint Peter and by Saint Apostle Peter himself.

Actually, and this is the truth, the only existing evidence about the unknown mythical predecessor of Saint Peter, is Saint Apostle Peter himself, conventionally called in this paper as the enigmatic image of Saint Peter in the Romanian folklore.

In fact, it is understandably that enigmatic image is a synonymous expression equivalent in meaning with the unknown mythical image. Both of these synonymous expressions: enigmatic image and unknown mythical image, are functionally designating, the same mythological personage in his successive mythical and biblical continuity. There is a real synonymy conventionally accepted such as for having the same or nearly the same religious meaning, as long as before the biblical New Testament times and after.

To be more precise, this synonymity represents, in our case, the two personages fulfilling almost the same religious duties in conjunction with the supreme Thraco-Dacian deity, and then with the God of our Christian ancestors. Also this synonymity is revealing to us a cosmogonical continuity, that certainly suggests a kind of a pre-Christian anticipation, in the Romanian folklore, concerning the passage from the dualistic

Thraco-Dacian mythology to the triadic Romanian mythology in which Saint Peter is included, also.¹⁹

Hopefully, we may find out in this synonymy the time and the real name of this unknown mythological personage, by learning when his celebration and popular cortege of ceremonial attributes and religious prerogatives have been nominally transferred from him, being applied in the Romanian folklore under the name of the Saint Apostle Peter. Already, Romulus Vulpescu in his monumental book “The Romanian Mythology” has clearly asserted that “...The Dacian Pantheon so much synthetic and unified in its mythical structure has been to a great extent assimilated by the local primitive Christianity, that we are more ontologically than logically apprehending the value of its survivals in some essential aspects of the popular culture”.²⁰

This complicated process of a mythical amalgamation, Christian symbiosis and finally even of a possible Christian transposition of the non-biblical mythogony, between the old religion of the Thraco-Dacians and the new Christian religion of our ancestors is particularly proven in the cosmic Christianity of the Romanian folk mythology, among the other examples by the Saint Peter himself.

Thus, according to the Romanian triadic cosmogony, the participation of Saint Peter as a devoted companion, adviser and partner of God at the creation of the world, is illustrated by many impressive cosmogonical legends, colinde and popular stories, from all the provinces of Romania.

This enigmatic Saint Peter is also portrayed in that cosmogonical time as an intransigent guardian at the door of Paradise, during the time when Lucifer led his infamous revolt of angels against God and satanically fell from heaven.

¹⁹ Gh. Vlăduțescu, *Filosofia legendelor cosmogonice românești* (Philosophy of the Romanian Cosmogonic Legends) București, Editura Minerva, 1982, p. 99. Also, for more informations and mythical details, see: Tudor Pamfile, *The Story of the World of Long Ago, According to the Beliefs of the Romanian People*, București, Academia Română, 1915, p. 26-27. In Romanian.

²⁰ Romulus Vulcănescu, *Mitologie Română* (Romanian Mythology), București, Editura Academiei Române, 1985, (714 pages), p. 293.

But what is very important to be seriously taken into consideration is the very fact that from time to time, in the beginning, after the world has been created, God was descending from the heaven traveling on the earth in the company of Saint Peter. This divine event is solemnly depicted especially in the Romanian colinde which are reflecting the “cosmic Christianity”. According to Mircea Eliade, this god whose companion was Saint Peter is not yet the Christian God, but obviously a deus otiosus. “Mais il est évident, Mircea Eliade said, que ce Dieu qui se retire et s'éloigne n'est pas celui du judéo-christianisme”.²¹

Certainly, there is not a metaphor but a strangely striking image to see Saint Peter in the company of a cosmic god who has nothing to do with the biblical cosmogony. Also, there is not even an attempt of Saint Peter to reconcile both the biblical and mythical cosmogonies. In fact, there is something more than that, which may indicate a very important moment in the history of Christianization and Romanization of our direct ancestors the Thraco-Dacians.

The presence of Saint Peter in the company of a cosmic non-biblical god, might be in our understanding a precious indication about the time when indeed our unknown mythical personage has nominally and functionally disappeared under the biblical image of Saint Peter in the Romanian folk mythology.

Certainly, the time of disappearance of this unknown mythical personage, from the Thraco-Dacian cosmogony and mythology, could be approximately established before the transition from the Daco-Roman to the Daco-Romanian mythology, probably at the beginning of the Christianization and Romanization of the Thraco-Dacians (II-III centuries). More precisely, this time is coinciding with the brutal interdiction and abolishment of the religious worship of the supreme Thraco-Dacian Deity and especially that of Zalmoxis, caused by the Roman conquest and transformation of the conquered part of Dacia into a province of the Roman Empire, nicknamed Dacia Felix.

²¹ Mircea Eliade, *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan*, op. cit. p. 93.

In this context, we have to retain some valuable information for our paper, provided by Mircea Eliade and Romulus Vulcănescu. Thus, Mircea Eliade has cautiously noticed that we know nothing about what was happened to Zalmoxis and his cult following the transformation of Dacia into a Roman province (106 A.D.). Nevertheless, according to him the best explanation of the disappearance of Zalmoxis and his cult must be researched in the precocious Christianization of Dacia (before 270 A.D.).²² Also, Romulus Vulcănescu, a Romanian authority in Mythology, was scholarly underlining the truth that the Thraco-Dacian mythology was reduced by the Romans to the clandestinenes and for that reason “the name of Zalmoxis, his symbolic representation or any other form of his cult are not mentioned in the Daco-Roman mythology,”²³ nor later on, in the Romanian Christian mythology.

To quote again Mircea Eliade, we are learning from him that: “The new towns worshipped the gods of the Roman Empire, but in villages and in the mountains the cult of Zalmoxis perpetuated, even if, later, under a different name”.²⁴ We have to confess that the last part of Mircea Eliade’s annotation, concerning the continuation of the cult of Zalmoxis “under a different name” is astonishingly becoming for us, a very inciting question. Who might be then identified under this different name? Could be there a new unknown mythical image that intuitively was perceived by Mircea Eliade as being able to continue, under a different name, the cult of Zalmoxis? Obviously, it is out of any question that Mircea Eliade was not referring to the Thraco-Dacian god Gebeleizes whose name, according to Herodotos, was confused by some Thracians with the name of Zalmoxis.

But always such questions are generating the same questions in searching for the truth. It is quite possible that the above inciting presumption of Mircea Eliade could be in the

²² Idem, *op. cit.*, pp. 72 and 74.

²³ Romulus Vulcănescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 125. and 129.

²⁴ Mircea Eliade, *The Romanians, A concise History*, “Roza Vânturilor” Publishing House, Bucharest, 1992, p. 13.

same time a very promising chance to finally find out the real identity of the unknown mythical image, biblically impersonated by the enigmatic image of Saint Peter in the Romanian folklore.

In this historical conjecture, the appearance of Saint Apostle Peter in the Daco-Romanian and then Romanian folk mythology, by continuing the unknown Thraco-Dacian enigmatic image, meaningfully suggests that the real identity of the mythical image of Saint Peter could be positively approached from the perspective of Zalmoxis. There are many reasons pleading in this sense.

However, all these mythical, religious and Christian evidences are strongly related and reciprocally acknowledged by their inner religions, in our case by the Thraco-Dacian religion, also known as the religion of Zalmoxis, and the Christian religion as it was apostolically implemented, nationally assimilated, spiritually confessed and popularly lived by all the Eastern Orthodox Romanians everywhere in the world.

Ethnologically, there is an almost perfect analogy between the Christian and Thraco-Dacian religion which spiritually has fulfilled itself in the Romanian Orthodox Christianity. "That is why, using the words of Mircea Eliade, when the first Christian missionaries arrived to bring the new faith to the Daco-Romans, the latter embraced Christianity at once and before others did so: Zalmoxis had paved the way for the new faith for centuries..."²⁵ The same conclusion was scholarly formulated by the greatest Romanian Patrologist, the Rt. Rev. Prof. Ioan G. Coman. According to him, the Geto-Dacians embraced the Christianity being convinced that Zalmoxis Himself advised them to do so.²⁶

Also, for what it is worth to be noted here, we are mentioning the closing remarks made by N.A. Constantinescu

²⁵ Idem, *ibidem*.

²⁶ Jean Coman, *Zalmoxis un grand problème gète*, in *Zalmoxis*, Revue des études religieuses, publiée sous la direction de Mircea Eliade, Paris, 1939, II, 1, p. 34..

at the end of his lecture: “Zalmoxis and the current of the mystic renewal of old religions”.

Carefully analyzing the spiritual renewal of the old religions during the VIII-VI centuries before Christ, N.A. Constantinescu has distinguished among them the religious teaching of Zalmoxis as very nearer to the Christian idealism. The Zalmoxean spirit of the Thraco-Geto-Dacian religion has propitiously granted terrain to the popular Christianization of Dacia.²⁷

Truly, these religious realities and historical events are logically compelling us to admit the marveling analogies, not only between the Thraco-Dacian religion and Christianity, that is certainly requiring a special study, but also between the assumed roles that Zalmoxis and then the enigmatic image of Saint Peter have successively played during the Christian transition from the Thraco-Dacian Mythology to the Romanian folk mythology.

Hopefully, between the disappearance of Zalmoxis and appearance of Saint Apostle Peter in the Romanian folk mythology we may discover not a simple coincidence, but the real identity of the unknown mythical image impersonated by the enigmatic image of Saint Peter.

Indeed, in the disappearance of Zalmoxis and his cult, under the military pressure of the Roman army and the destruction of his religious sanctuaries, one could see his popular reappearance under the enigmatic Christian image of Saint Peter, in the large framework of the Cosmic Romanian Christianity, on the eve of Christianization and Romanization of the Thraco-Dacians.

In this revelatory perspective, the enigmatic image of Saint Apostle Peter in the Romanian folklore and particularly in the Cosmic Romanian Christianity, is without any doubt the image of Zalmoxis himself, whose Thraco-Dacian mythical and religious heritage has been saved in this way, under the name

²⁷ See: N.A. Constantinescu, *Zalmoxe și curentul de înnoire mistică a vechilor religii* (Zalmoxis and the current of mystic renewal of the old religions), București, “Bucovina” I.E. Torouțiu, 1941, p. 20.

and the same spiritual prestige of Saint Apostle Peter in the Romanian folk mythology and in the large framework of the Cosmic Romanian Christianity.

To our surprise, this popular identification of Zalmoxis with Saint Apostle Peter is proven by the Romanian colinde. It is well known the testimony given by Herodotus about Zalmoxis. After describing the Thraco-Dacian ceremonial of sending a messenger to Zalmoxis, Herodotus continues: “This same tribe of Thracians will, during a thunderstorm, shoot arrows up into the sky, and utter threats against the lord of the lightning and the thunder, because they recognize no god but their own”.²⁸

There are many Romanian colinde resounding throughout the millennia the text of Herodotus. For instance, I would like to mention here one of them. Celebrating their ancestral ritual of Colinde, the Romanian “colindători” (Christmas carolers) are interpreting by traditionally officiating at the window of their host, the colinda: “The Hunters of the Old Christmas”. The hunters, so to say the Christmas carolers, looking up, are seeing the sky being clouded over and immediately they are ready to shoot arrows in the clouds, when a voice from the clouds shouts to them do not shoot their arrows in the clouds, because:

*“...I’m not who you’re thinking I’m,
Because I’m Peter, Saint Peter
The good godfather of God...”*

Obviously, it is really amazing. The old Thraco-Dacian deity Zalmoxis is revealing his new name to the hunters of the Old Christmas, informing them about his new identity as Saint Peter and also his new spiritual relationship with God.²⁹

²⁸ Herodotus, *The Histories*, Translated and with an Introduction by Aubrey de Sélincourt, Penguin Books, Baltimore, Maryland, 1961, p. 272-273.

²⁹ More details and interpretations concerning the “*Saint Peter in the Romanian Folklore*” are to be found in my essay “Sfântul Petru în

Without any doubt, there was popularly recorded one of the greatest event in the historic ethnogeny of the Christianization and Romanization of our Thraco-Dacian ancestors. There was a real fullness of times, when their religious heritage under the spiritual authority of Zalmoxis has been popularly Christianized and Romanized under the new divine authority of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as it was believed and acknowledged by Saint Apostle Peter.

First of all we have to remark that over there the Thraco-Dacians were deeply experiencing an analogical process of similarities between the two religions, that of Zalmoxis and that of Jesus Christ.

In fact, during this period of religious transition, the mystery of the Zalmoxean theandrisms was sacramentally transfigured by the real Christian theandrisms of Jesus Christ, which ethnically has becoming the specific difference of the Romanian Christianity. In other words, this Romanian theandrisms spiritually means the supreme characteristic of our ancestral and actual Christian Orthodox Faith.

However, in my opinion what has to significantly be emphasized is the very fact that, independently from each other, this popular analogy of all these essential similarities between Zalmoxism and Christianity, has been patristically endorsed by one of the three greatest Cappadocians, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus (c.329-390). Therefore, in his literary poem “À Némésius”, scholarly analyzed by the Rt. Rev. Professor Jean Coman,³⁰ Saint Gregory of Nazianzus is trying to convince his good friend, the governor of Cappadocia, Nemesius, to become a Christian.

folklorul românesc” (Saint Peter in the Romanian Folklore), București, 1962, 45 pages (Unpublished).

³⁰ Jean Coman, *Grégoire de Nazianze et Némésius. Rapports du christianisme et du paganisme dans un poème littéraire du IV-e siècle de notre ère*” Studia in honorem Acad. D. Decev, Sofia, Académie Bulgare des Sciences, 1958. Also: Gheorghe Alexe, “Jean Coman, Grégoire de Nazianze et Némésius...” in “Ortodoxia” (Orthodoxy), Bucharest, Year XIII, 1961, No. 3, p. 443-446

Following his superb pleading about various cultural and religious rapports between paganism and Christianity, by offering to Nemesius his reasons for and against, finally Saint Gregory of Nazianzus presents the elements of rapprochments between Christianity and paganism.

Among them, the analogy between Zalmoxism and Christianity, regarding the deification of man, has been considered as an element of the first order. "Zalmoxis was introduced to Nemesius as fulfilling the same redemptory function as Jesus Christ: the deification of man. In both cases, the deification is realized by sacrifice: in Christianity through the sacrifice of Christ and man; in Zalmoxism through the sacrifice of man; the two sacrifices are voluntary; both deifications are crowned by the union of man with God." There is one of the most prestigious approach ever made between the Thraco-Dacian religion of Zalmoxis and the new Christian religion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Even if Nemesius who eventually was not persuaded to become a Christian, the Thraco-Dacians have ontologically understood by heart the analogy between their religion and the new Christian religion as it was theologically demonstrated by the Great Cappadocian Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, who certainly was one of their own race.

However, there are many analogies between Saint Apostle Peter and Zalmoxis, as the great priest, prophet and god in conjunction with the Thraco-Dacian supreme and unique deity, but only one has convinced me to identify the mythical image of Saint Peter in the Romanian folklore with Zalmoxis himself.

And this is a philocalic analogy. Commenting the teaching of Saint Maximus the Confessor (580-662) about the uncreated light at the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Mountain of Tabor, Saint Gregory of Palamas was anagogically calling Saint Apostle Peter as the symbol of the Faith in God.²

³² The Romanian Philokaly, Vol. 7, Chapter 22, p. 292.

The same, Zalmoxis was anagogically symbolizing the monotheistic faith in the supreme Deity of the Thraco-Dacians religion, being recognized such as in the whole of the pre-Christian world. Two symbols of faith, not complementary, but analogous to each other, ontologically revealing in the end the same Christian symbol of Faith, under the wings of the Holy Spirit.

I hope everybody knows or heard about an excellent historical book whose title became a famous saying and a common place in Romania. I'm referring to George Brătianu's book: "Une Énigme et un Miracle Historique: Le Peuple Roumain" (Paris, 1937).

Personally, I don't think that the Romanian nation is an enigma and an historical miracle. More justly, I believe that from Zalmoxis to Saint Apostle Peter, and since then to our days, the national history of the Thraco-Dacians and Romanians is not anything else than a Romanian theandric mystery of God, that always has to be actualized and lived accordingly, in our public and daily life.

Before closing our paper, despite all the controversies and interpretations still in progress, concerning Zalmoxis and the Thraco-Dacian religion, I would like to again emphasize the spiritual analogy between Zalmoxis and Saint Apostle Peter that fundamentally is consisting in their faith in God. Both of them are finally symbolizing the same faith in our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, Who charismatically fulfilled the Thraco-Dacian religion of Zalmoxis in the Romanian Christianity of our ancestors and ours.

Theodor Damian

**The Desert as a Place of the World's
Transformation According to
Eastern Asceticism**

“Out of the Depths I Have Called unto You”

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; and the earth was waste and void” (Genesis 1.1). It was empty, a desert, dead.

The desert is a desolating place, awful, avoided because often it is synonymous with *death*.

Often an adventure in the desert, wandering there, living there is an adventure of life and death. The risks are numerous and not minor. We think of wild animals, the lack of water and food, the burning sun, the devastating winds, the overwhelming solitude. To get lost in the desert is sure death.

This is the place where monks and nuns withdrew to live. Curious and bizarre choice! As though they were looking for death at any cost!

However, they did not look for death, but for salvation. They were looking for purification,¹ for God. They knew what they knew! Who taught them that the desert changes one so much? That it draws one so much nearer to God?

Indeed, the man of the desert is different from the man of the world.

One of the starting points of monasticism, which is the way of the desert, was the wish to take the cross and to follow Christ until suffering and death, to actualize in another way the martyrial life from the time of persecution.

These people, who have shown to the world that when the way seems impossible, the impossible is the way, as Paul Evdokimov said, paraphrasing Kierkegaard, these people of the

impossible² wanted to accomplish in their life the sixth beatitude of our Lord: “Blessed are those with pure heart for they will see God” (Matthew 5, 8). They wanted to achieve as much as possible the purity of the heart in order to acquire the vision of God. And for this aim they chose the desert.³ They decided to start a new life, to form a new identity, a new heart; and they needed a new place, too.

The desert produces a different type of man, a new way of being, it offers a special understanding of life, a different look at things. The desert spiritualizes the being because here one must place oneself totally in the hands of God. The desert will pull one out of time. It is the spatial representation of *kairos*, $\forall \mathcal{R} \Delta \cong H$, while the world is the spatial representation of the *chronos*, $\Pi \Delta \in \leq H$.

The *chronos* is program, schedule, occupation, division, fragmentation, spreading out, wasting, loss. *Kairos* is appropriate moment, concentration, gathering, fulfillment, overflowing, continuation, permanence, lasting, durability. And, in spite of the fact that the desert, by its immensity, can appear a wasteland, suggesting disorientation, it brings together, helps one to find oneself, strengthens, facilitates communion, unity.

Through its stillness, the desert helps one to come “home”, to concentrate on the higher values of life, to realize spiritual equilibrium.

“Thus man, having entered wholly within himself, becomes aware of himself and awaits within himself the coming of God and the divine transformation.”⁴ Did the Holy Fathers go into the desert to populate it and to introduce there the divisions of the *chronos*, of the world from which they came, or did they retreat to find there the spirit of immensity, of the infinite, thus responding to the human soul’s eternal nostalgia for the infinite, the nostalgia for God?

In a way, they did both, but especially they populated the desert, thus taking it out of the limits of its definition as a place of death, of fear, of loss and giving it a new definition, transforming it into a place of spiritual warmth, of communion

with God, of salvation. At the same time, they came there to look for God, to find God, to dedicate themselves to God.

And they did find God. The desert facilitated this encounter, because in the desert, one depends solely on God. In the world, too, one depends solely on God, but there one also has the impression of self-dependence in many ways, or one forgets on whom to depend, while the desert does not allow one to forget on whom one depends.

That is why the man of the desert is different. More mystical, more silent, more faithful, better able to meditate, and stronger. That is why Matthew Fox could say that “only mystics should teach in science labs. Awe and wonder need to return”.⁵

That is the way we can understand how, sometimes, people with little instruction in the schools of this world, after a lifetime spent in the desert, wrote and left behind teachings which were not passed by any philosophy of the world, teachings that changed man’s way of being, which were introduced in schools and daily practice, which were at the foundation of the spiritual structures of the world. These were the people of the desert, anonymous heroes, most of them!

They knew what the desert meant, that it was the place of demons, especially in the biblical understanding of the term. The Old Testament clearly shows this, speaking, for instance, about Azazel (Leviticus) who was the demon of the desert or the place of demons in the desert.

They knew Jesus was tempted in the desert and people possessed by demons were often banished to the wilderness.

However, this is the place where monks and nuns chose to live, to struggle, to better themselves, to create a new world. It was as if they wanted to chase the demons from earth completely. If the demons lived mostly in the desert, by populating the desert, the monks and nuns gave the demons no possibility to live anywhere in the world, and definitively forced them to leave it.

Pure Heart and Dispassion

This heroism, courage, and struggle on the part of the monks and nuns, was led on behalf of the whole of humanity. They humanized the wilderness and made it no longer the place of demons, but the place of God. The place where God speaks to man (Hosea 2,16); they made of their pure heart a desert⁶ in order to receive better the word of God and to let this word have a profound echo with a permanent reverberation in their lives. Meister Eckhart teaches that the detachment from the nothingness of all things leads to the purification of the heart,⁷ to the internalization of the desert.

Monasticism always made the connection between the incarnation of God, the pure human nature in Jesus Christ, the childlikeness and the pure heart required for our deification.

The pure heart is a way of deification; it paves the way to God and makes one susceptible to the divine inflowing.⁸ The pure heart thus was understood by monastics to be a way of being in the world.

The liberation from sin and the realization of the pure heart in monasticism are related to what is called “dispassion”, which is freeing oneself from his or her compulsive self.⁹ Meister Eckhart writes that dispassion as well as dispossession consist of detachment and is a virtue above all virtues; it is the closest virtue to nothingness and in that, more than everything else, it brings us closer to God.¹⁰ Dispassion is the freedom from worldly passions - it is changing the object of passion. This is an em-passion for Christ in His pain and death and joy and glory of Resurrection; in this sense, dis-passion, as St. Gregory of Nyssa says, will be just a re-channeling of the personal energies, of the spiritual and inner enthusiasm of human being for new and saving values as he or she advances in the direction of God. Em-passion for Christ is love for Christ. In this case, dispassion is not equivalent with apathia, $\forall B \forall 2 \gamma \therefore \forall$, non-passion, but as we mentioned above, it is just a re-channeling of one's enthusiasm. In fact, dispassion, dispossession from the worldly things and empassion for Christ - as passion implies the natural enthusiasm of humans for

something - is a re-establishment of the state of enthusiasm in its real and authentic condition: God in us ($f \in H$, *en-theos*, contr. form = $f \in H$, *enthous*).

It is to be possessed by God, to be in God, overwhelmed by God, overwhelmed by what you have holy in yourself, the image of God discovered in the depth of the person, even through the darkness of sin, of separation, as we sing in the Orthodox worship at the funeral service: "The image of your glory I am, o God, even if I carry the wounds of sin!"

This "even if" gives priority to the image of God in us indicating the real state and condition of man: God in us, which is enthusiasm. The Fathers and the Mothers of the desert really re-established the human being as an *enthusiastic* being.

No enthusiasm means death. That is the light in which we must understand the answer given by St. Gregory Palamas to Barlaam, on dispassion, when Palamas specified that dispassion is not the death of passion but the conversion of passion from lower values to higher values,¹¹ which, as Joseph Pieper says, is primarily a form of turning *toward* those values.¹² It is all about internalizing.

"The ascetics interiorized the desert and for them this signified the concentration of a silent and recollected spirit. At this level, where the human being knows to keep silence, the true prayer is placed and the being is mysteriously visited,"¹³ and taken into the "now of eternity" of God.¹⁴

Speak, God, Your servant is listening

Why did St. John the Baptist, and afterwards Jesus, often preach in the desert? To whom could they preach in the desert? They knew what they were doing. They pulled the world (people) out from the world and they talked to them in the wilderness, where the soul leaves *chronos* and comes into *kairos*, where the soul's preparation is done by the place itself, a place which sensitized them, helped them to see more realistically their place vis-à-vis God.

Desert, place of silence where man becomes so powerful, but also place of confrontation: with evil, with wrong tendencies, with the self. The desert is the place of self-verification, of self-proving. “The desert evokes man's latent capacity for initiative, exploration, evaluation. It interrupts his ordinary pattern of life. It intercepts the stultifying process of conventional, routine piety. It disengages him from the regular sound of respectable human activities. Man learns to be still, alert, perceptive, re-collected so that issues become clear, reality becomes recognizable and unambiguous. He knows God, not abstractions about God, not even the theology of God, but the much more mysterious and mighty God of theology – the God of Abraham, of Moses, of Elias, of Peter, Paul and John, of the fathers of the desert, the God of saints and the God of sinners. The words God spoke through Hosea are always significant: 'I shall espouse you in faith, lead you into the desert and speak to your heart.' This desert tradition is a long one, stretching back into the Old Testament, and it is a wide one, spreading beyond the Christian tradition to wherever men seek God.”¹⁵

The desert is the best place for humans to re-build the world, the human life. “That is what God has in mind when God calls us into the desert.”¹⁶ So, it is out of the world that the world can be restored.

But, for such a kind of toil, it is necessary to have a discipline of the desert, as the Holy Fathers mention. This discipline of the desert is, for most of the time, rigorous and uncomfortable. One can feel it like the people of Israel felt it when they arrived into the desert after their release from the Egyptian slavery; people felt uncomfortable and miserable, just as they came from another misery, that of slavery.

St. Gregory of Nyssa gives a very nice metaphorical explanation for living in the desert, speaking about the story with the bitter waters of Mara (Exodus 15, 23); he says the monk may feel uncomfortable and in pain when he leaves the world with all its sweetness, but, in fact, he is freed from slavery. Coming in the desert, in solitude, he will have the bitter taste of this kind of life. But if he will put the wood in the waters, as God revealed, the waters will become good and will

make life possible. This wood with which he has sweetened the waters is the wood of Resurrection because the Resurrection began on and with the wood.¹⁷

Since the desert is the place where one stands before God and is alone with God one can hear God in humility, as the prophets of the Old Testament said: “Speak, God, your servant is listening!” One receives the word of God, builds his or her life on this word and lets the word of God work one's spirit, to change the person, to renew the mind, to deepen the understanding so that one can see exactly where he or she is and where God is.

That is why God brings man into the desert. Because this is the place of discovery. And in these new circumstances, when humans speak to God, they will be transfigured by faith, by the conscience of God's presence. That makes the word of prayer become a true and living word: “Out of the depths I cried to you, o God, listen to the voice of my prayer.”¹⁸

Silence as Home of Being

To speak of silence is a hard task. Probably in order to do it well one would have to abide by the exhortation implied in the Latin proverb: *si tacuisses philosophus mansisses*.

Silence relates us to everything and first of all to the great silence before creation; in that case silence in ourselves is an anamnesis, a recapitulation of this great silence; at the same time our silence will create a bridge between us and the silence existent in all things.

Through the re-capitulation of things in our own silence, we will create the opportunity for things to capitulate. To capitulate is to leave any kind of ambition and to obey God - in this case. It is the right position *coram Deo*, the position which God assigned to everything He created. This is a participative and integrative position which is supposed to be man's normal being in the world.¹⁹

If, through sin, human nature was corrupted and lost the right position before God, since man is part of creation, all creation lost its right position before God.

That is why the human beings through their silence, participating through grace and faith in the silence of God, while also being in communion with the silence in things, bring them in the space of the human silence and re-capitulates them. Man gives them the opportunity of capitulation again and again simultaneously with man's own capitulation because his or her silence became the place of his or her own self-capitulation. In this way, man, through the renouncement of ambitions and arrogance, will come back to the due obedience and so will regain the right position *coram Deo*.

This process of reconciliation with God and with the cosmos, by the overcoming of the separation introduced by sin between humans and things and God, is man's duty, a duty which he or she accomplishes by the grace of the loving God.

Since silence as renouncement to arrogance facilitates the exclusion of separation, the reconciliation, the recapitulation, it also makes possible the anamnesis.

To remember all things is like giving them a name again, like re-baptizing the whole creation, like repeating the work of Adam. To give a name again is to know, to recognize, to confirm into existence, to rearrange in the right place.

Silence as anamnesis is the place and the circumstance which again situates a human being at the heart of creation in order that he or she may dominate it in the most creative, loving and saving way, as Pico della Mirandola says: "I placed you in the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you could with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains."²⁰

The overcoming through silence of the separations present within human nature and also between human nature and God and things, confers onto the silence a perichoretical dimension, in this precise sense that we enter, through our silence, in communion, in a kind of interpenetration with all other silences in the universe, in the things. This is because the nature of silence is the same anywhere and anytime; therefore, entering in communion with the things themselves, we realize consciously and mystically the unity of the whole creation and the communion with God.

But, if in the mystical space of the silence, this recapitulation is achieved, the aim of this achievement is related to the future.

In silence, the past and the future merge in this sense that the past is worked in view of another future state or condition. This future, as Fr. Staniloae states, “is never closed back in on itself.”²¹ On the contrary, in God, all dimensions of time are bound together.²²

This training of the past in a dynamic way toward the future, in the “space” of silence, gives to silence a holistic, efficient and eschatological dimension. The unity of creation, the communion with God, is a goal to be fulfilled; through our silence, we are on our way to this accomplishment, but always being in the grace of God, assisted all the time by the Holy Spirit at work in us.

We are in this holy journey at work in collaboration with God, even if it is the duty of humans to restore what they themselves destroyed! Being helped by the grace of God through our willingness to receive it, this silent openness will be like a permanent prayer for God's collaboration through the Holy Spirit in our work.

This is what makes silence to have an epiclectical dimension as well; silence will be a continuing personal epiclesis, an invocation of the Holy Spirit to come and to sanctify *our intentions*, our work, our life, our world.

In our intentions to work for the restoration and transfiguration of the world, the silence then, is a keystone. It is in the depth of this silence that we become, it is through these in-tensions, our inner tensions that form our new identity that we can reach deep within ourselves to our inner energies and strength; silence is then power, decision and enthusiasm. With these tools we can start any action with all chances of fulfillment.

Silence is such a powerful tool in moments of indecision, doubt, fear and crisis because it is self-collection. St. Symeon the New Theologian speaks about the mystery of self-collection²³ and relates it to solitude. The self-collection is

understood as silence (hesycheia).²⁴ In this sense, silence is again an anamnesis, a recapitulation.

Indeed, solitude facilitates self-collection, the collection from the wasting or spreading in many things, the realization of a person's unity. This is why for Meister Eckhart the practice of the solitude of the spirit is a “must”.²⁵ This comes through detachment as the fourth century Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom exhorts: “Let us put away all earthly care,” in order to prepare to enter the great silence of The Crucified.

We do not know exactly how this silence operates in ourselves, how this “recueillement” brings us home from our personal diaspora. But, what is certain is the fact that it helps us to come “home” to dwell in our spirit and this is the way we become powerful, with a strength and a new sense of our personality and identity. The silence as “home” is the answer we give to God when, as we distance from Him, He calls us asking: *Quo vadis Homo?*

Notes:

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1. Archim. Ioanichie Balan, Shepherd of Souls: the Life and Teachings of Elder Cleopa, Master of Inner Prayer and Spiritual Father of Romania (1912-1998), St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000, p. 54.
 2. Emilianos Timiadis, Le monachisme orthodoxe hier-demain, Ed. Buchet/Chastel, Paris, 1981, p. 14.
 3. F. Vanderbrouke, Le moine dans l'Eglise du Christ, Ed. du Mont César, Louvain, 1947, p. 20.
 4. Georgios Mantzaridis, The Deification of Man, St. Vladimir Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 1984, p. 85.
 5. Matthew Fox, “Biophilia or Necrophilia? The Most Important Spiritual Question of our Time”, Spiritual Questions for the Twenty First Century, edited by Mary Hembrow Snyder, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2001, p. 144.
 6. St. John Cassian, “The Third Conference on the Relaxation during the Fifty Days”, ch. 28, in A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, XI, Ed. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1955, p. 515.
 7. Meister Eckhart, The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense, Transl. and Intro. by Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, Preface by Huston Smith, Paulist Press, New York, 1981, pp. 285-294.
 8. Ibidem, p. 293.
 9. Henri J.M. Nouwen, Desert Wisdom; Sayings from the Desert Fathers, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2001, p. XV.
 10. Meister Eckhart, op. cit., p. 286.
 11. St. Gregory Palamas, “Defense of the Hesychastes”, see Georgios Mantzaridis, op. cit., p. 79.
 12. Joseph Pieper, The Concept of Sin, St. Augustine's Press, South Bend, Indiana, 2001, p. 57.
 13. Paul Evdokimov, Les Ages de la Vie Spirituelle, Ed. Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1964, p. 171.

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14. Meister Eckhart, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
 15. William McNamara, "The Prolonged Retreat; A Contemplative Experience", in *Call to Adventure*, Ed. by Raymond J. Magee, Abingdon Press, New York, 1967, p. 95.
 16. *Ibidem*.
 17. Gregory of Nyssa, *From Glory to Glory*, Transl. by H. Musurillo, Introd. by J. Daniélou, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1961, p. 92.
 18. Verse from Psalms sung in the Vesper Office in Eastern Orthodox Church.
 19. Theodor Damian, *Theological and Spiritual Dimensions of Icons According to St. Theodore of Studion*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, NY, 2002, p. 20.
 20. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Gateway Edition, Chicago, 1956, p. 7.
 21. Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brooklyne, Mass. 2000, p. 196.
 22. Megan McKenna, *Christ All Merciful*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2002, p. 27.
 23. Symeon le Nouveau Theologien, *Traité Théologiques et Ethiques II*, ch. XIV, 135, trad. par J. Darrouzes, Ed. du Cerf, Paris, 1967, p. 455.
 24. The word "hesychia" is translated in French by J. Darrouzes A.A. by "recueillement". In English "recueillement" would be self-collection as moment in the spiritual life; it is to collect oneself, to collect one's thoughts. It is interesting to notice here the similarity between the very meaning of the word "intelligo" which through the Greek *lego*, means separation of something in many pieces, but also the recollection, the bringing together of these many pieces, and the word "silence" in its connotation as "recueillement", self-collection from a waste, a separation, spreading, dispersion. Is silence intelligence? Maybe this is the reason for which *si tacuisses philosophus mansisses!*
 25. Meister Eckhart, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

Andreas Andreopoulos

The Mountain of Ascent in the Icon of the Transfiguration

Separation of Heaven and Earth

One of the most well articulated examples of the Middle Byzantine Transfiguration iconographic type is an illumination from a manuscript with the homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus (known as the Paris Gregory manuscript), dated at the last quarter of the ninth century, only a few decades after the end of iconoclasm and the Triumph of Orthodoxy. In contrast to the symbolic and complex rendition of the 6th century Transfiguration mosaics at Sinai and at St. Apollinaris in Classe, and even more so compared to the subsequent hesychastic type with the elaborate mandorlas and the triple mountain, this representation is as close to the biblical text as possible. The mandorla includes Moses and Elijah. This is not unusual for the Middle Byzantine type, and it is rather consistent with the gospel account, if we accept that it corresponds with – although we cannot say that it signifies – the luminous cloud that enveloped Christ, the prophets and the disciples. Its more usual interpretation as “glory”¹ outside this context, in icons of the Transfiguration, the Resurrection, the Ascension and the Dormition of Mary, is almost exclusively a feature associated with Christ.

The hand of God above Christ, outside the frame of the illumination and difficult to discern, represents the voice of the Father, a detail not included in most Byzantine Transfigurations. Peter, on the left, is standing on his feet and his hand gesture indicates that he speaks, symbolizing his question about the tabernacles. The relatively small distance

¹. Greek iconography uses the word *δόξα* for mandorla, which also means glory.

between the upper and the lower plane – at least relatively small compared with most post-iconoclastic depictions – indicates that despite the hierarchy of honour and importance that is given to Christ and the Old Testament prophets, the two planes are not (yet) separated by an entire mountain, but they almost coincide. It is evident from all this that this miniature incorporates as many elements from the gospel narrative as possible. There is only one minor feature of narrative interest, occasionally found in icons of the Middle Byzantine period when space allows it, that this illumination does not include: a representation of Christ and the disciples ascending and descending Thabor.

The Paris Gregory Transfiguration illumination is the first clear evidence we have towards an iconographic tendency to separate the plane of the Transfiguration into two distinct levels. This tendency can be found even more clearly articulated in many subsequent icons, but a careful examination may find some evidence towards it as early as the 6th century Rabbula gospels illumination and the mosaic of the Transfiguration in St. Catherine's monastery on Mt. Sinai. Although there is not much distance between the two levels yet in the Paris Gregory illumination, the space of the icon is already clearly divided into two parts, the lower earthy part with the disciples, and the upper heavenly part with Christ and the prophets in glory. The background of the two parts is very different, marking them as different spaces. The fruit-bearing palm trees on the upper part, behind Moses and Elijah define the upper part as a prefiguration of Paradise, an idea consistent with the Transfiguration exegesis, and present in iconography at least since the apse mosaic in St. Apollinaris.

The tendency to separate the two levels can be seen in an even more prominent way in later Transfiguration depictions, such as the ninth century Khludov Psalter illumination. The distance between the two levels has grown significantly as the peak of Thabor between the upper and the lower level takes about one third of the vertical axis. This is certainly a significant development since the time Thabor was symbolized with a thin green line, as we can see in the sixth century mosaic

in St. Catherine's on Mt. Sinai and the Rabbula Gospels illumination. Nevertheless, this growing distance was not exactly seen as a fence, it did not reflect a static distance as in the Platonic "divided line". The representation of this growing distance between heaven and earth, symbolized at the same time prayer and ascesis, the means for the transcendence of this distance. John of Damascus, for instance, described the ascent of Mt. Thabor in these words:

Why does he lead his disciples onto a high mountain? Because divine scripture figuratively calls the virtues "mountains". [...] And so then, it is necessary to leave earthly things behind on earth, to transcend this body of lowliness and stretch out towards that sublime and divine mirror of love so as to see the things that cannot be seen. For whoever arrives at the summit of love, as it were, stands out of himself and perceives the invisible one. He flies over the covering darkness of the bodily clouds and comes into the clear sky of the soul and so can look more keenly into the sun of righteousness, even though he cannot contain the sight of the whole Godhead. Then he will pray by himself, for hesychia is the mother of prayer and prayer is the revelation of the divine glory. For when we quieten the senses, and turn to ourselves and to God, and are freed from all the distractions of the outside world, we become inward to ourselves. Then it is that we see clearly in ourselves the Kingdom of God.²

The preceding passage connects the mountain of the Transfiguration to the spiritual exercise and ascent that was more clearly associated with hesychasm. Although John wrote in the eighth century, he already identified the most important constituent elements of hesychasm as it was only expressed six

² John of Damascus: *Oratio de Transfiguratione*, 10, PG 96, 550.

centuries later. His connection between hesychia and prayer (hesychia is the mother of prayer), as well as the transcendence of “earthly things” through the quietening of the senses, and, foremost, the identification of the ascent of Thabor as the model of this ascent, give credence to the view held by many theologians, that hesychasm was known in the monastic communities many centuries before it was expressed in the fourteenth century and formulated as a Church doctrine. But before we follow this strand, let us examine briefly the significance of Thabor in Western iconography, which explored a different role of the growing iconographic element.

Western depictions

The separation between the plane of the earth and the plane of heaven can be observed in some Western Transfigurations as well, although in a quite different way, as we can see in the illuminations from the Gospel books of Otto III made in the end of the 10th century. The separation between heaven and earth is even more prominent here. In the Aachen Gospel the two levels are completely disconnected, and Thabor seems to be dividing the two levels rather than connecting them. The light above Christ signifies the voice of the Father, because this is how the Father made his presence according to the synoptic Gospels. The position of Christ is in the middle, between the divine light that comes from above and the (separated) earth below. The Munich Gospel expresses this idea of Christ as the mediator between heaven and earth even more dramatically. The hand of God descending from the top is symmetrically opposed to the disciples on Thabor, while the body of the transfigured Christ connects the two levels that are represented by two opposing triangles. The spiritually perfected Old Testament prophets have transcended the material plane and stand between heaven and earth as well. Such representations seem to be particularly inspired by the connection between the Transfiguration and the Incarnation. Indeed, an illumination that was based on the Otto Gospels Transfiguration illuminations, made in the second quarter of the

eleventh century (Cologne), juxtaposes the Transfiguration with a somewhat abstract depiction of the Nativity. The Incarnation scene here, which seems like a descent of the soul of Christ to the earth, replaced the representation of the heavenly plane. An even earlier, though not as explicit, connection between the Incarnation and the Transfiguration can be seen in the church of Saints Nereo and Achilleo in Rome, made around 800. The apsidal arch presents the Transfiguration between a representation of the Annunciation and a representation of the Virgin and child. The image that would be expected to be in the place of the Transfiguration is, of course, the Nativity; it is possible to see the Transfiguration, in this context, as the “complete” Incarnation, or as the fulfillment of the in-carnation that started with the Nativity, the moment when the divine nature of Christ is not simply united with his human nature, but when this union is made explicit. In this sense, the German type with Christ standing between heaven and earth, allowing the divine light of the Father to pass through him and onto the disciples, represents this view rather successfully. The main visual difference between this type and its Byzantine contemporary however, is that it is the figure of Christ instead of Thabor that bridges the gap between heaven and earth. There is certainly no doctrinal mistake in either view, but we can observe the difference in focus and psychological importance: against the distance between heaven and earth, which was growing as Christianity was substituting the eschatological sense of imminence of the first Christian centuries, the West stressed the historical descent of Christ, while the East stressed the experiential ascent of asceticism.

Although it is true that the Easter as well as the Western patristic tradition had made the connection between the Transfiguration and the Incarnation, the prominence of Thabor and the upward movement it represents in later Byzantine iconography and its symbolism of ascetic ascent (something that is not only seen in the writings of the Fathers but also in the representation of Thabor as a triangle pointing upwards) express the Eastern view of synergy (a combination of the upward and the downward movement that some of the hesychastic

mandorlas expressed magnificently) as opposed to total grace. This upward movement has an ample background in the theology of the Transfiguration: Without the theology of deification that the Eastern Church connected to the Transfiguration, Mt. Tabor would appear as a forbidding border, a great divide between the heavenly and the earthly plane, but with this background in mind it is possible to see it as another version of the heavenly ladder. In that sense the Transfiguration iconography reveals the struggle for theosis, even five centuries before the flowering of hesychastic theology.

The Hesychastic Mountain

The representation of Mt. Tabor became quite dramatic in the last phase of the evolution of the Transfiguration iconography, the one that is characterized by the “hesychastic” mandorla. The new type is inaugurated by an illumination in a manuscript of the hesychast Emperor John VI Cantacuzenos, dated between 1370 and 1375, that was copied extensively. Nevertheless, despite the reasons that lead to the identification of the final development in the Transfiguration iconography as “hesychastic”, we should not make the mistake of thinking that hesychasm and the asceticism that is associated with it are only a phenomenon that appeared in the 14th century, or that it is only through the writings of Gregory Palamas that hesychasm and the Transfiguration were so closely connected. The writings of much older fathers suggest that the connection was known long before the time hesychasm had to be formulated as a doctrine. Cyril of Alexandria, for instance, writes, anticipating themes that were developed almost a millennium later:

Christ went up the mountain, taking the three chosen ones, to show that an earth-bound mind would never be suitable for contemplation, only a mind which has spurned earthly things and gone beyond all bodily matters to stand alone in hesychia beyond all the cares of this life, one that can be said to be higher than the

oppressive passions, for then it is transformed into a certain elect and godly radiance.³

The hesychastic type is usually identified by the mandorla, but its representation of Thabor is quite characteristic as well. Peter, John and James remain at the foot of the mountain, and their representation essentially corresponds to their earlier conventional representations, as it can be seen in the Paris Gregory illumination, but Thabor is presented more strange and inaccessible than ever. The most prominent difference however, is that the mountain is now almost always split into three, with Christ, Moses and Elijah apparently standing on a different mountain.

We can interpret this development in two ways. The first is consistent with the patristic collapse of all mountains of ascent and importance into the mountain of the Transfiguration. Let us not forget that the biblical account does not name the mountain, but it was identified with Thabor, probably for the first time by Origen,⁴ who based his assumption on the verse from the Psalms “Thabor and Hermon shall rejoice in your name”⁵ and subsequent Fathers adopted it. The Fathers were not too meticulous about the actual place of the historical Transfiguration, but sometimes saw it as a culmination of all the other ascetic ascents, of all the Old Testament mountains that were superseded by the mountain of the Transfiguration. Proclus of Constantinople, for example, writes:

which Moses and It says that the Master took Peter and his companions and ascended a high mountain on which Elijah conversed with Christ; a high mountain on which the Law and the Prophets conversed with Grace; a high mountain on which Moses sacrificed the paschal lamb and sprinkled the doorsteps of the Hebrews with its blood; a high mountain on which Elijah

³ Cyril of Alexandria: *Comm. in Lucam*, 9, PG 72, 652.

⁴ Origen: *Comm in Ps.*, 88, 13, PG 12, 1548.

⁵ Psalm 89, 12.

dismembered the ox with those others and consumed the sacrifice with fire passing through the water; a high mountain on which Moses stood who opened and closed the waters of the Red Sea; a high mountain where Elijah stood who opened and shut the clouds of rain.⁶

Under this light, we can take the separate branches of the mountain to indicate the unity of all the previous asceticisms that lead only to Christ, the representation of the ubiquitous mountain and the incessant upward spirituality that is not only limited to Thabor or Hermon, or Sinai. Moreover, as additional research has shown, the theology of the Transfiguration absorbed, as it were, after the seventh century, the rich mystical and exegetical tradition of Mt. Sinai. Maximus the Confessor capitulated in his writings the mystical significance of Sinai as it can be found in the long tradition that includes Philo, Gregory of Nyssa and pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite, and connected it to the Transfiguration which gave – to put it simply – a Christological turn to this tradition, and expressed the “characteristic hiddenness” of God, who is only revealed as a πρόσωπον, quite appropriately in this case, a face so radiant one cannot look at.⁷

Nevertheless, we can see this relationship between Sinai and Thabor a century before Maximus, in the apse mosaic of the monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai, and the two panels above it, that represent Moses at the burning bush and Moses receiving the tablets of the Law. The visual connection among the three scenes presents a hierarchy of theophanies, with the Transfiguration on Thabor as the culmination of the previous theophanies on Sinai.⁸ This is a case where a significant

⁶ Proclus of Constantinople: *Oratio* 8, PG 65, 763.

⁷ Question 191.

⁸ Cf. Jaś Elsner: *Art and the Roman Viewer*, Cambridge 1995, p.111 and Andrew Louth: *Wisdom of the Byzantine Church: Evagrius of Pontus and Maximus the Confessor*, University of Missouri 1998, pp. 23-24. Louth observes that the iconographic panels might have actually inspired Maximus.

theological idea was expressed iconographically long before it was put into writing. The fact that iconography has grasped the mystical relationship between the two mountains accounts for the rather sudden prominence of Thabor in subsequent icons. The impressive mountain that appears in the Khludov Psalter or the Athonite icons is Thabor and Sinai at the same time; more precisely, it is Thabor, but after it absorbed the mystical legacy of Sinai.

On the other hand, the division of Thabor into three parts could be seen from the exactly opposite point of view, as Moses, Elijah and Christ had a different mountain to climb, as it were. Could this be seen as a more personal or individualistic view of the ascetic ascent, something like the metaphorical cross that every Christian is individually called to lift in imitation of Christ? This is not necessarily inconsistent with the theological meaning of the Transfiguration or with the hesychastic struggle, but it leaves the door open to a dangerous kind of pietism that later hesychasts had to guard against. Indeed, after hesychasm developed into a full-blown doctrinal theology, we can detect a concern for a possible usurpation of the presence and experience of Christ within the liturgy. Several theologians moved fast enough to address the issue before it became a problem. The sacramental character of Christianity is stressed by Nicholas Kavalas, for instance, who was a fervent supporter of Gregory Palamas and hesychasm. Moreover, Theophanes of Nicea, writing in the late 14th century, after hesychasm was officially accepted as a doctrine by the Orthodox Church, in a tone that sounds defensive, comparing the experience of individual *μέθεξις* to the sacramental and inclusive *κοινωνία*,⁹ stresses exactly the inclusive and ecclesial character of the latter, over what could be taken as a measure of and struggle for personal holiness and individual moral(ist) perfection.

It is possible, however, to accept both views, and to suggest that under the influence of hesychasm it is not necessary

⁹ Theophanes III of Nicea: *Περί Θαβωρίου Φωτός, Λόγοι Πέντε*, edited by Ch. Sotiropoulos, Athens, 1990.

to see the transcendental mountain of ascent as one unrepeatable historical moment only, although the reference to Thabor and the historic Transfiguration is certainly preserved intact. Inasmuch however, the Transfiguration of Christ demonstrated his divine Glory, it also foreshadowed the transfiguration of humanity, it was the first among many Transfigurations and μεθέξεις with the Uncreated Light that followed and still occur in our days. It is for this reason that some writers¹⁰ have defined the upper limit of the Christian life not with the Resurrection, but with the Transfiguration. Everyone will be resurrected at the Second Coming of Christ, but that does not mean that everyone will share in the bliss of the Second Jerusalem, or in the Uncreated Light.

The increasing prominence of the mountain in the Transfiguration iconography expresses an increasing distance between the levels that represent heaven and earth, something that can be seen in many other areas of worship, such as sacred architecture and the interpretation of the building of the church as a representation of the universe, the earth being represented by the rectangular part and heaven by the dome.

The mountain of the Transfiguration however, provides a connection between the two levels, even if it seems inaccessible at times, not as inviting as the triumphant mosaic of the Transfiguration in the apse of St. Catherine's in Sinai. As much as we would not like to venture a risky interpretation, it seems that heaven, or salvation, or perhaps the historical Second Coming seemed farther away than before, that the psychological distance increased. That may be true, but at least the connection between heaven and earth was still there, the prospect of deification even during this lifetime which is signified by the Uncreated Light that radiates to the disciples at the foot of the mountain, was making up for the liturgical mysticism that developed in late Byzantium and the post-Byzantine era.

¹⁰ For an eloquent view on this issue, cf. Phillip Sherrard: *The Sacred in Art and Life*, p. 90.

Face to Face: The Eastern/Western Painting of Icons: Commonalities and Differences

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Christian religious art is the vast background of this paper. Iconography is its specific interest and the difference between Eastern Orthodox sacred art and the Western Catholic religious painting - its ambition. For an honest researcher it is obvious that the subject is too large to be constrained in a short presentation and that it is of extreme difficulty to refrain from taking sides, if any one view comes home to your taste and belief.

Keeping oneself impartial amidst the images of artistic Christology is a work of will and fairness.

In fact, what makes the artistic and religious representations in the East and in the West so different, mainly after Giotto's paintings, about 1300, is the conservative determination of the East to respect the dogma established by the Great Councils, (see the Nicene in 787), bringing the characters of the Gospels to "a hieratic perfection and venerable stability". (1) The Western masters were encouraged to paint Christ in a multitude of original visions, praising the art and the artist above the inspiration and - to cite the Apostle Paul - thinking the work "through the mind of the flesh".

The Byzantine East has made the Icon part of the worshipping ritual, part of the liturgy, an instrument not only in keeping the faith but also in discovering it, a tool for opening the door to the spiritual being and to the participation in the mystery of the Sacrifice and Salvation. This may explain the development of the religious fresco in the churches of Bucovina in Northern Romania, the all inside/outside painted monasteries,

where all the icons belong to the church and are to be revealed only to the faithful who would come to them in the Church.

An Eastern icon in the house of a non-believer, no matter how precious, has merely a decorative, maybe financial, but no spiritual value, whereas in the house of the Orthodox Christian it is the central spiritual point of the household, in which the vague perception of surrounding divinity becomes disciplined worship.

What in the West would represent Christian imagery reverses in the East into the image of Christianity.

The West brings a fully human Christ to men; the East helps men to reach a fully divine Christ.

The Western Christian art evolved into an art of the ascent (naturalistic, experience of our early existence), treated as true revelation and fixed into art.

The Eastern Christian art has remained an art of the descent, that is, a symbolic art, which embodies otherworldly experiences into real images, thus becoming the highest reality - according to Father Pavel Florensky - who wrote that "Everything is beautiful in a person when they turn to God and everything is ugly when turned away from God" (2).

He sees Eastern iconographic aesthetics as "that which for the subject of knowing is truth, for its object is love and for one who contemplates, this knowing is beauty". His entire view is based on the Orthodox Philokalia (love of beauty) as the essence of the human spirituality.

The origins of such different views "within the system of the Christian world have followed a long historical path, which lies across several cultures, embraces many nations and almost 20 centuries" (3); also, extremely diverse geographical, political and economic circumstances.

The art of the Renaissance - typical Western cultural event and spring point of the modern art - stopped at the external forms of the World, at naturalistic images, "because of the secularization of the culture, its liberation from the Church and from God" (4)

In Fr. Pavel Florensky's opinion, the Eastern icon is Theurgical, that is - art of God's work - it is not psychological,

but ontological, oriented towards revelation of the prototype, towards the discovery of the unknown reality; it is not the discovery of the image but rather the removing of the shell from what is there, eternal. However, it has to be acknowledged that, if the artist isn't bound to the dogma and to the rigors of the well established prototypes (like the ones we find in Dionysus of Furna' Painter's Manual), it is a dilemma to decide how Jesus looked like, (for we have no other records than the Gospels), how his suffering could be shown as not just personal but cosmic, how his human and divine nature could both be made clear at the same time (5).

For the Eastern painter, it had been decided for them and he relies on his talent whereas for the Western painter, each brush stroke is a trial of imagination supported by skill.

To Michel Quenot we owe a sharply realistic explanation on how the image of the icon of Christ had been established: "...the face of Christ, the new Adam, resembles the Color of Clay... clay translates into Hebrew as Ad amah - a reminder that His image belongs to every race, to every people, and that the son of David born of the Virgin Mary was a Jew rooted in history. To give him a black, white or yellow face "transgresses the historical truth of the Incarnation" (6).

Constantine Cavarnos, (citing Photios Kontoglou), calls the Byzantine art "The art of the arts", emphasizing its simplicity, clarity, restraint, power and great spirituality. Defending the "unnatural" aspect of the Eastern icon, he explains that it just has a different function, a religious function. The meaning of such a statement is to make us understand that unlike the Western religious representation, which displays an event in front of our eyes, a real event, the Eastern icon helps us discover a mystery.

ICON is IMAGE and "in the image we find the most convincing manifestation not only of the truth but also of every distortion of the truth by virtue of its visual character...the image denounces every violation of the patristic Tradition...It is precisely in the IMAGE that we observe most clearly the discrepancies between the Orthodox doctrine and spiritual life

on one hand and those of the Western confessions on the other” (7).

When he speaks about the Eastern religious art, Photios Kontoglou - himself a contemporary traditional icon painter - says: “The sweetness of this art is apocalyptic”.

This may be so, but it is sure as well that the world would be a smaller place without the paintings from the Sistine Chapel.

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The birthplace of the Christian imagery is the geographical space where the Gospels were written, the source of Genesis, the Middle Eastern region.

This explains why the very first Christian representations were signs and symbols, since the second commandment forbade the making and worship of idolatrous images and because the first Christians were Jews, and thus it is easy to understand their shying away from giving a face and shape to Messiah.

