# ROMANIAN
## Thraco-Dacian and Byzantine Romanity of Eastern Europe and Asia Minor
# MEDIEVALIA

Vol. XII, 2013
Vol. XIII, 2014

Papers presented at the 48th and at the 49th
International Congress on Medieval Studies
Western Michigan University,
Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA
May 9-12, 2013; May 8-11, 2014

The Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality
New York, 2015

Donations toward the cost of printing and mailing are welcome and tax-deductible, payable by check or money order to the *Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality*, sent to the General Editor, Theodor Damian, 30-18 50th Street, Woodside, New York, 11377, DamianTh@aol.com. Correspondence concerning *Romanian Medievalia* should be also directed to the General Editor.

ISSN: 1539-5820
ISBN: 978-1-888067-41-5

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48TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON MEDIEVAL
STUDIES
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY,
KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN, USA
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# The Art of Communication in Gregory of Nazianzus' Poetry

THEODOR DAMIAN

## *Introduction*

Gregory of Nazianzus' poetry is richer and more complex and profound than that of other poets of his time because it springs not only from a brilliant mind, but also from long and deep mystical experiences.

As Preston Edwards indicates, Gregory's poetry is in tone with his theological writings. There is clear unity of purpose between them,[1] yet his poetry is inseparable from his life experiences as well.[2]

Gregory was offered the chance to have an academic career in Athens and while he accepted it at the strong insistence of his friends, he left Athens shortly after having taught there, in order to embrace a different lifestyle, that of contemplation and prayer.

For Gregory, silence, contemplation, prayer and study was all that philosophy was about and to live a philosophical life was of a higher value than to be an academic.[3]

However he did have an academic mind as well and that is plentifully indicated by his theological and creative writings. Yet, this combination of academic knowledge and mystical experiences would be the basis and the main characteristic of his poetry.

That is why he has verses that are purely didactic in nature but also verses that are purely spiritual and of course a combination of the two aspects at once in the same poem.

In the theological treatises Gregory used at his best his brilliant

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intellectual abilities, knowledge and communication skills, in order to both teach effectively the orthodox doctrine of the Church and combat the heresies of the time. The same is true for the poetical writings, where the general and common purpose was to attract and convince the reader. These poems are not descriptive in nature, as when the author describes a landscape. They are deeply psychological (in particular when autobiographical) and deeply theological or philosophical (when it comes to explaining his religious convictions as he does in poems such as "On the Faith," "On the Son,", "On the Holy Spirit," "On Providence," "On the Soul," "On the Two Covenants and the Appearing of Christ," "Against Apollinarius," "On the Incarnation of Christ," and many others.)

The same powerful communication skills are also used in poems related to morality, where he writes about what is to be done, which requires a lot of clarity and precision, as well as persuasion skills, and in poems where he uses the style figure of personification, such as where he has marriage and virginity or the worldly life and the spiritual life talking to each other.

One can find effective communication in poems where he is in critical dialogue with his own soul, in poems meant to stimulate self-knowledge and self-assessment using the Socratic method like in the one entitled "Who Am I?," poems that are in many cases "cries of the heart, expressions both of self-pity and of unshakable faith,[4] and in poems where he offers spiritual guidance to young people having in view their moral education.

Communication is a very complex phenomenon, it is both cataphatic and apophatic, that is ,we can say what it is, yet it is more than we can say, it happens on undefined channels as it transgresses human capability of catching every aspect of it and dissecting it.

However, everything that makes a communication good and effective can be found in Gregory's poetry.

According to Stephen E. Lucas,[5] for example, communicating with an intended audience implies choosing a topic, determining the general and the specific purpose, audience-centeredness, awareness of the audience's characteristics (age, sex, religion, ethnicity), use of

illustrations and examples, organization and structure of ideas, getting the attention and interest of the audience, being mindful of the use of language in terms of meaning of words, accuracy and clarity, using language vividly (imagery, rhythm, style figures), having in view the informative and persuasive character of the speech, building credibility, using logic and reasoning but also appealing to emotions, using critical thinking in terms of defining a problem, analyzing and interpreting it, but also finding and offering potential solutions. These are just some of the aspects and tips that the effective communicator needs to pay attention to.

When it comes to Gregory's communication through his poetry, we find all of these and others applied in many ways, together with other features characteristic to the art of poetry.

This short presentation does not intend to go into all details of such an interesting and complex topic. It will only bring a number of illustrations that will be enough to prove Gregory's excellent communication skills with particular application to his poetry.

## *Communication strategies*

No wonder that Gregory of Nazianzus was the greatest rhetorician of his age, "an undisputed master of words."[6]

Beyond his innate rich talents with his love of education, he studied rhetoric diligently, in all places where he went to school: Diocaesarea, Caesarea of Cappadocia, Caesarea of Palestine (when he studied with the renowned sophist Thespesius), Alexandria (the largest university center in the East) and Athens with its famous professors, where Gregory studied with Proeresius who was a celebrity as an orator.[7]

In such a situation it is understandable why the art of communication had no secrets for him.

Writing was for Gregory of Nazianzus like a second nature. At the question: why don't you leave writing aside so you can calm down? asked by Eustatius in a moment where the bishop was not feeling well, he responded: "There is a kind of boiling in myself; it is

impossible for me to contain it."[8] But also, as Peter Gilbert notices, Gregory writes poetry because that "acts for him as a kind of pain-killer in times of physical or mental suffering." [9]

Another purpose of his poetry writing was to show that there is literary talent among the Christian writers, not only among the pagan ones, an enterprise that engaged him in a difficult but successful struggle, that of using the profane culture in the service of the Christian one, Gregory had to use all possible strategies from being logic, attractive and strategic to using a variety of psychological methods, showing perseverance and courage.

As a philosopher and in particular as a theologian he had to impart his knowledge and feelings to others, as philosophy is about teaching people how to die and implicitly how to live, according to a Socratic definition and as theology is missionary in essence. Consequently writing for himself is not the purpose even though at times that might seem to be in Gregory's case.

When writing has other people in view and the intention is to teach them the right way of living and believing, communication skills become fundamentally important.

As a versed rhetor and according to classical rule, in his very long autobiographic poem, Gregory announces the topic at the very beginning in order to prepare the reader mentally for what follows. "The purpose of this discourse is to make complete exposure of the course of my misfortunes and as well of my advantages," we read, and then the poet gives the motivation and the reason why he wants to do that, namely because if he does not do it, others will, and each one will have his own inclinations (read bias),[10] and consequently the author's own account is the best. Using critical thinking he explains this more precisely in later verses, where he writes: "I am obliged to tell of all my adventures going back in time, even if I have to be too long, so that false interpretations would not prevail against me."[11]

As Jean Bernardi notices, Gregory wrote this poem (on his own life) with his old passion for teaching and had in view educated people, especially students.[12] But, as the bishop indicates in another verse, the target is more general and ambitious and for the long run:

"Listen you all, people of today and also people of the future," he writes.[13]

As this poem is to be viewed like a testament, like a legacy, it is clear why from the start he uses established communication strategies and dedicates himself so much to it.

A successful communication technique is the appeal to past (in particular) or present authorities. As an exquisitely educated man that he was, having studied in the most famous centers of learning of his time, with his love and thirst for knowledge, Gregory was very familiar with the works of the classics. Anthony McGuckin gives us a partial list, in alphabetical order of the authors Gregory refers to in his writings, including poetry: Anaxilas, Apollonios of Rhodes, Aratos, Aristophanes, Aristotle, Callimachus, Demosthenes, Diogenes Laertios, Evagoras, Heraclitus, Herodotus, Hesiod, Homer, Isocrates, Lucian, Lysias, Philo, Phocylides, Pindar, Plato, Plutarch, Sappho, Simonides, Socrates, Theocritus, Theognis, Thucydides.[14]

Biblical references are to be found everywhere in his poetry as his basic formation was theology and his nature mystical.

The fact that in many poems, in particular the long ones, he has an introduction where he uses communication techniques to catch the reader's attention, such as warnings asking for attention, using the captatio benevolentiae strategy, where he explains the reason of that particular piece of writing and other similar details, even to the point where when he finishes his introduction and announces that he just did that ("Be it that these statements be considered the exordium of my discourse")[15] shows that he pays good attention to the organization of his message, to the systematic character of elaboration and the clarity of communication.

For Gregory, meaningful discourse has to have content.

We see that he paid good attention to this issue when in his autobiographic poem, he criticizes the empty discourse of the arrogant writers, whose only skill was to be well versed in the "vain and useless ability" of manipulating the words they were pronouncing with noisy sonority,[16] who were speaking (or writing) just to hear themselves doing it.

In order to engage the reader and break possible monotony of discourse, very often Gregory formulates rhetorical questions. One example is where he writes about the beautiful moral life of his parents. We read: "My parents, because of their life were often object of laudatory conversations. How could I express it? What proof could I offer?"[17]

Another communication strategy used by Gregory is the intercalation in his narration of the direct speech where he suddenly starts a dialogue with the reader or with God, for instance, or with his own soul. This is meant to engage the reader by interpellating him or her to help him assimilate the information and get the message.

Speaking of his mother's promise to offer him to God, a promise made before he was born, Gregory, in modesty but playing intelligently on ideas, writes: "If I am worthy of my parents' commitment, this is due to God who listened to their prayers and gave me to them; if, on the contrary, I deserve hate, this is because of my sins."[18]

On occasion Gregory becomes very ironic and confrontational in order to both shock and show strength, but also to challenge and captivate the audience.

In the poem To those with no love (toward him, referring to the bishops who did not want him in Constantinople) he writes: "You who bring sacrifices, my brothers, jealousy had a hard time to kill me […] I am gone: Applaud."[19]

On several occasions the theologian used his poetry in order to defend himself against these bishops who were the cause of his resignation from the patriarchal see. In such works Gregory has two goals in view: first, to denounce the bishops' hypocrisy, and second, to defend his reputation as a nuanced and profound theologian who ably elaborated on the doctrine of consubstiantiality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son (homoousion).[20]

In defending himself in his verses, in such situations, Gregory also examines his life and mind with an open conscience and in great detail. In these conflicted situations, as he writes out of indignation, the poet uses an array of communication techniques meant to explain, prove the adversary's error. It goes without saying that he

had to be extremely careful in his formulations, systematic, logical and convincing, as he had to deal with sensitive theological issues and knew that his adversaries were also very educated and powerful.[21]

In another case he starts with an insult to those who possibly disagree with him in theological matters, in order to incite, to shock and show or produce indignation. In the poem On the Incarnation of Christ he attacks: "Foolish is he who honors not the royal and eternal Word of God."[22]

## *Conclusion*

These are just a few examples of who Gregory of Nazianzus was as a poet and of some of the main communication techniques, skills and strategies that he used in his entire poetical career. The examples indicate that he knew that the first imperious need in his poetry writing was to be effective in getting the message across, in particular in terms of the spiritual growth of his readers.

Gregory of Nazianzus remains one of the most powerful theologian-poets of his age and it is an all the more challenging task for future students of his poetry, to bring to light and share the value of his creative writing in all the endeavors of his life.

NOTES:

[1] Preston Edwards, "I will speak to those who understand: *Gregory of Nazianzus' 'Carmina Arcana,' 1, 1-24,"* in http://www.apaclassics.org/AnnualMeeting/02mtg/abstracts/Edwards/html.

[2] *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 work will be made as Peter Gilbert).

[3] Theodor Damian, "Gregory of Nazianzus: When Greek Philosophy Meets Christian Poetry," in *Romanian Medievalia,* Vol. IX, The Romanian

Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality, New York, 2009, pp. 31-32.
[4] *Gregory of Nazianzus,* by Brian E. Daley, S.J., Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 163.
[5] Stephen E. Lucas, *The Art of Public Speaking,* Third Edition, Random House, New York, 1989.
[6] *Saint Gregory Nazianzen: Selected Poems,* Translated and with an Introduction by John McGuckin, The Sisters of the Love of God Press (SLG), Convent of the Incarnation, Fairacres, Oxford, 1995, p. VIII. See also: Tincuta Closcă, *Atitudinea părinţilor greci ai Bisericii din veacurile II-III faţă de tradiţia oratorică [The Attitude of the Greek Church Fathers of the IInd and IIIrd Centuries Concerning the Oratoric Tradition],* in *Theologia Catholica,* year LVI, Nr. 3-4, 2011, Cluj-Napoca, p. 23.
[7] Stelianos Papadopoulos, *Vulturul ranit: Viata Sfantului Grigore Teologul [The Wounded Eagle: The Life of Saint Gregory the Theologian],* Transl. by Pr. Dr. Constantin Coman and Diac. Cornel Coman, Ed. Bizantina , Bucuresti, 2002, pp. 18-43.
[8] Stelianos Papadopoulos, *op. cit.,* p. 261.
[9] Peter Gilbert, *op. cit.,* p. 3.
[10] *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze, Oeuvres Poétiques, Poèmes personnels, II, 1, 1-11,* texte établi par André Tuilier et Guillaume Bady, traduction et notes par Jean Bernardi, Ed. Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2004, p. 57.
[11] *Ibidem,* p. 59.
[12] *Ibid.,* p. 57.
[13] *Ibid.,* p. 59.
[14] John A. McGuckin, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography,* St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 2001, p. 57.
[15] *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze, Oeuvres Poétiques,* p. 59.
[16] *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze,* textes choisis et présentés par Edmond Devolder dans la traduction de Paul Gallay, Les Editions du Solei Levant, Namur, Belgique, 1960, "On His Own Life [Sur sa vie]," .p. 34.
[17] *Ibidem,* p. 32.
[18] *Ibid.,* p. 33.
[19] Saint Grégoire de Nazianze, *Oeuvres Poétiques,* p. 47.
[20] John McGuckin, *op. cit.,*, pp. 371; 375.
[21] *Ibidem,* p. 372.
[22] *Saint Gregory Nazianzen: Selected Poems,* p. 5.

# A Liturgical Mystery in the Context of the *Mystagogy* of Maximos the Confessor

ANDREAS ANDREOPOULOS

There is a certain difficulty in the interpretation, the understanding and also the translation of a certain part of the liturgy of St Basil and the liturgy of St John Chrysostom, where although certain approaches have been put forth, and although there is some consensus among liturgists, I think the issue is not closed. The questionable moment is the oblation in the anaphora, at the elevation of the Holy Gifts, just before the invocation of the Holy Spirit, when the priest exclaims "Τα σα εκ των σων σοι προσφέροντες, κατά πάντα και διά πάντα." Despite the corruption at large of προσφέροντες to προσφέρομεν for centuries, which is gradually being corrected in our days,[1] the phrase in its correct rendering has no main verb. This is provided in the response of the people "σε υμνούμεν, σε ευλογούμεν, σοι ευχαριστούμεν Κύριε, και δεόμεθά σου, ο Θεός ημών." The whole dialogue may be translated as "Your own from your own, offering to you according to all and for all – we praise you, we bless you, we give thanks to you Lord, and we pray to you, our God".

An almost identical phrase is found in the anaphora of St Gregory the Theologian. There are two differences here: first, the phrase is addressed to the Son instead of the Father (the whole anaphora of St Gregory is addressed to the Son). Second, the ending of the phrase of the priest is augmented, with the addition of the words "δώρων" and "και εν πάσιν" (τα σα εκ των σων *δώρων* σοι προσφέροντες, κατά πάντα και δια πάντα *και εν πάσιν*").

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Nevertheless, there are some difficulties in the consideration of the oblation in the anaphora of St Gregory. The oblative phrase seems a little awkward theologically, since in this case the gifts are not offered to the Father, but to the Son. This, of course, is consistent with the rest of the Liturgy, but it may be read as a confusion of the hypostases and the roles of the Father and the Son, in a way not very representative of Cappadocian theology (although it is certainly possible to read it in an orthodox way). Furthermore, the additional words make it seem like an expansion of the Basil/Chrysostom oblation. For this reason I suspect that the oblation of the anaphora of St Basil was added in the Liturgy of St Gregory, with these two augmentations – although perhaps against this conclusion we may see that the identification of Christ as the one who is received as well as the one who receives, may be seen in the prayer of the Cherubic hymn from that liturgy. Since the manuscript tradition of this liturgy is not very rich or very ancient, and the precise dating of this embolism is difficult if this is what it is, I think we can continue our examination putting the Gregorian variant aside for the most part.

To return to the phrase "τα σα εκ των σων σοι προσφέροντες κατά πάντα και δια πάντα", there is much literature on the first part of the phrase, which expresses the entire theology of the Christological drama in its ecclesiastical and liturgical dimensions, although it has its roots in the Hebrew tradition.[2] The problematic part is the second part of the phrase, the words κατά πάντα και διά πάντα, which may be understood, interpreted and translated in several ways – and in trying to keep a distance from the usual interpretations, I am translating it here as literally (and perhaps as neutrally) as possible, as "according to all and for all", although current translations include "in all things and for all things", or more simply "in all and for all", and also "in behalf of all and for all", "on behalf of all and for all", "because of all and for all", "in every way and for everything", and even "entirely and for all things".[3]

The first level of the difficulty is that the phrase is grammatically ambivalent. Πάντα is usually read as the accusative of the neutral plural παν, but it may as well be the accusative of the masculine singular πας. There is rather overwhelming – but not

complete – consensus favouring the reading of both words as the neutral plural form. Yet, even St Justin Popovic, who first heard the liturgy using the plural neutral for both words as it is given in Slavonic, understood the first word as the singular masculine form of the word, and used it in this way in his own translation to Serbian and in his sermons,[4] having considered the possibilities that the Greek text opened.

Nevertheless, this dissonance reveals what the deeper problem is: that there is no consensus, not even nearly, as to what this phrase means exactly. What makes this observation even stranger is that the Patristic tradition, which has given us otherwise detailed expositions of the Divine Liturgy, such as the one by Nikolaos Kavasilas, is not helpful either. The addition of και εν πάσιν that we find in the anaphora of St Gregory is not directly consistent with any of the main interpretations of this phrase, and seems something that adds to the imagery of the offering (offering as wholly and completely as possible), but not to its theology – and it certainly does not help us with the identification of the origin of the phrase. The problem becomes an embarrassment when we consider that this is perhaps *the* most central phrase in the entire Liturgy. This phrase, which is divided between the clergy and the people, is not a description of an act, but the offering act itself, and it encapsulates most of the theology of the Eucharist. In this carefully constructed and weighted phrase, how can the meaning of these two words elude us?

Another level of difficulty is that scholarly study for centuries focused on the words of the priest and tried to find a self-contained meaning for them. This explains and is reflected in the corruption of προσφέροντες to προσφέρομεν, but the problem is deeper than that. As it follows right after the Remembrance of the works of Jesus Christ – that nevertheless culminate with his eschatological presence – the instinct of most liturgists was to try to read it as an extension of the Remembrance that precedes it, which is certainly valid for liturgies without the eschatological turn that we see in the Basil/Chrysostom anaphora. Therefore, the consensus is to read the contentious phrase as a continuation of the commemoration, as if the "all and all" refers to the works of Jesus Christ that are listed in the

commemoration, even though the first part of the phrase has moved beyond it, into the offering of the Gifts. Indicative of this are the views of influential theologians such as Fr Gervasios Paraskevopoulos and Panagiotis Trembelas. Paraskevopoulos writes that "keeping in mind all those that have been accomplished, we offer to you those things of yours that belong to you according to all (according to your commands and according to the apostolic commandments) and for all (for all the things that you have done for us)."[5]

Trembelas similarly, writing only a few years after Paraskevopoulos, but expressing something he had in his mind for thirty years since his first publications on liturgical matters,[6] understands the "all and all" as "according to every place and for everything that you have done for our salvation."[7] His interpretation of δια πάντα is certainly connected with the Remembrance, while his interpretation of κατά πάντα as "according to every place" (κατά πάντα τόπον) refers to Malachi 1:11 and can be understood as a reading of the universality of the Eucharist. Michel Najim and T. L. Frazier, to mention an example of modern pastoral direction on this point, take a similar position, and they read the κατά πάντα και δια πάντα as "always and everywhere".[8] Most liturgists simply downplay the importance of this phrase, as we can see for instance in the brief discussion of Taft on the anaphora of St John Chrysostom, where he simply translates it as "for everything and in every way", and does not write anything else about it.[9] Likewise, most modern liturgists are content with a similar interpretation – as something that refers to the Remembrance or to the universality of the Eucharist, and have not tried to identify its origins.

Fr Dumitru Staniloae on the other hand, takes this one step further, perhaps a little more carefully. He sees a degree of universality in this phrase. He understands the κατά πάντα as the concentration and elevation of all the gifts of God to us and of us to God in the Eucharistic body and blood, while he reads the δια πάντα not in neutral plural but in masculine singular, and he takes this to mean that the gifts are given for the sanctification and the benefit of everyone.[10] It seems to me that Staniloae's interpretation does not

follow in the general trend to connect too strongly the oblation with the Remembrance, and thus he avoids this pitfall.

That Remembrance lists the things that Jesus has done to achieve the salvation of the people: the Cross, the tomb, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the enthronement at the right hand of the Father, and the Second Coming – although it is strange that the Incarnation is not mentioned. Of course, the inclusion of the Second Coming among the things that Christ has already done, speaks to the eschatological time of the liturgy. Therefore, to 'remember' this event that has happened only in liturgical or in eschatological, but not in historical time, places the anaphora in an eschatological context. Of course, this eschatological turn has largely been missed or downplayed, because it is an innovation of the Byzantine liturgy, and cannot be found in older liturgies – the anaphoras of the Liturgy of St Mark and of the Apostolic Constitutions for instance, include a reference to the Second Coming of Christ, but they place it in the future ("in which time he will come to judge the living and the dead"), rather in the list of the things that have already been accomplished. For this reason, several liturgists either ignored it, or simply read it as an augmentation of the historical remembrance that may be found in all anaphoras since the Jewish Berakah.

There is another methodological trap here: although we usually understand 'remembrance' as a reference to things of the linear, historical past, its use in a liturgical context almost always points to something else. In this case we are the ones who remember, but when we ask God to 'remember' the local bishop, those who work in the church, and anyone we have in mind, it is obvious that the word means what the repentant thief meant on the cross, when he asked Jesus to 'remember him', or rather accept him in his Kingdom. This offering or petitioning meaning of remembrance is even more obvious in the anaphora of several ancient liturgies, such as the Liturgy of St James, which includes a long intercession of commemoration.

In the case at hand, although 'remember' cannot be read in the same way, I believe it is nevertheless more charged than the remembrance of the past. Rather than recall in memory, what the text

probably calls for here is a projection of the people onto the Christological drama, which is mapped by the Christological events mentioned. This projection to eschatological, and therefore timeless Christology, is consistent with the very act of the offering. To echo Schmemann's views on the nature of the offering, the Eucharistic elements serve as the focus of the offering of the people of God, and therefore what happens to them, and the way they are treated, reveals something about the participants. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that ancient liturgies, such as the Apostolic Constitutions, connect the act of remembering with something that is placed in the future. This connection, in this case, says more about the liturgical aspect of memory as presence, rather to the eschatological dimension that become more overt in the Constantinopolitan tradition.

In the historical reading however, there is no account for the first part of the problematic phrase. What can be meant by "in all things", or perhaps more correctly, "according to all things"? Moreover, if we try to understand this sentence as a response to the historical remembrance, is it at all necessary to have the problematic addition here, since that meaning would not be different if the paragraph were simply "Μεμνημένοι τοίνυν της σωτηρίου ταύτης εντολής και πάντων των υπέρ ημών γεγενημένων... τα σα εκ των σων σοι προσφέροντες, σε υμνούμεν, σε ευλογούμεν," etc., or "Remembering the command of the saviour and all that has taken place for our sake… offering to you what is already yours, we praise you, we bless you", etc.? In addition, since the commemoration of the things that have been accomplished for the salvation of the people is not said aloud by the priest, can its ripples affect the words of the loud proclamation to such an extent?

Finally, if we tried to come up with a phrase that shows this causal connection between the works of Christ and the offering of the people, we would have done it in a less cryptic way - something like "διά πάντα όσα υπέρ ημων εποίησας, τα σα εκ των σων προσφέροντες, σε υμνούμεν, σε ευλογούμεν, σε ευχαριστούμεν και δεόμεθά σου Κύριε ο Θεός ημών," or "for everything you have done for us, offering to you what is yours, we praise you, we bless you, we give thanks to you and we pray to you Lord, our God". This would

be a complete and straightforward phrase. Why was it necessary to use such a difficult phrase instead, both in terms of grammar and interpretation? The reasonable direction to follow for a grammatically awkward phrase like this, which does not quite fit, is to try to see if it echoes any Scriptural passages. And yet, none of the Biblical sources for the words of the institution (Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:14-20 or 1 Cor. 11:23-26) gives us anything similar to κατά πάντα και δια πάντα. We have to put this line of thought aside for the moment.

All the possibilities that have been suggested by several theologians at times, may be read in the text. Nevertheless, we have to admit that all the liturgical commentators since the time of Kavasilas (or since the time of the anaphora of St Gregory the Theologian, if we accept that it is an augmentation of the Basil/Chrysostom anaphora) are doing educated, or even inspired guesswork. None of the commentators, ancient or modern, have identified either a Biblical or textual source for the κατά πάντα και δια πάντα, or any other historical background of the phrase.

Nevertheless, if we dismiss the interpretation of κατά πάντα και διά πάντα as "according to all things and for all things", what is the alternative? Where should we look for the source of the phrase? How should we interpret it? Can we start examining all the grammatical and interpretive possibilities of the phrase, ranging between anything such as “according to everyone (who has given testimony) and for everyone present here” and “according to everything in your divinity and always”? It is hard to say if any of these possibilities have a better historical or liturgical foundation.

This is precisely where we would hope to be assisted and guided by the Fathers, who nevertheless did not leave us any relevant writings. The Patristic mystagogies are strangely silent on this point. There is no reference or explanation of the phrase in the Mystagogy of Germanos of Constantinople, or in the earlier shorter mystagogical texts. Nicholas Kavasilas, who offers quite detailed information elsewhere, is uncharacteristically silent on this point, and only writes that “these gifts are yours in all and every respect.”[11] Later writers, such as Symeon of Thessaloniki, who similarly give a long and

detailed interpretation of the Liturgy, seem not to be sure what to make of this one – Symeon skips this part completely. And yet, I think it is possible to find some guidance – even if indirectly – in the *Mystagogy* of Maximos the Confessor.

Naturally, one of the first things we notice about the *Mystagogy* is that Maximos does not include the anaphora in his discussion of the Divine Liturgy. It has been suggested[12] that the reason for this is that his commentary is limited to what a layman would have heard, either because there is no evidence to suggest that Maximos was a priest or deacon, or because his *Mystagogy* was written as an interpretation that could be useful to a layman. Nevertheless, a layman would have heard the phrases of the anaphora that are said loudly by the priest, and would have heard, or said the parts that are said by the laity. For the laity the anaphora in its entirety may be somewhat opaque, but for this reason the phrase Τα σα εκ των σων... and the response of the people (or actually, as we have seen, the completion of the phrase) σε υμνούμεν.., has shouldered the entire weight of the anaphora in, popular piety. This suggests that it would be even more necessary to say something about that phrase if the intended readership of the treatise does not consist of clergy! In addition, since the *Mystagogy* was written as a symbolic explanation of the liturgy that tries to highlight, from the Maximian point of view, the way in which the Liturgy leads the soul and the Church to salvation, and since the anaphora is a central part in this way to salvation, it is hard to imagine how it could be possible to write a treatise on the Divine Liturgy ignoring its most important part.

