

PUBLISHED UNDER THE AEGIS OF THE ACADEMY OF ROMANIAN SCIENTISTS



THE ROMANIAN INSTITUTE OF
ORTHODOX THEOLOGY AND
SPIRITUALITY

Symposium

Vol. XXXIII, Nr. 1, 2026
New York

The Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality
incorporated in August 1993

Published under the aegis of the Academy of Romanian Scientists

Theodor Damian, Ph.D., President

30-18 50th Street, Woodside, NY 11377, Tel.: (718) 626-6013,

E-mail: DamianTh@aol.com

Editor: Theodor Damian

Assistant to the editor and designer: Claudia Damian

INTERNATIONAL EDITORIAL BOARD:

John A. McGuckin (Theology), Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary, New York;

Oskar Gruenwald (Interdisciplinary Studies), Institute for Interdisciplinary Research, California;

Maxim (Iuliu Marius) Morariu, The Academy of Romanian Scientists, New York Branch;

Heinz-Uwe Haus (Theater), University of Delaware, Newark

Louis Tietje (Ethics, Social Policy), Metropolitan College of New York;

Ioan N. Rosca (Philosophy) Spiru Haret University, Bucharest.

© 2026, The Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality, New York. All rights reserved

Authors are responsible for their research and opinions.

ISBN 978-1-888067-67-5

ISSN 1084-0591

CONTENTS

- 5 Theodor Damian
The Need for Transcendence
- 25 Richard Grallo
Following your Desire to Know
- 29 Alexandru Lazăr
Reinterpreting Hell and Salvation: Contemporary Universalism in American Charismatic Theology
- 47 Heinz-Uwe Haus
The Influence of Sophocles on Contemporary Theatre or Sharing of Responsibility
- 59 Vasile Mărculeț
Church Organization in the Istro-Pontic Region (End of the 10th Century – 12th Century)
- 85 Maxim (Iuliu-Marius) Morariu
A Special Orthodox Example of Spiritual Autobiography: The Diary of Fr. Sergius Bulgakov
- 97 Lino Bianco
*“National Unity Through Humanity”:
Speech Commemorating Victory Day in Malta, 2025*
- 107 Heinz-Uwe Haus
Notes on Goethe’s Faust
- 115 Book review
- 117 Maxim (Iuliu-Marius) Morariu
Paul H. B. Chang, *The Spiritual Person. An Intellectual Biography of Watchman Nee*

The Need for Transcendence

Abstract: About transcendence, human reason itself speaks, taking into account the fact that reality itself is inconceivable. Yet once aware of that, it helps man to re-enter the house of being, to cultivate the ontological hope in the possibility of returning to the origin, to place the soul at the top of the hierarchy of any values, to see in history and in the continuous present its definitive role, because, as Saint-John Perse says, recalling Hegel, “there is no other history than that of the spirit.” Hence the need to discern between what passes and what remains, between Heraclitus the Ephesian and Parmenides the Eleatic, therefore between the permanence of passing and the permanence of the essence, of being.

The logic of transcendence should not need lawyers to argue in its favor. Man only needs to realize that his soul, his consciousness, are a piece of the transcendent, a constitutive, structural, ontological, transcendental element, hence his longing for the transcendent as in a kind of *abyssus abyssum invocat*.

Keywords: society, church, secularization, transcendence, technology, God, existence

Introduction

Seeing the situation of the contemporary world, of the Western world in particular, we rightly ask ourselves how it came to this. Collective and individual aggressiveness, relativization of values, existential confusion, exacerbated individualism, indifference to the suffering of the other, as a person or as a group, perversion of conscience, abandonment of principles, unapologetic opportunism, subjective interpretation of what the common good means,

Theodor Damian, PhD, is Professor emeritus of Human Services and Education, Metropolitan College of New York; President of the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality, New York; President of the American Branch of the Academy of Romanian Scientists.
--

ideological radicalization, hatred, intolerance, resentment, rancor, poisoning of interpersonal relationships, disintegration of the family, loss of faith, addictions and vices transformed into virtues, uncontrolled liberalism, narcissism, conflict and political instability, corruption, victimization, etc.

One of the main causes of this decline, according to the observations of many analysts, is the secularization of society, where the Christian faith, the Church, was pushed from the center to the periphery, becoming, from an influential and normative institution, a private and optional choice. And when God becomes an individual option, the place from which man removed him must be filled with something else, usually with a false ego, in the sense of man's moving from modesty to arrogance, and of the well-known expression "full of self". But the cult remains. Having moved from theocentrism to anthropocentrism, man continues the act of worship, only now it is about the cult of the self, the cult of the human person.

As the Church no longer has a normative function in society, people formulate their own norms according to the vision of the world and life that they embrace. The statistics on religious affiliation are evocative in this sense. According to one of them, in the second decade of the 21st century, the number of Americans, for example, identifying as Christians fell from 75% to 63% and 3 in 10 identify as "none", meaning they are either atheists or agnostics, or other types of "none".

With local variations the situation is similar in other countries in Western Europe. For instance, most people in the Netherlands today have never visited a church, and one in 10 of those who still identify as Catholic say they don't believe in God, according to the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, Australia, Anthony Fisher, who wrote about the situation in the Catholic Church.¹ Speaking of another place, the Basque country in Spain, he reports that there the men are "delivering their wives to Church each Sunday and waiting for them in a bar."²

¹ Anthony Fisher, "The West: Post or Pre Christian?", in *First Things*, Nr. 330, February 2023, p. 20.

² *Ibidem*, p. 24.

Post-Christian society and modern technology

The separation between church and state and church and culture, in particular after Enlightenment, which led in the West to a full blown secularism that intended to abolish religion altogether, determined some social theorists already by the 1930's to begin speaking about a post-Christian society. This type of secularization went hand in hand with the process of disenchantment³ where people were encouraged to find enchantment in something else.