In their designated burial places appear the first symbols of the new religion: The Fish, the letters KP, the trigram IHS, Alpha and Omega.

For the Fish there are several interpretations: the initials of the Greek word for fish – IXTYS - form one denomination of Christ - Jesus Christ Son of God the Savior. Another relates the fish to the water of the Baptism or to the fishes and loaves at the wedding in Caana. Christ’s disciples also become fishermen of men.

St Augustine interprets the fish as a sign of His descent into the depths of his mortal life as into the abyss of the waters.

KP (from the Greek Khrestos) means “anointed” - see “Messiah” and was used as a symbol of affiliation and as good luck charm, mostly through the 4th century. It is also called a Christogram, sacred monogram or Constantinian monogram.

The trigram, IHS - Jesus Hominum Salvator, appears in the 6th century but can be found in medieval works and miniatures, later being adopted by the Jesuits.

The letters Alpha and Omega represent the All-ness and the Omnipotence of God. However, all these letter symbols are used even today.

Other Christian symbols are The Good Shepherd (“I am the good shepherd...who giveth his life for its sheep” John 10:11), the Vine (“Ego sum vitis vos palmites”: John 15: 5) and the Lamb (used in the West even after the Council of 692 which forbade the representation of Christ in animal form).

Later Christian symbols are the Rosary and The Cradle (as relic holder) and are mostly used in the West.

The Cross, that will become the Sign of Signs in the whole of Christianity, was used as early as the first century. However, because of the habit of crucifying common criminals, it was kept as a symbol more than an image for a long time.



Figure 1: Portrait of a Woman

Fayum, 2nd Century (Christian Period). Copy from the “Petit Larousse de la Peinture”. Librairie Larousse, Canada, 1979. Vol I.

Later, in the 3rd century, its glory and glorification began (see the Hymn of St. Hyppolytus to the Glorious Cross which becomes: the Tree of Salvation, Bed of Love where the Lord married us, Pillar of the Universe etc).

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment that led from the Christian symbols to the images of Christianity. As a matter of fact, we know that the symbol and the image co-existed constantly.

**Figure 2: Theotokos
Hodighitria
surrounded by the
prophets.**

16th Century, Pangarati
Monastery, Romania.
National Art Museum,
Bucharest. Museum Photo.
Copy from "The Resurrection
and the Icon" by Michael
Quenot. St. Vladimir
Seminary Press, Crestwood,
New York. 1997. Page 212.



The Christian religious art, which according to M. Quenot, originated in the heart of the undivided church evolved in the East in the first centuries under the political and ideological umbrella of the Byzantine Empire.

Its two major aesthetic influences were: 1- the Egyptian art, through the Coptic funeral rituals (as seen in the portraits from Fayum) and 2- the Imperial Byzantine Imagery.

The Eastern representations of the Virgin Mary bear a great resemblance to the "Egyptian portraits of women with dark complexion, large sweet eyes, narrow Semitic noses and modest demeanor", like in the Fayum portraits, whereas Christ Pantocrator, the "Divine King, Judge, Priest and Lawgiver" - almost a symbiosis between Christ and the Emperor clearly derives from the Imperial representations.

Icons are monumental - mural, or portable (for easier personal use).

The first portable icons are the Coptic icons from the 4th century, faces looking forward, with an alert look and hieratic poses.

Four of them are known to have survived - the ones brought to Kiev from Mount Sinai by archbishop Porphyry Ouspensky.

The principal types of icons reached their canonical form between the 7th and 9th century, under the mentoring of the Ecumenical Councils.

Like the Egyptian art, they continued to ignore direct perspective and thus, opened up possibilities for artistic creativity choosing “the life of the thing” over “the thing”. (9)

Artists were encouraged to create by both the state and the Church. In fact, Emperor Constantine relieved the artists who made the mosaics in the churches of all taxes and Basil the Great kept iconographers in equal honor to the Gospel writers.

Mosaics were first and foremost appreciated Christian representations, for their monumental aspect and their former artistic use in the Empire.

Little remains of the art of the early Eastern Christians because of the iconoclastic movements of the 8th - 9th centuries and the ravages of the crusades; However, after 1204, the sacred art retreated from the cities and palaces into the churches, monasteries and the new Christian Orthodox grounds. (Mount Athos, Mistra, Kahrie Djami, Kahrie Camii, Meteora, Serbia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, Ukraine and Russia). Here, it kept to traditions, remaining almost entirely truthful to its sacred liturgical role.

The West took a different path altogether. It is not to say that in the West there was no development. It followed more or less - theologically if not esthetically - the lead of the East. However, starting at the end of the Romanic period, “a progressive separation between the Church of Rome and the Oriental Church can be observed over the centuries preceding the official split of 1054. For the Byzantines, who ascribe to the image a central role in their spiritual life, the honor given to...the image of Christ reverts back to the original, to Him,

therefore the sacred art has to be regulated by means of strict rules.

The Roman Catholic Church adheres to the educational and didactic aspect of the image and does not take into consideration the sacramental character of the icon, venerated on the same level with the Cross and the Gospel". (10)

The Western Church, starting with the Church of the Franks, will give the artist excessive freedom in the presentation of the Truth, which leads under the influence of growing humanism, to a progressive desacralization of the sacred art, leading to the Renaissance, which opened the gates of religious art to lay imagination.

The "Caroline Books" (Libri Carolini), undermined the efforts toward unification initiated by the Second Council of Nicea which maintained that only the artistic dimension can be left to the artist because freely interpreted...the sacred mysteries become object of arbitrary imagination and emotion...disconnected from liturgical life" (11)

The Western Icon became in the post Romanic centuries more representational than sacred. It evokes customary experience, not reverent faith. It has artistic qualities but trades the mystical approach for an extension of the material world that paints natural phenomena, potent and rich people and their families, artists themselves play the role of Gospel characters.

By placing real people into the Gospels, their sacred character is devoid of spiritual descent, if not of beauty. The characters in the Western religious paintings are "actors posing in front of a painter, with staged movements and theatrical expressions". (12)

In the East, an Icon is a Saint; in the West, it is "somebody" whom you may happen to know. Understanding this helps to understand the irrelevancy of the icon in the protestant faith.

III

Giotto may best illustrate the point of separation between the two directions in Christian art. When he started

painting the frescoes in the Arena Chapel in Padua, “his work proved iconographical similar to Karyie Camii, a Byzantine work of the same period...but his seeking realism, solidity, actuality and energy was wholly Western”. (13) At Karyie the old system of perspective (from within rather than from without) is respected; Giotto experiments with vanishing perspective. Karyie shows humanist concern but still unveils an unreal world; Giotto is more humanist and realist.

After Giotto, the West never felt the same degree of responsibility in Christian art, therefore it was free to develop along a course of progress into reality. It brought forward the individual.

This was theologically foreign to any development in the East. (14)

The East kept mostly to the Icons of the Resurrection - representing the 12 Great Feasts and the Descent and the Ascension.

However, the most beloved theme among the icons of the world of Orthodoxy is Mary, the Mother of God and the Mother and Child.

Several types of Virgin Mary Icons have been accepted as part of the ritual: The Mother of God Orans, Theotokos, Hodigitria, Philokalousa or Eleusa, Mother of God of the Sign (Oustiug), each representing a different attitude of Mary to the Child or a different position of the Child to her.

Mary Hodigitria, an earlier type of icon, is pointing towards her son; the Eleusa, loving mother, earned popularity later; Our Lady of Vladimir is a perfect example: It was painted in Constantinople (1125-30) for a Russian patron and its stylistic origin is Egyptian. Rice feels that in this Icon, “the interpretation of love has become the aim of art rather than the depiction of the two symbols of divinity”. (15) In the presence of this image of Love, to which the only measure is love without measure, the words of Father Pavel (Florensky) are beautifully poetic: “Now I look at the icon and I say to myself: Behold, this is She, not her picture, but She herself, contemplated by the means of, with the aid of, iconographic art. As through a window, I see the mother of God” (16).

In the West, Mary is depicted in relationship with Christ Child or Christ on/off the Cross; These themes prevail but far from being cast into typeset poses, pre-approved by the Wise Fathers of the Church, who made sure that canons exist (as freedom, and not constraint” - Florensky), they are rather a realistic display of the joys and fulfillment of early motherhood, or, boundless motherly sorrow. However, three types emerge into the Renaissance:

- 1) The Nativity,
- 2) Madonna and Child, usually a pretty young woman bearing the features of the country of origin of the painter or of the model, nicely dressed in the fashion of the time, and
- 3) Pieta.



Figure 3:
Our Lady of Vladimir.

cca 1130. The Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. Copy from the Byzantine painting “The Last Phase” by David Talbot Rice. The Dial Press, Inc. New York. 1968. Page 33.

This last type of icon has become a trademark of the Western Christology and gives precedence to the Virgin. The Nativity is the theme which best demonstrates the acute difference in the East/West compositional visions. The West has indeed created real masterpieces such as the Nativity at Night,

with the light-bearing child as the centerpiece. The approach to the same theme in the East is of an essential difference; The central personage is always Mary in a cave (reminding of Christ's descent into Hell), laying and pondering in visions of the future; The Child is laid in a crib, almost a crypt, clad in white sheets, reminding of the funeral wraps of the dead. Joseph is never a central part, never near Mary; he is usually shown in the lower part of the icon, looking away in deep thought, as if trying to take in the event. He is not an active part in the mystery. This type of icon is completely and uncompromisingly symbolic.



Figure 4: Nativity at Night

by Gertger tot Sint Jans, late 15th Century. London National Gallery. Copy from "The Image of Christ", Catalog of the exhibition "Seeing Salvation."

The National Gallery, London. 26 February - 7 May 2000. Page 31.

Next the Virgin and Child, almost every other religious painting in the West represents the life and death of Christ. Many new themes based on His life and suffering developed here, the West showing an increased interest in the Passion versus the Compassion. This happened under the influence of mystics such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Francisc of Assisi, Catherina of Sienna etc.

The theme that has brought about extreme representational differences is the Crucifixion.

In the East the mystery is not analyzed or dissected, it is contemplated. (17) The Icon of the Crucifixion shows a Christ almost devoid of materiality, “standing on the Cross, not hanging from it, of another nature...the suffering redeemer...it is



**Figure 5:
The Nativity of Christ.**

Rublev School, ca 1410-1430.
Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. Photo
by CER, Mendon, France. Copy
from: “The Icon” Image of the
Invisible, by Egon Sendler.
Oakwood Publications.

not “anyone’s” body but the body of God - Man himself; He seems to be supporting the Cross” (18). He represents the Gladdening Sorrow”, the “Joyous Grief”. Around this Cross, one’s hope is full of immortality because it reveals that “Christ does not give his life on the Cross, he is life giving itself to whoever is willing to receive it” (19).

This type of icon evolved from the early Coptic representations in which Christ on the Cross is still alive, has open eyes and looks upon men with compassion and love. In the 11th century, Christ’s eyes are shut, increasingly pointing toward His human nature. But here stops the naturalism of this icon. He is dead already but of another matter, spreading His hands in an embrace of mankind rather than in the abandon of the suffering. His nudity is pure and luminous, never cadaverous.

An Eastern Crucifixion has to make us believe in the Resurrection.

In West, this theme has taken many liberties. There is an increasing obsession with Christ's naked and tortured body.

In the famous Crucifixion by Mathis Grunewald, “a work of despair”, “this painter’s Christ died” as professor Cullman wrote in 1961. (20) The nude is reduced to naked and there are no signs of divinity in the broken, contorted body. The sight is of desolated sorrow; it “appeals to our pity and makes us feel guilty” (21).



**Figure 6:
The Crucifixion**

by Nicolae Suceiu, last
decade of the 20th
Century.
Private Collection.

The Western imagination has produced many original themes on the Passions of Christ, such as The True Likeness (Veronica's veil, The shroud of Turin, The Mandilion), Arma Christi, Christ in the vine press (origin of the Transylvanian Jesus with the vine painted on glass), Ecce Homo, Christ, the Light of the World etc.

Only the True Likeness has some correspondence in the East: Acheiropoieton - Face-Not-Made-By Human-Hands.

One icon has to be mentioned here, since, in the East, the Icon is a matter of otherworldly experience and mystical revelation. In this icon, the dogma is proven right: It is Andrei Rublev's Trinity. This icon, considered to have been previously unknown to the world and revealed to Rublev who painted it in

the monastery of Zagorsk inspired by the spiritual experience of Sergius of Radonezh, is a work of true magic.

Gregory of Naziens writes in 390 these words about the Trinity: “No sooner do I conceive of the One that I am illuminated by splendor of three... When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one living flame, and cannot divide or measure out the Undivided Light”. (22) These words come into being in Rublev’s Trinity. There are many other Eastern and Western representations of the Trinity but none so poignant as this.

Figure 7:
The Holy Trinity

by Andrei Rublev, 1411.
Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.
Copy from “The Meaning of the
Icon” by Leonid Ouspensky &
Vladimir Losky. St. Vladimir
Seminary Press. Crestwood.
New York. 1999. Page 198.



IV

St Augustine wrote, that: “man moves in images”;

I think that in the Eastern sacred art God moves in icons.

John of Damascus wrote: “I do not venerate matter but the creator of matter, who became matter for my sake”. For this reason also, the Armenian monk Sirapie Narsessian felt that “We behold images with our eyes, we hear them with our ears, we understand them with our hearts and we believe”. (23)

This must be so because our entire spiritual life is woven around symbols, beautifully expressed by Hermann Hesse who wrote that “Every phenomenon on earth is a symbol, and every

symbol is an open gate through which the soul, if it is ready to do so, can penetrate to the depth of the world, where you and I, day and night, become one. Aesthetic phenomena are perhaps the widest and most available gates to the spiritual realm”. (24)

I began by acknowledging how difficult it would be to keep oneself impartial in comparing two ways of speaking in images if one is so much closer to one’s heart.

If there is a noticeable partiality however, the German author who wrote about the Orthodox sacred art explains it better: “Never, in all the evolution in human art, have painters succeeded in spreading heaven before us so superbly, so truly, so profoundly, at no other time was art so living and real”. (25)

I also share my partiality with St John of Damascus as he writes: “If a pagan comes asking you to explain your faith to him, take him in the church and show him the holy icons”.

Notes:

- (1) Cavarnos, Constantine. *Byzantine Sacred Art*. Massachusetts: Insitute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Sudies, 1992, p 38
- (2) Florensky, Pavel. *Iconostasis*. Trans. Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrijev. New York, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000, p 29
- (3) Florensky, Pavel. *Op cit*. p 11
- (4) Florensky, Pavel, *Op cit*. p 53
- (5) Finaldi, Gabriele, et. Al. *The Image of Christ: The catalogue of the Exhibition Seeing Salvation*. London: National Gallery, 2000, p 6
- (6) Quenot, Michel. *The Resurrection and the Icon*. New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997, p 53
- (7) Ouspensky, Leonid and Lossky, Vladimir. *The meaning of the Icon*. New York. St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999, p 9
- (8) Cavarnos, Constantine. *Op cit*. p 46
- (9) Florensky, Pavel. *Op cit*. p 61
- (10) Quenot, Michel. *Op cit*. p 9-10
- (11) Quenot, Michel. *Op cit*. p 45
- (12) Cavarnos, Constantine. *Op cit*. p 91
- (13) Rice, David Talbot. *Byzantine Painting: The last Phase*. New York: The Dial Press, 1968, p 149
- (14) Rice, David Talbot. *Op cit*. p 150
- (15) Rice, David Talbot. *Op cit*. p 11
- (16) Florensky, Pavel. *Op cit*. p 80
- (17) Quenot, Michel. *Op cit*. p 46
- (18) Cavarnos, Constantine. *Op cit*. p 119
- (19) Quenot, Michel. *Op cit*. p 159
- (20) Cavarnos, Constantine. *Op cit*. p 116
- (21) Finaldi, Gabriele, et. Al. *Op cit*. p 105

- (22) Quenot, Michel. Op cit. p 23
- (23) Quenot, Michel. Op cit. p 61
- (24) Bychov, Victor. The aesthetic Face of Being: Art in the Theology of Pavel Florensky. Trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993, p 91
- (25) Cavarnos, Constantine. Op cit. p 91



Laurentiu Popica

**Markus Bockmuehl's
Exegesis of Judaism and Pauline Christianity
and Its Impact on Christian Spiritual Life
Throughout the Ages**

In the Hellenistic period, the Jewish religious thought began to reassess the Biblical heritage while it found in the surrounding pagan cultures a new understanding of God's mysteries. The early Christianity was in this respect an explicit affirmation of God's revelation through Christ, as apostle Paul makes known in his letter to the Colossians (1:26): "The mystery hidden for ages and for / from generations now has been revealed to His Saints."

Offering a new and illuminating perspective on this ample theme, Markus Bockmuehl's exegesis of Judaism and Pauline Christianity balances analysis with synthesis in order to expand biblical understanding, and treats the ancient Jewish and Pauline literature "independently, each on its own terms (...) , however not in complete isolation".[1]

From the very beginning the problem of recognizing influences or traces of the Ancient Near Eastern religious views in the Bible, appears to Bockmuehl in its various shades and he tries to present it as such. He carefully shows in his study "Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity" that although not peculiar to Israelite religion there are elements of older and widespread ideas and practices which Israel shared with many other peoples.

What indeed is characteristic to Judaism is that revelation in the Bible is "impossible without the word", a fact also pointed out by Albert De Pury in his book "Sagesse et Revelation dans l'Ancient Testament", published in 1977. Moreover, the Sinaitic Torah is the focus of all revelation, according to all Jewish writings surveyed by Bockmuehl: the

apocalyptic literature, the major Qumran manuscripts, the so-called wisdom literature, Philo's writings, Josephus' historiography, the ancient versions of the Bible and the Rabbinic teachings of the Tannaic period (c. AD 70-220).

In all these writings the Torah represents the embodiment of wisdom, "it is fully comprehensive and contains all things necessary for Israel's life before God as the chosen people." [2] This common feature of Judaism had in effect a "nationalisation of wisdom": "where there is no revelation the people are unrestrained; but happy is he who keeps Torah" (Proverbs 29:18).

On the other hand, the secret things revealed to some Jews (sages, patriarchs or kings, all chosen by God, often after prayerful and ascetic preparation) are to be mediated to the whole community. For the disclosure of divine secrets is not normally made for private benefits.

All ancient Jewish writings accept the inspiration and the authority of the prophets. But at the same time, Bockmuehl writes, they "express a certain hesitancy in speaking about a prophetic activity of the Spirit in their own day". However it is sometimes suggested that "God continued to speak even to the present generation, chiefly through inspired insights (whether exegetical or visionary) granted to the privileged interpreters of God's word written" 3.

Judaism, Markus Bockmuehl explains, might be summarized, however at the risk of caricature, as: "a) exclusive monotheism, b) revelation and orthopraxis, and c) election and redemption" 4. On this basis "any contemporary claim of additional divine disclosure must have recourse to Mount Sinai as the unquestioned touchstone and reference point". Thus, "in light of the prior authority and givenness of a written Torah (...) all new revelation, even genuine which some at least of the apocalypses undoubtedly claim to be, is always << meta-revelation>>." [5] New and old stand in reciprocal relationship; new disclosure is given shape and texture by a charismatic reading of the old and in turn, is instrumental for the understanding of the proto-revelation . [6]

But in his exegesis of Judaism, Markus Bockmuehl makes reference also to particularities of the traditions surveyed. The theologian observes that at Qumran there is "an unusual focus" on the Teacher of Righteousness and a small group of priests who were the only ones considered worthy of mediating revelation (through profound study and inspired interpretation) to the rest of the community. This, in a sense, resembles the fact that in early Rabbinic literature, as well as in Ben Sira, only the most qualified should engage in the pursuit of divine mysteries. It is worth-mentioning here that Wisdom literature which indicates the past tense perspective of prophecy, also suggests that only scribal sages could further receive sapiential inspiration.

Another particularity is to be found in Philo, who clothes his language of revelation in Hellenistic garb, offering an example of deep interaction between Jewish hermeneutics and pagan philosophy. Bockmuehl also notices that Philo "generally does not think in epochs of Heilsgeschichte," [7] but in "the largely noumenal idea of <<knowledge of God>>." [8] Interesting, too, is that Hellenistic patterns are adopted not only by Philo. Josephus who "attempts to demonstrate that Judaism as the religion of revelation is not dependent on secret ritual but instead practices its truth openly before all,"[9] reflects a good knowledge of contemporary Greek mysteries. "On one occasion he even appeals to Plato for the notion that God's truth must not however be disclosed to the ignorant mob." [10] In addition, the Rabbis themselves, appropriated Hellenistic usage in regarding certain religious practices as "mysteries", establishing the distinctiveness of Israel. "This apparently proved a useful device in a period calling for clearer sociological definition and internal cohesion." [11].

Against this background, Pauline Christianity may be considered to manifest paradigmatic differences with Judaism but at the same time, substantial similarities with it.

In examining Paul's letters, which sometimes make "use of Greek philosophical or religious idiom,"[12] being written in Greek, Bockmuehl is eager to discover the two "irreplaceable, unalterable and basic" pillars "to all of Pauline Christianity,"

[13] namely the redemptive revelation of God's righteousness in Christ and the apostolic revelation of the gospel to Paul.

Here, we are reminded that divine judgment and redemption, wrath and righteousness are all themes firmly rooted in the Old Testament, especially in the prophets. Bockmuehl shows that "the Messiah according to Jewish expectation will bring judgement leading to both vindication of the righteous and punishment of the wicked (...). In Paul and the New Testament, too, it is the Messiah's parousia which will bring salvation as well as wrath from heaven (especially Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2 Peter 3:3-13)." [14]

As regards the other "pillar" of early Christianity many passages from the New Testament are discussed by Bockmuehl to illustrate the idea that "like a prophet, Paul speaks and acts on behalf of Christ," [15] that he firmly believed God's revelation to be continuing in the preaching of the gospel and more specifically in the apostolic ministry. To exemplify, the theologian analyses some samples of "the clearest language" that is in this respect to be found in the 2nd Letter addressed to the Corinthians.

It is clear, from Bockmuehl's point of view that past revelation in the Bible indeed defines Christian faith and life in the present but it also "entails and prompts an ongoing divine disclosure in the apostolic mission. One might well speak of a << kerygmatisation >> of the constitutive past dimension of revelation for the present." [16]

Moreover, in Pauline Christianity what was revealed becomes not only Paul's mission but ongoing revelation and continuous missionary work of those who believe in Christ. In the Apostle's vision the church participates as the Messianic community at the ushering of the new age. His ministry to the church in fully carrying out the word of God is a direct deduction of his God-given plan, on behalf of the churches (see 1 Corinthians 4:1 ; 1 Corinthians 9:7). [17]

Bockmuehl also makes clear that in Paul as in Judaism "the notion of divine mysteries is intricately linked with revelation." [18] He speaks of mysteries that are summed up in the message of the gospel of Christ and mysteries referring to

God's plan of salvation relating to the eschaton and being couched in contexts of traditional language and careful scriptural proof. These latter mysteries "are introduced only under certain circumstances, the criteria being the maturity of the audience and its edification on an issue of particular concern." [19]

In this light we reproduce here the passage that seems to us very important if not central to Bockmuehl's exegesis of Judaism and Pauline Christianity and its impact on Christian spiritual life throughout the ages, and which also seems to be in favour of a logical symmetry both for Pauline pattern of revelation but also for Bockmuehl's treatment of the two religions: "the mystery which, having been hidden from ages and generation was recently manifested to His saints, those to whom God wished to make known what is the glorious richness of this mystery among the Gentiles, viz. Christ among you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26-27). [20]

A detailed analysis of this passage which Bockmuehl indeed makes, suggests that it refers to: (i) "God's mysteries revealed through Christ and to the apostles and also to: (ii) proclamation of the divine truth to the Gentiles". Here we must add that regarding this passage Romano Penna in his study "Il <<Mysterion>> Paolino" points to the interesting conceptual parallel in Acts 10:41: "God manifested the risen Christ 'not to all the people but to previously chosen witnesses, that is, to us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead'" [21].

Taking into consideration the words "we speak God's wisdom in a mystery" from 1 Corinthians 2:6, Bockmuehl emphasizes this idea. He quotes Paul's statement "we actually do speak wisdom among those who are qualified but it is not wisdom of this world" (1 Corinthians 2:6) and he writes: "at Qumran, too, knowledge and ethical or ritual <<perfection>> were expected of full initiates and especially of leaders. There, as in 1 Corinthians 2:6 only the perfect ones had access to the mysteries of deeper knowledge." [22]

At the same time, Bockmuehl notices, "this passage remains consistent with a common place of both pagan and Jewish religion in antiquity: secret divine wisdom is properly

reserved for those who are qualified," [23] but we must see that this disposition in Paul is just "a pedagogical measure and a matter of straight forward common sense." Further, the difference between Paul's view and that, for example of Qumran or the mystery religions, is also pointed out by Bockmuehl: the apostle preaches the "word of the cross" to all, both to those who are saved and those who are lost (1Corinthians 1:18).

The fact that in Judaism there are statements about the Messiah coming to the Gentiles and even of a temporary rejection of the Jews is familiar. But in Pauline Christianity it is implied that Israel will be saved at the parusia, after the conversion of the Gentiles.

Thus, Paul introduces something new against a background of familiar terms and concepts, something until then "unreleased" -- "a piece of eschatological intelligence" which he couches in fully Biblical reasoning. To Bockmuehl, it seems likely that this is "revelation by exegesis (...) a dynamic inter-reaction of Scripture, exegetical tradition and religious experience (...). The catalyst is a Biblical meditation" and "the answer obtained is described as mystery that is a gift of revelation." For the Torah has not been replaced by Christ and the gospel but has become "the attendant witness to the surpassing end-time revelation of God's righteousness and saving design" [24]. In his rapid survey of revelant passages in the Pastoral Epistles and early Patristic writings, Bockmuehl sketches the early church's reception of the Apostle's teaching. Paul's use of apocalyptic motifs in his epistles to Tit and Timothee generally keeps with the dualistic traditions of apocalyptic thought and is expressed in "unmistakably Jewish" terms [25]. But these writings also offer "the theme of divine saving counsel of grace having been foreordained before the ages but now manifested by the Christ event and entrusted to the apostle's dissemination" [26].

About the writings of the second century: the Didache, Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr and the Epistle to Diognetus, Bockmuehl remarks "a further continuation of the general use of mystery" to denote "the gospel of Christ as a whole or the

totality of God's saving purposes for mankind as revealed in him and pertaining especially to the church." [27]

In evaluating the results of his exegesis of Judaism and Pauline Christianity, Bockmuehl finds the same pattern of revelation that is seen in similar three dimensions: (i) past salvation event (Exodus) and constitutive revelation (the Torah given to Moses); (ii) present revealed elaboration (through tradition and interpretation) of the past revelation; and (iii) future crowning revelation of the Messiah and / or the Kingdom of God. For Paul, Bockmuehl mentions, "the future dimension has already broken into the past and the present." [28]

Another observation is that potential issues of theodicy like suffering, death and the hard heartedness of Israel accentuate Paul's conviction that "all the promises of God find their Yes in him" (that is Christ) (2 Corinthians 1:20). [29]

The conclusion is that "Paul's theology had a lasting impact on the early apostolic age because the later letters of the Pauline corpus along with the Apostolic Fathers, continue the emphasis on the universal (and especially the ecclesiological) dimensions of the divine mystery revealed in Christ." [30]

As it is mentioned in the Epistle to Diognetus (8:9-11), too, the mystery hidden for ages and generations now revealed through Christ "gave us all things at once both to share in his benefits and to see and understand -- and which of us would ever have expected these things?" [31]

Notes:

1. Markus N.A. Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity*, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K., 1990, p. 4.
2. *Ibidem*, p. 124
3. *Ibidem*, p.225
4. *Ibidem*, p.19
5. *Ibidem*, p. 29
6. *Ibidem*, p. 124
7. *Ibidem*, p. 124
8. *Ibidem*, p. 75
9. *Ibidem*, p. 90
10. *Ibidem*, p. 90
11. *Ibidem*, p. 126

12. Ibidem, p. 129
13. Ibidem, p. 137
14. Ibidem, p. 140
15. Ibidem, p. 143
16. Ibidem, p. 137
17. Ibidem, p. 182
18. Ibidem, p. 226
19. Ibidem, p. 227
20. Ibidem, p. 182
21. Penna, Romano, Il "Mysterion" Paolino, Supplementi alla Rivista Biblica 10. Brescia : Paideia, 1978, p. 32
22. Markus Bockmuehl, Revelation ..., p. 159
23. Ibidem, p. 159
24. Ibidem, p. 225
25. Ibidem, p. 212
26. Ibidem, p.213
27. Ibidem, p.227
28. Ibidem, p. 227 - 228
29. Ibidem, p. 229
30. Ibidem, p. 230
31. Ibidem, p. 230

Nicholas Groves

Optina Pustyn as a Center of Desert Spirituality in 19th Century Russia: In Search of the Prayer of the Heart:

Introduction

In the middle of the nineteenth century in a monastery a few hours south of Moscow, a very remarkable phenomenon was occurring. Amid the bustling activity of this community, almost a city in itself, the life of silent prayer (hesychia) of its monks and their elders (startsi) was beginning to attract not only the attention of monastic Russia, but of the larger culture of a nation in the middle of deep social and spiritual unrest. Soon such authors as Gogol, Dostoevsky, and even Tolstoy, would come to converse and seek guidance from elders including Fathers Macarius, Anthony, and Amvrosy. Both men and women and peasants and landowners visited. The monastery itself had extensive “guest services” (as we would call them today), and depending on your rank in society, you could find a more or less comfortable place for rest and meditation.¹

One of the many literary productions of this community was the little book we have come to know as The Way of the Pilgrim. The world that the “pilgrim” invites us into will be the subject of our investigation, a world of the “prayer of the heart” and the practice of spiritual eldership (of the startsy) which it teaches. The monastic world which gave birth to this book

1. For a basic introduction to Optina and the literary figures who frequented it under different circumstances, see Leonard J. Stanton. The Optina Pustyn Monastery in the Russian Literary Imagination. Iconic Vision in Works by Dostoevsky, Gogol, Tolstoy and Others. (NY: Peter Lang, 1995), especially chapters 2 and 3 on the monastery itself. Also more briefly, John B. Dunlop. Staretz Amvrosy. Model for Dostoevsky's Staretz Zossima. (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing, 1972), pp. 32-38.

survived the efforts of the Soviet government to destroy it. The Way of the Pilgrim, in numerous editions and translations, has become a classic of world spiritual literature. Optina itself is once again open and thriving, having been reestablished in 1995.² It attracts many visitors and tourists. Perhaps we can consider ourselves among them as we examine some of the extraordinary lessons available from Optina's elders and the tradition which nourished them, a tradition preserved and promoted by Paisius Velichkovsky in the eighteenth century. We shall find that what was an age of the so-called Enlightenment in Western Europe was a time of a very different form of enlightenment in Eastern Europe, of a form of wisdom which challenged the spiritual foundations of western culture. As we study (however briefly) the predecessors of Paisius and the work of Paisius himself, we can find their wisdom valuable for our own time. In the second part of my study to be given as a sequel, I shall look at how Optina influenced the larger Russian culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the "Russian religious renaissance" as it has been called. We shall find that Optina has by no means delivered her last words of wisdom.

My present investigation has two parts. First, I shall consider how the teaching on the prayer of the heart and

² The version of the pilgrim's work that I am using is The Pilgrim's Tale, edited with an Introduction by Aleksei Pentkovsky, translated by T. Allan Smith, (NY: Paulist Press, 1999). This is the closest to a scholarly rendition of the text that we have in English. Especially valuable is the Introduction which includes information about links of the story to Optina. See pp. 1-46. Many people are most familiar with the work in the translation by R.M. French. The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way. (In several editions – first published in 1930 by S.P.C.K.). In 1928, Roman Catholic monks at the monastery of Amay-sur-Meuse (later Chevetogne) in Belgium published a French translation. See E. Behr-Sigel. Lev Gillet. A Monk of the Eastern Church. (Oxford: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1999), p. 331. For a contemporary tourist's account of Optina, overall quite sympathetic while objective, see Victoria Clark. Why Angels Fall. A Journey Through Orthodox Europe from Byzantium to Kosovo. (NY: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 314-323.

hesychia is rooted in the early desert tradition of the Christian East. This tradition was developed extensively in Byzantium by St. Symeon the New Theologian and others. Here I shall be concerned with its desert origins. This tradition was to pass from Byzantium into eastern Europe, especially through the regions that are now Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia. The preservation and development of the practices of hesychia were thus to survive the destruction of Byzantium. The silent and often unnoticed work of monastic scribes in monasteries including those of Mount Athos passed on the heritage that Paisius himself was to embrace. This particular transmission of texts and their practice by elders needs to be examined in some detail because it has received little treatment except in the most learned and often hard to locate scholarly articles. I believe it deserves a wider audience. Secondly, I would like to describe briefly the teaching of Paisius himself concerning both eldership and the prayer of the heart. For Paisius, a Ukrainian monk of the eighteenth century, the two were inseparable. Prayer was never a “private” matter, a dialogue of an “alone” with the “Alone,” or mysticism as it has often been understood in the western sense. Rather as the first disciples asked, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1ff.) desert Christians have asked the very same question of their elders in the practice of prayer. Surprisingly enough, some of the monastic leaders of Orthodox Russia in this time were to greet the rediscovery of hesychia and eldership with suspicion rather than welcome, as Paisius’ biographers will inform us. This tradition, venerable as it was, threatened power and prestige in the ecclesiastical world. It challenged an Enlightenment form of education which was becoming a norm in Russia and even the Ukraine.³ It presented

³ For seventeenth and eighteenth century developments in Russia, see first three essays (by Treadgold, Cracraft and Nichols) in R.L. Nichols and T.G. Stavrou, eds. Russian Orthodoxy Under the Old Regime. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1978). Also M.J. Okenfuss. The Rise and Fall of Latin Humanism in Early-Modern Russia. Pagan Authors, Ukrainians, and the Resiliency of Muscovy. (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Alexander Sydorenko. The Kievan Academy in the Seventeenth Century. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1977).

a “Counter-Enlightenment” or “Anti-Enlightenment,” deconstructing Voltaire and other French philosophies by challenging their views of God and the world. The desert tradition as expressed by Paisius also called into question an entire aristocracy of learning and privilege that accompanied the spread of the European Enlightenment into the monasteries and academies of the Slavic world. We shall have occasion to describe this when we examine our subject’s biography. It was this tradition of the heart and “prayer of the heart” that were later to appeal particularly to such Russian writers as Dostoevsky, Gogol, and even Tolstoy who visited Optina, a desert founded by disciples of Paisius. They found in Optina that “heart” or core of Christian spiritual life that was increasingly threatened by a certain rationalism imported from the West.

I. The Prayer of the Heart in the Early Christian and Byzantine World

To “pray without ceasing” (I Thess. 5:17) has been a challenge for Christians since the very earliest years. As the “pilgrim” describes himself and his work, we can find ourselves in good company:

By the mercy of God I am a Christian; by my deeds, a great sinner; and by vocation a homeless pilgrim, a man of mean estate who wanders from place to place. – p. 49.

The words “pray without ceasing” were planted in his mind, and he “began to wonder how anyone could pray without ceasing when merely to stay alive demanded so much of each individual.”⁴ We begin our journey of discovery of what it means to “pray without ceasing” in the deserts of fourth and fifth century Egypt, Palestine and Syria. While these were actual physical deserts, the tradition of Christian spiritual combat and interior stillness (hesychia) was by no means to be limited to such an environment. The “desert” would come to

⁴ The Pilgrim’s Tale, p. 49.

signify primarily a place of meeting with God. In scripture the desert is the point of encounter of Moses with God on Sinai (interpreted on its many levels by St. Gregory of Nyssa in his Life of Moses), as well as Christ's own temptation. It is a condition of challenge, of being both open and empty. Its silence allows us to hear the words of a living God and of teachers who have met that Word. Whether in the deserts of the East, the cities of the Byzantine Empire, or the far reaches of Celtic islands where monks wandered in search of solitude, the prayer of the heart was to be a living reality.⁵ The call that came

⁵ On the desert in Christian traditions, see C. Cummings. Spirituality and the Desert Experience. (Denville, NJ: Dimension, 1978); T.M. Gannon. The Desert and the City, an Interpretation of the History of Christian Spirituality. (NY: Macmillan, 1969), especially chapter 2; B. Lane. The Solace of Fierce Landscapes. Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality. (NY: Oxford University Press, 1998). One noteworthy difference between Christian East and West has been that the East has always cultivated a practice of desert life in monastic dwellings in cities and towns. Such was the Stoudios community in Constantinople. See H. Alfeyev. St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 13-19. Yet there were also some strong examples of this in the West. Carmelite convents and monasteries in Spain in the seventeenth century in the reforms of Saints Theresa of Avila and John of the Cross were certainly presences of the desert in the city. It would be more precise to maintain a distinction between the "prayer of the heart," which is the larger practice of prayer that unites body, mind, and spirit; and the "Jesus Prayer" proper which has been from very early times one important form of this prayer. The Ancients taught that the prayer of the heart could take varied forms. On prayer of the heart and the Jesus prayer, two very helpful guides are: A Monk of the Eastern Church. (Lev Gillet). The Jesus Prayer. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1997), and Kallistos Ware. The Power of the Name. The Jesus Prayer in Orthodox Spirituality. Fairacres Publications, no. 43 (Fairacres, Oxford: SLG Press, 1974). For general background on prayer in the Desert Tradition: I. Hausherr. The Name of Jesus (translated by C. Cummings, OCSO) in Cistercian Studies Series 44. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1978). Of great importance in the development of the tradition of the "prayer of the heart" was the experience of Syrian Christianity, which from its earliest origins has sought for the Kingdom and the Bridegroom through ascetic strivings. This current of spiritual life flowed into Byzantium and later into Slavic lands and had strong influence. See the informative article

out of the heart of this desert was to be: “Father (Mother) give me a word that I may live.” It is important for us to realize from the beginning of our discussion that the individual practice of prayer and the teaching of an elder or guide always went together. Rarely, if ever, was a pilgrim on his or her “own,” doing a solo flight of spirituality. The desert, the environment of practice, was a place where the disciple was warned continually against the perils of such aviation. (John Climachus, for one, was especially ready to warn against it in The Ladder.)⁶ A dangerous crash – whether from excessive or unregulated fasting, vigils, or particular prayer practices – awaited someone trusting in their own wisdom. Rather it was much better to see the saving wisdom from the words, lives and examples of those who have struggled before us. You will know these individuals – so the desert tradition tells us – by the living fire of their appearance. They are living icons. As we hear from Palestine: “Abba Hilarion went to the mountain to Abba Anthony. Abba Anthony said to him, ‘You are welcome, torch which awakens the day.’ Abba Hilarion said, ‘Peace to you, pillar of light,

of Gabriele Winkler. “The Origins and Idiosyncrasies of the Earliest Form of Asceticism,” in W. Skudlarek, OSB, ed. The Continuing Quest for God. Monastic Spirituality in Tradition and Transition. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982), pp. 9-43. For Syrian monastic understanding of “heart” and the physiology/spirituality of prayer, see the discussion with texts in chapters 2 and 3 of R. Beulay. La Lumiere sans forme. Introduction a letude de la mystique chretienne syro-orientale. (Belgique: Editions de Chevetogne, 1986).

⁶ All the desert literature, especially the *Apothegmata Patrum*, or Sayings of the Fathers, as well as biographies of desert saints, warn against such “solo flights.” It is a temptation of pride and can lead to destruction and/or madness. Climachus, for one, maintains: “For those sailing the tides of spirituality (?) know only too well that the religious life can be a harbor of salvation or a haven of destruction, and a pitiable sight indeed is the shipwreck in port of someone who had safely mastered the ocean.” Step 2: On Detachment. The Ladder of Divine Ascent, translated by C. Luibheid and N. Russell. (NY: Paulist Press, 1982), pp. 83-84. (Hereafter Climachus. Ladder).

giving light to the world”⁷ . The purpose of desert Christian practice, as another saying expressed it, was to become “all fire.” It was the power of such presence that brought many people to eagerly seek out not only the deserts of the East, but later many of the monastic communities of Byzantium and later such centers as Dragomirna and Neamt in Romania, or Optina and Valaam in Russia. The elders of such places, trained in the prayer of the heart, radiated a light and a warmth that reached far beyond where their words could penetrate. John Climachus, writing in the seventh century, sums up much of this earlier desert teaching on prayer in The Ladder of Divine Ascent, In chapter 28, a little treatise “On Prayer,” he makes such observations as these:

Prayer is by nature a dialog and a union of man with God. Its effect is to hold the world together...Prayer is the mother and daughter of tears. It is an expiation of sin, a bridge against temptation, a bulwark against affliction. It wipes out conflict, is the work of angels, and is the nourishment of all bodiless beings....It is wealth for monks, treasure of hermits, anger diminished.⁸

With his usual rambling collection of imagery, Climachus reaches the main point of his description:

Try not to talk excessively in your prayer, in case your mind is distracted by the search for words. One word from the publican sufficed to placate God and a single utterance saved the thief.

Make the effort to raise up, or rather to enclose your mind within the words of your prayer...

To pray, for Climachus, involves bringing the mind and the heart together. Herein is the origin of the prayer of the heart as it will be developed and refined by the later tradition. As Climachus tells us:

To keep a regular watch over the heart is one thing; to guard the heart by means of the

⁷ Alph. Hilarion 1 (PG 65,242) as quoted in C. D. Hainsworth. Staretz Paisy Velichkovsky (1722-1794) Doctrine of Spiritual Guidance. Excerpta e Dissertatione ad Lauream. (Rome, 1976), p. 36, n. 106.

⁸ Climachus. Ladder. Step 28: On Prayer, pp. 274ff.

mind is another for the mind is the ruler and high priest offering spiritual sacrifices for Christ. (Ibid., p. 280)

Very much in the same tradition as Climachus who warns about excessive prayer, the nineteenth century pilgrim will seek to avoid words and practices for their own sake, however highly recommended. His journey will be into the heart of the prayer.

There has been considerable discussion among scholars about the meaning of the term *hesychia*, a word related to the practice of the prayer of the heart. It seems to me that, however interesting, much of the intricate examination of terms can miss the most basic point. In the early Christian tradition, especially in the ascetic teachings of the fourth and fifth century desert saints, *hesychia* meant most fundamentally a condition of heart and spirit: being in a state of “quiet” where we can be most receptive to the word and presence of God. This might, but at times did not always, require a physical absence of people or distance from settlements. At its most conscious level, those who practiced *hesychia*, a condition of continual prayer (as with Climachus quoted above), knew that it was an inner condition that could be cultivated even under the most distracting of circumstances. Anthony of the desert describes it as a state of always having God before our eyes. (Anthony, Alpha 3 in The Sayings of the Desert Fathers, several editions.) Many centuries later, it is what the western Catholic writer Brother Lawrence calls The Practice of the Presence of God.⁹ Particular methods or practices of this prayer will vary in place and time.

As the teaching of the prayer of the heart was to develop, both in the deserts and in the city monasteries of Byzantium, such as the Studium in Constantinople, we find an

⁹ On meanings of *hesychia*, see particularly I. Hausherr. “L’hesychasme. Etude de spiritualite,” pp. 164-169 in collection of his studies, Hesychasme et Priere. Orientalia Christiana Analecta, no. 176. (Roma, 1966). The importance of quiet as a condition of the life of the hermit is stressed in several Patristic authors, especially John Chrysostom and Basil of Caesarea.

increasing refinement in its application.¹⁰ It is only in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries in the last years of Byzantium, that we can speak of any “method” or prayer. It has been a suggestion of some that a hesychast method might be related to neighboring Sufi practices in Islam, or even a distant connection with yoga as practiced in Indian religions.¹¹ Whatever these influences may or may not have been, it seems to me that the foundation of the prayer of the heart, of practices of hesychia is clearly found in the Gospels. Following in the Hebrew understanding of the “heart” as the center of human life, Jesus constantly asks his disciples to look within to find the Kingdom of God (also, of course, a Kingdom proclaimed in and for the world) and to cultivate prayer “in secret.”¹² It is not very far from such a view of “heart” to methods of prayer that involve bringing the mind into the heart. Actual practices of this prayer did become quite precise by the time of St. Gregory Palamas. So precise in many cases that much of tradition speaks strongly about the need to find an “elder,” a spiritual guide to lead someone into it. Prayer becomes a work of apprenticeship as the disciple asks the gerson (starets) as the disciples asked Jesus the

¹⁰ I. Hausherr. Hesychasme et Priere, especially no. 12, “L’hesychasme. Etude de spiritualite,” pp. 163-237. Also the article “Hesychasme” in Dictionnaire de Spiritualite, pt. 7, 1. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1969), cc. 381-399.

¹¹ For a comparative study of hesychasm and some varieties of Indian yoga, see T. Matus. Yoga and the Jesus Prayer Tradition: An Experiment in Faith. (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984). Father Matus is a Camaldolese monk deeply interested in dialogue with other spiritual traditions. Some scholars suggest similarities between Sufi practices of prayer, invocation of God’s name, and the Jesus Prayer. See for example: B. Thurston, “Thomas Merton’s Interest in Islam: the Example of Dhiker,” in R. Baker and G. Henry, eds. Merton and Sufism. The Untold Story. A Complete Compendium. (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999), pp. 45-50.

¹² The cultivation of silence as an integral part of monastic life was essential for St. Benedict and the Master who preceded him. See A.G. Wathen. Silence: the Meaning of Silence in the Rule of St. Benedict. Cistercian Studies Series, n. 22. (Washington, DC: Cistercian Publications, 1973). Prayer “in secret” is context of the Lord’s Prayer: Matthew 6:6ff.

way to pray. This is not to be a mysticism of the “alone” with a distant God, a gaining of personal light. It is to be the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.¹³ In most cases the master who teaches a disciple, whether in a desert cell or in Byzantine monasteries, speaks very little. The “word” he or she provides is a “word” put into practice, chopping wood, drawing water, growing vegetables, weaving, etc. This word emerges out of an inner, if not outer, silence. Prayer is practice as practice is prayer. One very important activity that accompanied simple prayer was the copying of manuscripts of the Fathers. This was worthwhile because it both preserved and carried on the tradition (the literal meaning of *paradosis* – the “passing along” of something), and created a mental and spiritual tradition where someone actually encountered the words they had to transcribe.¹⁴ In the best desert practice, work and prayer, the activities of the cell alternate. Boredom and other temptations are met continually with the plea: “God, come to my assistance. Lord, make haste to help me.” So it is in the desert, the devil is to be defeated.

Here are a few examples of this eminently practical wisdom, the wisdom of *hesychia*, spanning several centuries.

Nicephoras in his Profitable Discourse on Sobriety advises us:

¹³ For this development of For a basic introduction to Optina and the literary figures who frequented it under different circumstances, see Leonard J. Stanton. The Optina Pustyn Monastery in the Russian Literary Imagination. Iconic Vision in Works by Dostoevsky, Gogol, Tolstoy and Others. (NY: Peter Lang, 1995), especially chapters 2 and 3 on the monastery itself. Also more briefly, John B. Dunlop. Staretz Amvrosy. Model for Dostoevsky’s Staretz Zossima. (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing, 1972), pp. 32-38.

¹⁴ In an important sense in the labor of writing and transcribing texts, the desert ascetic became the teaching that he or she was trying to imitate. Literature as an ascetic work mirrored and expressed reality. See James E. Goehring. Ascetics, Society and the Desert. Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), chapter 4, “The Encroaching Desert: Literary Production and Ascetic Space in Early Christian Egypt,” pp. 73-88.

Attention is a sign of sincere repentance. Attention is the appeal of the soul to itself, hatred of the world and ascent toward God....Attention is the beginning of contemplation, or rather, its necessary condition...The greatest of all great things may be gained by many or even by all, mostly by being taught how...it is necessary to seek a teacher who is not himself in error, to follow his instructions, and so to distinguish by careful attention, defects and excesses to the right or the left encountered through diabolical suggestion.

Gregory of Sinai (14th century) one of the major teachers of interior prayer, and an author of great importance for the later Philokalia, reminds us that: “God is gained either by activity and work or by the art of invoking the name of Jesus.”

For prayer to be effective according to Philotheus of Sinai (9th –10th centuries), “By the memory (bringing into mind) of Jesus Christ, gather together your mind that is scattered abroad.”¹⁵

If we have the humility (self-knowledge) to seek out a teacher of this prayer, a prayer that asks mercy on each of us as sinners as did the pilgrim in The Way of the Pilgrim and the many hesychast saints who walked before him, we grow in a sense of God’s presence, a sense as real as our breathing. Such a prayer brings with it a sadness that is also joy. Sadness over our distance from God. Joy that God is with us, if we can just return to God through a labor of obedience which is somehow also the discovery of our most true selves. We weep for the sin and for

¹⁵ These and some other excerpts from the desert tradition are quoted and described in M. Basil Pennington, OSCO, Centering Prayer. Renewing an Ancient Christian Prayer Form. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), pp. 27-33. Father Pennington and Father Thomas Keating (another Trappist monk) are contemporary teachers of “centering prayer,” an adaptation of desert wisdom to contemporary life. Of course, the great treasury of these desert teachings is the Philocalia, most accessible in the version of Bishop Kallistos Ware.

the beauty that is also within us. We offer to bear the sins of others, rather than condemn them. We have a kinship with the animals and the trees. We have come “home” to the God who has been awaiting us all along. This is the way of the prayer of the heart, the way of the desert, of Climachus’ “joyful sorrow.”¹⁶

The practice of eldership and the copying of texts characterized Byzantine monasticism particularly after the period of iconoclasm in the ninth century. Eldership often included lay people going to monks for spiritual counsel. One important center was the Stoudion monastery in Constantinople.¹⁷ Such a combination of textual scholarship and eldership was to recur frequently in the following centuries. Optina and its elders was a later expression of this venerable tradition.

One of the most influential places where the tradition of interior prayer flourished in the Byzantine world was Mount Athos. It is quite likely that hermits and monks living together in small cells were there by at least the ninth century, if not earlier. St. Athanasius founded the Great Lavra, a cenobitic community, in 963. Legend, of course, has the monastic origins of Athos going back much further and describes the interest the Theotokos, the Virgin Mary, had in this particular Holy Mountain.¹⁸

¹⁶ I do not intend to suggest that the tradition I have been describing was limited to the East or Byzantium. Although it received many of its fullest expressions there, it was also fundamental to the early Christian and medieval West. The Rule of St. Benedict expresses virtually the same teaching as it integrates prayer and life in the monastery and invokes Basil the Great. For interrelation of eastern and western monastic life, see the collection of essays edited by B. Pennington. One Yet Two: Monastic Tradition East & West. Cistercian Studies Series, n. 29. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976). This volume can serve as an introduction to an important topic that still awaits further needed exploration.

¹⁷ H. Alfeyev. St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition, chapter 1.

¹⁸ On the origins of monastic life on Mount Athos, see particularly the first essays in A. Bryer and M. Cunningham, eds. Mount Athos and

The communities of Athos became – in the words of Anthony-Emil Tachiaos – “an immense cultural and intellectual workshop” as well as centers and training grounds of prayer. It is remarkable that thousands of manuscripts in monastic libraries there have been preserved in Greek, Georgian, Slavic and other languages. Many still await cataloging or careful scholarly attention although some projects (such as at Hilandar) have been ongoing. As early as the time of Athanasius, there were monks from Caucasian Georgia who later were to found Iviron. While exact details are not certain, there was a strong Bulgarian presence from this time as well.¹⁹ By the fourteenth century, if not earlier, Wallachia and Moldavia were contributing much to sustaining Athos and other places in the church while the surrounding Empire was in deep crisis. As the historian Petre Nasturel describes this work and its effect:

Without the help of Wallachians and Moldavians, we cannot be sure of what would have become of these monasteries overwhelmed in debt both by the inefficiency of the monks and the staggering taxation of the Ottoman conquerors. This action through which

Byzantine Monasticism. (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum,) Also essays 1-3 in Le Millenaire du Mont Athos. 963-1963. Etudes et Melanges, vol. I. (Editions de Chevetogne, 1963). For legends about the Theotokos and her first appearance on the Holy Mountain, see R.M. Dawkins. The Monks of Athos. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1936), chapter 7. By calling these accounts “legends,” I do not intend to pronounce one way or another on their historicity. We are living here in the world of myth and symbol, whereas Mircea Eliade and other scholars have explained, an entirely different dimension of reality is present than in a western and linear view of history. See for example, Eliade’s classic statements on this theme in his The Sacred and the Profane and The Myth of the Eternal Return (available in various editions).

¹⁹ See Anthony-Emil Tachiaos. “Mount Athos and the Slavic Literatures,” in Cryillomethodianum 4, 1977. On Bulgarian and Serbian translation work and the theories underlying practices of translation, see H. Goldblatt. Orthography and Orthodoxy. Constantine Kostenecki’s Treatise on Letters. (Skazanje Izbjavljeno o pismenex). (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1987).

*Wallachia and Moldavia acquired renown was not limited to Athos. The other sanctuaries of Orthodoxy, Balkan and Oriental, and the four patriarchates under Greek hegemony also knew its benefits.*²⁰

This was to be the beginning of a long and fruitful collaboration. The many monastic foundations, whether small cells or large monasteries in the land we call Romania have been linked with Mount Athos for at least six hundred years of its history. There has been a mutual support of monastic life and prayer shared between them. As Paisius Velichovsky would learn on his journeys in the eighteenth century, he had many ancestors. In Romania today this same bond joins the spiritual life of her people with the Holy Mountain. It is almost impossible to imagine the one without the other.²¹

Our particular concern is with the transmission of the teachings of the Fathers that went on in the monasteries of Athos, especially teachings concerning interior prayer. It is important here to emphasize what this transmission was not so that we do not go looking for something we are not going to find. It was not a mere “passing on” (the literal meaning of *paradosis* or *traditio*) of learning for its own sake, as a special object of study. Rather to “pass on” texts and the teachings contained in them was to keep alive an authentic spiritual practice. The fathers and mothers of Egypt and Palestine, and of Constantinople, taught realities that the copyists were living and practicing. At. Anthony the Great, Barsanuphius of Gaza, John Climachos, or Simeon the New Theologian were close relatives in the spiritual life.²²

²⁰ P. S. Nasturel. Le Mont Athos et les Roumains. Recherches sur leurs relations du milieu du XVe siècle à 1654. (Rome, 1986), p. 29.

²¹ For monastic life in Romania today, see the account of Mother Cassiana. Come, Follow Me. Orthodox Monasticism in Moldavia. (Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life Publishing, 1991); also chapter on Romania, pp. 203-251 in V. Clark. Why Angels Fall.

²² Much the same again, could be said of monks in the West. For monks and culture in the West, the classic work remains Jean Leclercq. The Love of Learning and the Desire for God, available in several editions.