Another explanation for this absence[13] is that Maximos respected the apophatic nature of the anaphora and passed it in silence. This is not unusual for Maximos, who refrains elsewhere as well from committing his deepest and most theological thoughts to writing, preferring perhaps to illuminate his disciples in person.[14] And yet, it is not sensible to plan a theological treatise of this depth, which would examine the liturgy as if it had no anaphora. The *Mystagogy* is too systematically written (or rather planned) for this, and I believe that it does indeed include a discussion of the

significance of the anaphora, although not exactly where we would expect to find it.

In the introduction and in the first chapters of the *Mystagogy, Maximos* discusses the significance of the entire liturgy in several ways. Only in the eighth chapter he proceeds with a step-by-step exposition – in which, as noted before, we find no discussion and analysis of the anaphora. This suggests that Maximos has developed the theology of the *entire* liturgy in the beginning, and then he discusses its parts separately. At the end, in the 24th chapter, he gives a recapitulation of the steps of the liturgy, twice, with some further theological comments, but in this chapter too, he wishes to give more than a list of symbols and their meanings, and instead touches on the steps of salvation, giving an organic account of the parts of the liturgy. It is obvious that he needs to refer to the theology of the missing part here as well.

Maximos quotes Colossians 3:11 both in the beginning and in the end of the *Mystagogy*. He quotes the same passage in his *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer*. The *Commentary* repeats many of the themes of the *Mystagogy* to such an extent that we can think of it as another development of the same Eucharistic theology that we find in the *Mystagogy*. Maximos' reading of the επιούσιος as a reference to the eschatological time for instance (which he does in a way that does not oppose directly Chrysostom's interpretation, but it is rather suggested as an interpretation at a deeper level), his interpretation of the prayer as a Trinitarian prayer, and the reference of Christ as the bread we ask for, attest to this.

Maximos sees the Pauline image of the cosmological unity in God, as we find it in Colossians 3:11, as the end and the culmination of the work of salvation. This is the image that he uses in the first chapter of the *Mystagogy* to describe the relationship between God and the Church, which he develops further into the image of Christ as the centre of an ontological sphere that is defined by straight lines radiating from him and reaching all beings. In the Commentary he says something very similar when he discusses Unity and Trinity, and the relation of the people with God, again in relation to Colossians 3:11: "Christ is in all, creating by what surpasses nature

and the law, the spiritual configuration of the Kingdom which has no beginning". The key Pauline expression πάντα εν πάσι Χριστός (Christ is all in all) in several variants may be found at least six times in the *Mystagogy*, most of which are in the first chapter. However, one of these times is in the recapitulation of the 24th chapter, right where he tries to explain, in one sentence and one breadth, what is happening at the distribution of the communion.

For Maximos the entire liturgy is an ontological journey of the becoming into the being of God. In the introduction and in the first chapter of the *Mystagogy* he describes God as he who is and who is becoming all in all – all things in all people. This dynamic play between the πάντα and the πάσι, the first of which refers to things (qualities, differences, identities, etc) and the second to all people. Although there are several other Pauline themes in the work of Maximos, such as the view of the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit (from 1 Corinthians 6:19), none rival the cosmic theological dimension that he develops from this passage.

Both in the *Mystagogy* and in the *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer*, Maximos develops the dynamic relationship between the πάντα and the πάσι along an ontology of communion – a Eucharistic ontology. This is, of course, a much analyzed aspect of his work in modern literature, and it is not necessary to repeat it in detail here. It is sufficient to mention that he places Christ in the middle of a network of ontological relations, which substantiate the particular beings. The distributed and yet not divided presence of Christ ensures that all possibilities of existence exist simultaneously in every being.

How far is this Maximian development of the Pauline theme of the all in all, from the sacramentality that is expressed in the "according to all and for all"? Can we gain an insight to this if we read the enigmatic liturgical phrase next to the *Mystagogy* of Maximos, and understand it as a phrase with unmistaken Biblical background and eschatological meaning? Even so, is it possible to read this eschatology at the level of "all things" or of "all people within the Church"?

The larger cosmological context of the thought of Maximos, as well as his view of the logoi in Creation would suggest a cosmic liturgy at the level of every created thing. Yet, his preference for Colossians 3:11, which refers to the different possibilities of the human condition, instead of the similar but more cosmological image of πάντα εν πάσι in Ephesians 1:10 and 1:23, suggests that at this liturgical level at least, Maximos had in mind the people of God who follow the way of faith, and not "all things under heaven and on earth under Christ".[15] With this in mind, we can interpret the liturgical phrase of κατά πάντα και δια πάντα as a reference to the Eucharistic offering that is taking place in (or according to, or at the level of) all of the constituent elements of the Church and its members, and for everyone who participate in it and submit – or rather deposit – their individual hypostatic being at the feet of the Bridegroom Christ. If this assumption is right, the first πάντα refers to all things or all qualities or all possibilities of existence and is read as a plural neutral, while the second refers to people and is read as a singular masculine.

It is hard to say what Maximos had in mind, and to what extent this represented the views of his time regarding the liturgical phrase, or his own views about it. It is also not unusual for an enigmatic and difficult phrase like this, to have hosted more than one meanings within the tradition and the experience of the Church. It is certainly possible to read it according to Ephesians rather than according to Colossians, and in this way to offer a different grammatical and cosmological reading. It is also possible that as they both exist in the Pauline thought, the difference between them is a difference of emphasis rather than a difference of essence.

In the end, we have to say that the question of the interpretation of the oblation remains open, as no conclusive evidence can be found that will settle the issue. Nevertheless, the eschatological direction that Maximos explores, can at least suggest that we look at the elusive phrase and the whole oblation as an eschatological turn that sets apart the Basil/Chrysostom anaphora from all the other liturgical anaphoras – and not just as an eschatological augmentation of the Remembrance. In addition, the

connection with Colossians and Ephesians provides the (missing) scriptural source that explains the awkward syntax and makes the eschatological reading credible. The phrase was modified slightly in order to fit in the oblation, but as a result it was difficult to see where it came from. It is also possible to see the early liturgical variant that we find in the anaphora of St Gregory the Theologian as an attempt to strengthen the Pauline background and to make it more evident, since the added "και εν πάσιν" echoes more strongly the passages from Ephesians and from Colossians. It is just unfortunate that modern criticism, with few exceptions (such as the case of Fr Dumitru Staniloae) was exploring the connection of the phrase with the preceding Remembrance, and did not explore other options.

At any rate, this hypothesis is offered as a contribution to the study and the understanding of the Divine Liturgy, perhaps as another educated guess in a series of educated guesses regarding the meaning of the oblative phrase, and hopefully more conclusive evidence will be brought forward in the future in order to illuminate this liturgical mystery.

NOTES:

[1] Cf. The editions of the Divine Liturgy by Ephrem Lash in 1995 and 2011, published by the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain, as well as the recent editions of the Ieratikon published by the Church of Greece.
[2] Cf. 1 Chronicles 29:14.
[3] Cf Ephrem Lash, *The Central Part of the Byzantine Anaphora – a Translator's Note*, website of the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain.
[4] Cf. his sermon *The Internal Mission of the Church*, written in 1923.
[5] Gervasios Paraskevopoulos, *Ερμηνευτική Επιστασία εις την Θείαν Λειτουργίαν*, Patra, 1958, p. 211.
[6] Such as his book *Αι Τρεις Λειτουργίαι,* Athens 1935.
[7] Panagiotis Trembelas, *Λειτουργικόν*, Athens, Sotir, 1963, p. 101.
[8] Michel Najim, T. L. Frazier, *Understanding the Orthodox Liturgy*, Antiochian Diocese of North America, 2010, p. 146.

[9] Robert F. Taft, "St John Chrysostom and the Byzantine Anaphora that Bears his Name," in Paul Bradshaw (ed.), *Essays on Early Eastern Eucharistic Prayers, Liturgical Press*, 1997, pp. 195-226, especially pp. 2210-221.
[10] Cf. K. Karaisaridis, Η συμβολή του π. Δημητρίου Στανιλοάε στη μελέτη των λειτουργικών θεμάτων, Athens 1997, pp. 299-300.
[11] Nicholas Kavasilas, *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, 49, PG 150, 481D-484A.
[12] A. Louth, "The Ecclesiology of Saint Maximos the Confessor," *International journal of the study of the Christian church*, 4 (2), 2004, pp. 114-115.
[13] Allain Riou, Le Monde et l'Église selon Maxime le Confesseur, Beauchesne, Paris, 1973, p. 165.
[14] Perhaps the most obvious case is the discussion of the trees in Paradise in *Questiones ad Thalassium*, where Maximos offers two possible explanations and then adds that there is a "better and more secret explanation, which is kept in the minds of the mystics, but we, as well, will honour by silence."
[15] Ephesians 1:10.

# Western-Byzantine 'Hybridity' in the Ecclesiastical Architecture of Northern Moldavia

ALICE ISABELLA SULLIVAN

## *Introduction*

The northern region of Moldavia in modern Romania preserves some of the most striking architectural monuments of the post-Byzantine world. The painted and fortified monastic churches found here on the eastern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains are particularly remarkable for their distinctive architectural features and brightly colored image cycles. These monuments date to the reigns of two of Moldavia's most illustrious rulers, under whose patronages the majority of the buildings were also built: Prince Stephen the Great (*reg.* 12 April 1457 – 2 July 1504), and Prince Peter Rareș (*reg.* 20 January 1527 – 14 September 1538; 9 February 1541 – 3 September 1546). The oldest of these monastic churches was built under Stephen's guidance and supervision.[1]

During Peter's reign, earlier architectural forms were consolidated and both older churches and newly built ones were embellished both inside and outside with a large and consistent set of brightly colored images in multiple registers.[2] A case in point is the Church of the Annunciation at Moldoviţa Monastery, completed under Peter's patronage in 1532 and painted in 1537 (fig. 1)

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Fig.1. Church of the Annunciation, Moldoviţa Monastery, founded 1532 (source: author)

The churches under discussion here were built in the century following the Turkish conquest of Constantinople on 29 May 1453 that resulted in the collapse of the great Eastern Roman Empire. This event, on the one hand, marked the disappearance of the main political, military, cultural, and religious power in south-eastern Europe, the eastern Mediterranean, and the western Black Sea regions. On the other hand, the fall of Byzantium signaled the increasingly oppressive presence of the Ottoman armies in the region. The Ottoman Turks threatened Moldavia's independence as well in their efforts to conquer the Christian west. However, the princes of Moldavia, beginning with Stephen the Great, eventually negotiated treatises with the Porte that allowed the region to retain its autonomy. And yet, given the ongoing presence of the Ottomans in Moldavia from the second half of the fifteenth century onwards, perhaps it is no surprise that these enemy figures begin to appear in the iconography of the great monastic churches. For example, in the

extensive *Last Judgment* scene painted in 1547 on the west façade of the Church of Saint George at Voroneţ Monastery, some of the damned to Christ's left are distinctly represented as Turks (the others as Jews and Tatars), identified primarily by dress, facial features, and even inscriptions (fig. 2).

Fig.2. *Last Judgment*, west façade, Church of Saint George, Voroneţ Monastery, painted 1547 (source: author)

Likewise, in the celebrated scene of the *Siege of Constantinople* painted in 1537 on the south façade of the Church of the Annunciation at Moldoviţa Monastery, the artillery, cavalry, and infantry forces of the enemy that are depicted on the right of the composition marching steadily towards the city gates are also represented as Turks with their round, beardless faces, and white turbans (fig. 3).

This detail would have rendered a scene that was otherwise intended to represent an historical attack of Constantinople—namely, the siege of 626 by the Avars and the Persians that was foiled with the help of a miracle-working icon of the Virgin Mary—closer to contemporary concerns and thus more immediate to the political and

military situation in Moldavia in the first decades of the sixteenth century. This powerful historical episode—a story of divine aid in the fight against non-Christian enemies—had particular resonances at that time and was painted on seven churches from the region, presenting thus a clear response to the Ottoman threat against Moldavia's independence, political stability, and religious identity.[3]

Fig.3. *Siege of Constantinople*, south façade, Church of the Annunciation, Moldoviţa Monastery, painted 1537 (source: author)

By the last decades of the fifteenth century, Moldavia emerged as a Christian frontier at the crossroads of western European and Slavic-Byzantine cultures. Prince Stephen the Great even referred to his domain at this time as the "gate of Christianity," stating in a letter dated 25 January 1475, in which he requested from Europe's leaders military and financial support for his anti-Ottoman campaigns, that if his realm were to be conquered by the Turkish forces, "then the rest of the Christian world will be in great danger."[4] In the crucible of the post-1453 world, Moldavia's contacts with its closer and more distant neighbors resulted, especially in the artistic sphere, in assimilations and translations of select elements from both the Latin and the Greek ecclesiastical domains into existing local traditions, often with surprising effects. This eclecticism with respect to sources is most evident in the monastic churches built beginning with Stephen's reign. The churches exhibit in their forms, modes of construction, and image cycles an unprecedented mixture of Byzantine, western Gothic, and Slavic architectural and iconographical features, among others.

The famous Romanian historian Gheorghe Balş famously characterized these monuments as "Byzantine churches built with

Gothic hands and following principles that were in part Gothic."[5] Indeed, the layout of the churches and the nature of their interior spaces, dimly lit and with extensive image cycles entirely covering the walls, demonstrate affinities with Slavic and Byzantine church architecture and building traditions. Other features of the buildings, such as the large buttresses set against the thick walls, the curvilinear tracery found in the upper sections of the windows, and the receding pointed arches of the door frames, for example, follow Gothic models predominant in church architecture in western Europe. Various aspects of these religious monuments are of a local character as well, which developed in an effort to fulfill certain needs of the patron and of the community at large. In this guise, these churches, then, present an exceptional synthesis of eastern- and western-inspired aesthetic and symbolic convention set alongside local traditions.

In what follows, I seek to look at the ecclesiastical architecture of Moldavia from this period through cultural connections and to examine in this context the layouts of the churches, their architectural features, and spatial solutions. My aim is to demonstrate that these monuments are, indeed, a testament to the varied cultural and artistic exchanges that extended between the region of Moldavia and the Byzantine world, on the one hand, and the cultures of the west, on the other hand. The eclectic nature of these religious buildings reveals aspects of how cross-cultural exchange and translation operated in frontier regions, like Moldavia, in moments of crisis, and how, in turn, these critical moments were articulated artistically.

## *Distinctive Features of the Moldavian Churches*

The Church of the Annunciation at Moldoviţa Monastery—a building characteristic of Moldavian monastic church architecture from this period—is a suitable example for the examination that follows (fig. 1).[6] The church, founded under Prince Peter Rareş's patronage and completed in 1532, is located at the center of the monastic complex at Moldoviţa (fig. 4).[7] Because of the semi-eremitic life carried out at this site, and others like it from Moldavia,

which emphasizes silence, prayer, temperance, and humility, the church and the refectory, which is often the second largest building in the monasteries, serve as the main common meeting places for the monks and nuns. They are, thus, the larger and more prominent buildings in the monastic complex. The remote location of these monastic communities, like the one at Moldoviţa, the need for defense in time of need, and the desire to set the monastic world apart from the rest, explain, in part, the presence of the massive rectilinear fortification walls and towers that surround, and also dwarf, the monasteries.

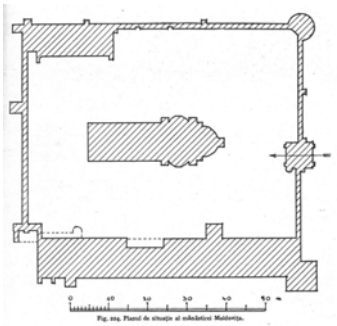

Fig.4. Ground plan of the monastic complex, Moldoviţa Monastery (source: Gheorghe Balş, *Bisericile şi mănăstirile moldoveneşti din veacul al XVI-lea. 1527-1582,* Tiparul Cultura Națională, Bucharest, 1928, p. 195)

The ground plan of the Church of the Annunciation, which is one of its most distinctive features, is of a particular Byzantine type (fig. 5). It consists of an open barrel vaulted exonarthex towards the west with three arched entrances on the north, south, and west sides. A single narrow entryway leads into the domed pronaos of the church, which has two large windows on the north and south walls; then follows the so-called burial chamber *(gropniță)* with a single small window facing south, which gives access, through another small entryway, to the naos of the church where the mysteries of the Eucharist are celebrated. The naos, above which rises a slender cylindrical tower supported by arches and pendentives, comprises a central rectangular space with three semicircular recesses or apses—two smaller ones towards the north and south, and a larger one

towards the east—each covered by a semicircular dome and each having one window opening at the center. The naos area, therefore, is triconch in plan. The entire plan of the church, however, presents a readaptation of the triconch plan since it is extended westward from the triconch naos by the addition of the burial chamber, pronaos, and exonarthex. Therefore, the plan of the church is best characterized as an elongated triconch.

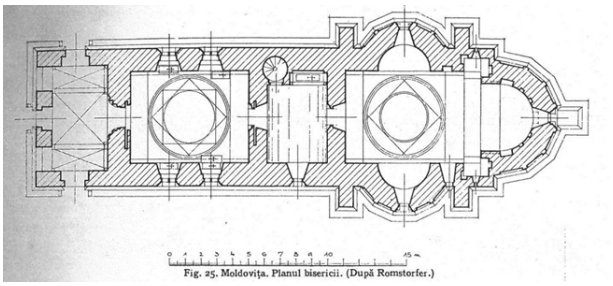


Fig.5. Ground plan, Church of the Annunciation, Moldoviţa Monastery (source: Gheorghe Balș, *Bisericile și mănăstirile moldovenești din veacul al XVI-lea. 1527-1582,* Tiparul Cultura Națională, Bucharest, 1928, p. 31)

The triconch plan characteristic of the monastic churches of Moldavia—which defines a centralized structure that has small side apses extending on three sides of the central, main space that is either square, circular, or oblong in shape—has precedents in the churches from Constantinople, Thessaloniki, and in particular in the Katholica of the great monasteries on Mount Athos. Scholars have determined that the Katholikon of the Great Lavra Monastery on the Holy Mountain (963) was the first Athonite building to adopt the triconch plan (fig. 6).[8]

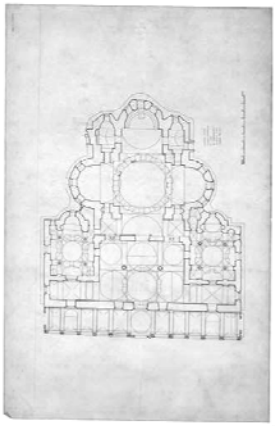

Fig.6. Ground plan, Great Lavra Monastery, Mount Athos (source: Pavlos Mylonas, Neohellenic Architecture Archives: http://www.benaki.gr/eMPArchitecture/eMuseumPlus)

The Katholikon was initially rectangular in shape and had three semicircular apses only towards the east end. In the late tenth century, however, the naos area received a north and south apse. According to one explanation, this was accomplished in order to facilitate the antiphonal singing of the two choirs of monks that assembled in these spaces during the liturgical rituals that took place there. This type of triconch plan seems to have been adopted primarily in the context of monastic worship and may best be understood as a "regional phenomenon" limited to the monastic communities on Mount Athos and to related areas in northern Greece, the Balkan region, and the territories north of the Danube River, which include Moldavia.[9] Indeed, following the initial transformation, the triconch plan was taken up again in the Katholika of nineteen other monasteries on Mount Athos, and, by the second half of the fourteenth century, this particular type of plan appeared, with slight variations, in Moldavian and Serbian churches as well.

The oldest still extant church built out of stone in Moldavia to preserve the triconch plan is the Church of the Holy Trinity in the northern city of Siret, founded between 1354 and 1358 by Sas Vodă as a chapel in the royal court in that city (fig. 7).[10] In the Balkan region, the triconch plan appeared only slightly later, with one of the earliest masonry examples identified as the Church of the Ascension at Ravanica Monastery, founded around 1375 by Prince Lazar (*reg.* 1373-1389) (fig. 8).[11] In Wallachia, on the other hand, the first churches to adopt the triconch plan are the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin at Tismana Monastery, consecrated on 15 August 1378, and the Church of the Trinity at Cozia Monastery, founded between 1387 and 1390. Despite the lack of documentary evidence, the surviving monuments suggest a more direct point of contact between Moldavia and the Byzantine world that would have contributed to the adoption and transformation of the triconch plan in the Moldavian context. This may not have been the case for Wallachia, however, where the first iteration of the triconch plan is preserved in a monument built slightly later than the church at Ravanica Monastery.

Fig.7. Church of the Holy Trinity, Siret, founded 1354-1358 (source: author)

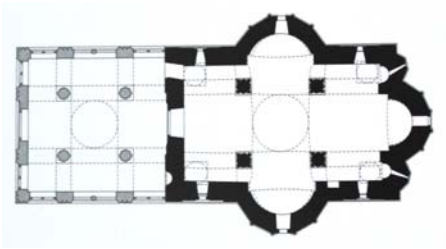

Fig.8. Ground plan, Church of the Ascension, Ravanica Monastery, Serbia, founded c. 1375 (source: Slobodan Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans from Diocletian to Süleyman the Magnificent,* Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2010, p. 680, fig. 792/A)

In the context of Moldavian monastic church architecture, the triconch plan underwent certain transformations during the second half of the fifteenth century and the first decades of the sixteenth century. In the later churches it was no longer a triconch plan *per se*, being elongated towards the west by the addition of various other rooms. In essence, it was transformed into the so-called *elongated triconch plan* with the addition of the burial chamber, pronaos, and exonarthex, which extended the church significantly towards the west. The westward elongation of the monastic churches of Moldavia has neither direct Byzantine nor Gothic religious architectural precedents. Dumitru Năstase has suggested that this longitudinal character has secular architectural prototypes as evident in the layout of the fortresses and royal houses found throughout Moldavia during this period.[12]

But it is not only the plan of the Moldavian monastic churches that reinterprets earlier Byzantine examples. The entire monastic

layout does as well. The monasteries founded beginning with the second half of the fifteenth century, as is the case at Moldoviţa, have centralized churches with the ancillary buildings and the fortifications surrounding the church on all sides set in a square or rectangular format (fig. 4). This rectilinear arrangement of the monastic complexes in Moldavia follows the layout of early Byzantine-Orthodox monasteries such as that of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai, founded between 548 and 565 by Emperor Justinian following the death of his wife Theodora, as well as the monasteries from Mount Athos. This particular monastic layout, however, differs from the circular organization found in the Orthodox monasteries of the Balkan regions, as is the case, for example, at Studenica Monastery in Serbia, founded between 1190 and 1196 by Prince Stefan Nemanja (*reg.* 1166-1196) (fig. 9). This observation, in addition to the presence of the triconch plan in Moldavia prior to this form appearing in the religious architecture of the Balkan regions, suggests that there existed, in fact, direct influences between the monastic communities of Moldavia and those of the Byzantine world, without necessarily there being a mediation of artistic and architectural forms through the Balkan Peninsula. What I am suggesting here diverges from what scholars have proposed and argued for in the past, namely, that architectural features of a Byzantine character arrived in Moldavia mediated through regions of the Balkans, and in particular through Serbia.[13]

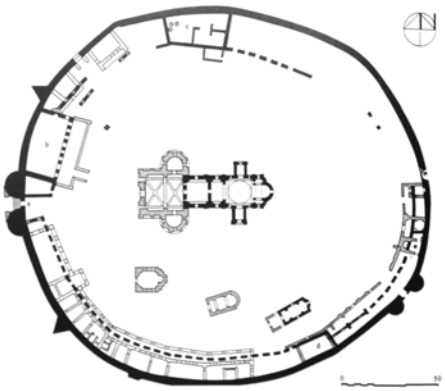

Fig.9. Ground plan of monastic complex, Studenica Monastery, Serbia (source: Slobodan Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans from Diocletian to Süleyman the Magnificent,* Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2010, p. 488, fig. 548)

The question that remains, then, is who and/or what were the agents of transmission and translation of architectural forms from one region to another in these instances? What we do know is that following the collapse of the Eastern Roman Empire to the Ottoman Turks, the Moldavian princes took an interest in Mount Athos in particular—gifting precious objects to and financially supporting the restoration of Athonite monasteries. As a result of these direct contacts, it is possible that traveling monks, artists, and architects facilitated the transfer of ideas and artistic forms between these two Orthodox centers.[14]

Whereas some of the features of the Moldavian monastic churches have Byzantine prototypes, others follow Gothic models predominant in church architecture from western Europe. For one thing, the mode of construction of the monastic churches, using mainly quarried stone, emulates the building techniques found in western Gothic buildings. The large three-tier buttresses, unknown in churches of the Slavic-Byzantine type, have precedents in Gothic churches as well, as is the case, for example, at the Church of Saint Michael from Sopron, Hungary, founded in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. The subdivisions of the roof, evident particularly in the Moldavian royal monastic commissions of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, also present a solution derived from Gothic architecture. Saxon churches from Transylvania, for example, have partitioned roofs with individual sections covering the chancel and the nave separately. The large lancet windows of the exonarthex and the pronaos in the Moldavian monastic churches of the early sixteenth century in particular, as evident at the Church of the Annunciation at Moldoviţa Monastery, with trefoil cups surmounting quatrefoil oculi tracery in the upper sections are also of a Gothic type (fig. 10).[15]

A distinctive feature of the Moldavian churches from this period is their murals: hundreds of brightly colored scenes arranged in multiple registers wrap around the whole of the church both inside and outside. Christological, Mariological, and hagiographical stories painted in a Byzantine style and iconography appear alongside full-length depictions of saints, prophets, and angels. Interspersed with the religious images are historical scenes as well, such as the famous

attack on Constantinople in 626 by the Avars and the Persians (fig. 3), and the *Cavalcade of the Holy Cross,* an event that marked Emperor Constantin I's conversion to Christianity following his defeat of Emperor Maxentius and his armies at the battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312. The iconography of the program and the arrangement of the scenes within the architectural framework in a hierarchical manner have precedents in Byzantine churches.

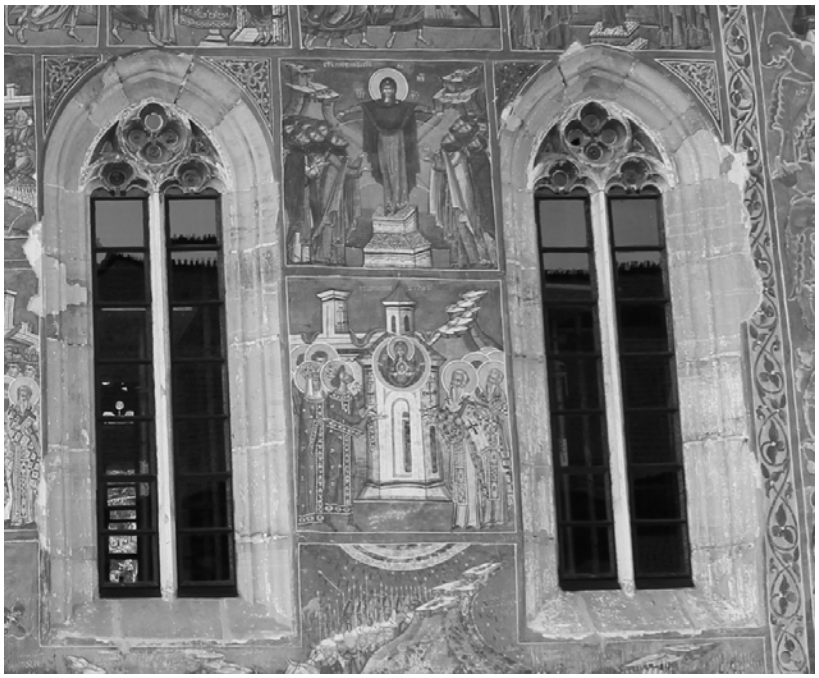

Fig.10. Pronaos windows, south façade, Church of the Annunciation, Moldoviţa Monastery (source: author)

The interiors of the pronaos and burial chamber are painted with scenes from the lives of saints from the Orthodox calendar year. The interior of the naos displays events from the life of Christ and that of the Virgin Mary, as well as a votive painting on the west wall that usually shows the patron with his immediate family members presenting a model of the church to Christ. The patron saint of the

church is also depicted in this scene, mediating the encounter between the human and the divine. In the dome of the pronaos the Virgin Mary stands in an orans pose. The dome of the naos displays a large image of Christ Pantokrator. In the altar area, the semicircular apse shows the Virgin Mary enthroned with the Christ Child in her lap, while below are prophets and angels and various Eucharistic images drawn from Orthodox iconography.