When God is killed, as Nietzsche reported in the madman's story through which the German philosopher in fact criticized man's position coram Deo, before God, God's place is taken by an idol, and in Nietzsche's telling, this idol is man himself, who is then incapable of doing God's job. The metaphor is clear: man wants liberation from the divine authority considering it too restrictive for his current views about life and world and that leads him to a false existence, one of dream and irreality, as Simone Weil put it.⁴ In this context one can ask whether the emancipation from God and from religion was indeed one from dream and irreality and the beginning of a real existence, or exactly the other way around.⁵

The philosopher Emil Cioran described this situation in sharp words. "Man," he says, "accumulates irreality and delights himself in falsity, in an irrational tendency towards gigantism. What throws us into action is our debility and inadaptability."⁶

The war against God is madness. It is not by mistake or happenstance that Nietzsche chose a madman to talk about the killing of God. Disenchanted with who he is, man wanted to assume an identity that did not fit him, like wearing expensive and beautiful clothes that are in fact too tight. Today this kind of desire for a new identity is found in the hope placed in technology. As Alexander Dugin writes, in Michael Miller's presentation, "the history of liberalism is one of false liberation from collective identities and extended sources of authority, culminating in man's attempt to liberate himself from gender identity and human identity in favor of

³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, Harper and Row, New York, 1951, p. 159.

⁵ Theodor Damian, *Implicațiile spirituale ale teologiei icoanei [The spiritual implications of icon theology]*, Eikon, București, 2003, p. 20.

⁶ Emil Cioran, *The Temptation to Exist*, transl. from French by Richard Howard, Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1970, p. 15.

cyborgs, artificial intelligence networks, and products of genetic engineering.

To be free in the liberal way is at last to liberate the human being from himself. Individual freedom leads to the destruction of man.”⁷ The cyborg as man's dream of acquiring immortality, of reaching bodily transcendence by becoming a virtual being altogether reflects, in a sense, Plato's disdain for the physical body considered to be the soul's prison and from which the soul has to escape.

We already live in a form of metaverse as more and more of our lives, labor, leisure time, spending, wealth, happiness and relationships go online. They will exist online.”⁸

Technology is becoming the “iron cage,” to use Max Weber's expression, from which it is more and more difficult to escape because it makes us feel good. As the saying goes: the most dangerous prison is the one in which you are made to feel good. You will never want to get out.

Looking at our lifestyle today, Theodor Adorno states that we are living in “the false, and there is no right living in the false.”⁹ It looks like we are condemned to living in the false.

The cyborg enchantment for a new identity and new existential condition represents a major target in science and technology. “It raised the expectation in some quarters that cutting-edge research in brain imaging, simulation capacity, and artificial neural networks will soon make possible the transfer of an individual's entire mental life - thought, sensation, memory, emotion, psychology - from his physical brain to an exceedingly complex computer file” [...] that is “mind uploading,” “the perennial dream of achieving immortality.”¹⁰ Of course, a hard problem remains, and that is called consciousness!

⁷ See Michael Millerman, “Alexander Dugin explained,” in *First Things*, Nr. 330, February 2023, p. 46.

⁸ Mary Harrington, „Surviving the Metaverse,” book review for *The Metaverse and How it Will Revolutionize Everything*, by Matthew Ball, Norton, New York, 2022, in *First Things*, Nr. 330, February 2023, pp. 51-52.

⁹ See Claire Richters, “Glimpses of Light from Enlightenment's Prison,” book review for *A Precarious Happiness: Adorno and the Sources of Normativity*, by Peter E. Gordon, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, in *The Hedgehog Review*, Vol. 26, Nr. 1, Spring 2024, p. 155.

¹⁰ Martha Bayels, “The Character of Tragedy,” in *The Hedgehog Review*, Vol. 26, Nr. 1, Spring 2024, pp. 62-63.

As one can see, the consumption society dominates man, it consumes him physically and in particular spiritually. In life's problems, man looks for help to machines, becomes dependent on them to the point of reification. In this phenomenon of dehumanization, technology becomes idol and the idol becomes monster, as Abraham Heschel warns.¹¹ This dehumanization, in Nicolas Berdyaev's view, brings man to bestialization, a process that will end in the deification of the bestial.¹²

The loss of the mystery

The illusion of a new existential enchantment by which man abandons his objective reality produces “a fracture of being,” as Cioran puts it,¹³ and is explained by A. Dugin when he writes about the essential difference between man as an individual and man as a human person: “The individual is the product of subtraction of the personality from the human being, the result of liberation of the human unit from any bonds and collective structures.”¹⁴

Individualism, which, according to Robert Bellah's report in the bestseller *Habits of the Heart*, published in 1985, became a main feature of life in America already in the last decades of the 20th century, generating many types of crises, is a departure from man's ontological destiny. The ontological structure of man is trinitarian as he was made in God's image, the tri-une God's image, whose main characteristic is loving communion.

The Western civilization's decline, which mirrors the revolt against God, the abandonment of the sacred or the chasing of the sacred from the profane, the demythologization of God and of the Bible, and the loss of Tradition, of the mystical tradition as well, and in particular due to modern rationalism and the misperceived irreconcilable conflict between religion and science, caused man to

¹¹ Abraham Heschel, *Who Is Man*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1965, p. 86.

¹² Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Fate of Man in the Modern World*, Ann Arbor Paperbooks, The University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1963, p. 27.

¹³ Emil Cioran, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

¹⁴ Michael Milleran, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

lose “the mysterious ground of existence” that Heidegger believed we are capable to be moved by.¹⁵

Thus, man has become a prodigal son who has lost his direction and the sense of existence. This wandering now leads him directly to a desert of despair that can only have two endings: suicide (as in Nietzsche’s madman who killed God) or returning home, to God, because, as Pavel Florenski warns, ultimately, there will be no other choice for humanity but Holy Trinity or madness.

Going back to God implies a conscious restoration of the mystery, a re-enchantment of the world, a return to the undemythologized traditional values, with constant awareness not to fall into traditionalism, as Jaroslav Pelikan warns when he defines Tradition as the living faith of the dead and traditionalism as the dead faith of the living.