An early example of this spiritual and intellectual work is a translation group or combination of groups, of Slavicized Bulgars on Athos from the tenth century. Describing productions of this team, Tachiaos explains: “Both the language and the handwriting of these manuscripts show that they come from a literary milieu which already has a long tradition and permit us to accept them as examples of the work of a team well-versed in literary work.”²³ From the eleventh century Athos becomes “a centre of Byzantino-Slavic literary collaboration,” (Tachiaos, p. 6) which it will continue to be until the time of Paisius. Literary and spiritual collaboration will go hand in hand. The work of the spiritual teacher who instructs a disciple is usually involved in the passing on of texts, copied as expertly as possible. Spiritual and literary practice are two expressions of one reality: the life of interior prayer. Such a use of a manual activity as copying as well as its combination with interior prayer would find ample justification in the teaching of the desert saints. St. Sava of Serbia can serve as an example of this relation between prayer and literary production. Son of King Stephan, Sava wandered about after his father’s death in 1200 and spent much time on Athos as a monk. He is considered as a founder of at least five types of Serbian literature: monastic writings, biography, sacred poetry, letter-writing and translation. (See Tachiaos, p. 9ff.) At this time on Athos, Sava would have encountered monks such as those described by the Russian Dosifej of the Kievan Lavra, who reported that “in the isolated cells inhabited by the more ascetic monks, a typikon of reading the Psalter was observed...but more emphasis was placed on the ‘Jesus prayer.’” (Tachiaos, p. 10, n. 26) This is a highly valuable witness to the importance of this form of prayer at this time, a continuation and development of the early desert tradition and of the exact prayer practice described by Climachus.

When we reach the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, we find a full-blown work of spiritual and literary renewal (renaissance), part of an “Orthodox internationalism” (to use

²³ A. Tachiaos. “Mount Athos and the Slavic Literatures,” p. 5.

Tachiaos' phrase). At the Great Lavra in the early fourteenth century, Slavic monks are busy at work translating Greek texts of such writers as Isaac the Syrian into Slavic languages. Here is the beginning of the work that will later be the *Philokalia*. The *Life of Gregory of Sinai*, an important hesychastic teacher, informs us that Gregory had a circle of Greek and Slavic monks he took with him to Bulgaria. One of the first (if not the first) Romanian writers, the monk Nicodemus, had lived on Athos and had been educated in these same circles. (See Tachiaos, p. 18 and notes for details) In terms of manuscripts, relations became reciprocal. Many Slavic manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries found their way to Athos. Of these a "majority of the material...is provided by the collection of texts generally known as *Sborniki* (florilegia)...made up of various texts, whose number and variety of subject-matter make us consider them invaluable encyclopedias of the era." (Ibid., pp. 19-20) Many of these *Sborniki* are made up of monastic spiritual writings. Thus there comes to be a mutual borrowing and sharing of works and the traditions shaping these works between Athos and Slavic lands, a pattern that will be reinvigorated by the work of the Ukrainian Paisius Velichovsky and his disciples in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the Ukraine, Moldavia and in Russian centers such as Optina.

But we would miss half of the story if we were to think that spiritual traditions, especially the tradition of hesychasm or the prayer of the heart were passed on mainly through written words. They were to be as much spoken words passed on from elders to disciples in answer to the great request of the desert: "give me a word that I may live."²⁴ As the Byzantine Empire crumbled from forces at work both within and without, by the mid-fifteenth century there was a "Byzantium after Byzantium."²⁵ This survival was made possible in large part by

²⁴ On word and words in the desert, see the valuable study of D.E. Burton-Christie. *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*. (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²⁵ N. Iorga. *Byzance après Byzance*. (Paris: Editions Balland, 1992); also collection of essays edited by John J. Yiannias. *The Byzantine Tradition*

the work of monastic copyists and scholars who have been wrongly accused by some of being obscurantist and anti-intellectual. The mere fact that these monks rejected Latin learning (aspects of scholasticism and a “new” humanism, such as that patronized by Barlaam of Calabria) does not mean they were hostile or indifferent to the intellect.²⁶ Rather they believed the treasure of the Christian life was elsewhere.

In the southern Slavic lands of Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania and the Ukraine, the monastic revival continued. Such Byzantine figures as St. Gregory Palamas revived and enriched a teaching on interior prayer that reached back to St. Basil the Great.²⁷ “Byzantium after Byzantium” was to inherit it. Witnesses to this continuation of the hesychast tradition in the Balkan lands are not just literary. Much painting and architecture (including the famous painted churches of Romania with outside iconography) embodied the bringing of the mind into the heart.²⁸ Probably of even greater importance was the cultivation of interior prayer, the prayer of hesychia in the many hermitages, sketes and monasteries of these lands. In the case of Wallachia and Moldavia, there is an explosion of monastic growth in the period after the fall of Constantinople. It is into these monastic centers that works such as those collected by a special delegation sent by King Alexander the Good to Constantinople will be brought. Thus, there will be an abundant material for literary and spiritual study as for pictorial art and

After the Fall of Constantinople. (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1991).

²⁶ A very balanced view of the different currents of thought in later Byzantium, including hesychast and humanist writers such as Barlaam is provided by S. Runciman. The Last Byzantine Renaissance. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

²⁷ J. Meyendorff. Introduction a l’etude de Gregoire Palamas. Patristica Sorbonensia 3. (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1959). Throughout this work, Meyendorff shows Patristic background to Palamas’ thought.

²⁸ M. M. Vasic. “L’hesychasme dans l’Eglise et l’Art des Serbes due moyen age,” pp. 110-123 in L’Art Byzantin chez les Slaves. Les Balkans. (Paris: Geuthner, 1930). For Romanian painted churches, see G. Nandris. Christian Humanism in the Neo-Byzantine Mural-Painting of Eastern Europe. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1970).

music in the translation of the living relics of Byzantium. Within such a hospitable environment the prayer of the heart and its teaching will be cultivated. The left bank of the Ukraine in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries will be a place especially open to influences from its western and southern neighbors.²⁹

II. Paisius Velichkovsky: Learning and the Prayer of the Heart

For all practical, if not spiritual purposes, young Petr Velichkovsky had a comfortable and prestigious life ahead of him. Although he had lost his father at the age of four, he could look forward to inheriting his father's position (and also that of his grandfather and great-grandfather) as protopresbyter in the Cathedral of Poltava. There would be marriage, a family, and the esteem of a community.³⁰ Poltava itself was a rather prosperous town at the crossroads of important trade routes, enjoying peace after many years of war and plunder.³¹ The metropolitan of Kiev was so impressed with a recitation young Petr gave that he declared him successor to the protopresbyter position held by his forbears and urged his mother to enroll him in the schools of Kiev. A promising career had begun.

Or so it seemed at least until Petr began to learn about the vibrant monastic life in the territories around Kiev. This interest was kindled by contact with a monk attached to the

²⁹ For hesychasm in the Ukraine, see S. Senyk. "L'hesychasme dans le monachisme ukrainien," *Irenikon*, 1989, pp. 172-212; also her translation with Introduction. Manjava Skete. Ukrainian Monastic Writings of the Seventeenth Century. Cistercian Studies Series, no. 192. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2001).

³⁰ For biographical details, see Paisius' autobiography as presented in J.M.E. Featherstone, ed. The Life of Paisij Velyckovskyj. (Cambridge, MA: Ukrainian Research Institute of Harvard University, 1989), pp. 4-5.

³¹ For background on Poltava, see Father Sergii Chetverikov. Starets Paisij Velyckovskii. His Life, Teachings, and Influence on Orthodox Monasticism. (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1980), chapter 1. Unfortunately, the English version of Chetverikov has no notes or other explanatory material. It would be helpful to know more about the sources of this valuable biographical study.

Academy in the Brotherhood Monastery of the Epiphany, Father Pachomius and by Father Pachomius' library. As Paisius himself tells us: "I felt no small longing and love for the monastic life, the more so when I befriended several others who had a similar longing and intention toward monasticism and especially after I had been deemed worthy to find as an instructor and guide in this the most pious hieromonk, Father Paxomij...Sometimes through his own invaluable words, sometimes by instructing me to read, this man with his books kindled in my soul a longing for monasticism."³² Here at an early age we find the three essential ingredients which blended together to direct Paisius' life: friends, books and the monastic way. If we study his life and his many journeys carefully, we shall find these always present. A love of learning combines with a love of companions and a thirst for spiritual experience and direction. This is the witness his valuable autobiography provides us with. Such a vision of his life was soon to set Paisius at direct odds with the received wisdom and career patterns of his time.

Perhaps the most defining event in Paisius' life in terms of his future direction was his confrontation with the authorities of the Kiev Academy. He had been taking less and less interest in his formal studies and a companion had complained to the head of the school about the seeming peril to his friend's career as well as wasting his mother's money. (A familiar story today as much as it was in the eighteenth century Ukraine!) What is not so familiar is the motivation behind Paisius' lack of interest in the curriculum.³³ He preferred the different curriculum of the

³² Autobiography, p. 7.

³³ Yet we also need to be careful not to draw too sharp a contrast between monastic and scholastic elements. It would be most accurate to describe a growing scholastic climate in Orthodox Russia and Eastern Europe, one which owed much to humanistic traditions and to the Enlightenment. Kiev was one of the main centers, partly because of geographical proximity to Poland and Western Europe. Existing along side of these currents of thought, there had long been a strong and at times fierce eremitic and wandering ascetic tradition. Monks could be troublesome politically as well as spiritually. On hermits and wandering monks in Russia, see: The Northern Thebaid. Monastic Saints of the

monastic life and the example of the caves in Kiev, the wisdom of an earlier culture. He was to set himself directly against the principal intellectual and spiritual currents of his time; against elements brought in to the Ukraine, Russia and other Slavic lands from the Enlightenment of western Europe. Paisius dared question a form of training that owed much to the Jesuits and Tsar Peter the Great's desire to remake Russia in the image of Europe.³⁴ (In some ways and unknowingly, Paisius anticipates the Slavophile movement of the early nineteenth century in Russia. One of its most important members, Ivan Kireevsky, had extensive contacts with Optina and helped substantially in the production of patristic works edited and/or retranslated earlier by Paisius.) Very much in the manner of Benedict of Nursia in Italy in the sixth century, he wanted to be (in the words of Benedict's biographer) "knowledgeably ignorant and wisely untaught," *scienter nescius et sapienter indoctus*. These words would apply very well to Paisius at this time in his life.³⁵

Russian North. Introduction by I.M. Kontzevich. (Platina, CA: Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1975) and G.B. Michels. At War with the Church. Religious Dissent in Seventeenth Century Russia. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). Michels uses much archival material relating to monastic interaction with society and government. For the biography of an eminent prelate of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century who was also much involved in encouraging learning: K. A. Pappmehl. Metropolitan Platon of Moscow (Petr Levshin. 1737-1812): The Enlightened Prelate, Scholar and Educator. (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1983). We can see the strong influence of western scholastic modes of thought in the Ukraine and Russia in the portraits of authors given in S. Tyszkiewicz, S.J. Moralistes de Russie. (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1951).

³⁴ Besides items listed in note 3, see the larger cultural picture presented in J.G. Garrard, ed. The Eighteenth Century in Russia. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973). Father Georges Florovsky. Ways of Russian Theology. (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1979), pt. 1, chapter 5, "Struggle for Theology."

³⁵ See Gregory the Great. De Vita et Miraculis Venerabilis Benedicti Abbatis. Book II of Gregory's Dialogues. Latin text and edition with French translation in A. De Vogue, ed. Sources Chretiennes, vol. 260, pp. 126-127. An English version is available, translated by H. Costello

Let us allow Petr (later Paisius) to speak for himself as we notice the exact picture of the intellectual life he paints, a life he is to reject for a different life of the mind and spirit:

My first reason for leaving my secular studies is my unswerving intention to become a monk: fearing the unknown hour of death, I desire, if only I could, to go off as soon as possible to such a place where, God helping, I should be able to fulfill my intention. A second reason is that I feel no benefit to my soul from secular studies; for hearing in these studies the oft-mentioned names of the gods and goddesses of the Greeks and the tales of their poets, I have come to hate such studies from the very bottom of my soul. – (Autobiography, p. 18)

Very harsh words indeed, especially from a young man who must have appeared to the headmaster or rector as not only insubordinate, but an intolerable stuffed-shirt. It is not hard to be sympathetic to such a reaction. Where is this young man coming from anyway? But Paisius goes on to explain:

A third reason is that I have considered the fruits of this learning upon the spiritual leaders of monastic rank: how they live in great honor and glory and in all manner of bodily ease like secular dignitaries, dressing themselves in costly garments and riding in state in splendid carriages drawn by choice horse. To this I say, heaven forbid! – not in condemnation, but with fear and trembling lest if I remained long enough in the schools and having acquired secular learning, then became a monk, I too should suffer not only this, but because of the weakness of my soul, something ten thousand times worse, succumbing to all manner of spiritual and bodily passions. These then are the

and E. de Bhalraithe as Gregory the Great. The Life of Saint Benedict. (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's, 1993), p. 3.

reasons why I have abandoned my secular studies. – (Ibid., p. 19).

If we are to believe the young man's account, there is much more involved here than a distaste for a curriculum or even a condemnation of his academic masters. Rather there is a certain realism and self-knowledge. Petr fears that he might indeed become someone he would himself despise. He contrasts this in his own mind to the monastic life as he had experienced it, as little as that had been. He resolves to pursue his vision which he sees as his own moral and spiritual salvation. To do so, he will need to work around and then confront directly his mother's deep disappointment at his choices as well as the strong disapproval of the Kiev Academy. Petr was to choose a "counter-culture" that was alive and well in the forests and hills of Moldavia, Wallachia, Serbia and parts of the Ukraine, an alternative spiritual world of the prayer of the heart.³⁶ The brand of monastic life he was to seek out was considered radical and dangerous. Wandering and rebellious monks had been a thorn in the side of established church and state from at least the time of Patriarch Nikon in the seventeenth century, if not earlier. Paisius was to ally himself with what were definitely viewed as "fringe" elements in his society.³⁷

³⁶ Paisius' account bears every trait of authenticity according to most scholars who have examined the text. It is most likely that it was dictated for his successors with the larger community as its audience. Its title, given by Paisius, begins: "A narrative concerning the holy community of fathers and brethren, my spiritual children, most beloved in the Lord who in Christ's name have gathered about me" – Autobiography, p. 3. Tachiaos describes this text in his "Introduction": "It frequently reveals a childlike naiveté and a spontaneity that make his work not only vivid, but powerful and convincing as well. The Autobiography presents an accurate portrait of its author. His sincerity, somewhat confessional in nature, infects the entire text from beginning to end and imbues the portrait of the author with its distinctive features." – pp. xxiii-xxiv.

³⁷ The radical monastic tradition, if we can call it that, was also a direct heir of those who stressed "non-possession" of material goods by monks and their communities. St. Nil Sorskij, a strong advocate of this point of view, was an important inspiration for Paisius. See G.A. Maloney, S.J. Russian Hesychasm. The Spirituality of Nil Sorskij. (The Hague:

So it was that Petr, later to be Paisius, set out on his journeys. Very much like the pilgrim in The Pilgrim's Tale (Way of the Pilgrim), he was to seek a way to learn the practice of prayer and to find teachers. From the first moments of his journey, he was also to encounter texts and engage himself in the copying and preservation of them.

One of the first of these, very appropriately, was John Climachus' Ladder, a foundation of Orthodox monastic prayer and practice:

*One day he (the abbot of the monastery of Ljubec) summoned me and gave me the book of our father John Climachus...saying to me, 'Take this book, brother; read it with diligent attention and be instructed in holy obedience and in every good deed, for it is a book of great benefit to the soul.'*³⁸

In great delight he reads it and sets out to copy it "in the silence of the night, in order that I might have it for the constant benefit of my soul. Now I had no candles for nearly all the brethren of that monastery burned splinters for light, so I also lit a splinter which was some seven feet in length, and thrust it into a crack in the wall. Asking God's help, I began to copy the book with great difficulty on account of the smoke, for having nowhere to go, it was forced downward and filled my cell." (Ibid., p. 31) Similar scenes take place throughout Paisius' life, and his final moments will be filled with the busy copying and corrections of texts. Certainly this would be a better use of his talents than was his earlier "obedience" as cellarer in charge of food supplies. Paisius admits: "I performed this obedience with fervor, but it was completely beyond my ability." Perhaps his practical and managerial skills would increase in later life,

Mouton, 1973); also in greater detail, J. Spidlik. Joseph de Volokolamsk, un chapitre de la spiritualite russe. (Roma: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum, 1956); Orientalia Christiana Analecta, no. 146; S. Bolshakoff. Russian Nonconformity; the Story of "Unofficial" Religion in Russia. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1950), chapter 3.

³⁸ Autobiography, p. 31.

especially as he had to direct communities.³⁹ But texts, their reading and copying and the spiritual life they nurtured, were always his real love.

Later, while on Mount Athos, at the end almost of his period of wanderings and settlings in search of a teaching of the practice of prayer, Paisius makes a great discovery of manuscripts of the Fathers, almost by accident. It appears that most of the brethren at a location he visited had little concern for the use of these texts. But they did, at least know of their existence. Paisius describes his discovery thus:

Nevertheless my hope in God was not destroyed and I prayed to him to help me find the precious sources. My gentle and merciful God answered my fervent prayer. I finally found the books for which I was searching and some I even obtained as personal possessions. My good fortune happened in the following way. On one occasion I was traveling with two monks from the St. Athanasius Lavra to the St. Anna Skete and I was passing near the high hill of the Prophet Elias Skete...A novice noticed us and immediately invited us to his cell. He went to find some food to give us after our journey. As I stood at the open window of his cell, I noticed an open book on his little table. It was obviously the transcription of some monk. I examined it more closely and discovered that it was a text by St. Peter the Damascene. Ineffable joy flooded my soul. I felt that I had found a heavenly treasure on earth....In reply to my further inquiries, he (the novice) disclosed where I could find other ascetical books: the works of St. Anthony the Great, St. Gregory the Sinaite, St. Philotheus, St. Hesychius, St. Diodochus, St.

³⁹ But practical skills such as baking the community's bread, etc., never seem to have been a strength. Paisius' autobiography attests to this. (Autobiography, pp. 72-74, "Paisij is an awkward baker.")

*Thalassius, St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Nicephorus, St. Isaiah and others.*⁴⁰

This list will be almost exactly the list of works that will be included in the library of Optina, the fruit of the translation and editorial work of Paisius' later monastic disciples.⁴¹

Paisius finishes his account of the bibliographic discovery by extolling the importance of erudition and translation:

When I asked him (the novice) why I had been unable to locate any of these books, he answered that no one was able to read them. They were written in pure Hellenic Greek which none but educated Greeks could read. Thus, these books were almost completely forgotten. The novices who had just arrived from Caesarea Cappadocia came to Athos when they heard about these books. They learned not only colloquial Greek but ancient Greek as well in order to copy these books and to study them as best they could. Filled with joy over the news I had heard, I begged the novice to make copies of his books for me and promised to pay whatever sum he would require.

Such a treasure trove makes us wonder what other marvels were hidden in the monasteries of Athos at this time. In a period of relative indifference to such literary works from the past, the discovery is all the more notable.

Paisius' love for the texts that express the tradition of the prayer of the heart will continue throughout the rest of his life as he settles in such communities as Dragomirna.⁴² To the very end of his life, often at considerable physical trial to himself, he continues to translate and correct texts. It is an act of

⁴⁰ See Paisius' account of his discovery of books as given in Chetverikov, pp. 121-124.

⁴¹ For a list of books prepared and published at Optina under its early Elder Macarius, see Father Leonid Kavelin. Elder Macarius of Optina. The Optina Elders Series, III. (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1995), chapter 4: "Publication of Patristic Books."

⁴² See Chetverikov, pp. 131-157, part IV, chapter 1.

asceticism as much as of learning. And it is an activity that provides balance for his own practice of eldership. Comforting a monk who felt he must be a nuisance with his continual struggle with his thoughts, Paisius remarks:

Why are you so stupid? Do as I do. I argue with you all day, and with some I weep, with others I rejoice and do other things. When I throw you out of my cell, I throw out all my thoughts with you. Then I take a book into my hands and I hear nothing as if I am keeping silence in the Jordanian Desert. (quoted in Chetverikov, p. 156)

Clearly the book and the care of his brethren went together for Paisius. Such will be the practice at Optina, refounded by his disciples.⁴³ There the elder and the disciple, instructed by a reading and a living of the Fathers, were to be open books – one to the other.

⁴³ Theodosius, a monk of the Manjava skete in the Ukraine in the seventeenth century, speaks of the intimate bond between word and the person speaking the word in a similar fashion: “The written word, as one wise man has said, is a dumb philosopher who understands much but cannot tell people what he understands. In the same way, writing contains the understanding of many things but cannot talk of itself. For this it needs a servant and leader to carry out in deed for the disciples what has been bequeathed so that the written word may become a salvific deed.” – S. Senyk, translated and edited Manjava Skete, p. 35.

Mihaela Albu

**Byzantium In The Romanian
Theatrical Literature
(Valeriu Anania's and Marin Sorescu's theatre)**

„Byzantium, with all it represented... as a complex of institutions, a political system, a religious formation, a type of civilization, comprising the Hellenic intellectual legacy, Roman law, the Orthodox religion, and everything it created and preserved in terms of art – did not disappear, and could not disappear with the fall, in succession, in the fifteenth century of its three capitals”, appreciated the great Romanian scholar Nicolae Iorga in *Byzantium after Byzantium*.¹ This formula became well-known and defines concisely the permanence of the Byzantine ideal, of “Byzantine” culture.

In his Preface to the English version of Iorga's book, Virgil Candea notes many commentaries and echoes of it. In one of them, *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas*, the author, Georg Stadtmuller underlined the importance of Iorga's studies: the book has “the merit of dealing for the first time in a convincing manner with the continuation of Byzantine cultural life under Otoman domination.”²

So, that so called “Byzantium after Byzantium” means first of all the continuity of a great form of civilization, the vitality of its ideas in every domain.

Charles Diehl argued (in his *Les grand problemes de l'histoire Byzantine*³) that all of Eastern Europe preserved for a long time and still preserves the memory of this civilization. This could happen because “Byzantium” was first of all a civilization; it was religion, art, literature, style of life and it is

¹ Nicolae Iorga, *Byzantium after Byzantium*, Iași, Oxford, Portland, 2000, p. 20

² Idem, p. 5

³ Charles Diehl, *Les grand problemes de l'histoire Byzantine* - Paris, 1943

not surprising that its continuity was especially a spiritual continuity.

“Byzantinism” as a “phenomenon” was seen by Nicolae Iorga as “one of the most fascinating in all of history”⁴ because it represented an “ideal”. This ideal was also spread by the emigrants, by their descendents and also by artists who admired these “indestructible ideals” hundreds of years after the fall of Constantinople, “this city which comprised an entire world”

In a Conference („Byzantine Literature – Its Meaning, Its Divisions and Its Importance”⁵, Iorga said also that „there are some elements that survived the Byzantine Empire, after the conquest of Constantinople; there are also some elements which come from this Byzantine world (a world that was not only a Greek one) and these elements still live today (...) therefore, there is something Byzantine in Bulgarian, Serbian, Romanian and Turkish civilizations.”

Romanian literature reveals „this something Byzantine”, these Byzantine elements because history was and still remains an important subject for Romanian’s authors. After the romantic writers - Hasdeu, Vasile Alecsandri, Al. Davilla, Delavrancea -, from the beginning till the end of the 20th century many other playwrights (Horia Lovinescu, Ion D. Sirbu, Valeriu Anania, Ion Luca, Vasile Voiculescu, D. R. Popescu, Marin Sorescu) published historical dramas.

It is obvious that a subject like “Byzantium” and the time “after Byzantium” were a great temptation for Romanian authors.

I selected to present two writers (and three plays), the two playwrights being very distinct in their style, and in their manner of approaching historical subjects. Valeriu Anania and Marin Sorescu are representative for the modern Romanian drama because their plays speak about two different historical periods using two different points of view about history.

⁴ Nicolae Iorga, op. cit., p. 26

⁵ Idem, „Byzantine Literature – Its Meaning, Its Divisions and Its Importance”, published in *Literatura Bizantului*, „Univers” Publishing House, Bucharest, 1971

Valeriu Anania (b.18. 03. 1921) started writing poems in 1931. At 16, a play by Valeriu Anania was broadcasted on the radio. In 1939, Nicolae Iorga himself suggested to a group of actors to perform one of his plays. Since then he continued to write theatre.

A play entitled *Greul pamantului. Mit valah in devenire*⁶ is very difficult to be translated, but I'll risk a possible translation of the title: "The Body of the Land. A Wallachian Myth".

This is not a real historical play because in Anania's work the reader can find a special relationship between history and tradition, between history and myth, between written documents and oral traditions. However, the latter in each pairs is more important for the author especially because his intention is to reveal the ancient times, proto-history and to imagine the life of our ancestors. History itself consists of their life, their beliefs, their habits, but these are more than history, they are myths. This is the reason that Anania's plays can be understood also as fairy-tales, as stories that speak about a mythical world. However, this world existed and we know about its existence from historical documents. Although they reveal real facts and real people, these documents cannot speak about the heart and the soul of those people. We could say that a fictional man, even though he is created by an author's imagination, has more life and could become more real than a historical character. Valeriu Anania, like other authors, knew this and wrote his plays selecting the characters especially from ordinary people.

Thus, in *Greul pamantului*, the author succeeded in writing real characters with those created by his imagination.

The place is the Wallacho-Bulgarian kingdom of the Asan family. About this, Gheorghe Bratianu, a historian who revealed a new approach of this science wrote that the

⁶ Valeriu Anania, *Greul pamantului. Mit valah in devenire*, "Eminescu" Publishing House, Bucharest, 1982.

Wallacho-Bulgarian Kingdom was a state where the Romanian people made a great contribution.⁷

⁷ Between 1185 –1189 the documents tell us about the Romanians' and the Bulgarians' revolt against Byzantium, under the leadership of brothers Assan and Peter, considered to have had Wallachian origin (they led the Wallachian shepherds in the Haemus-Balkan mountains). After this battle a powerful principality was set up, including the former Byzantine territories, located between the Danube and the Balkans, as well as most of the Thracian territory. This principality is known in history as the Bulgarian-Wallachian or Bulgarian Romanian Czardom. Târnovo was the capital of this czardom. The Byzantine historians Nicetas Choniates and Theodor Schuriates, as well as subsequent documents recognize the inestimable help given by Wallachians living in the Northern part of the Danube or by those of Romanian origin, to brothers Assan and Peter, likewise to the Bulgarians living in the area. "The setting up of the new Bulgarian state took place with Romanian help and this is an example of solidarity and cooperation for a common goal." Obviously, that Czardom also included the Timoc region and the valley of the Danube. "The victory of the insurgents and the setting up of the Romanian-Bulgarian Empire (the second Bulgarian Czardom) have a double meaning: firstly, the Wallachians living on the Southern bank of the Danube prove to be a force able to cooperate side by side with the Bulgarians in setting up a political-territorial structure, located naturally, following the tradition of the first Romanian-Bulgarian czardom, but with a Wallachian dynasty – the Dynasty of Assans. The evidence of the Assans' Romanian origin is shown – among others – by the correspondence between Ionitã Caloian (the Handsome), Assan's and Peter's brother and Pope Innocent III, to whom Ionitã had asked the recognition of his imperial title. Both of them invoke the Roman origin of the Romanians living in the Southern part of the Danube, which points out both the existence of the Wallachians' awareness of their Roman origin and the recognition granted by the papacy to this reality. Secondly, the Wallachian-Bulgarian victory consolidated the relations of the just created state with the Cumans living in the Northern part of the Danube and, through them, with the Romanians living in the Charpathian-Danubian space. The collaboration during the revolt facilitated the expansion of the Romanian-Bulgarian Empire beyond the Danube." After the killing of the two rulers, another of their brothers, Caloian Ionitã (1197-1207) ascends the throne. In 1203, emperor Caloian Ionitã and his army invaded the Vidin-Nis region, which he annexed to his empire. "The Romanian-Bulgarian Empire became the most powerful state in South-Eastern Europe"(http://www.romanii.ro).

However, because an artistic work is especially an interpretation and not a transcription of history, the theatre cannot be seen as presenting real facts like a textbook. The new reality, the reality of the art reveals a point of view and above all a manner, the author's manner of understanding both life and history.

Valeriu Anania's play can be placed in the large category of historical drama because some of the characters have documentary sources. But the play is more than history. It is a story about life and death, about a special love for the homeland, about old traditions and beliefs of a very old people who used to live on a territory placed so close to the Byzantine world.

It is obvious that the story starts in Byzantium, "near the gates of Vlaherna." The first scene is a symbolic one. The emperor is having his crown and cape - the signs of his power -, removed. Without these, this emperor becomes like any other simple man. This idea is sustained for the reader by the emperor's very common phrases. His first sentence is: "Do you hear the old horse?" (I have to mention here that in Romanian the word for "horse" is "martoaga", a word for an old valueless horse). However, this phrase is in a contradiction - 1st with our image about the emperor of Byzantium; 2nd - with the words of the other characters who glorify him (both in Latin and Greek) like a God. The emperor is concerned more about a horse race than about his kingdom. The first allusion to the kingdom is the one referring to the war with "the Vlachs and the Bulgars". In the dialogue a permanent relationship is revealed between historical allusions and an informal language.

Symbol and myth

Romanian historian of religion, Mircea Eliade has provided us with a helpful distinction between myth and fairy-tale or legend. Although mythic patterns are variously applied, Mircea Eliade says the following about them: "the world speaks to man and in order to understand this language it is enough to know myth and decode their symbols. By means of myths and

symbols of the world, man perceives the mysterious solidarity of time, birth, death, resurrection, sexuality, fertility, rain, vegetation and others."⁸

As I argued above, in Valeriu Anania's play, we can find symbolic characters and symbolic traditions, which are close to myths than to history. "Muma", an old spelling of the modern word "mama", represents "the Mother of the Earth" or The Earth itself, the Homeland where Ionita (Caloianul⁹) wants to return from Byzantium. But in his country he had no more place. His two brothers took even the land inherited from their parents. Without this inheritance, Ionita couldn't find his roots among the ancestors. There was a cemetery there, and Ionita couldn't disturb the silence of the dead.

Longing for his country and wanting to help his people to fight against Byzantium, he returns and – in the end – his death is presented like an integration with his homeland: he sinks as ground opens beneath him, keeping in his hand also some ground.

Therefore, theatre of Valeriu Anania is mythical-philosophic and lyrical-dramatic which express a viewpoint about a historical period that is little known to lay people.

⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Aspecte ale mitului*, Editura "Univers" Publishing House, Bucharest, 1978, p. 133

⁹ Caloianul (Romanian Rainmaker): "Caloianul" is a figure used in Romanian village rite rainmaker. He looks like a man and is adorned with flowers. In summer time, women and children from the dry regions gather and model this "Caloian". They invoke the rain and her advantages (blessings) through a procession. Everybody then gather at the border of the village. They also can invite the priest of the village and together they adorn a young tree. They use fresh fruit pretzels and candies. After that, the group simulates the funeral of the "Caloian". First they carry it to the dry fields. In the end they bury the "Caloian", throwing it into a river. The waters of the river must carry it far away, thus bringing rains. During the procession, the children and women cry and mourn. The priest says prayers for the invoker of the rain. In other Romanian regions dancing and singing accompany this ritual. The invoked rain appears even a day or two after this ritual. In popular belief it is said that only the "Caloian" has unfastened the rains. ([www. google/ caloianul](http://www.google.com/search?q=caloianul))

Another Romanian author, Marin Sorescu, wrote philosophical theatre.

The time soon after the fall of Byzantium produced Marin Sorescu to speak about it. It is history but it is more than that. It is his own point of view about the old time and about a well-known character – Vlad Dracula.

Marin Sorescu was born in 1936 and died in 1996. He was a member of the Romanian Academy and of Academy Mallarme in Paris. During his life, he received many international prizes and his books were translated in English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Russian, Bulgarian, Polish, Hungarian, Swedish, and Dutch etc. His first volume was a volume of parodies, *Singur printre poeti* (Alone among Poets); after which he continued with other volumes of poetry that created a new style in Romanian literature, "Marin Sorescu's style".

The same happened with the other important "chapter" of his work - the theatre.

Another Romanian playwright, Camil Petrescu said once about theatre that it is "an event with men". But Marin Sorescu's theatre isn't only about such events, but also about dramatized narratives, and moves toward philosophy, toward interpretation.

Reading or watching his performances, anybody can observe that the theatre as a scene, as a show with all of its classical accepted characteristics, with its materiality is overtaken in Marin Sorescu's work by another kind of theatre. In this anti-theatre all the tragically laws were denied, including the narrative one. Here ideas and symbols are the primary focus.

Therefore, in any of his plays, the dialogue is charged with a philosophical sense that eliminates in part or almost totally the story. Aware like many modern authors of his technique, in *Exit through the Sky*, Marin Sorescu confessed that if his plays, *Jonah*, *Cousin Shakespeare*, *The Verger*, *The Matrix* "are read without any dialogue, they can become a book

of philosophy."¹⁰ The narrative and the dialogue are converted therefore into the essay, in a philosophical discourse.

In this sense, in a Postface of his volume of poetry, *The Youth of Don Quijote*, the author's confessions of poetry can be understood with a general meaning - for all his creation: "The function of a poem is rather one of knowledge. It must include philosophy. The poet, is either a thinker, or is nothing. The real poet is a philosopher."¹¹

History and myths, folklore and traditional beliefs can be found in Sorescu's work, and especially in his theatre. His work is interpreted by the point of view of the modern philosopher, master of the culture of the world.

Marin Sorescu's plays could be classified according to two themes: one theme is the essential man and the second theme is the historical man.

Therefore, the dramatist's interests are in two directions. One perspective is thinking and interpreting life; and the second perspective is destiny within the historical context.

History, as an element of the past, can be seen in correlation with the present, which the reader discovers only as an allusion. Together, these two temporal dimensions compose a major term, the political, which completes a triangle. Love and Death are general themes. They come from myth and prehistory. Politics is the modern man's preoccupation. Regarding this, we can observe that Marin Sorescu's theatre has common themes with Mircea Eliade's work, on one side, and with Eugen Ionescu's theatre, on the other. But, as anyone can see, M. Sorescu's theatre has also many differences from these two writers. It is myth and history, it is mythical synthesis, it is politics and history, but all are treated with an ironical style that succeeds in de-mystifying the historical taboo. His irony however is a tragic one.

¹⁰ Marin Sorescu, *Iesirea prin cer* (Exit through the Sky), "Eminescu" Publishing House, Bucharest, 1983

¹¹ Marin Sorescu, *Tineretea lui Don Quijote* (The Youth of Don Quijote), "Tineretului" Publishing House, Bucharest, 1968, p. 151

Marin Sorescu's interest in history was revealed in two plays – *Raceala* (A Cold) and *A treia țeapă* (The Third Stake). Both plays refer to one of the most interesting characters of Romanian history, Prince Vlad, who reigned in Wallahia after the fall of Constantinople. "I have tried to study, both as a poet and a playwright, several of this knots of world history which, when unraveled, have repercussions on Romanian history as well on my personal history, to coin a phrase. Such a knot is the fall of Byzantium."¹² Of course, the Romanian writer did not see Prince Vlad like Bram Stoker. "I have tried to see him rather differently, more in keeping with the historical truth, with an astonishment but also with an understanding that tragic destinies always awake in us."¹³

Dennis Deletant, the translator in an English version of *The Third Stake* like "Vlad Dracula the Impaler", considered that Vlad, in Marin Sorescu's drama is "a victim of his time."¹⁴

If the previous three plays by Sorescu (*Jonah*, *The Verger* and *the Matrix*) had a reduce number of characters (in *Jonah* only one, in the *Verger* and *the Matrix* – two), *A Cold* and *The Third Stake* have many and various characters. However, only Vlad and Mohamed are historical figures, and all the others are the author's creation.

In *A Cold* and *The Third Stake*, history becomes a pretext for the author's meditation about the role of a leader and about the destiny of a people. Both in *A Cold* and *The Third Stake* "the principal hero is, however, the common folk, who create through tens of individual destinies a great river of tragedy. A little medieval Romanian history does not go amiss amid so much world history, especially as the events have the value of an emblem, and, through translation, can be placed everywhere, and in any time, forwards or backwards. In their hear of hearts, at their spiritual core, people are the same everywhere, they have the same thoughts, the same aspirations.

¹² Idem, *Vlad Dracula- the Impaler (A treia țeapă)*, Forest Boks, London-Boston, 1987, p. 9

¹³ Idem, op. cit, p. 10

¹⁴ Idem, op. cit., p. VII

They get by as best they can and react identically in identical situations.” In these two plays, Marin Sorescu chose the two. Two of the commanders of the powerful Turkish army try to talk to him, but the Sultan is busy with ... writing a textbook and odes. As in all his literary creation, the irony is one of the main aspects of Sorescu’s style. However, he used two different kinds of irony: one for the Sultan which is closer to mockery; the second is for Vlad (and the Romanians). This irony reveals Sorescu’s intention to portray the intelligence of the Romanian prince. This is a special manner of revealing the author’s patriotism. As in Anania’s *The Body of the Land*, the principal characters, Toma (because Vlad does not actually appear on the stage), returns to his homeland because he has been wounded and wants to die there. Thus, he wishes to be integrated in the land of his forefathers.

CONCLUSIONS

We can conclude, after a very short presentation, that in these two writers’ plays the audience/ readers will watch/ read – besides historical facts – an analysis of them, an analysis of life. The historical characters live in their time, but also think about their main role in history. The authors took historical facts as pretexts for a modern analysis, a modern point of view about this complex period of world history, “one of the most fascinating in the history”, the Romanian Byzantinism.

Napoleon Savescu

A new approach to the origin of the Romanian people

The Carpatho-Danubian space bears the oldest vestiges of man's existence and activities in Europe, indicating its belonging to the vast area of anthropogenesis.

In Valcea County, at Bugiulesti, an important number of animal bones lead back to the Villafranchian period. Human osteological remains found at Ohaba Ponor Cave (two hand phalanxes and a foot one) belonging to *Homo sapiens neanderthalensis* speak of a different historical period.

The Cave of the Crow, once a settlement near today's Brosteni, Gorj County, dated with radioactive carbon, proved to have been inhabited 47,550 years ago. Obviously, we cannot say much about these remote ancestors of the Carpatho-Danubian people. Some of the most tragic moments in the history of the Carpatho-Danubian Space were spurred by political historians who tried to manipulate the past. One can only feel so weak and helpless in front of these scholars who come to such aberrant, illogical conclusions about the history of the Carpatho-Danubian people that one may wonder whether it would be better to stay out of their "business". Truth asks for two things: it takes someone to utter it and someone to hear it.

We shall try today to take the first step by speaking of the real ancestors of the Carpatho-Danubian Space.

1. Some scholars believe that because of the similarities between Romanian and Italian and especially Latin, the Romanians are the late descendants of the Romans. Especially because the latter conquered Dacia in 106 AD (Dacia, the old name for the Carpatho-Danubian land nowadays inhabited by the Romanian people) for a period of 165 years.

2. Others hold that during these 165 years, the Roman troops imposed Latin to the native population which attributed to the complete disappearance of the local language. Only 14%

of Dacia was conquered by the Roman soldiers who must have spoken all languages other than Latin.

How did the first theory, adopted also by the Romanian government today, begin?

1. Nicolas Olahus who published his Geography of Hungary in 1558 took pride in the fact that he was of Roman lineage.

Seemingly, this theory of the questionable origin and descent of the Dacian-Romanians was embraced even by Pope Pius II. (according to it, the Dacian wives and daughters were “eager” to wed and join the Roman soldiers for no reason other than to learn Latin).

The Moldavian Chronicle, Grigore Ureche (1560 – 1647) traces back our ancestry to the “Ram” (Rome) because of the similarities between the language the Moldavians spoke and the one used by the population of the Italic Peninsula.

What scientific arguments could he have provided 500 years ago that could support such a theory? It is hard to answer. Seemingly, leading an isolated monastic life he must have based his theory on intuition only. The harm that he did to the history of the Dacian – Romanian people has been hard to imagine.

However, what can one say about those who took over his theory only to spread it out proudly?

Miron Costin (1633 – 1691), another scholar of the Moldavian history, as if trying to overtake his predecessor, started to popularize the idea and translate it into other languages, Polish included. (See his Polish Poem). He emigrated from Poland to Moldavia when he was 18, after studying in a Jesuit college not only Polish, but also Italian and especially Classic Latin.

However, they are not the only promoters of the theory supporting the Roman descent of the Moldavian, Wallachian, and Transylvanian people (who even back then shared, as they do today, the same language, very similar with Latin).

The 17th century brings two other brilliant scholars, Dimitrie Cantemir and Constantin Cantacuzino, who took over and spread even farther this theory of Roman descent. (although

Dimitrie Cantemir himself speaks at some point about “our Dacian language”).

In the 18th and 19th century, a movement called “The School of Ardeal” promoted the introduction of the above theory into schools, colleges and universities.

In 1908, a great professor named, Nicolae Iorga (whose mother’s maiden name was Arghiropol) made another approach to the so-called theory of the “Romanization” of the Dacian people, during the first conference of the Popular University at Valenii de Munte. This was a regrettable hypothesis that slowed down the Dacian research for a few hundred years.

2. However, let us see who are those who consider the Geto-Dacians the bravest among the Dacians, the true ancestors of the Carpatho-Danubians and of today’s Daco-Romanians.

In 1554, Joannes Magnus published in Rome his Historia de Omnibus Gothorum which speaks of the Geto-Dacians as of the founders of Europe. According to him, Zamolxis created or enacted the first written laws in the history of mankind, which would inspire the Athenian ones and almost all the legislation of the ancient world. He published not only Zamolxis’s laws but also the Getic alphabet. I wonder why Grigore Ureche, the Moldavian erudite scholar, did not read his book which had been written in Medieval Latin when Grigore was 6 years old. Was it his young age that stopped this well-learned Moldavian scholar from reading this book?

In 1597, in Lyon, the brilliant scholar Bonaventura Vulcanius published his De literis et lingua Getarum sive Gotharum. At the time, Grigore Ureche was 37 years old, but again, unfortunately, for all his erudition, he does not seek to go beyond the knowledge he had acquired there which came from a remote monastery in Moldavia.

The year 1687 bears a special significance in the history of the Carpatho-Danubian space; at Upsala, Carolus Lundius, the president of the Swedish Academy of Sciences, published his Zamolxis Primus Getarum Legislator, providing extremely well-documented information about the Geto-Dacians (unfortunately this was long after Grigore Ureche had died). However, the thesis could have been studied and further

approached by Miron Costin, the Moldavian scholar, 54 years old at the time (his violent death, by decapitation, four years later followed his accusation, by the then Moldavian prince, for being involved in espionage for the Poles).

Still, documents speaking of the continuity of the Dacians on this land in the 11th century have been found within the borders of the Carpatho-Danubian Space too. Codex Rohonczi mentions that the Dacian writing went from right to left and from down upwards. This might explain why the sermon in the Orthodox Church was using Dacian, “vulgar” Latin. The first musical notes in the European history, “The Hymn of the Blachi Youth”, were the expression of these people’s loyalty towards their country and sovereign, Vlad.

In Transylvania, Nicolae Densuseanu (1846-1911), one of the greatest personalities of the Carpatho-Danubian people, finds the courage to fight the world and cast a different light on the already-existing theory. The Carpatho-Danubians’ roots, according to him, do not go back to the year 106 AD; these people’s history spans back thousands of years ago to a time when our ancestry was synonymous with heroism.

Nicolae Densuseanu’s made great efforts to bring to light the true historical past of his people. His pride and love for the country inhabited by the Carpatho-Danubians and whose boundaries were only linguistically marked, encouraged the scientific research, despite the opposition he faced. Proto-Latin, Pelasgian Dacia was the country he loved and sacrificed for. His Prehistoric Dacia was published posthumously, in 1913.

Years later, in 1974, in California, Los Angeles, Marija Gimbutas, a European archaeology professor, published The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe. Sharing the same view on the above-mentioned theory, Marija Gimbutas refers to the Carpatho-Danubian Space as "the cradle of Ancient Europe", while she calls its inhabitants the creators and founders of the European civilization, long before the Greek and Judeo-Christian civilizations flourished.

There is one self-evident aspect: the Carpatho-Danubians, the oldest European people, second only to the Indians, according to Herodotus, could not have disappeared

overnight, after a temporary, partial invasion (only 14% of the Dacian territory was occupied by the Roman army).

The theory denying the Carpatho-Danubians' existence before the year 106 AD is simply unacceptable, although, unfortunately, this is what the Romanian schools and universities are preaching.

An unacceptable idea is that the Roman legions which conquered only 14% of Dacian territory had, in as little time as 165 years, the entire population – both under the Roman occupation and outside it – speak a new, Romanic language (while 86% of the Dacian territory was never conquered by the Romans).

Why are the history professors in Romania so certain that the Dacians learned Latin from the Roman army, which gathered soldiers from the four corners of the world, from Africa, Palestine, Germany, etc.?

Are they sure these Roman soldiers, coming from the most remote regions of the world, did speak Latin themselves?

What Codex Rohonczy, Joannes Magnus, Bonaventura Vulcanius, Carolus Lundius, N. Densuseanu, Marija Gimbutas, Dumitru Balasa, the priest and history researcher (see his Tale of Romanization), Ph.D. Prof. Augustin Deac (The Romanians, Geto-Dacians' Late Nephews) defend, was namely that the Dacians were speaking Vulgar Latin long before Rome itself existed, which seems by far more logical.

Daniela Anghel

**Vlad the Impaler
and his unbelievable Myth as “Dracula”**

For most vampire buffs, Dracula is the fiend who comes to haunt us and suck our blood at night-time. For a few others, he is the aristocratic Transylvanian count from Eastern Europe who wishes to conquer England and the rest of the world. For the Romanian nationalist, he represents the immortal hero of the race, ready to rise from his grave in defence of the fatherland at the hour of need, to paraphrase the poet Eminescu. It is the essential immortality of both hero and antihero that provides a trait common to both these extremes images of Dracula and Vlad the Impaler.¹

Several Romanian political leaders and strategists of exceptional abilities of the medieval period were successful in mobilizing the defensive resources of the small countries against one of the most formidable war machines of the Middle Ages: The Turkish Empire.

The Ottoman armies reached the Danube in the second half of the 14th century. For five centuries, the Romanian lands would be involved in conflicts designed to open for the Crescent a corridor to the heart of the Continent. Chronicles and documents rightly refer to this region as “the Gate of Europe,” and its defence became the Romanians’ permanent task.²

The papal energies were aimed at diverting attention from the problems within the Roman church by working at healing the schism between Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, which had divided the two churches since 1054.

¹ Florescu Radu R., Mc.Nally Raymond T. “Dracula Prince of Many Faces, Back Bay Books, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, New York, London, 1989, p.236

² Candea Virgil, An Outline of Romanian History, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1977, p.28-29

Reunion, in fact, was to be the precondition for a joint eastern and western crusade against the Turks.³

In this context, Radu Florescu describes Vlad the Impaler as the by-product of the Europe of his day-the Renaissance, essentially a period of transition with his accent of nationalism and secularism that is still very characteristic of our epoch.⁴

The Turks had advanced their frontier to the Danube; the border of what would eventually be Dracula's land, which at the time represented the frontier of European civilization.⁵

On September 26, 1459, in Mantova, Pope Pius II (1458-1464) a thorough "Europeanist" saw the Ottoman menace not merely as a danger for Eastern Europe, but for Christianity itself and proclaimed the anti-ottoman crusade and offered 100,000 ducats for a logistic organization. Only one European prince began the battle, and that was voivode Vlad Tepes of Wallachia who delivered a crushing defeat to Mehmed II Fatih (1444-1446, 1451-1481) the conqueror of Constantinople.

The image of a Christian hero was nevertheless rejected by the European consciousness, and the concept of perjurer and blood-thirsty sucker was accepted, which was accredited by Saxons and merchants, whose intentions were to fully seize the Romanian markets and attempts to dethrone the Vlach prince.

This plan was sustained by Matia Corvin (1458-1490), the King of Hungary, as well as embraced by German society. Mathia had received 40,000 ducats, and the Roman-German emperor Frederick III (1452-1493) had committed himself for the purpose of the foreseen crusade. Both spent their forces in this personal and fruitless rivalry opposing one another and crushing the unity of the threatened Western Europe.⁶

Pope Pius II was particularly disappointed with the Hungarian king who had pocketed over 40,000 ducats from the papal curia. King Matthias had defrayed the costs of reclaiming

³ Florescu Radu R., Mc.Nally Raymond T., op cit. p. 23

⁴ idem, p. 13

⁵ ibidem, p. 15

⁶ Dogaru Mircea, Zahariade Mihail, op. cit. p. II-III

the crown of St. Stephen - Hungary's first Catholic king, who owed his crown to the papacy. The symbolic holy crown, topped by a heavy golden cross and bedecked with precious jewels, was originally given by Pope Sylvester II to the first king of Hungary, St. Stephen, in the year 1000, to commemorate Hungary's entry into the Christian community of states through the king's conversion to Catholicism.⁷

As ruler of Wallachia, Vlad distinguished himself through harsh administrative measures and by an anti-Ottoman policy. Only six years after the fall of Constantinople, Vlad refused to pay tribute to the Porte, and in 1461, he liberated Giurgiu, crossed the Danube and killed 24,000 Turks. Sultan Mohammed II the Conqueror led the retaliatory campaign against Wallachia the next year. Vlad, who had valiantly withstood the invasion, fell victim to his enemy and was imprisoned at Vishegrad by the King of Hungary, Mathias Corvinus, to whom he had appealed for assistance. Mohamed's success did not alter the autonomous political status of Wallachia, whose throne was immediately taken by Vlad's brother, Radu cel Frumos (Radu the Handsome). Vlad escaped from his Hungarian captivity twelve years later. In 1476, he took part in anti-Ottoman battles in Bosnia and temporarily reoccupied the throne of Wallachia. In the same year, this unyielding fighter for the freedom of his people was killed in a campaign against the Turks, who had come to install Laiota Basarab as prince.

During his reign, Vlad Tepes (who, like so many of his contemporaries) punished his opponents by impaling them, when the sobriquet had favoured the Brasov Saxons' trade through Wallachia, but had severely repressed their tendency to interfere in the affairs of his State by backing various pretenders. The Saxons found an original way of taking revenge on the Wallachian Prince by means of pamphlets printed in the German Western world during 1480-1500. The distorted portrait of Vlad resulting from these publications (taken up by an obscure modern novelist – Bram Stoker) accounts for all the

⁷ Florescu Radu R., Mc Nally Raymond, op.cit.p.26, 164, 165

modern Dracula mythology spread through horror novels and films.⁸

The tribute we pay to the German-inspired Stoker creation is to concede unabashedly that without the vampirism, the historical personality of Vlad the man would have languished permanently in the shadows of obscurity.⁹

In the early 1970s Florescu teamed with his Boston College colleague Raymond T. McNally as the author of *In Search of Dracula*. Their book drew upon the historical data concerning Vlad the Impaler, the fifteen-century Romanian prince who had been associated with the vampire legend by Bram Stoker. In the late 1960's, they formed a team with Romanian historians Constantin Giurescu and Matei Cazacu to perform research on Dracula and vampire folklore. It was found that in Romania, vampire folklore was not tied to Dracula until recently.¹⁰

One last factor in the extraordinary Vlad / Dracula dichotomy is Romania's reaction to Stoker's best-selling novel, which has been printed in virtually every European language and many Asian ones. To date, the book has not been translated into Romanian, nor have Lugosi-style vampire films been shown in Bucharest.¹¹

Interestingly enough is the fact that Vlad / Dracula was a man of faith and the founder of many churches and monasteries. But his own political philosophy is revealed in a letter addressed to the mayor of Brasov in 1457: "Pray," he stated, "think that when a man or prince is powerful and strong at home, then he will be able to do as he will. But when he is without power, another one more powerful than he will overwhelm him and do as he wishes."¹²

Dracula was often seen in the company of Romanian Orthodox monks. He was known to be particularly fond of the

⁸ Candea Virgil, op.cit, p. 32-33

⁹ Florescu Radu R., Mc Nally Raymond, op. cit. p. 236

¹⁰ Melton Gordon J, *The Vampire Book, the encyclopedia of the undead*, Visible Ink Press, Farmington Hills, MI, 1999, p. 253

¹¹ Florescu Radu, R, Mc Nally Raymond, op. cit. p. 220

¹² idem. p. 90

monasteries of Tismana and Snagov, both of which he often visited. He also liked ritual, a characteristic trait of Orthodox believers. Even when he imposed the death sentence, he insisted upon proper ceremony and a Christian burial for his victims.¹³

Vlad / Dracula, the Impaler was a Christian crusader against the infidels, a medievalist prince who deserves to heir his father's Dragon oath. The old Romanian chronicles, as well as oral tradition, credit Dracula with the foundation of several monasteries, the most famous of which was the monastery of Snagov, where his body allegedly lies buried. Other monasteries and churches built by Dracula can be found scattered throughout the country. One of them is the monastery of Comana, founded in 1461 and the church at Constantinesti. There is also the church of Saint Nicolae at Tirgsor, whose inscription discovered by late Constantin Giurescu reads: "By the Grace of God I voivode [prince], ruler of Ungro-Wallachia, the son of the great Prince Vlad, have built and completed the church on June 24, 1461. In addition, Dracula gave donations and land to the monasteries of Govora, Tismana and Cozia, located in northern Oltenia, where he liked to pray and were his grandfather, Mircea the Old, was buried. Particularly meaningful were his "donations" to the holy mountain at the eastern end of the Acte peninsula in Greece, the great holy shrine and cultural centre of all the Orthodox churches, which never submitted to Turkish occupation even after the conquest of Constantinople. So, Dracula was not only a protector of Christianity, he was mostly a protector of the religion of his country, and of the whole Orthodox world.

The Romanian Orthodox Church played its role as a powerful instrument of princely power. It was loosely linked to the patriarchate of Constantinople since the conversion of the country by missionaries of the Eastern Orthodox Church during the ninth century. In fact, from the foundation of the Wallachian principality, the Romanian church was to all intents and purposes autonomous under the rule of a native chief bishop, who styled himself "Metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia and

¹³ ibidem, p. 97

Exarch of the Plains.” Theoretically, his authority extended to all those of the Orthodox faith in Transylvania. Serving him were other bishops and abbots of a number of wealthy and powerful monasteries such as Tismana, Govora, Cotmeana, Vodita, Cozia, Glavacioc, Dealul and Snagov. They owned vast tracts of land and countless villages and had a seat in the princely council. These monasteries, which enjoyed immunities and privileges and were exempt from taxation, generally supported the central power. Princes occasionally resided and hid their treasures there. In times of danger, individual monasteries were compelled to make financial contributions to the war commensurate with their respective importance. In addition, there were a few Roman Catholic abbeys belonging to the Dominican, Franciscan, Cistercian and Benedictine orders. Some of them were offshoots of more powerful Transylvanian foundations across the mountains. A Franciscan monastery existed in Tirgoviste, close to the prince’s palace. The Roman Catholic Church, however, had little influence. Roman Catholicism was always considered “foreign” and was suspect both for religious and political reasons since the papacy was closely associated with Hungarian power.¹⁴

Vlad Dracul, Draculas father, was tied to the empire by a threefold bond; as a Draconist; a vassal of Sigismund; and a fellow Catholic crusader.¹⁵ Dracul married Princess Cneajna, the eldest daughter of Alexander the Good, Prince of Moldavia (1400-1431), a member of the Musatin family. The second legitimate son was Vlad / Dracula, born in Sighisoara, in November or more likely in December 1431. He was born in Transylvania (“trans Silva” meaning in Latin “beyond the forest”), in a house in the medieval city of Sighisoara, which still stands today. We are ignorant of the religious affiliation of Dracula and his brothers. Dracula and Radu spent their early years on Romanian territory, and they may have been secretly baptized in the Romanian church. They, perhaps for diplomatic reasons, attended mass at first in the chapel of the Dominican

¹⁴ idem. p. 32

¹⁵ idem, p. 42

monastery in the vicinity of their court. On the one hand, Dracul could hardly afford offending Emperor Sigismund, who had specifically requested that he support Catholic institutions in his country. On the other hand, he must have known that conversion to Orthodoxy was a necessity for a future prince, required by the fundamental laws of Wallachia.¹⁶

Vlad / Dracula looked upon the gradual expansion of Roman Catholic monasteries built by the Hungarian king on both sides of the Carpathian Mountains with great suspicion. These monasteries were viewed as papal enclaves on his land that eluded his jurisdiction. Their power and influence offended his patriotism. A number of narratives allude to a conflict between Dracula and individual Catholic abbots and monks, many of whom saw their monasteries destroyed and were lucky to escape impalement. The spokesmen of the Catholic Church got their belated vengeance by blackening Dracula's name for posterity-thus helping to pave the way for the vampire image.¹⁷ The raids and the atrocities against the German Catholic monks who were fortunate enough to escape from their monasteries, which had been reduced to ashes, brought with them to the West what, in essence, became the first Dracula "horror stories."¹⁸

Before his captivity by the Turkish court, Vlad Dracul was introduced by the monastic scribes into Cyrillic script and Old Church Slavonic, as well as into the Latin language of the diplomatic correspondence. He studied political science – in particular, the theory of the divine right of the sovereign and the theory of the government reflected on the teachings of Neagoe Basarab.