The exterior of the church is painted with a series of images of saints, apostles, prophets, and martyrs in multiple registers that wrap around the north and south apses of the naos and converge around the central window of the apse. On the south façade are found representations of a historiated *Tree of Jesse* along with an extensive depiction of the *Akathistos Hymn* dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The north façade, usually more deteriorated because of the severe weather conditions of the region, displays scene from the life of the Virgin Mary and that of Christ, as well as moments from the *Teachings of the Apostles.* On the west wall of the church, at the entrance into the pronaos, one encounters an elaborate representation of the *Last Judgment* painted in a style and iconography of a Byzantine character. If the church has an exonarthex, as is the case at the Church of the Annunciation at Moldoviţa Monastery, the west façade displays scenes from *Genesis.* The exterior paintings, on one level, help demarcate the different interior spaces of the church. At the same time, they help teach and prepare the Orthodox faithful for the spiritual journeys that they are to assume upon crossing the threshold and entering the sacred space of the church itself.

## *Conclusion*

The culture and overall character of Moldavia, which contributed to its particular artistic production, has been characterized as "the result of a complex and extensive synthesis of elements pertaining to the Orthodox traditions of Byzantium, Mount Athos, Bulgaria and Serbia, and of Catholic and Protestant elements received via Ragusa, Venice, Hungary, Bohemia and Poland, blended together into an original unity."[16] I would argue, however,

that what we are dealing with in the monastic churches from this region built in the century following the collapse of Byzantium is not so much a synthesis *per se* of these distinct artistic traditions, but rather a readaptation and translation of select elements in order to fulfill certain needs. Distinct, indeed, from the cultures of western Europe and those of the Slavic-Byzantine world, in which the artistic production evolved in a more "homogeneous" fashion and in relation to trends and principles closer to their own, Moldavia, and the rest of the Romanian lands around the Carpathian Mountains, continually found themselves at the "junction, the point of collision of very different civilizations."[17] Therefore, their works are unprecedented in their *modes* of synthesis and translation of disparate elements, and the affinities they share with quite distant and distinct cultures.

The eclecticism embraced in monastic church architecture in Moldavia, however, presents a challenge to conventional notions of a purely regional style. Moreover, it cannot be discussed as a form of hybridity, since a hybrid implies two purities that are mingled, and this is not the case here. A hybrid, rather, may be "the sign of an attempt to reconcile forms of cultural exchange, with attendant aspects of both assimilation and resistance," as art historian Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann has explained it.[18] In this regard, the phenomenon of cultural contact and translation is a give and take, with elements and meanings accepted, rejected, and transformed dependent upon the new context and the motivations of the patrons, the artists, and the larger communities.

Although it is important to consider the aspects of Moldavian monastic church architecture from this period and their affinities with earlier Byzantine, Slavic, and Gothic traditions, among others, the element of the local should not be forgotten.[19] Synthesis and translations between old and new, domestic and foreign, aristocratic and popular traditions all come into play in the development of what we may refer to as a Moldavian type of monastic architecture that prevailed in the century following the destruction of Constantinople—a type of monument that presents a particular kind of response to the crisis of 1453 and to the emergence of the Ottoman Empire as a dominant force in south-eastern Europe, the eastern Mediterranean, and the western Black Sea regions at this time. I

would not venture to call this type of religious architecture, however, part of some abstract concept of a "Moldavian School" of architecture at this moment, as scholars have done in the past.[20] This would be problematic and narrow from a methodological standpoint, as well as tied to nationalist political sentiments and ambitions.

Despite the eclectic character of the Moldavian monastic churches from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the processes of transmission of artistic and architectural ideas and stylistic variants from disparate places are still elusive. Perhaps masons and artists from different centers and working within distinct building traditions came to Moldavia in the aftermath of the collapse of the great Byzantine Empire and contributed to the building of the churches.[21] If this were the case, then, their implementation of new skills, ideas, and techniques, alongside those developed locally, led to particular building standards to evolve. Changing patterns of patronage that emerged in the new socio-political atmosphere of the post-1453 world could have also contributed to the distinctive character of these monuments. Despite the lack of extensive archival documentation on the builders and artists who worked on these churches, and the nature of their patronage, a careful examination of the buildings themselves can glean insight into their builders and patrons alike, as well as the cultural contacts that occurred in this region at this time. The lack of written sources should not preclude learning about these issues because, in fact, as the art historian Slobodan Ćurčić has argued in regard to Serbian architecture, which poses similar problems, there is always "documentary value of the physical evidence at hand."[22]

NOTES:

A version of this article was presented in the session titled "Romanian Medievalia: The Center with No Periphery: In Memory of Lucian Roşu" organized by the Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality in New York at the 48th International Congress on Medieval Studies held at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, MI. I thank Dr. Theodor Damian for organizing this session. Certain aspects of this material have also been presented at the Medieval Academy of America and the Medieval

Association of the Pacific Annual Meeting held at the University of California, Los Angeles (April 10-12, 2014), in a session titled "Architecture and Encounter". At both venues, I thank the audience members for their thoughtful questions and feedback. Their insightful comments and observations have further informed my examination of this material.
Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

[1] Scholars have identified to date thirty-four religious monuments commissioned by Stephen the Great during his reign. Twenty of the churches are securely attributed to him based on their extant dedicatory inscriptions. These include: the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin at Putna Monastery, the Church of the Holy Cross in Pătrăuţi, the Church of Saint Procopius in Milişăuţi, the Church of Saint Elijah in Suceava, the Church of Saint George at Voroneţ Monastery, the Church of the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist in Vaslui, the Church of Saint Precista in Bacău, the Church of Saint Nicholas in Iaşi, the Church of Saint George in Hârlău, the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Borzeşti, the Church of Saint Nicholas in Dorohoi, the Church of Saint Peter and Paul in Huşi, the Church of Saint Nicholas at Popăuţi Monastery, the Church of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel at Războieni Monastery, the Church of the Birth of the Virgin at Tazlău Monastery, the Church of the Ascension at Neamţ Monastery, the Church of Saint John the Baptist in Piatra Neamţ, the Church of the Rising of the True Cross in Volovăţ, the Church of the Descent of the Holy Spirit at Dobrovăţ Monastery, and the Church of the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist in Reuşeni. For the remainder of the monuments the dedicatory inscriptions no longer survive but they are attributed to Prince Stephen based on local oral traditions: the two early churches dedicated to Saint Nicholas at Probota Monastery, the Church of Saint Demetrius at Pângăraţi Monastery, the Church of Saint George in Baia, the Church of Saint Parascheva in Cotnari, the Church of Saint Parascheva in Ştefăneşti, the Church of Saints Michael and Gabriel in Scânteia, the Church of Saint Parascheva in Râmnicu Sărat, the Church of Saint Parascheva in Feleac, the church from Vad Monastery, the church from Floreşti, the church from Târgu-Frumos, the church discovered near the Şipot River close to the royal court in Suceava, the chapel of Saint John the New from the tower at Bistriţa Monastery, and the chapel from Hotin Fortress.

[2] During his two reigns, Prince Peter commissioned the construction, painting, and restoration of thirteen churches in Moldavia. These include:

the first church at Agapia Monastery that unfortunately no longer survives (built), the Church of the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist in Arbore (restored), the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Baia (built), the Church of Saint Nicholas in Bălineşti (restored), the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin at Bistriţa Monastery (built), the Church of the Descent of the Holy Spirit at Dobrovăţ Monastery (restored), the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin at Humor Monastery (built), the Church of the Annunciation at Moldoviţa Monastery (built), the Church of Saint Nicholas at Pobrata Monastery (built), the Church of Saint Nicholas at Râşca Monastery (built), the Church of Saint Demetrius in Suceava (built), the Church of Saint George at the Monastery of Saint John the New in Suceava (restored), and the Church of Saint George at Voroneţ Monastery (restored).

[3] The scene of the *Siege of Constantinople* is painted on the south façades of these Moldavian churches: the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Baia, the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin at Humor Monastery, the Church of the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist in Arbore, the Church of Saint George at the Monastery of Saint John the New in Suceava, the Church of Saint Nicholas at Probota Monastery, the Church of Saint Demetrius in Suceava, and the Church of the Annunciation at Moldoviţa Monastery, which displays the most elaborate and best preserved example of this scene.

[4] *Documente străine despre români,* Direcţia Generală a Arhivelor Statului din Republica Socialistă Română, Bucharest, 1979, pp. 56-58. The Romanian translation was reproduced after Ioan Bogdan, *Documentele lui Ştefan cel Mare,* Comisia Istorică, Bucharest, 1913, II, p. 319. This letter survives in three copies in the Italian language. Two are in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan, and one in the Biblioteca Marciana, Venice.

[5] "…s-a putut caracteriza biserica moldovenească ca fiind un plan bizantin executat cu mâini gotice şi după principii în parte gotice." Gheorghe Balş, *Bisericile lui Ştefan cel Mare,* Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1926, p. 14.

[6] The following publications provide an introduction to the monastery and its history: Alexandru Bocănețu, *Mănăstirea Moldoviţa,* Institutul de Arte Grafice și Editură „Glasul Bucovinei," Cernăuți, 1933; Ştefan Balş and Corina Nicolescu, *Mănăstirea Moldoviţa,* Editura Tehnica, Bucharest, 1958; Teodor Bălan, "Mănăstirea lui Alexandru cel Bun de la Moldoviţa," in *Mitropolia Moldovei şi Sucevei,* 39, no. 7-8 (1963), pp. 418-427; Scarlat Porcescu, "Mănăstirea Moldoviţa," in *Monumente istorice bisericeşti din*

*Mitropolia Moldovei şi Sucevei,* Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei şi Sucevei, Iaşi, 1974, pp. 183-190; Corina Nicolescu, *Moldoviţa*, trans. by Elisa Madolciu, Editura Sport-Turism, Bucharest, 1978; Iuliana Marcel Ciobataru, "Egumenii Mănăstirii Moldoviţa în secolul al XV-lea," in *Research and Science Today* (revista ştiinţifică studenţească, Universitatea "Constantin Brâncuşi" din Târgu-Jiu) 2 (2011), pp. 52-62.

[7] The dedicatory inscription of the Church of the Annunciation at Moldoviţa Monastery, written in Old Church Slavonic, is found on the south façade of the church to the left of the entrance. It reads: "With the Father's will, the Son's help and the Holy Spirit's blessing, the believer and worshipper of Christ, Io, Peter Voievod, through God's will Prince of Moldavia, son of Stephen Voievod the Old, built this church dedicated to the Annunciation of our holy Theotokos and forever the Virgin Mary, in the year 7040 [1532], and it was consecrated on September 8, under Abbot Ştefan, and it was painted in 7045 [1537] under Abbot Avramie."

[8] Pavlos Mylonas, "Le plan initial du catholicon de la Grande-Lavra au Mont Athos et la genèse du type du catholicon athonite," in *Cahiers archéologiques* 32 (1984), pp. 89-112. His architectural drawings of the religious buildings on Mount Athos are accessible through the website of the Neohellenic Architecture Archives: http://www.benaki.gr/eMP-Architecture/eMuseumPlus (accessed on 12 April 2013). Robert G. Ousterhout supported Mylonas's argument in his study *Master Builders of Byzantium,* Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1999; reprinted by the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2008, esp. pp. 92-93.

[9] Ousterhout, *Master Builders of Byzantium,* p. 18.

[10] The Church of Saint John from Siret follows a similar plan as the Church of the Holy Trinity in the same city. However, while Petre Constantinescu maintains that the church is contemporary with the Church of the Holy Trinity, Gheorghe Balş claims that the church dates to the eighteenth century. See Petre Constantinescu, "Narthexul în artele bizantine, sud slave şi române," Ph.D. dissertation (Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iaşi, 1926), pp. 226-227; Gheorghe Balş, *Începuturile arhitecturii bisericeşti din Moldova,* Cultura Naţională, Bucharest, 1925, p. 5.

[11] Slobodan Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans from Diocletian to Süleyman the Magnificent,* Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2010, p. 674.

[12] Dumitru Năstase, "Despre spaţiul funerar în arhitectura moldovenească," in *Studii şi Cercetări de Istoria Artei: Seria Artă Plastică* 14, no. 2 (1967), pp. 205-207.

[13] For these views, see especially: Gheorghe Balş, "Influence du plan serbe sur le plan des églises roumaines," in *L'art byzantin chez les slaves. Les Balkans. Premier recueil dédié à la mémoire de Theodore Uspenskij,* P. Geuthner, Paris, 1930, pp. 277-294; Tereza Sinigalia, "L'église de l'ascension du monastère du Neamţ et le problème de l'espace funéraire en Moldavie aux XVe—XVIe siècles," in *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art. Série Beaux-Arts* 25 (1998), pp. 19-32; Horia Teodoru, "Contribuții la studiul originii și evoluției planului triconc în Moldova," in *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice* 31, no. 1 (1970), pp. 31-33.

[14] Relevant studies on the contacts between the Romanian lands and the monasteries on Mount Athos include: Nicolae Iorga, "Le Mont Athos et les Pays roumains," in *Bulletin de la Section historique de l'Académie roumaine* 2 (1914), pp. 149-213; idem, *Portretele domnilor noştri de la Muntele Athos,* Editura Cultura Noastră, Bucharest, 1928; idem, "Daniile româneşti la Muntele Athos," in *Revista istorică* 19 (1933), pp. 19-21; Teodor Bodogae, *Ajutoarele româneşti la mănăstirile din Sfântul Munte Athos,* Tipografia Arhidiecezana, Sibiu, 1941; Damian P. Bogdan, "Despre daniile româneşti la Athos," in *Arhiva Românească* 6 (1941), pp. 263-309; Radu Creţeanu, "Traditions de famille dans les donations roumaines au Mont Athos," in *Etudes byzantines et post-byzantines* 1 (1979), pp. 135-151; Virgil Cândea, and Constantin Simionescu, *Witnesses to the Romanian Presence in Mount Athos,* Editura Sport-Turism, Bucharest, 1979; Petre Năsturel, *Le Mont Athos et les Roumains. Recherches sur leurs relations du milieu du XVIe siècle à 1654,* Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, Rome, 1986; Virgil Cândea, "L'Athos et les Roumains," in *Mount Athos and the Byzantine Monasticism*, ed. by Anthony Bryer and Mary Cunningham, Variorum, Hampshire, 1996.

[15] The Graphic Collection of the Akademie der Bildenden Kunste in Vienna preserves comparable examples. See Johann Josef Böker, *Architektur der Gotik: Bestandskatalog der weltgrößten Sammlung an gotischen Baurissen (Legat Franz Jäger) im Kupferstichkabinett der Akademie der bildenden*

*Künste Wien,* Verlag Anton Pustet, Vienna, 2005. A few relevant examples include: 16.996 – The elevation drawing of a portal frame with uninterrupted profiles and a tympanum, southern German, 1446 (p. 307); 17.004 and 17.004v – Drawings of tracery windows, c. 1465, attributed to Laurenz Spenning (p. 316); 17.016 – The drawing of a four-part tracery with trilobes and quadrilobes connected, as executed (with slight variations) at Spišský Štvrtok, attributed to Laurenz Spenning, c. 1456 (p. 325); 17.026 – The elevation drawing of the porch of the former chapel of Saint Maria Magdalene, situated south-west of Saint Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, c. 1460 by Laurenz Spenning (p. 337).

[16] Emil Turdeanu, *Oameni și cărți de altădată,* Editura Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1997, I, p. 170. "Cultura românească în forma slavă a fost rezultatul unei sinteze ample și de lungă durată, în care elementele împrumutate din tradiția ortodoxă a Bizanțului, a Muntelui Athos, a Bulgariei, a Serbiei s-au întîlnit cu elemente ale civilizației catolice și reformate primite prin Raguza, Veneția, Ungaria, Boemia și Polonia și au fuzionat într-o unitate originală."

[17] Balş, *Bisericile lui Ştefan cel Mare*, p. 11. "...țările noastre, spre deosebire de cele apusene unde artele au evoluat într-un mediu mai omogen și în relație cu regiuni de tendință și principii apropriate de ale lor, tările noastre se găsesc la confluența, la punctul de ciocnire al unor civilizații foarte diferite."

[18] Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister, and City: The Art and Culture of Central Europe, 1450-1800,* Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1995, p. 114.

[19] Corina Nicolescu discusses the element of the "local" in relation to the artistic production of Moldavia at the turn of the sixteenth century, during the last third of Stephen the Great's reign. "Procesul de evoluție a artei moldovenești…avea să ducă la rezultate noi în ultima treime a domniei lui Ștefan cel Mare. De-abia atunci atinge maximul de dezvoltare în arhitectură, pictură și broderie adevăratul stil moldovenesc, stil ale cărui caractere sunt atât de indisolubil legate de spiritul local...[...] Mai presus de toate, noul proces artistic și cultural se caracterizează prin puterea sa de sinteză, prin îmbinarea dintre vechi și nou, dintre autohton și străin, dintre tradiția aristocratică și inspirația populară." Corina Nicolescu, "Arta în epoca lui Ștefan cel Mare. Antecedentele și etapele de dezvoltare ale artei moldovenești din epoca lui Ștefan cel Mare," in *Cultura moldovenească în*

*timpul lui Ştefan cel Mare*, ed. by Mihai Berza, Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, Bucharest, 1964, p. 362.

[20] Paul Henry, *Les églises de la Moldavie du nord des origines à la fin du XVIe siècle. Architecture et peinture*, Librairie Ernest Leroux, Paris, 1930, esp. Chapter 2 "Pătrăuţi et les origines de L'école architecturale Moldave du XVe siècle." The concept of a "Moldavian School" would be just as problematic as the one Gabriel Millet coined in relation to fresco painting in Macedonia—"The Macedonian school". This concept paralleled his definition of Byzantine architecture in Greece, which he termed "l'école grecque." Gabriel Millet, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'évangile aux XIVe, XVe et XVIe siècles, d'après les monuments de Mistra, de la Macédoine et du Mont-Athos,* Fontemoing, Paris, 1916, pp. 625-690. "The Macedonian school," open to influences from the "Orient and Italy," is contrasted here to the more conservative "Cretan school." Slobodan Ćurčić takes up this issue in regard to Serbian architecture in his article "The Role of Late Byzantine Thessalonike in Church Architecture in the Balkans," in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 57, Symposium on Late Byzantine Thessalonike, 2003, pp. 65-84. Millet coined a similar concept for the ecclesiastical architecture of Serbia from c. 1375 and c. 1450, which he dubbed "The Morava School" ("L'École de Morava") because of a particular stylistic unity that he observed among the monuments from this period. Gabriel Millet, *L'ancien art serbe: les églises,* E. de Boccard, Paris, 1919, esp. Chapter 3 "L'école de Morava". See also Vladislav Ristić, *Moravska arhitektura,* Narodni Muzej, Kruševac, 1996, and a recent critical reassessment of the problem by Jelena Trkulja, "Aesthetics and Symbolism of Late Byzantine Church Façades, 1204-1453," Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2004.

[21] With regard to ecclesiastical architecture in Serbia, Slobodan Ćurčić has argued that "…workshop skills acquired by young apprentices on major building sites, supervised by Byzantine master builders, became the means of spreading Byzantine architectural styles within Serbia." Ćurčić, "The Role of Late Byzantine Thessalonike in Church Architecture in the Balkans," pp. 78-79. See also idem, "Two Examples of Local Building Workshops in Fourteenth-Century Serbia," in *Zograf* 7, 1977, pp. 45-51.

[22] Ćurčić, "The Role of Late Byzantine Thessalonike in Church Architecture in the Balkans," p. 84.

PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE
49TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON MEDIEVAL
STUDIES
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY,
KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN, USA
MAY 8-11, 2014

# Managing Change in Gregory of Nazianzus' Poetry

THEODOR DAMIAN

*Preliminaries*

Change is a constant and common phenomenon in life. But as common as it is, very often it is hard to manage, even in cases where it is anticipated, even desired and all the more difficult when it comes by surprise and in ways that have a serious impact on our lives, when it affects our habitual way of being. Many times change comes as a novelty against our comfortable status quo, as a threat, because being unpredictable it brings us into new territory where anything can happen, where we are not in control. Change implies departure from the original nature, transition, transformation, loss and gain, it brings about delight, joy, happiness and well-being just as it brings about frustration sadness, anger and suffering.

If Plato is right when he says that man is a mass of conflicting desire, then in such an existential condition change is at home. But even in such a condition, some people seem to master their life pretty well, as they conscientize their needs and their fight and go through fire to reach their goals, and others, while being aware of their needs, their goals, succumb to circumstances that put expected or unexpected pressure on their lives and manners of decision making.

In some other cases people do not know what they really want and will be blown by the wind of their fate or destiny in all directions, happy just to be able to stay afloat and not to be swallowed up by the deep. Some are confused about their real

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vocation and try to navigate between where they are and where they think they are meant to be, and finally others might be caught between two equally strong vocations and try to navigate between the two. This is a life where one is not only constantly subject to change, like in the other cases as well, but also where one might not feel really accomplished in either of the two.

It seems that Gregory of Nazianzus belonged to this last category. He had the fire of the desert in his heart and the light of the intellectual understanding in his mind. He loved to live a solitary life dedicated to God alone, a philosophical life that implied detachment, but he also loved philosophy in the general sense of the term – he considered himself a philosopher besides knowing he was a theologian – and conscientized the need to put his talent, capacity, and education in the service of the Church.

Very often when one is in such a situation one tries to do two different things at the same time and does not really succeed in any of the two. This is not the case of Gregory. However, by reading his life carefully, based on his own confession, one might come to the conclusion that while he was a great theologian and a dedicated mystic, if he would have had only one direction, say that of theology, he would have written many more theological works than he did, and perhaps would have been a great and long serving Patriarch on the high see of the Christian world, Constantinople.

Or , on the other hand, had he consecrated his life uniquely to the hesychia, he might have become a great desert father who would have made history, or one who, maybe even greater, would not have made any history but been known only by God alone.

### *Dilemmas*

Specific to Gregory is the fact that he tried to walk the fine line between both vocations, yet being in constant pain and feeling miserable when following one, any of the two, and missing the other.

Even if the middle way between the two vocations did not really make him happy, it seems to have been the solution to his

dilemma when nothing else was better. Stelianos Papadopoulos describes this struggle:

> He [Gregory] would not renounce the hesychia and its divine gifts, but he could not deny the fight for theology, either. Hesychia was charming him. Theology was a holy duty. He struggled a lot with himself and his God, and then, he found the solution: the middle way. Between those who do not marry and those who marry, between ascetics and Christians living in the world. The first ones withdraw from the world, live a rigid and special life worrying about nothing but the soul, they are serene and meditative. The others live a regular life, being part of the world's troubles, losing their tranquility and worrying about the others' souls. The first ones, with the vision of God, the others, people of concrete deeds. Gregory, following the middle way, always tried to take from hesychasts the highest virtues, and from the people of the deed, love. This is how he solved his great problem: staying celibate, but working in the world, being a pastor and theologizing.[1]

### *Athens*

Also, when he was in Athens, for about ten years, with Basil, while enjoying his academic activities and accomplishments, and apparently being "idyllically happy" there, as John McGuckin writes,[2] he nevertheless longed for an ascetical life of detachment which he called philosophical.[3] However, the dilemma related to which way to choose, even if diminished after Basil's departure from Athens when Gregory also strengthened his desire to leave, tormented his mind, as he testifies in his long autobiographical poem:

"I was looking for a solution, the best of the best;" on the one hand he wanted to throw "into the abyss the things of the flesh," which means to embrace a life of solitude, but, on the other, he says, "I was possessed by the desire for divine books and by the light of the Spirit that resided in the contemplation of the Word, a thing which cannot be accomplished in the desert with its calm," that is, he wanted to theologize. Even when he was trying to discern God's ways, he writes, "It was not easy for me to find the one which was really the best. For different reasons each one seemed to be good or

bad, as it often happens when one has to do something;" consequently, many times he had to "change direction."[4]

### *Ordination to priesthood*

Another big dilemma in Gregory's life that illustrates a radical change he had to go through is related to his ordination as a priest so that he could help his father, Gregory also, in the pastoral work in Nazianzus, in 361. While he was thinking of the usefulness of an active life, like that of pastoral care and leadership in a congregation, and the appreciation one has to have for such work ("I was thinking, anyway, that one has to have good feelings for people of action who received from God the honor to lead people in the accomplishment of divine rights"),[5] he strongly inclined towards a contemplative lifestyle. He wanted to be a monk, not a priest.[6]

However, after much struggle, he had to obey his father's will and strong insistencies and accept, embittered heart, the ordination to the priesthood, out of respect for his father, but in particular, as we read in a poem about his own troubles, out of the great pity he had for him:

> The affection I had for my parents who were dear to me retained me, bringing me like a burden to the earth or, rather, not so much the affection as this pity which tears everything down […] pity which is the sweetest among all passions, pity for the white hair of divine aspect, pity for their sadness, pity for the loss of their children…[7]

It is also interesting to see how Gregory understood the respect due to somebody combined with that person's moral authority as equal to tyranny, as he bitterly complains:

> My father, who after all knew my desires very well, allowed himself to be caught in this, I don't know how, by his paternal love, - and it's a fearsome thing when love is joined by power. He wanted to submit me to the influence of the Spirit and honor me with the best he had: he made me obey and forced me to take the second place next to him. This tyranny (I can't help, even now, using this word, and my divine Spirit forgive me for such feelings), this tyranny caused me

> such suffering that I suddenly left everything, friends, parents, birthplace, kin, and, just as a bull bitten by horsefly, ran away to the Pontus in order to relieve my pain…[8]

Once in Pontus, finding refuge with Basil, his admired friend, Gregory changed his mind and, again, at the constant and strong supplications and insistencies of his father and also afraid of some kind of malediction, returned home:

> While with his help [Basil's] I was trying to calm my pain, my excellent father, overwhelmed by age, vividly wanting to see his son, increased his supplications in order to make me return and honor his last days; and as my pain diminished over time, I ran again jumping into the abyss. I should have never done it, but I was afraid of the screams and indignation of my father, I was afraid to see his love change into curse, the effect of a simple irritated affection.[9]

Apparently Gregory came to terms with his condition, helping where he was supposed to help and doing what he was supposed to do, for about ten years during which he traveled several times to Pontus to see Basil, work with him and help him, in particular when his fried came in conflict with Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea.

### *Ordination as bishop*

A tragedy happened in 372 when Basil, now bishop of the northern part of the province of Cappadocia, in competition with the bishop of the southern part over episcopal jurisdictions, ordained Gregory as bishop of Sasima, not far from Nazianzus, in the south, in order to increase the number of bishops in the south who were faithful to him.

That ordination, which Gregory considered a gross manipulation by his father and Basil, and which filled his heart with disillusionment, pain and anger, represented a great, substantial and undesired change in the theologian's life. This hierarchical move, while abrupt and unwelcome, also put him in a dilemma in the sense that he had to finally accept arguments from both his father and Basil

that it was the work of the Spirit in the service of the Church, that the Church was in a time of trouble and need and that he was right there, endowed by God with many gifts that had to be put at work there and then.