We speak of modernity as generally beginning with the Age of Reason, in the Middle Ages and augmented by Enlightenment, when the major disenchantment with religion took place. Yet from the disenchantment point of view, modernity actually began with Adam and Eve being disenchanted in paradise by Satan who portrayed to Eve the Edenic existence, where man represented the untainted image of God, as an injustice. Thus, Satan stirred in Adam and Eve’s hearts a feeling of disenchantment about their condition and about God, leading them into disobedience and based on a kind of inner revolt, asking themselves why weren’t they equal to God. Not happy with who they were, with their identity, they wanted to be like God. So, Satan enchanted them with an illusion which led to the fall from their existential condition in paradise.

Therefore, the solution of man’s estranged condition is the return to the sacred, to God, to the origin. It is in its origin that the power of a thing lies, according to Mircea Eliade, that is the mythical time, *illud tempus*, the time of the sacred, which can be reached through rituals that re-connet (re-ligo, religion) man with God.

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, “The Fourth Political Theory,” cf. Michael Milleran, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

The axiological confusion

What Satan did to Adam and Eve was to plant in them the seed of pride, of vanity that led to questioning the original order of the world and to wanting to order it according to their own desires and understanding, as if they understood the world, the universe. That was their sin, as sin is defined by the Church Fathers as an error of thinking. That was the first axiological confusion, which is mirrored in our society today, where each one wants to order the world according to his own ideas. *Quot capita tot sensus*, the Latin saying goes (as many heads, so many opinions).

In such pluralism, based, among others, on an ever more subjective notion of human rights, confusion is to be expected. As Joseph E. Davis writes, with “the normative pluralism of our situation, it is hard to achieve stability or practice consistent truthfulness where so many other values, often incompatible, are in play and none can necessarily claim precedence over the others.”¹⁶

It appears that Descartes was right when he considered that less laws and rules will bring more stability in a society.¹⁷ Less rules would allow people to see better the essential, the common denominator, that is the common good in a society. The confusion of values makes one live in illusion, like in the patristic example where Avva tells his disciple: Light is reflected on a wall. Don't venerate the wall! Pay attention to the light.¹⁸

The issue of values is also related to education, and one place where that is evident is the school curricula, from grade education to the university, where disciplines belonging to humanities, including classical languages, for example, are taught less and less, with a visible tendency of their elimination from the study programs in the detriment of character formation and of a solid general culture. As Michah Mattix observes, “education, now, understands itself primarily as a problem solving and knowledge acquiring enterprise.

¹⁶ Joseph E. Davis, “The Basis of Everything: The Fragility of Character in a Truth-Challenged World,” in *The Hedgehog Review*, Vol. 26, Nr. 1, Spring 2024, p. 90.

¹⁷ René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, Fourth Edition, Hackett, Indianapolis, IN, 1998, pp. 10-11.

¹⁸ Anthony DeMello, *One Minute Wisdom*, Double Day, New York, 1986, p. 33.

It trains students in the use of a single voice. Such an education is barbaric, no matter how developed it may be.”¹⁹

That single voice is represented by science and technology in particular. Yet these fields, without the balance of humanities, are vulnerable, just like Einstein said about science and religion: science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.

When Emil Cioran wrote that “the mode of knowledge man chose is an offense, a criminal intention toward creation before which he stands as its self proclaimed destructor,”²⁰ he referred to the primordial situation when God forbade Adam to eat from the tree of knowledge. Yet that bad choice can be seen as an echo in the type of knowledge man chooses today.

This situation has direct and powerful implications on the moral order in society, on the values man chooses and how he chooses them. A paraphrase of a Romanian proverb would say: tell me what values you choose and I will tell you who you are.

The relativization of values and moral decline, where God is no longer the supreme value, allowed man to also lose his place in the top of the hierarchy of values as being the image of God. In other words, man is no longer the supreme value after God. He was replaced by what man does, desires, creates. The machine, for example, is becoming more important than man. Or, if man is important, that is in the sense of his ego and less, or not at all, in the sense of special appreciation and consideration of man as human being, of humanity.

That decline is partially reflected in situational ethics, where whatever one does is justified by the context, by the situation. That is similar to some cases in the process of confession, where one goes to the priest and is supposed to tell one’s sins and wrongs, and while doing that, starts explaining each transgression in its context in order to offer extenuating circumstances and receive less penance or get an easier absolution.

It is also like knowing precisely the divine commandment “you shall not lie,” formulated simply, clearly, strongly as well, and the liar would say: yes, but ... in that particular situation...; and then, there is another situation, and so on, ... and this is how lying becomes a habit. That is one way in which the reversal of values happens when a new

¹⁹ Michah Mattix, “The Integrity of Poetry,” in *First Things*, Nr. 330, February 2023, p. 30.

²⁰ Emil Cioran, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

normal arrives. For example, in today's world, truth is no longer a generally accepted moral categorical imperative, which is why the term post-truth society or age is now in use. That determined William Damon, a psychologist teaching at Stanford University, to write that we live in a dysfunctional period of social change in which an essential commitment to truthfulness no longer seems to be assumed,²¹ the sociologist Joseph E. Davis to state that in contemporary life “the evidence of growing dishonesty is overwhelming,”²² or James C. Rahn to express concern about the moral order in American life: “In America today,” he writes, “there is no coherent, much less operative ethics within either the public sphere or private life.”²³

The seriousness of the human situation

If someone were to paint a picture or make a diagram of the history of human civilization and try to interpret current realities, taking into account the historical context and possible future perspectives with special regard to the worrying discrepancy between morality and technology, including the fantastic possibilities of AI, he or she would have more than enough reason for alarm.

That is why Abraham Heschel expresses himself so bluntly when he speaks of the frightening seriousness of the human situation.
24

In equally blunt terms, Emil Cioran, observing “man’s thirst for adventure and infamy,”²⁵ draws attention to the weakness of human nature, especially in the struggle with the self and the consequences of this. “As long as we are incapable of conquering our deficiencies,” he says, “we have no choice but to cultivate them and enjoy them,”²⁶ leaving the reader to realize for himself where the

²¹ William Damon, *The Death of Honesty*, Hoover Institution, January 12, 2012 (<https://www.hoover.org/research/death=honesty>).

²² Joseph E. Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

²³ James C. Rahn, „The Necessity of Networks: The Case of William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect,” in *The Hedgehog Review*, Vol. 26, Nr. 1, Spring 2024, p. 114.