Dracul, Vlad's father, was held in Turkish custody for just one year, when his eldest son Mircea ruled Wallachia (1442-1443). Dracul was eventually released upon his promise, sworn on both the Bible and the Koran, not to participate in any further action against his Turkish suzerain. He was to pay the

¹⁶ idem, p. 46-47

¹⁷ ibidem, p. 98

¹⁸ idem ibidem, p. 123

usual tribute of 10,000 gold ducats, but to this fine was added the obligation of sending a contingent of young boys, five hundred strong, destined for Turkish janissary corps – a new act of fealty. As a further guarantee of future loyalty, Dracul undertook to leave his two younger sons, Dracula age eleven and Radu, not more than seven years old, for the next six years. The purpose of hostage taking was not merely to guarantee the good behaviour of the parents, but also to influence mental attitudes of princes likely to succeed to the throne of loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, without necessarily requiring that they convert to Islam.

Another remarkable younger man, brought up at the same court was Mehmed II, Murad's second son, who would become Dracula's protagonist. Dracula and Radu were tutored by the best minds in the cultivated tradition of fifteenth-century Ottoman education. They took courses such as philosophy, Aristotelian logic, and theoretical mathematics. Dracula's education was completed in fine Byzantine traditions inherited by the Turks. Dracula's knowledge of the Turkish language was soon close to perfect—a circumstance that was to place him in good standing on future occasions. Undoubtedly, this six year period of Turkish captivity, at an age when character is moulded, constituted as significant a segment in Dracula's upbringing as did his years at the Wallachian court. Thus, the period is relevant in accounting for Dracula's cold and sadistic personality. On the whole, Dracula, a gaunt and rather ungainly youth, was a difficult pupil, prone to temper bouts; the whip and other forms of punishment were often resorted to in order to cow him into obedience. By way of contrast, there was Radu, whose unusual good looks and sensuality attracted the female members of the seraglio as well as the male "minions" in the Sultan's court. Because of their differences in character, temperament and physique, the two brothers developed an intense hatred for one another, which was exacerbated by the associated differences in the treatment they received.¹⁹

¹⁹ idem, p. 55, 56

Vlad / Dracula's political detractors who exploited its double meaning attached evil implications to the name. Vlad / Dracula's father was named "Dracul" because of his honour and because he was a "Draconist," which meant he was a member of the Order of the Dragon (draco in Latin). He dedicated his life to fighting Turks and heretics. In the year following the death of Jan Hus, the first martyr of the Protestant cause in Europe, the Hussite heresy that he had championed began to spread. Sigismund summoned an imperial diet at Nuremberg in February 1430 to organize the fifth crusade against the powerful armies of the rebel Hussite leader Jan Zizka von Trokow, who was using quite revolutionary tactics and had kept four crusading armies at bay in the 1420s.²⁰

In the early dawn of February 8, 1431, a most unusual ceremony took place in the double chapel of the imperial fortress, which involved Vlad's induction into the Order of the Dragon. The order had originally been founded by the Holy Roman Emperor in 1387 and was reorganized in 1408 as a secret fraternal society. A principal aim entailed the defence and propagation of Catholicism against the partisans of Jan Hus and other heretics, and of course, crusading against the infidel Turks.²¹

In Orthodox iconography, particularly those icons that depicted St. George slaying a dragon, the dragon symbolized the devil. Therefore, the name Dracula was associated with the devil. The word Drac, however, can mean either "devil" or "dragon." The use of this particular nickname in no way implied that Dracul was an evil figure and connected with the forces of darkness, as some have suggested. The name Dracula, with an "a," is simply a diminutive, meaning "son of the dragon." That the family itself did not consider the epithet in any way offensive is proven by the fact that they consistently adopted it, and that Dracula signed letters by this title. The historians also used Dracula to describe all members of the family, as well as

²⁰ idem, p. 39

²¹ idem, p. 40

their descendants, who were collectively known as the Draculestis.²²

Vlad Tepes (which means the Impaler), voivode, prince or dominus, belonged to the princely house of Basarab, a native ruling family. He referred to himself as “Prince Vlad, son of Vlad the Great, sovereign and ruler of Ungro-Wallachia and of the Duchess of Almas and Fagaras.” The best known of the early Basarabs, Mircea the Old, sometimes referred to as Mircea the Great, was Dracula’s grandfather, who ruled without interruption during a period of some thirty-two years from 1386 to 1418.²³

Having surrendered his two sons as hostages to the Sultan, Dracul sent a contingent under his son Mircea to help the crusaders during the long campaign of 1443. By allowing his son Mircea to cooperate with the Christian forces, Dracul had broken his promise to the sultan and consequently risked the lives of his two sons. Being perpetually aware of the danger of assassination and consequently, of the expendability of life, Dracula became a cynic. He also gained invaluable insights into the torturous working of the impressionable Turkish mind and learned the effectiveness of the Ottomans’ use of terror tactics. He was to employ this knowledge to great advantage in his subsequent career.²⁴

Hunyadi’s decision to eliminate Dracul rose from the circumstances that followed the debacle at Varna. Dracul and Mircea held Hunyadi personally responsible for the magnitude of the Christian disaster, because of Hunyadi’s refusal to take Dracul’s advice at Nicopolis. Hunyadi clearly nurtured ambitions of his own, extending not only to seek the Hungarian and perhaps even the Polish crown, but also to secure the principality of Wallachia for himself. Thus, he launched a deliberate propaganda campaign against Dracul, portraying him as always secretly supporting the interests of the Sultan.

²² idem, p. 41

²³ Florescu Radu R., Mc.Nally Raymond T. “Dracula Prince of Many Faces, Back Bay Books, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, New York, London, 1989, p. 34

²⁴ idem, p. 60

Forewarned, Dracul and Mircea ordered the city to close its gates. But a boyar revolt took place, hatched by the partisans of the Danestis. Mircea was captured by the citizenry of Tirgoviste, tortured, and killed in the most horrible fashion and then buried alive. Vlad Dracul was also caught and assassinated close to Bucharest.²⁵

A Romanian peasant oral tradition tells us that Dracul, sensing that his end was near, turned to Cazan his former chancellor and asked that he remit to his son and heir, Vlad Dracula, two precious relics: the Toledo blade granted to him by Emperor Sigismund at Nuremberg in 1431, and the gold collar with the dragon insignia engraved upon it.²⁶ A few faithful followers took his body and buried him in a small wooden chapel at the site of the present Monastery of Dealu near Tirgoviste.²⁷

Vlad Dracul's death was devastating. After all, he had been one of the mainstays of the Christian resistance, a most effective crusader and the only representative of the Dragon Order who remained loyal to his oath at least in fighting the Turks.

Sultan Murad II informed Dracula about his father's death at the end of the year of 1447, since news traveled slowly from Wallachia to Adrianople. He was now completely free. Dracula was made an officer in the Turkish army; he was also made to understand by his Turkish masters that they considered him a candidate for his father's throne. His stern character and leadership qualities had evidently impressed Murad. After some time spent at the court of Murad II, the "son of the dragon" fled to Moldavia to stay with Bogdan II, Moldavia's prince who was Dracula's uncle. Dracula lived at Suceava, from December 1449 until October 1451, in the company of his cousin Stephan, who was a few years younger than him. Stephan the Great was Moldavia's most famous ruler, bestowed by Pope Sixtus IV with the coveted title of "Athlete of Christ" an honour that had

²⁵ idem, p. 60, 61

²⁶ idem, p. 63

²⁷ idem, p. 61

eluded Dracula. The two cousins were likely to have been educated together by learned monks from neighbouring monasteries and by chancellery scribes.²⁸

Vlad Dracula's allegiance to the crown of Hungary and to the Christian cause, a pledge also implicit on his Dragon oath, had signified a permanent rupture with his former Turkish protectors and now legalized this action.²⁹

Dracula engaged Vladislav II in combat somewhere near Tirgoviste. He had the satisfaction of killing his mortal enemy and his father's assassin in a hand-to-hand combat.³⁰ Dracula-Danesti maintained a struggle so bitter and bloody that the historians have labelled it the Dracula-Danesti feud. In terms of its violence, it can be compared to the Lancaster-York conflict of England and Shakespeare's Capulet-Montagu rivalry.³¹

Dracula ruled Wallachia as a Prince for three periods: 1448, 1456-1462, 1476-1477. First, he ruled for only two months until a member of his rival Danesti clan supported by Hungary, claimed the throne. Second, for a period of seven years when he carried the most famous military exploits against the Turks.

Making use of a mixture of truly extraordinary tactics unusually well suited to the terrain of his country, he was able to repel an army three times the size of his own and inflict upon Mehmed the Conqueror one of the greatest humiliations of the latter's lifetime.³²

A remarkable phenomenon was spotted on the month of June 1456, noticed earlier by the Chinese astronomers, and what turned out to be the most famous comet in history named by the name of the astronomer Edmund Halley (1636-1742) – Halley's Comet.

²⁸ idem, p. 64, 65, 66

²⁹ idem, p. 81

³⁰ ibidem

³¹ idem, p. 37

³² Florescu Radu R., Mc.Nally Raymond T. "Dracula Prince of Many Faces, Back Bay Books, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, New York, London, 1989, p. 241

Dracula and his astrologers must have considered its appearance to be a positive sign, since during the period of its sighting he achieved his dream of securing his ancestral throne. This positive view is further suggested by the fact that the Dracula coin has been discovered so far as the only one that depicts on one side, the profile of the Wallachian eagle with its wings extended and a cross in its beak, and on the other, a crescent mounted on a star trailing six undulating rays in its wake. The coin, bearing the hallmark of a Brasov goldsmith, was of a very high quality and obviously meant to replace those of Dracula's father, which bore the Dragon symbol. This particular coin has additional interest as being associated with the appearance of Halley's Comet.³³

The connection between Vlad the Impaler, Dracula, and the vampire myth is just nonsense. An analysis of the vampire phenomenon could make a good subject for a further debate. Today, the popular appeal of the vampire is reflected in more than 25 active vampire interest organizations in the United States and England with their own regular publications.³⁴

The belief in vampires preceded the introduction of Christianity into southern and eastern Europe. It seems to have originated independently as a response to unexplained phenomena common to most cultures. One divergence between the two churches frequently noted in the vampire literature was their different understanding of the incorruptibility of dead bodies. In the East, if the soft tissue of a body did not decay quickly once placed in the ground, it was generally considered to be a sign of the devil. That the body refused to disintegrate, meant that the earth would, for some reason, not receive it. An incorruptible body became a candidate for vampirism. In the West, the opposite was true. It was believed that the body of a dead Saint often did not experience corruption like that of an ordinary body, particularly if the body emitted a sweet-smelling odour, rather than one of putrefaction. These different

³³ idem, p. 83

³⁴ Melton Gordon I, *The Vampire book, the encyclopedia of the undead*, Visible Ink Press, Farmington Hills, MI, 1999, p. IX

understandings of incorruptibility explain in large part the demise of the belief in vampires in the Catholic West and the parallel survival of this belief in Orthodox lands, even though the Greek Church officially tried to suppress this belief. However, vampirism was never high on the Christian agenda, and thus, was rarely mentioned. Its continued presence was indicated by occasional documents such as an eleventh-century law promulgated by Charlemagne as emperor of the new Holy Roman Empire. The law condemned anyone who promoted the belief in the witch vampire (specifically in its form as a strix).³⁵

Melton also mentions The Cult of the Vampire as a semi-secret magical group operating in England that built its practice of magic on the model of vampirism. Vampires formed clans and developed techniques for controlling the occult forces of nature. The modern Cult of the Vampire is an organized initiatory magical order with seven degrees... the order's lineage, it is claimed, comes from Transylvania and was introduced into England in 1888 as the Ordo Anno Mundi.³⁶

Almost everywhere, vampires have been seen as evil, monstrous creatures. Historical myths show people eager to locate and destroy such creatures by putting a stake through their hearts, decapitating them and filling their mouth with garlic. We can no longer relate to these images and evil conceptions to Vlad Tepes, even if our hero's methods of punishment seemed to be far from orthodox.

The "vampirism" specialist, the Irish Abraham (Bram) Stoker, who was affiliated with the "Golden Dawn" Society for studying the occult sciences, took over the myth, and magnified and enriched it through the genre of the grotesque. His book *Dracula*, which first appeared in 1897, met people's desire for mystery and thrillers and created the archetype of all the terror characters in our century. "Dracula"—the vampire tyrant, has cast an undeserved blame directly onto the image of the hero / prince Vlad Tepes and indirectly onto the Romanian

³⁵ Melton Gordon I, *The Vampire book, the encyclopedia of the undead*, Visible Ink Press, Farmington Hills, MI, 1999, p. 117

³⁶ idem, p. 158

people who gave birth to such a “monster.” Is it indeed no coincidence that, in the full swing of a racist upsurge, of marginalizing the Romanians and the Slavs through force by the dying Austro-Hungarian Empire, that the “information” was delivered to Stolker by a Hungarian, the professor Vambéry from the University of Budapest. Is it possible that Vambéry and the Hungarian historians did not know the real story? ³⁷

³⁷ Dogaru Mircea, Mihail Zahariade, op. cit, p. III

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Theodor Damian

**St. Gregory of Nyssa on the Power of God
(Some Theological Aspects)**

*Dieu n'était pas obligé de créer l'homme;
Il l'a fait dans un élan d'amour.*
St. Grégoire de Nysse, *Béatitudes*, VII

Introduction

In an age coming after the theology of the death of God, in a post-Christian, new pagan society (Leslie Newbegin), where the detraditionalization process (R.N. Bellah, R. Madsen and others, *Habits of the Heart*, Harper and Row, 1985) have led to a new kind of theological syncretism and crisis of theological identity in the churches, in a society, which becomes more and more electronic and where the super-power of continually new technologies glorifies and depersonalizes the human being, the problem of the power of God continues to be an actual concern. This problem is not a totally new one on the map of today's theological preoccupations. Centuries ago the Church had to deal with it. One of the most famous theologians who wrote on this topic is St. Gregory of Nyssa.

* * *

In this paper I will try to present some guidelines of St. Gregory of Nyssa's theology on the power of God introducing first, in a few words, his personality, theology, and a general theological background of his time and second, his concept on the power of God in general but also in relation to creation and more particularly to Christ - cross, resurrection - and to the Holy Spirit as an answer to the Arian Eunomius. Also I will speak about the Trinitarian character of the power of God in St. Gregory's thought and about the presence and manifestation of that power in the sacramental life of the Church.

Biographical data

St. Gregory of Nyssa, recognized as the most honored among the Nicene Fathers, rightly called "Father of Fathers" or "the star of Nyssa,"¹ was one of the three Cappadocian Fathers along with his brother St. Basil the Great and with St. Gregory of Nazianzus or the Theologian. He was born around 331 AD² in a well-to-do devoted Christian family with ten children which gave several saints to the Church. His grandmother Macrina, his mother Emmelia, his sister Macrina again exercised a strong influence in the family concerning the dedication to an authentic Christian faith and life. Gregory was educated at the local schools. He did not attend foreign schools for special studies, as in the case of Basil, but later, when he spent time in the monastery with Basil, he learned from his brother much of what he had studied in Athens, for which Gregory always spoke with a great respect of his brother. Gregory was a diligent autodidact and he became very well instructed in theology and philosophy. He tried to introduce what was most valuable in the lay classical culture into Christian thought. Like all Cappadocians he made steadfast efforts to defend the Nicene doctrines vis-à-vis the heresies of his time.

Later he became a rhetorician and married Theosebeia, but this was not an impediment for him to enter the monastic life after some years, and after many hesitations and tribulations he became bishop of Nyssa, in 371. A few years later he started to have problems at Nyssa, and in 374 the Arian emperor Valens exiled him and replaced him with an Arian bishop, but in 378 Valens was succeeded by the orthodox emperor Gratian and Gregory and all other bishops who had been exiled were reinstated. In 379 his brother Basil died, and Gregory became "one of the foremost champions of Orthodoxy."³ His zeal in the defense of Nicene doctrines imposed him as a theological authority, and thus he had a major role in the whole of the work of the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 381, where the terminology adopted to define the dogmas of the Trinity and hypostases were mostly taken from his works.⁴

In 394 he was present at another synod at Constantinople,

and after that there is no more information concerning him.⁵ He probably died in 395 A.D. and is commemorated in the Eastern Church on January 10th and in the Latin Church on March 9th.⁶

His works

St. Gregory of Nyssa, the most intellectual, the most profound of the Cappadocian Fathers, called by St. Maximus the Confessor (VIIth century) "le docteur de l'univers," wrote many works: theological, moral, ascetical treatises, apologetic books, letters. I mention here just a few of them: the twelve books *Against Eunomius*, *The Great Catechism*, *On the Making of Man*, *On the Holy Trinity*, *On "Not Three Gods,"* *On the Holy Spirit*, *On Virginity*, *The Life of Moses*, *The Life of Holy Macrina*.

In his books, he treated a large variety of problems; from the divine essence and energies - in this respect being a predecessor of St. Gregory Palamas - to the two natures in Christ; from the existence of evil in the world to the final reintegration of creation in the divine communion, where he shows his Origenism; from the knowledge of God through contemplation - Θεωρία - to the self-knowledge - γνωτε σε αυτον - of concern to both Socrates and the Apostle Paul; from the humility of God to the glorification of man in the divine communion in the Kingdom of God, and many others. However, three great directions in his theological preoccupations can be distinguished: the problem of evil, the relation between the ideal man and the actual man, and the Spirit.⁷

In his writings, where he proved an excellence of style, St. Gregory used any means to put philosophy in the service of theology at the level of speculation, reflection, expression, vocabulary, method, etc. Even if he can be highly speculative, he does not attempt to rationalize the revelational truth.

He remains a mystic of the Christian Church and a theologian of *via negativa*, showing evidently his apophatism in his way of doing theology.

Like the other two Cappadocians, St. Gregory of Nyssa was evidently an Origenist, but not to the point of being overwhelmed and dominated.

"Disciple éclairé et non servile, il sait manifester son indépendance et prendre de la distance."⁸ He diligently studied Origen when he spent time in the monastery with his brother Basil, and they even wrote a book, *Philocalia*, with excerpts from the most beautiful parts of Origen's works. From Origen he inherited the extensive use of the Holy Scriptures as a work method. This is visible in all of his writings, and sometimes he produced entire books where he just interpreted passages or books of the Holy Scriptures, like *On Beatitudes*, *The Life of Moses*, and others. He also inherited from Origen the concept of apokatastasis –*αποκαταστασις* - understood especially by Gregory as universal restoration of all things in their primordial virginal state.

The heresies of his time

The heresies of his time were especially related to the theology of the Trinity and of the Incarnation. First, Arianism, with its teaching that Jesus Christ was a creature and the resultant confusion concerning the understanding of the Trinitarian doctrines, to which St. Gregory responds largely in his books against Eunomius; second, Apolinarianism, which taught that in Jesus Christ the divine Logos had replaced a human soul, to which St. Gregory, like the other two Cappadocians, answered by teaching that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man and only in that way the power of God was fully manifested in the works of Incarnation, and that Jesus saved what He assumed and if He assumed only the human body He saved only that, and the human soul remained unsaved, which is contrary to the scriptural revelation; and third, Macedonianism or the heresy of pneumatomachs, which considered the Holy Spirit to be a creature, and to which St. Gregory answers in detail in his works on the divinity of the Holy Spirit and His consubstantiality with the Father and the Son.

Generally we can say that the orthodox authors fought against these heresies in three main ways: (1) reconsidering the scriptural passages which were subject to controversy, reinterpreting those texts in a more rational way than allegorical; (2) stressing the unity of Scripture as a whole, which only in this way is a means in the economy of salvation, and fighting against the method of isolating texts from their general context and interpreting them arbitrarily; (3) making an effort to give a more harmonious expression to the Tradition, *παράδοσις*, as unity between the faith confessed and lived and the contemporary expression of the theology of the Church.⁹

Eunomius

Eunomius was the most prominent adversary of St. Gregory. He was a well-educated man, aristotelian and neoplatonic in his teaching, mainly trying to reinterpret in highly speculative and rationalistic categories the Arian doctrines maintaining that the Son and the Holy Spirit are creatures, or in his own terms that there is a Source or Absolute Being and then, another Being existing by reason of the first but before all others which came after, and again, a third Being inferior to the first as to its cause and inferior to the second as to the energy which produced it. He uses the terms "Ungenerate" and "Generate" for the Father and the Son, saying that the Generate is the seal of the energy of the Almighty. He is Lord and God and Maker of all creation intelligible and sensible, but He has received from the Ungenerate the power and the commission for creation as if he were hired and received that power *ab extra*; the Generate or the Only-Begotten came from nothing, and there was a time when He was not, therefore He is the first creature of the Ungenerate.¹⁰

St. Gregory argues that if the Son were not in the beginning and He were not the image and wisdom and power of the Father, that would mean that even the Father did not exist at some time because there cannot have been a Father with no image, wisdom, and power, a Maker without hands, a Beginning without Word, a Father without Son.¹¹

St. Gregory shows the eternity of Son's generation, and the inseparable identity of His essence with the Father. He demonstrates that the Son is not the slave of the Father, but that they work together in the whole economy of salvation. St. Gregory even becomes ironical, mentioning that Eunomius did not use the Trinitarian terminology Father and Son, but Ungenerate and Generate, and proves with his coherent speculative mind that however logical Eunomius wants to be in his demonstration, he is clearly mistaken and finally illogical. St. Gregory calls him Antichrist! Also, St. Gregory combats Eunomius' heresy and confusion of his teaching about the Holy Spirit.

St. Gregory's apophatism

As St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, speaking on God, starts with what God is not, thus inscribing himself in the line of apophatic theology, being indeed also one of its creators. In order to justify better his position, St. Gregory recalls one's attention on the human condition in the world, invoking definition-texts or images from the Scriptures; the human being is "dust and ashes" (Gen. 18,27), "grass" (Isaia 40,6), "like the grass" (David, Ps. 36,2), "vanity" (Eccles. 1,2), "miserable" (I Cor. 15,19). And then, when the problem of speaking of God comes, St. Gregory asks: "What language would allow me to speak of His nature? Of this good, what example could I find in the field of the known? What new language could I invent to signify the ineffable and the inexpressible? For the Word said as much as I could understand but it did not exhaust the immensity of its subject."¹² Or, as we find mentioned aphoristically: "Only God speaks well about God"¹³

And not only in speaking about God's essence do we not have adequate words, but even in trying to speak about God's attributes manifested in creation, about God's incorruptibility and perfections, as long as the attributes refer to the divine nature, our words would be insufficient to express the plenitude of God's essence or relation between essence and attributes.¹⁴

And this, because "The nature of God in itself, in its own substance passes any representation, no one can approach it, it is beyond any attempt to formulate it. Man has not found in himself the ability which would let him understand that which is incomprehensible."¹⁵

It is interesting to find out that even though there is such a difference and inadequacy between our words and the reality of God, St. Gregory makes evident the fact that we have something in common with God, connatural with Him and this is the humility. Humility is conforming to our nature, and if one in life follows that which is in conformity with one's nature, that is humility, because it conforms to God's nature, too, one will wear like a vestment "the beatific form of God."¹⁶

St. Gregory offers a very plastic image to express the ineffability of God thus making more relevant his apophatic theology. He says that just as every person breathes air according to the capacity of his or her lungs - a capacity ordered according to how much is necessary to that person, and nobody can exhaust all air - so in the same way with the understanding of Scripture, of Revelation, of God, every person understands according to his/her own capacity and intelligence, but the real grandeur of God, no one can understand.¹⁷ And in order to be scripturally founded, he quotes: "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on the earth, so let your words be few" (Ecclesiast. 5, 2).

The power of God

The power of God occupies the central place in all our speaking about God. Wherever we turn to see God, we see God's power. For any way in which we try to understand God, we have to start from what is closer to our understanding: God's power. Any word we would use to speak of God, any word we could give Him - all would indicate the same thing: the eternal power of God which creates everything that exists, imagines the unimaginable and the not-yet-existing, and embraces all creatures.¹⁸

The power of God is always a coherent unity in itself. Or as Michel René Barnes puts it, “God is like a unity of power in one mind.”¹⁹ This unity cannot be divided into different parts as the works of God are different,²⁰ and it cannot be limited to different means, as God in His supreme sovereignty uses freely a multiplicity of means.²¹

The power of God is immanent in creation²² and creation reflects the divine nature.²³

However, even if we know about the power of God from its manifestation in creation, as being related to God’s nature, it exists eternally independent of any visible manifestation; for instance, one of the ways in which, before creation, the power of God was invisibly manifested was at the level of foreknowledge of God²⁴ about how things will be and how they will evolve; therefore we can speak about a foreknowing power of God.²⁵ The divine power of God rules not only over all creation, but also over all things related to creation and which were not directly created, for instance, death. The power of God contacts death without changing itself in any sense or becoming weak, that is why it is a saving power, a vivifying one, and this is proper to its character to operate for the life and the salvation of those who need that.²⁶ Since it is eternal, nothing has already passed for the power of God, nothing will be, but the whole extension of nature is *present* in it (emphasis added).²⁷

Being creator of all things through His divine power, by virtue of the same power God decides the time of creation and evolution of every thing.²⁸ Therefore the power of God as we can see is eternal, independent of creation, all-embracing, sovereign, indivisible, unlimited, foreknowing, unchangeable at contact with creation even with death, undiminshable, vivifying, saving, authoritative. The measure of this power is the will of God,²⁹ and the will of God is an element of the definition of the divine power because, Gregory answers to Eunomius, almighty is the One who has been able to realize His will.³⁰ There is simultaneity or a concordance between the will of God and the power of God. It is enough for God to wish and things can become. The omnipotent power of God does not render God's will unrealized,³¹ neither that will which has the

power to do all things, will have any tendency to do evil because this is contrary to the divine nature.³²

Therefore the will and the power of God are in perfect harmony. Any contradiction here would be a separation and would contradict the nature of God itself, and that would be an absurdity, a non-sense. The substantial power of God through the divine Word creates all the good things and is able to do whatever it chooses to do because it chooses only what is compatible with the divine nature. All the foundations of the universe - as creature which is good - depend on the power of the Word of God, St. Gregory says.³³

One of the reasons of the perfection of divine power resides in the fact that the power is in harmony, in collaboration with other attributes of God. This coexistence of divine attributes is the foundation of the whole exegesis of creation.³⁴ St. Gregory specifies that the power of God is not a capricious power, but is from and related to the nature of the triune God.³⁵ Because God is at once omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent³⁶ and the attributes operate perichoretically - for example, in the true wisdom of God, we can see His power and vice-versa³⁷ - that is why the divine power is distinguished from any oppressive, authoritarian, tyrannical, absurd, destructive action.³⁸

The perfections of God are *perfections* only because of their interrelatedness and because they cannot be otherwise. For example, as St. Gregory says, with an evident Platonic influence (see *Meno*), goodness without justice or power is not goodness, power without justice or goodness or wisdom is brutal and tyrannical, wisdom or justice, taken separately are no more virtues but vices: "Power separated from justice and wisdom is not considered a virtue, for power in this form is brutal and tyrannical."³⁹

But much more than that, the power of God keeps its balance and force because it comes together with the humility of God. As D. Migliore expresses it aphoristically: "The true God is the God strong enough to live with and for others." And again: "The true God is majestically strong yet shows that strength most awesomely in humility and weakness."⁴⁰

The humility of God proves that the omnipotence of the divine nature is associated with love which also belongs to the divine nature and this humility is even a greater proof of God's omnipotence than any miracle. "The humility of God is the exercise of the superabundant power of God in creation, it exercises the transcendent power of God as condescension to the weakness of our nature, the sublime being manifest in lowliness."⁴¹

The humility of God comes from the fact that God wills to deal with creation. It is in this relationship that our idea of God is formed. Even the word *God* does not refer to the *ousia* of God but to the divine attributes and actions, because the word Θεος comes from Θεασται which means to see, to supervise, to look, to penetrate all things, everywhere, to know the inside of the hidden things. Θεος is Seer. God is the One who sees what is to be seen.⁴² The etymology of the Greek name of God indicates the fact that God knows things before they are. Knowing, seeing them, God, with the power of His Word, calls them into being and continues to *see* them, to know their mystery, to rule over them in harmony, love and humility. This ability to penetrate the things in their hidden intimacy is a source and expression of the divine power.

In this sense we can say that the omnipotence of God involves God intimately in every aspect of the world,⁴³ and therefore it is clear that the power of God, like all attributes of God, is conceived in relation to His creation.⁴⁴ Many times in his works, St. Gregory of Nyssa expresses in different ways this idea: "God sustains into being all intelligible things and of a material nature. He comprises in Himself all things which He rules and controls with His encompassing power."⁴⁵

In other places St. Gregory speaks insistently about the power of God related to the *divine industry*. This divine industry is understood as the work of God for creation in its double aspect: to cause the coming into being of that which did not exist before and to maintain in being that which exists already. Therefore, the divine industry is related to the economy of creation and especially to the unity and the coherence of it: "A solid link between the things thus created was instituted in

nature through the divine industry and power which holds the universe in being."⁴⁶

At this point, St. Gregory has a theory of qualities of things which are different from their essence and which, through the power of God, create a mode of existence for things. God therefore impresses on every thing its own, distinct mode of being according to its qualities, which are not the being itself, but accompany the being, as we say also that the essence of God and the perfections of God are two different things which accompany each other but do not reside in confusion, neither do they produce any separation in the divine unity of being.

St. Gregory ascribes the problem of harmony between essence and qualities to the power of God: "Everything is possible to the divine power: to give existence to that which does not exist, as well as to give to the being its convenient qualities."⁴⁷ And even more than that, the power of God reflected in the economy of creation does not refer only to the two aspects of the divine industry. Yet it also refers to the permanent providence, supervision, and company with things in their evolution, according to their structural qualities in the way of their continual renewal; this renewal in St. Gregory's thought, has the sense of their return to the primordial state, in the framework of the universal restoration of creation,⁴⁸ as we mentioned before.

St. Gregory of Nyssa teaches that the divine power in operation generates the creation; this is part of the change through which being was substituted to non-being.⁴⁹ The power of God as a source of change which is even more mysteriously and specifically related to human beings than to the universe, helps the being to pass from the state of corruptibility to that of incorruptibility.⁵⁰ This passage is called by Gregory the life of creation which is extended between two extremities; at the end of each extremity is the power of God, found there in order to strengthen our nature. But also, the power of God occupies all the space of the interval.⁵¹

This theology of the interval is strictly related, in St. Gregory's thought, to the theology of participation, one of his

most basic and strongest theological concepts. The human being was created by God in order to be a reflection, a living resemblance of the transcendent divine power.⁵² The only way to keep the right position in the middle of creation, as a superior being, is for the human being to be a living reflection of the divine power. That is why the soul has several powers that are proper to its nature⁵³ - since the soul is made in the image of God, and in God also the power is inseparable from the divine nature.⁵⁴ And "indeed, every human being, every living creature, possesses and exercises power to some degree."⁵⁵ As a reproduction of the supreme power of God, της αω δυναμεως απεικονισμα,⁵⁶ human beings had to participate and collaborate with God in the economy concerning the whole creation, in total freedom, using the power they received to accomplish the divine purpose. Pico della Mirandola put this idea in the following words: "We have given you, Oh Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor any endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgment and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine."⁵⁷

We can see here the freedom and the power, two important elements, components of the image of God in the human being, elements which, only through an authentic participation in the life of God, can become creative. St. Gregory relates this idea, generally and also specifically, to

Christ: "The participation in God's perfections is both the foundation and the unfolding of the 'image of God' in Man. Sin is the refusal of participation. Redemption is accomplished by our sacramental and moral participation in Christ."⁵⁸

We participate in God's life and power through Christ after the Incarnation, according to our capacities. But the very fact of participation is a privilege and a vital necessity, as Gregory puts it quasi-syllogistically: If God is the Life and supply of any good, the participation in that keeps us alive. Without participation in Life, we are dead.⁵⁹ He is at hand. And this participation is possible because God loves the creation and God is present in the creation. As Bonhoeffer said, we cannot, especially since the Incarnation, speak of God in separation from the world, nor of the world in separation from God.⁶⁰

This power of God which keeps things in being traces the way back to God as well. And this is another point of St. Gregory's theology of the power of God. This theology of the way back is founded - at the level of knowledge - on the contemplation of God, θεωρία, through nature.

Again, God, Θεός, is the Seer. God sees things, calls them into being, keeps seeing them, and they stay alive. When God does not see them, when God turns His face from them, they die. Gregory quotes Ps. 104, 29-30: "When you hide Your face, they are terrified, when You take away their breath they die and return to the dust. When You send Your Spirit they are created and You renew the face of the earth." The mystery of God and the way back can be understood even from the perspective of death, not only from that of maintaining things into being.⁶¹ But even in that, *to see* is necessary.

If God is seer and human being is the image of the One who sees, then the human being has to see. And first of all man has to see the first one to be seen, the One whose image he is: God. It is natural and necessary for humans to see. But to see God, this is contemplation: θεωρία (from Θεός + ὁραω = to see God). Being image of God is like being face to face with God, therefore not to see God is unnatural, abnormal, is corruption, error, sin. God, however, cannot be seen in His *ousia* but only in His energies manifested in creation and in

Christ who is the power of God.⁶² "God makes Himself visible by the divine energies manifested in creation and by the operating power revealed in Christ."⁶³ This is one of the ways of the knowledge of God: *seeing* Him, contemplating the creation. And the first thing to be seen in creation by contemplation is the power of God.

Indeed, the beauty of creation, the harmony and its stability are traces which bring us back to God through the understanding of His ineffable power which, however paradoxically, overcomes any understanding.⁶⁴

It is interesting to notice that this power, which brings us back to God,⁶⁵ a fact that we realize by contemplation, appears differently in the ontological structure of creation and in that of the human being. In creation, the power of God was manifested in the beginning through the fact that God simply ordered and the things were. The power of God improvises the creation, as Gregory says. Whereas in the creation of Man the divine power is preceded by a reflection of God, the creation of the universe is not preceded by such a reflection.⁶⁶ In that difference consists the power which the human being has over the universe: to see it, to penetrate it, and in this way to find God, contemplating His energies in the created order.

Jesus Christ and the power of God

"Christ is the power of the Father."⁶⁷ The power is the Word of God. The Word is power in Himself, αυτοδυναμς.⁶⁸ The Logos is power and will together, and the power is the capacity to put the will in operation. Life is the product of the power and will of the Word of God. But the Word of God is the Life, and He has the faculty of willing, προαιρετικην δυναμιν εχει in an absolute manner. This will is powerful.

As in God, the will of the Word being omnipotent necessarily does not incline to evil which is contrary to His nature. The power of the Word of God is an absolutely efficient power.⁶⁹

The Incarnation

Having trouble with the Appolinarians who were denying the full humanity in Christ, St. Gregory had to answer also to the classical question of Incarnation: *Cur Deus Homo?* Why did God become Man? Why was an Incarnation necessary for human redemption and why did not God restore the humanity by a simple act of divine will? St. Gregory answers, "d'une grande élégance dialectique"⁷⁰ that redemption through Incarnation is strictly related in a very visible way - more than it would be just through a simple divine will - to the power, goodness, wisdom, and justice of God. The human being can know in this way something about God and, as a free person, can freely choose to walk in the way of salvation brought by Christ. This is the goodness which inspires God to save the fallen humanity; the wisdom indicates the means of salvation: the power allows the use of the means and gives the possibility for a miracle with no precedent to be realized, and the divine justice determines the mode of redemption.⁷¹

Also, Gregory answers that a sick person does not prescribe to the physician the remedy or the regime the sick should follow, but it is the physician who prescribes that. The sick person is happy to have someone completely qualified to take care of him.⁷² In addition, the Incarnation proves the paradox of the divine power or the efficiency of the power of God, or how great that power is and to which point it can go. Wrapped in a body, together with the divine goodness, wisdom, justice, the power of God becomes more accessible to humanity.⁷³

The fact itself that the almighty nature of God was able to descend into the lowliness of the human condition is even a greater proof of the paradox of divine power in Incarnation, greater even than the miracles, which have an imposing and supernatural character. The accomplishment by the divine power of a great and sublime action is, in some way, a logical consequence of its nature. God's humility shows better than everything else the superabundance of the divine power. The incorruptible power of God, Gregory says, the grandeur itself,

finds a place in lowliness without losing its elevation and thus one can see how the Divinity becomes human yet remaining Divinity. In this context, he offers a comparison, showing that just as light has the ability to dissipate the darkness, life to destroy death, the power, as well, proves to be power by destroying the darkness, the death, and all that is contrary to human nature, bringing to it purification and restoration.⁷⁴

The Cross

The crucifixion, the cross is the real source of knowledge of God's power, as D.L. Migliore said. On the cross the power of God is not limited, but the life, the death, the resurrection of Christ are the center and standard for any understanding of God's power.⁷⁵ Thus the cross becomes the center of the universe. "The power of the cross controls and holds together the universe,"⁷⁶ Gregory says.

The cross is a means for contemplation and understanding. It helps us to understand that the power, the love, and the divine providence of God radiate from its center, through its four arms like through channels to the four directions of the universe which Gregory calls with the words of St. Paul: the height, the depth, the width, the length (Ephes. 3, 18). The ineffable power of God brings the four parts of the universe together and holds them on the center of the cross. The cross shows that the power of God penetrates the whole creation.⁷⁷ The cross became the object of contemplation, θεωρία, the place where we see God in a supreme manifestation of this power, the power to renounce absolute power and to die humbly as the last among men. This kind of power is a compassionate one which reaches out to people in their sin.⁷⁸

The Resurrection

"The Creator chased out of His creation couldn't enter it again but crucified; and the power of His resurrection needs our freedom, in order to achieve the transfiguration of the universe" (Olivier Clement).

We have here all the mystery of the love and power of God transparent in the humility of the cross and the glory of the resurrection. In his argument against Eunomius, St. Gregory of Nyssa has spoken about resurrection in order to point out that Jesus was not a creature but fully God and fully man. If Jesus could die on the cross as a simple man, His resurrection is not that of a simple man. It is not at all a human thing. And not only His resurrection proved the power He had as true God, but the other resurrections Jesus made, too.

H. F. Cherniss remarks the fact that arguing with Eunomius, St. Gregory explains to him logically how the power of God can perform resurrections, saying that for God it is easier to restore to its former state the human body since God has done the more difficult task of creating matter out of nothing.⁷⁹ However, a resurrection is a recapitulation of creation in the sense that it proves logically (even if paradoxically) or it helps one to understand how God could create all things out of nothing but only through the power of His Word. When Jesus said a word and Lazarus arose, the people present there could consider as if having been present at the moment of creation of the universe when God spoke His Word and things appeared.

The power of God was so clear and so similar to creation when under the power of Jesus' word the dispersed elements of human being came back together reinstating the harmony lost in death. In the moment of Christ's resurrection, God Himself became the point of encounter between death and life, stopping in Himself the process of decomposition of the nature produced by death; God Himself became the principle of reunification of elements of human being.⁸⁰

But if the Resurrection of Christ was the culminating point of God's power⁸¹ and the victory of life over evil and death, how can one explain the existence and the manifestation of the evil after the Resurrection? St. Gregory says that the fact that after the Lord's Resurrection there is still manifestation of evil in the world does not prove that the Resurrection was useless or powerless or that it did not bring and complete the salvation of humanity. The Lord's Resurrection has the sovereign power to destroy all evil. But here, the existence of

the evil in the world is to be understood in terms of the economy of God, οικονομία του θεου. This wise economy consists in the fact that the survival of a *weakened* evil power in the world is allowed for those who came after Christ, in order that they, too, could affront the evil, as Jesus affronted it in its essence. This current evil is only the echo, the resonance of the real evil which died through the death of the Son of God. But fighting this weakened evil, people can participate in their own salvation, being in communion with Christ in the work of fighting evil. And as Jesus did that with the grace of God, the same grace is also helping people in the Church to fight evil. "And this is connected to the fundamental idea of Gregory concerning the cooperation of man's freedom with the work of salvation,"⁸² Jean Danielou says.

The Holy Spirit and the power of God

The same Eunomius taught not only that the Son of God was a creature but also the Holy Spirit, and thus arrived at the heresy of Macedonius. Therefore defending the full divinity of the Son, St. Gregory defended and defined also the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. In this context, the point of the argument is also at the level of the divine power.

Teaching that the power of the Godhead came from the Father to the Son and ceased there, the pneumatomachs separated the nature of the Spirit from the Divine glory. St. Gregory answers to that, specifying that the power of the Spirit is one with the life-giving power of the Father and of the Son by which our salvation is achieved and our nature is assisted for its transfiguration, for its passage from corruptibility to incorruptibility.⁸³

"The Spirit of God is the power, the energy of the new beginning in human life. The Spirit is the power of God at work among us,"⁸⁴ D. Migliore states, and in the same context of defining the theology of the Holy Spirit St. Gregory continues: "When one calls the Spirit, Divine, one speaks the truth; when one defines Him to be worthy of honor, to be glorious, good, *omnipotent* (emphasis added) one does not lie."⁸⁵

We can see from this description that it is the consubstantiality of the Spirit with the Father and the Son which makes Him to have the same attributes related to the nature of God.

Speaking of the divinity of the Holy Spirit, with indignation against his adversaries, St. Gregory says bitterly: "It is indeed a monstrous thing to refuse to confess this in the case of the Spirit"⁸⁶

The Holy Spirit has this same sovereign, eternal power because of His indivisible, indestructible, eternal, consubstantial unity with the Father and the Son. St. Gregory wants to be very clear: "Therefore, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are to be known only in a perfect Trinity in closest consequence and union with each other, before all creation, before all the ages, before anything whatever of which we can form an idea."⁸⁷

Being Holy and of divine essence, the Holy Spirit has no diminution in any perfection vis-à-vis the other two persons of the Trinity. In virtue of His divine essence, He participated in the act of creation, a fact which proves His almighty power. If He is creature and therefore not omnipotent, He could not have participated in the act of creation and especially if one takes into consideration that Eunomius set the Spirit to be even inferior to the Son. Then Gregory asks: "If the heaven and the earth and all created things were really made through the Son by the Father but apart from the Spirit, what was the Holy Spirit doing at the time when the Father and the Son acted upon the creation? Was He employed upon some other work and was this the reason that He had no hand in the building of the universe?"⁸⁸ And again: "Well, if He was not present, they must tell us where he was!"⁸⁹

Being in the world after Jesus' ascension, the Holy Spirit manifests His divine power leading the people of God, to the Kingdom which is power⁹⁰ and truth,⁹¹ to eternal life which is also dependent upon the almighty will of God ⁹² and also a manifestation of God's power.

The power of God, Trinitarian perspective

In his book *The Power of God* D. Migliore states: "The power of God, the power of creative, suffering and transforming love has a Trinitarian shape according to the New Testament."⁹³ And he makes clear what kind of Trinitarian shape: "The majestic power of God is made known in the crucified Jesus Christ and in His life-transforming Spirit."⁹⁴

With the same clarity the power of God as a communicated perfection between the Trinitarian persons on the basis of their common essence, is stated by St. Gregory: "The fountain of power is the Father and the power of the Father is the Son, and the Spirit of that power is the Holy Spirit; and the creation entirely, in all its visible and spiritual extent, is the finished work of that Divine power."⁹⁵

Indeed, the creation is again the mirror in which if one knows how to look in and helped by the written revelation, one can discover not merely a general presence of an *extra mundo* transcendent God, but the personal presence of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; "all creation is a movement of the divine will, an impulse, a transmission of power beginning from the Father, advancing through the Son and completed in the Holy Spirit."⁹⁶ Speaking again about this Trinitarian movement of the power of God related to creation from which it could be known, St. Gregory enriches his concept, teaching that the divine and superintending power of the three persons of God is one power exercised over creation, inseparable, in mutual conjunction, as we learn from the Scriptures; he says "that Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God and that very power of superintendence and beholding which we call Godhead, the Father exercises through the Only-Begotten, while the Son perfects every power by the Holy Spirit."⁹⁷

In the intra-trinitarian life there is an essential unity with no confusion and a hypostatic distinction with no separation. The nature, the essence of the Word is the same with God the Father and also with the Holy Spirit; the divine attributes: eternal, substantial, life, almighty, freedom, etc., refer to every Trinitarian divine person.⁹⁸

The consubstantiality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit does not allow us to think of any hierarchical essential structure of the Trinity "for He who is in the Father with all His own might and He who has the Father in Himself includes all the power and might of the Father. For He has in Himself all the Father, not merely a part of Him. And He who has Him entirely, assuredly has His power as well,"⁹⁹ St. Gregory argues logically and theologically.

The power of God, sacramental perspective

After the Lord's resurrection, in the epoch of the Holy Spirit, in the time of the Church which exists between the first and the second coming of Christ, the power of God has not disappeared; it works in many ways in the world, in visible and invisible ways, as in the transformation of the human seed in the human being, the transformation in the Eucharist and in the blood and body of Christ of the liturgical offering, the transformation of the human body and spirit after receiving the Holy Communion, the moral changes operating through baptism in the life of the believer,¹⁰⁰ and many others. This is especially the sacramental work of God through the Holy Spirit, rightly called the life-transforming Spirit.¹⁰¹ The work of the Holy Spirit is, as was mentioned, chiefly to transform.

Even the deification of human beings, a common concept in the early Fathers of the Church, is also a transformation, the transfiguration of the whole creation, which is the ultimate aim in the evolution of the creation is transformation, and all this is operated by God, in the Son, through the Holy Spirit.

The concept of transformation, transfiguration is strictly related to the idea of sacrament in which the power of God is manifested as in a permanent process of renewing the creation. In the last part of his *Catechetical Oration*, St. Gregory of Nyssa speaks particularly and insistently about the power of God manifested in creation, Incarnation, Resurrection, and the sacramental life of the Church, operating both in a visible and mystical way.

Matter cannot resist the power of God. The elements of matter came out of nothing and were put together through the power of God, St. Gregory says. They have their form and manner of being, their link through the same power of God. Therefore, "the power of God when it wills transforms, μεταρρᾶσει, the substance, οὐσία, of a thing in that the power wills and it produces a reality which is consubstantial, ὁμοουσιος, to the present mutation."¹⁰²

In the context of such an understanding of the constitution of matter and its way of being under the power of God, St. Gregory explains the transformation of the Eucharistic elements in the body and the blood of Christ saying that the matter in itself has a changing nature because it is based on an alteration and lives out of that permanent alteration. The emergence from non-being to being is an alteration, a passage, made possible by the power of the Word of God.¹⁰³

If one does not believe in the transforming nature of matter, what about the transforming accomplishment in the matter by the grace of regeneration? asks Gregory.¹⁰⁴

Speaking about the Eucharistic transformation, he becomes speculatively practical: "When we see the bread, we see in a sense, the human body as long as we know that the bread penetrates in the body and becomes itself body; in the same way, but even more, the body in which God incarnated, being nourished by bread was in a sense identical to the bread, as long as the food transforms itself in order to take the nature of the body. But this body which became the dwelling of God was transformed by God's presence and elevated to the divine dignity. Here we have a reason to believe that the bread sanctified by the Word of God is transformed in order to become the body of God the Word."¹⁰⁵

Conclusions

In the present paper I intended to present some guidelines of St. Gregory of Nyssa's theology of the power of God. His concept on that problem is scattered all over his writings. However, I used here more often his books against

Eunomius, *The Great Catechism*, the treatises: *On "Not Three Gods," On the Holy Spirit, On the Holy Trinity, The Beatitudes, and On the Creation of Man.*

I want to recall here that the theology of St. Gregory of Nyssa was acknowledged and highly appreciated by the Church in his time and afterwards, that his works served as a basis for the dogmatical formulations of the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, 381, and through the way it was founded, structured, and elaborated, his theology proved its validity and capacity to illuminate across the centuries until our time, when it continues to represent a strong source and guide for the theology and the life of the Church.

NOTES

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 2. The exact year of his birth is not known. NPNF opts for 331, as well as H.F. Cherniss in *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa*, Cambridge University Press, London, England, 1930; also Louis Méridier in the introduction of his French edition of Gregory's *Great Catechism*, paralleled by the Greek text, Paris, 1908, and others; Tony Lane in the recent work *Harper's Concise Book of Christian Faith*, Harper and Row, 1984, mentions the year 335 A.D.
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 4. See: Grégoire de Nysse, *Discours Catéchétique*, texte grec, trad. française, introd. et index par Louis Méridier, Paris, 1908, p. xvi.
 5. *Ibidem*, p. viii.
 6. NPNF, Prolegomena, p. 8.
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 8. Grégoire de Nysse, *Les Béatitudes*, trad. de Jean-Yves Guillaumin et de Gabrielle Parent, Introduction et notes de A.G. Hamman, col. "Les Pères dans la Foi," Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1979, p. 13.
 9. M. van Parys, *Exégèse et théologie dans les livres "Contre Eunome" de Grégoire de Nysse...* dans "Écriture et Culture philosophique dans la

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 11. Ibid., VIII, 5, NPNF, p. 207.
 12. Les Béatitudes..., p. 91.
 13. Ibid., p. 23.
 14. Gregory of Nyssa, On "Not Three Gods", NPNF, p. 333.
 15. Les Béatitudes..., p. 83.
 16. Ibid., p. 32.
 17. Ibid., p. 92.
 18. Grégoire de Nysse, Discours Catéchétique, V, 3, pp. 25-26.
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 22. Johannes Zachhuber, Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance, Brill, Leiden, 2000, pp. 158, 234.
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 26. Grégoire de Nysse, Discours Catéchétique, XXXV, 10; XXXVI, 1, 2, pp. 167; 171-173.
 27. Grégoire de Nysse, La Création de l'Homme, 185, A-D, see: E. Corsini, "Plerôme humain et plerôme cosmique," dans "Ecriture et Culture...", p. 118.
 28. Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, IX, 1, NPNF, p. 211.
 29. Ibid., II, 6; NPNF, p. 108.
 30. Idem, Answer to Eunomius' second book, NPNF, p. 309.
 31. Idem, Against Eunomius, VIII, 5, NPNF, p. 207; see also: H.F. Cherniss, op. cit., p. 26.
 32. Idem, The Great Catechism, NPNF, p. 476.
 33. Idem, Discours Catéchétique, V, 2, p. 25.
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38. Daniel L. Migliore, *The Power of God*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1983, pp. 49, 55.
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 41. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, NPNF, p. 494.
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 44. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
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 72. *Ibid.*, XVII, 2, p. 91.
 73. *Ibid.*, XVIII, 3, p. 111.
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 98. *Idem*, *Discours Catéchétique*, p. xxviii.
 99. *Idem*, *Against Eunomius*, II, 6, NPNF, p. 107.
 100. *Idem*, *Discours Catéchétique*, p. lxxxii.
 101. Daniel L. Migliore, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
 102. Grégoire de Nysse, *Homélie* Clementines, XX, 2, 6-7, chez J. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

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- ^{103.} Idem, Discours Catéchétique, XLIV, 57, p. 100.
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Andreas Andreopoulos

The Symbol and the Icon in Patristic Tradition: A Semiotic Comparison

The difficulty with concepts such as “symbol” and “icon” is that their meaning today is not what it used to be a few centuries ago. Certainly, a study that deals with them in the patristic era (and, by extension in the Church, medieval and modern, for the Church has not left, conceptually, the patristic era) has to reexamine and perhaps redefine them. Symbol and icon mean something different in an ancient Greek, Hellenistic or Byzantine context, when compared to the dominant modern understanding of these concepts.

Symbol, in modern semiotics, suggests almost always a representation of something well known, very often intangible, such as an idea or ideology, or national identity. The connection between the symbol and what it represents is so strong that the meaning is immediately recognizable. The symbol is usually closely and universally tied to what it represents, and, unlike “sign” in general, which is often open to interpretation, its meaning is direct, immediate and unequivocal. The sickle and hammer, a national flag or a national anthem, the language of the colors or the flowers are examples of usual symbols within contemporary culture.

The use of sign and symbol is normally associated with the absence of that which is signified or symbolized, and this is consistent with its initial meaning. The original meaning of the word σύμβολον in ancient Greece, referred to the one half, or one of two corresponding pieces of a bone or a coin. Two contracting parties broke the bone or the coin, each of them keeping one as a reminder of the contract. The etymology suggests that when the two parts were brought together, they would reveal the original wholeness of the object, and the mutual recognition of the two parties. The use and reference of

symbol was later extended to marks made by specially carved rings and stones, in the way we use our signature today.

The symbol, therefore, refers to a missing part. In a religious context, symbols are used in respect to the correspondence between the material and the spiritual world. We symbolize something that is not really present, and this is even more evident in visual representation: a painting or a photograph, are present even after the depicted person is away or dead. The quest for a faithful depiction in fact, has its origins in the practice of the ancient Egyptians who preserved the body after death, in the hope of its resurrection. The funeral portrait is a development of the mummy, preserving at least the likeness of the departed. Portraits of kings and rich patrons in the Renaissance had a similar function: to preserve something of the represented person even when the original had passed away.

The most profound Christian understanding of the symbol however, as it can be found in several important areas of Christian life, such as iconography, liturgy and the expression of doctrine, is somewhat different from all this. The reference to an absent part, especially within a religious context, sounds much more Platonist than Christian, although Christianity relies heavily on the use of symbols. It is, of course, impossible to deny that Platonism and Neo-Platonism played an important role in the formation of Christian thought and theology. It is, furthermore, impossible to deny that Christianity too, makes a distinction between the “here” and the “there”, or the “now” and the “then”, where the “there” and the “then” refer to the divine realm or the eschatological perfection.