Gregory's rage against his ordination is directed first of all against Basil, his most trusted friend, whom he did not necessarily feel obliged to obey in the same way as his father (this is the father's extenuating circumstance here), even if in this case Basil acted like a father, and an even more rigid one than Gregory's biological parent. With bitterness and irony in his autobiographical poem Gregory writes:

> We lived to see a day when we saw coming to us the most loved of all my friends, Basil… Ah! What can I say! Yes, I will say it anyway! … And this friend acted just like my father did, but much stricter though! Before my father, in fact, I had to cede when he tyrannized me, but before Basil I was not obliged to do the same, due to a friendship which caused my unhappiness instead of liberating me from my problems […] do I have to accuse you, the best of all men, and the pride that you got from becoming a bishop? For all the rest, for this eloquence that we studied together, you would probably not have deemed yourself better than me. No, my friend, you did not believe this then, and if you would, we could, in order to stop this kind of idea, find an impartial judge among people who knew us well. What happened, then, to you? How could you suddenly reject me? Oh, let this law of friendship which honors friends in this particular way disappear from this world! Yesterday we used to be lions and today, look at me, I am reduced to the condition of a monkey; and even to be a lion was not enough for you! And even if you behaved this way towards all your friends, you should have - and I say it loudly - you should have made an exception for me, because you preferred me among them all when you were not yet elevated above the clouds, when you did not see everything as being at your feet.[10]

What hurt Gregory even more was the fact that Basil did to him the inconceivable: he lied to him: "Basil, who for all the rest was the man farthest from lying, lied to me."[11]

Gregory's rage was further increased by the pitiful condition of the place where he was supposed to be a bishop, Sasima. We read a description of it in the same poem:

> There is a relay on the big way of Cappadocia, at the junction of three roads; there is no water there at all, no greenery, nothing that pleases a free man; it is a small narrow village, terribly hateful; all one finds there is just dust and noise, chariots, laments, cries, tax collectors, tools of torture, chains; in fact, the inhabitants are nothing but strangers travelling through and vagabonds: this is my Church of Sasima. This is where Basil placed me while he himself lived in a place with fifty auxiliary bishops! […] Someone tell me, in God's name, what was I supposed to do?? Was I supposed to be happy? […] Not finding a place to shelter my old age? Always being violently chased away from the roof that protected me? Not even having bread to share with a guest? Being charged, in my poverty, to lead a poor people? […] Ah, ferocious beasts, will you not receive me? With you, I think, I could find more fidelity.[12]

In these very special circumstances, under great pressure from the most influential persons in his life, his father and his best friend Basil, Gregory accepted the ordination. He does explain though in the poem on his own life that he did it not so much for Basil, as for his father whose irritation he could not take. Gregory the Elder apparently made good use of arguments related to his age, his weariness, his illnesses, not forgetting to use sweet and emotional language in order to convince his son:

> It's a father who supplicates you, my very dear son, an old father in front of a young man, a master in front of his servant according to nature […] it's not gold that I am asking from you […] I am inviting you to place yourself next to Aaron and Samuel and to make of yourself a precious help in God's eyes. The One who brought you in the world possesses you; do not dishonor me, my child, so you can find an appropriate reception by the Unique Father […] Give me this grace, give it to me, or else, let someone else bury me.[13]

To these requests and threats Gregory could not but cede. However, as he testifies, he never did anything in that Church of

Sasima, not even a single service in order to pray there with the people.[14]

### *Constantinople*

The next big change in the life of Gregory the Theologian was his promotion to the patriarchal see of Constantinople in 380, endorsed by the emperor Theodosius, including his position of leader of the Second Ecumenical Council in 381, after the death of Meletius, which proved to be an extremely difficult task. The fact that he accepted this change was a sign that he understood his calling and mission in that place and moment. We read in his confessions:

> It was to them [people in Constantinople] that, due to the fact that we enjoyed a certain reputation in God, due to our life and doctrine […] the grace of the Spirit sent us [he is using the majestic plural here] at the request of numerous priests and believers, in order to help people and assist with the doctrine.[15]

However he didn't like it more than the solitude he was longing for. Proof is that as soon as he felt overwhelmed by the situation that implied administration, controversy, diplomacy, and fight, he just resigned and left.

He left considering himself like prophet Jonas who had to jump off the board of his ship, as a sacrifice of himself, in order for everybody else there to be saved, even if, in Gregory's case, according to his testimony, he did not feel responsible for the storm.[16] He gave those gathered at the synod a farewell speech, emphasizing that there was no fault on his part for all the troubles, controversies, lack of discipline, faith and animosities there and that his own debt that he must pay is death, a debt that belongs to God alone. After saying all that, he just went to the door and left for good, being torn, however, between joy and a certain sadness.[17]

*Conclusion*

These are the few main phases of Gregory's life where change, even radical, indelibly affected his life.

How was Gregory managing change in his life? Apparently, not so well at all. Except for the changes related to his education, in Athens in particular, all other phases that implied both ordinations, as priest and bishop, and then, the promotion to the see of Patriarch of Constantinople and president of the Second Ecumenical Council indicate that he was not ready for change, and he did not find the best way to cope with it. That is why, maybe, in his poetry there are so many places where he victimizes and underestimates himself, he complains, protests, and expresses his unhappiness and regret, as he constantly invokes "my pains," "my sufferings," "my ills," "my failures," and blames himself bitterly: "I am evil," "weep, weep, sinner," "the serpent apprehended me again," "I am terrified," "I am in torment here," etc.

In other words, from this point of view (of the suffering), he is ready for change, and wants it, yet in such a situation one needs a strategy for survival which in Gregory's case is God alone, the only way. His confidence in God was unbreakable, his love inextinguishable, his faith unshakeable. For the Theologian, God was the reason why things happened the way they did, and He was the escape and the hope in time of trouble. Here are some examples of his recourse to God:

"I look to you, o Christ, more than to the hardships I endure" *(Lament to Christ);* "Blessed One, look at my poor body" *(Prayer to Christ),*[18] "Christ, may you bear me, your servant, as you wish" *(Against the deceiver in time of sickness),* "Save me, o Christ, my king" *(Lament for his soul).*[19]

* * *

Gregory of Nazianzus was a very unique and interesting type of personality. While apparently not being able to reconcile his two main inclinations, that for public service and that for solitude, in the sense that he could have done much more in each, had he had only

one of them, however he did reconcile them in his own way. While in public service he often took retreats to satisfy his thirst for solitude and maybe to regenerate and renew his energy, and on the other hand, while in solitude he did not stop writing, which in a different way, was a public service, too.

Gregory of Nazianzus was a man like from a different world living in this one here. He was like not belonging here, yet he felt he belonged to God to whom he was attached with burning love. He might have not managed very well the changes that he had to face in his life, but that fact itself produced an intellectual, literary heritage without which Gregory would not have been who he in fact was, and without which we would be poorer.

NOTES:

[1] Stelianos Papadopoulos, *Vulturul rănit: Viaţa Sfântului Grigorie Teologul [The Wounded Eagle: The Life of Saint Gregory the Theologian],* Translation from Greek into Romanian by Constantin Coman and Cornel Coman, Ed. Bizantina, Bucuresti, 2002, p. 49.
[2] John McGuckin, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography,* St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 2001, p. 76.
[3] *Ibidem,* pp. 78; 80.
[4] Saint Grégoire de Nazianze, *Oeuvres Poétiques, Poems personels,* II, 1, 1-11, text établi par Andre Tuilier et Guillaume Bady, traduction et notes par Jean Bernardi, Ed. Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2004, pp. 69-70.
[5] *Ibidem,* p. 71.
[6] Theodor Damian, "Poetry as Witness, Gregory of Nazianzus's Three Special Vocations: Theology, Mysticism, Poetry," in *Romanian Medievalia,* Vol. XI, The Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality, New York, 2012, p. 8.
[7] Saint Grégoire de Nazianze, *Oeuvres Poétiques,* p. 20.
[8] Saint Grégoire de Nazianze, *Poemes, Lettres, Discours,* Textes choisis et presentés par Edmond Devolder dans la traduction the Paul Gallay, Les Editions du Soleil Levant, Namur, Belgique, 1960, p. 41.
[9] *Ibidem.*
[10] *Ibid.,* pp. 42-43.
[11] *Ibid.,* p. 44.
[12] *Ibid.,* pp. 45-46.

[13] Saint Grégoire de Nazianze, *Oeuvres Poétiques…,* pp. 78-79.
[14] *Ibidem,* p. 79.
[15] *Ibid.,* p. 82.
[16] *Ibid.,* p. 131.
[17] *Ibid.,* p. 132.
[18] *Saint Gregory Nazianzen: Selected Poems,* Third edition, Translated and with an Introduction by John McGuckin, SLG Press, Convent of the Incarnation, Fairacres, Oxford, 1995, p. 16.
[19] St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Poems on Scripture,* Translation and Introduction by Brian Dunkle, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Yonkers, New York, 2012, pp. 147; 151.

# Innovation and Tradition: The Epistolary Style and Theology of Nilus of Ancyra

CLAIR MCPHERSON

> Something made from papyrus, and made up of many sheets of paper, is simply called a "paper,"[1] but when the Emperor has signed it, it is called "an Imperial rescript."[2] You should think of the divine mysteries in the same way: *before the prayer of the Priest and the descent of the Holy Spirit there is plain bread and ordinary wine set before you, but after that terrible epiclesis, and the arrival of that worship-worthy, life-making, and good Spirit,* it is no longer plain bread and ordinary wine placed on that holy table, but the body and priceless undefiled blood of Christ the God of the Cosmos, clean of any and all defilement for those who partake of these in fear and great longing.
>
> (Letter 1.44, *To Philip the Lawyer)*[3]

A *rescript* was, and still is, a legal document signed in response to a specific request made by the addressees. During the Principate, such a rescript was called an *annotation*, but during the Dominate, when the sacrality of the Emperor was emphasized, it became a *Sacra*—literally, "a set of holy words, a sacred letter." At least, it was used that way in the early 5th century, for the paragraph above represents the earliest recorded instance of the word.

All of this—the novel word, the striking analogy, the awareness of context—typify the author of these words, Nilus of Ancyra. In the first place, the thought is ingenious: most people would not think to associate a prayer in the Christian liturgy with the signature on an official document. But once we grasp the connection, it seems natural. Secondly, Nilus has cleverly matched his metaphor

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to his reader: Philip the Lawyer would certainly have been familiar with rescripts, with *Sacra* (unlike such other correspondents of Nilus such as Timothy the Subdeacon). Thirdly, Nilus is taking a teaching that was part of his tradition—namely, that the bread and wine used in Christian worship become the Body and Blood of Christ—and augmenting it in a clever and meaningful way.

In his treatise *On Holy* Poverty, Nilus himself compared Tradition, *Paradosis*, which for many people is a kind of chain to bind the present to the past, to the process of a relay race: the baton must be handed along, the runners must stay within their lanes, but the motion is forever forward. The next runner in the series always covers new ground.

In his principal authentic writings—the treatises *On Monastic Ascesis, On Holy Poverty, On Monastic Excellence*, a *Commentary on the Song of* Songs, and a vast collection of letters—Nilus emerges as an ascetic and teacher of spirituality who creatively adapts the teachings of his predecessors Athanasius and Evagrius to his new and different circumstances; a theologian who advances Nicene doctrine imaginatively into new and daring territory; and as a stylist in the eloquent tradition of Gregory Nazianzen and John Chrysostom who has found his own witty and effective voice.

In short, Nilus is eminently worthy of our attention because he embodies his own precept: he honors tradition by developing it, by passing it along, by, indeed, covering new ground.

At this point, you may well be asking yourself a certain legitimate question: if Nilus has so much to offer, why have I not heard of him before? Or, why do I remember the name in a dismissive footnote in the New Catholic Encyclopedia, or one of John McGuckin's reference works, or the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, or Quasten's *Patrology*?

Because until very recently, Nilus had escaped our attention. The only significant scholarship directed at Nilus in the modern era was negative - literally negative, a process of subtracting from the treatises, sermons, and letters traditionally attributed to Nilus those which now for stylistic, historical, and above all manuscript evidence have been assigned to other writers, Evagrios Pontikos especially. Nilus, scholars realized, had been used as a pseudonymous shield for

Evagrius when the latter came under suspicion of Origenism; Nilus had no such reputation, was indeed widely respected by all sorts and conditions, and provided therefore a convenient means for Evagrius' admirers to preserve his writings.

That they did so obviously was a good thing in itself; several key treatises in the entire volume of the Patrologia Greaca assigned to Nilus are now considered important works of the earlier ascetic theologian. Nilus' letters are another matter—generally considered largely authentic, they have nevertheless been shuffled, divided, and interpolated in the process of tradition; scholarship is in process of sifting them and sorting them out.

Nilus' life is almost entirely unknown. The Saint's Life that replaces history by orthodoxy goes something like this:

We know him first as a layman, married, with two sons. At this time he was an officer at the Court of Constantinople, and is said to have been one of the Praetorian Prefects, who, according to Diocletian and Constantine's arrangement, were the chief functionaries and heads of all other governors for the four main divisions of the empire. Their authority, however, had already begun to decline by the end of the 4th century.

While St. John Chrysostom was patriarch, before his first exile (398-403), he directed Nilus in the study of Scripture and in works of piety. About the year 390 or perhaps 404, Nilus left his wife and one son and took the other, Theodulos, with him to Mount Sinai to be a monk. They lived here till about the year 410 when the Saracens, invading the monastery, took Theodulos prisoner. The Saracens intended to sacrifice him to their gods, but eventually sold him as a slave, so that he came into the possession of the Bishop of Elusa in Palestine. The Bishop received Theodulos among his clergy and made him door-keeper of the church. Meanwhile Nilus, having left his monastery to find his son, at last met him at Elusa. The bishop then ordained them both priests and allowed them to return to Sinai. The mother and the other son had also embraced the religious life in Egypt. St. Nilus was certainly alive till the year 430. It is uncertain how soon after that he died. Some writers believe him to have lived till 451.The Byzantine Menology for his feast (12 November) supposes this. On the other hand, none of his works mentions the

First Council of Ephesus (431) and he seems to know only the beginning of the Nestorian troubles; so we have no evidence of his life later than about 430 (*Orthodox Wiki* article).

Aside from the relationship with Chrysostom, which internal evidence and several letters tends to confirm, this is almost certainly bogus, and its speciousness acted as a second reason to ignore him during the twentieth century.

For Nilus himself, it was assumed, had no intrinsic interest: if he was a shield for Evagrius, he must have been Orthodox and dull. He must have been "the lesser writer." That Nilus might himself be worth study is only just beginning to occur to students of Patristic theology and of Late Antiquity.

In recent years a very few excellent studies have appeared that consider Nilus in his own right and explore the works Nilus scholarly consensus considers authentic. Daniel Caner devotes a substantial chapter in his *Wandering, Begging Monks* (Univ. of California, 2002) to Nilus, who denounced the fraudulent subjects of Caner's study, and Anne Richmond Seville offered a fine study of Nilus' critical use of typology in her 2008 Catholic University of America doctoral dissertation, "Ascetics and Society in Nilus of Ancyra." My own work, a translation of Nilus' authentic works, is intended to continue this recovery of one of the great authentic voices from the fifth century.

Let us consider a few examples of Nilus' epistolary style. Here is an excerpt from his *To the Secretary Hipponicus*:

> People often pray that they may be liberated from their own bodies, as they think of the body as what drives the soul to sin. Better to pray for delivery from their own miserable ways, their pathetic, filth-loving minds.
>
> The hands of Christ highlight the hindrance, abolition, and firm obstruction of the progress of sin, the doing of evil, and all [such] ungodliness. For by the power of the Master's Cross we have thrown away, stepped upon, and deleted the one who defeated and defrauded us—and our sin besides (1.327-328).

First, note Nilus' continuity with Orthodox tradition: Gregory of Nyssa similarly said genuine Christian dualism is never matter versus Spirit, but sin versus the Will of God. "People" seek that liberation for the simple reason that Neoplatonsim was the default ontology of late Antiquity, Christianity notwithstanding.

But note also again Nilus' choice of imagery perfectly appropriate for this correspondent, a secretary: the hands of Christ "highlight" the obstruction of sin, the Cross lets us throw away and delete "the one who defeated and defrauded us"—the alliteration approximating the original.

Now consider this excerpt from his *Letter to Nimertius the Silentiary*:

> Never surrender yourself to giving up anything that supports the act of piety. For by taking a pause, and by sounding the false notes of leisure, you are being put into a very bad position. But turn your mind to frequency in prayer, and to the Lord's precepts, and your thought to his overwhelming benevolence and protection. That way you will easily escape not only the doing of sin, but also the impetus, the stirring up of the memory of base deeds in the past.
>
> I applaud your spiritual determination and self-control, your distancing yourself from the sight of debased things, your forbearance, and other virtuous behavior, all of which you manage to exhibit while involved in the middle of the secular world. But most pleasing to me is the fact that you separate yourself from all the clowning fools. Look, that is what really is weaving your crown of victory (12-13).
>
> literally, "the piety of bracing action."
> i.e., the garland worn by the triumphant competitor.

A *silentiary* was the official at the court in Constantinople who "looked after the quiet of the palace" (Lampe 1589B)—actually, he was in charge of entertainment, as we should put it, and was quite esteemed, holding the rank of Senator. Nilus here shows his skill at the encomium—he praises Nemertius for doing in his mental life exactly what he did professionally. A Silentiarius would have been used to applause., and the word also describes what a rhapsode did:

so Nilus is "hymning" Nemertius—who would have had considerable experience dealing with rhapsodes.

> Peter the leader of the Apostles says "if you are reproached in the name of Christ, you are blessed" (1 Peter 4.14). And the Lord says through Isaiah, "do not fear the reproach of men" (Isaiah 51.7). He himself cries out in the Gospel, "Blessed are you, when they revile you, rejoice, and be happy, for your reward is great in heaven" (Matthew 6.11-12). In the Letter to the Hebrews, the Apostle Paul commends those who have a seething faith in the Savior Christ. So, if anyone has this experience, do not be discouraged in any way, nor be troubled if your good repute, nor your honest ways, nor your radiant piety, are reviled by asinine, godless, dirty people. For these fornicators laugh at those who control themselves, the godless look down upon the godly, the blind call themselves sharp-sighted, and the low-lives revel in and boast about their very sins and the shameless their shameful feelings, calling what is bitter "sweet." But let us consider them ridiculous, and impugn them, and feel sorry for them in that they will soon be destroyed.

Here Nilus addresses Isidore the Reader. Nilus was a master at the *opposite* of encomium, which is invective. Here he quite artfully sets up ironic antitheses: asinine, godless, dirty fornicators who laugh at those with sophrosyne, blind who call themselves sharp-sighted, lowlives who call sweet what is bitter. Nilus here brings the beatitude "blessed are you when others revile you" to vivid verbal life.

Nilus' *Letter to Zendorus the Deacon* evinces his sensitivity to and mastery of dogmatic theology:

> I am pleased that you have singled out these words of John, the Bishop of Constantinople, so I am writing you this in answer to the question you raise. "the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a Dove as it descended upon Jesus" (Matthew 3.16). Now on the one hand, in our case, this divine deposit first happens at the moment of our Baptism, on the other hand, "in Christ there was the fullness of divinity" (Colossians 2.9). Do not imagine that Christ received the Spirit because he did not already have it. He sent it himself, as God, from on high; he himself, as human being, welcomed it from below.

> From himself to himself it descended, from his divine nature to his humanity (2.293).

Nilus lived in the middle of the great Christological controversies, which begin with the Council of Nicaea in 325, with its condemnation of Arianism, and ended with the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Zendorus the Deacon has obviously asked how it is that Christ received the Spirit at Baptism, juts as everyone does, if he and the Spirit were already God. Nilus gives what would be regarded as the Orthodox answer at Chalcedon: Christ received the Spirit in his human nature; he dispatched the Spirit from his divinity.

And as always, Nilus finds an unusual and striking word: the Spirit is "deposited." Deacons in the First Church were responsible for the treasury, and therefore a weekly deposit would have been something quite familiar to Zendorus. And behind this lies the Patristic notion, underscored in recent years by John Zizioulas, that Baptism is the completion of human personhood.

Likewise, the *Letter to Zendorus the Monk* suggests Nilus' grasp of ascetical theology:

> Lift your eyes to God: what are earthly things to you? Don't look down: what good is this passing world? You are detached from the world, and the noose of this life. So don't consider worldly outcomes, mind your own business, and think about whether whatever you're doing is appropriate for an ascetic. The sacred teaching screams at you: "be careful then how you live" (Ephesians 5.15), and where you walk, and by what rule you are governed (2.25).

Again, Nilus transforms an unremarkable bit of ascetic guidance—"do not be attached to the things of this world"—into a memorable admonition by the use of the startling metaphor and the striking word: the world is a "noose," a good way to hang oneself accidentally, and Scripture—well, the word is [1] βοαω, in Classical and in Patristic Greek, means to scream, howl, bellow: make a vigorous, loud vocal noise. The sense obviously is "Scripture practically screams this at you."

Nilus embellishes the text of Ephesians with two parallel additions: walk, and "be governed." The word περιπατεω had long had strong connotations of philosophical teaching (Plato, *Epistle* 348c; the followers of Aristotle, of course, were known as περιπατητικοσ. See also following note.

πολιτευεσθε. In Plato and Thucydides, the word means "to be a citizen," or "to take part in the state"; the Cappadocians used it to refer to living the Christian life and belonging to the community of faith. Nilus is the first (here and Epp 3.46) to use it to mean "live under an ascetic or monastic rule."

By contrast, Nilus' grasp of contemporary monastic problems is patent in this *Letter to Heliodore*:

> Whoever with much sweat and toil and time has contended with pleasant cravings, finally hits the target of apatheia, we assent to their contact with convents. But those who—like you—are burdened by their fondness for pleasure are to be barred from such most risky contact lest they cast their own souls and the souls of others into the abyss. Unless it is absolutely necessary, and cannot be avoided, women, whether religious or not, are not to be glanced at.
>
> The best word for you at the moment is that of Jeremiah, "O stupid and heartless people" (Jeremiah 5:21 LXX). Because you really should be ashamed at the disgraceful acts, the empty glory, the impudent words, … and the arrogant way you treat others, and brag about everything, and congratulate and commend yourself. Instead, be ashamed, says the holy prophet, and take the dishonor you deserve, so that, by being ashamed, you come to perceive yourself and to recognize your lowliness, and thus be enlightened. For awareness of sin is daybreak for the soul, and self-condemnation is the start of salvation.
>
> Confess that weakness of yours to God, so that the power of grace can flash like lightning, and the will of the Lord will work wonders for you (2.46-48).

An historical irony provides the context for this letter. The great monastic movement—literally a movement, from urban to desert life—was a reaction to the material affluence and spiritual

flabbiness that came with the Peace of the Church as many became Christians for purely secular reasons. But by the early fifth, monasticism had become so successful as to attract false monks. Nilus abhorred these bogus versions of what he himself was, and provoked a most eloquent remonstration: "awareness of sin is daybreak for the soul, and self-condemnation is the start of salvation"—exactly the kind of eloquence practice by Nilus' predecessors Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom.

This also incidentally is an example of the difference between what the ascetic guides meant by apatheia and what we mean by apathy: we mean something entirely negative, insensibility, numbness; they meant stability of emotions, the ability to ignore the moment-by-moment distractions that cause the undisciplined person to lose focus.

2.50, *to Aristoclus the Monk*

> You seem to be of two minds, saying lovely things, doing lowdown things, raging like a dog with rabies, barking mercilessly at others, and your face turning purple. At least then set yourself straight, brother, or your deeds will end up at war with that sacred vocation of yours.

Here Nilus directs his sharp, bitter invective at Aristoclus, a monk conspicuously flawed by one of the natural flaws monastic exercise is supposed to diminish: *dipsychia*, "two-mindedness." And a further *example of Nilus' wit.* Aristoclus' anger is defeating his purpose in life; Nilus uses a violent metaphor to match: his deeds will end by doing battle with that purpose: διαμαξωνται τα εργα σου τω σεμνω επαγγελματι.

And here, in his *Letter to Vincent the Ascetic*, Nilus shrewdly points to a perennial monastic issue:

> The harder you are on your body, with a hard and prickly way of life, the more you must be humble at heart, and lowly, and think yourself nothing, lest you allow empty glory to have a place within you, and

> thereby cultivate thorns instead of corn, and lose all that hard work (2.51).

This word to Vincent is wrapped around a paradox: the ascetic can become proud of the "hard and prickly way" of asceticism, and end up with a hard and prickly inner life, full of thorns rather than corn. The better one is at asceticism in its outward forms, Nilus shrewdly notes, the more one has to beware of *kenodoxia*, "empty pride," one of his predecessor Evagrios' "Eight Unworthy Thoughts."

> Now, what did you expect when you chose silence and seclusion? All sorts of pressure, and the countless chafing of irritating demons, their ambushes and assaults. Then why now are you so vexed, and disgusted, turning colors, all for the way the demons drag your soul about like oxen yoked to a wheel, wandering around distracted, sliced like bread? Stand your ground thankfully, patiently, with a swaggering mind, in frequent prayer, and vigorous vigil, and beautiful self-mastery, abiding in the Stronger One, looking forward to the end.
>
> The end for those who enter warfare for Christ is deliverance, that of the Demons, bitter destruction. For now, you are stabbing and being stabbed, but you are going to trample them, and scare off the ones who are frightening you, because you will have taken counsel with the Lord (2.137-8).

In this *Letter to Euphemius the Monk*, Nilus reminds another is disciple of the original objective of the flood of souls into the Egyptian Desert, the paradigm for all subsequent monastic variations: spiritual combat, not peace and quiet. So, Nilus urges, stop acting vexed, stop turning colors (Nilus enjoys pointing to the physical tics of false monks: in his treatise on monastic excellence, he says they pretend to be fasting by making noises and twisting their faces as though being strangled). Euphemius should act like a proper soldier, φρονηματι σοβαρω, 'swaggering," a verb associated with soldiering as far back of Archilochus.

Nilus' rhetorical brilliance in the service of Orthodox theology is again represented by this letter addressed to *Count Socrates*, a higher-ranking official in the late Empire:

> The Christ who rescues resurrects the bodies of the dead with no more effort than the act of sneezing. For tell me, what would be more difficult: to mold the figure of a human being that did not exist at all, or recast one that has been melted down? Since God makes us out of nothing in the first place, obviously he has the power to raise us when we have been poured out (2.200).

"No more effort than sneezing" is litotes: sneezing actually takes no effort at all, because it is involuntary and by definition effortless. But it is also wonderfully earthy, and therefore appropriate for the Christ who is now incarnate, as well as cosmic. Nilus then resorts to Irenaean imagery and an *a fortiori* argtment: God molds the protoplasm out of nothing at creation; at resurrection, God simply recasts one that has been melted down.

The *Letter to Rodominus the Priest* shows that just as Nilus is utterly unintimidated by the secular officialdom, so he is utterly unimpressed with the ecclesiastical hierarchy:

> O how you will reproach yourself, and blame yourself for your thoughtlessness, when you rise from the grave to pay the penalty for this life! How you will tear yourself, sigh useless sighs of repentance, when there is no time left for due regret because the appropriate period is over! How you will weep and wail when you see the brightness of the just, when the splendid heavenly rewards are distributed, and the casting of the erring into the deep darkness, when, heartsick and cramped in spirit, you say, "woe to me of little faith, and no purpose or intention! Woe, for I have of my own volition lost my chance! Woe, for I did not want to think about this place of judgment! What empty glory did I prefer! Why did I value gluttony and alcohol above eternal life? Why did I welcome anger as my friend and guest? Why did I serve fornication and shame as though they were the ladies of the house? Why did I like the practice of useless acts? (3.213).