²⁴ A Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

²⁵ Emil Cioran, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 138.

cultivation of defects, imperfections, sins in theological terms, can lead, and what the final outcome may be.

Of course, the future can only be gloomy, considering how the world is structured into “the miserable and the rich,” as Eminescu put it in a poem, and looking at the tendency of the few rich who can buy everything for themselves, compared to the rest of the world, who receive what they need by the portion, just as much as those who have will decide to allow them. Therefore, the future, with all its promises, is completely uncertain, even for those who imagine that they can buy it. In this context, the words of the American businessman Arnold H. Glasow are meaningful: “The trouble with the future is that it usually arrives before we are ready for it.”

This state of insecurity combined with modern man’s fear of death and the impossibility of overcoming existential contrasts brings us back again and again to the fundamental question: Who is man? In this sense, the philosopher and theologian Abraham Heschel also asks: “Isn’t our entire civilization built on a false interpretation of what man is?”²⁷

Where, when and how did the idea, the tendency to have to the detriment of being, take root in the human soul, or rather, took possession of the human soul, or how did we reach the existential confusion, where being is understood by having?

Without answering this question, in his work *To Have or To Be*, Erich Fromm offers interesting reflections, but without seeing a light at the end of the tunnel, because he says skeptically: “in order to understand a thing, man must have it; and having it, he destroys it.”²⁸

That is why Oscar Wilde said that there are only two tragedies in the world: one consists in the fact that man cannot obtain what he wants and the other in the fact that man obtains. This, in the end, is the real tragedy.²⁹

²⁷ A. Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

²⁸ Erich Fromm, *Avoir ou être*, R. Laffont, Paris, 1981, p. 35.

²⁹ See A. Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

The illusion

And another tragedy is when man identifies himself with what he has and with what he does, not understanding the qualitative existential difference between these things and as such losing his royal dignity of origins. Thus, becoming profane, always external or marginal to things, even if he falsely identifies with them, he ends up being an agent of disintegration. When he manages to enter them, he does so like a worm that enters a fruit and destroys it.³⁰

This situation leads Karl Barth to exclaim: "Man, as we know him in this life, is an impossibility. This man, before God, can only die."³¹

The vain sensation of omnipotence makes the man separated from the Almighty live in illusion, to indulge in appearances and then even to believe that they define him. Instead of living as if he were to die the next day, he lives as if he were immortal. Appearances deceive not only others, but even himself. They actually hide his vulnerability, his weaknesses, his inner poverty. And when you have lost the authentic and ultimate meaning of your existence, of destiny and destination and you go through life like a "messenger who has lost the message,"³² life is lived sideways, or as Victor Frankl says, man lives in an "existential vacuum."³³ Such a situation makes another philosopher conclude that "man is absurd,"³⁴ and hence, of course, the absurdity of our world foreseen by Nietzsche when he portrays the courage of the shamelessness of killing God or by Jean Paul Sartre (No Exit) when he warns about the consequences from which there is no escape when man without God builds a false destiny that leads him to a wrong destination.

Although an atheist, Sartre writes this play about an essential theological concept, namely hell, an existence in a state of total and irreversible separation from God, which confirms A. Heschel's

³⁰ Cioran, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

³¹ Karl Barth, *The Word of God and The Word of Man*, translated and with a new preface by Douglas Horton, Harper, New York, 1957, p. 140.

³² A. Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

³³ Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Third Edition, A Touchstone Book, Simon Schuster, New York, 1984, p. 111.

³⁴ Diogenes Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1985, p. 249.

conclusion that “the opposite of the human is not the animal, but the demonic.”³⁵

The remaking of the image

Theologically speaking, the cause of the human drama must be sought in the beginning. Something happened sometime, somewhere. Man, made as a deiform creature, endowed with freedom of choice, aroused the envy of the devil. The devil, suggesting to man to break God's commandment by eating the forbidden fruit, advising him that in this way he would be like God, thus pushing him towards a false divinization, actually caused his dehumanization.

Being the image of God, man had the consciousness and the awareness of the ultimate belonging (“Our Father who art in heaven”), a consciousness rediscovered in man by the divine Logos incarnate in history. This belonging is the only one that gives meaning to existence because it is its basis. The exit from the image, a fracture in being, as Emil Cioran would say, can only survive partially, in an illusion of existence, as the part cannot survive separated from the whole, that kind of path leading to total extinction, like a spark that jumps out of a flame.

So, if we know the cause, we can think of a solution. In this case, as the cause has to do with religion, the solution must also come from there. In other words, the restoration of the image of God in man, the reestablishment of human existence on the eternal values that relate to the knowledge of God and submission to the imperatives of the relationship with Him, are meant to free man from the embarrassment of his present condition. Embarrassment because “we are the greatest miracle on earth and yet we do not understand it.” “Religion,” says Abraham Heschel, “depends on what we do with this ultimate embarrassment.”³⁶

This is embarrassment, because we are an unanswered question, because we don't understand the "why" of things, our existence being an extraordinary thing, a miracle in itself, because we received as a gift a life for which we paid nothing, or as Bryan Magee says, we are given all “these possibilities [...] without our fully

³⁵ A. Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 113.

understanding them. We are awe stricken by our situation. We are so small in everything compared with what there is, and so ignorant. Mystery surrounds us on every side. And our destiny is not in our hands [...] We cannot explain life itself or within life, consciousness and love.”³⁷

The logic of transcendence

In the universe and in our lives, if we look closely, everything speaks of transcendence. Our world has no value except in its relationship with the transcendent.³⁸

This relationship humanizes man, maintains him in his authentic condition and has the implicit effect of humanizing his world. Otherwise, as a philosopher warns, existence without transcendence is a way of being where things become idols, and the idols – monsters,³⁹ and these, in the end, will devour those who created them, will devour their worshippers.

About transcendence, human reason itself speaks, taking into account the fact that most of reality is “unconceptualizable” for us,⁴⁰ or rather, reality itself is inconceivable. Once aware, it helps man to re-enter the house of being, to cultivate the ontological hope in the possibility of returning to the origin, to place the soul at the top of the hierarchy of any values, to see in history and in the continuous present its definitive role, because, as Saint-John Perse says, recalling Hegel, “there is no other history than that of the spirit.” Hence the need to discern between what passes and what remains, between Heraclitus the Ephesian and Parmenides the Eleatic, therefore between the permanence of passing and the permanence of the essence, of being.