Nevertheless, there is never a complete separation between the two polar opposites. For Christianity heaven and earth are not like the static dividing line in Plato’s Republic, which suggests that there is not much communication between the two, but they are connected by Christ himself, as he told his disciples: “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man”¹. Christ is, in that sense, the ultimate symbol,

¹ John 1:51.

because he reveals the Father in his person, as it is seen both in the New Testament² and the Fathers of the Church,³ and because of the connection of the heavenly and the earthly that he achieved in his person. The magnitude of this can be seen in the theology of the unity of the two natures of Christ. Maximos the Confessor has discussed the importance of the symbolism of Christ, referring to him as the “symbol of himself”. In a wonderful and profound passage, Maximos writes that Christ

*accepted to be unchangeably created in form like us and through his immeasurable love for humankind to become the type and symbol of himself, and from himself symbolically to represent himself, and through the manifestation of himself to lead to himself in his complete and secret hiddenness the whole creation.*⁴

The above passage stresses something that permeates the highest expressions of symbolism in the Church. Every kind of symbol-as-presence, in doctrinal formulation, liturgy or iconography, is connected in some way with Christ or with the revelation of the Trinity and the outpouring of the divine theologia into the realm of the oikonomia. The same thing is expressed in the work of pseudo-Dionysios, for whom symbolic theology stands above an unites cataphatic and apophatic, which in turn, correspond to oikonomia and theologia. In other words, the highest form of symbol is that which connects the “here” and the “there”, the earthly and the numinous. This engenders and is reflected on many aspects of Christian theology and worship. The theology of deification, the stress on the seamless union of the two natures of Christ, as well as the art and the liturgy of the Church, are witnesses to this understanding of the symbol: the symbol-as-presence, which is perhaps peculiar to a Christian understanding of symbolism. Moreover, as we shall

² *He who has seen me has seen the Father*, John 14:9.

³ Cf. for instance, Origen’s reference to Christ as the *απαύγασμα* (brilliance, luminous reflection) of the Father.

⁴ Maximos the Confessor: *Ambigua 10*, 31 C.

see, if we are to judge from the difference between Orthodox iconography and Western religious art, the symbol-as-presence is an especially Orthodox concept.

Christians in the first few centuries after Christ went at lengths – although always reluctantly and forced by the situations – to provide a “definition” of the Christian faith. The most succinct and complete expression of the faith was the Creed. Several Creeds had been in use since the beginning of Christianity, as confessions of faith, professed by the catechumens who were baptized. In the beginning of the fourth century however, slightly before the First Ecumenical Council, the Creed was used as a proclamation of faith and as a definition of orthodoxy. The Creed was the minimum possible expression of what Christianity is about, and it was known as “The Symbol of Faith”.

Why was the Creed called a symbol? Why is the text which, despite the attempts to use expressions taken out of the Gospel as much as this was possible, was in many ways, the final product of theological negotiations and compromises, seen as the quintessential verbal expression of Christianity? How can it symbolize faith itself?

First, we have to remember that theology in general, and issues that had to do with the Creed in particular, were of interest not only to churchmen, emperors and theologians, but to everyone – as much as politics is something we are all interested in nowadays. The famous complaint of Gregory of Nazianzos about people everywhere – on the street, in the market – discussing the fine points of the theology of the time,⁵ is quite descriptive in that respect, of a time when the difference

⁵ “It has gone so far that the whole market resounds with the discourses of heretics, every banquet is corrupted by this babbling even to nausea, every merrymaking is transformed into a mourning, and every funeral solemnity is almost alleviated by this brawling as a still greater evil; even the chambers of women, the nurseries of simplicity, are disturbed thereby, and the flowers of modesty are crushed by this precocious practice of dispute”, Orat. xxvii. 2 (Opera, tom. i. p. 488). Comp. Orat. xxxii. (tom. i. p. 581); Carmen de vita sua, vers. 1210 sqq. (tom. ii. p. 737 sq.).

of one letter, between homoousios or homoiousios was important enough to divide the Church. Similar, in this respect, is the sensitivity around the issue of the filioque. What was always seen as a scandal in the East was not so much the different theological view of the West,⁶ but the fact that the West dared change the Symbol of Faith so easily, without the approval of an Ecumenical Council. Why is this important? The Creed was not an affair of the intellectual Church, but of the entire Christian population. For most people it did not explain or argue the faith, but it symbolized it – even when they approached it with as much fervor as any erudite theologian. In this way, the Creed is much wider in scope than a theological treatise or a prayer.

We can see that the Symbol of Faith is practically synonymous with the correct faith. It was seen as the minimum declaration of the complete Faith. If you could proclaim it, every word of it and without any additions, you were doctrinally a part of the Church. The symbolism here is that of the existing and present faith and Church. Moreover, the symbol here is understood as the essential expression or representation of something larger, which may not be absent, but is certainly elusive. To say more, on this level, would put us in danger of saying more than we can safely say without resorting to perilous metaphors and imprecise descriptions. It is already a convention, a “symbolism”, a withdrawal of apophatic truth in favor of the cataphatic expression. It is bad enough that we use conventional expressions such as “Father”, “Lord”, and so on, which at least are deeply embedded in our religious consciousness. In the Symbol of Faith we see this exact paradox: truth is apophatic although present, whereas the symbol is cataphatic. The symbol is, in that sense, more present than the real faith.

⁶ Besides, there was never much of a dialogue on this between East and West, and when there was, the results were rather positive. The dialogue was hindered by other issues, most often the primacy of Rome. Cf. the dialogue between Nicetas Stethatos and Anselm of Canterbury.

Liturgy is another area where Christian symbolism shows its difference from secular symbolism. There is of course, an element of dramatic action or narrative in all services, but what makes the source of all sacraments important, the Eucharist, is the real presence of the body and the blood of Christ.

The Roman Mass and the Orthodox Liturgy have similar structure, and they developed almost simultaneously, expressing, the same truth. Something was apparently different however, when the West tried to pinpoint the manner and the exact moment of the change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. The theology of the transubstantiation, which starts some time in the ninth century, expresses the same concern. Unfortunately however, the East too was somewhat influenced by this, although it was always reluctant to separate the anaphora, when the change takes place, from the rest of the liturgy.

Why is this problematic? The semiotic problem of the theology of the transubstantiation is that it undermines the meaning and the function of the other parts of the liturgy. If we know the precise moment of change, and if we can isolate the prayer or the invocation that brings about the change, and if we assume that this moment is categorically different from the rest of the liturgy (since the manifestation of the body and the blood of Christ take place on a different level than the rest of the liturgy), what is exactly the role and the need of the liturgy of the catechumens, the readings and the antiphons, for instance? Are they not useless, at least from a purely theological point of view, and perhaps necessary only for psychological reasons?

The problem here arises from the fact that the rest of the liturgy is either a symbolic (that is, dramatic, representational) celebration, whereas the transubstantiation claims to be something completely different. However, the reluctance of the Orthodox Church to plunge into this theological issue, and, more recently, the views of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, put the whole thing in a more clear perspective: We cannot forget that the communal body is, for us, at the same time symbol and

presence, or better still, symbol-as-presence. The liturgy of St. Basil refers to the Holy Gifts as *αντίτυπα* (signs, symbols) of the body and the blood of Christ. This suggests, clearly, that we see them as symbols at the same time we see them as consubstantial with the body and blood of Christ. Fr. Schmemmann went at lengths to discuss this in his writings. The symbol is not fake, it is transparent, and makes visible what we could not otherwise see.

This does not mean that we are crypto-Protestants. The Holy Gifts are at the same time symbol and reality, something we can understand only too well if we remember that Christ too, is a consubstantial image of the Father. For this reason, as Fr. Schmemmann argued, there is no sense in isolating the exact moment of the change, or the exact prayer. The anaphora is not what it is without the liturgy of the Word, and without the Trisagion, and so forth. Everything that happens since we enter the church, or rather, after we are baptized, is connected through and looks up to the sacrament of the Eucharist and the sacramental, liturgical and mystical presence of Christ among us. “Symbol” here means the connection with that which we cannot see.

Iconography, finally, fits even more the description of symbol-as-presence. The Orthodox icon is never treated as a painting or a simple representation. This was the case even in the pagan symbolism of deities, and in the powerful representation of the Emperor – known through the much-quoted reference of St. Basil about the honor that is given to the emperor through his statue.

The icon however, derives its meaning from the theology of the image, whose most theologically charged example is that of Christ as the image of the Father. Common to Christians and (pagan) neo-Platonists, the image and the prototype are not connected arbitrarily, but share something essential. *Εικόνα* was used by neo-Platonists in order to describe the relationship between what is higher and what is lower in the hierarchy of the universe, from the completely transcendental One to the lofty Intelligence to the lowly Soul in the philosophy

of Plotinos, or the more developed multi-leveled universe of Proklos. Every step below is an image of that which is above it. The word “icon” was used to denote the religious painting, but it evoked memories from a philosophical and theological past where “icon” suggested a lot more than superficial likeness. This weight was carried by iconography throughout its history, which always retained something of the initial memory of the ancient or proto-Christian “εικόν”. We can see this as late as the fourteenth century, when Theophanes of Nicea discussed in his Homilies on the Uncreated Light, the symbol and the icon. The icon, he said, may be superior to the symbol, because although it is possible for both of them to share the essence of what they represent, the icon may have, in addition to this, a physical resemblance with the prototype, which is not the case with the symbol. This may sound compromising, in the light of the pseudo-Dionysian preference for dissimilar symbols. There is a danger, warns pseudo-Dionysios, in using symbols that bear a similarity to what they represent, in order to describe the supernatural realm: we may start thinking that the transcendental reality we want to describe actually looks like the conventional symbol we use.

So, true negations and the unlike comparisons with their last echoes offer due homage to the divine things. For this reason there is nothing ridiculous about representing heavenly beings with similarities which are dissimilar and incongruous.⁷

The theology of the icon is naturally shaped by the pseudo-Dionysian view, but it is a little more complicated than this. The icon is similarity and dissimilarity at the same time. Very much according to the need for likeness, the depicted figure is recognizable, since it shares its personhood with the depicted saint. Since however, it represents celestial realities, it does not try to imitate forms of people, buildings and natural elements as we find them on the earth, but completely

⁷ Celestial Hierarchy, 145 A.

transfigured. St. Andrew or St. Michael may be recognizable in an icon, but the lack of shadows, the elongated bodies, the big ears, the small and always closed mouth, and so many characteristics that are in direct violation of the laws of naturalist representation, make it difficult for us to confuse the earthly and the celestial.

Iconoclasm forced Christian thinkers such as John of Damascus to expound the semiotics of the icon. In his *Second Apology Against Those Who Attack The Divine Icons*, he defines six categories of icons, categories of different orders, including the consubstantial or “natural” as he calls it, image of the Father on Christ, the image of God in man, and the image of God in all Creation. This gave him the freedom to discuss the veneration of icon as opposed to the worship to God, but at the same time showing that the icon is a lot more than a simple representation. Moreover, John organized the several kinds of icons around God, in a way that reminds us of the pseudo-Dionysian hierarchy, with certain kinds of icon closer to God and others farther away. Even the more lowly kind of icon however, bears something of the likeness of God, and refers to him.

Symbolism, as it appears in the highly influential writings of pseudo-Dionysios, is particularly intriguing. Pseudo-Dionysios has used symbols and symbolism in various ways. His work may be used to demonstrate the depth of the religious symbol, but he also used symbolism in the more conventional way (cf. his discussion of the symbolism of the colors in *Celestial Hierarchy*). Nevertheless, his entire work, in many places, presents the entire universe, visible (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*) and invisible (*Celestial Hierarchy*) as a multiple structure which is connected to God through several layers of symbols. In his work we come across all kinds of symbols, from the less significant ones (symbolism of colors), to more important ones (names of angels, sacraments). “Symbol” is, for pseudo-Dionysios, a concept as multifaceted as “icon” for John of Damascus.

John and the other defenders of the icons discussed extensively the function of icon as an aid to prayer, as a way to worship Christ through the veneration we give to his icon. The function of the icon as the “gospel of the illiterate” is also mentioned. But apart from the didactic function and the icon as an aid to prayer, the icon has a third function. It is not only a vehicle that takes our prayer and our worship to heaven, but it is also a window from which heaven looks upon us. The icon suggests a presence, and is treated traditionally as such. Not only icons are often given honors normally given to people – for instance, on the Feast of John Chrysostom in the church of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the icon of John Chrysostom is placed on the patriarchal throne – but there are feast days and hymns dedicated to specific icons. The icon is a presence as real as any human being.

There is something else that demonstrates the icon-as-presence in a very dramatic manner. Inverted perspective, a fundamental technical premise in iconography, implies a gaze coming from the other side of the icon, the “eye of God”. This is demonstrated by the custom of Byzantine and Russian painters, who as late as the nineteenth century used to paint the so-called “Great Eye” on the canvas and write the word “God” underneath, before they started painting the icon. This suggests that the dynamics of the gaze are reversed in an icon: the canvas hides and reveals at the same time, in the same way the icons of the iconostasis hide and reveal the mysteries of the altar, the real presence of Christ or the depicted saint from the other end. As opposed to Renaissance painting, which, with its illusionist techniques tried to create a window (or a gaze) to another world, the icon is a window from another world, at the same time for us to look into, and to be looked upon.

The icon is a symbol. It is a symbol which, as all symbols in Christian, and especially Orthodox tradition, carries within it a reality of that which it symbolizes. Although it does not share its essence with the prototype, it shares something else, which is almost as important: according to the defenders of the icons, it shares its hypostasis, its personhood, with the

depicted saint –to be more precise after the discussion of symbol and icon, I would not use the term “depicted” or even, as the Russian tradition has it “written”, but “symbolized” saint. The mere fact that the Fathers chose this highly charged concept to show what connects the icon and the symbolized saint, shows how serious this issue was for them. As a presence looking over us from beyond time and space, I am tempted to ignore the Platonic overtones, and think of the icon as the symbol of something more real than us.

Pedro F. Campa

**Romanian icons:
A Contribution to Balkan Art**

It is generally assumed that the only major contribution of Balkan countries to Byzantine art is the art of mural painting. The purpose of this paper is to focus on Romanian icons since they seem to preserve some of the purest traditions of Byzantine art in the Balkans. Although the famous mural paintings in Moldovan monasteries are well known to art historians, there are no studies, in English, that deal with the origin and development of portable icons on wood, or on glass, in Romania.

Presently, as we dwell in the midst of the computer age, the word icon is enjoying a fortuitous revival. Icon; however, in its strict religious definition means the pictorial image of Christ, the Virgin, or the saints, using the medium of tempera on wood (and on occasions enamel, mosaics, metal, glass or embroidery) following certain canonical principles, as taught by the Eastern Orthodox Church. In a broader context an icon is any religious representation used by the Orthodox Church and Orthodox believers as an article of religious devotion. Beyond materials and craftsmanship however, there are more subtle points to a true Orthodox definition of the word. An icon, canonically speaking, is essentially a painting of worship, a form of liturgical art or hagiographia; a holy art not made to please the senses, but to uplift the spirit and to beckon the viewer to see beyond the physical world into the realm of the divine.

Whereas Western Renaissance religious painting attempted to mold Christ, the Virgin and the saints into a human likeness diminishing their scale by depicting their emotions and their physical toils in a realistic manner, the icon attempts to represent, in a stylized manner, these holy personages as they have been transformed by their death and glorification.

It is not the object of this presentation to give a dissertation on the aesthetics, or the theology of the icon, but rather to focus on several aspects of the Romanian icon tradition that have been somewhat beguiling to me.

We know that icons existed as far back as the 7th century, and that catacomb- and cave-Christian painting date even earlier than icons. However, only fragments of portable early Byzantine icons have survived to this day. We can only speculate on their size and style from contemporary inventories and from what survives of Byzantine frescoes and mosaics. Icon and fresco painting began in the Balkans with the appearance of Greek missionaries and the conversion of the Slavs. Thus the point of entry of Byzantine art into the Balkans was Thessaloniki. Byzantine painting arrived in different waves, and although we have no portable Balkan icons dating from the 12th century, the early frescos of the Church of Saint Panteleimon in Nerezi (ca. 1164-Serbia), for example, give us a glimpse of this provincial Byzantine art. Commissioned by Emperor Alexios Comminus, these early frescos have a sense of emotion, an empathy that is going to become a characteristic imprint of Balkan religious art. It is practically impossible to isolate the history of icon painting in the Balkans, by ascribing modern boundaries to a Christian iconography that belonged to a Pan-Orthodox-Byzantine world. There were no such things as identifiably Serbian, Macedonian, Bulgarian or Romanian icons in the early Middle Ages, unless we can ascertain their origin based on the analysis of the language of the inscriptions and/or the original site of their installation.

We can however, infer a great deal about style, technique and subject matter of portable Balkan icons based on the study of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century mural painting. Unlike the Russian tradition, which can be grouped into schools (Novgorod, Pskov etc.), and whose icon-painting tradition relied on strict rules laid down in icon manuals (*podliniki*), Balkan icon painting followed the basic schema of the frescoes from the walls of churches and monasteries. Balkan artisans slowly introduced some innovations and themes that will

eventually differentiate a Romanian icon from a Bulgarian or a Serbian one.

For centuries Romania was a bastion against the Asiatic invasions. From the end of Roman rule in Dacia in 271 AD, Barbarian conquerors invaded from Central Asia seeking to conquer Rome or Byzantium. Two fiefdoms emerged in the thirteenth century in this war-torn region: Moldavia and Wallachia (the so-called Țara Românească). After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottoman Empire began the systematic invasion of the Balkans on their route to Vienna.

Bulgarian, Serbian and Romanian princes sometimes resisted the Turkish onslaught, and sometimes made deals with the enemy in order to survive. The Moldavian ruler Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great) repelled the Ottoman invasion, kept the independence of his realm (1457-1504) and in a sense determined what was to become the historical northern and eastern border of Romania (Moldavia). Although Ștefan cel Mare's long reign was punctuated by continual struggle, it witnessed a high level of cultural development, and was a period of great ecclesiastical building and patronage. In the second half of the fifteenth century, Stephen the Great built forty-four churches, including Putna Monastery in 1466, where he was buried. After Stephen's death Suleiman the Magnificent invaded Moldavia, and in 1541 he installed Stephen's son Petru Rareș (1530-1538 and 1541–1546) Rareș' reign was marked by the fall of Hungary to the Turks in 1526. During his reign the monasteries of Probota (1530), and Râșca (1542), and the churches of Baia (1532), and St. Demeter (1534-1535) in Suceava were built. Likewise, legacies from his reign are the monasteries of Humor (the smallest of the painted monasteries 1532-36), Coșula and Horodniceni.

A descendant of the Craiovești Voievods, a dynasty who reigned in Wallachia during the 15th and 16th centuries, Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521) stands out as its most important prince. Through tribute, diplomacy and alliances he maintained the independence of Wallachia and during his reign the important monastery of Curtea de Argeș was built. In the same

tradition of patronage as Byzantine emperors, Basarab sponsored other monasteries in the Balkans, such Cutlumuş, Hilandar, Iviron (in Mt. Athos) as well as other religious enclaves in Constantinople, Jerusalem, Mount Sinai, at Meteora (in Thessaly).

Monasticism was, and remains a most important feature in the Eastern Church, and the nobility of the Romanian principalities continued the tradition of erecting churches and monasteries. About a dozen monasteries dating from the second quarter of the sixteenth century remain in Bucovina. The most notable of these monastic enclaves are Humor, Moldoviţa, Arbore and Voroneţ. The so-called painted monasteries (because of their exterior and interior frescos) show the influence of the Byzantine tradition of the artists active in Wallachia in the 14th and early 15th centuries.

Early Romania, that is the Danube principalities, in spite of the struggle with the Turks, managed to retained a degree of independence that nourished its art, sometimes leading to a blending of Byzantine and Western art, as well as to the emergence of a Romanian style.



Figure 1.
19th Century Moldavian
Icon.
Private Collection

Even to the casual observer, it is an inescapable fact that Romanian icon painting is influenced by mural painting, and Romanian icons tend to retain a monumental quality. But, what does a typical Romanian icon look like? I purposely chose an ordinary 19th century Moldavian piece from my own collection (**Fig. 1**). This is an icon of the Baptism of Christ (Botezul Domnului) painted with tempera on wood panel dating from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The scene depicts John the Forerunner baptizing Christ (in the center) with a host of angels on the right. Above Christ's head, there is a segment of a circle representing Heaven (the circle that Adam had closed for himself and his progeny) from which emerges a dove and a ray of light, representing the Holy Ghost and the presence of God, respectively. The angel in the foreground has his head tilted forward, and his hands covered with cloth, in a gesture of reverence. Christ is blessing the waters with his right hand as John lays his hand on Christ's head. This is the only orthodox icon where the Holy Ghost can be accurately represented as a dove since it is truly scriptural (Matt.3:116-17).

The first striking thing about this piece is the bright and bold primary colors. The second thing is the scale. The figures are so big for the space that they do not seem to be a part to the composition. Unlike the detached serenity found in academic Russian icons, there is an expressiveness in the eyes and in the gestures that, albeit the stiffness of the figures, the bold paint strokes accomplish a successful composition. This icon is so similar to a fresco of the Baptism of Christ on one of the walls of the Monastery of Probota (ca. 1530) as to almost construe that it is its direct source. There several reasons for this conjecture. The color, the contours and the eyes of the figures mimic the Probota fresco. Also, there is one detail in the painting, not present in traditional Orthodox iconography of the Baptism that hails back to very early Byzantine sources. Whereas later Byzantine icons tried to represent immersion by depicting the Jordan waters as a dark cave with Christ in the center, this icon has Christ standing on a board or platform as he emerges from the waters of the Jordan after being immersed.

This Byzantine/Romanian variant is perhaps taken from one the hymns for the Feast of the Theophany liturgy where Christ is referred to as the floating log on a tempestuous water for the faithful to hold on in order to attain Salvation. Aside from the fact that the inscription on the top is in Romanian in Cyrillic writing, this icon is identifiably Romanian within an early conservative Byzantine style.

The next example is an important subject for icons in the Orthodox Church since, like the Baptism of Christ, it commemorates one of the Great Feasts of the Church. The Dormition of the Mother of God (Adormirea Maicii Domnului; Koimisis in Greek; Uspenie in Slavonic) or what is called in the West, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The typical Roman Catholic iconography for this Church belief (declared into dogma by Pious XII in 1950) is Mary Queen of Angels. The familiar image of the crowned Virgin represents Mary bodily ascending into Heaven, or enthroned in Heaven, surrounded by clouds and angels. The feast of the Dormition, according to tradition, dates back to the 3rd century. The legend relates that when near death, Mary asked to be buried at Gethsemane, and the Apostles and disciples gathered at her death bed. The legend survives in several versions, the most important being the Pseudoepigrapha of St. Melitus written in the 5th century and an account of St. Modestus, Bishop of Jerusalem.

The traditional Orthodox representation, since Byzantine times, which survives intact in Russian and Greek icons to this day, depicts the dead body of the Virgin Mary on a bier surrounded by the grieving Apostles. Sometimes besides the Apostles there are four other figures depicted: James, the first Bishop of Jerusalem, and three disciples of the Apostles: Timothy, Hierotheus, and Dionisious the Aeropagite. In the center of the composition there is the figure of Christ circumscribed inside a mandorla holding, in his arms, the soul of his Mother which is in the guise of a baby wrapped in white swaddling clothes. This representation is also used in the

embroidered cloth (epitaphions) used in the Orthodox services of the Dormition.

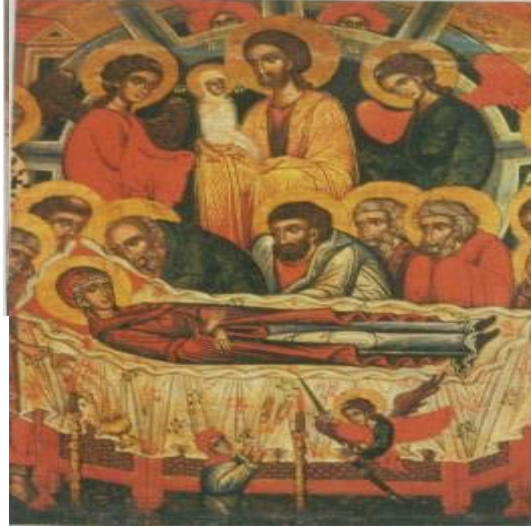


Figure 2.
Frescoes detail at
the Serbian
monastery of
Grachanitsa.
14th century.

The standard representation of the Dormition the suffered some modifications as it entered the Balkans. **Fig. 2** is a detail from one of the frescoes at the Serbian monastery of Grachanitsa (ca. early 14 century). Christ is inside a mandorla holding the soul of Mary but the Apostles seem to be leaving (Peter and Paul linger behind) to make way for the angels who will take Mary into Heaven.

This standard Orthodox iconography continued to survive as we can see in this detail from this sixteenth-century Macedonian triptych (**Fig. 3**) from the Church of St. John, the Forerunner in the Slepche Monastery, now in the Museum of Skopje. The figure in the bottom alludes to a folk tradition that depicts a pagan (or sometimes a Jew) who touched the bier of the Virgin, and his hands were cut off by an angel; he later repented and was healed. In this illustration one can see the swaddling clothes of the soul of Mary more clearly. Christ is depicted inside an architectural mandorla, and there are two Seraphim peeking from behind. As in most Balkan icons you can notice the boldness of color, and the figures, that without

being totally Western in style, are more expressive than those in Russian icons.

Figure 3.
16th century
Macedonian triptych

Romanian icons and frescoes of the Dormition combine tradition, innovation, and outside influences. For example, in Humor (ca. 1532-1536), one of the painted monasteries, in one of the frescoes on the southeast wall Mary is depicted enthroned as she ascends into Heaven surrounded by angels, which resembles traditional Roman Catholic iconography for the Assumption. Conversely, in Suceava (Bucovina ca.1600) in the Church of the Dormition, the fresco on the portico of the Church has the traditional Orthodox representation of the Dormition including Mary's soul in Christ's arms.



Figure 4.
Dormition of the Mother
of God
Banat Icon
18th century

In eighteenth-century Romanian icons there are more departures from traditional Orthodox iconography of the Adormirea that attest to the creativity and innovation of local artists. In the next example (**Fig. 4**) an 18th century icon from a Church in Vinga (now in the Collection of Episcopia Aradului) Christ is blessing Mary, and presumably reading from a book (the Akathistos? or the Panikhida?) being held by James. Mary's soul, no longer in Christ's arms, is being held by two angels in a red sphere above a column of clouds. The Romanian icons of the Dormition show a variety of compositions which are unprecedented in Orthodox iconography outside of Romania.



Figure 5.
Dormition of the
Mother of God
Maramureş icon
18th century.

The next example of the Dormition (**Fig. 5**), also from the 18th century, is from Transylvania, perhaps Maramureş (now in Muzeul Ţăranului Român). In this icon, Christ is opening his arms as if to receive the body of his Mother. The Apostles share the scene, standing around Mary's bier, with other bishop saints (one can see their omophorions) not contemporary to the event in attendance. There are twenty two

figures in total. In this wonderfully expressive icon, Jesus does not hold his mother's soul in his arms. One can notice in the background the typical buildings of a Romanian monastic enclave. There might be some simple explanation for the departure from the traditional iconography of the Dormition in Romania. Rather than ascribing a theological reason for the absence of Mary's soul in this icon, we could construe that Western influences might have affected the composition. There were Uniates in Transylvania, and Orthodox icon painting might have suffered some influences as early as 1730. Another plausible conjecture for the singularity of Romanian icons is that the creativity and innovation that characterizes Romanian mural portraiture could have influenced the conservative continuity of icon painting.



Figure 6.
Dormition of the
Mother of God
Original Romanian Icon
mid 19th century.

By far the most original Romanian representation of the Adormirea that we have found is this icon (**Fig. 6**) that dates

from the middle of the nineteenth century. The haloes of the Apostles have been re-gilded by an amateur. Here the traditional bier with Mary's body is surrounded by Apostles and other disciples numbering twenty three. The Virgin's soul has been transformed from a baby in swaddling clothes into an ethereal figure who reaches out to Christ who is enveloped by rays of light signifying the presence of God the Father. Although the figures in this icon are painted in a Western "realistic" manner, it is curious to note that the artist did not reproduce a Catholic version of the Assumption (Mary Queen of Angels). This icon incorporates the basic elements of the Dormition, and reinterprets the composition without departing from Orthodox tradition. In this icon, the open field on top, with the small figures of Mary and Christ, and the massive gathering of figures on the bottom, as if dividing Heaven from Earth, bodies from souls, contribute to give the composition the characteristic monumentality of Romanian icons.

The Romanian icon tradition also uses another medium unknown in other Orthodox countries, reverse painting on glass. Although this area is more suitably discussed under the heading of folk art, it is important for icon painting because it preserves themes that have disappeared from the tradition of Orthodox iconography since Byzantine times.

The origins of glass icons (*icoane pe sticla*) are somewhat obscure. The technique dates back to seventeenth-century Austria and Bohemia where miniature landscapes were executed as reverse-glass paintings with a gold foil background. The earliest glass icons were pious souvenirs of the pilgrimages of the Catholic-Greek Uniates to the shrine of the Virgin in Radna on the Mures river. The earliest Orthodox icons come from the village of Nicula in Northern Transylvania and they date from the early to the middle of the nineteenth century. These early glass icons were the work of German artists who relocated from Sandl (Dancu, pp.23-7).

The glass-icon craft and trade was soon taken up by peasant artisans in Nicula, and sold in fairs and markets. The subject matter of glass icons does not differ much from those on

wood, and most glass icons, like their wooden counterpart, are inspired by mural painting. The study of Romanian glass icons is a complex one. The relative accessibility of Transylvania as one of the great Balkan crossroads made this region subject to foreign Orthodox influences from Serbia through Banat, as well to Catholic influences from Hungary and Poland. Also, in the nineteenth century the mass printing of hand-colored xylographs prints (woodcuts) as souvenirs from holy places, produced in Hasdate (close to Nicula) made this images not only the model for glass icons, but at times the actual tracing template to create the icon.



Figure 7.
Adam and Eve
copy by Mircea
Purcarea
from Romanian
Peasant Museum
19th century

What is important, however, is that glass icons, aside from being an innovation are, like wood icons, preservers of some Byzantine subject matter that is unknown to the Orthodox world outside Romania. A favorite topic of glass-icon painters is Adam and Eve (Adam si Eva). This subject matter is almost unknown in the Russian and Greek Orthodox tradition outside of mural painting. The icon of Adam and Eve in **Fig. 7** is a copy by Mircea Purcarea from the Romanian Peasant Museum of a nineteenth-century glass icon from Banat. The subject matter is

taken from a fresco painting, and it depicts Adam and Eve in Paradise, surrounded by Seraphim, flanking the tree of Good and Evil as the serpent offers Eve an apple. The artist has added a Roman Catholic touch, never present in Byzantine murals: the image of God the Father wearing a triangle as a halo.



Figure 8.
Adam and Eve
Moldova, Glass Icon
ca. 1880

Another glass icon of the same subject (**Fig. 8**) depicts Adam and Eve with the Tree of Good and Evil and a colorful Serpent. This primitive icon is from Moldavia (ca. 1880). The flower decorations, which are also used in peasant Romanian embroidery and furniture painting, gives the composition an unmistakable Romanian touch. Above the figures, as not to doubt that this is an Orthodox icon, there are five onion domes from Orthodox churches. These pieces albeit small, and naive have a powerful impact because of their vivid colors and monumental scale.



Figure 9.
Mystical Supper
Glass Icon by Doina Adam
Romanian artist
from Philadelphia, PA.

The next illustration (**Fig.9**) is an Orthodox representation of the Mystical Supper. This glass icon was inspired on an older icon, and was executed by Doina Adam, a Romanian artist from Philadelphia. Unlike the Da Vinci-style representations, in Orthodox depictions Christ and the Apostles are seated or sometimes standing at a round table. This is a bright and powerful composition compressed in an eight by ten inches format. It depicts Christ and four Apostles in the foreground, as they partake of the Last Supper. The presence of other Apostles is suggested by their haloes in the background. In glass icons one can differentiate traditional Orthodox-Romanian topics from imported subject matter gleaned from Roman Catholic devotional painting. The decoration as well as the palette of these Catholic pieces might be identifiably Romanian, but the actual depiction of events, or the attributes of the saints does not subscribe to Orthodox tradition. Also the figures in these "Westernized" compositions are usually inspired by Italian and German baroque paintings or prints.

As I hope to have shown, it would be simplistic to assume that Romanian icons are, like Ukranian or Belorussian icons, a halfway house between Byzantine and Western

painting. Romania inherited and preserved some of the purest Byzantine artistic traditions in the Balkans which were reinforced in the seventeenth century by contacts with artists from Mt. Athos and by the cultural artistic milieu fostered by Moldavian and Wallachian Voievods. Innovation and creativity, and sometimes borrowing from secular subjects, infused a peculiar character to Romanian religious painting. Romanian icons while incorporating some Western tendencies present startling innovations without abandoning Orthodox tradition. The presence of the painted monasteries, and the continued modern and contemporary production of folk glass and wooden icons, attest to an uninterrupted artistic tradition of Orthodox iconography unknown in other Balkan countries.

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Nicholas Groves

**Russian Society and Culture in an Age of
Crisis: Elder Nectary and Optina**

Surely among the most remarkable realities that have followed the collapse of the former Soviet Union more than ten years ago has been the revival of monastic life in the Orthodox Church. It is remarkable not only for Christian believers, but as a testimony to the human spirit. That monasticism or religion in any organized form could survive and flourish after more than seventy five years of the most intense forms of persecution is a testimony to the Holy Spirit working in the human spirit, to theosis in action. In many ways Lenin and his Cheka have been proved wrong. Faith is not an opiate of the people. Rather it is a life sustaining force. While the full story of the survival and rebirth of Christianity in Russia has yet to be written, all accounts and studies that we have document a courage, faith and determination over many decades [1]. In the Russian Orthodox Church, monastics have been special bearers of this renewed life. "Christ is risen from the dead. Trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs giving life."

Of the monasteries revived, Optina is of special interest. The purpose of this paper will be to examine the life and witness of one of the last Elders or spiritual teachers of Optina, Elder Nektary. Born in 1853, as Russia entered the profound period of internal crisis that led to the 1917 Revolutions, he died an exile from Optina, closed by the Bolsheviks in 1923. It would seem that his life was an abject failure, as was that of his community. But it will be my thesis that Optina and the part of the Russian spiritual tradition he belonged to, was never stronger than in such weakness and seeming failure. [2] With St. Paul as he faced his own persecutors, Nektary could say: "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power

of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12: 10, RSV) Nektary offered himself as part of the kenosis, of the pouring out, of Christ himself. What I find most noteworthy about his own particular kenosis was its quiet nature. There was no bloody confrontation with authorities.

Rather an old man who dies in obscurity. As we shall see, Nektary witnessed against the forces of death by living a simple life of seeming retirement, while some old disciples continued to visit him. He did not advise forms of open rebellion, but rather love in practice, of nonviolence. His was not to be the fate of some other monks and elders of Optina, such as his own disciple Fr. Sebastian, who spent years in the camps and in exile. [3] Nektary’s response to the Bolshevik regime would have fulfilled the words of Elder Sebastian: “At these times I have said that one must pray, pray to God, and also live in love. Then only can we be delivered from this” (Quoted in T.V. Torstensen. Elder Sebastian of Optina, p. 43). No more, and no less.

Yet a word of caution might be in order as we begin our account. Perhaps the open horrors that Christians experienced under the Soviets were not the worst trials of all. We could well ask as we begin the twenty- first century if indifference and an easy complacency, or verbal warfare and self-righteousness among competing Christian groups may not accomplish what Lenin and Stalin failed to do. Will Christianity endure a persecution it creates among and between its own followers? [4] We could wonder how Nektary and the Elders of his tradition would look at both materialism (a materialism that is anything but dialectical), and at churches and communities of faith which are cozy with a culture of secularity. Whether in Russia, Europe, or the United States, would they find a “grace that costs,” as Bonhoeffer described it?

I shall suggest that the greatest legacy of Optina and of Elders such as Nektary is not the re-establishment of an open and thriving monastery, as exciting as that may be, a spiritual

boosterism of “onward and upward.” Rather it is a teaching about the realities and values of an inner vision that bears fruit in outer witness. Such teaching is not dependent on external circumstances, even on whether churches or monasteries are open or closed. In fact, the Optina Elders challenge us to look within, to the Holy Spirit dwelling in the heart. They call us to be hesychasts, those who welcome God in the stillness of their hearts, and hear the “laughter of the heart” of which St. John Climachus wrote in his Ladder. Such laughter sounds both beyond and within time and space, in exile and at home.

I. The Heritage of Optina

The monastery of Optina, called Opta’s Hermitage of the Presentation of the Holy Mother of God at Kozel’sk since the nineteenth century, dates back to at least the fifteenth century. The account of its foundation speaks of a reformed bandit named Opta as having begun the observances of monastic life there. [5]. Located approximately two hours’ journey south of Moscow in a lush river valley, on the banks of the Zhizdra river, it has attracted many visitors over centuries. Perhaps the most well known of these have been such intellectual and literary figures as Ivan Kireevsky (the first Slavophile), Dostoevsky, and Gogol. There has been considerable speculation as well as to Tolstoy’s visit to Optina soon before his death, particularly as it might point to some sort of reconciliation with the official Church.[6] Of considerably greater importance has been Optina’s appeal to a wide range of people of all sorts and conditions, from intellectuals to housewives, from nobility to peasants. People came, often from considerable distances, to ask “words,” or teachings from the Elders, much as they would have in the deserts of Egypt and Palestine in the fourth and fifth centuries. It has been the Elders of Optina who have been its most renowned spiritual teachers.

The practice of Eldership figured in the history of Optina from its refounding in 1796 by Metropolitan Platon (1737- 1812), who was metropolitan of Moscow and Kaluga

from 1775. Platon found this location a site particularly appealing for a desert form of religious life:

In 1796 His Grace Metropolitan Platon of Moscow, while visiting this Hermitage, realized this place to be exceedingly well suited to eremitical-cenobitism. . . And in order to convey his plan more expeditiously into practice, he requested of Abbott Makarii, the Rector of Pesnosh, to provide him to this end a suitable man, such as the Hieromonk Avramii was known to be. He, upon his arrival thither, encountered but a few monks, and structures, with the exception of the Cathedral Church, entirely of wood, and these shabby etc. [7]

Of equal importance for the history of Optina was the founding of the skete of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist by Metropolitan Filaret of Moscow in the early nineteenth century. As in many other areas, Filaret advanced his interests in the spiritual renewal of the Church, interests which included translations of Scripture and an emphasis on preaching. The beginning of Eldership at Optina was the result of the efforts of two Filarets: Filaret of Moscow (Drozdov) and Filaret of Kaluga, and later of Kiev:

Each Filaret admired the eremitical ideal in monasticism. Filaret Amfiteatrov was the first to act in bringing that Ideal into practice at Optina. He suggested the hermitage Construction project to Abbot Daniil, issued the documents Authorizing it, and arranged for the move to Optina Pustyn Of a 'family' of semi-eremitical monks then living in the Roslavl forest in the Smolensk government. [8]

It was with the arrival of Fr. Moses Putilov, and his younger brother from the forests of Roslavl that the practice of Eldership began in earnest at Optina. It was to continue in a far different environment through the 1917 Revolution to the present, however faint this light might seem to burn at times. Eldership was (and is) part of a spiritual tradition, a form of spiritual parenting or lineage, that extends back to the deserts of the fourth and fifth centuries, if not earlier. It was revived by Paisius Velichkovsky in the eighteenth century in the Balkans,

Ukraine, and Russia.[9] It also connects with the Russian practices of “non-possessor” monasticism of St. Nilus Sorski 10 As part of the “non-possessor” tradition in Russian monasticism, Optina had relations with the episcopacy and official church leadership that were at times difficult. While many bishops were enthusiastic about the revival of spiritual life in monastic communities such as Optina, there were others who felt a threat to their authority. Perhaps they also sensed a certain frustration at trying to establish external controls and standards over people and places who sometimes were elusive. Such appears to have been the relationship of Bishop Nicholas of the Kaluga diocese (bishop from 1835-1851) to the monastery and its elders. Although Abbot Moses willingly, if sadly, spared monks to fill posts the bishop needed to fill, it seems that Bishop Nicholas became increasingly demanding of the community, and critical. For reasons that are not clear “Optina Hermitage alone out of all the monasteries of Kaluga diocese, was forbidden to officially accept any novice without presenting him before the Bishop to pass an examination in church reading and chanting, catechism and sacred history. The Bishop himself conducted these examinations, and sometimes quite strictly.” [11] Such attempts at control were sometimes amusing and awkward:

Out of many such examinations, one is remembered vividly by the brethren of Optina Hermitage. Once, when Bishop Nicholas was there on a visit. He insisted that several people who wished to be officially numbered among the brethren come to him for an examination in the superior’s rooms. The Bishop began to ask them questions from the catechism. ‘We did not prepare for an examination, most reverend Vladyka,’ one of them answered, ‘in our cells we read the monastic books more.’

Having determined that John Climachus’ Ladder was a fitting subject for an exam, the bishop ended up having to admit himself that it was hard to recount details from this book. Asked why this particular book, a classic in the Orthodox monastic tradition, was so hard to remember in detail, Father Moses himself replied: “Well, your Grace, this kind of book requires

application in practice“ (Ibid.). Truly an answer in the letter and spirit of the deserts of the earliest monks. Yet Bishop Nicholas continued his practices, much to the distress of the community. Throughout such trials with Episcopal authority, Father Moses advised both obedience and humility: As for the grievous visitations which have come to us from that right hand which had granted grace and mercy to us sinners, we must endure them with humility of soul. (Ibid., p.134) To the great relief of the Optina community, the next bishop, Gregory II, was much more of a support. For the time being, at least, there was harmony.

While it would not be accurate to draw too dramatic a contrast between the prophetic tradition of Optina and the demands of the larger Church and episcopal authority, tensions such as I have described above indicate a major characteristic of Optina monasticism. Monasteries such as Optina, sketes, and hermits represented what we might call a “confessing “tradition in Russian Orthodoxy. Much in the manner of such Lutheran pastors and teachers over a hundred years later as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, these monastic practitioners called for radical prayer, humility and discipleship even at the cost of their own reputations and careers- and later on, their lives. There are also important similarities to such western monastic reform and renewal movements as the Cistercians of the twelfth century. Thus, while not condemning established forms of monastic life, the hesychastic way of Optina and similar monastic centers emphasized interior practice as much, if not more, than exterior obediences and compliances. It also had deep roots in the wandering and forest traditions of Russian spiritual practice, of podvigs or strenuous practices. [12] These forms of practice in Russia adapted almost ideally to preserve teachings and communities from extinction by governmental, or even ecclesial, power. Their flexibility enabled them to survive a wide variety of persecutions. One of the chief practices of these forms of monastic life was Eldership.

Just what (and still is) this Eldership? If we are to understand and appreciate Elder Nektary, or other Elders of

Optina, it is first important that we situate these individual teachers within a context. At first we might ask: is Eldership the same as what many people today call spiritual direction? I suspect that the best answer would be both “yes” and “no.” “Yes” in that it involves practice in a spiritual tradition, and in the person of someone who can offer advice, counsel and prayers, as well as example. But it is markedly different from some forms of spiritual direction many of us may be familiar with in the West, where there were particular “schools” (such as the Ignatian or Salesian) or now where certain individuals can even be officially “certified” as practitioners. Rather at the heart of Eldership is the Desert tradition of monasticism, where a deep personal bond unites master and disciple. Here the spiritual and the personal are intertwined. The Elder in the Desert and at Optina was to bear the sins and burdens of the disciple. In the words of Father Moses: “We must bear one another’s spiritual infirmities cheerfully, without bitterness. After all, if someone is physically ill, not only are we not offended with him, but we even help him in any way we can. This is how we must treat spiritual illnesses also.”[13] In this tradition, someone comes to a teacher with the perennial question of the Desert, a question of the heart as well as of the head: “Father/Mother give me a word that I might live.” [14] The “word” of the master (if and when given) not only must be obeyed, but it draws the disciple into a special bond with the master, the giver of the word. Such a bond in turn requires a complete revelation of one’s thoughts to the abba/amma - a total spiritual nakedness. In the earlier deserts and at places like Optina, it was more than likely that your spiritual father or mother already knew not only your thoughts, but your sins as well. Elder Nektary continues in this tradition, and accounts of meetings with him often show him well aware of the burdens people carried, without a word of introduction being spoken. Such intimacy places both master and disciple in a condition beyond time and space, where the master often knows the thoughts and actions of the disciple without being told about them. Thus before his entrance into Optina the future Elder

Joseph had his life there predicted by the Elder Amvrosy, with whom he would live for fifty years:

The Elder looked at them (at Joseph and two nuns visiting from Belev) Seriously and said, 'This Brother Ivan will prove useful to us and to you.' thus the great Elder Amvrosy, not yet knowing of whom they spoke nor yet having seen him, already foresaw his high calling and he prophetically foretold what benefit Ivan would subsequently bring to Optina itself and to all the women's convents under the Elders. [15]

Elder Nektary was to continue in this tradition, as his biographies show. The master is literally responsible (as in the Desert) for the sins of the person he or she guides. To have a spiritual Elder is to have a guide, a father or a mother, and a physician of the soul all rolled into one. The mutual reality of eldership requires the greatest of efforts, and brings the greatest of results, of the union of two human beings in the presence of God. The Fathers/Mothers of the Desert frequently described monastic life of this sort as the highest "science of the soul." To learn and to teach in this school is to both learn and teach the art of prayer. Such has been the work of the Elders in Orthodox monasticism, carried down from the deserts of the East in late antiquity, kept alive in many monastic centers in Byzantium, and rediscovered by Paisius Velichkovsky (among others). It was to revive in marked contrast to the highly scholastic methodologies of school and monastic life in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the Ukraine and Russia. (With much encouragement from monks and other teachers in Rumania, Serbia, and other Slavic countries.) A living text has been the Philocalia, a collection of writings of the desert ascetics on prayer, especially the "prayer of the Heart". (Note: It would be most instructive and interesting, but well beyond the boundaries of this essay, to compare the role of the Elder with traditions of spiritual transmission or lineage in other religions, particularly with different forms of Buddhism. Perhaps we are in the presence here of a universal human reality, one that Christianity has brought to a realization through the Desert

tradition.) Our best witnesses to Eldership in its Russian manifestations, and in relation to Optina, are such authors as the late I.M. Kontzevitch, himself a disciple of Optina Elder Nektary. [16]

Describing Eldership, Kontzevitch makes the following points: Eldership is a work of the Holy Spirit, just as all real “mysticism” is not of the human imagination, but of the same Spirit:

The prophetic ministry is a special gift of grace, a gift of the Holy Spirit (charisma). The prophet possesses a special spiritual vision- clairvoyance. For him the boundaries of space and time are, as it were, set aside; with his spiritual gaze he sees not only events that are occurring now, but also future events. He sees their spiritual meaning; he sees the soul of man, his past and future.

Such guidance is necessary in the Christian life because the alternative is to be led into the abyss of self by our imagination:

For many have endured great ascetic labors, much hardship and toil for God's sake, but because they relied on their own judgement, lacked discernment, and failed to accept help from their neighbor, their many efforts proved useless and vain. (Quoting St. Mark the Ascetic- fourth century.)

The words of disciple to an Elder will be: “Father, tell me what the grace of the All-Holy Spirit will reveal to you, and heal my soul“. (Quoting Palestinian Patericon.) The work of the Elder is a work of re-creation, of bringing the human person back to the condition of Adam, of the original creation:

*“I was full of ineffable joy, feeling my mind purified of any sinful desires.
I delighted in a purity which I cannot describe.
The truth itself is the witness of this;
I was fortified by firm faith in God and by great love. . .
I became dispassionate and bodiless, enveloped in
God's enlightenment, having been created by His will.
(Palestinian Patericon, II, pp. 95-96)*

Those who live by the teachings of the Fathers and Scripture, and who regularly confess their thoughts, are those who truly see and live.

(Quoting Brianchaninov, Works, I, p. 545)

(Note. All quotes from I. M. Kontzevich. The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit, pp. 63 ff.)

Such is the life and work of the Elder as it appeared in its glory in Optina throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. This work and the presence of the Elders attracted multitudes, of all varieties. (Even to the point where the cell companions of Elders would complain of the noise and bustle. Give them the “quiet” of Mount Athos instead!)

If we were to describe the vocation of the Elder in as concise a way as possible, we could say that the Elder is someone who has cultivated interior stillness and the prayer of the heart under the guidance of another Elder (as Nektary under Elder Anatole), and then is available to pass on teaching and counsel to others. This hesychia attracts many people, as the person who lives in it is a source of light (sometimes a visible, physical light). As Nikolai Gogol portrayed his experience of Optina:

I stopped at the Hermitage of Optina and took away a memory that will never fade. Clearly, grace dwells in that place. You can feel it even in the external manifestations of worship. Nowhere have I seen monks like those. Through every one of them I seemed to converse with the whole of heaven. I did not ask how they lived: their faces told me everything. [17]

We might ask how idealized a portrait this is. It seems to me that this would be to miss the point. Many people who visited Optina at the height of its influence felt this way. Gogol speaks for many others: “Their faces told me everything.” Such were their perceptions of a remarkable reality. When someone went to Optina to visit an Elder, the response of the Elder could be as varied as that of the Desert abba/amma. Numerous accounts of the Optina elders emphasize their foreknowledge of people and events. Thus a person who met an Elder often found

their problem already understood, and solution presented. Elders were comforting on many occasions, but were also quite capable of severity if that was needed. The life of prayer was a life of struggle, of meeting the world where it was, not where we might want it to be:

To my questions about evil thoughts that could attack me Fr. Anatole answered, ‘Thoughts are salvation for us; if we realize that they are bad, battle against them and don’t bring them to fulfillment.’

Fr. Nektary said, ‘No matter what you’re doing at any time-sitting, walking, working- say with your heart, ‘Lord, have mercy.’ Living in the monastery, you will see and experience the whole meaning of life.

Rather than avoid what is unpleasant or difficult, Nektary advises that we place it in the presence of the Name of God:

*In difficult moments, when your easy, worldly life comes clearly
Back to mind, it’s better to recall God’s holy Name more often
And beg for help; for what is sinful is consequently dangerous
For the soul. It’s better, even mentally, to make an effort not
To go backwards. [18]*

Clearly stillness and peace (hesychia), paradoxically, involved struggle as well as engagement of both Elder and disciple: “Thoughts are salvation for us”. “Salvation” because they provided the opportunity for asceticism and for growth in Christian life.

We could well ask to what extent an Elder, such as Nektary or his earlier predecessor Moses, felt the burdens and sadness of those they directed. The written records we have do not tell us much about this. But it is clear that empathy, an ability to understand and enter into the experience of another, was central to eldership. Father Moses seems to have struggled especially with anger. (See Elder Moses, p. 167.) Of Nektary we are told: “His favorite saying was, “In everything one must have Patience and humility.” (Nektary, p. 161). The elder would often teach patience by deliberately making people wait for long

periods to see him. “But then, how happy you would be when he received you! It was so good to be with him at the time of Compline. These were his rest hours. He did not like to answer questions at this time, and did not speak. He would sit in his armchair and, silently, would pray or doze; but his silence was always more beautiful and lofty than words. Sometimes he would ask you to read aloud to him.” (Ibid.) To watch such a man take a nap was worth the entire visit. However it was cultivated, elders such as Nektary based their lives on a conscious practice of love. He said of the love of Christians: “We love with a love that never changes. Your love is the love of one day - ours is the same today and for a thousand years.” (Ibid., p. 195) I find it very hard to imagine how someone who cultivated both an interior stillness and an exact knowledge of those who visited him would not be affected by the needs and feelings of his disciples.

Such, in brief, was the life of Optina at the height of its influence. But what of the gathering storm of revolution that was to come? How did the elders see the conflict to come? Watchman, tell us of the night.

II. Nektary and Optina in revolution

The late Thomas Merton (Fr. Louis) frequently told a story which he attributed to the Tibetan Buddhist master Trungpa Rinpoche. I believe this account could apply equally to the experience of Optina in revolution. According to Merton, when Trungpa was about to set out on the dangerous and uncertain trek from Lhasa to India to escape the Chinese and carry his spiritual lineage into exile, one of his teachers advised him: “Now you’re on your own.” [19] For someone from a lineage or tradition of teaching such as either Trungpa or the elders of Optina, to be “on your own” did not in any sense mean to follow whatever teaching or practice you wanted. Rather it meant that you would have so internalized the tradition, made it your own and yourself its disciple, that you could adapt its externals to the situation where you found yourself. Surely neither Orthodox Christianity in Eastern Europe, nor Tibetan

Buddhism, would have been able to survive the last century if their masters had not been able to do this. Optina's particular heritage as part of the hesychast revival begun by Paisius gave it a special ability to respond and adapt to crisis. To cultivate stillness in the middle of persecution and destruction is a special gift. Revolution came to Russia's monasteries in stages. It would be inaccurate to say that the October Revolution brought immediate closings. In most cases, varieties of persecution could be both deliberate and random, often depending on local circumstances. In large part because of the Civil War which was not entirely over until 1922, as well as a concern for world-wide public opinion, the Bolsheviks waited for opportunities to enforce their systematic hatred of religion.[20] Optina was officially closed in 1923, on Palm Sunday. Many of its monks, including Elder Nektary, were sent to prison in Kozelsk, and later to the village of Kholmische. He barely escaped execution. His survival through the intercession of a disciple, Nadezhda Pavlovich, with Lenin's wife, Krupskaya, who was a personal friend, illustrates much about the complex religious climate in Russia at that time. Pavlovich (1895-1980) had worked in the presidium of the All-Russian Union of Poets from 1919-20, and first visited Optina in 1922. She became Nektary's disciple. As one account describes their relationship:

He blessed her to occupy herself with literary work, to always take care of Optina, and to do everything possible for its preservation. It was thanks to her that the monastery library and its manuscript department were taken to Moscow In 1928, and that the Monastery received the status of a cultural monument in 1974 when it was taken under government protection and restoration work begun. [21]

Such was Nektary's wisdom in adapting to circumstances and in taking care of his own disciple. The particular events of his encounter with Bolshevik authorities tell us much about the changing conditions of life in Optina in the 1920s. After the official closing of the monastery in 1923, there were numerous searches and arrests. Komsomol members stood guard at the cells of monks who had not yet left the monastery.

After arresting several of the brethren, they came to Nektary. “Those who came were in a belligerent frame of mind, thinking that the Elder would accuse and oppose them. But he was quiet and calm. He was standing there, blinking an electric light.” [22] It appears that on this as on several other occasions Nektary acted as a “holy fool,” or at least with the behavior of someone in that tradition:

The Elder had never allowed anyone into his cell, so that the cell-attendants did not know what was in there. When they came to take inventory of his possessions, even the cell-attendants were going in for the first time. And what did they see? Children’s toys! Puppets, balls, lanterns and small baskets! Those who were taking inventory asked, ‘What are these children’s toys for?’ And he replied, ‘I myself am like a child.’ They found church wine and canned foods, and he said to them, ‘Drink up and eat.’ And they drank all the wine. . . . When he rode out of the Monastery (on a sleigh) his last words were, ‘Give me a hand,’- so that they would help him up into the sleigh. He sat down, blessed the road ahead, and left. (account of Mother Nektaria, Alexandra Kontzevitch in Ibid., pp. 217-218)

It appears that Optina survived in some fashion because of the intercessions of such Disciples of Nektary as N. Pavlovich. She convinced the local branch of the Cheka to preserve the physical monastery, in exchange for some valuable gifts and furniture items left in the rooms of the Superior. “In this way the remaining monks were given the possibility of living within the walls of Optina and attending the still-functioning churches.” (Ibid., p. 223)

Nektary’s fate was to be different. He was moved to a house in the nearby village of Kholmishche, where he had a half of this dwelling set aside for him. He was attended by N. Pavlovich. In spite of these relatively comfortable quarters, exile from Optina plunged the elder into what was at times a deep depression:

At that time, on the farm and in Kholmishche, the Elder was, for a time, in a terribly depressed state. On the farm he told me (Pavlovich) frankly, ‘Don’t ask me about anything... I can’t

be an Elder now. You can see that I don't even know how to direct my own life right now.' Our day would go like this: I slept, along with Fyonya, in the same house as he, in the other half. We would go for a blessing in the morning, and I would remain and pour him some tea. Then I would take away the dishes and the Elder would begin to rearrange the lumps of sugar and would sit silently in a terribly sad state. Once I noticed that he had become nervous and was toying with little boxes, not in the usual way. I asked him what was wrong and took everything away so that he would stop. He said very quickly and plaintively, 'Do you think it's easy for me? In the Skete I had visitors and my garden was under my window and I labored there. But what is there for me to do now?'