It was a classic precept by the fourth century: just as the Demons could not repent once exiled from the Kingdom of Heaven, so humans cannot repent once having passed through the portal of Death. Nilus expresses it with his customary vigor: the rhetorical questions in antithetical form, why did I value gluttony and alcohol over eternal life? and personification: anger as my guest, fornication as lady of the house.

To another priest, Polychron, he offers the following advice, expressed in an extraordinarily simile:

> Through your letters, and even through those who have delivered them, you have earnestly asked me if I would show you the remedy and cure for the infestation of demons, given your piety, your very sad heart, and your weariness to the point of giving up. So now, without any further delay, I am about to convey to you this most compendious yet most terse word of comfort. So pay careful attention to what I am about to say.
>
> Many lofty waters flow from the clouds high above us, waters from the sea which by the commandment of God have cast off their saltiness and now flow sweetly. We likewise, by the will of God, and the faculty of goodness, if we lift ourselves, can be transformed eventually, immune and far removed from the saltiness of sin which had engulfed us, as the prophecy predicts. For we may be enrapt in clouds of spiritual understanding, into the mystical ether, and if we continue to be with God afterwards, not misled by any distractions, plucked away or distracted by cravings, never turning from his benefice, as our Lord and our pastor, following him throughout the rest of life, subjected to him, we shall experience that in perpetuity. Therefore we encourage ourselves and are urged by these words as the godly … (3.142)

"Pay careful attention to what I am about to say" makes sense indeed: what he is about to say involves a simple but totally unexpected simile. The soul by ascesis and the will of God is purged of sin exactly as seawater is purged of salt when lifted by evaporation to the clouds and turned into the sweetness of rainwater. In seventeenth century poetry, such an utterly unexpected

comparison was called a "metaphysical conceit," and that sems to me the best label for what Nilus has accomplished here.

The letter continues:

> … the Apostle Paul writes, let us be entirely superior to sadness, so insidiously suggested to us by the impure spirits in order to make our righteous striving slack and limp. For why should we ever be distressed and dispirited when our Lord says plainly in the Gospel, that after he has been exalted, he will draw us all unto him, and the Prophet has professed this, adding that this applies to each and every soul: "Wait upon the Lord, and keep his ways, and he will exalt you, to inherit the celestial realm." As we meditate on such things, we shall not lose hope of our salvation. "Let us serve the Lord in fear, and exult in him with trembling," and with much piety, without losing hope, without neglect, and without ceasing to persuade others. The filth-loving demon, inventor and master of sordidness, pours thoughts of women and pretty boys into the minds of one who struggles, letting them thus sin with their images. And this very thought often sculpts in their minds a feeling of loathing and shamelessness.

Here Nilus develops the notion that the demon is a kind of artist, blocking out the image of lust in the mind, then carving out the feeling of shamelessness. This is the kind of subtle introspective psychology Nilus has learned from Evagrios; the latter's "Eight Worthless Thoughts" are of this nature, far more subtle than their later development, the Seven Capital Vices, which themselves are more subtle than the modern misnomer, the Seven Deadly Sins.

In his *Letter to Nilus the Scholar*, he described Demons by means of another vivid metaphor:

> [Scholars such as you, who certainly practice a fair amount of ascesis, are usually ignored by the Devil and his cohort.] They will not yet have had our experience of the struggle with possession. They will not yet know what it is like to stand in the line of battle against those slings. They have not yet suffered the attack of these spiritual barbarians. These invisible thugs have not come to them yet. Not yet has this dark, bitter, unsmiling phalanx approached them. Not yet has Assyria attacked. Not yet have they been tested. Not yet have they been shaken and stricken (3.153).

Now the Demons are vicious warriors. “Spiritual barbarians, “ literally unfleshly barbarians, ασαρων βαρβαρων, ις δελιβερατελψ ινχονγρυουσ; normally, “barbaric” characters are thought less “spiritual” than civilized. The Demons are in a different reality: they are spiritual barbarians. (The passage is also a perfect illustration of artful rhetoric: the anaphora on “they have not yet,” the extended military metaphor, the alliterative seasoning sprinkled throughout, which I have tried to approximate just once, “shaken and stricken” for διεσεισθησαν και διετιναχθησαν.)

The *Letter to Ptolomaeus the Senator* evinces another powerful expression of theology through metaphor:

> Faith in Christ the Imperial Rescuer alone is righteousness (Romans 10:10), and to confess him by word of mouth is absolute rescue.
>
> God-fearing Isaiah says, “they should not speak according to this word, concerning which there are no gifts to give for it” (Isaiah 8:20 LXX). Nothing is as valuable as professing the name of our master’s imperial name, and of our blessed tradition and sacred gnosis. For this very reason we have the apt Davidic saying, “what shall I give back to the Lord for all he has done for me” (Psalm 116:12), who accepts faith and repays with heavenly gnosis. Holy Gnosis offers a myriad of good things.
>
> Often a few ships will suffer shipwreck in the summertime, while others will get through the winter safe and sound. How many athletes who expect certain victory meet defeat instead? And how many expecting to take second place wind up with the Palm? Let us not presume, nor let us despair, but let us persevere in prayer regarding everything that concerns us.

The word *gnosis* may surprise readers of this translation, but it should remind us of the fact that there never was a “religion” called *Gnosticism*. That is a modern umbrella term for a variety of cults in Late Antiquity, often variants of Christianity and sharing the notion of secret, private insight. The fact is, however, all cults, including Orthodoxy, claimed to offer Gnosis; the concept is Platonic, meaning “genuine knowledge” as opposed to opinion.

Note too the "imperial" name of Christ—an example of Nilus' matching vocabulary to reader.

Rescue, however, is the dominant image here, and I deliberately translate the Greek *soter* as "rescuer" rather than "savior" for two reasons.

First, "Savior" has become a word practically restricted to Christ. In the ancient world, it was applied to any rescuer, so it would associate Christ with someone saving a drowning victim or carrying a victim from a burning building. Second, the word had an original theological connotation well-known in the ancient world: soter was a primary epithet the god Zeus because he was the one who rescues from shipwrecks. Anyone who experienced such a delivery might set up an altar to Zeus Soter. Ptolemaeus, presumably a Gentile convert (or catechumen) would have been quite familiar with this.

Nilus' precept in part 3 is a fine example of Christian *apatheia*—not lack of feeling, but a balance between the errors of overconfidence and despair.

The ancients spoke of "cutting," rather than building, a road. Thus in his *Letter to the Reader Asteros* :

> Do not cut your way ahead by opinion, but by work of beautiful polity and gnosis of God (2.8).

Both operations are, obviously, involved. The precept here is derived directly from Plato, who opposes opinion, "doxa," to genuineknowledge, "gnosis."

Nilus was especially adept at excoriating hertics, as this *Letter to the Priest Abraham* shows:

> You receive the Spirit, who searches the depths of God, not in order to comprehend the nature of God, as Eunomius (with his sideways-twisted mind) says, but to glorify him in depth and wisdom; as the Apostle says, "I do not reckon that I have laid hold of it, but I press on, that I might comprehend" (Philip. 3:12).
>
> We receive the Spirit, says the Apostle, not so we can understand what is the nature of God with precision, but that we might perceive the myriad good gifts, which, having discovered these, we then

> explain. How then is the cosmos supported, or sustained, if its many components are not brought into being, and held together, by God? No one who sees a beautifully constructed cithara, well-tuned, well-constructed, or hears it accompanying some song, fails to conceive of a luthier or a cithar player, even when these are not visible. And thus to us the artistic maker is clear, and the prime mover, and the preserver of created things, and received by the mind.
>
> Demons are allowed to approach and to hover above certain people, to annoy others for a long time, by the order of God Director of the Games, Curator of the Gymnasium, and Judge of the Contest, and some endure the temptations of crowds of impudent demons to their last gasp (1.16-20, 25).

Why is Eunomius' mind sideways-twisted? At first, it merely sounds like a grotesquery (which of course it is) but this is more than that.. Eunomius refused to see the separation of Persons in the Trinity so, like someone who views a lineup of three persons from the side, he manages to see only one, by contorting his posture. Heresy means "choice," as Nilus knows, so it is not that he cannot see the three; he chooses, perversely, not to.

Nilus also offers here a pleasing version of the "argument frm design." The sight, or the sound, sight unseen, of a cither or lute automatically leads us to assume there must be a luthier who made it or a musician who plays it. This is far more appealing than the 18th-century version, "a clock implies a clockmaker," and behind it lies the ancient notion of the music of the spheres.

And finally, the struggle with demons here is figured as an *Athlon*, a contest in a stadium (which Ancyra most certainly had), regulated by a Trinitrian God who is director of the games, curator of the gymnasium, and judge of the contest.

In his *Letter to Helidorus the Monk*, Nilus answers a rhetorical question of the Pharisees with an amalgam of metaphors worthy of a John Donne:

> John the Baptist, fearing lest anything vile affect him, as happens to us humans, lived in the Desert (Matthew 3.1). But Jesus, true God, and Lord of all, brought himself to the cities, and dined with sinners, since he is the sun of justice. The rays of the sun dry up the mud and

> whatever smells bad immersed in the puddle, and purify, making it incorrupt. Still, the Pharisees, propelled by envy, say, "Why does Jesus eat with sinners and tax-collectors?" (Matthew 9.11). O deluded, uncomprehending, and blind at heart! Don't you comprehend that the physician has to stay close to the sick, and not somewhere else? Where the sinners are, is where the mercy-seat is put. The Christ came to call sinners to repent, not the righteous. Jesus Christ spent his life among the sinners according to the plan, so that repenting sinners could lodge with the righteous, and rejoice together with them in the kingdom of heaven (1.41).

The "mercy seat" was the lid covering the covenant box or "Ark of the Covenant," understood as the nexus between God and humanity. This is a very imaginative working-out of Nicene Christology. It has nothing sacrificial.

And in his *Letter to Mlitius the Chancellor*, he introduces a very imaginative bit of typology: the spies in Canaan are like the Angels, Christ like Joshua, and we are like Rahab, the prostitute who shielded the Hebrew spies:

> The men who were sent by the High Priest Moses into Palestine (Numbers 13:18) were explorers seem to me to symbolize the heavenly Angels, who watch over and provide for the whole cosmos. Nothing involving humanity is beyond providence. That is why the Angel who appeared in the guise of a Macedonian for the rescue of people urged the Apostle Paul, "Go forward to Macedonia, and help us."
>
> When you longingly read through the majestic Scriptures, make note of every set of instructions and every command, so as to adorn the rooftop of the house of your mind with a garland, which will mark you as a citizen of God's. That wreath marks not the beginning of arête but rather its completion, so that we are not condemned, like the fellow in the Gospel who proved unable to finish his tower (Luke 14:30) …
>
> … for when we put that wreath of fair membership on our rooftops, we become just like that very faithful woman Rahab, who received those messengers of Joshua .. just as we now can extend hospitality toward Jesus Christ the Commander of the Angels (1.59-61).

To *Naina the General*, Nilus fearlessly asserts:

> Scripture inspired by God offers many instances of inanimate things personified, as in "the sea says this and that, and the abyss says 'it is not in me'" (Job 28:14, loose paraphrase), or "the heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19/18:1). And the Lord informs us with a broadsword in his hand that he is replete with flesh and blood, and the mountains and hills are questioned about their jumping (Psalm 114/13:4), and, "what ails you, O sea, that you flee, and you, Jordan, that you turn back?" *(Ibid.* 114/13:5). If this is the case, what is this saying from Proverbs you set before me, namely, "The Lord made me the beginning of his ways in his works" (Proverbs 8:22)? Solomon called his own book of dark sayings "parables" (Proverbs 1:1). One kind of teaching is conveyed in parables, enigmatically expressed and allowing various interpretations; quite different is teaching that is clear, not hidden, sensibly, and explicitly taught. You turn from the well-lit teaching of the Apostle, your spiritual vision being impaired, and you focus on dark riddles. And what is your excuse? I wanted to solve your problem from Proverbs, but since you have been stunned by the poison of the Arians with their mindless teaching, I have checked the motion of their shafts, exhorting you only to be persuaded by the proclamations of the Evangelists and the Apostles, and not by the paralyzing Arians with their snake venom. But there is no point in pouring words into the ears of the dead (1.70).

"The Lord made me the beginning of his ways," in the LXX translation, was used by the Arians to support their theory that Christ was created. Nilus counters this for the Arian general Gaina by noting the non-literal nature of much Scripture. But the Apostles proclaim, without enigma, the divinity of Christ. Nilus challenges Gaina: Arians are venomous snakes: has their bite slain you? If so, why do I bother "pouring words into the ears of the dead"? Gaina was an exceedingly powerful figure; Nilus is here following in the dangerous, brash footsteps of his mentor Chrysostom.

And to the same powerful general he writes this Christological note:

> Surely not on your own initiative but because others have compelled you to you to write me asking how can the Son of God be of one subsistence with the Father and rule with equal power, since he asks the Father to subject everything to him and, as the Apostle writes, he himself is subjected to the Father, who has subjected everything to him (1 Corinthians 15.28)? Friend, what are you saying? Does Christ, who is God, need to be subjected To God? Well, when would an arrogant and godless pirate ever be subject to anyone whatsoever? How then is this said, that the Son, after the subjection of his enemies, will be subject to him, who has subjected everything?
>
> Just as the one who through the plan of incarnation dissolves my curse is called a curse because of me, and the one who alone is sinless is called sin, and the unblemished lamb of God who removes the sin of the cosmos, and becomes the new Adam for all his great antiquity, so the one subject to no man makes himself subject, as head of all. And as I am independent and factious because I have denied God, so Christ is called independent because of me. After all things have been subjected to him, he will fulfill his subjection as he brings me safely to the Father. Christ always existed *homoousios* with the Father according to his divinity, equal in might and like him, and it would be pointless for me to write otherwise (1.79).

Here, in the *Letter to Flavian*, Nilus provides a unique answer to a classic question of Scriptural interpretation:

> Why did Christ wash the feet, rather than some other part of the disciples' bodies? Because he was not just washing away dirt. He was also adding divine power to the heels of the Apostles. For ever since he said to the serpent, "beware the human heel" (Genesis 3.16, LXX), this was the way life has gone. The fact that he washed the feet of disciples suggests the symbolic meaning: "I have given you the authority to tread upon serpents, and upon all the power of the unseen enemies" (Luke 10.19). Isaiah said also, "How lovely and noble are the feet of those with the message of peace!" (Isaiah 52.7). For the Apostles of Christ, wandering throughout the world, on the one hand destroy the Devil in battle, and on the other mete out peace to everyone, and proclaim to us the noble loveliness of heaven.
>
> The Lord touched those feet, as if to strengthen weak worldly feet destined to run everywhere under the sun. He grasped the part of the

> heel that was cursed in the beginning, like a great physician imposing his hand, in order that the intellectual venom of the serpent might be excreted. The heel thus strengthened by the Lord trampled Satan, who deceived the first-formed ones in the beginning… (1.80, 81).

Why indeed did Christ wash the disciples' feet on Maundy Thursday? That was the servant custom, the modern NT scholar tells us—which is correct. Nilus discovers another meaning: he is healing the bruise that the Serpent inflicts on the heel of the faithful, and strengthens their feet so that they can, as the Body of Christ, fulfill the prophecy of Psalm 90/1, "you shall trample underfoot the lion, the asp, the serpent, and the adder."

In the *Letter to Charis the Bishop*, Nilus offers advice based on the Classical tradition of the Virtues:

> "Sin is not reckoned when there is no law" (Romans 5:13). For the law that told us what to do and forbade the contrary was not yet completed in us… for the death which is sin is apart from the law. When the Law was completed within us by the completion of thought, and the commandment arrived, immediately evil was found in us, and sin came to life.
>
> What circumcision of the foreskin is considered to be for the poor Jews, so are self-mastery, and fasting to the point of nausea, and insane craving to those who fast according to the Greek customs, or those of the Manichaeans, and others who similarly feel loathing for the good things God has made.
>
> Self-mastery according to Christ is something lovely, of the highest level of arête, and most advantageous. The Greek and the Manichaean kind is criminal and dangerous (2.9-11).

Sophosyne is Nilus' subject here, and he is expressing with characteristic elegance the notion that Christianity did not so much cancel as perfect Greek ascesis and Greek ethics. Self-mastery was of course one of the Four Virtues, the hinges on which swing the gates of human ife as the great medievalist Josef Pieper puts it, and Christianity was in the process of appropriating these, baptizing them

as it were. The Manichaean and the Greek versions, Nilus tellingly observes, are 1 dangerously extreme and 2 dangerously based on "hatred for the good things God has made."

To *Nicodemus the Ascetic*, by contrast, Nilus offers this edifying paradox straight from the recent Christian tradition of the self-denying Desert Dweller:

> You should thank God that you own nothing. That way, you will not be asked for an explanation on the Day of Judgment. For he says, "To whom much is given, from him much will be demanded" (Luke 12.48) by the Angelic tax collectors. And the Rich Man is said to be judged more harshly because of the wealth he is allowed, and an exacting accountant, and a frightful reckoning, and asked whether he kept a good or a bad bank account of what he had received from God's providence (2.22).

This is a point Nilus makes central to an entire treatise, *On Holy Poverty*, whose thesis was that poverty is good not because worldly goods are bad, but because in Eden, we had no possessions because we had everything.

> The holy, and life-giving, Spirit, to whom we make obeisance and extol with the Father and the Son, initiated, from the beginning, many things that have arête. It strengthened and gave self-control to many who were working good works; it strengthened the nerve of many spiritual athletes into praise of the Lord Jesus Christ. It equips one voice to proclaim wisdom, it enlightens another soul for prophecy, grants another the power to expel demons, and another the ability to interpret sacred Scripture. It strengthens one person for chastity, makes another greedy for alms-giving, bestows the gift of vigil-keeping on another, and fasting, and of disdaining the business affairs of the world, and of handling poverty, making a priority of cultivating one's spiritual life, and fearlessness, and prepares another to die for Christ in times of persecution. It works in others in every which way, but remains, in its own nature, immutable and unmovable. This the Prophets expressed from the start in the sacred Scriptures. Later it outdid the unsurpassed Greek sophists through a few low-born disciples: that is, he led the faithful upon whom the Apostles immediately to start speaking in languages they did not know. You yourself have this resident leader, guardian, protector,

> and champion that you might not fear a single demon nor wicked man who intends to set traps for you within your house, which God has established (2.204).

This *Letter to Valens the Imperial Officer* displays Nilus at his most rhetorically brilliant; consider a few of his perfectly-chosen words:

"Spiritual athletes" is actually αθλουντασ. It is not translatable literally into English, because it is a form of a verb English lacks: "atheleticizing" would be a rough approximation. Normally the Christian word was αθλητησ; Nilus uses the active participle of *athleo* to convey the idea that the Spirit innerves them even as they are striving.

"Greedy for alms-giving" is of course a splendid oxymoron: willingness of give alms really involves the opposite of greed.

"Making a priority of cultivating one's spiritual life" is ιδιοπραγμοσυνη. Latin translation construes that as "preferring the welfare of other's to one's own," but this is simply not what it means. This is about ascesis, not about charity.

"Φεαρλεσσνεσσ" ισ απτοησια. Nilus represents the earliest use of this word, unknown in classical Greek. It is probably one of his coinages that caught on; thenceforth it is well-represented.

Now comes a series of alliterative phrases: *apotoetos, analloioton*, and *atrepton.*

The adjective απτο[ι]ητοσ is used in LXX (Jeremiah 26.28) "she who was fearless has been delivered up.; "immutable and immovable," αναλλοιωτον και ατρεπτον. The former is the more philosophical word (like "impassible) the latter the personal term ("inflexible").

In conclusion, we return to the passage we began with the letter *To Philip the Lawyer.*[4] For besides his imagination, it evinces Nilus' *paradosis*, his dynamic handing along, of the tradition he inherited concerning the Holy Spirit. Let us examine it again, this time more closely:

> εκ παπυρου, και κολλησ χαρτησ κατασκευσασθεισ, χαρτησ ψ ιλοσ καλειται, επαν δε υπογραφην δεξηται βασιλευσ, δηλον ω

σ Σακρα ονομαζεται, Ουτωσ μοι νοει και τα θεια μυστηρια, π ρο μεν τησ εντευξεωσ του ιερεωσ, και τησ καθοδου του αγιου Πνευματοσ, ψιλον αρτον υπαρχειν, και οινον κοινον τα προκε ιμμενα; μετα δε τασ φοβερασ εκεινασ επικλησεισ, και την επιφ οιτησιν του προσκυνητου, και ζωοποιου, και αγαθου Πνευματ οσ, ουκ ετι ψιλον αρτον και κοινον οινον τα επιτεθειμενα τη α για τραπεζη, αλλα σωμα, και αιμα τιμιον και αχραντον του Θ εου των απαντων, καθαριζον απο παντοσ μολυσμου τουσ μετ αλαμβανονταϲ φοβω, και τοθω πολλω.

> Something made from papyrus and made up of many sheets we call a plain "paper," but when the Emperor has signed it, it is called "an Imperial rescript."[5] You should think of the divine mysteries in the same way: *before the prayer of the Priest and the descent of the Holy Spirit there is plain bread and ordinary wine set before you, but after that terrible epiclesis, and the arrival of that worship-worthy, life-making, and good Spirit,* it is no longer plain bread and ordinary wine placed on that holy table, but the body and priceless undefiled blood of Christ the God of the universe, clean of any and all defilement for those who partake of these in fear and great longing *(Letter* 1.44).

The Holy Spirit is coming into focus at this stage, as the period of the Christological controversies was coming to its end. Nilus calls the Spirit by three qualifiers:

προσκυνητου, "worship-worthy," as do Basil and Chrysostom, ;

ζωοποιου, "life-giving," used previously only by Nyssa (Cat Or 36), whereas Christ had been "giver of life" as in the Phos Hilaron;

αγαθου, "good." This is Nilus' contribution, and it cements the Divinity of the Holy Spirit in two ways: Platonically, as Form of the Good; Scripturally, as Jesus rebuked the scribe by saying "god alone is good."

In each case Nilus has taken a qualifier far more associated with either God, God the Father, or God the Son, and pointedly applied it to the Spirit.

Consider Nilus' subtle use the word επικλησισ. That had become the technical Christian name for the invocation of the Spirit, but originally it was the word for "Name": νῦν δ' ἂν πολλὰ πάθῃσι φίλου ἀπὸ πατρὸς ἁμαρτὼν Ἀστυάναξ, ὃν Τρῶες ἐπίκλησιν καλέουσιν … (Iliad 22.505-506).

(Now having lost his father he will suffer greatly—he whom the Trojans call by the *name* Astynax…)

But it became, secondly, a word for summoning someone to court, summoning members to the assembly, or calling a person to office; Herodotus gives *epiclesis* these senses as early as the 5th century CE.[6]

Only at its third stage did it become a word for an invocation of a deity or daemon; it is used in the LXX in this way ((2 mac 15:26, "the men with Judas met their enemy with prayer and petition (επικλησεωσ και ευξων); Lucian, in the second century, uses it in reference to Aphrodite (Περι Ορξεσεωσ, 2).

Thus Nilus is utilizing his familiar strategy of linking the later, religious, metaphorical sense with the original, literal—and in this case, Imperial, sense, which supports his analogy: the Priest calling upon the Holy Spirit is like the citizen sending an appeal to the Emperor. That already makes the Holy Spirit "God," since βασιλευσ, usually translated "king," is the epithet for God most frequently used in the NT itself.

Now, in the Christian trajectory of the word, it had been used for prayer in general, for the consecration of Baptismal water, and for Chrism; it was just beginning to be used to refer to the invocation during the Eucharist. In this sense, Irenaeus had referred to the "epiclesis of God" (Adv Haer4.18.5 (1028b), Cyril of Jerusalem mentioned the "epiclesis of the Trinity" (Catech. 19.7). Basil refers to the "epicletic words" *(Spir*. 66 (3.54E; M.32.188B). Nilus is the first to specify an epiclesis of the *Spirit* in the Anaphora.

And he goes further. For the first time Nilus also names the *response* of the Spirit *to* the Epiclesis: he calls it the "visitation," επιφοιτησισ, of the Holy Spirit. Previously, this word was used for the way the Spirit inspired prophets, for the way demons infected victims, and as a synonym for the Parousia of Christ. In Letter 102, Nilus himself uses it to refer to the time of Christ's sojourn on earth.

But he is the first to use to word in reference to the consecration of the Elements.

Now the *Parousia* or *epiphoitesis* was in official letter-writing something quite specific: it was "the projection of the official's person, the sense of his felt presence, and the transmission of his authority," as M. Luther Stirewalt Jr. explains in his *Studies in Ancient Greek Epistolography* . It is "effected… by the document itself," and it would "include many expressions of longing for human contact: reason for writing, expectation of response, plans for a visit…, and above all sensitivity to the felt presence of one for the other."[7]

In other words, the *epiphoitesis* was the way in which the Emperor "arrived" with his signed letter—as we would say, his "virtual" presence.

In response to the invocation, the Spirit makes an επιφοιτεσισ, a visitation, or advent, or arrival. This word had always been used for divinities and numinous beings, but had become a virtual synonym for *Parousia* (Origen speaks of the "παρουσιαν ου επιφοιτεσιν," *fragmenta in Matthew* 10:23), and was used in reference to either Advent of Christ. It had been used also for the descent of the Spirit on Christ, and for the inspiration of the Prophets.

Nilus was the first, though by no means the last, to use the word in this sense: the visit the Spirit makes in response to the Epiklesis. In other words, the parousia expected in any visit by the Emperor—and the expected response to an Imperial rescript.

NOTES:

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εκ παπυρου, και κολλησ χαρτησ κατασκευασθεισ, χαρτησ ψιλοσ κα λειται. Literally, "[made] of papyrus, and made of sheets glued together, is called a plain sheet." The English equivalent is calling a numbers of sheets of paper bound together a "paper." Either way, Nilus' point is the same: the ordinary packet is transformed into something extraordinary by the signature.

[2] σακρα. The transcribed Latin word meant " an Imperial document."
[3] PL 79.103.A-B. All quotations from Nilus, excepting those taken from the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, are from this volume in Migne.
[4] σχολαστικοσ. By Late Antiquity, this was the normal meaning of the word.
[5] σακρα. The transcribed Latin word meant "an Imperial document."
[6] (5.75, 7.8).
[7] M. Luther Stirewalt, Jr., *Studies in Ancient Greek Epistolography,* Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1993, p. 5.

# Other Research

# An American Faust:
# Reflections on an adaptation of Goethe's "Faust I" by Heinz-Uwe Haus

DAVID W. LOVELL

## *Introduction*

This essay reflects on some of the issues of theatrical adaptation by taking as a case study the recent staging of Goethe's "Faust I" by Heinz-Uwe Haus in Delaware in March 2014. While there has been a renewed interest in Goethe's *Faust* more generally in the past couple of decades, and an explosion in German productions of *Faust,* especially since Peter Stein's unabridged 23-hour production at the Expo 2000 in Hannover, productions in English are far less common and in some respects far more troublesome as both artistic and financial propositions. How, in other words, to translate the masterpiece from the master of German letters into an accessible event for English-speaking audiences without losing their attention, transmogrifying the play's complex layers of meaning, or caricaturing the three central roles of Faust, Mephistopheles and Margarete? Goethe is generous to us in the First Part of *Faust,* by creating vivid scenes and moving between them at a reasonable pace without diminishing the epic and episodic nature of the work, and by writing characters that cry out for strong performances; but he challenges any director with a script of more than four hours and a dense package of information, ideas, irony and wit. Haus has delivered an English-language adaptation with economy of words, swift pace, pertinent humour, and strong performances and staging. I use this essay to sketch the challenges of the play and Haus's solutions to them.