The logic of transcendence should not need lawyers to argue in its favor. Man only needs to realize that his soul, his consciousness, are a piece of the transcendent, a constitutive, structural, ontological, transcendental element, hence his longing for the transcendent as in a kind of abyssus abyssum invocat. Theologically speaking, as man is the image of God, the great abyss calls the small, or the small yearns

³⁷ Bryan Magee, *Ultimate Questions*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2016, pp. 46-47.

³⁸ Theodor Damian, *op. cit.* p. 137.

³⁹ A. Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁴⁰ Bryan Magee, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

for the great, for the source. Therefore, as long as this tendency is natural and logical, opposing or even ignoring it is unnatural or, better said, against nature.

In this sense of the ontological tendency towards God, St. Augustine also expresses himself: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and my soul is restless until it rests in you."⁴¹ But the search for God would not take place if God were not already in man. That is why the patristic adage says: you cannot go towards God if you do not already depart from Him; or also Blaise Pascal in the dialogue that God has with him: "You would not seek Me if you had not already found Me."

The longing for God

The longing for God and the restless search are beautifully and poetically illustrated by Lucian Blaga: "Where are you Elohim / We wander troubled and unwillingly / Through the elements of the night we spy on you / We kiss the star under our heels in the dust / And we ask about You, Elohim // We stop the sleepless wind / And we test you with our nostrils, Elohim / We stop strange animals through spaces / And we ask them about You, Elohim" (Ioan is torn in the wilderness).

Longing implies a past, lived experience. You cannot miss something you have not seen, heard, or experienced. We miss a place because we have been there; people, because we have had dealings with them; a piece of music because we have heard it once and liked it. In general, longing is associated with positive states of mind: pleasure, joy, peace. You don't miss a terrible suffering, a degrading experience, just as you don't miss death because you didn't experience it.

This longing characterizes human life, it is felt, directly or indirectly, more or less consciously, in a vague, indefinite or more concrete form, a fact that, again, confirms man as a religious being, as Mircea Eliade explains.

The longing for God is also based on the fact that after the primordial fall, out of His love for man, God did not throw man into chaos, into non-existence, into the nothingness from which He made everything, nor at an unbridgeable distance, abolishing the possibility of any contact, but, on the contrary, instead of throwing him out

⁴¹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Penguin Classics, New York, 1961, p. 21.

altogether, He settled him (!) near the place from which he was expelled, as the Scripture states: “And expelling Adam, he settled him near the garden of Eden” (Genesis 3, 24, emphasis added).⁴² One should note here the meanings of the expression “to settle”: tenderness, care, love. And He placed him nearby, that is, however, somewhere close, in order to reaccept him as soon as the conditions for reintegration were met, but also for him to keep the longing for origins, for God, burning.

So, man is compatible with transcendence because he is the image of God in his spiritual part, as the great philosophers of the world affirm, from Parmenides and Plato, passing through Jesus Christ and Paul of Tarsus, to contemporaries. We have something within us from beyond us, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty also observes when talking about language when he says that although it transcends us, we still speak. It also happens with our existence: we are part of the Being beyond us. We are mortal and yet we share in Being. According to the reflection of the English philosopher Bryan Magee, “we humans are partially in this world and partially not. The fact that the self is not found in Nature may explain the widely held conviction that a self is not an object or a thing, and therefore cannot be justifiably treated as such,”⁴³ which also confirms the highest dignity of the human being.

Dwelling on the transcendent

The transcendent dimension of the human person also emerges from a conversation between Bishop Theophilus of Antioch (2nd century) and an atheist who, contesting the existence of the soul, also asked for evidence of the existence of God. To this, the Bishop says: Show me your man (in you) and I will show you God.

He who does not believe in God, nevertheless has Him in the depths of his being, which is why Jesus Christ said it in general: “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). It must only be discovered, but one cannot discover it when one is scattered abroad. For the one who discovers it, however, God becomes the center

⁴² See: Brenton English Septuagint; Blue Letter Bible; Septuaginta-die-bibel.de; Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură, București, 2008, 2023.

⁴³ Bryan Magee, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

around which he gravitates and on which he bases his life, the transcendent source of the meaning of existence.

He who believes advances, pushed by his own courage of faith, towards ever new possibilities as Emily Dickinson says meaningfully: "I dwell in possibility". But the believer would say even more: I dwell in the transcendent, or, I live in the Resurrection, contrary to the Heideggerian concept of *Sein zum Tode* (existence towards death), yet transfigured for the Christian into *Sein zur Auferstehung* (existence towards Resurrection).

However, even *Sein zum Tode* is sometimes interpreted not as a fatality, not as a condemnation, but as a possibility for a new beginning, for a re-rooting in Being,⁴⁴ a process also understood by Maurice Zundel when he said that "man is not yet, he must become. This is the primary objective of our hope."⁴⁵

Theologically speaking, though, becoming is a way towards the origin, towards God, but through people, a fact which takes us into the territory of morality, the man next to me being my transcendence as Roger Garaudy writes:⁴⁶ "I do not define myself fully except in relation to the other person, to all people in the totality of their history and culture."⁴⁷

So, everything is relationship, and any relationship is an encounter that gives new meaning to life, of course, the encounter with God, the great encounter, being the one that gives life its full, total meaning.

In today's world, however, although metaphysics is the profound source of morality, this is not a main concern in academic circles, observes the American professor James C. Rahn.⁴⁸

The secularization of society is considered to be one of the causes of this uprooting, due to which the narcissism, the individualism of modern man has become an increasingly visible characteristic. Reflecting on this, Simone Weil demanded imperatively: "Let man empty himself of his false divinity."⁴⁹ Hence

⁴⁴ Michael Millerman, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁴⁵ Marc Donzé, *La pensée théologique de Maurice Zundel*, Editions du Tricorne, Editions du Cerf, Genève, 1980, p. 73.