(See Elder Nektary, p. 223)

Yet he continued to have visitors, a number of whom he refused to receive. Finally his disciple and companion Nadezhda prevailed on him in compelling words: "Batiushka, after all, these people have come three hundred miles. If the shepherd falls into such faintheartedness, what can one expect from the sheep?" Her words had effect. "And then I saw something wondrous and terrifying- I had been speaking with a weeping, weak old man. And right before my eyes he straightened up and became majestic. Before them was an Optina Elder. He spoke with power and authority. After fifteen or twenty minutes he dismissed them, and human frailty again returned to him." (Ibid., p. 224) In the tradition of Optina the particular trials the monks received were often seen as a balancing out, of sorts, of honors received in life, or as the result of the taking up of the sins of one's disciples. (Such especially had been the belief of Elder Joseph.)

Yet in spite of Elder Nektary's despondency while living at Kholmishche, he refused to allow anyone to find a better place for him- if such might be available. Rather than move, he advised "God has brought me here," and described how a vision of other (departed) Optina Elders had ordered him to stay there. Many people found their way to him, and he had a correspondence with many. Apparently, Patriarch Tikhon consulted him on several matters. But Nektary carefully avoided being drawn into the highly intricate and contentious disputes

within the Church at the time (Renovationists, etc.). He preferred a path of listening and being available to all, as much as his own human strength and the grace of God could enable him. In his own humanity and struggles with depression he seems to have found a solidarity with the weaknesses and humanity of the very people he received. His “foolishness,” very much in the tradition of the “fools for Christ” or Iurodivyi, underlined his humility. [23] But this “foolishness” united him with many who came to him. Elder Nektary appears to have taken a particular delight in giving a shock to intellectuals who visited him by asking them to blow toy whistles or do other seemingly silly tasks. Whether deliberately, or by necessity, he had a wardrobe that consisted of mismatched socks, strange looking hats, etc. He had a collection of children’s books that he gave adult visitors to read. [24] Somehow in his daily life he could keep a condition of mindfulness that had him never rushing and never being late for events. As the beekeeper, Fr. Macarius, remembered him: “He never came out to a visitor right away - he always gave you time to think about why you had come.” He moved about with a certain deliberateness: “It was as if he were carrying some kind of sacred cup, filled with a precious liquid, and he was exceedingly careful that not one drop be spilled from it.” (Metropolitan Benjamin Fedchenkov, quoted in Elder Nektary, p. 159). It is interesting and significant that much the same spiritual practice in the daily details of life is part of other religious traditions, such as Ch’an or Zen Buddhism, and is recommended by such teachers as the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh. Elder Nektary’s approach to life, in and out of persecution, is described well in the words of his biographer: “In Elder Nektary there was a spiritual incisiveness and a surprising simplicity; even in deep old age he still knew how to laugh like a child.” (Ibid., p. 158) Incisiveness, simplicity, laughter. Even in the midst of his later depressions.

An important part of direction or guidance of his spiritual children was the assigning of reading material. Often

when someone came to visit, Nektary would have left open or on a table something he wanted the person to read.

Sometimes it appears to have been a direct (or indirect) answer to a question that the person was planning to ask Elder Nektary. As one such visitor recounted:

He (Elder Nektary) received few people each day, but kept each one with him for a long time. He spoke little, and more often gave people something to read, though the answers frequently did not correspond to the questions. But the reader who had a good understanding of what he had read would find something pertaining to himself in that which he had been compelled to read, and would see that, perhaps, this was really more important than what he had persistently asked about. There were also occasions when both the Elder and the visitor would sit silently for a long time and, not having said one word to one another, the Elder would appoint another time for his visitor to come.

(Elder Nektary, pp. 72-3).

It appears that Fr. Nektary continued to receive visitors as much as his physical and spiritual condition made him able to do so until the point of his death at Kholmishche on April 29, 1928. It is reported that he died with a smile. (Ibid., p. 232.)

Conclusion: The Legacy of Optina

Having surveyed the life of Fr. Nektary, however briefly, I believe that we can suggest some conclusions about the spiritual legacy Optina and its Elders. Firstly, Optina is part of a much larger tradition, or grouping of traditions. Its practices, especially of eldership, have roots in the lives and practices of monks in the fourth and fifth centuries, in the deserts of Egypt and Palestine. Reading about Fr. Nektary and other Optina Elders is almost exactly like reading about Anthony or other desert saints : “As if following the precept of St. Anthony the Great, that ‘one must not keep a bowstring taut constantly,’ the Elder sprinkled his instructions and strict demands with a joke, a funny story or a tale.” [25] (Elder Nektary, p. 170). As in the desert, even animals get into the act.

A cat person himself, “he would tell a story of how a cat saved Noah’s ark. When an unclean spirit entered into a mouse and tried to gnaw through the bottom of the ark, the cat caught that pernicious mouse and ate it. And for this all cats will go to heaven.” (Ibid., p. 170) Also, as with the earlier desert teachers, such Optina Elders as Nektary used discretion and an understanding of individuals as the basis of their direction. “One must not demand the work of a bee from a fly; each person must be given according to his measure. You can’t treat everyone the same.” (Ibid.) Some of us are bees, some of us are flies. No value judgement appears here.

The desert tradition had been revived in differing ways throughout the history of Byzantium, especially with Theodore of the Stoudios monastery in Constantinople, and in the writings and teachings of Symeon the New Theologian. Each one of these revivings or renewals emphasized or singled out a particular aspect of the larger monastic tradition.[26] It was in particular the revival of ascetic life by Paisius Velichkovsky in the eighteenth century in the Ukraine and Romania, continuing much of the earlier teaching and emphasis of Nil Sorsky , that prompted a renewal in Russia. In many respects this revival was a direct challenge to the deliberately secular culture imported into Russia by Peter the Great and his successors [27]. As we have seen earlier, Optina was a direct recipient of Paisius’ return to the sources. Thus it should come as no surprise that Paisius and later on the monks of Optina translated and edited a large number of patristic works, nor that some intellectuals flocked to Optina and other such centers in the early nineteenth century to learn from this wisdom. The Slavophile writers such as Kireevsky and Khomiakov were especially influenced by this patristic renaissance. [28] And, as with the desert tradition, the primary word at Optina was “work.” As Elder Nektary advised: “Work! Work makes the years fly by unnoticeably.” Work in whatever form was a way to make present a living tradition, whether in beekeeping or book translation.

Yet tradition was not to be frozen at some point in time. If its living reality had been absorbed by a disciple, it was to

animate thought and action in the present. So it was that Elder Nektary advised: "I have lit the lamp, but take care of the wick yourselves." (Elder Nektary, p. 170) [29]. What this advice meant for those who experienced the hardships and persecutions of life after the 1917 Revolution, according to Nektary, was that they were not to immediately oppose all aspects of life in this "new" society as evil. They were rather to make intelligent choices in discerning the signs of the times about them. Thus he advised the parents of a child who complained about the "antireligious" quality of a local soviet school to pay more attention to life at home: "After all, your children will be soviet citizens; they should go to the public schools. And if you want them to preserve Christianity, let them see a truly Christian life at home." [30] Nektary's response to those who interrogated him while at Optina at the time of its closing was to ask about their comfort, whether they had food or drink, etc. He as well as other monks at Optina were willing to cooperate to some extent with various government authorities or representatives who came to the monastery to do such things as complete an inventory of the library. Such cooperation may very well have resulted in the preservation of this valuable collection. Contact with members of the intellectual and artistic communities continued through the Revolution and until the official closing in Great Lent of 1923. N. Pavlovich was by no means an isolated example of this continuity in Optina's ministry of presence. [31] Nektary saw truth in different Christian communities, and in other religions: "Wisdom has built herself a house with seven pillars. Orthodoxy has these seven pillars. But God's wisdom has other dwellings - they may have six pillars or fewer, and accordingly a lesser measure of grace. . . . God desires not only that nations be saved, but each individual soul. A simple Indian, believing in his own way in the Creator and fulfilling His will as best he can, will be saved; but he who, knowing about Christianity, follows the Indian mystical path, will not." (Ibid., p. 181) As to whether a committed Orthodox Christian could also find some wisdom on the Indian path is apparently a question Nektary did not encounter.

The Elder found it very difficult to bear the internal divisions that came to the Church in Russia after the Revolution, especially the Renovatianist or “Red” movement. He strongly advised his disciples to avoid clergy who belonged to these groups. As to the fate of Christianity in Russia, he had sobering words. (It would be interesting to wonder if he spoke of Russia only, or of the fate of Christianity in other parts of the world.) :

Earlier the Church was a vast circle reaching to the whole horizon; but now it's like a ringlet- do you see?- like a ringlet. And in the last days before Christ's coming it will be preserved in the following form: one Orthodox Bishop, one Orthodox priest, and one Orthodox layman. I'm not saying that there won't be any churches at all-maybe there will be-but Orthodoxy itself will be preserved only in such a form”
[32]

His prayer for the “last days” in which the Elder found us living was:

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Who art coming to judge the living and the dead, have mercy on us sinful ones; forgive our sinful falls in this, our life, and by the judgments which Thou knowest protect us from the face of antichrist in the innermost desert of Thy salvation. [33]

Meanwhile, there is the keeping of the teachings handed on to us. A life of humility and self-knowledge; of prayer; of waiting on God, even when God does not seem to answer. We are to trim the wicks of our lamps.

End-Notes

A Note on the Sources:

In studying the lives of the Elders of Optina, we need to rely to a large extent on biographies of these figures written not long after their deaths. While there is much valuable material in these, including eyewitness accounts, we need to be aware at the same time of the devotional quality of such writings. Can we be sure a particular Elder was like he is portrayed? Questions of this sort are important for students of history. What we can be

more certain of is that the people who wrote about an Elder saw him in the fashion described. As to exact factual details, if they are available, we need to wait for the opening of archives and other materials that may soon be at our disposal. In the essay that follows, I quote especially from Elder Nektary of Optina by I. M. Kontzevitch, who was a disciple of Nektary. The book was first published in France, and then in the United States in 1952. The version I use, Elder Nektary of Optina (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1998), also includes several other accounts by people who knew the Elder.

1. There is a large literature concerning the struggles and survival of Orthodoxy in Russia after the 1917 Revolution. Of particular value are the studies of William Fletcher. *The Russian Orthodox Church Underground.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); John S. Curtiss. *The Russian Church and the Soviet State, 1917-1950.* (Church and the Soviet Regime, 1917- 1982. (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984). Some eyewitness accounts of conditions of the Church in Russia in the 1920s are also important. I am thinking particularly of M. d'Herbigny, especially his "L'aspect religieux de Moscou en Octobre, 1925, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, (Rome, v. 3, no. 20), and Francis McCullagh. *The Bolshevik Persecution of Christianity.* (London: E.P. Dutton, 1924). More recent publications concerning life under persecution, especially life in the gulag, gain much from such background. See especially the Fr. Arseny volumes: *Fr. Arseny, 1893- 1973.* (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's, 1998) and *Fr. Arseny: a cloud of witnesses*, translated from the Russian by Vera Bouteneff. (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's, 2001).
2. For details on Nektary's life, especially his early years, see I.M. Kontzevich, *Elder Nektary*, pp. 33 ff.
3. T.V. Torstensen. *Elder Sebastian of Optina.* (Platina, Ca.: St. Herman, 1999).
4. Among several books describing current conditions of the Orthodox Church in Russia, and its relations with other Christian groups, see J. Witte Jr. and M. Bourdeaux. *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia. The New War for Souls.* Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1999). There is an account of a recent visit to Optina in
5. For the early history of Optina, see L.J. Stanton. *The Optina Pustyn Monastery in the Russian Literary Imagination.* (N.Y.: Peter Lang, 1995, pp. 53 ff).
6. See *Ibid.*, chapter 7, "Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy and the Problem of Going Away."
7. Quoted from Kavelin. *History of the Russian Hierarchy in Stanton*, p. 58.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

9. On Paisius and his revival, see *The Life of Paisij Velychkovskiy*, translated by J.M. E. Featherstone. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), a critical edition of biographies with notes and Introduction; *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky*. (Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1976); and S. Chetverikov. *Starets Paisii Velichkovski: his life, teachings, and influence on Orthodox monasticism*. (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1980). There is a translation of some of the writings of Paisius in *St. Paisius Velichkovsky: Field Flowers in Little Russian Philokalia*, vol 4. (Platina, Ca.: St. Herman, 1994).
10. G. Maloney, S.J. *Russian Hesychasm. The Spirituality of Nil Sorskij*. (The Hague: Mouton, 1973). Concerning “non-possessor” monasticism: T. Spidlik, S.J. *Joseph de Volokolamsk. Un chapitre de la spiritualite russe*, in series *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*. (Roma: 1956).
11. *The Elder Moses of Optina*. Translated from the Russian by the Holy Nativity Convent, Boston, Massachusetts, 1996, p. 131. See “A Note on the Sources” above.
12. I. M. Kontzevitch, translator and editor. *The Northern Thebaid: Monastic Saints of the Russian North*. (Platina, Ca.: St. Herman, 1975).
13. *The Elder Moses of Optina*, p. 185.
14. The meaning of this question and its answers in the desert is the subject of D. Burton-Christie. *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
15. *The Elder Joseph of Optina*. Translated from the Russian by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, Massachusetts, 1984, p. 52.
16. For a short biography of Kontzevich, see the introductory chapter in I. M. Kontzevitch. *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*. (Platina, Ca.: St. Herman, 1988).
17. Quoted in Stanton, p. 51.
18. Previous three quotes from Kontzevitch. *Elder Nektary*, pp. 79- 80.
19. Merton quoted this story often in talks he gave novices at the Abbey of Gethsemani. Trungpa’s own account of his journey is found in *Chogyam Trungpa. Born in Tibet*. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966), and reprintings.
20. Various studies of this period emphasize the often cautious approach of the central Bolshevik government to enforcing its official attitudes to religion. There was a sharp division within the party and state on this subject. While it was certainly the Bolsheviks’ desire to eliminate religion of all kinds, there was a serious risk that to do so would provoke much resentment and even violence, especially if assaults on churches and believers were direct. See chapters 2-5 in

Edward Roslof, *Red Priests*, a work based on research in newly open archives.

21. See Elder Nektary, p. 157.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
23. On holy foolishness, see the essay on this subject by Timothy (Kallistos) Ware in *The Inner Kingdom*. (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's, 2000). For the Byzantine expressions of this, see D. Krueger. *Symeon the Holy Fool. Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City*. (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1996). For Russia: E.M. Thompson. *Understanding Russia: the Holy Fool in Russian Culture*. (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1987). Thompson argues for a strong shamanistic influence on the developing of a Russian tradition of holy foolishness. Although interesting and valuable, I do not find her arguments conclusive. In the Russian practice, this is not a path that someone undertakes for themselves. Usually it is in consultation with a spiritual abba/amma that it is taken up. The heart of the practice is to put on foolishness as a way of behavior- both to live out Christ's own foolishness and poverty, and to startle the complacent and pious out of their usual ways of being.
24. See Elder Nektary, pp. 158- 161.
25. For community, solitude and spiritual eldership in the desert tradition, see G. Gould. *Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
26. On different concepts of reform, and how reform has been expressed in liturgical and monastic environments and their interactions, see T. Pott. *La Reforme Liturgie Etude du phenomene de l'evolution non- spontanee de la liturgie Byzantine*. (Roma: Edizioni Liturgiche, 2000), especially the first chapters. Pott describes in some detail the effects of the Studite monastic reform on the liturgy of Constantinople. One of the characteristics of the Studite reform was a special involvement with liturgy and hymnography.
27. Biographers of Paisius especially emphasize how their subject rejected what he considered as the worldly learning of academies in Kiev in favor of the wisdom of the older monastic ways. Such academies were the pride of Russians intent on imitating the West. Another effect of European academies on the Orthodox Church in Russia was the development of a scholastic form of theology and theological manuals modeled on Roman Catholic, and sometimes Protestant, prototypes. A direct response to this was the "neo-patristic" revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, including the writing and teaching of Fr. George Florovsky. In some ways, this revival was a continuing of the earlier translating and editing work of Paisius and company, although the emphasis was different. On the theological revival in late nineteenth and

twentieth century Russia see the essay by Lewis Shaw, "John Meyendorff and the Heritage of the Russian Theological Tradition," pp. 10-42 in B. Nassif, ed. *New Perspectives on Historical Theology. Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). A rediscovery of patristic sources was to open the Church to greater involvement by ordinary believers rather than to limit it to the monastic world. Such later Russian thinkers as Paul Evdokimov and Fr. Alexander Schmemmann were to continue in this direction.

28. The impressive publication program at Optina is described in some detail in L Kavelin. *Elder Macarius of Optina*, chapter 4, "Publication of Patristic Books," pp. 157-175, as well as the following chapter in *Elder Macarius of Optina.* (Platina, Ca: St. Herman's, 1995). On Kireevsky and Optina, see particularly Appendix 3, "The Life of Ivan V. Kireyevsky," pp. 291- 307. Kireevsky and the Slavophiles are portrayed in considerable detail in N. V. Riasanovsky. *Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles: a Study of Romantic Ideology.* (Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith, 1965).
29. Quoted in *Elder Nektary*, p. 170.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
31. For details of Nektary's contacts with the artistic and intellectual communities, see *Ibid.*, chapter 2, pp. 155-182.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 179. *Ibid.*, p. 180

Sabina Cornelia Ispas

**The Romanian Căluș
Healing Practices of Jewish-Christian
Origin in the Modern Age**

The ritual of the *Căluș* is performed by an esoteric group of men during a certain period of the liturgical year, related to the movable feast of the Pentecost or White Sunday (Rusalii in Romanian). This ritual has several functions, such as therapy and prophylaxis, providing fecundity and prosperity. It has a warlike, initiatory and showlike character. The group uses specialized equipment: the flag, the wooden sticks of the *călușari*, plants with prophylactic and curative properties – such as garlic and wormwood, purifying substances – salt, frankincense and water. During the curative operation, a hen is sacrificed. The head of the group of *călușari* is called *vătaf*, and he shares his authority with the *mut* (dumbman), a character who wears a mask (usually made of goat skin) on his face and is armed with a sword and sometimes, a whip. The costumes of the men are provided with special marks, to be easily identified: shirts adorned with flowers embroidered with red cotton, belts, girdles, and handkerchiefs worn across the breast and the back, a special head gear (turban, fez, hat with ribbons), and small bells and tassels around the ankles.

Under certain circumstances, and in well established moments of the ritual, women are also involved. Small children are “made to dance,” to impart them health. The group is accompanied by musicians. The music and the spectacular dance are characteristics that render the *Căluș* an exceptional choreographic complex. A rigorous typology should associate it to the Transylvanian *Călușer* and the *Juni* of Brașov.

For years and years, I have studied several documentary sources. It is said that the young Magyar poet Balassa Balint (1551-1594) had danced on September 25, 1575 – when

emperor Rudolf was crowned – a kind of Dance assumed to be the *Căluș*, which he learned in Transylvania. In the poem *Zlatna oder Gedichte von Ruhe des Gemuths*, Martin Opitz mentions a round dance, where dancers crouch and jump “like goats,” which could be surmised to be “a form of the local *Căluș* long lost since then.”

On October 19, 1599, during the festivities organized by the Prince of Transylvania, Sigismund Bathory, to honour Prince Michael the Brave and his family, the warriors of Baba Novac (Michael’s general) performed a *călușari* dance showing consummate skill.

In the *History of Transalpine Dacia*, Fr. J. Sulzer mentions that the dance of the *călușari* is thought to be “a significant remnant” of the *coli-sali* of the ancient Romans. He points to the existence of a special tune for such dances, as well as to the great number of days when the dance was practiced: January 9th, 13th, April 21st or May 21st. The last date is associated to White Sunday.

A comparative study of the structure of the *căluș* and *călușer*, correlated with other types of events and historical data, proves that in the early 20th century, the ritual pattern of the *căluș* existed in Transylvania, Banat, the Danube Plain (on either bank) and the South of Moldavia.

The best known and most often cited testimony relative to the *căluș* is that provided by Prince Dimitrie Cantemir in *Descriptio Moldaviae*. It precedes the systematic collections of the 20th century. The learned prince pays great attention to that ritual event, proving that it was performed not only in the country side, but that it had wide resonance in the culture of the period. He calls the *Călușar*, a dance related to tradition. The character of a paramilitary group with a strict discipline, the right to wear arms, the oath, and the esoteric aspect, render this ritual an important component of calendar-related traditions. It should be analysed more carefully in the time context to which it is exclusively attributed.

The time when any ritual is performed is an essential characteristic, as it invariably is a sacred time. Related to the

calendar, the *Căluș* is exclusively a ritual of the White Sunday or Pentecost (Rusalii), with a movable date. It may be performed for three days, a week, 8,9,10 days, or even up to 40 days. Within this time interval, patients “taken from the *căluș*” or “charmed by *iele*” are shown to the *călușari*, who diagnose and cure the patients. The *călușari* used dance and music as a specialized therapy, associated with wearing and consuming ritual plants such as wormwood and garlic. They acquired special powers when joining the group and cured patients only during special days. The characteristic of illnesses that they may have cured is worth noticing. The illnesses were believed to occur as punishment for disobedience, for not observing interdictions to work, for not worshipping Whitsuntide and for trespassing in areas devoted to the *iele*. The cure consisted in the performance of redemption and purification rituals by the ritual song and dance of the *călușari*.

According to all available data, the Christian feast of the Pentecost was a central moment of the event. It may be stated that the archaic form of the thaumaturgic *Căluș* occurred between Ascension and Whitsuntide, in a range of 8, 9 or 10 days of “oath”.

White Sunday (Rusalii, also called the Great Sunday), the tenth day after Ascension and the fiftieth after Easter, commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and the foundation of the Christian Church in Jerusalem. It is followed by White Monday (Lunea Rusaliilor) when the Holy Spirit is celebrated as a person of the Trinity. Iconography depicts the Holy Spirit as a dove, or as tongues of fire descended upon the apostles at Pentecost (Acts, II, 1-4). Tertullian considered the 50-day period as a “day of long-lasting feast,” a spiritual joy believers who used to sing *Hallelujah*, did not fast and did not kneel when praying. That feast is rooted in Judaism, in “the feast of harvest.” The Descent of the Holy Spirit was prefigured that very day by Moses, when he received the Law on Mount Sinai. In both events, Godhead is perceived as an authoritarian Theophany, who awes man by

intensely stressing him. It may become dangerous for those who come too close to this divine energy.

We cannot detach the date of the Christian feast from the period of the thaumaturgic *Căluș*, as the relation between those two events is obviously one of subordination. The *călușari* performed their ritual acts only within that lapse of time. We think it is necessary to recall this event that occurred 2000 years ago.

There was a “brotherhood” whose cohesion was hallowed by a mystery-laden event – only men were endowed with exceptional powers of communication and thaumaturgy. Women, touched by the same energy, did not acquire thaumaturgic attributes, but they served the group and participated in all that followed. This justifies the presence of women in the group of *călușari* – sometimes one or two *crăițe* (young queens) were documented in the localities of Leu and Sălcuța (Dolj County). Women are also present in certain episodes of the dance and prepare the instruments used to cure.

The *călușari* are bound to a group not only for one year, but for a much longer lapse of time with obvious consecration function – 3,5,7, or 9 years. The *vătaf* holds this office for life and may transfer his authority to an elected successor. The authority transfer of the male line is a sacerdotal-type transfer, reminiscent of the Apostles acts. The *călușari* are charismatic beings. They are endowed with divine gifts by the Holy Spirit, who gives them as It desires. Charismas were imparted to the apostles, the members of the church hierarchy, but also to those Baptised. Special charismas are meant for serving in the church: apostles and prophets became “pastors” or “teachers.” Other charismas are extraordinarily spectacular, temporary and personal, and non-redeeming. They are meant for nonbelievers. Such are: the gift of prophecy, miracle-making, the power to drive away demons and the use of foreign languages. The *călușari* may be thought to be such charismatic beings within the sacred period of the Theophany of the Pentecost.

The *călușari* are endowed with curative powers only during the lapse of time when the *Căluș* flag is raised. This flag

is raised yearly during Whitsuntide. In its absence, the group has no identity, no authority and no curative power.

The flag is prepared by the same astants. They imprint their identity on the flag by laying their hands on it. At the end of individual marks, there are tied plants with ritual functions and a textile piece. Others make a fixed number of needle stitches on the insignias on top of the flag. In a more recent variant, they pass under and arc formed by the flag and the sword of the *mut*. I have already mentioned in other papers the role of the hand in rituals in expressing God's will in curing or punishing. Such actions transfer part of the *călușar'* s identity and personality onto the flag, which turns into the body of the *Căluș*, formed of all the bodies of the group' s members. The flag is not a mark of the group, but is the group itself.

These actions are very important as they reunite energies scattered when the *Căluș* was "buried." Whenever the flag is raised or unearthed, energies become active. Every year, when the flag is raised, the group's integrity, faithfulness and efficiency are tested. On the same occasion, the group is supplemented in case a *călușar* had abandoned it.

The primary form of the cross, called *stâlp* (post), is still present in several places of Oltenia, in the South of Romania. It is stuck at the head of the grave for the first 40 days after death and replaced by a cross proper after that. The cross is the tree of life. It awards protection, power and authority. It reconciles and unites heaven and earth and opens the way to the lost Paradise. In the Old Testament, the cross was prefigured by various objects or signs: Aaron's and Moses's, rods, the pillar of the copper snake and the *thau* sign. These rods resemble many of the insignias of authority and sacerdotal power encountered in archaic forms of caroling and sticks of the *călușari*, which are instruments used by the members of groups of youth.

Women have no sacerdotal function. In the early church, they were allowed to hold the office of deaconess. Deaconess's were aged and chaste and helped the apostles and the evangelists in their mission. They did not officiate the mass, however. Their part was to nurse patients, to help the poor,

orphans, foreigners and to assist in female baptisms. Apostolic Canons, the 19th canon of the Council of Niceea, and the 16th canon of the Council of Chalcedon, mention the ordaining of deaconesses by laying on of hands.

In folklore, women were often characterized as wicked and devilish, which actually guarded them by preventing them to transgress norms and sin, especially in the field of domestic activities assigned to them after being exiled from Eden.

In Romanian traditional culture, one can distinguish two types of female representations: on the one hand, the saint, whose exemplary life awarded her an improved status; and on the other hand, invisible beings who acted as law enforcers who immediately sanctioned willful or unintentional errors and were favourably influenced by people who made amends. That category includes pure representations of the flying *Iele* (also called *Sfinte* <Saints>, *Măiestre* <Wonderful>, *Doamne* <Ladies>, *Frumoase* <Beautiful ones>, *Nepomenite* <Nameless>, *Șoimane*, *Zâne* <Fairies>. Their names are not used as propitiatory formulas but as forms of voicing great respect and consideration, together with their special qualities and relation to the godhead. It is worthy to note that they sang and dance the hora in the air, accompanied by sounds of pipes, bagpipes, violins and flutes.

The *Iele* are also called *Rusalii* and are associated to the feast of the *Rusalii* (Whitsuntide) in Romanian tradition. This is no accident. They are generally perceived as flying and hovering female beings, in varying numbers (2, 3, 9, 12). Their general characteristics are mentioned in legends: young girls, holy, chaste, dressed in white, singing and dancing in the air, in fields at crossroads or near springs. They help fine players, especially pipe-players, but severely sanction those who play their tunes for other people. They punish those who dance with them and the women who do not observe the feast of the Whitsuntide. At the end of time, they will go to Paradise.

The images painted on the walls of churches involve only a few scenes with dances and songs. Three feasts are represented: the wedding at Cana, Irod's banquet and the return

of the prodigal son. Each one has a different significance and theological message. The Old Testament mentions the sound of trumpets, heralding Godhead in all its splendour, or the victory of heroes. The Apocalypse also speaks of it. Most importantly, are the texts of Psalms, where the joy of knowing God is voiced by songs and dances, particularly in the Psalms called *Allelujah*. Psalm 150, *Allelujah*, seems to be the most illustrative of the image of dance and songs as Christian devotion to God, that “long-lasting day” of joy, placed by Tertullian for the early Christian centuries during Ascension and Pentecost. This scene is known in the church paintings as *hora domnițelor* (the round dance of the princesses) and occurs in several images, mostly between the 17th and 19th centuries.

The dance of the maidens expresses their joy that the Messiah's promise was fulfilled. It is offered as a gift to the Godhead. This educational and catechizing image may be associated to the hovering female representations that act especially in days related to the Descent of the Holy Spirit. An unexpected argument is provided by the tradition of the population in the South of Macedonia and of Megleno-Romanians, who practice *călușari* dances between Christmas and the Twelfth Nights, called by them *The feasts of the Rusalii*. There is not doubt that the Rusalii are associated to the epiphany of the Holy Spirit at Jesus's baptism as well as to its descent on Pentecost. The *Rusalii* are therefore associated to the third person of the Trinity. The relation existing between the painted image of *hora domnițelor*, the dance of the Iele and the presence of the Holy Spirit during the *Rusalii* is provided by the role played by women during redemption.

The Didascalia on priesthood points out: “The deacon replaces Christ and you shall love him, you will honour deaconesses as replacement of the Holy Spirit”. According to Evdokimov, “the man is related ontologically (in his spiritual being) to Christ, the woman is ontologically related to the Holy Spirit”.

Observations on the mut.

The most important and characteristic attribute of this character is the prohibition to communicate by speech. The communication with the group of thaumaturgs and with the people of the community is performed by the language of signs, with a high degree of abstracting, more precisely from a certain standpoint, but also from a standpoint full of suspicion and fear. He is a “punisher,” like the female representations mentioned above. He usually wears a goatskin mask (possibly semantically and ritually related to the goat mask in Christmas caroling) and worn-out dresses. This ritual is meant as a detaching from the individual features of the other group members, helping him to be unbiased in rendering decisions. The worn-out dresses were used by several mystics, as an outer visible mark of their holiness and detaching from material worldly goods. His outer aspect, lacking elegance and beauty, makes him the last of the group. Yet he is most authoritative and relentless, a careful observer and a swift decision-maker. He seems to rule and supervise the group of actants and its relations with the others. The scarce or absent communication between some members of the *călușari* group and the group for whom the ritual is performed is compensated by other human or non-human realities they may contact as charismatic performers. A special communication assigned to the *mut* is evinced by the absolute prohibition to use words. The nonverbal communication meant for entities outside the group is advocated for by the asymmetrical rhythmic structure, present especially in therapeutic dances, such as *Rața* (the duck) or *Calul* (the horse). This is the most abstract and direct way of communication, which replaces words with a “sonorous mask,” liable to exert a magical action. The prohibition to speak, meant for the *mut* and the absence of the informational substance in the communication of the *călușari*, makes us think of possible similarities with the *glossolalia*, the gift of communicating with people of different languages or culture, which the Apostles

acquired at Pentecost in order to impart the message of the Holy Gospel.

When evangelization began, Palestine harboured several groups, some with an active role well defined in history at the time, and others – discrete, with an exemplary existence. In addition to Pharisees, Sadducees, Samaritans and Essenes, the works of Josephus Flavius and Philo Judaeus mentioned therapeut – a type of ascetic, men and women, who lived in Egypt, secluded in lonely cells and far from populated places. They fasted every day up to sunset, and on the seventh day, they gathered, sang all night and had a common meal. They also gathered plants, herbs and fruit to prepare teas, ointments and drugs for sick people. Hence, they adopted the name “therapeuts.” This piece of information throws special light on healing acts that amazed many people who had opposed the preaching of Christianity among non-Jews in the first centuries.

To conclude, some specifications are necessary. We associate the Whitsuntide *Căluș* and the Transylvanian winer *Călușer* to precise events recorded in the Sacred Text and relative to the manifestation of one of the persons of the Trinity- the Holy Spirit.

This event is not a liturgical drama reproducing the episode described in the Acts, but a mystery acted in the period of the fifty days. The thaumaturgical *Căluș* also rules the relationship between man and woman, not only by point of conciliation and cooperation, but also by assigning them precise roles, meant for each of them in the act of Salvation. The two thousand years that have elapsed, made it possible to get several types of *Căluș*, with different functions and roles. Some of them underwent processes of desacralization and deritualizing. Research has most often included them in a single, more or less complex, action.

George Alexe

**The Biblical Presence
of the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians
in the Holy Scripture**

The topic of this paper might be considered at least intriguing if not in some way fascinating.

Intriguing because the presence of the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians in the Holy Scripture could be rather unbelievable and unimaginable for those who do not accept at all the Holy Bible even as an historical source of information.

Fascinating, because the true history of mankind could be found only in the Holy Scripture where-in-to is emphasized not only the historical relationship among men or nations, but also the divine history of the eternal dialogue between man and God. In this sense, the true history of man is not appearing unilaterally as being monophysite or pantheist but entirely theandric.

Therefore, Holy Scripture is addressing the entire mankind, without any discrimination, and there is no reason for the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians to be ignored or excluded from this theandric history.

However, Mircea Eliade, a great Romanian novelist and one of the greatest world scholars in the History of Religions and Philosophy of Culture, has considered the Thracians as being the “great anonyms” of history.¹ To a great extent he was right if we are going to take into account only the Greek or Latin written sources about them, known by the specialists as *interpretatio graeca* and *latina*. Nevertheless it was non-other than interpretation of Mircea Eliade, concerning the religious creations and spiritual heritage of the Thraco-Dacians, that scholarly changed this hyperbolic image of their mysterious and disputable anonymity.

In fact, the Thracians have never been so anonymous in their mythological, prehistorical and, certainly, biblical times. The famous Greco-Roman mythology, religion, literature, culture, and art, would be inconceivable without the Thracian influential and consistent contribution. There surely is a striking difference between the true history and the so called common places created throughout the millennia about the Thraco-Dacian realities they pretend to represent.

Unfortunately, these common places historically inherited from generation to generation are not illustrating, but rather minimizing if not even ignoring the impressive role that Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians have played in the ancient times and medieval history.

Particularly, the main task of our paper is not to accredit the Greek or Latin interpretations at the expense of our “great anonymous of history.” In fact, there is a real Thraco-Dacian and Greco-Roman religious, cultural and artistic symbiosis, that has culminated in the Byzantine Orthodox spirituality of the Eastern Roman Empire and also in the Eastern Orthodox Romanity of Latin language.

No wonder why if in our times, a persistent Romanian movement is dedicated to the revival of the Thraco-Dacian and Illyrian distinctive legacy not only in Europe, but also in The United States. It is suffice to mention here the cultural and artistic activity promoted by the “Dacia Revival International Society of New York” established by Dr. Napoleon Săvescu, and also to underline the notable contribution of Mr. Mihai Vinereanu’s book “*The Thraco-Dacian Origin of the Romanian Language.*”²

Of course, our paper is strictly limited to the biblical presence of the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians in the Holy Scripture of the Old and the New Testament. My purpose at this time is to theologically underline some biblical aspects regarding the ethnic and religious identity of the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians, in Eastern Europe and Asia Minor, as they are reflected in the Holy Scripture.

For obvious reasons, we don't have to ignore the theological importance of these biblical and apostolical sources about Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians, because they are providing a strong evidence of their existence that is archeologically and historically confirmed and validated in the same time.

But what is most important and ought to be noted, is the very fact that the Holy Scripture proves to be in the first place a religious book based on the divine revelation, and not a history book in the real sense of the word, even if the history and the archeology are both scientifically confirming the historicity of the Holy Scripture. It is by itself understood, that the Biblical truth was not made scientifically known to the world, but through the Divine Revelation. To reach that conclusion, the archeology has had to excavate and investigate into the biblical past, scanning more than 4,000 years, in order to document the Bible as History, like Werner Keller masterly did.³ By opening the door into the real historical world of the Old and New Testaments, Werner Keller has solemnly stated that: "*The Bible is right after all.*"⁴

Of course, the historicity of the Holy Scripture together with the historicity of the archeology and history could be verified and validated by one another through themselves. Indeed, there is a triple verification. On the one hand, the historicity of the Holy Scripture is validated by the historicity of the archeological and historical sciences. On the other hand, the Holy Scripture is revealing its true historicity upon which the archeology and history, along with all their correlated disciplines, are theandrically based upon.

At this point a problem arises. Does the archeological and historical presentation of the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians coincide with the one we find in the Holy Scripture? In other words, to what extent the archeological historicity of Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians coincides with their own biblical historicity? Evidently, the priority of the Holy Scripture in recording the biblical existence of Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians, in Eastern Europe and Asia Minor, is absolutely secured, since all the other archeological and historical sources are attesting

the Thraco-Dacian and Illyrian ethnic existence much later than the biblical sources. Certainly, in this situation, the archeological and historical sources are scientifically endorsing the biblical evidence offered by the Holy Scripture.

In such circumstances, one thing is becoming clear. Among the other biblical nationalities recorded in the Holy Scripture, the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians have never been considered as being the great anonyms of history. In fact, their presence in the Holy Scripture is bestowing upon them a distinctive aura of biblical recognition, worldly attested, while their presumptive anonymity is nothing more than our medieval or modern ignorance about them.

Without ignoring the biblical hermeneutics and exegesis as the most efficient means to theologically interpret and understand the Holy Scripture, our concern is limited only to the existence and eventually to the theandric role played by the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians, among the other biblical nations, in the Divine economy, so to say in the Divine plan of creation and redemption of the world from the fatal consequences of the ancestral sin.

In other words, we may attempt to create a “sacred history” of the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians, preserved and transmitted not only through the myths, as Mircea Eliade has scholarly demonstrated his concept of “sacred history”, but also more precisely through the Holy Scripture and yet through the Holy Tradition. This new kind of “sacred history” of the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians has been spiritually completed and perfected, at the fullness of times, in the sacred history of the Romanian apostolic and patristic Christianity.

To move on, we are going to search for the biblical presence of Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians, in the Holy Scripture, first in the Old Testament and then in the New Testament. We may note that in the sacred books of the Old Testament, one could find two genealogies of mankind. One is concerning with the biblical creation of man, named the genealogy of Adam to Noah, or the “generations of Adam” (Genesis, 5:1-6:8). The second one is regarding the biblical creation of nations

following the flood of Noah. They are simply called either genealogy of Noah, or the “generations of Noah,” (Genesis, 6:9-9:29), either “The generations of Noah’s sons” (Genesis 10:1-11:9).

Of course, we have limited our research only to the descendants of Japheth and his sons, where the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians are to be found, especially following the Flood of Noah. By the word “descendants” are to be understood in the Holy Scripture of the Old Testament the national groups.

Therefore, according to the Chapter 10:1-32, of Genesis, which is the first book of Pentateuch and also of the Holy Scripture, the origin of Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians is ethnically included among the northern Indo-European nations descending from the third son of Noah called Japheth and his own sons.

Thus, the sons of Japheth are:

Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Mesheck and Tiras.

Then the sons of Gomer are:

Ashkenaz, Riphath and Togarmah.

And finally, the sons of Javan are:

Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim.

By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations,⁵ and they were located “mostly in the region of Black Sea”.⁶ All of these names of the sons and nephews of Japheth their “ancestor,” are also mentioned in the First Book of the Chronicles, 1:4-7.

Certainly, there are many biblical commentaries trying to identify the nations ascending from Japheth and his sons.

For instance, H. L. Ellison believes that chapter 10 of Genesis, even if not all the nations are figuring there, represents the world as it was known to Israel at the time of Solomon (961-922 BC).⁷ That means almost ten centuries before Jesus Christ, since the Indo-European nations are biblically recorded. But, probably, their existence is much older than their recording in the sacred books of the Holy Scripture.

In his historical background of the Old Testament, Merrill F. Unger was mentioning, among other Biblical events, that the Noahic descendants, (Shem, Ham and Japheth), have emerged into the first world nations around 5000 years B.C., or before 4000 B.C. as geologically must be dated the Noahic Deluge.⁸

Beyond what has been said, some precious informations concerning the ethnic generations originated from the sons of Japheth, are to be found in The Scofield Reference Bible,⁹ as follows:

Gomer is the progenitor of the ancient Cimerians and Cimbri, from whom are descended the Celtic family; from Magog are descended the ancient Scythians; Tubal's descendants have peopled the region south of the Black Sea, from whence they spread north and south. It is probable that Tobolsk perpetuates the tribal name. A branch of this race peopled Spain; and *Tiras, is the progenitor of the Thracians.* (our underlining).

Also it is worthy to be mentioned as being very important, the God's blessing bestowed upon Noah and his sons, by prophetically saying unto them to be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 9:26-27). This means in the exegetic interpretation given by the Scofield Reference Bible that from Japheth will descend the "enlarges" races. "Government, science, and art, speaking broadly, are and have been Japhetic, so that history in the indisputable record of the exact fulfillment of this declarations."¹⁰

All these important names and places mentioned or suggested by the ethnographical structure of the nations, biblically recorded in Genesis, chapter 10:1-32, are skillfully illuminated and elucidated by the new Unger's Bible Handbook,¹¹ not only in the light of the Holy Scripture, but also in the light of the old historical annals and of the modern scientific archeology of the past century and a half. For instance, limiting our interest only for the purpose of this paper, will particularly select from the descendants of Japheth, those

Indo-European northern nations that are directly or indirectly related with the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians.

Thus, the Cimmerians of antiquity, (in the central Asia Minor), are to be identified with the name of their progenitor, Gomer, as they are so mentioned in the book of the prophet Ezekiel (38:6) and in the annals of the Assyrian emperors Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal (7th Century B.C.). Under the name of Gog and Magog have to be recognized the Scythians, (probably a common term for the northern barbarians). The attacks against Israel, of Gog, king of the land of Magog, Meshech and Tubal, and of Gomer with “all his bands” are threateningly depicted by God in the prophesies of Ezekiel against them. (Ezekiel, Chapters 38 and 39).

A briefing explanatory note about the names of Gog, Meshech and Tubal, might be necessary. In the Old Testament, Thraco-Phrygia was called Meshech. According to the Dictionary of the Bible by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (p. 318) Tubal is very probably identical with the Tibarenoi of Herodotus, located South-East of the Black Sea. Meshech and Tubal are to be found in Asia Minor, and Gog is possibly Gyges, king of Lydia about 650 BC. Let us not forget that Lydia was a Thracian country incorporated in the Roman Province of Asia Minor.

There are many almost mythical legends about these two nations called Gog and Magog, both of them geographically situated in the North of Thracia. Some of them have been critically analyzed by Nicolae Densușianu (see: note 17), especially those concerning the mythological war between the giants (also known under the name of Gog and Magog) and the gods. A special attention is given by Densușianu to the lost war of Gog and Magog, against the Macedonian king Alexander the Great.

To our surprise, even Beatus Augustine of Hyppo (354-430), in his famous book “De Civitate Dei” (The City of God), is confusing Gog and Magog with the Thraco-Getans and Massagetans. We may emphasize that following Ezekiel, six centuries later, Gog and Magog are mentioned in the Revelation

of St. John the Divine, (20:8). John L. McKenzie, S.J., in his Dictionary of the Bible (p. 318), is may be rightly considering that “Gog does not seem to be an apocalyptic figure in the proper sense of the word.”

Also, under the name of Ashkenaz are to be legitimized the Scythians (Assyrian: Askuz), and, under the name of Riphath, according to the Josephus’ Antiquities, we have to identify the Paphlagonians preserved in the Rhiphaean Mountains.

Tarshish, the second son of Javan, mentioned in Ezekiel (27:12) and other places in the sacred books of the Holy Bible, is considered by some historians as a Thracian tribe having this name. Dodanim perhaps the Dardana, whose name was giving to the Thraco-Dardanians of Asia Minor. The names of Tarsish and Dodanim are to be found also in The First Book of the Chronicles (1:7).¹²

Trying to summarize this part, we are learning from the Jerome Biblical Commentary¹³ that the “most of the Japhetites are located in Asia Minor and the Mediterranean islands. Possible identifications include: Gomer, Cimmerians; Magog, Lydia; Tubal and Meshech, residents of Black Sea area; Ashkenaz, Scythia; Tarshish, Tartessus (in southern Spain); and Dodanim people of Rhodes.”¹⁴

However, the destiny of all these nations generated after the flood has been fundamentally changed following the Tower of Babel and after the creation, through the Patriarch Abraham (Genesis, 12:1-3) of the monotheistic nation of Israel chosen by God to be a “witness to the one true God in the midst of universal polytheism (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 43:10-12); a recipient and a custodian of divine revelation (Romans 3:1-2; Deut. 4:5-8); a witness to the blessedness of serving the true God (Deut. 33:26-29); a people through whom Messiah the Redeemer would come (Genesis 3:15; 12:3; 49:10; 2 Samuel 7:16)”¹⁵.

Rev. Dr. Atanasie Negoită, our beloved Professor of the Old Testament Exegesis, at the Faculty of Theology of Bucharest University, teaching us about the God’s Judgment of the nations, we have learned that, in the Old Testament, after

the divine election of Abraham, very little or almost nothing has been spoken about the other biblical nations, except Israel. All these other nations are mentioned only as the scourge of God when Yahweh was punishing Israel for his sins, or when these nations themselves are punished by God for their sins.¹⁶

However, the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians never were they nicknamed as the scourge of God against Israel. On the contrary, there are proofs of good relationship between Israelites and Thracians. The friendly attitude of the Thraco-Scythopolitans toward the Jews has been biblically recorded in II Maccabees. When Judas and his company arrived in Scythopolis, “the Jews that dwelt there had testified that the Scythopolitans dealt lovingly with them, and entreated them kindly in the time of their adversity; they gave them thanks, desiring them to be friendly still unto them...” (12: 29-31). In the same context is also mentioned the bravery of “a Thracian horseman” (12:35). The Thraco-Phrigian Phillip was appointed governor of Jerusalem by Antiochus, by proving to be “for manners more barbarous than he that set him there” (II Maccabees, 5:22).

However, let me briefly introduce to you a classical essay that in some way is related to our paper. It is important, because it is contemplating the confusion of languages and dispersion of the biblical nations, after the Tower of Babel has been destroyed. This genuine essay is titled: “The Language of Pelasgians according to the Biblical and Homeric Traditions” and has been written 90 years ago by the Romanian Scholar Nicolae Densușianu, whose actuality is more than obvious, especially in the field of the modern and postmodern Romanian thracology.¹⁷

First of all Densușianu was profoundly concerned with the prestige of the Holy Scripture as a biblical source of ethnic investigation. His biblical and homeric inquiring into the history of Pelasgians as being the direct ancestors of the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians has a totally different purpose than our paper. According to him, the presence of the Thraco-Dacians, Macedonians and Illyrians from Europe and Asia

Minor in the Holy Scripture during the biblical times, have constituted the same ethnic unity and nationality based on the same common pelasgic background. His intention was to demonstrate the biblical prehistory and protolativity of the Thraco-Dacians, by studying the history and language of Pelasgians as their ancestors. One could be amazed by the original interpretation of Densușianu and his very rich biblical, folkloric, literary and philological documentation. Without any doubt, his conclusions worthily deserve to be commended and eventually updated.

As a matter of fact, we have to mention that at the beginning of the 7th Century in our Christian era, the Holy Scripture was quoted for the first time as mentioning the Thracians, Mysians, Macedonians, Dalmatians and Illyrians among the other Indo-European nations that are descending from Japheth.¹⁸ In anticipation we may say that already the Old Testament was biblically opening the doors to the new Christian gentiles by paving the way for their solemn entrance in the Holy Scripture of the New Testament.

That is why, before closing this part of our paper, we have to remark some religious aspects of the spiritual presence of Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians in the Holy Scripture of the Old Testament to be better understand their Christian presence in the New Testament.

For instance, we may note that Zalmoxis the highest priest and prophet who was recognized as the well known deity of all the Thraco-Dacians, was compared with Moses the author of Pentateuch, who has lived between the years 1526 B.C. and 1406 B.C.¹⁹ Related with this valuable information, might be hypothetically considered the allegation of professor Beer Sheba of Israel who asserts without proving that Zalmoxis was a “Jew” who has taken refuge to the Geto-Dacians from where he came back to Jerusalem during the reign of Solomon and then he returned to the Thraco-Dacians of Northern and Southern Danube, telling them about what he has learned in the Holy Land²⁰. Also the local legends about City of Scythopolis (established in 626 B.C. following the Scythian invasion) are to

be seriously taken into consideration since they are attesting the origin of this city as being in connection with the myth of the Thracian god Dionysos²¹.

There are many religious influences and similarities between Israelites and Thraco-Dacians during the Old Testament era, especially during the era of the Hellenistic civilization. The fight against religious Hellenization of the Jews through the Thracian God Dionysos is ample depicted in the second book of Maccabees.²²

Certainly the ethnic presence of the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians in the Holy Scripture is illustrated in the first place by their spiritual presence which is strongly attested not only by the history of religions, but also by the Hellenistic civilization. Without exaggerating under the Hellenism promoted by the Thraco-Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great, the great spiritual thoughts of Thraco-Dacians have helenistically shaped the religious syncretism that helped the spreading of Christianity. The Thraco-Phrygian god Sabazius was worshipped as the universal deity of Asia Minor. Eugene Lozovan in his “Dacia Sacra” emphasized the identification between Sabazios and Dionysos while the Jewish communities assimilated him to Yahweh Sabaoth.²³ We may note also that in 139 B.C. some Jews were expelled from Rome ostensibly for introducing the worship of Zeus Sabazios.²⁴ Evidently, there is an Hellenistic Thraco-Judeo-Christian syncretism whose spiritual meaning has to be understood in the light of the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testament and also of the Holy Tradition.

However we have to keep in our mind a clear distinction between what means cultural and ethnical in Hellenism in order to avoid any possible confusion. Hellenism is a cultural movement not an ethnic denominator of the nations. Hellenism is created by man. Nations are created by God. What is cultural might be peripheral and ephemeral to a nation. But what is ethnical is ontologically and theandrically essential to a nation for ever.

Since their biblical creation recorded in the Old Testament and Christian recreation in the Holy Spirit at the fullness of time, registered in the New Testament, the ethnic identity of all the nations has been preserved and strengthened through their Christianization as it is proved by their massive presence in the Holy Scripture, especially in the New Testament. At this time, just a reminder note about the correlation between biblical and historical presence seems to be necessary. It is clearly understood that compared with the Jewish history, the biblical presence of the Thraco-Illyrians appears such as sporadic and secondary in the Old Testament though historically their distinctive and uninterrupted presence is attested as existing since 13th century B.C. Once more we may remark that history and archeology are fully endorsing and completing the biblical historicity of the Holy Scripture.

No wonder why that all of these Thraco-Dacian and Illyrians who settled in their migratory movement from Eastern Europe to Asia Minor, between 13th and 7th centuries B.C., are historically attested by clearly being shown their ethnic identity along with their various religious, cultural and artistic activities. Among these Thraco-Illyrians populations we may briefly mention here the Phrygians, Mysians, Bithynians, Carians, Lydians, Lycians, Trers, Edons, Trallians and the Cappadocians.

Not long ago, Dimitrios C. Samsaris has scholarly studied the Thracian ethno-demographic and social life in the following provinces of Eastern Roman Empire: Proconsular Asia (comprising Mysia, Lydia, Caria, and Phrygia); Bithynia-Pontus; Galatia; Cappadocia; Lycia-Pamphylia; Cylicia, Syria; Judea (Palestine) and Arabia.²⁵ The results of his studious inquiry are indeed impressionable. At the same time, as Leonid A. Gindin demonstrated, the linguistic presence in Anatolia of the Thracians along with Dacians, Mysians and Phrygians, etc. remains historically uncontested forever since the Homeric times.²⁶ Certainly, this linguistic presence constitutes a new endorsing of the biblical presence of the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians in the Holy Scripture.

However, the biblical research of the Thraco-Illyrians in the Holy Scripture must be extended to the entire Thraco-Dacian population in Eastern Europe and Asia Minor. A great scholar, Professor I.I. Russu of Cluj-Napoca, Transylvania, in his book of notable excellence: *“The Ethnogenesis of the Romanians. The Autochthonous Thraco-Dacian Foundation and the Latin-Romanic Component,”* clearly depicts the vast territory populated by the Thraco-Dacians not only in the North-East of Balkan Peninsula, so to say in Thracia (approximate between the Aegean Sea and Haemus-Balkan Mountains), but also in the neighboring territories between the Black Sea, Aegean Sea up to the borders of Macedonia and Illyria, Danube, as well as the Northern region of Danube up to the Galician Carpathians and the Sarmatian steppes (The Free Dacians and Thracians unconquered by the Romans) and also further in the East are mentioned the important Thraco-Dacian enclaves in the zone of the Sea of Azov and of the Cimmerian Bosphorus., Prof. I.I. Russu makes special mention of the Thracian Southern Islands of the Thracian Sea, outside of Balkan Peninsula, such as Thasos, Samothrace, Lemnos, Imbros (where the actual Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople His All Holiness Bartholomew I was born), Tenedos, etc. In addition to these Thracian islands, are remembered the Thracians living in the West of Asia Minor, particularly in Bithynia, Mysia, Phrygia, Troas and Lydia.²⁷

All of these Thraco-Illyrians gentiles are biblically recorded in the New Testament, particularly in the “Acts of the Apostles”, the “Epistles of Saint Paul,” who was rightly surnamed the “Apostle of Gentiles,” then in the “General Epistles” of James, Peter, John, Jude and in the book of “Revelation”, also called “the Apocalypse,” by St. John the Divine.

In all respects, this biblical presence of the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians in the Holy Scripture of the New Testament has to be ethnically recognized and ecumenically appreciated for its contribution to the establishment of the One, Holy, Apostolic and Universal Church. In fact the biblical

presence of the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians in Eastern Europe and Asia Minor corresponds with their Christian history as it was recorded in the Holy Scripture especially in the New Testament.

But above everything, we have to emphasize the great biblical impact of the Thraco-Dacians of Asia Minor in the apostolical, patristical and ethnical Christianization of their brothers of Eastern Europe. This spiritual relationship based on the ethnical brotherhood of the Thraco-Dacian communion, has been historically illustrated by the Thraco-Dacian and Roman Ethnogenesis of the Romanian Orthodox Christianity and also of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Romanity of Thraco-Dacian structure and Latin language.