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That Faust himself, or the story of Faust, are fixed and agreed are notions that need to be dispelled immediately. "Faust" is all about change and adaptation. A popular story, based on a historical character of the fifteenth century, to which were attached various popular legends, "Faust" bounced from Germany to England and back over the succeeding centuries. The *Faustbuch* had appeared by 1587; Christopher Marlowe's play, *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* was first performed in 1592. Goethe ultimately made it into a profound vehicle for his own concerns - an adaptation in its own right - though he kept adding to it almost to his death in 1832. And the adaptations have continued: Gertrude Stein's 1938 *Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights,* for example, relies on the well-established reputation of Faust so she does not have to retell the whole story. (In Stein's work, Faust has sold his soul to the devil for electric light).[1] Thomas Mann's 1947 novel, *Doktor Faustus,* likewise employs the "Faustian bargain" of his central character, Adrian Leverkühn, to develop an allegory of the rise and fall of Nazism.

In the sections below, I shall first examine the arguments around "adaptation" itself, and especially the questions of when a production can be properly said to be an adaptation, and what makes a successful adaptation. I proceed to examine the ways in which the Haus production deals with text, characters and staging.

Since the issue of adaptation is often connected with a judgement about fidelity to the text or message of, in this case, a play, it is worth noting Goethe's own views about whether his *Faust* has a message. In fact, Goethe was adamant that this play did not contain a "central message":

> Indeed, that would have been a fine thing, had I wanted to string such a rich, variegated, and extremely versatile life, as I represented in Faust, on the meager thread of a single central idea! It was altogether not my manner as a poet to strive for the embodiment of something *abstract.* I received *impressions* - impressions that were sensuous, vital, lovely, motley, hundred-fold - whatever a lively power of imagination offered me (Goethe to Eckermann, 6 May 1827).[2]

While we may try to search for, or construct, central messages, Goethe himself was aware that over nearly a lifetime of work on this play there was a richness and messiness that was irreducible to glib phrases. Given the German proclivity to great systems of abstract ideas and historical threads in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries - Fichte, Kant, Hegel, Herder, Schelling, Schiller, and Marx, among many others - Goethe's insistence on *yielding to one's impressions,* and the worth of impressions themselves, is refreshing. As he wisely said: "do not always think that everything is vain if it is not some abstract thought or ideal".[3] This is a theme to which I shall return in the concluding section.

## *Performance and adaptation*

Every play encounters some level of "adaptation" as it is translated from the page to the stage. Important decisions must be made about costumes, sets and lighting, about dialogue that might be re-phrased or even discarded, about scenes and characters that are unnecessary, and about emphasis and timing. The Director has a crucial role in making such decisions, and thus in shaping the "raw material" of the text into a thing of relevance for his or her times. While we might be especially conscious of the challenges of adapting plays that cross time and cultural zones, and of speaking to specific audiences, the issue of adaptation is one that confronts all directors who have a genuine desire to communicate. In the case of Haus's production of "Faust I", a play of perhaps more than 4 hours has been reduced to just over two hours. How to allow an American audience, relatively unacquainted with this masterpiece of German letters, to appreciate the depths of its insights into the human condition and, at the same time, follow its epic storyline in a time-frame that aligns with their expectations of an evening at the theatre?

Goethe's *Faust,* as I have already noted, is performed far less often in English than in its original German. The translations, however, are more than serviceable, even though each has its own style. Haus's production draws on three translations: Howard Brenton's poetical adaptation (for the Royal Shakespeare Theatre);

the well-known translation by the philosopher Walter Kaufmann in 1962, on which the quotations in this essay will chiefly be based; and Robert David MacDonald's performing version (for the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre Company). MacDonald's obituary in *The Scotsman* in May 2004 declared that "His translations of supposedly untranslatable and unperformable works, such as Goethe's *Faust,* opened up worlds for audiences."[4] As a native German speaker with fluent English, Haus drew also on the German text as published in the Hamburger Ausgabe (edited by Erich Trunz and published in Munich in 1981), and created a text from all these sources that was comfortable for the actors to speak and for the audiences to apprehend.

Apart from the matter of translation, there is a large academic and practitioner debate about the issue of what constitutes an "adaptation" of a work of art, particularly nowadays in the area of cinematic transpositions of literature (which are often decried as secondary or inferior). I shall briefly describe the issues before turning to the ways that Haus has transformed-for want of a neutral term at present-this version of "Faust I" for the American stage. The key questions for this debate are: when does change equate to "adaptation"?; and when is "performance" (or "staging") a more appropriate description than adaptation?

It is worth noting at the outset that some playwrights have a strong aversion to any change whatsoever to their works. Samuel Beckett, and subsequently his estate, are known - perhaps notoriously - for disallowing any changes to his text, or even stage directions. Perhaps they are motivated by a desire that their legacy, which they see embodied in their texts and the performances they authorise, not be adulterated or destroyed, or by the assumption that their vision and intent is the limit of the works they have created. But if postmodern accounts of literature have done anything positive, they have clarified that authorial intent is only one factor in understanding a literary work (if, for some, it is relevant at all), and that literature cannot be reduced to the author's biography. All encounters with literature are, at some level, creative interpretations.

Much of the criticism of adaptations centres on the issue of whether they are "faithful" to the originals. But thoughtful treatments

discount such "fidelity criticism" (or "authenticity") chiefly on account of whether there can be said to be "originals"; thus the question of "what is" a play, a film, or a piece of art becomes quite important. Often an adapter's job is one of contraction, described as "a surgical art";[5] often, especially in transposing from book to film, it is about successfully "showing" rather than "telling". Adaptations sometimes have to do quite different jobs depending on the medium.

The criteria for what constitutes an adaptation are variously set. For Linda Hutcheon, the bar is set high: adaptations are "deliberate, announced, and extended revisitations of prior works."[6] By contrast, Fischlin and Fortier, in their discussion of *Adaptations of Shakespeare* (2009), take an inclusive approach to the issue, arguing that "Adaptation as a material, performance practice can involve both radical rewritings, and a range of directorial and theatrical practices."[7] The problem with this approach, according to Kidnie, is that it collapses adaptation into production. She argues instead that "adaptation as an evolving category is closely tied to how the work modifies over time and from one reception space to another."[8] "The work," as she describes what others might call "the text," is "an ongoing process rather than a fixed object."[9] "The challenge to adaptation studies thus remains: when speaking specifically of drama, what constitutes adaptation as distinct from production?"[10] Is performance an inherently adaptive practice? Kidnie thinks not, allowing the term "adaptation" only where "the work" (itself continually taking shape as a consequence of production) can be distinguished from what is "not the work" by communities of users who act as an audience and as monitors on, and limiters to, what is a change outside acceptable parameters. Such an approach may be attractive in Shakespeare studies, where scholars and knowledgeable audiences form a type of (quite large) "user community", and perhaps for German-language Goethe studies, though a sociologist would observe that it has all the shortcomings of any community decision where in-groups and out-groups are liable to form.

In Germany, Goethe's *Faust* has been staged in radically imaginative ways, including Jorg Bochow's adaptation of "Faust I", at the State Theatre Stuttgart 2005-06, where the story line was

shaken up in baffling ways (two of three Fausts drink the fatal poison and later return to life as two Mephistos). Volker Losch's 2006 "Faust II" in Stuttgart was the transfer of Goethe's drama to a contemporary context; Michael Thalheimer's "Faust I" (2004) and "Faust II" (2005) in Berlin were controversial for presenting Faust as a "self-centered egomaniac."[11] Many of these adaptations have received hostile critiques. Pilz, for example, argues that both the Jan Bosse production of "Faust I" in Hamburg 2004, and Hasko Weber's in Stuttgart in 2005: "focused on only one aspect of the whole in order to find a viable theatrical form. Peter Stein's [2000] production, on the other hand, delivers poetic messages about the tragic fate of man - the sort of messages that would defy any clear-cut explanation."[12]

Further adaptations, in Hutcheon's sense, of Goethe's *Faust* have also appeared in English in recent times. In 2004, David Mamet's *Dr. Faustus* premiered in San Francisco, with a very different development from Goethe, by setting Faust as a domesticated academic with wife and sick child.[13] In May 2013, the Scapegoat Carnivale Theater in Montreal performed a workshop production of Goethe's *Faust,* adapted by Alison Darcy and Joseph Shragge, incorporating "video and shadow puppets to bring to life the play's many settings."[14] In all these cases, the issue of audience knowledge and familiarity with a play, and hence expectation of the performance they have paid to see, is key. Anthony Tommasini, chief music critic for *The New York Times,* has ventured - with regard to opera - to say that "the more familiar the piece, the more freedom a production team wants to claim in revising it. You can play around with *The Magic Flute* because it's so well known." Adaptations of opera, however, present different issues from a play, since words and music are set, published and widely available:

> Musicians know how to play them; singers know how to sing them. Reorchestrating Mozart or Verdi would be complex and expensive. But stagings start from scratch ... A company has to build sets and make costumes anyway, so if a house wants to be hip, directors are given leeway to shake things up.[15]

The latitude that directors have with English versions of Goethe's *Faust,* however, is more limited than with many other more familiar adaptations, such as of those of Shakespeare's plays. If the audience "knows" the original text or story, there will be Significant expectations, and the drawing of parallels between expectation and performance: "Knowing audiences have expectations - and demands."[16]

Understanding the audience is key to the director's art. The contemporary, American, audience for theatre is a diverse group (especially in a relatively discerning university town like Newark, DE, with its students and faculty, and nearby larger and more cosmopolitan cities including Baltimore and Washington, DC), but they all have many different options for entertainment: and whatever else theatre may be, it must be entertaining to be viable. Holding the audience's attention, initiating them into the layers and meanings of the play, encouraging their identification with characters and situations without feeding the illusion that they are real, are parts of the complex alchemy that produces those thoughtful reactions in an audience that constitute success. This is an audience that is likely to know of the "Faustian bargain", and perhaps also that the striving of humans for mastery over nature and society seems itself to be such a type of "bargain", bringing with it as much insecurity and pain as joy. We are, or perhaps we ought to be, cognisant of the sin of hubris. This, I think, helps to explain why Faust has such a strong appeal to today's Western mindset, whatever the aesthetic position one holds (though Goethe's extraordinary anticipation of many modern phenomena add to the appeal).

A successful adaptation relies, in the first place, on the Director's ability to make the play coherent and understandable to a contemporary audience without significant loss of depth and complexity, a challenge deepened by the multiple translations required to move from nineteenth century Germany to twenty-first century America. Second, it relies on the ability of the Director and the actors to convey the stance of the characters. And third, it relies on the staging and design to set the scenes without overpowering the acting. The primary decision a Director must make is how a play

works; all else flows from this. Understanding how Goethe's *Faust* works requires some understanding of its context and importance.

## *The importance of Goethe's Faust*

Goethe's *Faust* is important in at least two fundamental senses, both of which are in tension with each other when staging this drama today. To begin, *Faust* is perhaps the single most important work of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), who is perhaps the single most important figure in German letters. Traditionalists and purists alike object to the cutting of phrases, or characters, or scenes, much as adapting Shakespeare is sometimes seen as heretical. (Goethe himself would have had little truck with such people, not just because he was a very practical theatre director himself, facing all the pressures that directors do, or because he constantly changed the text of *Faust* for much of his adult life, but because staging the entire play - Parts One and Two - in their unexpurgated richness would require a performance beyond the resources of theatre companies facing normal practicalities and the stamina of the usual audiences). In the second place, *Faust* is a work of immediate and enduring relevance to the human condition: to those who strive for knowledge, and especially understanding, and who see it constantly just outside their reach; to those who struggle with issues of right and wrong, of following one's heart against the restraints of social conventions; to those who recognise both the virtuous and the base in their own natures; to those who have a sense that their efforts, however much praised, are puny and even somewhat ridiculous. How, then, to pay appropriate homage to Goethe and also to convey these enduring themes to a contemporary, predominantly English-language audience who, moreover, are unlikely to be completely familiar with the epic structure of the play (as distinct from Faust's wager with the Devil, which is simply the device that unlocks the real substance of this drama)?

Walter Kaufmann declared that "What is truly astonishing about *Faust* is its modernity and, next to that, some timeless qualities."[17] The matter of Faust's "ruthless striving" for knowledge

and control had a rapid appeal amongst Germans in the nineteenth century and beyond, and it has even been seen as characteristic of modern culture more generally. Oswald Spengler, for example, in *The Decline of tbe West,* first published in 1918, called Western civilization "the Faustian culture", because man had sold his soul to "technics"; he was seeking to reach the impossible.[18] And it is not difficult to see Faustian themes emerge nowadays in contrasts between humans' technological mastery and their inability to solve social problems, and especially - in accounts of global warming - in the paradox that technology has become a threat to the future of human life.

The starting-point for Haus is the notion that Goethe's insights are modern. He explained that "Faust is all of us whose longing for happiness and fulfilment makes us restless and susceptible to temptation."[19] And, to acknowledge the active collaboration that makes the University of Delaware's Resident Ensemble Players such a vital part of contemporary American theatre, questions about enduring themes are ones that the cast, the designers and the producers have all had to confront. Their answers may not satisfy all, but in my view they succeed in creating a connection with the audience that is provocative, thoughtful, and ultimately satisfying.

## *Haus's approach: economy + performance = adaptation*

Heinz-Uwe Haus is no stranger to the challenges of interesting plays, nor to the sensibilities of American audiences. He comes with thirty years' experience in the United States, and a long list of successful productions in Delaware (where he is on the faculty of the University of Delaware's Theatre Department), in Vila nova University, and elsewhere. Haus began his career at the Deutsches Theatre Berlin, and was a founding member of the East German Directing Institute and head of its Directing Department. Haus's Brechtian approach has been described elsewhere,[20] with particular emphasis on what he calls "physicalized" acting-a trademark of his craft-and on theatre as a community event. His underlying view, in

accord with Brecht's, is that the director must strive to move his or her audience to see the relevance of the theatre to their world.

Kaufmann praises Goethe's "craftsmanship of the construction" of the play, and argues that it anticipates Brecht's "epic theatre" by a hundred years. [21] This is the case as much for Part One as for Part Two, which is sprawling, because Part One is episodic, and contains a variety of styles. Nevertheless, Part One is carried forward, as Kaufmann puts it, by a "brilliant sequence of scenes: Martha's Garden, At the Well, City Wall, Night, and Cathedral. There are no long speeches or creaking conversations to tell us what happened: the presentation could not be simpler; what does not need to be said is left unsaid."[22] The whole can be understood as "epic" theatre, in which the drama is not driven along by the need to arrive at the denouement. As David Luke put it: "In the epic style ... 'sensuous breadth' is of the essence: certain discursive lingering over pleasing detail and episode for its own sake, a tendency of the parts to pursue their own enjoyable autonomy rather than remain functions of a tightly-controlled, end-directed whole."[23]

The staging of this production was simple but effective. Actors made use of the entire playing area, while being brought together on a slightly raised round platform in the middle with minimal use of props. Lighting, by Bill Browning, was stunningly effective, using a wall of single colour in different scenes to create moods. The characteristic simplicity of Haus's set design was complicated to a minor extent by the use of pyrotechnics ("magic flame effects") in a couple of scenes: partly because such special effect were not essential; and partly because they were not reliable across all performances. A concession to the American audience, accustomed as they now are to the ubiquity of special effects, these pyrotechnics dimmed the sense that the audience was watching a theatrical performance, not observing a slice of real life.

The production begins, as Goethe intended, with a discussion between the theatre director, the poet and an actor about the purpose of the theatre, and then proceeds to the "Prologue in Heaven", where Mephistopheles wagers with God over who will control the soul of Faust. The focus is on Faust: in his study, in despair at not being able to understand the world despite a lifetime of study, and abject that he

knows nothing. He casts about for devices to assist him and, when none succeeds, he contemplates suicide. He is arrested by the sound of church bells ringing in Easter, reminding him of childhood happiness. Faust and his famulus, Wagner, walk into town on Easter morning, Faust still in desperate mood despite the warm greetings of the villagers, and a black poodle - Mephisto in disguise - follows them home. Back in his study, Mephisto eventually reveals himself to Faust and promises to show him the pleasures of life, in exchange for his soul. Faust agrees that if Mephisto can give him a moment in which he no longer strives, in which he is satisfied and wants to remain, then Faust will give up his soul:

> If to the moment I should say:
> Abide, you are so fair-
> Put me in fetters on that day,
> I wish to perish then.., I swear. [24]

Mephisto leads Faust to Auerbach's Cellar in Leipzig, where Faust is disgusted by the drunken patrons: a miscalculation by Mephisto on what might satisfy such a man. This is the break for intermission. It is appropriate since Faust has made the fateful decision to break from the sterility of his study, from theory, to engage with the world. As Mephisto famously says to the student, theory is "Grey": "And green alone is life's golden tree."[25]

We return in the following scenes to see where this will lead, and specifically to the role of Gretchen. The second part of the performance begins in the Witch's Kitchen, where a potion turns Faust into a handsome young man. On the street, he sees Margarete, a beautiful and uncorrupted young woman, and demands that Mephisto procure her for him; Mephisto leaves jewels for the young woman on her bed. Gretchen brings the jewels to her mother, who donates them to the Church. Mephisto once again leaves jewels, but this time Gretchen shows them to her neighbour, Martha, who advises her to wear the jewels, secretly, only in her house. By a ruse, Mephisto worms his way into Martha's house and contrives for Faust to meet Gretchen. In the following garden scene, Gretchen confesses her love to Faust, and even considers allowing him to her bed despite

his evasive answer about religion, which is also a not-so-subtle question about his view of marriage. Gretchen takes a bottle of sleeping potion to administer to her mother, so that they can be together, but the mother is poisoned. The next scene, at the well, suggests that Gretchen is pregnant, and is acutely aware of the social and religious sanctions against unwed motherhood. Then we have a duel between Faust and Gretchen's brother, furious at the liaison with his sister, in which the brother is killed. Gretchen is next in the Cathedral, seeking comfort for her sins. Faust seeks solace in the orgy of Walpurgisnacht, the witches' festival, but cannot be entirely distracted from the image of his beloved Gretchen (who has drowned her newborn baby, and been condemned to death). In the dungeon, waiting for the sentence to be carried out, Gretchen is approached by Faust who wants to rescue her, but - at first not recognising him - she resists. Ultimately, Faust flees, and Gretchen offers her soul to God. A heavenly voice intones, at the end of the play: "She is saved".

Much of the success of this production relies on strong acting. The complexity of the characters must come through; we must understand Faust's despair at his minuscule understanding; we must understand his love, and not simply carnal desire for Gretchen; we must understand the strength of Gretchen herself; we must understand the relationship between Mephisto and Faust as essential and symbiotic; the Mephisto character must be believable as that part of our very own character. Despite this grim fare, or perhaps because of it, we also need to acknowledge the humour that Goethe writes into his play. Peter Stein argued that "As a matter of principle, the theatre needs humour ... In *Faust,* comedy sneaks in everywhere, especially through Mephisto."[26]

The three key parts are those of Faust himself, Mephisto, and Gretchen. The part of Mephisto was played in an outstanding way by Mic Matarrese. Haus used him to announce changes of scene, and even to pull across the Brechtian curtain: he provided, in a sense, the narrative thread of the play. (This was an essential role for those audiences that did not know the play intimately, but also because of the directorial excisions and the rapid changes of scene). Significantly, Haus does away with medieval cliches of horned devil with cloven feet, to make the Devil "normal"; as he writes: "What

kind of Devil would he be if he couldn't conjure up a human appearance that inspired confidence?"[27] But Haus allows - encourages! - the actor to explore the contradictions in behaviour between his human appearance and his supernatural magic tricks. This is actually great fun for the audience and, surprisingly perhaps, Mephisto emerges (with his wicked humour and his frustrations and impatience in dealing with Faust) as an almost endearing character: one with whom we at least empathize! As Haus relates: "Mephisto is clever, high-spirited, witty, and sometimes even charming; he is a sharp observer and a keen analyst, and he is a realist whereas Faust is an idealist theoretician."[28] Mephisto, indeed, is Faust's entry into the real world, and he represents something that is, to a greater or lesser extent, in all of us.

Mephisto is a part of Faust (both alter ego; and containing a tendency towards self- destruction, just as Gretchen might be considered the feminine part). As Janz says, Mephisto has many roles, and

> If we compare Mephistopheles with the traditional picture of the devil, it is quite clear that he has become more complex-and more ambivalent ... So he can well be called a "man without qualities", and in this respect Mephistopheles is more modern that the epitomes of evil on the Elizabethan stage-such as Richard III-and elsewhere.[29]

Kaufmann adds that

> Goethe forces us to sympathize with Mephistopheles. Unlike Faust, Mephisto has a sense of humor and is even capable of laughing at himself; he is a keen psychologist who sees through convention and pretense; and, though radically dishonest when it suits his purposes, he confronts us with a rarely equaled candor just when Faust's enthusiasm outsoars all scrupulous concern with truth or honesty. It may well be that Mephistopheles is Goethe's greatest single creation.[30]

Haus spends a great deal of time thinking through the role of Mephisto. But his evaluation of the role of Faust, and the demands upon the actor, are equally sharp. Faust is played in this production

by an intense Stephen Pelinski. The story is about Faust's "awakening", and then about his tragic engagement with the world. But Faust's quest for understanding, on which he is prepared to stake his life, at first, and then his soul, cannot be satisfied in his books. He must engage with the real world, and that is why Mephisto is so important to this conception. Faust outgrows the need for Mephisto, and consequently and ultimately wins his bet for his soul (though this is something that we know only from the very end of the whole play). As Haus put it: the "ability to grow and change is what allows Faust, who is initially helpless and dependent on Mephisto for all worldly things, to be victorious in the end."[31]

Faust undergoes a transformation across the play, requiring more-than-competent acting. This is not an opportunity for glib performances, caricatures, or political statements. Pelinski's Faust moves us with his ability to convey the challenges, the disgust, the horror, and the realisations of his journey into the real world. Brecht, when staging *Urfaust* in Berlin in 1953, according to Hans Schulte, reduced Faust to a deadly threat to society: thus "Radical deconstructions ofthe Faust figure, quite often exposing it to ridicule, became an unfortunate, state-subsidized fashion."[32] Haus's treatment is more sympathetic as well as being strong. Peter Stein argued that "any stage production will have to make Faust the commanding figure throughout,"[33] and Haus, with Pelinski, achieves this effect.

It is perhaps the character of Margarete (Gretchen, played by Sara J. Griffin) who is the most surprising feature of this production. A "lesser" character in Goethe's play, though crucial to the development of the story and to its complex messages, Gretchen emerges here not just as a device, but as a role that develops and displays enormous strength. Gretchen sacrifices her virtue, her family, and ultimately her life, for the simplest and highest of motives: for love. She begins as an unsophisticated and sheltered girl, but ends as someone prepared to face her punishment. Her commitment to the right path is undimmed; and it is - on her death - rewarded with salvation. So Gretchen emerges from the Haus production as a figure both vulnerable and strong. She allows Faust to impregnate her outside the bounds of marriage; she kills her mother; she drowns the baby at birth and refuses the opportunity to

escape the death penalty for this crime. She is condemned by society, but she is saved by God. Griffin relishes the physicality of the part encouraged by Haus. She successfully describes a major development of her character across the first Part of Faust, from innocent to destroyed, but unbowed, woman.

*Conclusion*

It is important not to miss some of the key points in discussing the questions of adaptation, particularly its purpose and success. First, for Goethe, *Faust* was a work-in-progress, essentially a life's work, that grew and sometimes changed in significant ways (including the deliverance of Gretchen) across almost a lifetime of continued interaction with his text. Second, and for Goethe but also for his intended audiences, the importance of this work lay in its attempts to explore and understand the human journey in which Faust, Mephisto and Gretchen were partial, interlinked, but key elements, and in which the purpose was not to deliver a message but to get the audience to think. Goethe himself was not the sort of purist who would subject audiences to versions of works "for their own good, whether they liked it or not": he was a practical director as well as a genius of literature who understood the various dimensions of staging a play (as the Prelude in the Theatre, which begins *Faust,* demonstrates). That Haus's production was a significantly shortened version of only the First Part of *Faust,* in a language not the original, and in a style that was entertaining, fast- paced and engaging[34] is against the spirit of the play only if it serves to create a kind of pleasant diversion for audiences. Instead, it brings the issues alive in their heads and hearts.

Haus's adaptation of "Faust I" is an exceptional work. Strongly directed, splendidly cast, and supported by expert sets and lighting, costumes and choreography, it entertains without diverting. As an adaptation, it is faithful to the spirit of Goethe's *Faust.* It is a creative response to the issues of engaging with a contemporary American (indeed, more generally, an English-speaking) audience, as

was abundantly clear by watching and talking to members of the audiences afterwards.

In her discussion of adaptation, Hutcheon is right to point out that "in stage productions as in cinema, the characteristic preoccupations, tastes, and stylistic trademarks of the director are what stand out and become identifiable."[35] The academic debate over "adaptation" will doubtless continue, with one or more sides accepting Haus's production as, on their terms, an adaptation. What can be said with certainty is that Haus's "American Faust" is recognisably within the Goethean poetic, dramatic and humanistic tradition while at the same time being very far from Goethe himself, and displaying the style of an accomplished Brechtian director. Make of that what you will. But as a piece of theatre, it has to be acknowledged a great success.

## CREDITS

*Faust,* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, presented by the Resident Ensemble Players, Thompson Theater at the Roselle Center for the Arts, University of Delaware, March 6-23, 2014

Cast:

| | |
|---|---|
| Faust | Stephen Pelinski |
| Mephisto | Mic Matarrese |
| Gretchen | Sara J. Griffin |
| Earth Spirit | Deena Burke |
| Theater Manager / The Lord | Lee Ernst |
| Wagner / Valentine | Michael Gotch |
| The Witch | Elizabeth Heflin |
| Martha | Kathleen Pirkl Tague |
| Lieschen | Erin Partin |
| Raphael/Brander | Paul Hurley |
| Gabriel/Siebel | Mark D. Hines |
| Michael | Lynn Berg |

Production staff:

| | |
|---|---|
| Heinz-Uwe Haus | Adaptation and Direction |
| William Browning | Scenic and Lighting Design |
| Andrea Barrier | Costume Design |
| Eileen Smitheimer | Sound Design |
| Joann Browning | Choreography |
| Waldo Warshaw | Special Effects Designer |
| Larry Denburg | Magic Consultant |
| Ryan Touhey | Music Direction |
| Cat Wallis | Stage Manager |
| Kathryn Ambrose | Assistant Stage Manager |
| Megan Kraft | Senior Production Assistant |

NOTES:

[1] Martin Puchner, "Drama and Performance: Toward a Theory of Adaptation," in *Common Knowledge* 17:2, 2011, pp. 292-305.
[2] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, Anchor Books, New York, 1962, p. 10.
[3] *Ibidem,* p. 11.
[4] "Robert David MacDonald," in *The Scotsman,* 21 May 2004, http://www.scotsman.com/news/obituaries/robert-david-macdonald-1-531869.
[5] Abbot, cited in Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation,* Routledge, New York, 2006, p. 19.
[6] *Ibidem,* p. XIV.
[7] Cited in Margaret Jane Kidnie, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation,* Routledge, New York, 2009, p. 5.
[8] *Ibidem,* p. 5.
[9] *Ibid.,* p. 6.
[10] *Ibid.,* p. 7.
[11] Scheringstiftung, "Egomaniac Faust - Director Michael Thalheimer Stages Goethe's Faust," 16 October 2004. http://www.scheringstiftung.de/i nd ex. p h p ?option=com _co ntent&view=a rticle& id = 1466%3Aegoma ne-faust-michael-thalheimer-inszeniert-goethes-faust&catid=56&ltemid=132&lang=en

[12] Dirk Pilz, "A contradictory whole: Peter Stein stages Faust," in Hans Schulte, John Noyes, Pia Kleber (eds.), *Goethe's Faust: Theatre of Modernity, C*ambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, p. 291.
[13] David Mamet, *Faustus,* Vintage Books, New York, 2007.
[14] Scapegoat Carnivale Theatre, *Faust,* http://www.scapegoatcarnivaletheatre.com/projects-3/880-2/
[15] Anthony Tommasini, "Adapting, Revising, Provoking," in *The New York Times,* 11 March, 2012, p. AR1.
[16] Hutcheon, *op. cit.,* p. 122.
[17] Goethe, *ed. cit.,* p. 12.
[18] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality,* translated by Charles Francis Atkinson, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1926.
[19] Heinz-Uwe Haus, Program notes for *Faust,* University of Delaware, 2014.
[20] Charles Helmetag, " 'Ein Berliner' in America: Directing Approaches in Context," in *The European Legacy,* 15:3, 1962, pp. 317-322.
[21] Goethe, *ed. cit.,* p. 15.
[22] *Ibidem,* p. 26.
[23] David Luke, "Introduction," in *Oxford World's Classics-Goethe. Faust: Part Two,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, p. XIV.
[24] Goethe, *ed. cit.,* p.185, lines 1699-1702.
[25] Goethe, *ed. cit.,* p. 207, lines 2038-39.
[26] Peter Stein, "Directing Faust: an interview," in Hans Schulte…, *op. cit.,* p. 265.
[27] Haus, *op. cit.*
[28] *Ibidem.*
[29] Rolf-Peter Janz, "Mephisto and the modernization of evil," in Hans Schulte, *op. cit.,* p. 32.
[30] Goethe, *ed.cit.,* p. 22.
[31] Haus, *op. cit.*
[32] Hans Schulte, „Introduction," in Schulte, *op. cit.,* p. 6.
[33] *Ibidem,* p. 7.
[34] Gail Obenreder, "UD's 'Faust' anything but dull," in *The News Journal,* 10 March 2014,http://www.delawareonline.com/story/entertainment/theater/2014/03/10/uds-faust-anything-but- dull/6259801/.
[35] Hutcheon, *op. cit.,* pp. 83-84.