⁴⁶ Roger Garaudy, *Parole d'homme*, D. Laffont, Paris, 1975, p. 148.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

⁴⁸ James C. Rahn, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

⁴⁹ Simone Weil, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

the need for authentic self-reflection or inquiry according to the Socratic advice, but also the Pauline exhortation, the need for kenosis, of emptying, of detachment from the fabricated personality and the return to the one created in the image of God. This type of becoming will transform the mirror man, in which he always sees only himself, into the window man, through which he always sees others and God, according to the inspired metaphor of Martin Luther King, and will lead to an expansion of morality, just as technology is expanding, otherwise we need to question where it will get without the compulsory and necessary moral dimension.

Conclusion

As Walter Brueggemann says, it is time to realize that it is vitally necessary for us to make that the praise, the doxology, our obligation and delight, to have them become the ultimate vocation of the human community⁵⁰ because, as A. Heschel also notes, if the world will perish, this will happen not due to a lack of information, but due to man's lack of appreciation for his neighbor,⁵¹ for the image of God present in every person. It thus draws our attention to the need for Spirit and spirituality, because matter awaits the transfiguring action of the spirit⁵² or, as St. Augustine warns, "he who is not spiritual even in his flesh becomes carnal even in his spirit".⁵³

We believe what we want to believe, but then we become what we believe. That is why it is important what we choose, it is important to pay attention to the divine advice for us to choose life (Deuter. 30, 19), that is, the path to the royal dignity of the human person, to its fulfillment in God. And even if sometimes this path seems difficult or impossible, Christ specifies that He is the way, that with God nothing is impossible, or as a patristic saying puts it, when the way seems impossible to you, make the impossible a way.

⁵⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1989, p. 1.

⁵¹ A. Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁵² Anoushka von Heuer, *Le huitième jour ou la dette d'Adam*, Jean Luc de Rougemont, Genève, 1980, p. 6.

⁵³ Cf. Paul Evdokimov, *Les ages de la vie spirituelle*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1964, p. 137.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Allen, Diogenes, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1985.
- Augustine, Saint, *Confessions*, Penguin Classics, New York, 1961.
- Barth, Karl, *The Word of God and The Word of Man*, translated and with a new preface by Douglas Horton, Harper, New York, 1957.
- Bayels, Martha, "The Character of Tragedy," in *The Hedgehog Review*, Vol. 26, Nr. 1, Spring 2024, pp. 62-63.
- Berdyaev, Nicolas, *The Fate of Man in the Modern World*, Ann Arbor Paperbooks, The University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1963.
- Brueggemann, Walter, *Israel's Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1989.
- Cioran, Emil, *The Temptation to Exist*, transl. from French by Richard Howard, Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1970.
- Damian, Theodor, *Implicațiile spirituale ale teologiei icoanei [The spiritual implications of icon theology]*, Eikon, București, 2003.
- Damon, William, *The Death of Honesty*, Hoover Institution, January 12, 2012 (<https://www.hoover.org/research/death=honesty>).
- Davis, Joseph E., "The Basis of Everything: The Fragility of Character in a Truth-Challenged World," in *The Hedgehog Review*, Vol. 26, Nr. 1, Spring 2024, p. 88-98.
- Descartes, René, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, Fourth Edition, Hackett, Indianapolis, IN, 1998.
- DeMello, Anthony, *One Minute Wisdom*, Double Day, New York, 1986.
- Donzé, Marc, *La pensée théologique de Maurice Zundel*, Editions du Tricorne, Editions du Cerf, Genève, 1980.
- Evdokimov, Paul, *Les ages de la vie spirituelle*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1964.
- Fisher, Anthony, "The West: Post or Pre Christian?," in *First Things*, Nr. 330, February 2023, pp. 19-26.
- Frankl, Victor, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Third Edition, A Touchstone Book, Simon Schuster, New York, 1984.
- Fromm, Erich, *Avoir ou être*, R. Laffont, Paris, 1981.
- Garaudy, Roger, *Parole d'homme*, D. Laffont, Paris, 1975.
- Harrington, Mary, "Surviving the Metaverse," book review for *The Metaverse and How it Will Revolutionize Everything*, by Matthew Ball, Norton, New York, 2022, in *First Things*, Nr. 330, February 2023, pp. 49-52.
- Heschel, Abraham, *Who Is Man*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1965.
- Heuer, Anoushka von, *Le huitième jour ou la dette d'Adam*, Jean Luc de Rougemont, Genève, 1980.

- Magee, Bryan, *Ultimate Questions*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2016.
- Mattix, Michah, "The Integrity of Poetry," in *First Things*, Nr. 330, February 2023, pp. 27-32.
- Millerman, Michael, "Alexander Dugin explained," in *First Things*, Nr. 330, February 2023, pp. 41-47.
- Rahn, James C., „The Necessity of Networks: The Case of William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect," in *The Hedgehog Review*, Vol. 26, Nr. 1, Spring 2024, pp. 110-116.
- Richters, Claire, "Glimpses of Light from Enlightenment's Prison," book review for *A Precarious Happiness: Adorno and the Sources of Normativity*, by Peter E. Gordon, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, in *The Hedgehog Review*, Vol. 26, Nr. 1, Spring 2024, pp. 155-158.
- Weil, Simone, *Waiting for God*, Harper and Row, New York, 1951.

Lumină Lină

Revistă de spiritualitate și cultură românească

Gracious Light

Review of Romanian Spirituality and Culture



THE ROMANIAN INSTITUTE OF
ORTHODOX THEOLOGY AND
SPIRITUALITY
CAPELA SF. APOSTOLI PETRU
ȘI PAVEL

AN XXXI / Nr. 3
IULIE - SEPTEMBRIE 2026
NEW YORK

RICHARD GRALLO

Following your Desire to Know

Abstract: What would it be like to have, as a response to everyday events, something other than strong emotions and feelings or automatic thoughts? The *desire to know* provides such an alternative. The desire to know reliably propels one towards learning about what is happening and setting about to improve it. The desire to know is a unique emotion, and following it is a very fruitful habit. Implications and applications are discussed.