Before closing our paper, I would like to briefly stress the very fact that in the “Acts of the Apostles” is recorded, among the other nations, the presence of the Thraco-Dacians in Jerusalem, at the Pentecost, when the Christian Church was created following the Descent of the Holy Spirit. These Thraco-Dacians who participated at this great event of the Apostolical establishing of the First Christian Church in Jerusalem, are mentioned as they are coming from Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia (See: “The Acts, Chapter II). The same, first Epistle General of Saint Peter is addressed to the Christians from Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Saint Apostle Paul is also the Apostle of the Thraco-Dacians, Macedonians and Illyrians, not only in Asia Minor but also in Eastern Europe, as he is stating in his “Epistle to the Romans” that “from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (15:19).

To conclude, there are many other apostolical references attesting the biblical presence of the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians in the Holy Scripture, especially in the “Acts of the Apostles” which is “one of the most fascinating books in the Bible.”²⁸ This biblical fascination of the “Acts of the Apostles” is also transfiguring in eternum the sacred history of our ancestors, the Thraco-Dacians and Illyrians. Thank you.

Notes

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- 3 Especially see: Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*, Translated from the German by William Neil, 2nd Revised Edition with a postscript by Joachim Rehork, New material translated from the German by B.H.Rasmussen, William Morrow and Company, Inc., New York, 1981, 414 pag.
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- 15 Merrill F. Unger, op. cit., p. 45.
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Evagrius Ponticus as a Spiritual Source for Modern Psychology

I would like to propose some terms from the ascetic works of Evagrius Ponticus as an introduction to a more elaborate study, which will take into consideration the teachings of this monk concerning the psychological problems issued from the ascetic life in the desert.

Philosopher and monk, disciple of the Cappadocians and of the desert Fathers, heretic for the Greeks and saint for the Syrians, Evagrius Ponticus has been a great personality in any case. Evagrius was born around 345 in Ibora, in the province of Pontus (Asia Minor), to a distinguished and influential family. We do not know anything about his youth or about his formation, although the teenager appears to have received an excellent education. The vicinity of Annésoi, property of Saint Basil's family, where he and St. Gregory of Naziansus withdrew in 357-358 to carry out a test of monastic life, offered Evagrius an opportunity to meet the famous Cappadociens. We know from Pallade that he was tonsured as a reader by the hands of St. Basil. After St. Basil's death in 379, Evagrius went to Gregory of Naziansus, Archbishop of Constantinople. Gregory ordained Evagrius as a deacon. In 380, Evagrius left his country for good and followed Gregory of Naziansus to Constantinople. Later, Evagrius left Constantinople for Jerusalem. He was accommodated by Melanie the Old, a widow of nobility who with Rufin, had found a monastery on the Mount of Olives. At Easter 383, Rufin gave him the monastic habit.

It is probably in 383 that Evagrius went to Egypt. He initially remained for two years in Nitria, one of the most famous monastic centers in Egypt, around 35 miles south-east

of Alexandria. He then he moved to Kellia, the Cells, where he remained for fourteen years, until his death. Evagrius claimed more than once that his teachings continue the monastic tradition, particularly two names of first rank among the monastic authorities of his time: Macarios "the Egyptian" and Macarios "the Alexandrine."

Why did Christians run into the desert during the 4th century? The desert was not only an unproductive land, but it was also the area of the tombs or the field of death, where the Egyptians never ventured without fear. When the monk went into the desert, he was prepared to carry out the battle, both physical and moral, with the demons. His defense was the ascetic life under the protection of Christ. The desert acquires a double significance for the monk: it is a place of refuge from the word's temptations, and at the same time, a place where temptations come directly from the demons. In the desert, the hermit can move away from the small distractions, small passions and virtues to engage in the cosmic combat between Christ and Satan. There is a close link between the retirement into the desert and the demons' attacks. The reason is that the demon defends his field against the ascetic who has the audacity to venture there; for this reason, the Devil uses all the stratagems, not only the terrifying appearances, but also all kinds of hallucinations, threats and supplications.

What the devil fears is that the ascetic fills the desert itself with asceticism. He fears that other monks will follow the first ascetic and will populate the desert, which becomes, to some extent, a city. Another image is that of the monks "fertilizing" the desert. Conversely, when the monks slacken themselves in the asceticism and act badly, the desert reappears; it is what Abba Isaac affirms: the monks, by their sins, transformed again the old great monastic site of Sketis into a desert. Which are the tactics of the demons in this battle? Their usual weapons are the "impure thoughts." These temptations of the "thoughts" are usual temptations of the beginner. When Anthony put himself in the school of the ascetics, the devil sought to make him give up his projects by pointing out his own

goods, the care he must take of his sister, all worldly pleasures, and in addition, the austerity and the difficulty of the virtue. Obviously, the demon does not fail to launch more brutal temptations to instill temptation in young ascetics, particularly the thoughts of lust.

It is in this medium and this tradition, that Evagrius wrote his works. He tried to consider the shadows and the lights of our inner life to understand and present them. The starting point of his study on the soul is the solitary life: the departure to the desert to fight with the demons and to obtain spiritual knowledge. Of course, as persons of the 21st century, we have questions. Can we still trust this logic that regards the human soul as the center of a cosmic combat against the forces of evil? To what point can the modern man still benefit from the psychological observations of Evagrius? Can one translate these observations into a more comprehensible language for our time? I will not answer these questions in the present study. I will introduce only some terms that belong to the psychology of Evagrius Ponticus.

Let us start by presenting **the anthropology** of Evagrius. He received the Platonic theory of the soul's tripartition from the philosophical tradition. The three parts of the soul are the rational part (λογιστικον), the irascible part (θυμικον), and the concupiscent one (επιθυμητικον). There is a difference of origin between the last two and the first: the rational part is the intellect, the 'νους,' which is the essence of the rational being. The rational being was created as pure intellect, incorporeal, then was deposed and covered with a body. The irascible part and the concupiscent one are of accidental origin and are due to the connection of the deposed intellect to a body; they represent what, in the soul, is of bodily origin, and together they constitute what Evagrius calls "the passionate part of the soul."

The *nous* is a mysterious element which comes from the divine sphere and which is now inside the human nature. Since it has such an origin, it is impossible for the human intellect to understand it. The *nous* is the image of God not because it is

incorporeal, but because of its susceptibility of the Holy Trinity. The man in this world is thus a “*nous*” built in a "practical" body. This body is like an "instrument" for the *nous* in the exercise of the good and the evil and by the means of which it is related with the cosmos. The role of *nous* would be to perceive "the reasons" of the beings; it is possible for it to do so only if it is healthy.

The irascible and concupiscent parts can and must also act in accordance with their nature: the concupiscent one by desiring the virtue and the pleasure that accompanies spiritual science, the irascible one by fighting for the safeguard of these goods (pleasure and virtue) and to protect the intellect against the demons that seek to ravish them. "The nature of the irascible part is to fight the demons and to fight for the pleasure, whatever it is." One very well sees an element intervening here that interests us: pleasure as the goal of the activity of the two parts of the soul: the difference we see is related to a "natural" activity and the other one as "against nature." The irascible part, like the concupiscent part of the soul and the body itself, is naturally a good thing. According to the use that one makes of it is "healthy" or "sick:" "It is there, indeed, the use which one must make of the irascible part: to fight the Snake with hatred. . . . Not to divert the use which you make of the irascible part until making a use of it against nature by irritating you against your brother." In this small text, one can see the complexity of the problems that interest us: to distinguish our own activity from that of a foreign spirit to identify the suitable means to cure this part of the soul.

Evagrius describes these two parts of the soul by their actions, which are against their own nature. He gives the suitable remedies to these definitions that are in opposition to these actions, which is his specific way of presenting these things in opposition to one another.

Now let us consider **the thoughts**, one of the fundamental elements in the teaching of our monk. In the technical vocabulary of the ancient monasticism, the notion of "thought" (λογισμος) is as ambivalent as the biblical concept of

"world" for the same reasons. The thought is a natural and good manifestation of the soul, of our feelings and of our perceptions of the things of this world. However, in a very subtle way, these thoughts can become the vehicle of intentions that do not correspond to their natural goal, which is to make available to us the sensitive world. At this point, they become "bad thoughts," with the meaning of an invitation to do evil. As such, they are the revelation of a state of our soul that is diverted from God.

Let us try to distinguish various types of thoughts. In his work *On the thoughts* (chapter 8), Evagrius speaks about angelical, human and demonical thoughts:

After a long observation, we learned how to know the difference that exists between the angelical thoughts, the human ones and those which come from the demons. Those of the angels, to start, scan the nature of the things and seek the spiritual reasons. For example: what is the purpose for which gold was created? The demonical thought does not know that, but it suggests without any shame the only acquisition of gold and predicted the pleasure and the glory which will result from it. And the human thought does no longer aim at the acquisition of gold or examine its symbolism, but it introduces only into the spirit the simple shape of gold, apart from any passion of cupidity."

In another chapter of the same work (31), Evagrius presents other criteria to distinguish the thoughts: among the good human thoughts are, on the one hand, those which come from our nature, which is good like everything that God created, and on the other hand, those which come from our will, when this one "inclines towards what's best;" bad thoughts are those that come from our will when it "inclines towards what's worse." "Better" and "worse" refer to the goal of the ascetic, which is prayer. Thus, he can say that three thoughts are opposed to the demonical thought, which cut it when it is delayed in the spirit: the angelical thought and the two good human thoughts.

In the *Antirrheticos*, the work in which Evagrius wants to present the battle with the demons by the intermediary of the thoughts, we can find other criteria to distinguish the thoughts. The fundamental question is to know if the term λογισμος always indicates the objectification of the demon's temptation.

First of all, it is necessary to say that Evagrius really tries to objectify all thoughts of any origin, so that many of the sentences of the *Antirrheticos* have the following form: "against the thought which achieves such or such action toward the soul," or "against the soul which receives (fight against) such thought." Also, one frequently finds a formula related to the action of the demon: "against the demon (of such passion) which advises me to achieve an action."

We should also add that there are rather clear sentences concerning the "human thoughts:" "Against the human thoughts which emerge in us and tell us that the battle with the demons does not bring anything good to us." It seems to me Evagrius has clearly expressed that these thoughts which precisely spout out from the depths of the soul during the battle with the demons are "human." Evagrius makes use of another expression that seems to go in the same direction: "Against the *thought of the soul* which believes it gets temptations beyond its forces." In this study concerning the distinction of the terms used by Evagrius, the object of these thoughts is important, since they appear closely related to the origin of the thoughts and, also, incidentally, to the terms that Evagrius employs. The monk who went into the desert is prepared to carry out the combat with the demons. The result is a tension that implies a work of autosuggestion.

Now let us consider the dialectical relation between *the thoughts* and the soul. It is necessary to distinguish several manners of the thoughts that act upon the soul:

- Thoughts that advise or encourage the soul in such direction:

"Against the thoughts which encourage the soul not to seek to ensure its food by the work of its hands or to receive something from our parents either..."

- Thoughts that push or force us to make such things:
"Against the thought of the vainglory which pushes us to make justice on account of men."

- Thoughts that are delayed in us: "to the Lord about the thought of avarice which is delayed in us and confuses our intellect by the memory of money which we lost or by the will to acquire what we do not have..."

- Thoughts that invade or surround our intellect:
"Against the thoughts of pride which surround our intellect and throw it in a great ruin."

- Thoughts that bind, retain or lead the intellect in a certain direction:

"Against the thoughts of sadness, which leads the intellect into the deep abyss of death and imprints an abominable image upon the souls."

This dialectical between the thoughts and the soul can be considered from the opposite point of view, namely from the point of view of the soul, which receives these various thoughts. Evagrius also uses here several terms to introduce the situation of the soul when it is confronted with the thoughts:

-The soul that receives or encounters thoughts: "to the soul which because of temptations encounters impure thoughts and does not seek to get rid of them by hunger and thirst and prayer."

-The soul that fights against the thoughts.

-The soul that is subject to the influences of the thoughts: "To the soul saddened by the thought of the *akedia*."

-The intellect that is put into motion and hurled by thoughts.

Another issue is to distinguish between demons, their methods of action, and passions and thoughts.

Primarily, there is a whole series of sentences where Evagrius states rather clearly that the demons act on our thoughts: "To the Lord about the demon which awakens the thought which cursed against my soul and agitates all shapes of the face during the night."

Secondly, Evagrius seems to develop another dialectical placing the demons and the soul at opposite poles: "Against the bad spirit which is opposed to my soul and shows me the sin of the beginning and sends sadness quickly to me." And the two poles can reciprocally change the main role: "To the soul troubled by the voice of the demon which whistles in the air."

Thirdly, Evagrius introduces another element into this dialectical: the *passions*. In his work *On the thoughts*, Evagrius explains the mechanism through which the demons act on the soul and introduce it to their impure thoughts, seeking to divert its concupiscent and irascible parts from their natural function. It is by using the representations of objects that the demons act. These representations come from the senses, and they are preserved in the memory from where they can be recalled either by the intellect or by the demons themselves. If the object were perceived with passion, the representation keeps, even when recalled by the memory, a passionate character.

How can the demons act on the memory and point out the representations from it? Through the passions, Evagrius answers. Very curiously, among the hundreds of the sentences of the *Antirrheticos*, there are only very few that explain how the demons use our passions to extract from our memory the passionate representations. Apparently, there are many more lines that refer to the relationship between passions and thoughts: "To the soul which, under the effect of the akedia, falls into sadness and considers that it was delivered to the torture of demons." Here, Evagrius expresses himself less clearly. This kind of less accurate expression gave rise to the opinion that Evagrius always uses several terms (thought, demon, and passion) to indicate the same reality and that only the formulation is faulty: it sometimes misses terms in the complete expression which would be "the thought of the demon of such passion."

Now let us see what we can say about the sequence between thoughts and passions. The majority of the sentences on this subject speak about the thoughts, which are born or awakened or stirred by passions: "Against the thoughts of the

soul which are stirred by the akedia and which push us to give up the holy way of the heroes and the place where we reside."

But one can identify a movement that goes in an opposite direction: thoughts, which excite or awaken the passions: "Against the thought which awakens in us anger concerning the money of our brother." We can admit that Evagrius really seems to forget certain terms of the mechanisms that he presents, and for this reason, some of them remain rather confusing and difficult to explain.

The monk is not alone in this spiritual combat. If the demons use several tactics to put the monk to the test, this one feels as a soldier of Christ who came especially in the desert to carry out this cosmic combat. In fact, the Lord's Angels are implied. They also act in various ways: "To the Angel of the Lord which appears suddenly in my intellect by cooling the thought of fornication and by driving out all the thoughts which attack it." But we should recognize that such sentences are very rare, considering the mistrust of the monks with respect to any angelical appearance. One can find sentences that relate to the theoretical belief in the assistance of the Lord through the Angels, but very few concrete examples.

This classification has a precise goal: to distinguish the various kinds of mechanisms, their causes and their descriptions. We should consider some other elements of the teachings of Evagrius Ponticus in order to have a more complete vision of his understanding of the soul and its difficulties. But this topic is beyond the scope of this small presentation.

Theodor Damian

Gregory of Nazianzus' Poetry and his Human Face in it

Introduction

In the present paper I do not intend to give an exhaustive analysis of St. Gregory of Nazianzus' poetry from a certain point of view, such as theological, moral, philosophical or literary. I simply want to present Gregory as a common man, in his very human hypostasis. St. Gregory the Theologian is the one whom we know very well especially from his theological writings. The man Gregory, who reveals himself in poetry in a different way than we are accustomed to think of him, is not known at all or just a little.

I think that in order for us to adequately understand holiness - in the human case - it is useful to emphasize the struggle, the temptations, the doubts, the suffering, the way towards it, not just the state of holiness, like an achieved ideal without a strong link to a lower background.

For instance, I was always more impressed by the story of Mary the Egyptian knowing where she came from and what she achieved than if I had only heard the ideal portrait of her.

St. Gregory's poetry is the place where one needs to go in order to discover the struggling man, not just the saint.

Gregory's Vita

St. Gregory of Nazianzus was the greatest rhetorician of his age¹, one of the Church's literary giants², a powerful

¹ Saint Gregory Nazianzen: Selected Poems, Translated with an Introduction by John McGuckin, SLG Press, Convent of the Incarnation, Fairacres Oxford, 1995, p. VIII. (Future references to this book will be made through the translator's name, John McGuckin).

theologian; with a sensitive and poetical nature,³ he liked philosophy and was a master in this field; he was a “philosopher of Beauty”.

When Basil, his great and good friend, left Greece after his studies there, Gregory wanted to leave, too, but his friends insisted so much that he decided to stay - even though not for too long. However, thinking of his home country, he declared that over there he would be able to live as a “philosopher of Beauty”, meaning as a Christian who tends towards perfection.⁴

This testimony indicates that he had a predilection towards meditation and contemplation, towards isolation where he could speak less and pray more, where - as it was perceived - it is easier, and the right place to achieve perfection. He withdrew into hesichia several times in his life, even when he was in his highest administrative position in the Church: in 381, as archbishop of Constantinople, after troubles during the Second Ecumenical Council, he did not hesitate to resign and go to his favorite place, home, where he had the opportunity to withdraw into isolation in order to pray, practice silence and write poetry.⁵

That was also the reason for which he renounced the yoke of marriage.⁶

* * *

Gregory was born in 329 in Cappadocia, in a town

² Ibidem, p. V.

³ Saint Grégoire de Nazianze, textes choisies et présentés par Edmond Devoldes, dans la traduction de Paul Gallay, Les Editions du Soleil, Levant, Namur, Belgique, 1960, p. 45. (Future references to this book will be made through the translator's name, Paul Gallay).

⁴ Ibidem, p. 39.

⁵ On God and Man: The Theological Poetry of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Translated and Introduced by Peter Gilbert, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 2001, p. 1. (Future references to this book will be made through the translator's name, Peter Gilbert).

⁶ Paul Gallay, p. 63.

called Naziansus or Arianzus, to Gregory the Elder (converted to Christianity in 325) and to Nonna.

In 345 he met Basil while in school in Caesarea of Cappadocia. He studied also in Caesarea of Palestine, Alexandria and Athens. His friendship with Basil the Great, especially in Athens, remained exemplary in history.

When he came back to Nazianzus he was baptized by his father, then ordained, although against his will. Gregory ran away to Pontus to stay with Basil. In 372 he became a bishop, again against his will (ordained by Basil and his father) for a small place called Sasima. Gregory would not live there. In 380 he was archbishop of Constantinople for about a year. He died in 389-390.⁷

While in Constantinople he was a resolute defender of the Nicene doctrines against the Arians that had taken the city. This is where he delivered his famous five theological orations that brought him the name “the Theologian”.

As John McGuckin notices, Gregory’s life was marked by five determining facts: the loyalty to his father, the recurring ill health, the friendship with Basil the Great, his involvement in the Church administration and theology (the Constantinople phase), and his awareness of the brilliant gifts he had.⁸

Gregory as a poet

According to Paul Gallay, Gregory of Nazianzus was the first one who conferred value to Christian poetry. There is no Christian poet of value who wrote in Greek before Gregory.⁹

In the same way, A.A. Vasiliev believes that Gregory’s poem *De vita sua (On his own life)* for instance, is worthy to be placed among the most beautiful literary works in general.¹⁰ Gregory was aware of his gifts and used them extensively. He

⁷ P. Gilbert, pp. 23-26.

⁸ McGuckin, p. VIII.

⁹ Paul Gallay, p. 27.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 27

wrote over 400 poems.¹¹ As Paul Gallay notices, his poetic style transpires even in his theological works.¹²

The main message of Gregory's poetry is the trust in God.¹³ It is in his poems and in his letters that we discover the human face of Gregory. Besides the saintly side of him: contemplation, ascetic endeavor, prayer, fasting, deprivations, here we see the common person that he was, very similar to us, with all his pains, doubts, problems, depressions, suffering, struggle.¹⁴

Gregory's ability to make connections, to carefully observe the reality around him, strengthened significantly his descriptive skills. One can see that in the following example where he describes Sasima, his bishopric, for which he was consecrated in 372 against his will by Basil and his father Gregory the Elder:

"There is a place on a highway in Cappadocia, at the junction of three roads; there is no water, no greenery, nothing of what can please a free man; this is a narrow, little village terribly hateful; there is nothing but dust, noise, carts, lamentations, moans, tax collectors, instruments of torture, chains; in fact, the inhabitants are nothing but foreigners who pass by, vagabonds; this is my Church of Sasima!"¹⁵ (*De via sua*)

In the long poem on his own life his reflective observations are formulated quasi aphoristically. When he speaks with indignation of how his father forced him into ordination Gregory writes: "It is terrible when love is combined with power"¹⁶ Here is another sapiential thought: "If the one who is obliged must remember the services he received, the

¹¹ John McGuckin, p. 5

¹² P.Gallay, p. 21.

¹³ Ibidem, p.21.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p.21.

¹⁵ Paul Gallay, p. 45.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 48.

benefactor must forget the services he offered.”¹⁷

This is just a small illustration of the reasons for which Gregory’s poems deserve to be brought back to our attention. “They deserve a small renaissance”, as Raymond Van Dam put it.¹⁸

The Purpose of his poetry

Gregory wrote his poetry for four basic reasons: to address those who had similar experiences, as the poet himself says, to give guidance to the young people in a form agreeable to them, to show that Christians are good at arts, too, or even better than non-Christians, and as a way of talking to himself, especially when he considered himself to be an “aged swan”¹⁹ according to his own metaphor.

In writing poetry Gregory did have in view the practice of Appolinarians who used to put their teachings in poetical form in order to have more adherence to the public. So Gregory did the same to counteract. He also believed that writing poetry he would write less than otherwise and that would fit his ascetical purposes.²⁰

It was also affirmed that he wrote poetry in order to obey a transcendent poetical genius.²¹

Types of poetry

Different people classify differently St. Gregory’s poetry. The poems are historical and dogmatic or moral, according to some scholars,²² or literary, historical, doctrinal

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 44.

¹⁸ Raymond Van Dam, (see book review for Carolinne White, Ed., Gregory of Nazianzus, Autobiographical Poems, “Cambridge Medieval Classics”, Vol. 6, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1996, at <http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/textidx?c=tmr;idno=baj9928.9805.009>).

¹⁹ P. Gilbert, pp. 12-17.

²⁰ P. Gallay, pp. 26-27.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Ibidem, p. 29.

and devotional²³ according to others.

Peter Gilbert speaks of poems related to *what is to be believed*, the theological ones (on the Holy Trinity, creation, providence, angels, soul, salvation in Jesus Christ), poems related to *what is to be done* (moral poems) like the one on virginity, for instance, poems related to who am I, autobiographical and also elegies and lamentations, and of those that form an *Ars poetica*, poems about writing, that can be considered literary theory or criticism, like the one on his own verses.²⁴

As John McGuckin writes, Gregory's poetry, and especially the dogmatic poems indicate the essence of the patristic legacy: prayer and theology are one.²⁵ As the old adage says: theologian is the one who prays.

Other characteristics

St. Gregory of Nazianzus' poetry is often in Homeric style, often difficult and deliberately obscure; it is suggestive or can be ironic as well.²⁶ He wrote in several verse forms: dactylic hexameter, iambic trimeter, mixed meters, elegiac couplets.²⁷ He is diverse in tone and expression, natural in his emotions, sincere in sharing his deepest convictions and beliefs.²⁸ He cultivates the paradox, the apparent contradiction as when he speaks about the Son of God: "He was mortal yet God/ of the race of David, yet maker of Adam, He wore flesh, yet was beyond bodily form/ He was sacrifice and celebrant/ sacrificial priest and God Himself" (*On the Son*)²⁹ Gregory writes, echoing the liturgical cheruvimic prayer where Jesus is

²³ P.Gilbert, p. 1.

²⁴ P. Gilbert, pp. 6-13.

²⁵ McGuckin, p. V.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ P.Gilbert, p. 6.

²⁸ P. Gilbert, p. 6.

²⁹ McGuckin, p. V.

the offer and the offered, the one who receives and the one who gives Himself to many.

As a theologian, particularly in the dogmatic poems, Gregory uses the apophatic style: “How can words sing Your praise when no word can speak of You?” Since God is unutterable, unknowable, the best way to speak of Him is to offer Him a silent hymn (*Hymn to God*).³⁰

“You are not one thing, not all things” the poet continues reminding one of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite’s cataphatic and apophatic theology, “You bear all names, how shall I name You who cannot be named?” (*Hymn to God*).³¹

Confident in what he says when speaking about God, and believing in the divine existence in the process, while being in the middle of his engagement and details, he suddenly warns the reader: “But here God Himself is going to inspire me” (*Meditation on the Christian Dogma*).³² In the same poem he addresses the readers - who can be imagined to be the heretics themselves or people who read their teachings, with self credit and pride: “Listen now to our excellent doctrine on the soul!”³³

Another theological poem (*On the Incarnation of Christ*) ends in this challenging and unusual way, very triumphalistically: “Then come here to me that I may cut these verses on the tablet of your heart with a pen that needs no ink”.³⁴

In *Epitaph for himself*, where Gregory talks about himself and where he nicely acknowledges that he was born and saw the light due to prayer (his mother’s prayer), the reader is talked to imperatively: “Inscribe that in stone.”³⁵

Part of his style is to use repetition in order to create effect, to talk to himself in the third person (like in the epitaph

³⁰ McGuckin, p. 7.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Gallay, p. 68.

³³ Ibidem, p. 72.

³⁴ McGuckin, p. 6.

³⁵ Gallay, p. 60.

on his death and that of his parents, where he laments: “How sad Gregory’s hand is, how bitter the letters that he writes”³⁶, or to personify things, as when he is talking to his flesh, that “sweet enemy”: “flesh, respect me, contain your desires and stop your rage against my soul...” “I will reduce you to slavery” (*Agaist the flesh*).³⁷

Gregory as a common man

More than any other writings Gregory’s poetry shows “a man conscious of his failures and flaws”,³⁸ hence the emphasis that is placed on humility in many ways. Gregory appears to be a man like all others, one who experiences depression, pain, doubt, who laments and complains, who shows indignation, who is afraid to die or indulges in little vanities.

For instance, when he describes his friendship with Basil in Greece, he confesses: “If I can praise myself a little I would say that both of us, we did not remain unremarked in Greece” (*De vita sua*).³⁹

He was afraid to die and prayed ardently, when, on his way to Greece, the boat he was on was about to disappear in a great storm in the sea. He was all the more afraid as he thought of a double death: one physical, in the sea, and the other, spiritual, because he was not yet baptized in the water of salvation (*De vita sua*).⁴⁰

In *De vita sua*, again, Gregory speaks with great pain and indignation against his best friend Basil for having forced him into episcopacy, especially in that desolate place, Sasima, while Basil was a great bishop surrounded by 50 auxiliaries; he felt that he was treated with unexpected arrogance, and reminds Basil of the good times when “you were not elevated above the

³⁶ Gallay, p. 59.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 57.

³⁸ McGuckin, p. VI.

³⁹ Gallay, p. 38.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, pp. 35; 37.

clouds”.⁴¹

Gregory is appalled at Basil’s behavior and blames him for having lied: “Basil, who, for all the rest was the man the most distant from lie, had lied to me”, the poet complains in the same poem.⁴²

He complains again when with resignation and “blessed wounds”, frustratingly accepted the assignment to Sasima (*De vita sua*): “Not to have even some bread to share with a visitor!” “Ask me to show a different type of courage and propose this destination to other people wiser than me”, the bitter reply sounds. “Oh, wild beasts. Will you not receive me? With you, I think, I could find more faithfulness!”⁴³

When his father called him to Nazianzus to help him after Gregory, running from Sasima, took refuge in the mountains, the new bishop finally accepted for fear of punishment. In fact the father was blackmailing Gregory when he wrote to him: “Give me this favor, please; if not, let someone else put me in the tomb!” (*De vita sua*).⁴⁴

Gregory’s struggles with the flesh are also remarkably described in another poem (*On the human nature*), where he seems to anticipate the tone of Charles Baudelaire in his poem *The Flowers of Evil*: “Flesh, this is what I have to tell you, to you, so difficult to heal, sweet enemy, [...] ferocious amazing thing! But it will be even more amazing if you finished by being my friend!”⁴⁵

The very human side of Gregory is shown in a poem (*On a calumniator*) where he blames another man and calls him evil, instead of praying for him as one would expect: “My friend”, Gregory starts, “You say many evil things about me/ If you were a really virtuous man/ I might believe you right in some of them; but if you are an evil man/ then I pray you will

⁴¹ Gallay, pp. 43-45.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 44.

⁴³ Ibidem, p. 45-46.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 48.

⁴⁵ Gallay, p. 78.

always speak evil of me/ indeed all the more./ And so I would win both ways/ for I would hate to be held in good esteem by wicked men.”⁴⁶

The last verses here might remind those who know Romanian poet Mihai Eminescu of his diatribe against those that he despised, at the end of one of his letters: “If I bear easily and with a smile their hatred/ Their praises for me, certainly, would sadden me beyond measure.” In *De vita sua*, Gregory expresses the same kind of feeling: he is indifferent to applause and noisy acceptance by vanitous men.⁴⁷

In some cases, Gregory of Nazianzus has a very unusual way to address God in his prayers, a way that resembles a little the Old Testament prophets’ negotiation or protest in their dialogue with God. In *De vita sua*, describing the storm where he was about to die, he tells us that he almost warned God that if God would take his life now, he would lose a worshiper!⁴⁸ This can be taken as an irony and also as a very bold attitude.

In another instance (*Prayer to Christ*), talking about a life of suffering, as if he knows the mystery of being, or when one is considered pure by God, as if protesting and judging, Gregory addresses Christ: “Lord, what need is there now of any further pains to purify my soul?” [!]⁴⁹ This seems also to be intended to teach God a lesson of logic!

The attitude here is in line with a very interesting sense of self-justification that transpires in a poem where he tells Christ what to do and argues with Him: “Christ, do not press heavily upon me/ or crush me in the weight of sorrows/ for there are many more evil than I/ on whom you show your mercy.”⁵⁰

Not only that he implies that “I am not the worst of them, after all,” but he is reproaching Christ for the way He

⁴⁶ McGuckin, p. 19.

⁴⁷ Gallay, p. 49.

⁴⁸ Gallay, p. 37.

⁴⁹ McGuckin, p. 17.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 15.

chose to deal with His servants!

In the poem *The Serpent* Gregory seems to imply that Christ has an obligation to serve him, because “I am Yours, o, Christ/ then, save me as it is Your heart’s desire to do.”⁵¹

Or put it in another way: “In the morning I greet my God/ and resolve to give no room to sin/ ... / Do you,/ my Christ/ bring this beginning/ to a happy end” (*Morning Prayer*).⁵²

This can sound like nice prayer, but also as if he expressed an intention not to sin, then left it to God to make sure he didn’t sin. He did his job, now it is up to God to do His job!

Conclusion

St. Gregory of Nazianzus was a very interesting personality. In a sense, like walking in the footsteps of his Master, Jesus Christ, he was weak and strong, sarcastic and uncompromising with his enemies, but a good person with a loving nature; he experienced contrasts and extremes with stoic resolve while being affected in other cases beyond possibility of expression.

Indeed, his poetry reveals the real man and the real saint thus being a significant instrument for the necessary knowledge we want to have of the one who was a brilliant theologian, a powerful philosopher and the greatest rhetorician of his age.⁵³

⁵¹ McGuckin, p. 15.

⁵² Ibidem, p. 14.

⁵³ Ibidem, p. VIII.

Andreas Andreopoulos

The Wondrous Poetry of Symeon the New Theologian

The writings of Symeon the New Theologian may not be as philosophical as those of Fathers such as Gregory of Nyssa or Maximos the Confessor, they may not betray the psychological insight of Evagrius of Pontos, and they may not display the erudition of Basil of Caesarea or Gregory Palamas. Nevertheless, he certainly wrote about things he lived, he felt, he envisioned, and not about disembodied logical deductions that could lead to much more than an abstract, theoretical view of the Divine, even if his writing is as raw as his understanding of the experience that spawned it. His opponents did, unwittingly, a great service to the memory of Symeon, by throwing the ridicule of “New Theologian” at him, and giving ideas to the Church. Nevertheless, the tradition of the Church accepted him as the third “Theologian” in a very select group, and maintained the nickname given to him by his opponents, because he was one of the very few saints that fulfilled in a most admirable way Evagrius’ definition of a theologian: “If you know how to pray, you are a theologian; and if you are a theologian you know how to pray.”

Only a few centuries after Symeon died, in the middle of the fourteenth century, the tradition of hesychast monks such as Symeon, who prayed ceaselessly, believed in the possibility of participating in God through the operation of his grace, his Holy Spirit or, as it was then expressed, his Uncreated Energies, and occasionally even had mystical experiences of the light, was challenged on a theological level. All this was officially accepted as doctrine of the Orthodox Church, mostly through the attempts of Gregory Palamas. But we can certainly recognize that the ground was prepared by the contribution of Symeon the New Theologian. The extent of Symeon’s influence

can be seen by the fact that along with his own writings, his name was mistakenly given to one of the two treatises that describe the method of hesychastic prayer, that Gregory Palamas cited in his *Triads*,¹ which became the basis of the official hesychastic doctrine. In addition, some his own writings, as well of his biographer and disciple Nicetas Stethatos, were included in the *Philokalia*, the collection of ascetic writings that was published in 1782 Venice by Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain and Makarios of Corinth, translated to Church Slavonic by Paissy Velichkovsky in 1793, and contributed in the regeneration of the monastic, hesychastic spirit in the Orthodox East.

In the 20th century, Symon's writings finally started to be translated and circulated in the West. For many people, the significance of Christianity, or the significance of religion in general, is to maintain the essential unity between heaven and earth. We live in a fallen world, but this world is not far from God, and certainly not forgotten by him. Perhaps the greatest spiritual divides of the modern world are not to be found among Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and so on. Even before we start thinking about interfaith dialogue and the differences and similarities among religious denominations, even including "moral" atheists, we can see the rift between those who live in a world of objects, who use the world, the people and themselves as if they were things, sometimes even in the name of religion, and who often, if they do not completely reify God they exile him in another universe far, far away, and then those who, with all their faults, vices and mistakes, live in the spirit, who try to see God in and through the others, and whose sense of ethics is grounded in the metaphysical unity between the "here" and the "there", trying to live on earth and in heaven at the same time, and ultimately see these two directions not as a war between a Good Empire (us) and an Evil one (them), but as a constant Herculean personal choice between Virtue and Vice, the Freedom of Infinity and the prison of the media-constructed,

¹ Gregory Palamas, *Triads* I, 2, 12.

material world. The golden chain of saints that know only the bonds of love and faith, and certainly the particular link by the name of Symeon the New Theologian, the reminder that one can see God face to face, even in this lifetime, are sources of spiritual strength and support and a guarantee for the unity of heaven and earth. They invite us and inspire us to lift the curtain and peek through. All this makes the writings and the personality of Symeon the New Theologian relevant and important even today.

His most important works have been translated to English as *The Discourses* (translated by C. J. deCatanzaro, Paulist Press, 1980) and *Hymns of Divine Love* (translated by G. Maloney, Dimension, New Jersey, 1975), while the three-volume study by Alexander Golitzin (*On the Mystical Life*, SVS Press, 1995-1997) and the impressive book by bishop Hilarion Alfeyev (*St. Symeon the New Theologian and the Orthodox Tradition*, Oxford University Press, 2000) are the best introductions to his life and work. Symeon's writings consist of a huge collection of hymns and poems, catecheses (which he usually read to his monks in the morning service). The main themes in his writings include the importance of the spiritual father, ceaseless inward prayer, prayer in tears, the mystical union with God, and the mystical experience of the light.

In this, the contribution of Symeon is particularly important, as in the long tradition of the mystics and theologians of the light, he is the first Eastern saint to speak openly about his experiences. How is this possible? The traditional way of writing theology and mysticism as it had existed in the East for centuries was not personal. Evagrius, John of Climacus, and Maximos, for instance, never wanted to make any personal claims in their writings, but they were content to write from within the school, or rather the Church they are part of. On top of this, the traditional Byzantine attitude was suspicious, to say the least, of any idea that was not already found in the Gospel and the Holy Tradition. Therefore, every new idea was always heavily camouflaged as extremely old. The 18th century view of Edward Gibbon about Byzantium as

an empire where nothing really important happened in art, culture, society or science in more than a thousand years, has been strongly criticized since then: Gibbon fell in the trap Byzantines created, trying to pretend that nothing new was ever going on. The same suspicion followed personal views, ideas that were possibly different than those of the Tradition. More than a need for uniformity, this was, especially in the monastic circles, symptomatic of the ascetic resistance against the temptation of pride.

Symeon tries to follow the same formula as the writers before him. Not even for a minute does he present any of his views as something new. Yet, the weight of the experience is so overwhelming, that he reverts to a personal voice. In addition, since he wrote all of his works to be read to his monks, or not at all, he did not trouble himself too much to follow the traditional rules of writing.

Moreover, the role of the spiritual father, to which he dedicated so much in his writings, is similar to that of the Church. It is faith, works and foremost, love that connect the links of the chain of the saints. This love is not a generic, abstract and impersonal love, but at least in the beginning, the love one gives to the person through which one sees Christ, until one learns to see Christ through everyone – yet always personally. Symeon's poetry, his catecheses, his theology, all his writings, stress love as a personal feeling. The spiritual father, like the priest and the bishop, are images of Christ, icons through which our love passes through to Christ. Symeon loved Symeon the Elder as he loved Christ – it is through a personal, real love that he was later led to see Christ himself, and not through an intellectual, disembodied “wish to love”. It is also because of the obedience-through-love a monk pays to his spiritual father, that he manages to subjugate his ego, without resulting to blind, rigid obedience – because to recognize somebody's failings does not mean that you love them any less.

Symeon's poems are different from those of Romanos Melodos or Gregory of Nazianzos, for instance, because they convey their spiritual experience in a personal way that is not

found in ancient poetry. Unlike with older poetry, the reader here does not remain unaffected, he/she cannot help but express his own feelings when he reads it. At the same time, the expressions, metaphors and conventions Symeon uses, are very close to the expressions, metaphors and conventions similar to those of much later poetry:

*Do not look at all to the right nor to the left,
but as you have begun, so even run more ardently.
Make haste always to apprehend, to seize the Master.
As often as he should disappear, even 10,000 times,
likewise 10,000 times he will appear to you
and thus he who cannot be grasped will be grasped by you.
10,000 times, or rather as long as you still breathe,
seek with greater ardor to run towards him.²*

Putting aside the relatively small difference between the popular language of the 11th and the 18th century, Symeon's poetry, formally speaking, could easily pass for much later Greek demotic poetry. It is very likely then, that he was using poetic imagery that was already available to him, in songs of the lower social strata, where attic poetic rules were of no consequence. His poetry shows what is usually identified as a trend only about two centuries later, in the so-called Renaissance of the Paleologians: a shift to personal expression and subjectivity, a "humanism", which was not only not opposed to the theocentric model, but had found a way to serve it better – an Orthodox humanism. Symeon's poetic voice is immediate, human, yet his Christ and his God is present, with him and with the reader, and not trapped in a "historical" capture, or exiled in the past, as is the case with Western humanist art, which despite its artistic merits, misses and ignores too often the experience of the continuous, trans-historical and living presence of Christ in the Church. The humanity of Christ here is not seen as any kind of proof for his historical existence, but as what makes his divinity approachable to us.

² Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymns of Divine Love*, translated by G. Maloney, Dimension Books, 1975, hymn 48, p. 245.

A good question with any poet, and with Symeon in particular, is why did he write, what was that thing that moved him in order to resort to poetic expression? His poetic output is so big, that we cannot help but modify the question to not just why did he write, but also why did he write that much, and what was that thing that moved him to compulsive poetic expression?

Symeon himself gives us an answer in his poetry:

*I have written that so that you may know the way that I believe
and if you consent to it, that you may believe and be repentant,
for if you really do not possess the treasure that this world cannot
contain,
if you have not yet received the glory of the Fishermen
that have really received those who have received God,
you will leave the world and the things of the world,
with agility you run before the doors of life and of the stage of earth
are closed for you [...]
and then you will know, dear soul, and you will learn
that those who do not possess the Divine Spirit,
shining in their mind like a torch
and dwelling in their heart in an indescribable manner,
are sent into eternal darkness.³*

His reason for writing could not be explained in a more straightforward way, and it could not be more consistent with his priestly calling. He writes in order to save people from hell and to lead them to the light of Christ. This sounds like a practical reason, as it were, that sets him apart from the tradition of poetic literature of the past. Style of writing, conventions and expressions that refer to the ancient past, were still considered extremely important in poetry until much later. Yet Symeon does not try to “be” a poet, it is just impossible for him to stop the flow of words from inside him. In a strange way, his expression is original because he did not try to be original in the way we would mostly understand the word today: he did not care about advancing the art of poetry; he only wanted to speak as directly as possible. Yet, he is original

³ Ibid., hymn 21, p. 99.

because his maverick way of expression foreshadowed the way of the future.

It is not only on literary matters that he sees no reason for originality, however. His theological imagery is strangely dependent on the language of doctrine – at least it looks strange to us when we try to see it within the framework of poetic expression. Despite the highly innovative images he uses in order to describe his own rapture, when it comes to describing the object of his inspiration and desire, he uses expressions such as “indivisible Trinity”, “unity without confusion”, which are known *topoi* in doctrine.

*If indeed you are called by many and different names,
still you are a unique being.
But this unique being is unknown to all nature,
he is invisible and ineffable.
He who in showing himself is given all names.
This unique being is a nature in three hypostases,
one divinity, one Kingdom,
one power, for the Trinity is a unique being.
For my God is a unique trinity, not three beings,
because the one is three according to hypostases.
They are connatural, one to the other according to nature.
Entirely of the same power, having the same essence,
united without confusion in a way that transcends any human
intelligence,
yet they are mutually distinct without being separated.⁴*

Passages like this show that inspiration and theology were not mutually exclusive in the poetry of Symeon. But although the content is so much connected to theology, sometimes it is difficult to trace a single theme in a poem. Sometimes they take the form of a free religious association with images that weave into each other. In that sense, the poetry does not give any theological insights or any new piece of information, and does not try to connect philosophically rationally the images it uses. Most of the time, especially with longer poems, Symeon follows associations with themes very similar as those of his sermons, sometimes referring to biblical

⁴ Ibid., hymn 45, p. 233.

or liturgical passages, widely part of his everyday monastic life. Nevertheless, these passages are not exegetical in nature, or illuminating in any other intellectual way. They are rather structural points that allow Symeon to weave the canvas of the poetry.

What does the poetry really consist of then, if the biblical, theological and liturgical references are mostly structural? What remains if we take them out, is an emotional monologue that speaks of love and desire of God. It is, really, not much more than poems one writes to his beloved – the difference is that the beloved here is God. We have similar images of joy, of anticipation, and of the unworthiness a suitor feels as he tries to woo the noble lady of his love. Yet, despite the subjective voice, despite the high emotional tone that runs through every poem, he does not get carried away in moralism or in sentimentalism. The experience seems to be flowing through him as he is writing. What we are seeing here is an uncontrollable creativity, paired with an uncontrollable desire.

But this is one more piece of evidence that makes us think of his poetry as the result of automatic writing as it were, as if he was writing just because he had to. And, once more, what was the reason to write over fifty long poems that most likely, as far as he could expect, would not be in wide circulation anyway?

There is a medical hypothesis that has been put forth about St. Paul, as well as other religious writers. It has been put forward in neurological circles that St. Paul had some sort of a temporal lobe event on the road to Damascus, when he had that amazing visionary experience. According to this hypothesis, his conversion and some of his behavior subsequently was attributable to this event. A number of features are common to temporal lobe attacks. They are often experienced as religious experiences and they stimulate the creativity, so that people

write, paint or compose a lot. In addition, temporal lobe attacks are often accompanied by hallucinations of a visual nature.⁵

All this fits perfectly with the case of Symeon as it does with the case of St. Paul, yet in either case we should not jump the gun against the apparently reductionist view that explains away the visionary experience. Science adds that a temporal lobe incident or any hallucination cannot create religiosity or a saintly life if there is no preexistent matrix that may explain the experience and build a life on it. In addition, knowledge of the anatomy of a miracle does not make it any less a miracle. But if this view is correct, if even only the first vision of Symeon, which was given to him at an early age, was given to him through a temporal lobe incident, it would also explain his uncontrolled creativity. But at the same time, this uncontrolled inspiration and creativity is exactly what made him break down the limits of traditional poetry and use the poetic language of simple people, because it was much more direct – the language one would use to write love poems to the beauty of the neighborhood.

But the significance of Symeon as a poet does not stop with the pre-Renaissance personal tone we have seen. The real revolutionary element in his poetry is the collapse of the borders of art, thought and experience, something that is understood not so much in the context of the Renaissance, but in the context of postmodernism and the collapse of the limits between art and life. In that sense, his poetry, the pure expression of the raw experience, is even more important than his sermons.

Naturally, it is impossible to do justice to Symeon the New Theologian and his poetry in a short and relatively superficial presentation. But it is perhaps unfortunate that although the thought and the personality of Symeon have been explored widely the last few years, his poetic side has not been read and studied. And certainly, what I tried to do here is just

⁵ Cf. Geoffrey Haydon: *John Tavener: Glimpses of Paradise*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1995, p. 142.

touch upon some of the issues that can help us penetrate his
boundless poetic spirituality.

Napoleon Savescu

When No One Read, Who Started to Write?

For thousands of years, the legend of a great flood has endured in the biblical story of Noah and such Middle Eastern myths as the epic of Gilgamesh. Few scientists believed that such a catastrophic deluge had actually occurred. But these Bible “stories” for some scientific people appeared to have a real truth to them. Considering that religion and science have to work together, two distinguished geophysicists have discovered an event that changed history; a sensational flood 8,600 years ago in what is today known as the Black Sea.

Not only have we found stories about the flood in the Bible, but also in ancient clay tablets excavated from the ruins of biblical Nineveh more than a hundred years ago. These tablets revealed a much older version of the same flood legend. Archeologists searched the length and breadth of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Mesopotamia to no avail for evidence of such a flood. As earth scientists made new discoveries about the history of rapid climate change, they learned that the Mediterranean *Sea* had once been a desert and 5,000,000 years ago, the Atlantic Ocean burst through the Strait of Gibraltar and refilled the Mediterranean basin. William Ryan and Walter Pitman posed the scientific question “Could some more recent, similar catastrophe have been the source of Noah’s Flood?”

The end of the Cold War enabled Ryan and Pitman to team up with oceanographers from Bulgaria and Russia, as well as Turkey, to explore the Black Sea. Using sound waves and coring devices to probe the sea floor, they discover clear evidence that this inland body of water had once been a vast freshwater lake lying hundreds of feet below the level of the world’s rising oceans.

In 12,500 B.C., the earth's temperature increased, and the Eurasian ice sheet started to melt. The level of sea and oceans increased by 150 meters. The England peninsula had become an island.

The Atlantic Ocean water burst again through the Strait of Gibraltar and refilled the Mediterranean basin. Increases of the Mediterranean Sea level to 150 m. had a disastrous consequence. Huge pieces of land being flooded, sank. One example is the piece of land that was linking the Balkan peninsula with Turkey, which disappeared giving birth to the Thracian Sea (later known as the Aegean sea) and to many new islands. Strange cultures and very advanced civilizations were left in these islands. Some of these islands were actually the mountain tips of all that remained unsubmerged, which proved that this piece of land was an important corridor of civilization that linked Europe to Asia. Suddenly, the legend of lost Atlantica started to become more realistic.

Sophisticated dating techniques, sometimes using both the carbon 14 and a new method of Thermal Ionization Mass Spectrometry (TIMS) confirmed that 8,600 years ago, the mounting seas had burst through the narrow Bosphorus valley, and the salt water of Mediterranean had poured into the lake with unimaginable force, racing over beaches and up rivers, destroying all life before it. The margins of the lake, which has been a unique oasis or a Garden of Eden for an advanced culture in a vast region of semi-desert, became a sea of death.

Noah's biblical flood is solidly grounded in contemporary science. It is an astonishing religious story that sheds new light on our roots and gives fresh meaning to ancient myths.

If there was ever a time when our kind did not think, then it was also a time when we did not speak. Thus, it was also a time when we did not write, either. How long ago that must have been. We can only guess; but it was so long ago that, by definition, we mankind would not refer to in the same way that we do today. It is possible to think without words, but by the

same token, it is not possible to speak without language. What makes us the analytical people we are today is writing.

Neither speaking nor writing arose fully formed. The development of both was an ongoing, incremental task that has yet to find a final point of evolution. New thoughts, and new words, continue to be produced; and as far as one can tell, the productive expression of human thought will not achieve an end state for as long as people exist. From what we can see, the future of thought and speech stretches much further ahead.

At first glance, this seems to be particularly true of the specific form of linguistic expression that we call writing. The earliest examples of a written form date back about 7,500 years, to around 5,500 B.C. relating to what today is known as Tartaria Tablets.

We can reasonably assume that thinking and speaking go back much farther than this date; but such activities leave no permanent trace and so, we conclude that most of what we humans might have thought and said for most of our collective history has been lost to us in the irretrievable depths of time beyond memory until writing appeared.

Our oldest written texts are among our most treasured artifacts, and unlike other remnants of our past, they are still being use today much as they were when they were first created. Indeed, such ancient texts are more widely read now than they were when first penned.

Of course, the technological advances that we might expect of 2,500 A.D. are far beyond anything we can imagine; but then, the technological advances of 2001 A.D. are far beyond what could have been conceived of in 5,500 B.C. Would the written records of life in 2004 A.D. be of interest to people in... 5,500 A.D.? Quite probably, they would be considered to be utterly fascinating.

Does it make any sense then for us in 2004 A.D. to ignore written records that date from 7,500 years ago, if we could still find and read such recorded experience?

Whatever form of written communication in the year 5,500, it will in all probably be very different than the phonetic forms of writing we use today.

It is not surprising then, that the form of writing used 7,500 years ago was very different than phonetic script. When writing began, it started as a form of communication that was essentially different than speech. Today, we write down the words we speak, but 7,500 years ago, people wrote down their ideas as expressed in terms of their perceptions. This approach to writing had numerous advantages over phonetically-based writing systems: for one, since our senses are innate, such a form of writing can be understood by anyone without them having to learn any specific form of spoken language or phonetically-based writing.

Writing provides a way of extending human memory by imprinting into media less fickle than the human brain. However, many early philosophers such as Plato, have branded writing as a detriment to the human intellect. They argued that it makes the brain lazy and decreases the capacity of memory. It is true that many oral cultures often pass long poems and prose from generation to generation without any changes, which writing cultures can't seem to do. But writing was a very useful invention for complex and highly populated cultures. Writing was used for record keeping to correctly count agricultural products and for keeping a calendar to plant crops at the correct time. Writing was also used for religious purposes (divination and communicating with the supernatural world) and socio-political functions (reinforcing the kingship).

However, writing isn't an absolute requirement of urban culture. In the past centuries, scientists have used writing as one of the "signs" of civilization, which is an incorrect assumption. The Incas and earlier Andean civilizations never developed a writing system. They, in turn, came up with interesting solutions: they used the quipu (a series of ropes with knots indicating amounts) for record keeping, and complex tapestries as calendars. The Mississippians who built Cahokia hadn't used

any kind of record keeping at all, but they built very impressive cities in the American Midwest.

Among many ancient societies, writing held an extremely important role. Often writing is so revered that myths and deities were drawn up to explain its divine origin. In ancient Egypt, the invention of writing is attributed to the god Thoth (Dhwty in Egyptian), who was not only the scribe and historian of the gods, but also kept the calendar and invented art and science. In some Egyptian myths, Thoth is also portrayed as the creator of speech, possessing the power to transform speech into material objects. This myth ties in closely with the Egyptian belief that in order for a person to achieve immortality, his or her name must be spoken or inscribed somewhere forever.

In Mesopotamia among the Sumerians, the god Enkil was the creator of writing. Later during Assyrian and Babylonian periods, the god Nabu was credited as the inventor of writing and scribe of the gods. And similar to Thoth, Mesopotamian scribal gods also exhibit the power of creation via divine speech.

Among the Mayans, the supreme deity Itzamna was a shaman and sorcerer as well as the creator of the world. (In fact, the root of his name, "itz", can be roughly translated as "magical substance, usually secreted by some object that sustains the gods"). Itzamna was also responsible for the creation of writing and time-keeping strangely enough even though Itzamna isn't a scribal god. This duty usually falls on a pair of monkey gods as depicted on many Mayan pots and is also preserved in the highland Mayan epic "Popol Vuh." Still, in one rare case, the scribe is a rabbit.

In China, the invention of writing was not attributed to a deity, but instead, to an ancient sage named Ts'ang Chieh who was a minister in the court of the legendary Huang Ti (Yellow Emperor). While not divine, this invention occurred in mythological times and served as a communication tool between heaven (realm of gods and ancestors) and earth (realm of humans) as demonstrated by the inscribed oracle bones used for divination during historical times.

Whether it is used as a medium to communicate with the gods, or as a magical or supernatural power, writing was clearly believed to possess a divine nature in these ancient cultures. Hence, writing became not only a way to extend memory, but also a tool for the elite to justify their rule upon the common, illiterate people.

The Vinca civilization in Europe was one of the earliest urban societies to emerge in the world, in Southern Charpatian aria more than 7,500 years ago. They developed a writing system whose wedge-shaped strokes would influence the style of scripts in the same geographical area for the next 3000 years.

It is actually possible to trace the long road of invention of the Vinca writing system starting with the mysterious Tartaria tablets from Transylvania, Dacia known today as Romania.

What explanation can be given to the fact that three clay tablets containing Sumerian pictographic writing, made with local clay , but at least 2,500 years older than the oldest tablets found in Mesopotamia, are found in a region where the surrounding cities have Sumerian names such as URASTIE, SIMERIA, and KUGIR? Is it possible that Sumerian groups have migrated as far north as the western present-day Romania, because at that time they did not exist! Today the Tartaria Tablets are included in the "Vinca" culture. Maria Gimbutas's remarkable work, Milton McChesney Winn of the University of California Los Angeles, and Ryan and Pitman all come to the conclusion is that these three clay tablets are a pre- Sumerian writing. It is impossible to otherwise explain their similarities, especially the fact that they contain pictograms absolutely identical with those found in Djemet-Nasr and are dated 2,500 years before Sumerian existed! Today the inclusion of just these three tablets in the "Vinca" culture seems unrealistic. Others tablets and a multiple artifacts have been found as part of it, indeed belonging to a proto-European, Danubian culture that is more widespread than is ascertained to this day.

The inscribed artifacts were used both by the common people in domestic rites and by a powerful priestly elite during

magical and religious ceremonies. According to certain authors, when celebrating burial rite, the inscribed Tartaria tablets accompanied the charred bones of an individual in a grave.

“The reorganization of religion and the invention of a script, see Tartaria tablets were basic elements of the long period of transition experienced by the populations of south-east Europe, of which many aspects are still unknown to us today (Harmann, 1997 and Merlini 2002).”

These not only include the Tartaria but also Turdas tablets from Transylvania (studied by N. Vlassa and others), the artifacts of the Vinca cultural area in Serbia (studied, notably, by Shan Winn), and isolated objects from Bulgaria such as the Gradesnica plaque and the much-discussed (and variously interpreted) Karanovo Seal.

Had south-west neolithic Europe developed its own script 2,500 years before the Sumerians and Egyptians?

A mother on a throne holding a child in her arms was found in a small village called, Rast, in western Romania, which belonged to the Vinca culture. Both figures are covered with strange geometrical and abstract motifs that suggest writing according to Marija Gimbutas. This is astonishing, because this "Madonna" is over 7000 years old.