# Cuvântul şi geneza lumii: implicaţii hristologice în cosmologie

ALEXANDRU DAN ADAM

ABSTRACT: This essay discusses the connection between God the Father and the divine Logos in the framework of the intra-trinitarian relationships and the role of the Logos, son of God, in the creation of the world. The author emphasizes the ontologic distinction between God and His creation, the total dependence of the created order on its Creator, and the creation's vocation and need to participate in the divine life.

Creaţia lumii este tratată încă din referatul Biblic care debutează cu o afirmaţie de ordin general: "Întru început a făcut Dumnezeu cerul şi pământul. Iar pământul era nevăzut şi neorânduit, întuneric deasupra genunii şi duhul lui Dumnezeu se purta peste apă. Şi Dumnezeu a zis: ' Să fie lumină.' Şi a fost lumină. Şi a văzut că lumina era bună. Şi a despărţit Dumnezeu lumina de întuneric. Şi a numit Dumnezeu lumina 'zi' şi întunericul 'noapte'. Şi a fost seară, şi a fost dimineaţă: ziua întâi" (Gen.I, 1-5). Majoritatea interpreţilor, referindu-se la acest text, leagă ideea de "început" cu prologul Evangheliei lui Ioan,[1] care spune că : "La început era Cuvântul şi Cuvântul era la Dumnezeu şi Dumnezeu era Cuvântul. Acesta era întru început la Dumnezeu. Toate prin El s-au făcut; şi fără El nimic nu s-a făcut din ce s-a făcut. Întru El era viaţă şi viaţa era lumina oamenilor. Şi lumina luminează în întuneric şi întunericul nu a cuprins-o" (Ioan I, 1-5).[2]

Întâi, Moise ne arată în Geneză că lumea a fost făcută prin Cuvântul lui Dumnezeu, iar prin despărţirea întunericului de lumină a dat un timp potrivit fiecăreia.[3] Mai târziu, în Evanghelia lui Ioan ni se explică cine este Cuvântul care creează lumea. Vladimir Lossky spune că: "Sfântul Ioan evocă un 'început' veşnic, acela al

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Cuvântului, termenul fiind aici analogic şi desemnând o relaţie veşnică. Pe de altă parte, 'începutul' îşi găseşte sensul deplin în textul Facerii, unde chemarea la existenţă a lumii dă naştere timpului. În sens ontologic, Cartea Facerii este, astfel, secundară în raport cu Prologul Sfântului Ioan; cele două 'începuturi' sunt deosebite, fără a fi, cu toate acestea, cu desăvârşire străine unul altuia, dacă nu uităm natura intenţională a ideilor divine… 'Începutul' din primul verset al Facerii semnifică, aşadar, creaţia în timp."[4]

Dacă primul "început" (cel din Facere) ne arată crearea timpului, cel de al doilea ne exprimă că "Cuvântul era dintru început", iar Sfântul Vasile cel Mare se întreabă: "Dacă era la început, atunci când nu era? […] Ştii oare când S-a născut, ca să poţi fixa în timp cuvintele 'înainte de'?"[5] Aflăm de aici că Logosul divin nu este circumcis de timp, ci doar începutul lumii este fixat în timp şi împărţit în cicluri de zile şi nopţi,[6] ceea ce ne arată o logică interioară a lumii, o raţiune a ei. Termenul "zi" este folosit nu pentru a desemna un timp de douăzeci şi patru de ore, cum multă vreme s-a crezut, ci – prin comparaţie cu "ziua de muncă" – pentru a indica prezenţa activă a lui Dumnezeu, câtă vreme tot ce există este lucrat de El. Avem, aici, motivul cel mai puternic pentru ca miliardele de ani pe care le numără ştiinţa să nu-l sperie pe teolog şi să nu mai pară o lipsă de evlavie, fiindcă "ziua de muncă" vorbeşte despre un Dumnezeu care îşi afirmă demnitatea şi puterea prin chenoză sau prin coborârea iubitoare la posibilităţile creaţiei, aşa cum a procedat şi spre mântuirea acesteia.[7] Logica Cuvântului este Raţiunea Tatălui, vehiculul de comunicare între Subiectele Treimice care se manifestă prin creaţie. Creând, Dumnezeu vrea să mărească numărul subiectelor care să se bucure de fericirea comuniunii cu El. Fiul îndeplineşte dorinţa Tatălui de a avea mai mulţi fii şi creează lumea cu împreună Sfatul Tatălui şi al Duhului Sfânt, devenind mai apoi puntea între persoane ca subiecte şi îndeplinind rolul revelării lui Dumnezeu oamenilor. Prin faptul că Fiul lui Dumnezeu e numit nu cuvânt, ci Cuvântul, se arată că nu este o persoană între altele, ci este Persoana prin excelenţă care atrage subiectele în comuniune, trezind mereu intenţionalitatea comuniunii.[8]

Logosul Ipostatic,[9] Cel Care este veşnic în sânul Tatălui şi prin Care toate au fost create, împlineşte atât omul, cât şi cosmosul,

deoarece, El este Persoana care stă în relaţie cu celelalte Persoane ale Sfintei Treimi. Logosul are două înţelesuri: unul de raţiune care subzistă în creaturi ca suport al existenţei lor şi cel de al doilea înţeles este de Cuvânt ipostatic - a doua Persoană a Sfintei Treimi.[10] Aşa se face că Revelaţia este, în primul rând, o Persoană (Hristos). Potrivit scrierilor ioaneice, Revelaţia este Logosul Întrupat prin care se găseşte calea de comunicare cu Dumnezeu. El este Cuvântul creator, prin Care s-au făcut toate, în care este Viaţa şi Lumina, Cuvântul Care a venit să-i înveţe pe oameni şi Care, pentru aceasta, S-a făcut trup. El este de asemenea Cuvântul Vieţii pe care apostolii L-au văzut cu ochii lor, L-au auzit cu urechile lor, L-au pipăit cu mâinile lor (cf. I Ioan 1, 13). Cuvântul lui Dumnezeu este Limbajul Tatălui prin care creează lumea şi începutul (Timpul). Hristos este Evenimentul cosmic, Logosul lui Dumnezeu şi agentul creaţiei.[11]

Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, în omiliile sale, explică legătura Cuvântului cu Tatăl zicând: "De ce este numit Cuvânt? Pentru că este chipul Celui care L-a născut, arătând în El Însuşi, în întregime, pe Cel care L-a născut; şi fără să Se despartă întru ceva de Cel ce L-a născut, are totuşi o existenţă desăvârşită în El Însuşi, aşa precum şi cuvântul nostru înfăţişează în întregime gândirea noastră; pe cele pe care le-am gândit în inimă, pe acelea le rostim prin cuvânt; astfel, graiul nostru este înfăţişarea gândirii inimii noastre, că din prisosinţa inimii grăieşte cuvântul. […] Ioan l-a numit 'Cuvânt' ca să-ţi arate naşterea fără suferinţă din Tatăl, să-ţi teologhisească existenţa desăvârşită a Fiului şi să-ţi arate prin asta legătura în afară de timp a Fiului cu Tatăl."[12] De aici se vede limpede că nici Tatăl, nici Fiul nu sunt cuprinşi într-un loc sau în timp, fiind aspaţiali şi atemporali. "Fiul era la Dumnezeu", aşa ne spune evanghelistul Ioan, adică era împreună cu Tatăl cel necuprins, iar un alt aspect pe care evanghelistul îl spune, referindu-se la Cuvânt, este acela că era "la Dumnezeu" şi nu "în Dumnezeu" , arătând prin aceasta că ipostasul Fiului nu se confundă cu al Tatălui, ci Tatăl, Fiul şi Duhul Sfânt sunt trei Persoane diferite având ca Fiinţă dumnezeirea, Cuvântul fiind dintotdeauna cu Tatăl, "Acesta era de la început", adică nu exista un timp în care Fiul să nu fi fost.[13]

Sfântul Ioan, folosind - în primul capitol al Evangheliei - pentru Hristos ca Dumnezeu numele de Cuvântul, a arătat caracterul

de Persoană activă a Fiului în dialog cu Tatăl, deci cu altă Persoană şi, prin aceasta, a subliniat faptul că începutul tuturor nu e o esenţă, ci o comuniune supremă de Persoane, gânditoare şi liberă. Aceiaşi idee o întâlnim şi la Sfântul Chiril al Alexandriei, Cuvântul nefiind altcineva decât Fiul etern al Tatălui. Dar la Sfântul Chiril folosirea termenului "întru început" indică nu atât relaţia Lui cu lumea, cum dă de înţeles traducerea lui în Biblia românească cu "La început", ci cu Tatăl. Deşi îl numeşte mai mult Fiul, prin acest nume arată relaţia Lui cu Tatăl, cum o implică de altfel şi termenul "Cuvântul" care "era" din eternitate.[14] Fiind chipul Tatălui, "Lumină din Lumină, Dumnezeu adevărat din Dumnezeu adevărat, deofiinţă cu Tatăl prin care toate s-au făcut," având aceeaşi dumnezeire, aceeaşi consubstanţă şi aceeaşi coeternitate cu Tatăl şi cu Duhul, cele Trei Ipostasuri sunt perfect egale între Ele şi au aceeaşi supremă voinţă, aceeaşi supremă cunoaştere, aceeaşi supremă putere de acţiune. Aşa se face că pe lângă Tatăl şi Fiul şi "Duhul care se purta deasupra apelor" participă la cosmogeneza lumii.

Sfântul Atanasie cel Mare spune referindu-se la creaţie şi la Creator: "…una fiind creaţiunea şi una ordinea ei, Unul trebuie cugetat că este Împăratul şi Domnul creator al ei. De aceea şi Creatorul a făcut întreaga lume ca una."[15] Hristos – Logosul devine creator dar şi Pantocrator, susţinător al lumii. "El este Dumnezeul cel Unul şi Unul – Născut, Care, provenind ca un bun din Tatăl, ca din izvorul cel bun, toate le orânduieşte frumos şi le susţine ca atare,"[16] spune acelaşi sfânt alexandrin. Logosul, ca Persoană şi Raţiunea din care iradiază raţiunile tuturor lucrurilor şi Cuvântul Care vorbeşte prin toate lucrurile, îi leagă pe oameni de Sine, atât prin faptul că e Creator al ei, cât şi prin aceea că e Mântuitorul ei.[17]

Găsim în abordarea ierahului alexandrin perspectiva teologică asupra antropologiei rezolvată în cheie hristologică. Fiindcă omul avea odinioară fire nefiinţa, dar prin iubirea şi Întruparea Cuvântului oamenii au fost chemaţi la existenţă, au fost chemaţi din stricăciune la nestricăciune şi la vieţuirea după Dumnezeu prin harul Cuvântului. Omul avea şansa perfecţionării, a îndumnezeirii, dar neascultând de Creatorul său şi părăsind raţiunea creaţiei a chemat împotriva sa moartea şi însingurarea, coborând progresiv în neputinţă.[18] Natura umană căzută din legătura cu Dumnezeu şi din comuniunea

Cuvântului începea să se descompună, iar umanitatea, lipsită de legătura cu izvorul vieţii, nu mai înainta spre nimic. Din pricina acestei neascultări, greşeala omului trebuia răscumpărată şi harul lui Dumnezeu readus, iar refacerea legăturii dintre Dumnezeu şi om a rămas ca misiune de Restaurare a Cuvântului care o făcuse dintru început. Astfel că Fiul lui Dumnezeu se Întrupează şi prin biruinţa Sa asupra morţii dăruieşte nestricăciunea prin asumarea ontologică a neamului omenesc, restaurând lumea şi aducând-o la starea cea dintâi. Ceea ce înseamnă că primul act al creaţiei este continuat prin Întrupare, iar rolul lui Iisus Hristos este acela de asumare a umanităţii. "Jertfa Domnului, moartea Lui ca jertfă reprezintă acest moment al perfecţiunii totale. Moment final în care ideea divină (ειδος) despre om, programul dat lui de Creator pe pământ încă înainte de cădere (Fac.1, 28), e realizat în plinătatea lui Iisus Hristos şi oferit ca pârgă a creaţiei, judecăţii Tatălui. Realizat într-o asemenea perfecţiune încât se poate spune că în Hristos eshatologia e deja împlinită şi moartea lui e Judecata Judecăţii (Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul). Din acest punct de limită, creaţia intră cu Hristos într-o altă ordine de existenţă, în veacul învierii."[19]

Prin actul chenotic al coborârii Fiului Lui Dumnezeu în lume ni se deschide drumul desăvârşirii. Fiind în solidaritate deplină cu noi, Hristos devine centrul uman, dând tuturor celor ce se împărtăşesc de El biruinţa asupra păcatului şi asupra morţii. "Toată mântuirea are marca unor relaţii personale între Hristos şi, prin El, între Sfânta Treime şi oameni."[20] Cunoaşterea Cuvântului şi comunicarea cu Logosul infinit oferă omului sensul şi viaţa veşnică. Pentru că numai prin participarea la Raţiunea supremă omul îşi descoperă raţiunea de a exista şi de a trăi veşnic.

Din cele spuse ni se descoperă două realităţi: dumnezeirea şi creaţia ca distincţie ontologică. În felul acesta se fundamentează alteritatea dintre dumnezeire şi creaţie. Totuşi, în mod fundamental există doar o singură realitate, cea dumnezeiască. Dumnezeirea este fiinţa, iar creaţia nefiinţa. Altfel spus, făptura există în măsura în care participă la dumnezeire.[21] Toată făptura este dependentă de lucrarea voinţei Creatorului ei şi doar în măsura în care participă la izvorul fiinţării şi al vieţii devine realitate şi existenţă bună.[22] Făptura trebuie să participe la Cuvântul Vieţii care e Raţiunea, Înţelepciunea şi

Limbajul lui Dumnezeu prin care toate capătă sens şi desăvârşire. Legătura lumii cu Logosul Ipostatic este imperioasă, deoarece, după cum am văzut, lumea nu îşi are existenţa prin sine, ci existenţa lumii este un dar de la Tatăl prin Fiul.

NOTES:

[1] Vezi de exemplu la Origen unde versetele din Facere sunt legate de cele din Evanghelia după Ioan. Origen identifică o tâlcuire a Vechiului Testament prin cel Nou, iar începutul, pentru autorul omiliilor, nu se referă „la ceva ce ține de timp", ci termenul „întru început" se referă la Persoana Mântuitorului prin care toate s-au făcut, subliniind prin acesta că începutul tuturor este Hristos. Cf. *Omilia I* în *Omilii, comentarii și adnotări la Geneză*, ediție bilingvă, introd., trad. şi note de Adrian Muraru, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2006, p. 121.
[2] Pentru o hermeneutică patristică asupra primelor versete din Cartea Facerii vezi lucrarea lui Andrew Loth, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Genesis I-Ll,*Inter Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2001.
[3] Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, „Omila a- III-a la Facere" în *Omilii la Facere*, trad. Pr. D. Fecioru, Ed. Institutului Biblic şi de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (IBMBOR), Bucureşti, 2003, p.25.
[4] Vladimir Lossky, *Introducere în Teologia Ortodoxă*, trad. de Lidia şi Remus Rus, Ed. Sofia, Bucureşti, 2006, p.73.
[5] Sf. Vasile cel Mare, „Omilia XVI" în *Omilii şi Cuvântări*, Colecţia Părinţi şi Scriitori Bisericeşti, nr. 1, seria nouă, Ed. Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, Bucureşti, 2009, p.260.
[6] Făcând referire la coexistenţa Fiului cu Tatăl, Sfântul Chiril al Alexandriei spune: „Nimic nu este mai vechi ca începutul, dacă ne gândim la definiţia 'începutului'. Căci nu va exista niciodată vreun început al începutului, sau cugetându-se vreun alt început existent înainte; şi aşa, mai departe se va nega existenţa unui început adevărat. Căci altfel, dacă se întâmplă să existe un altul mai înainte de începutul adevărat, cuvântul nostru despre început va merge la nesfârşit, răsărind mereu altul şi declarând ca al doilea pe cel la care s-a oprit căutarea noastră. Deci nu va fi început al începutului pentru cugetarea exactă şi adevărată, ci cuvântul despre el va exprima infinitatea şi necuprinderea lui. Deci mersul mereu înapoi neavând sfârşit şi depăşind măsura veacurilor, Fiul nefiind născut în timp, Se va afla existând mai degrabă etern împreună cu Tatăl, căci 'era la început'." *Comentariu la Evanghelia de la Ioan* în Colecţia Părinţi şi Scriitori Bisericeşti (PSB), nr.41, Ed. IBMBOR, Bucureşti, 2000, pp.14 -15.

[7] Pr. Sebastian F. Ardelean, *Curs de Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, dactilografiat, Timişoara.
[8] Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos sau Restaurarea omului*, Ed. Omniscop, Craiova, 1993, pp.79-83.
[9] Sfântul Ioan Evanghelistul identifică pe Fiul lui Dumnezeu care S-a întrupat cu Cuvântul, iar pe Acesta Îl cunoaşte, aidoma Sfântului Pavel, ca pe Cel prin Care toate s-au făcut, fiind înainte de Întrupare viaţa şi lumina oamenilor ce lumina în întuneric (Ioan 1, 3-5, 14). Sfântul Ioan a preluat ideea Logosului de la stoici şi de la Filon, identificându-l cu Fiul lui Dumnezeu. De asemenea, pentru Sfântul Apostol Pavel Logosul este Persoana ce îndeplineşte acelaşi rol de fundament al tuturor încă de la creaţie.
[10] Pr. Prof. Dr. Ion Bria, *Dicţionar de Teologie Ortodoxă*, Ed. IBMBOR, Bucureşti, 1981, p. 243. Despre Logos ca Persoana Fiului lui Dumnezeu în textele patristice, vezi, pe scurt, în G. W. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon,* Oxford, 1961, pp.808-811.
[11] John Meyendorff, *Teologia Bizantină*, trad. de Pr. conf. Dr. Alexandru I. Stan, Ed. IBMBOR, Bucureşti, 1996, p.205.
[12] Sf. Vasile cel Mare, „Omilia XVI", *op.cit.*, p.262.
[13] *Ibidem,* p. 264.
[14] Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Introducere la Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei***,** *Comentariu la Evanghelia de la Ioan* în PSB nr.41, Ed. IBMBOR, Bucureşti, 2000, nota 25, p.18.
[15] Sf. Atanasie cel mare, „Cuvânt împotriva elinilor" în *Cuvânt contra elinilor, Tratat despre Întruparea Cuvântului, Trei cuvinte împotriva arienilor,* introd., note, trad. de Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Ed. IBMBOR, Bucureşti, 2010, p.111.
[16] *Ibidem,* p. 115.
[17] Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Introducere la Sf. Atanasie cel Mare, Tratat despre Întruparea Cuvântului,* Ed. IBMBOR, Bucureşti, 2010, nota 1, pp. 131-132.
[18] Vezi Sf. Atanasie cel Mare în *Tratat despre Întruparea Cuvântului*, *op.cit*. pp.134-141.
[19] Pr. Constantin Galeriu, *Jertfă şi Răscumpărare*, Ed. Harisma, Bucureşti, 1991, p.207.
[20] Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică* Vol.II., Ed. IBMBOR, Bucureşti, 1999, p.74.
[21] Comuniunea sau unirea omului cu Dumnezeu nu se înfăptuieşte după fire, ci după har. El se împărtăşeşte din energiile necreate, ajungând prin asceză şi contemplare duhovnicească la îndumnezeire. Despre acestă temă vezi

lucrarea lui Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, Oxford University Press, 2004.
[22] Nikos A. Matzoukas, *Teologie Dogmatică şi Simbolică*, vol.II, trad. de Nicuşor Deciu, Ed. Bizantină, Bucureşti, 2006, pp.32-33.

# Din învăţăturile anahoreţilor

CAMELIA SURUIANU

ABSTRACT: This article presents and explains a story by theologian, philosopher, and writer Sandu Tudor, a Romanian Orthodox monk, about some aspects, words and deeds of wisdom from the life of sixth century monk Avva Sava, in particular as it relates to his tutorial relationship with his disciple, Alonie. Sandu Tudor's story was published in the review *Gândirea* in 1929.

Sandu Tudor, atât în poezia de factură religioasă cât şi în proza scurtă, a promovat modelul duhovnicesc. Dintr-o categorie distinctă face parte imaginea monahului răsăritean, căutător al drumului spre desăvârşire. În anul 1929, publică, în revista *Gândirea,* o povestioară cu tâlc, intitulată sugestiv, *Pentru Alonie cuviosul cel cu straie mândre sau cum că şi înfăţişarea cea făloasă sfinţenie poate să dosească*.[1] Subiectul evocat se aseamănă povestirilor din *Pateric*, culegere ce cuprinde aspecte din viaţa monahilor răsăriteni. Scriitorul de-a lungul evocării foloseşte un limbaj arhaic, specific hagiografilor.

Avva Sava, "un mare părinte pustnic", în vremea tinereţii sale a fost, rând pe rând, "clopotar, împletitor în papură şi doctor. De venea cineva să-i ceară ajutor, la orice fel de lucru, fără preget se ducea. Viaţa cea lăuntrică, în multe posturi şi rugăciuni şi-o petrecea."[2] Iubind singurătatea îşi alesese chilia în "clopotniţa de lemn deasupra porţii celei mari a mănăstirii".

Avva Sava, iubind virtuţile duhovniceşti, împletea munca cu rugăciunea. Fraţii din mănăstire, văzând că dintre toţi el era cel mai sărac, îl socoteau "foarte nestrângător." Dar în ascuns Avva "nopţile nu se hodinea trudindu-se să împletească rogojini din papură, pe care ziua la târg le vindea pe preţuri bune."[3] Din banii pe care îi câştiga,

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cumpăra “leacuri şi cele trebuincioase bătrânilor mănăstirii.”[4] Obştea nu-i cunoştea faptele de milostenie. Părintele socotind, în spiritul Sfinţilor Părinţi, că-i mai cuviincios “să nu ştie mâna ta cea stângă ce face dreapta.”

Dar, în scurt timp, ţara a fost cuprinsă de foamete, încât multă lume o ducea din ce în ce mai greu. Înmulţindu-se bătrânii mănăstirii şi nemaiputând singur să se îngrijească de ei, “Avva Sava îi dezleagă taina sa egumenului”. Avva Isaac, după ce l-a ascultat, îl sfătui să-şi ia un ucenic priceput. Egumenul îl recomandă pe Alonie ca fiind “destul de înţelept, fără de preget cu trupul şi cu adevărat plin de ascultare să se facă ţie rob tăcut ca mormântul.”[5]

În felul acesta, fratele Alonie, doritor de creştere duhovnicească, îi devine ucenic părintelui Sava. Tânărul îşi alese drept spaţiu locativ un vas uriaş din lut aflat “sub scara cea mare din tinda clopotniţei, în care odinioară, pe vremuri de secetă, se păstra apa.”[6] Acest loc, deosebit de strâmt, îi deveni chilie călugărească. A doua zi, Alonie, după ce i-a făcut trei mătănii cu plecăciune până la pământ, cu smerenie, i-a cerut să-i dea “porunca cea mai de preţ.” Iată ce l-a îndemnat bătrânul: “Fii om de taină şi să nu întinzi mâna ta în aceiaşi strachină cu nelegiuitul sau cu muierea. Mai ales om de taină să fii, pentru că nu se cade să-şi arate cineva viaţa şi faptele bune înaintea oamenilor spre laudă. Aşa vei ajunge să dobândeşti chipul cel îngeresc şi purtător de semne te vei face.” [7]

Apoi, şi-a învăţat ucenicul să împletească rogojini şi să tragă cele trei clopote “fie la morţi, fie la sărbători, şi cum să vândă fără tocmeală şi să se ferească de zarva lumii şi a mănăstirii.”[8] Astfel, împreună au început să lucreze şi să se roage, păstrând ascunse, de restul mănăstirii, faptele bune.

După un timp, Avva Sava, cunoscător al încercărilor monahale, observase că în viaţa tânărului, “ispitele nu-şi făcuseră loc.” Mai mult, băiatul se dovedise ascultător, smerit, plecat spre cele duhovniceşti, “respecta tipicul şi numai un colţ de posmag pe care îl usca din pâinea obştească lua în gură seara şi se arăta vârtos la trup şi tăcut la suflet.”[9] După trei ani de ucenicie “fratele cel tânăr ajunsese călugăr desăvârşit.”

Într-o zi de iarnă, sub un ger năprasnic, Avva Sava îl trimite la târg spre a vinde câteva rogojini. Bătrânul observând că Alonie era

îmbrăcat doar cu o haină veche, "s-a suit în chilia lui de sub clopote şi a desfăcut lădoiul cel ruginit din ungher, în care păstra hainele sale de îngropare. Se mai păstra încă, vechiul obicei al bătrânilor adus în mănăstirile noastre de prin Bizanţ de la Sfinţii Părinţi de odinioară. Şi obiceiul acesta era: fiecare să păstreze până la moarte culionul, haina cea neagră şi cămaşa, care se numeşte leviton, sub care omul lumesc era tuns şi lua sfântul chip, când îşi făcea aşezământul lui cu Dumnezeu în faţa obştei. Cu dânsele era datina să se îngroape călugărul. Cu staiele acestea el se îmbrăca numai Duminica şi apoi îndată se dezbrăca de ele strângându-le şi ticluindu-le bine."[10]

Bătrânul, fără a sta pe gânduri "şi-a scos acele veşminte de mult preţ pentru sufletul lui" şi i le-a dat ucenicului. Chiar dacă, băiatul cu multă reţinere a îmbrăcat hainele, nu a cârtit, conştientizând că de data aceasta se afla în faţa unei mari provocări. Fiind frumos la chip şi îmbrăcat cu rasa cea nouă, parcă în neconcordanţă cu ţinuta unui smerit călugăr care vindea rogojini, unii mireni au început să-l admire lăudându-l pentru ţinuta sa distinsă.