Keywords: self-knowledge, self-appropriation, self-regulation, wisdom, learning

Imagine that you are in a restaurant waiting for some friends to arrive for dinner. They are twenty minutes late. As you sit there, what is happening with you? What are you thinking? What are you feeling?

For many, thinking may take the form of self-talk that looks to identify causes and to fix blame. For others, feelings may come to the fore such as anxiety or depression or even anger. Can anything change this situation, even if your friends do not arrive at all?

Instead of getting caught up in intrusive self-talk that seems to go nowhere, or being taken over by negative emotions that can be quite exhausting, is there a third alternative? Is there an option that, no matter what happens, you will have benefitted from it? Also, can such a choice be implemented at a moment's notice?

An alternative strategy in this situation might be to switch away from the self-chatter and debilitating emotions to a genuine *desire to know*.

Richard Grallo, PhD is Professor emeritus of Human Services at Metropolitan College of New York and is a psycho-educational consultant in private practice specializing in applied psychology, education and other human service professions.

The Desire to know and authentic questions

What is the *desire to know*? The desire to know is an experienced tension towards correctly understanding what is going on in any situation. It proceeds through questions to answers, but it does not stay there. Not just any answers will do, but it asks for verification that the initial answers are correct. It has been called by many names, including “wonder”, or “the intention to learn” or even “curiosity.” It has its own calm feel to it, and is not like any other desire, feeling or emotion.

What are the effects of the *desire to know*? Here is a partial list of seven. (1) The *desire to know* generates *authentic questions*. (Stated another way, *authentic questions* are an expression of the desire to know.) (2) The *desire to know* follows questions where they lead, with no agenda other than getting things right. (3) The *desire to know* and its *authentic questions* immediately reframe situations, (i.e., they put situations in a new frame or context of meaning). (4) The *desire to know* and its *authentic questions* immediately refocus attention. Instead of paying attention to what is frustrating in this situation, we now notice something else that is interesting about it. This desire adopts a mindset of seeking what can be learned from and in this situation. (5) The *desire to know* and its *authentic questions* immediately change emotional states. Instead of growth-stopping anger, anxiety or depression etc., we now have a growth-promoting vital interest. (6) The *desire to know*, if unimpeded, invites us to the journey of investigating our own questions. (7) The *desire to know*, if unimpeded, extends into a life-enhancing *desire to grow*. It nudges the learner to make accommodations for new things learned, and to change one’s currently arranged personality into a more efficient and comprehensive version of the self. It leads towards greater “integrity” in the sense that the pieces of the newly emerging personality integrate well with one another.

How would these traits of the desire to know apply to our sitting alone and frustrated in a restaurant? (1) As one sits there, questions may suggest themselves. At first, they may be about our missing friends, but later they may drift to something else. (2) We may not be able to follow all of these questions now. We may need to wait for the answers, but at least we can make note of the questions. (3) The desire to know has immediately reframed the situation by redefining it away from an annoying waiting game into an

environment of questions and an opportunity for learning. (4) The desire to know has refocused attention towards emerging authentic questions, and away from self-chatter and negative emotions. (5) The desire to know and its authentic questions have immediately changed emotional states away from anger, or anxiety (worry) or depression (giving up) towards curiosity and vital interest. (6) If we hold on to the desire to know, the probability of correctly answering our questions increases. (7) If we practice this discipline when we are frustrated or disappointed, we change our personality as it is currently constituted; that is, we grow by accommodating to a new situation (however frustrating or disappointing). We move in the direction of a personality centered on learning; that is a *learning personality*.

Inauthentic questions

How does the *desire to know* and its *authentic questions* differ from inauthentic questions? Inauthentic questions are not really questions at all. They may be complaints or noises masquerading in the costume of interrogative sentences. For example, in this case, we might say “Why is this happening to me?” or “Why does everything always go wrong?” Persons advancing inauthentic questions are not really interested in the truth, especially if it costs too much. They may be simply venting. Or they may be attempting to place a “finger on the scales” and to fix blame. The desires of this person are frequently mixed with other desires and drives. They are often involved in being in love with one answer over the others without having done much in the way of investigation. Often inauthentic questions are the “easy way out.” If taken seriously, they usually do not lead to the work of learning and problem solving, and they never really lead to personal growth.

The choice

The key decision for anyone caught in situations of delay or frustration is this: What do I choose to do? The options are clear: (1) Choose to do nothing. This is a non-growth option that allows one to continue being subject, in the delay, to whatever feelings and emotions come along. (2) Complain. This is another non-growth

option that allows one to continue being emotionally controlled by the delay. (3) Choose growth. Amid the delay, and not controlled by the delay, switch to the desire to know and its authentic questions.

Everyday life is a gymnasium of potential exercises wherein, no matter what is presented, we can choose growth or not. Certainly, delays and frustrations need to be acknowledged for what they are. However, is that all? Delays and frustrations can be reframed as opportunities for learning and growth. Choosing growth as a habit would be an example of “getting the most out of life.” It may not be easy, and it may require some work and even courage.

Implications: Adopting the desire to know and its authentic questions as a part of everyday mindful practice will result in a *learning personality*, that is a person who is centered on learning. In contrast, choosing non-growth would be an instance of coasting and taking it easy, at least in the short term.

Applications: As a kind of homework, in your next delay or frustration experience, choose growth. Follow your desire to know. This can be done by following two authentic questions: (1) What can I learn from this situation? (2) How can I improve things?

RESOURCES:

Grallo, Richard, *Question and Insight in Everyday Life: A Blueprint for Transformative Problem-Solving*, Lexington Press, New York, 2021 [<https://Rowman.com/Lexington>].

Reinterpreting Hell and Salvation: Contemporary Universalism in American Charismatic Theology

Abstract: This study explores the relationship between contemporary Christian universalism and charismatic Christianity in the United States, examining the theological, spiritual, and cultural factors that have contributed to the growing popularity of universalist ideas within certain charismatic circles. Particular attention is given to the charismatic emphasis on the immediate experience of divine grace, healing, restoration, and the unconditional love of God, elements that have significantly influenced contemporary understandings of salvation and eschatology. The study analyzes the theological perspectives of figures such as John Crowder, Benjamin Dunn, and Carlton Pearson, highlighting their reinterpretation of salvation, human identity, hell, and final judgment. It further investigates how contemporary charismatic universalism challenges traditional doctrines of eternal punishment and promotes various forms of universal reconciliation. Finally, the article offers a critical theological evaluation from an Orthodox perspective, focusing on the relationship between divine grace and human freedom, the role of ascetic transformation, and the distinction between the hope for universal salvation and its dogmatic affirmation. The study argues that charismatic universalism represents one of the most significant contemporary attempts to reconcile divine love with eschatological justice while simultaneously generating important theological questions concerning freedom, salvation, and the ultimate destiny of humanity.