In Romania on Ocna Sibiului territory, at "Triguri" - a high terrace of Visa brook, situated near the old salt mines (the present lakes) - has identified one of the largest Neolithic (since 1977). Within the settlement, there were findings of six successive habitation levels, marked by pit houses and surface dwellings. In this context, there was a new "cult assemblage," discovered, unique up until the present day in this part of the ancient world. It contained a statuette and a pedestal bear with certain incised-engraved signs, which, according to their shape and elaborated disposal, seem to represent symbols and ideograms made in a linear manner. The only known analogy is represented by a statuette chiseled in lüne spar, which was discovered awhile ago in the Sanctuary no. 21 from the VIIth layer of the Çatal Hüyük settlement, Anatolia (J. Mellaart 1963, fig. 18). According to the C14 method, the layer in Romania,

has been dated between 6200-6500 B.C. (Antonova 1977, p. 21).

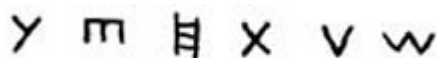
Also, displayed in the Sibiu Museum in Romania, a 7500-year-old phallus carries an inscription in the lost proto-European script that has never been deciphered.

These symbols have been found on many of the artifacts excavated from sites in south-east Europe, in particular from the Vinča culture in Romania, Greece, Bulgaria, eastern Hungary, Moldova, southern Ukraine and the former Yugoslavia. These artifacts date between the 7th and 4th millennia BC, and those decorated with these symbols date between 8,000 and 6,500 years old.

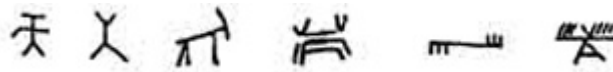
Many of today's scholars consider that the Vinča symbols represent the earliest form of writing ever found, pre-dating ancient Egyptian and Sumerian writing by thousands of years. Since the inscriptions are all short and appear on objects found in burial sites, the language represented is unknown, and it is highly unlikely they will ever be deciphered.

Signs are incised on pottery, spindle whorls, figurines and other clay artifacts. The signs are not components of ornamental motifs, although a few examples are abstractions from decorative prototypes. A sign may occur as a single, isolated sign on an otherwise unmarked area, or as a component of a sign group. This study includes correlations of sign usage according to context - pottery, figurines, spindle whorls, miniature vessels, "tablets" and artifacts of undefined use.

Signs found in isolation frequently appear on pottery and occasionally on figurines, but rarely on spindle whorls. Signs on pottery were analyzed according to their location on the vessel: (a) rim/upper body; (b) side near base; and (c) base. Certain signs, including:



are inscribed anywhere on the vessel; they are also found in sign groups and, indeed, later appear as script signs in the Mediterranean. Pictographic signs and symbolic elements are generally located on highly visible portions of the vessel:



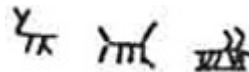
At Turdos, pictographs, or abstractions from them, are common; they are occasionally placed on the base, perhaps as information or to facilitate sign recognition on vessels that were inverted when stored. A few signs seem to be restricted to the lower side of vessels where they are not readily visible unless one intentionally observes the basal angle of the vessel. At certain sites, such as Medvednjak and Banjica, many of these are unique signs and may identify the owner or producer:



Signs suggesting the utilization of a numbering system appear on the base or on the lower side adjacent to the base:



Many of the Turdos signs restricted to the base are distinctive; such signs frequently are thought to denote identification of contents, province /destination or manufacturer/owner. However, basal signs are frequently zoomorphic representations:



Comb or brush patterns:



And symbols:



A specialized category confined to the base is a type of filled cross:



that is generally divided into symmetrically arranged quadrants. A similar arrangement is often found on stamp seals or artifacts considered to have cultic usages. Certain signs are randomly placed on pottery but are excluded from the base. Most of these:



appear commonly on figurines and may refer to a different sign subset dependent on other contexts. Particularly common representations on figurines are triple chevrons, 6 chevrons or 6 parallel lines; such arrangements probably reflect an ideological feature of the Vinča cultural template. Distinctive figurine signs:



found at several sites perhaps may signify specific concepts, personal identifications, or even an attempt to acquire magic-religious powers during rituals associated with specific figurine usage. Similar signs are also found on spindle whorls and are sometimes randomly placed on pottery. In short, the distribution of single signs contradicts the notion that the Vinča signs are merely owner's or maker's marks.

But why should the proto-European farmers have started writing things down? Around 10,000-9000 years ago, some tribes of hunters and gatherers from the west coast of what is now called the Black Sea, and at that time a vast freshwater lake, began to use new techniques and started to produce animal and human figures, pottery, copper and other metal artifacts. They also built palaces, temples and ships and invented weaving techniques. A catastrophic flood 7,600 years ago in what is today the Black Sea, changed their history and the history of humanity. The people fled the Black Sea, dispersing their language, genes, memory and their writing, not only west and north-west of Europe, but also to Asia and southeast into the Levant, Egypt and Mesopotamia (see W.Ryan & W.Pitman, Noah's flood, p.189-194, Touchstone, New York,1998).

1. One group of farmers called “Linear-band-Keramic”, (LBK), a name derived from their distinctive style of pottery, appeared in Europe within a century and a half after the flood, in the mid- sixth millennium B.C., rapidly occupying an arc from the Dniester River across northern Europe as far as the Paris basin, displacing the indigenous hunter-gatherers. To a number of experts, the spread of the LBK culture along this arc reflects a colonization by farming population in such a brief period of time that it’s beginning and end are presently irresolvable by the radiocarbon dating methods. They brought with them their longhouse building style, never before seen in Europe; these huge timber-frame houses, up to 150 feet in length, were organized into villages founded exclusively on the fertile soil blown across Eurasia during the sky-darkening sandstorm of the last Ice Age. The LBK pottery was decorated almost exclusively with incised patterns grooves and bands of dotted lines forming spirals, waves, concentric rectangles, and other geometric designs, almost all without applied color. Experts specializing in pottery can readily recognize shards from Moldova as if they had been crafted nearby in France. Their explosive movement from east to west up the Dniester and Vistula rivers, and across the Rhineland to the valley of the Seine has only recently been recognized as a mass immigration, almost an invasion of Europe by the Black Sea people, or LBK people.

2. Simultaneously with the appearance of the LBK, the Vinca emerged abruptly on the plains of what is known today as Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Hungary, settling on the river terraces. They constructed well-planned permanent villages on leveled ground with parallel rows of houses separated by streets. They plastered their house floors with white clay and built them from split timber planks, instead of mud-brick, in contrast to prior populations. Their art and pottery at Vinca were exceptional and in total contrast with the prior civilization.

3. The Danilo-Havar (DH) people settled along the Adriatic coast of Dalmatia in several of the fertile valleys that

cut through the mountains to the sea, strategically located at the seaward end of the Neretva River valley. DH pottery was sophisticated and decorated with rich patterns of chevrons, spirals, running waves, nested S's, and other geometric figures sometimes painted in black and red. They crafted a now-famous pot decorated with a sailing ship, dated at about 4,000 B.C.

4. People called Hamangians also seemed to emerge out of nowhere to settle in the region of south-east costal Romania. Two fascinating and quite modern-looking sculptures from the early fifth millennium B.C. were found together in a grave (Hamangia-Romania), the "Thinker" and his wife. Without the new concept of the Danubian culture, mother of the European civilization, and without the new knowledge about the Black Sea Flood, it would be difficult to explain the Hamangian's sculptures. It was suggested, on the basis of their splendid sculpting, their use of marble and the presence of spondylus shells, that they were immigrants from the area of Levant or somewhere else in southwest Asia. It is too easy to say that they belonged to the Black Sea fresh water lake people, but it makes sense. At that time, in the middle of the VI-th millennium B.C., Europe began a rapid ascent into what Childe and Gimbutas have called "The Golden Age of Europe." It has been nothing more then the forced exodus of more advanced people from a grand melting pot in the wake of a Grand Flood that gave the culture of Old Europe its thrust to a "Golden Age."

5. The proto Indo- Europeans

6. The Ubaid people / civilization

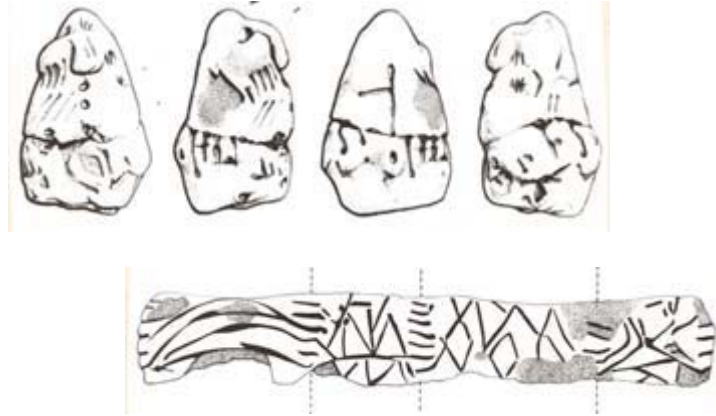
7. Pre-Semitic vs. Semitic people

8. Pre dynastic Egyptians

All of the above groups could consist of fresh water Black Sea people migrating all over as a flood consequence. The people fled, never to return.

Today, scientists explore the exiting archeological, genetic, and linguistic evidence suggesting that the flood rapidly created a human diaspora that spread as far as Western Europe, central Asia, China, Egypt, and the Persian Gulf. They suggest that the Black Sea People could well have been the mysterious

proto-Sumerians who developed the first great civilization in Mesopotamia.



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Mihai Vinereanu

The Place Of Thraco-Dacian Language In The Indo-European Family

The study of the history of Romanian people and Romanian language have never been without some political connotation and this fact seriously hampered the understanding of the data a researcher has in front of him. In this paper, I will discuss some of the most important aspects regarding the characteristics of Thraco-Dacian language in connection with modern Romanian.

We know that in 6-7 A.D., there were Thracian monks, at St. Catherine Monastery by Mount Sinai, founded by Emperor Justinian, who “prayed in their own language”, called Bessi, after a Thracian tribe who lived in Balkan regions. If these monks prayed in their native language far away from their motherland, it may be assumed that in the same period the language was spoken in the territories both South and especially North of Danube River and if the language was spoken at that time how it disappeared or maybe this never happened. Today, St. Catherine Monastery has the second largest collection of old manuscripts (after Vatican’s collection), but no one ventured till now to see if some Thracian manuscripts can be found here. Recently, a book was published in Romania, in October, 2003, where some 79 inscriptions on lead plates, of different sizes, are presented and discussed. The author, Dan Romalo is not a linguist, but an engineer. These inscriptions were ignored for more than 100 years and, meanwhile, many of them were lost. Before WW II, there were 131 such plates in V. Parvan Museum, in Bucharest, now are less that 30 left, but luckily, some of them were preserved as photocopies. Some scholars believed that they are fakes and therefore they were ignored ever since they were discovered. Recently, some dating has

been done at Oxford University and at the Institute of Nuclear Physics in Bucharest. In both cases, analyses show that the lead from the plate has the same impurities as some other ancient artifacts discovered in Romania, but the results are still inconclusive. According to other scholars, these are copies of some identical gold plates discovered over 100 years ago. Although the interpretations of Mr. Romalo do not seem to be correct in many instances, he deserves our esteem for his courage and hard work. In other words, we have in front of us 79 inscriptions in a Greek-like alphabet, it should be mentioned that some of them are written in some unknown writing systems, at least three more such alphabets. Judging by some well-known Dacian names, it must be assumed that we are confronted with some Dacian realities and most of all with Dacian language. It is obvious that there is a Indo-European language, similar to Italic languages, with a few satem tendencies, such as palatalization of the velars (k, g) in some instances when followed by front vowels as I have discovered long time before, these plates were published and known to people other than those working at Parvan Museum in Bucharest. Since the interpretations of Mr. Romalo are still under scrutiny we cannot have a definite answer regarding the main features of this language. For now, I cannot say more about these inscriptions. On June, 3rd, 2004, a presentation of these inscriptions will be made at the Romanian Academy in Bucharest by the young linguist, Aurora Petan. After this event, the Romanian Academy should take into its own hands the fate of these inscriptions. First of all, the problem of their authenticity should be solved at once and than the interpretations of these texts should be done by some professionals.

Romanian language is considered to be a Romance language which like some other languages includes three different linguistic layers: a Dacian substrate, a Latin stratum and an adstrate of Slavic origin. Contrary to this classical view of Romanian language, this paper shows that both Latin and especially Slavic influences on Thraco-Dacian and therefore, on

Romanian are less important that was believed until now. In fact according to my data Romanian is mostly a continuation of Thraco-Dacian rather than a Romance language, influenced by Latin and by Old Church Slavonic. Since both these languages from Indo-European stock, in some instances, it is difficult to specify the real origin of some of the lexical items of Romanian languages. On the other hand, a good part of Romanian lexicon cannot be identified as either Latin or Slavic, even by traditional methods. I should mention that for most of them, I identify Proto-Indo-European roots, most of them in IEW of Julius Pokorny.

Furthermore, this paper emphasizes on two types of evidence: linguistic, on one hand, and archeological and historical on the other hand. As I already mentioned ever since 18th century till recently, all the theories concerning the origin of Romanian people and language were influenced by the political views of the researchers less concerned with the scientific truth, but rather with the political implications of their writings.

Before analyzing the facts, it would be necessary to review the most common views regarding the origins of the Romanian language and people. It seems that the first writer who talked about “Dacian words” in Romanian was Dimitrie Cantemir, a Romanian writer and historian of late 17th, early 18th centuries who, in his *Descriptio Moldaviae*, asserted that those words of Romanian language “which are neither Latin, nor from other neighboring languages should be vestiges of ancient Dacians”. It is clear that D. Cantemir came to a simple and sound conclusion, forgotten by most of the later researchers. It seems that the problem started with the Romanian scholars of the so-called *Școala Ardeleană* (Transylvanian School) in late 18th, early 19th centuries. They were preoccupied with demonstrating the „pure” Latinity of Romanian language. They did not admit the existence of Dacian words in Romanian, since Dacians, according to their theory, were all exterminated during the two bloody wars between Dacian army and the Roman legions, between 101-106 AD.

Needless to say that this theory was grossly distorted as were those of their opponents. In fact, their theory was to win the battle with the Austro-Hungarian legislation which strongly discriminated against Romanian people of Transylvania which were considered late comers in Transylvania. Austrian writers like Sulzer and later R. Roesler tried to demonstrate that Romanian had infiltrated north of Danube river and into Transylvania in 12th-13th and therefore they were not supposed to have the same rights as the other ethnic groups. Roesler had taken over the idea of extermination of Dacian people from *Școala Ardealeană* scholars building a new scenario in which the Roman colonists brought during the 160 years of Roman occupation of one 1/5 of the entire Dacian kingdom left the Roman province after Rome abandoned their province north of Danube river in 271 AD to return 1000 years later when part of the territory was occupied already by other ethnic groups. Needless to say that both these theories are not true and there is today enough evidence to prove them wrong.

Miklosich (1862) in his study of Slavic elements in Romanian, tried to clarify also the substrate of Romanian which was considered the most obscure of all, using Albanian language for comparison. Unlike other linguists, he tried to explain the common features between Romanian and Albanian not by borrowing but by a common origin. W. Tomaschek, an Austrian linguist, analyzed the Thracio-Dacian glosses considering this language to be a *satem* language comparing them with words from Avestic and Persian coming to a series of misguided conclusions.

Among Romanian scholars, P.B. Hasdeu played a major role in understanding the so-called substrate of Romanian language. Like many others, he also looked into Albanian, going a bit too far considering Albanians at a certain time, to be un-Romanized Dacians, a strange idea since Hasdeu himself had admitted already that the so-called Romanian substrate is far by having always cognates in Albanian. Despite this fact, the idea was adopted by some scholars of 20th century such as the

Romanian historian V. Pârvan and the Bulgarian linguist V. Georgiev.

After WW II, a few linguists and historians dared to venture into this little known and highly controversial field. I would mention here the Romanian linguists C. Poghirc and I. I. Russu who did some research in the field unfortunately not going too far from the classical views. More remarkable is the work of the German linguist G. Reichenkron who used better linguistic apparatus, but unfortunately he limited his analysis to rare words, some of them not used anymore by the speakers of Romanian, although he could take into analysis some common words of present-day Romanian, thus his analysis would be more convincing.

After this very short presentation of the activity of some of the most important scholars concerned with the origin of the Romanian language, I will discuss some of the most important evidence that I have found which led me to a new theory regarding the origin of the Romanian language. As I have mentioned above, there are two kinds of data: historical and archeological on one hand and linguistic on the other. This paper is mostly concerned with the linguistic data which are analyzed in much more details. In this paper, I am taking into consideration only those archeological and historical data that strongly support my linguistic findings.

First of all, there are a few differences between certain very important facts regarding Roman province of Dacia and other Roman provinces of Europe; such as the span of time and the reduced territory of Romanization, facts which definitely should lead to very different results than the ones admitted by the traditional linguists. It is important to mention that Dacia was the last province added to the Empire when it was at its peak and the first European province to be abandoned. Dacia was conquered much later, in 106 A.D., and separated by other provinces by a large span of time: more than a century after the conquest of Rhaetia, more than a century and a half after Gaulle (52 B.C.), three century and a half after Sardinia, and more than two centuries after Iberian Peninsula, not to talk about other

non-European provinces. On the other hand, the province established on the northern bank of Danube river, represented only a 1/5 from the entire Dacian kingdom leaving most of the Dacians outside of Roman control, a well-known fact, but almost ignored by the great majority of the scholars who were concerned with ancient history of Romanian people. It is important to mention also that many Dacians were not included into the Dacian kingdom even before Roman conquest. We know that 150 years before the kingdom of Burebista was about three times larger than the one of Decebalus, the last Dacian king defeated by the Roman forces. The Roman administration withdrew from its Dacian province in 271 A.D. Such withdrawals never took place from Gaulle or Iberic Peninsula. To summarize, Dacia was the last European province added to the Empire and the first to be abandoned by Rome. The question is how the Dacians from the Roman province were Romanized in a such short span of time and especially how were Romanized the Dacians who never belonged to the Roman Empire and who represented the bulk of this nation. It was assumed ever since 19th century that the Dacians or either Romanized or simply disappeared from history with no trace, but it was never scientifically demonstrated. Since Herodotus we know that Dacians were the most numerous people in Europe, and, according to him, second only to Indians in the entire world known to Herodotus. In fact, they did not disappear since they were mentioned by many ancient and Byzantine authors after 271 A.D. till 13th-14th centuries when the first known Romanian principalities were established, using different names for them which may lead to a certain degree of confusion. In the 20th century many archeological sites were uncovered showing a strong presence of Dacian population in many different parts of present Romania: not only outside the former Roman province of Dacia, but also inside of this territory, between 4th-12th centuries. The great majority of the burial sites during this period show a large presence of Dacians during this period. Dacian population is easy to recognize by its specific burial customs.

In what follows, I will discuss some linguistic aspects regarding the real nature of Romanian language. First of all, a comparative-historical study between Romanian and other Indo-European language, besides Latin, Slavic and sporadically Albanian was never done systematically. First of all, a great mistake was made since everything that did not match Latin was considered Slavic or from other neighboring languages, and occasionally from the so-called substrate by ignoring some very important phonological phenomena of Romanian language. Doing this, a large portion of the Romanian lexicon was inadequately included to Latin or Slavic, or simply left with no valid etymology. After WW II no important advances were made in the field.

According to my data Thraco-Dacian was not a *satem* language as it was assumed ever since the dawn of modern historical linguistics, but it was rather close to Italic and Celtic group, especially with the P-dialects of these groups. Thraco-Dacian had a intermediate position between Italic and Celtic groups on one hand and the larger group of *satem* languages, due to its geographic position between these linguistic groups. However, judging by some particular phonological features, it was closer to the Italic and Celtic groups. Thraco-Dacian, Osco-Umbrian, Continental Celtic and some Greek dialects have a few common characteristics: first of all, the deaspiration of the Indo-European aspirated (e.g. bh>b, dh>d) and secondly, which is the most peculiar feature of these languages, is the labialization of the Proto-Indo-European labio-velars (kū, gū). The deaspiration and collapsing the aspirated and non-aspirated into a single group of sounds, took also place in the Balto-Slavic group. Concerning the labio-velars, Osco-Umbrian and Continental Celtic labialized all the labio-velars, while Thraco-Dacian labialized only those labio-velars followed by dorsal vowel (a, o, u), the rest of them being palatalized. Because of this, we may conclude that, in Thraco-Dacian palatalization of these labio-velars took place a little before the labialization of their counterparts. What is very important is the fact that the

phonological features of Thraco-Dacian were transmitted to Romanian language. Thus,

PIE *kū > daco-ilir. p / _____ / V [+back]¹

PIE *akūa (cf. Pokorny, 23) > traco-dac. apa.

PIE *kwatuor „four” > Thraco- Dac.*patur > rom. patru „four” (cf. Umbr. petur, Gaul. petru-, Welsh pedwar, Corn. peswar).

In Celtic, Italic and Thraco-Dacian realms, there were many toponyms with –apa, from PIE *akwa „water”. In Gallia Gel-apa, Arn-apa, Len-apa, Ol-epa, Mana-apia, Appa (several times). Greece, in Peloponesus: Apia, Inopos, Apidanos, Apanos „river in Acarnania”, Apila „river in Macedonia” In Italic Peninsula: Salapia „city in Apulia”. In Pannonia Colapis „river in Southern Pannonia” (today Kulpa, Hungary), along with the tribe of Colapiani (cf. Plinius the Elder), Saldapa „city in Scythia Minor” (today Dobrogea, Romania) to mention only a few.

This IE sound followed by a front vowel tuned into a simple velar (k):

PIE *kw > proto-traco-ilir. k / _____ / V [-back]

PIE *kwe “and” (Pokorny, 635) through some intermediary forms *ke, *k’e to mod. rom. și.

PIE *gw > proto-traco-ilir. g / _____ / V [-back]

PIE *guermo-s “hot, warm” > Dac. Germizara “Hot Springs”, a place mentioned by Ancient historians in Southern Transylvania, not far from Sarmizegetusa, the capital city of Dacian kingdom, where indeed, there were hot springs. From the same PIE root evolved Rom. jar “hot ashes” also present in Alb. žar, žarm and in some Slavic languages.

Palatalization takes also place with many other consonants followed by front vowels in Romanian words such as: țară “country, region” from PIE *ters- (cf. lat. terra, OIr. tir “region, territory”, Wlesh, Corn., Bret. tir “country, region”. From the same root derive other Romanian words as well: țărăână, țarină and perhaps tărăm. Also zeu “god” from PIE *deiwo (cf. Saba-zios also spelled Saba-dios, Gebelei-zis, Zamolc-zis, the names of some of the most famous Thraco-

Dacian gods), mânz “foal” from PIE *mend-. *mond- “breast, to suck, young animal” (cf. Alb. mēz “foal”, Mess. Jupiter Menzana “Jupiter of the horses” or miez “middle, the inner part of something” from PIE *medhi-, medhio- “middle” (cf. Dacian Mieza (PN), in Plutarch). The examples may continue, with many of other Romanian words. It should be mentioned that a good part of Romanian lexicon cannot be explained through Latin or Slavic, but they have cognates in other Indo-European languages and could be easily explained if one starts from the Indo-European roots found in Pokorny’s dictionary. In other words, all this palatalizations, in Thraco-Dacian, are clearly satem tendencies. From the data we have, it seems that continental Celtic, Italic P-dialects and Thraco-Illyrian formed a single linguistic group till the second of the half of the 2nd BC. Arbois de Jubainville citing E. Pamphilius shows that the Osco-Umbrian migrated from upper Danube region into Italic Peninsula around 1100 B.C. Marcus Gniphō (cf. de Jubainville) a Roman writer of Gaulish descent who lived in the 1st century B.C. argued that The Osco-Umbrian are an old offshoot of the Gaulish people. It has to be assumed that this writer knew Gaulish language and could not fail to see the similarities between these languages, much closer to each other than it was Osco-Umbrian and Latin, for instance. Furthermore, another ancient author, Pytheas of Massilia, a Greek who ventures into the North Sea, in 4th century BC, made some very interesting observations saying that from Rhine river westward, the population was Celtic, but to the East the Celtic population turned little by little into a Scythian one. This observation is consistent with the other historical information and, most of all with the linguistic data. We have to mention that over the centuries many times the Thraco-Dacian were Scythians by the Greeks. Also, Tacitus, tells us that Germans and Dacians are separated by the Hercynian Forest (today Black Forest) and the fear of each other.

Furthermore, Romanian and Albanian share much more than a set 100-180 words as it was generally assumed until now. There are at least 500-600 hundred words which are neither of

Latin or Slavic origins and also these two languages share a series of syntactical and morphological features.

Furthermore, I will emphasize on some of the common features between Thraco-Dacian and satem languages, especially the languages of the Balto-Slavic group which were neighboring Thraco-Dacian. This analysis helps us to understand the intricate relations between these groups not only they may share genetically, but especially to clarify the extremely complex process of borrowing between Proto-Slavic and Thraco-Dacian (and Proto-Romanian). Based on the phonological features of these two groups we may have a better picture of the real process of borrowing, not only from Proto-Slavic into Thraco-Dacian, but especially from Thraco-Dacian into Proto-Slavic. This last aspect was never investigated before, but doing so I came to the conclusion that Proto-Slavic did borrow from Thaco-Dacian much more than it was previously assumed. In this investigation Albanian and Hungarian played a crucial role in the sense that the shared vocabulary between these languages is large and many of these words have the phonological features of Thraco-Dacian, not the ones of Proto-Slavic. Albanian and Romanian are genetically related, but Hungarian plays a key role since it exhibits the same phonological features as Romanian and Albanian, not as Proto-Slavic.

Some of the most important features of Old Slavic languages are: the metathesis of liquids (l, r) from final final syllabic position and deletion of nasals from the same position and progressive palatalization of velars. Judging by modern Romanian and Thraco-Dacian did not have the first two rules, but palatalization of consonant took place, but only in some condition as I have mentioned above. In some situations, in Romanian PIE liquids have contrary tendencies than those found Old Church Slavonic.

PIE *k'louni „butt, lower back” (Pokorny, 607); cf Skt. śroni, Av. sraoni, Lith. šlaunis, Lett. slauna, O. Pr. slaunis, Lat. clunis, Cymr. clun, O.Ic. klaun, Rom. șale. All have the same

meaning as in PIE. Modern Romanian form derives from an older form *şalne.

In Romanian the liquid l moved from the position before vowel (diphthongue), after this vocali group. The palatal PIE palatal velar k' became a fricative in Romanian as in the satem languages. The liquid l did not turned into a r, as it would happen to this sound in intervocalic position, because it was followed by n, and, therefore was not followed by another vowel. I chose this example which shows clearly some clear-cut similarities and differences with satem languages.

In the same way, let's look at another example:

PIE *ghordos „fence, enclosure” (Pokorny, 444); cf. Hitt. gurtas, Gr. hortis „garden”, Lat. hortus, Alb. gardh, Got. gaird „fence”, OHG gart „circle”, Lith. gardas „gard”, OS! gradū „city”, Rom gard „fence”. In Thraco-Dacian and Romanian, PIE *gh became g as in most languages indicated above, except for Greek and Latin. Regarding the position of the liquid r, it stayed in the same position in Romanian as in most of the other languages, except for Old Slavic.

These are a few of the most important similarities and differences between Romanian and satem languages in general. These phonological features help us to understand the extent of influence and lexical borrowings and the relation with both Latin and Old Church Slavonic.

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Daniela Anghel

**Burial Versus Cremation In
The Carpatho-Danubiano-Pontic Area
(First Millennium)**

The main purpose of our paper is to archeologically emphasize some religious aspects concerning the burial and cremation in the Carpatho-Danubiano-Pontic area in the first millennium. In this regard, we will analyze the ways in which the bodies are disposed in the tombs according to the religious beliefs related to death and destiny of the souls after death.¹

From the very beginning, we have to underline the historical fact that archeological discoveries are revealing the bi-ritual character of the burial and cremation rituals in the Carpatho-Danubiano-Pontic area. These findings help us to better establish the evolution and manifestation of these funeral rituals over the centuries. Based on these discoveries, we may conclude that both rituals were practiced by Thraco-Daco-Getians many centuries ago before Christ.

However, the principal ritual of the Thraco-Dacian funeral ceremonies - practiced between the second century B.C. and 5th century A.D. has been incineration with its different variants. At that time, only heroes, nobles and children were buried using the interment ritual.²

Bi-ritualism has been practiced up to the X century A.D. in different percentages of either more inhumations or more incinerations, being distinct from region to region, or reciprocally influenced by the rituals of different migratory people. Finally, all of them have been changed as a result of the

¹ Popescu Mălăiești I. Pr.Ec., *Ardem sau îngropăm morții*, în România Mare, Belvedere 12, p.9

² Olteanu Ștefan, *Caracterul funerar biritual pe teritoriul României în secolele VI-X (considerații generale)*, articol publicat în *Analele Universității „Dimitrie Cantemir”*, seria Istorie, Nr.3-1999, p.102

adoption of Christianity. Even Christianity was spread in Scythia Minor (Dacia Pontica - the actual Dobrogea) in the first century A.D. especially by the apostle Saint Andrew who was proclaimed by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church as the “Protector of Romania.”

Certainly, in the Thraco-Daco-Roman Christian ethno genesis of the Romanian people, the old rituals did not instantaneously disappear. The ethno-genetic Romanian Christianization was a natural process, which gradually became the only Christian religion of the population living in the Carpatho-Danubiano-Pontic area. Naturally, during this ethno-genetic process of Romanian Christianization, all their ancestral rituals, especially those concerning burial and cremation, have been more or less converted or adapted to the new religion by gradually renouncing incineration for the inhumation.

Prof. Dr. Stefan Olteanu observed an increase of interment between II and VI centuries A.D. among the Daco-Roman and Romanized population. In some areas of Muntenia, Moldavia and Transylvania, bi-ritualism persisted but incineration was predominant. He associated the increase of the inhumation with the liberty of Christianity after the Edict given in Milan on 313 A.D. According to Stefan Olteanu, all the tombs discovered in Oltenia and Romano-Byzantine Dobrogea, between IV and VI centuries A.D. had been classified as Christian tombs.³

Generally, the ritual of interment was practiced. A good example of a Christian tomb was the discovery in 1971, of a Palaeo-Christian basilica in Niculițel containing the bodies of four Martyrs: Zoticos, Attalos, Kamasis and Filippos. In the interior of the crypt they found a Greek inscription reading: “Christ’s Martyrs” and in the right wall we can also read the word martyrs. In the following years, under the level of the crypt containing the four bodies, were discovered the remains of the bodies of other martyrs whose names are still unknown. A plaque made of limestone was discovered having this

³ idem, p.102

inscription: "Here and there is martyrs blood". Archeologists presumed the martyrdom took place either under Dioclețian prosecutions (303-304) or in the times of Emperor Liciniu (319-324).⁴

Bi-ritual funeral characteristics continue in VII-X centuries with a growth of Christian inhumations which seems to begin to dominate the incinerations particularly from the end of the VIII century. Bi-ritual necropolis was discovered at: Sultana, jud. Călărași, (74% of inhumation), Izvoru, jud. Giurgiu (77% of inhumation), Obîrșia, jud. Olt (90% of inhumation), Alba Iulia (were more than 500 inhumations were discovered and only 5-6 incinerations), etc. Most of the tombs are Christian. The bodies were disposed facing east, position west-east, with their hands on the chest and Christian inventory.⁵

Some of the discovered tombs dated VII-X century like in Nalbant, jud.Tulcea, Istria-Capul Viilor, Canlia, jud. Constanța, Gușterița, jud.Sibiu, Vinețești-Vaslui, Brătei, jud. Sibiu, Păuleasca, jud.Teleorman, where in their necropolis cremation was dominant.⁶

Many questions arise from those discoveries that are testifying the Thraco-Daco Roman ethno genesis of the Romanian people. How the population which occupied those territories was Christianized, how Christianity was spread, assimilated and adopted in the Romanian ethno genesis of the Thraco-Daco-Getians? Did they change their entire religious pantheon, rituals, and ethnic culture and spirituality? Answers to all these questions remain to be answered through interdisciplinary studies, by analyzing archeological discoveries, and by studying the development of the culture and its religion and mythology.

⁴ Păcurariu Mircea Pr.Prof.Dr., Sfinți Daco-Români și Romani, Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei și Bucovinei, Trinitas, Iași, 2000, p.

⁵ Olteanu Ștefan, Caracterul funerar biritual pe teritoriul României în secolele VI-X (considerații generale), articol publicat în Analele Universității „Dimitrie Cantemir”, seria Istorie, Nr.3-1999, p.105

⁶ Olteanu Ștefan, op.cit, p.105

Generally speaking, Christianity developed a distinct complex culture, spirituality and art. Christians did not develop a new language or a new philosophy or their own legislation. As Norman Cantor said, they adapted to what they found.⁷

Traces of the ancient world, customs and traditions are still seen nowadays and are related to the customs of the Romanian Thraco-Dacian ancestors. Even if the Christian rituals are well established by rules and a very strong tradition, they are still woven with ancestral customs. The best example of the funeral ritual that is not Christian can be found in Oltenia, where the second day after a person passes away, there is a tradition called “the burning of the death” practiced in many villages from Dolj district, at Măceșul de Sus, Băilești, Gângiova, Afumați, and Dobridor. In Vâlcea district, at Părăușani, the ritual takes place the next day after the burial after sunset.⁸

Among the other old customs of incineration practiced by the Daco-Getians are those called “the fires of the deaths,” being popular in the majority of the Romanian provinces. This ritual takes place during Holy Thursday during Holy Week of Easter and is called “Joimărilor,” “Joia neagră,” “Joimărica.” It is believed that on this day, the souls of the departed loved ones come back around the fires to drink and warm themselves. In Oltenia, these fires are made Wednesday nights after sunset.⁹ Even if this tradition seems to not be Christian, it emphasizes the relationship between the living and those departed, by illustrating the popular understanding of the so-called “Communion Sanctorum,” which emphasizes the spiritual communion between our Church still living and fighting against sins on this earth, and the Triumphant Church of those who departed this life and are now in heaven.

⁷ Cantor Norman F., „The civilization of the Middle Ages”, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 1993, in Burial and Funeral Ceremonies

⁸ Ionescu Ion Pr., Datini legate de problema continuității în ritul funerar în Oltenia, articol publicat în revista Mitropolia Olteniei, Anul XXIV, Nr.7-8, iulie-august 1972, p. 490

⁹ idem, p.492-493

As seen in the above example, we have many rituals practiced during births, weddings and deaths that are non-Christian as well as rituals related to nature and to life cycles. Romanians from centuries lived in a cosmic dimension. Those customs, traditions, rites and rituals, are “naturally integrating Romanian human beings in a superior order also found in the spiritual communion with the loved ones, living or departed.”¹⁰ The sympathy towards the cosmos so specific to the Romanian genius, as Father Stăniloae said, is not a pagan feeling, but a manifestation of the Christian, liturgical spirit.¹¹

“Modern Greek funerary rituals are derived with little change from Byzantium, but also from practices of the classical Greek world. Originally opposed by Christianity, this view would argue, endemic folk practices were eventually subsumed and an elaborate ritual of lament and burial continued to be practiced up to the present day, with a major discontinuity occurring only in the twentieth century, when the destruction of village life and tradition has posed a threat to age-old communal mourning customs.”¹²

Another example of this topic in a different geographical area, which was studied by Prof. Dr. Ștefan Olteanu, is the intervention of the Saxon Church in establishing specific rules against cremation.

Professor Ștefan Olteanu has associated the numerical increases of interment of the autochthon population in the Carpatho-Danubiano-Pontic area, with the intervention of the Church at the local Synod from Paderborne in 785 A.D. held against the Saxons.¹³ This “concilium mixtum” published 34 rules to be strictly observed by the Saxons in their process of Christianization. The 7 “capitula” is officially prescribing that:

¹⁰ Stăniloae Dumitru, *Reflexii despre spiritualitatea poporului român*, Editura Scrisul Românesc, Craiova, 1992, p.11

¹¹ idem, p.11

¹² Abrahamse Dorothy, *Rituals of death in the Middle Byzantine period*, article published on „The Greek Orthodox Theological Review”, volume 29, number 2, 1984, p.125-126

¹³ Olteanu Ștefan, *op.cit.* p.104

“Anybody who incinerates a body following the pagan tradition is going to be punished with death,” More than that, the 22 rules are stipulating that: “The bodies of the Saxons must be buried in church cemeteries and not on ... pagan (lands n.n).¹⁴

In the entire history of the Christian Church, there has never been found a single example where cremation was adopted as a ritual. Following the Semitic tradition, the inhumation was used as an inviolable, sacred practice among Christians. But it should be stated that there are cases when incineration occurred as a result of Christian persecutions. In such cases, the bodies of the Christian martyrs were burned and their ashes thrown on rivers or spread in the wind.¹⁵ The Pagan prosecutors had chosen to burn the bodies of the martyrs since it was against the Christian belief in resurrection.¹⁶ A natural Christian answer to this is the belief that God conserved the body’s elements for the resurrections even from ashes.¹⁷ But Christians chose to dispose of their bodies after death as their Savior Jesus Christ was disposed, following the tradition. They were convinced that God could resurrect anything anywhere, making no difference whether from soil or ashes.

Analyzing the archeological discoveries found in the Carpatho-Danubiano-Pontic Area in the first Christian Millennium, we may conclude that burial and cremation were practiced since the beginning of Christianity. The questions regarding the disposal of the bodies are related with the Christian beliefs of resurrection and life after death. The ancient practice of incineration was not at all in contradiction with the Christian belief in resurrection. Certainly, that is why the Eastern Orthodox Church never considered it necessary to make rules against the practice of cremation especially in the first millennium.

¹⁴ „Monumenta Germanica”, Leges, t.I, Conciles a Paderborne, a Attigny, a Worms, en 785 et 786, p.48

¹⁵ Eusebius, H.E., 1.V, c, I, P.G., t.XX, col.432 ,

¹⁶ Minutius Felix, Octavius, 11, P.L., t.III, col.267,

¹⁷ Ibid., 34, col.347

Therefore, the practice of incinerating bodies disappeared gradually with the spread of Christianity throughout Europe, being totally reduced after the X century. New disputes arise today, but the arguments against this practice are being debated in other terms, and they still depend on the people's beliefs of the life after death.

Raluca Octav

**Living With Icons
The Meaning Of Icons In The Modern World**

Introduction Or Meet Our World

Icon – eikon – means Image. We live in a world of icons as remote as the first use of the concept in the first centuries after Christ as since the lost days when the Teacher and His followers made the distance from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. We used to look at Icons to access and reinforce a system of beliefs that were as much a part of our daily lives as family values. Today, the use of Icons has become part of the vernacular, and for this reason, “icon” can be endowed with any number of meanings like “celebrity,” “modern hero,” or “social phenomenon” to name a few. In other words, “icon” has become part of Popular Culture. However, it should be mentioned that the reference to the Western Culture, even though covering Western Europe as well as the United States, has much heavier bearing in North America. The United States is so different from other parts of the world in many respects: it is a spiritual territory in itself. Peter Berger said that if we consider the Indians to be the most spiritual people and the Swedes the least, then America is a land of Indians ruled by Swedes. Americans seem to have the gleeful gung-ho mentality of brilliant curious young souls that go for the most groundbreaking ideas of the times, whether it is the adoption of Nietzsche’s philosophy that “God is dead,” Darwin’s theory of evolution, widespread TV evangelism as fast food for the soul. In America, many people have the symbolic Fish on the bumper of their cars, but some of the fish have Darwin’s name inscribed on its body. It is true that there is an immense intolerance to “color, language, belief, and ideology” but at the same time, there is also more tolerance to “color, language, belief and ideology” than anywhere else in the world. In a way, this

country is a model of humanity on its bumpy way to self-improvement. No wonder that new faiths, like the Bahai'i, believe that the next stage in the progress of mankind shall begin here. In Diane Eck's book, *A New Religious America*, she maintains that nowhere else, are there to be found so much religious dialog and such religious diversity than in America; nor is there any other place in the world where so much work is being done to bridge together both religious and scientific views.

Two Worldviews

In his book *Why Religion Matters*, Huston Smith lays before us a frightening but also enlightening idea – the “tunnel” of modernity. He thinks that American got itself into this tunnel because it has “separated to a confrontational level the two main worldviews of the Big Picture:” transcendental and material. He observes that, in the traditional, religious view, spirit is fundamental and matter is derivative and human beings are the less who have derived from the more. It also points toward a happy ending. The materialistic, scientific view turns the picture upside down and views material like the underwater part of the iceberg, humanity being the more that has derived from less and sees no logical point in the idea of the happy ending”.

The idea that having a worldview is such an important part of the human being is explained by psychologist William Sheldon of Columbia University when he writes, continued observation in clinical practice lead almost inevitably to the conclusion that deeper than the craving for social power, deeper even than sexuality and the desire for possessions, there is still a more generalized craving in the human makeup. It is the craving for knowledge of the right direction – for orientation”. Or, as Huston Smith puts it himself, “minds require echo-niches and the mind's eco-niche is its worldview, its sense of the whole of things.

The Transcendental Worldview – East and West

As much as the transcendental worldview is common to all believers in God, no matter the geographic layout, when it comes to Christians, there is a noticeable difference between the Christian Faith East and the Christian Faith in the West. This phenomenon may have something to do with the Icon, worshipped throughout Eastern Christianity as “the Biblical Vision of Beauty... or... God at work,” as Paul Evdokimov affirms.

Without getting into a history of the Icon as a religious tool, (it has been somewhat done in another paper by this same author), the icon didn’t gain its religious significance from the first centuries of Christianity since Judaism, taken the sin of idolizing the image very seriously. However, after four centuries of distancing itself from the Middle East and using symbols of faith such as the Fish, the Good Shepard, XP, and the Cross devoid of Christ, the marriage between art and religion deemed the Icon as the Human face of the Divinity.

The Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council declared the following about the Icon: “What the word says, the image shows us silently; what we have heard, we have seen.” It is, in the way the iconographers teach, a feast for the eyes.

It is true, however, and Paul Evdokimov said it beautifully, that “there is an art of contemplation that is in the heart of the Fathers’ cosmology... The vision of the thoughts of God concerning beings and things builds up a visual theology, or an iconosophy. Each thing has its own entelechy (meaning), tied to the thing itself.” Paul Evdokimov also mentions Joseph of Volokolamsk who wrote in the 15th century about Andrei Rublev’s Trinity in *The Treatise on the Veneration of Icons*. He states that “It is not the material icon which is venerated, but the Beauty which, by resemblance, the icon transmits mysteriously...” He goes on to say that the search for Beauty coincides with the search for the Absolute and the Infinite. The fact that the artists of this type of Icon today still use terms like

Transfiguration, Incarnation, Image and Light (as in Taboric Light), testify to the secret unity between art and religion, the iconographic vision of the world.”

In perfect alliance with this, the theosophy of the Fathers of the Eastern Church is not so much a logical doctrine as it is “a vision of life and grace.” In this “vision” resides the explanation for the veneration of such un-naturalistic representations as found in the Eastern Icon. Such Icons do not dwell in proportion, naturalistic movement and expression, realistic colors and similarities that can be pinpointed. Being a world of transcendence, the Eastern Icon shows us the events and the faces of people that have long transcended their earthly form and have assumed an epiphanic presence. For example, the Icon’s golden background is called “Light” and the artistic method used is “Progressive Enlightenment.”

The Icons never show a source of natural light. The subject is “The Light” because it reveals the Light of the Saints. It does not represent the subject but the symbolic subject. It is a “sacrament, a vehicle of a personal presence.” In the same way, the characters are always shown in proportion to their importance in the subject and not in their real human proportion.

The hieratic expression of the Icon is a “conventional expression of the transcendental.” As poetic as they sound, these words become effective in their beauty: “As a symbol, the Icon goes way beyond art it stands somewhat apart, as the Bible is above universal literature and poetry.” With the Icon as an intrinsic part of the Liturgy and of the household, Eastern Christianity has had less ideological turbulence along its history than the Christianity of the West. Of course, it had its heresies, the iconoclastic destruction of The Image and its centrifugal movements of national churches breaking free from central command. However, due in part, to the specific evolution of the ecclesiastic rules, and in part to the reverence and personal relationship of the believer with Icons and maybe, in part, to the political totalitarian systems of the countries of the Orthodox East that exclude dialog and social discourse (Imperial, Royal,

Enlightened Dictatorships, Communism), Eastern Christianity kept itself almost uneventfully traditional.

The transcendental worldview in the West has a very different evolution. The West, and I refer here to The Christian Western Europe, has evolved, after the Schism (split) of 1054 between the Western and Eastern Christianity, as a breeding ground for reform and revolution and “From the very beginning, Western Christian Theology has manifested a certain dogmatic indifference towards the spiritual significance of sacred art, toward the iconography that the Christian East so deeply venerates.” For a while, at least the religious art in the West remained true, or largely influenced by, its Byzantine counterpart, but after the 13th century, the “sacred art” of the West broke free from the artistic canons of the tradition and could “no longer be integrated into the liturgical mystery” as Paul Evdokimov observes. He goes on to say that the spiritual bodies of the saints could no longer be seen underneath the folds of their clothing... even the angels seemed to be made out of flesh and blood... the dialogue of spirit to spirit ended and the vision of the flame of things was replaced by emotions... the unspeakable mystery of the Cross loses its sacred power and fades away.

Western religious art also revered the images, but no matter how “refined and reflective of the natural world, it lost its ability to directly grasp and portray the transcendental.” The Christian West is artistically obsessed with the Cross and the sadness of its emptiness or the tragedy of the broken Body. On the same note, and cited by the same author, theologian Louis Bouyer in his work *Dieu Vivant*, says that “the western religious art shows nothing sacred when compared with the sacredness of icons.”

And a last citation from Evdokimov states that, “For the West, the world is real and God is doubtful and illusory. For the East, the world is doubtful and hypothetical and the only argument for its reality is God’s self evident existence.”

As religious art has kept taking more liberties in expression, so did the initially undivided body of the Church.

While the Christian Orthodox Church kept standing in the midst of history, “witnessing” it, the Western Christian Church kept “producing” history, centrifugally delivering out of the Catholic body innumerable disclaiming off springs.

It started with a reform, and then it kept multiplying into continuous reformation. In the West, Christianity kept building numerous new Churches, not so much “different” as “independent.” It almost seems that the need to belong to an unattached religious group presides over the idea of having the faith in one God. This idea is echoed more so in the United States; but than again, all the dissident faiths produced by Europe have found their legal haven there.

However transcendental this religious mosaic may be, it may also explain the slow gliding into Houston Smith’s “Tunnel.” In the East, the motion is slower, more cautious, maybe due to the fact that denouncing the transcendental worldview, which is tied to “one Church” of “one Nation” and “one Tradition” is also seen as a betrayal of national identity. In opposition, the West makes it accessible since it replaces a myriad of transcendental “forms” with just one:

The Scientific Worldview

This worldview, which has anointed “Matter” with the ultimate “Everything ness” has some brilliant and charismatic prophets, who make the dialog of the two worldviews enchanting. I was very close to becoming a champion for the cause when I first saw (and seeing can mean believing when the speaker is Carl Sagan) the physicist on Romanian TV, professing in the opening of his “Cosmos” series that “the Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.” It certainly sounds like the ultimate truth; however, there is nothing confirming and infirming such a statement. And what science really did was to “replace the traditional worldview – manifold in its expressions, single in its geometrical outline – with the scientific worldview.” This widely accepted and embraced worldview has pushed mankind down to its grassroots, to

become exceedingly materialistic, almost to the point of idolizing material things, looking breathlessly towards science in anticipation of the next gadget that will replace the one acquired the previous week or day.

Huston Smith reproachfully notes that “we have written science a blank check for science’s claims concerning what constitutes knowledge and justified belief.”

We cannot, in all honesty deny science its dues since it has tremendously changed the way we live, eat, work, travel, communicate and the length and quality of our lives. Conversely, it has also helped us to kill each other faster and in larger numbers. Besides, it has also instilled in us some very dangerous complexities: the complexity of Human Omnipotence, of the Validity of Science over Morals, the Faustian drive to “exchange” for the “benefit of” and the candid trust in science’s final ability to explain “The Big Picture.”

However, for all the benefits of science and the promise of its continuous development towards the ultimate Truth, why is the “longing” and the fundamental “dis-ease,” the incapacity of most of us to come to “full peace in this life” so unavoidable? For scientists, it may have started with Hiroshima when that ill-fated date of August the 6th made its transcendental counterpart the Transfiguration, which also falls on August 6th, and is even more Apocalyptic in its symbolism. Historian Paul Boyer describes it as an “atom induced revival of eschatological thinking.”

Robert Oppenheimer, responsible for the atomic bomb project, named the site of the first testing of the bomb “Trinity.” The only explanation he can give is that at the time, he was thinking of a poem by John Donne in which “death doth touch resurrection.” What can be more un-coincidentally symbolic? The religious history of the space exploration program is also amazing since it brings together people who dwell in the highest and most rarified heights of science with the strictest of the transcendental of values.

Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, one of the founders of modern rocketry, was inspired in his work by the mystic Nikolai

Federov, preoccupied with the “evolution of man’s humanity toward... self creation and immortality...”

Werner von Braun, the apt pupil of the Transylvanian scientist and author of “The Rocket into Planetary Space,” Hermann Oberth, named the project to launch the first man into space “Project Adam.” His religious beliefs were very strong and he used to say that: “matters of faith are not really accessible to our rational thinking...” He also said that his “experience with science led him to God...”

The crew of Apollo 8 read from the Book of Genesis on Christmas eve 1968, and Edwin Aldrin, who stepped on the moon after Neil Armstrong, took communion while the ship was landed in the Sea of Tranquility on the moon and noted after the mission that “it is interesting to think that the very first liquid ever poured on the moon and the first food eaten there were communion elements.”

Justifying the “Messiah complex” (Brian O’Leary), ex-astronaut Jim Irwin of the Apollo 15 mission, became a Baptist minister and led expeditions to Mount Ararat... “God has shared with us some of his creative power... including the powers of science and technology,” concluded Hugh Dryden, the first operational chief at NASA who was also a Methodist preacher.

These types of examples are endless. It almost seems that these flying men, Icarus of our times, tried to avoid burning their wings by recognizing the Power of the Sun.”

So again, where does this need originate? Is it, maybe, as the sociologist and philosopher Ernest Gellner has described, “the dehumanizing (sic Faustian) price of real knowledge which makes our identities, freedom, norms to be no longer underwritten by our vision and comprehension of things...we are doomed to suffer from a tension between cognition and identity.”

E. O. Wilson, the sociobiologist, wrote that people follow religion because it is easier than empiricism. That, indeed, would be too easy to qualify as the truth.

In this day and age, the number of people who made the transition from nonbelievers or indifferent believers to a transcendental system of values is larger than the opposed one. Jacques Monod strikes a nerve when he writes “no society before ours was ever rent by contradictions so agonizing...for the first time in history a civilization is trying to shape itself while clinging desperately to the animistic tradition to justify its values and at the same time abandoning it as the source of knowledge.”

The American sociologist Edward Bellamy, cited by David F Noble in his excellent book *The Religion of Technology*, wrote in *Equality* that the craze for more and more and ever greater and wider inventions for economic purposes, coupled with apparent complete indifference as to whether mankind derived any ultimate benefit from them or not... can only be understood by regarding it as one of those strange epidemics of insane excitement which have been known to affect whole populations at certain periods, especially of the middle ages. Rational explanation it has none.

Icons of the Future
The Coming Together of Religion and Science
for the Benefit of Mankind's Progress

There is no doubt that humanity finds itself in a spiritual crisis, and it is trying to solve it the wrong way. The dialog between scientists and believers has sadly turned into a conflict. What started out as an alliance, continues as a challenge followed with contempt (Julian Huxley observed that “it will soon be as impossible for an intelligent or educated man or woman to believe in god as it is now to believe that the earth is flat”) is now in the process of becoming a “fight for the human mind.”

However, there is much to be said about religion's resilience. Malcolm Muggeridge, editor of the Manchester Guardian, announced at his 75th birthday that the most important single political fact of the 20th century has been that

with every means of suppression at its command for seventy years, the USSR had not been able to destroy the Russian Orthodox Church.

The dialog has started again and is now being taken seriously. So where do we stand at this point? Quoting Huston Smith again, “science, modernity’s gold, is certain to figure importantly in the third millennium, and post modernity’s justice likewise stand a good chance of continuing. It is the traditional worldview that is in jeopardy and must be rehabilitated if it is to survive.”

The key should be found in the ontological separation of science from scientism. Science is the pursuit of the power of human mind to explore knowledge and fulfill its insatiable curiosity. Scientism, on the other hand, is based on exclusion of all other possible venues as logically unfit to be even considered, a waist of precious little time.

Because of this ideology, “we have turned science into a sacred cow and are suffering the consequences of idolatry...” one of which is the damage done to our habitat.

“The Third Millennium will be either religious or not at all.” This statement belongs to a well-known author of the 20th century – Andre Malreaux. Let’s hope he’s right.

I do not see humanity becoming religious overnight, turning away from science or declining all idea of research for the benefit of mankind. I mainly refer to the need for humanity to take a deep breath before entering the next stage and accepting that there is common ground for science and religion to cross bridges. As an example, a step can be taken if science will not reject Light as a metaphor for God and religion and will accept the study of the Physics of Light as a revelation. Allowing Einstein’s assertion that “the most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mystical,” is not just as a kindness towards the less endowed.

Rainer Maria Rilke “suggests that we think of God as a direction rather than an object. To ponder the words of Iraeneus of Lyon that “God became temporal so that we, temporal men, could become eternal.” After all, there is no benefit in rivalry if

both, religion and science originate in the depth of the human mind. It is just one different way of dealing with “otherness.” It is only in this way, that we have a chance to become as we have always been intended, ever since we have been given the choice in the Garden of Eden

Afterword:

The following list is laid out as unconventionally as the paper; it is merely a thankful enumeration of books that were the most inspiring and illuminating, and have helped me the most to trust my instinct and follow my heart. These books are:

Why Religion Matters by Huston Smith, Harper Collins, 2001.
The Religion of Technology by David F Noble, Penguin Books, 1999.
The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty by Paul Evdokimov, Oakwood Publications, 1996.
The Early Church by Henry Chadwick, Penguin Books, 1993.
Nicene Christianity edited by Christopher R Seitz, Brazos Press, 2001
Science and Religion edited by Ian Barbour, Harper and Row, 1968
The Spirit of Orthodoxy by M J Le Guillou, Hawthorn Books, 1965
Christian Faith and Natural Sciences by Karl Heim, Harper and Brothers, 1957.
Finding Darwin's God by Kenneth Miller, Harper Collins, 2000.
A New Religious America by Diana L Eck, Harper Collins 2002.
Carl Sagan by William Poundstone, Owl Books, 200.
The Orthodox Church by Timothy Ware, Penguin Books, 1997.
Signs and Symbols in Christian Art by George Ferguson, Oxford University Press, 1989.
The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy by Aristeides Papadakis with John Meyerdorff, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994.
Working on God by Winifred Gallagher, Random House, 1999
Religion in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations by Linda Woodhead, 2001
Psychology of Religion by Raymond F Paloutzian, Simon and Schuster, 1996.
Ancient Futures by Helena Norberg-Hodge, Sierra Club Books, 1992
The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity, Blackwell Publishers, 2001.