Alonie, stingherit de privirile mirenilor, de fiecare dată, se grăbea să vândă rogojinile. Dar, într-una din zile, în drum spre mănăstire, o şaretă se opri în dreptul său şi un boier îl pofti să urce. Spre surprinderea călugărului, binefăcătorul era însoţit de soţia sa, o femeie împodobită "în mătăsuri verzi şi plină de miresme îmbietoare."[11]

Fratele Alonie, pentru a-şi linişti sufletul, în taină începu să se roage. Chiar dacă nu-şi ridică ochii din pământ, "nu putu să nu audă strecurându-i-se în urechi şoaptele mlădioase şi calde cu care îl lăuda pentru portul şi chipul lui cel frumos, acea femeie lumească. (…) Simţi fierbinţeli în tot trupul şi dogoreli de jar."[12]

Ajungând în dreptul mănăstirii, fratele Alonie a coborât din şaretă, "împiedicându-se în straiele lui prea lungi", alergând spre chilie. Văzându-i tulburarea, bătrânul i-a dat să sărute o cruce de la Sfântul Munte Athos, spunându-i cu glas duios: "Linişteascăse sufletul tău, frate!" Apoi l-a însemnat cu semnul Sfintei Cruci poruncindu-i: "Du-te de te culcă." A doua zi, Avva, văzându-l îmbrăcat cu haina sa cea veche, nu l-a chemat la spovedanie, după cum era rânduială, ci cu multă blajinitate l-a dojenit: "Frate Alonie, călugărul adevărat înţelege că e mai presus de om şi nu i se cade să

fugă de ispită, ci s-o biruiască."[13] Ruşinându-se, tânărul a căzut la pământ, rugându-l să nu-l mai oblige să îmbrace camilafca. Avva înţelegând că ucenicul trebuia să depăşească ispita, i-a aruncat hainele cele vechi în foc, poruncindu-i să poarte în continuare frumosul veşmânt.

Sandu Tudor pune un accent deosebit pe starea sa sufletească, nuanţând, de-a lungul textului, câteva aspecte: "Mult a mai plâns fratele nostru întru ascuns pentru acel veşmânt vechi. Stătea la rugăciune ceasuri neîntrerupte, având mare frică faţă de vrăjmaşul care într-o clipă poate aduce căderea omului. Dar în războiul dinlăuntru, gândea că acum e vremea luptei lui şi chiar dacă îi era greu ţinea canonul ca să nu se dea biruit. De la o vreme însă ispitele şi peripeţiile din pricina straielor curgeau neîncetat. (...) Uneori îi venea să le murdărească sau să le sfâşie, dar se oprea fiindcă îşi amintea ce fel de straie erau şi atunci şi mai vârtos le îngrijea şi el mai mândru ca un Vlădică arăta."[14]

Deşi fratele se afla sub ascultarea duhovnicului, călugării din mănăstire au început să-l ponegrească: "Alonie cel mândru." Auzind cuvintele de ocară, chiar dacă "simţea cum îl muşcă de inimă şarpele mândriei," căuta să nu se supere. Tânărul "fugea de vorbă şi se închidea în singurătate şi în tăcere, maica prea înţeleptelor gânduri, fiindcă înţelese că slăbiciunea lui, era ispita mândriei,"[15] păcatul prin care Lucifer a căzut din pronia cerească.

Astfel, a ajuns "să fie singur şi mut, numai cu sine, chiar de se afla în plin norod la târg sau în cinul monahal. Cu mai multă râvnă, citea, cânta la strană, cărturărea sfintele scripturi, patericele şi vieţile sfinţilor părinţi."[16] În ciuda nevoinţelor, imaginea sa de călugăr mândru şi trufaş creştea în ochii fraţilor. Spre a se linişti, adeseori Alonie, săruta cu lacrimi în ochi icoanele din biserică, dar mai cu seamă pe cea a Maicii Domnului, pe care stăruitor o ruga să-l elibereze de patima mândriei.

Într-una din zile, după cum îi era obiceiul, a plecat la târg să vândă câteva rogojini. Trecând prin apropierea unei păduri, s-a trezit înconjurat de trei tâlhari, care văzându-i frumoasa camilafcă l-au dezbrăcat, lăsându-i doar o singură rogojină sub care să-şi ascundă goliciunea. Când s-a dezmeticit, a interpretat păţania ca pe un semn ceresc. Apoi, "pătruns de o ciudată linişte sufletească", s-a întors la

mănăstire. Strigând la Avva să-i coboare scara, pentru a urca în clopotniţă, părintele, fiind cufundat în rugăciune, nu i-a auzit glasul. Spre a nu-l deranja a coborât în vasul său de lut şi a început în taină să se roage. "Pe când se ruga, somn de răpire îl cuprinse dulce. Se vedea într-o pădure singur şi îmbrăcat numai în frunze, purtat de un tânăr luminos care îl călăuzea tăcut."[17]

A doua zi dis-de-dimineaţă, Avva coborând scara fu martorul unei mari minune. Deasupra vasului de lut, la câţiva centimetri, "juca un inel de aur viu asemenea nimburilor ce sunt zugrăvite pe icoane în jurul capului la sfinţi. Când a privit înăuntru l-a văzut pe fratele Alonie gol care încă dormea adânc somnul lui de răpire, cu mâinile împreunate pe piept, în rugăciune."[18] Părintele s-a urcat din nou în clopotniţă, a tras cele trei clopote, chemându-i pe fraţii mănăstirii să vadă şi ei minunea. Cu toţii au rămas uimiţi cum "inelul de aur viu se legăna încă limpede în ungherul de beznă ca un rotund fir de apă deasupra gurii vasului de lut."[19]

Cuprinşi de teamă şi bucurie, au intrat în biserică proslăvind pe marele şi milostivul Dumnezeu, "care-l învrednicise pe acest călugăr cu semnele sfinţeniei." Dar, după ce s-a încheiat Sfânta Liturghie fratele Alonie a dispărut. Dispariţia misterioasă lasă loc interpretărilor. Unii călugări spuneau că, deşteptându-se şi văzându-se gol, lucru ruşinos pentru un monah, a plecat din mănăstire; alţii erau de părere că s-ar fi dus în pădurile din apropiere, dorind a vieţui asemenea anahoreţilor; iar alţii considerau că în timpul rugăciunii a fost răpit de către un înger la Domnul. "Nici până azi nu se ştie ce s-a întâmplat cu acel cuvios Alonie. Nu i-au găsit nici una din sfintele lui urme, şi nici oase, dacă cumva s-a pristăvit în sihăstrie."[20]

Aparent, povestirea pare a fi culeasă dintr-o culegere hagiografică. Dar pe lângă nucleele narative enunţate, pe care de altfel le întâlnim şi în *Pateric*, putem distinge câteva subtilităţi artistice, ce scot în evidenţă talentul de prozator al lui Sandu Tudor.

În continuare, ne vom opri asupra câtorva aspecte cu valoare de simbol ce fac parte din recuzita povestirii. Scriitorul foloseşte detalii descriptive, pe care nu le întâlnim în textele patericale. Putem vorbi de existenţa unui singur personaj, care este configurat în dublă

ipostază, cea de ucenic şi cea de avvă. În felul acesta scriitorul evidenţiază etapele transformării personajului Alonie spre sihastru.

Interesantă este semnificaţia spaţiului, în care cele două ipostaze ale personajului Alonie-sihastrul îşi duc existenţa. Avva Sava (adică ipostaza sihastrului) într-un mod atipic pentru cinul monahal "îşi alesese loc de odihnă clopotniţa de lemn, aflată sub poarta cea mare a mănăstirii." Spaţiul locativ, oarecum bizar, dacă ne gândim la chiliile celorlalţi călugări, este un prim indiciu de izolare.

Clopotniţa este un fel de *prag*, care desparte lumea laică de cea monahală. (Însuşi Sandu Tudor, când a intrat în monahism, va alege ca spaţiu locativ clopotniţa Mănăstirii Antim, spre a marca faptul că el venise din lume, şi era doar un candidat la viaţa duhovnicească. În sensul că nu aparţinuse de la început spaţiului sacralizator. Spre deosebire de călugării care de obicei se închinoviază în jurul vârstei de paisprezece ani.)

Mircea Eliade, în *Sacrul şi profanul,* enunţă câteva semnificaţii ale limitelor de separare. "*Pragul* care desparte cele două spaţii arată distanţa dintre viaţa profană, adică laică şi cea religioasă, adică monahală. *Pragul* este totodată graniţa care deosebeşte şi desparte cele două lumi dar şi locul paradoxal de comunicare dintre ele, punctul în care se face trecerea de la lumea profană la cea sacră."[21]

În cinul monahal, locuinţa joacă un rol esenţial în demersul dobândirii rugăciunii interioare. (În unele mănăstiri, monahii dornici de o mai mare însingurare nu primesc vizitatori în chiliile lor.) Avva şi-a ales chilia la hotarul dintre spaţiul laic cu lumea monahală, dorind în rugăciune să le cuprindă pe amândouă. Totodată chilia oarecum atipică, parcă avea menirea să-i reamintească în permanenţă că se află cu trupul în lumea profană, iar cu sufletul în spaţiul monahal.

Sandu Tudor l-a investit pe monah cu un nume simbolic: Avva Sava. Călugărul este numit Avvă, termen care se tâlcuieşte în limba ebraică "părinte", în sensul de mare îndrumător spiritual. Amintim că, sfântul Sava a trăit prin anul 523, fiind autorul *Tipicului bisericesc*, culegere de reguli în care sunt incluse rânduielile liturgice. Cu siguranţă că nu este o coincidenţă. Sandu Tudor ştia că sfântul Sava a fost unul dintre marii noştri îndrumători spirituali. Prin

urmare, acest părinte cunoştea traseul prin care un ucenic putea să atingă desăvârşirea. Deşi cartea sa de căpătâi, pe parcursul secolelor a fost îmbunătăţită şi de către alţi călugări înduhovniciţi, ea s-a păstrat până în zilele noastre sub numele de *Tipiconul Sfântului Sava*[22].

Un alt simbol asupra căruia ne vom opri este clopotul. Avva Sava în cadrul mănăstirii îndeplinea funcţia de clopotar. Cu ajutorul acestui obiect călugării erau chemaţi la: liturghie, vecernie şi utrenie. Prezenţa celor trei clopote o putem asocia cu ideea de transcendenţă. Dar acest instrument sacru este şi mijloc de comunicare între cer şi pământ.

Clopotniţa este făcută din lemn, alegere lexicală ce denotă o nouă semnificaţie. Ne duce cu gândul la simbolul arborelui sacru, acel "axis mundi" care leagă lumea de aici cu cea de dincolo, fiind o trimitere directă la copacul, din care a fost cioplită crucea Mântuitorului. Mai exact ne referim la *acacia* – o varietate de salcâm cu lemn extrem de dur, de talie mică, cu spini foarte mari şi flori aurii. Dar, "acacia" este şi un străvechi simbol solar, al renaşterii, al nemuririi, fiind arborele sacru, al cărui lemn nu putrezeşte niciodată. Prin urmare, clopotniţa din lemn rememorează în permanenţă Avvei supliciul îndurat de Hristos. Se spune că, şi coroana de spini a Mântuitorului a fost împletită tot din ramuri de acacia.

Avva îşi construise chilia deasupra clopotelor, odaie la care are acces cu ajutorul unei scăriţe, pe care în timpul rugăciunii o ridică, pentru a nu fi deranjat. Scara este obiectul care face legătura dintre pământ şi cer sau mai bine spus între profan şi sacru. În sens eclezial semnifică urcuşul său duhovnicesc. Scara este şi simbolul progresiei, al transfigurării, permiţând "atât regresiunea cât şi ascensiunea, rezumând prin construcţia sa binară ansamblul verticalităţii."[23]

Alonie, ucenicul pe care stareţul îl recomandă ca fiind un tânăr ascultător, dornic de a se îmbunătăţi duhovniceşte, nu este invitat să locuiască împreună cu Avva în clopotniţă. Pesemne că tânărul nu parcursese încă, din punct de vedere spiritual, "treptele scării", cu alte cuvinte era doar un candidat la desăvârşire. El trebuia să înveţe paşii pe care îi parcursese în trecut însuşi duhovnicul. Lui i se distribuie ca spaţiu locativ "un vas uriaş de lut," aflat sub scara clopotniţei. Alonie, dintre toţi fraţii mănăstirii, ocupă însă un loc

“privilegiat”. Doar el fusese învrednicit cu statutul de ucenic. Slujirea unui Avvă era o mare onoare pentru un novice. Cât despre chilia sa, autorul povestioarei cu tâlc, ne aduce în atenţie un spaţiu locativ deosebit de interesant. Acesta poate primi numeroase interpretări. Putem împărţi vasul de lut în două părţi distincte. În jumătatea inferioară ucenicul îşi nevoieşte trupul, iar în partea superioară, deasupra capului, unde se înălţă clopotniţa mănăstirii, în permanenţă i se aduce aminte că mintea trebuia să o aibă veşnic îndreptată spre Dumnezeu. Acest obiect sacru, *pragul* care separă lumea profană de cea sacră, îi amintea zilnic scopul existenţei sale în cadrul mănăstirii.

Alonie, alături de bătrânul său duhovnic, împletea zi şi noapte, asemenea anahoreţilor din vechime, rogojini. La început, lumea târgului de provincie, cu vacarmul ei specific, nu i-a tulburat liniştea sufletească. Dar în momentul când duhovnicul i-a dăruit camilafca a ieşit la suprafaţă, “din ungherul cel mai acuns al inimii”, mândria, păcatul prin care Lucifer a fost izgonit din rai.

Veşmântul Avvei, dăruit fratelui Alonie, poate primi şi o altă tâlcuire. Spaţiul locativ, clopotniţa în care trăieşte Avva, denotă că monahul se retrage din lume nu spre a o abandona, ci spre a o sfinţi. Cel puţin la nivel teoretic, Alonie înţelege joncţiunea, fapt rezultat din supunerea de care dă dovadă. El acceptă lumea, cooperează cu mirenii, cărora le vinde rogojini, dar în momentul când norodul îl admiră pentru înfăţişarea sa distinsă, lăudându-l ademenitor, Alonie, fără să vrea în prealabil, se bucură. Când îşi dă seama că a căzut în capcana mândriei vrea să lepede camilafca, crezând că de vină este haina, înfăţişarea sa distinsă şi nu sinele său. Ca în cele din urmă, să se confrunte şi cu ispitele, venite de data aceasta, din partea călugărilor. Textul ne spune că Alonie, dezechilibrat puternic sufleteşte, începu din ce în ce mai mult să se roage. Apoi, vreme îndelungată medita la învăţăturile sfinţilor părinţi. Cu alte cuvinte, căuta o cale prin care să anuleze din sine firea cugetătoare şi să instituie în locul acesteia ipostaza îngerească, specifică castei monahale. În plan uman, liniştea s-a aşternut în momentul când, tâlharii, împinşi de o mână îngerească, i-au furat camilafca. Pesemne că veşmântul nu mai reprezenta o ispită.

Spaţiul locativ, în care trăieşte Avva, ne duce cu gândul la faptul că acest monah trăise şi el odinioară în lume. Chiar dacă, viaţa

sa este învăluită oarecum în mister, el trăieşte în uniune ontologică cu toţi fraţii. Amintim că Avva este singurul care, neştiut de nimeni, le poartă de grijă bătrânilor mănăstirii. Cu alte cuvinte, îşi iubea aproapele mai mult ca pe sine însuşi. Şi această virtute trebuia s-o dobândească şi Alonie. Mai exact, prin exemplul vieţii sale căuta să-i arate ucenicului calea prin care să depăşească slava deşartă şi clevetirea mănăstirii.

Un alt amănunt ne atrage atenţia. Părintele Sava era recunoscut ca fiind "un mare sfânt" doar de Avva Issac, egumenul mănăstirii, un alt călugăr îmbunătăţit duhovniceşte. Monahii au ca datorie spirituală unirea în chip tainic cu Hristos în centrul inimii lor. Şi în urma acestei simbioze, se iveşte "omul nou". Avva Sava era un desăvârşit, nu mai avea nevoie de camilafcă, el depăşise ritualitatea şi trăia sub auspiciul Duhului Sfânt, al iluminării sacre. Cel care avea nevoie de camilafcă era ucenicul. Prin caznele la care-l supune urmăreşte ridicarea sa la treapta desăvârşirii. Cu alte cuvinte, Avva Sava îşi dorea ca Alonie să devină şi el un *christofor,* adică un purtător de Duh Sfânt.

Ne aducem aminte că, în momentul când stareţul i l-a prezentat, Avva după ce l-a privit indelung, semn că i-a cercetat interiorul, i-a spus: "Dacă vei îndeplini întocmai poruncile mele vei ajunge la chipul cel îngeresc şi purtător de semne te vei face."[24] Fraza certifică faptul că Avva avea darul profeţiei. "Văzuse cu ochiul inimii" că Alonie avea nevoie de un îndrumător spiritual. Dacă tânărul ar fi fost un frate oarecare, Avva l-ar fi respins. Mai ales că nimeni nu-l putea obliga să-l primească ca ucenic. Amintim că stareţul doar îl recomandă, un alt gest nu face. Nu-l obligă să-l iniţieze în tainele desăvârşirii.

Dacă Alonie nu ar fi avut un asemenea îndrumător i-ar fi fost cu neputinţă să atingă desăvârşirea. Deoarece treapta aceasta ezoterică nu era un dar pe care Avva îl putea face. Totul depindea doar de el. De capacitatea sa de a depăşi obstacolele.

Un alt amănunt utilizat ne atrage atenţia. După trei ani de ucenicie Avva era mulţumit de comportamentul fratelui, dar şi oarecum mirat. "Ispitele în viaţa sa nu-şi făcuseră loc". Prin urmare, Alonie sub auspiciul bătrânului crescu duhovniceşte, dar nu într-atât să devină un iluminat. Pentru a precipita într-o oarecare măsură

desfăşurarea evenimentelor Avva "s-a suit în chilia lui, şi i-a dat spre purtare hainele sale de îngropare."[25] Prin acest gest, deosebit de important, Alonie este "împins" spre drumul desăvârşirii. Cu alte cuvinte, el beneficiază de învăţătura pe care Avva, pe când fusese şi el ucenic, o dobândise de la un alt anahoret.

Veşmântul are rolul unui transfer energetic care trece de la duhovnic la ucenic, şi tot aşa. Dacă sihaştrii nu împrumutau sub nicio formă camilafca, Avva Sava sparge tiparul. Pentru că Alonie, se dovedise ascultător, rugător, postitor, duhovnicul face o încercare, pe care nu o întâlnim în povestirile patericale. Păcatul mândriei este scos la iveală tocmai datorită utilizării acestui obiect sacru. Camilafca sub mantia căreia "omul lumesc ea chipul îngeresc" îi descoperă Avvei că ceea ce-i lipsea ucenicului era de fapt smerenia. Sandu Tudor la începutul textului ne spune că, Avva deoarece nu avea nicio agoniseală, era "considerat tare risipitor" de către personalul mănăstirii. La auzul vorbelor deşarte duhovnicul nu se tulbura. Nici nu le lua în seamă, pentru el importante erau doar faptele bune şi nu ceea ce credeau călugării despre el. Acest părinte, "foarte smerit", avea doar o singură bucurie, să-şi ajute semenii cât mai bine cu putinţă.

În cazul lui Alonie, cât timp fusese îmbrăcat modest, el nu atrăsese atenţia nimănui. Dar în momentul când înfăţişarea sa se schimbă şi veşmântul îi scoate în evidenţă trăsăturile fizice, Alonie cade pradă ispitei. Clevetirea pe seama sa îi tulbură în mod deliberat liniştea. Şi astfel, lepădarea de sine, umilinţa în faţa colectivităţii, devine pentru el o necesitate. Doar făcând faţă noii provocări putea dobândi smerenia. După ce deprinsese virtuţile monahale, este iniţiat, prin intermediul veşmântului sacru, în parcurgerea celei din urmă trepte ezoterice: iluminarea. Camilafca reprezintă, din punct de vedere ezoteric, unirea omului în cămara de taină a inimii cu Hristos *N.I.K.A*. Misticii au explicat fenomenul ca fiind o taină, în adevăratul sens al cuvântului. Iată cum prezintă, din punct de vedere simbolic, sfântul Ioan Hrisostom teofania: "Cămara Ta, Mântuitorule o văd împodobită, dar îmbrăcăminte nu am ca să intru într-însa, luminează-mi, haina sufletului meu, dătătorule de viaţă, şi mă mântuieşte."

Camilafca, privită ca obiect simbolic, în trecut îl ajutase şi pe Avva Sava să devină un iluminat. Spre această virtute urmăreşte să-şi

iniţieze ucenicul. Dacă-i privim viaţa de zi cu zi observăm că universul său spiritual era format din îndeplinirea serviciului religios şi faptele bune. Din cele două aspecte rezultă că Alonie nu cunoştea modul prin care putea să obţină iluminarea. De abia când înfăţişarea sa se schimbă, iese la suprafaţă păcatul mândriei şi o dată cu el necesitatea dobândirii smereniei, în sensul de lepădare de sine. Cu alte cuvinte, faptele bune trebuiau să rodească în sine, asemenea unor ofrande închinate Domnului. Mai exact, "să-L iubească pe Dumnezeu nu cu inima, care e cu totul insuficientă, ci cu iubirea Lui turnată în inima sa."[26]

Cuvintele de ocară, din partea fraţilor mănăstirii, îi limpezesc într-o oarecare măsură gândurile. În cele din urmă, Alonie înţelege că nu faptele bune sau rugăciunea sunt cele care îi lipsesc, ci puterea de a-şi asculta necondiţionat duhovnicul. Avva, răspunzătorul direct de mântuirea sa, caută rând pe rând să-i disciplineze fiecare gest, atitudine, vorbă şi faptă. Când tânărul îmbracă camilafca Alonie de fapt acceptă haina iniţierii. Momentul este deosebit de important deoarece începe în mod concret disciplinarea sinelui său. Din "omul vechi", el devine "omul nou" în care "chipul şi asemănarea divină" se instituie ca o pecete a harului Duhului Sfânt. "După ce Dumnezeu ne-a căutat inima, ne deschide uşa să intrăm singuri la El."[27]

După ce a fost tâlhărit, Alonie se întoarce liniştit în mănăstire. Dacă în trecut o astfel de ispită l-ar fi tulburat, tânărul care devenise acum un părinte desăvârşit, purtător al harul Duhului Sfânt, nu simte gravitatea situaţiei. Tâlhărirea unui monah era o ofensă gravă la adresa mănăstirilor. Pentru un călugăr o asemenea întâmplare era o mare ruşine. Amintim că monahii se bucurau în rândul mirenilor de un respect aparte. Cu toate acestea, Alonie interpretează păţania ca pe o "voinţă divină".

Ajuns în mănăstire şi observând că Avva, cufundat în meditaţie, nu-i auzi glasul, ucenicul intră, liniştit, în vasul său de lut spre a se ruga. Semnul vizibil al coborârii harului Duhului Sfânt asupra sa este inelul de aur, "ce se clătina uşor asemenea unui nimb deasupra vasului de lut." Alonie, după ce a respectat indicaţiile părintelui său duhovnic, reuşeşte, să coboare în cămara de taină a inimii şi printr-o simbioză cu Harul Duhului Sfânt intră în extaz.

Bucuria duhovnicului în faţa acestei hierofanii este nemăsurată. El îi cheamă pe fraţii mănăstirii să le arate minunea, nu pentru a se mândri în faţa lor, ci pentru a le arăta un exemplu viu de extaz christic. Cel care simte din plin bucuria este anahoretul. Pentru el, faptul că ucenicul îl depăşise într-o oarecare măsură, reprezenta cea mai mare ofrandă adusă proniei cereşti.

Inelul este folosit cu precădere în căsătorie, fiind simbolul consfinţirii unei legături sacre. Din punct de vedere mistic, acest simbol reprezintă unirea sufletului cu Hristos, fiind idealul fiecărui monah. Unii anahoreţi s-au putut bucura, încă din timpul vieţii, de această simbioză, alţii, deşi s-au nevoit o viaţă întreagă, nu au reuşit niciodată s-o atingă. Precizăm că, termenul de "extaz", provine din limba greacă şi din punct de vedere etimologic "înseamnă ieşire din sine,"[28] fiind efectul ultim al rugăciunii isihaste. Sfântul Ioan Scărarul descrie extazul ca fiind "o lumină infinită, văzută cu ochiul minţii, care-ţi inundă întreaga fiinţă. (…) Lumină în centrul căreia se găseşte Hristos."[29] Uneori lumina cerească se poate materializa, luând diferite forme, dintre care nimbul este cel mai des întâlnit. În acest sens, pentru ca mesajul să fie mai expresiv, Sandu Tudor optează pentru "inelul de aur," ca simbol al extazului christic.

În spirit pedagogic, povestioara cu tâlc nu este încheiată, scriitorul, lăsând loc interpretărilor, ne invită să meditǎm asupra vieţii monahale. Cât despre lexicul utilizat observăm tendinţa autorului spre limbajul vechi, eclezial, specific cazaniilor din secolul al-XVIII-lea, fapt care dă întregului text o tendinţă deosebit de vetustă. Desigur, toate acestea la un loc îi scot în evidenţă naratorului darul de excelent prozator.

De această dată, ceea ce ne surprinde la Sandu Tudor, care era o persoană mondenă, un jurnalist de temut pentru stilul său pamfletar, este cunoaşterea limbajului eclezial şi a mediului monahal. E de remarcat deschiderea, pe care ziaristul o propune cititorilor pentru explorarea vieţii monahale, subiect, în acea vreme puţin abordat în mass-media românească. Anahoretul era simbolul viu al sacrului în lume, ce impunea credinciosului un sentiment de respect aparte.

NOTES:

[1]Sandu Tudor, "Pentru Alonie cuvoisul cel cu straie mândre sau cum că şi înfăţişarea cea făloasă sfinţenie poate să doseasc㔝, în *Gândirea,* an IX, nr. 3, 1929.
[2]*Ibidem*., p. 248.
[3]*Ibid.*
[4]*Ibid.*
[5]*Ibid.*
[6]*Ibid.*, p. 249.
[7]*Ibid.*
[8]*Ibid.*
[9]*Ibid.*
[10]*Ibid.*
[11]*Ibid.*
[12]*Ibid.*
[13]*Ibid.,* p. 250.
[14]*Ibid.*
[15]*Ibid.*
[16]*Ibid.*
[17]*Ibid.*, p. 251.
[18]*Ibid.*
[19]*Ibid.*
[20]*Ibid.*
[21]Mircea Eliade, *Sacrul şi profanul*, Editura Humanitas, Bucureşti, 1995, p. 24.
[22]Ene Branişte, *Dicţionar enciclopedic de cunoştinţe religioase*, Editura Diecezană, Caransebeş, 2001, p. 427.
[23]Jean Chevalier; Alain Gheerbrant, *Dicţionar de simboluri* (vol. III), Editura, Artemis, Bucureşti, 1995, p. 202.
[24]*Idem*.,
[25]Sandu Tudor, *op. cit.,* p. 249.
[26] Nichifor Crainic, *Sfinţenia – Împlinirea umanului*, Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei şi Bucovinei, Iaşi, 1993, p. 193.
[27] Dumitru Stăniloaie, *Spiritualitatea ortodoxă*, Editura Institutului Biblic şi de Misiune al BOR, Bucureşti, 1992, p. 284.
[28]Nichifor Crainic, *Sfinţenia – Împlinirea umanului*, Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei şi Bucovinei, Iaşi, 1993, p. 215.
[29]*Ibidem*., p. 139.