Keywords: Christian universalism, charismatic Christianity, salvation, eschatology, hell, divine love, reconciliation, John Crowder, Benjamin Dunn, Carlton Pearson, Orthodox theology

Arhid. Alexandru Lazăr is a doctoral candidate at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

Introduction

In the final decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, the American religious landscape underwent significant transformations that profoundly influenced the understanding of salvation, divine judgment, and the ultimate destiny of humanity. Among the most important religious developments of this period was the emergence and expansion of the charismatic and neo-charismatic movement, which transcended the traditional boundaries of Pentecostalism and exerted a considerable influence on numerous Christian denominations throughout the United States.¹ The emphasis placed on the personal experience of the Holy Spirit, inner healing, extraordinary spiritual manifestations, and the immediate accessibility of divine grace contributed to the emergence of new forms of theological reflection, including within the field of eschatology.²

In this context, a number of authors and religious leaders began to re-evaluate traditional doctrines that had occupied a central place in American Protestant theology for centuries. Among these, the doctrine of eternal hell and the question of everlasting condemnation became the subject of intense debate, as the image of a God defined primarily by love, compassion, and reconciliation appeared increasingly difficult to reconcile with the prospect of a final and irreversible separation of a portion of humanity from its Creator.³

Contemporary Christian universalism developed within this spiritual and cultural climate. Although it cannot be identified exclusively with the charismatic movement, many of its theological premises found fertile ground in communities oriented toward the direct experience of divine grace and the emphasis on the unconditional character of God's love.⁴ Within these circles, salvation increasingly came to be understood less as a juridical deliverance

¹ Vinson Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal, 1901–2001*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 2001, p. 398.

² Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005, p. 241.

³ Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge (eds.), *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003, p. 15.

⁴ Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God*, Cascade Books, Eugene, OR, 2014, p. 28.

from eternal punishment and more as the restoration of the relationship between God and the whole of creation.⁵

The present chapter seeks to examine the relationship between American charismatic spirituality and the development of contemporary forms of Christian universalism. It will explore both the spiritual foundations that facilitated the emergence of this perspective and its doctrinal implications concerning the nature of salvation, the status of hell, and the possibility of universal reconciliation. Furthermore, the principal arguments advanced by proponents of this movement will be critically evaluated in dialogue with the broader Christian theological tradition and contemporary Orthodox reflection.

The context of the emergence of universalism within the American charismatic movement

To understand the development of Christian universalism within the American charismatic movement, it is necessary to examine the religious and cultural context that facilitated its emergence. Although universalism had appeared sporadically throughout the history of Western Christianity in previous centuries, its contemporary form developed within a framework significantly different from that of classical theological debates. In the United States, the second half of the twentieth century was marked by profound religious transformations that reshaped both theological discourse and the spiritual sensibilities of an increasing number of believers.⁶

The charismatic movement, which emerged in the early 1960s within various Christian denominations, represented both a continuation and an expansion of the Pentecostal experience that had originated at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁷ While classical Pentecostalism placed particular emphasis on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and the imminent return of Christ, the new

⁵ David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell and Universal Salvation*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2019, p. 24.

⁶ Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992, p. 468.

⁷ Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide*, Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 1997, p. 347.

charismatic movement focused more on the personal experience of the divine presence, inner healing, and the transformation of everyday life through the direct work of the Holy Spirit.⁸

This shift in perspective had important consequences for the understanding of salvation. In the classical evangelical tradition, emphasis was frequently placed on individual conversion as the means of escaping eternal condemnation. Preaching was often structured around the opposition between salvation and perdition, heaven and hell, and the acceptance or rejection of Christ. By contrast, many charismatic communities began to privilege the language of restoration, healing, and reconciliation. God was no longer presented primarily as a judge, but rather as a loving Father who seeks the recovery and healing of the human person.⁹

This theological shift was further encouraged by broader cultural changes within American society. Following the traumatic experiences of the two World Wars, and in the context of the rise of humanistic psychology, therapeutic culture, and the growing emphasis on personal development, many believers began to express reservations toward religious representations centered exclusively on guilt, punishment, and fear.¹⁰ The traditional language of eternal condemnation increasingly came to be perceived as incompatible with the image of a God of absolute love.¹¹

At the same time, American Protestant theology underwent a reassessment of themes such as grace, freedom, and the universal scope of Christ's redemptive work. Although the majority of evangelical denominations continued to affirm the existence of a final separation between the saved and the condemned, an increasing number of authors began to raise questions concerning the compatibility of God's infinite love with the existence of eternal damnation.¹² Within this context, certain reflections drawn from the patristic tradition were rediscovered and reinterpreted, particularly those associated with Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Isaac the Syrian,

⁸ Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 1987, p. 189.

⁹ Margaret M. Poloma, *The Charismatic Movement: Is There a New Pentecost?*, Twayne Publishers, Boston, MA, 1982, p. 107.

¹⁰ Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987, p. 26.

¹¹ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, Norton, New York, 1979, p. 29.

¹² Thomas Talbott, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

authors who expressed various forms of hope concerning the ultimate restoration of creation.¹³

The development of contemporary universalism cannot be explained solely by doctrinal factors. It must also be understood as an expression of a broader shift in religious sensibility. Whereas previous generations were shaped by a culture marked by the idea of individual responsibility before divine judgment, contemporary religious culture is characterized to a much greater extent by concerns for inclusion, healing, and reconciliation.¹⁴ Consequently, the prospect of universal restoration came to be regarded by some believers not as a departure from the Gospel, but rather as the most coherent expression of the love revealed in Christ.¹⁵

Against this spiritual and cultural background, authors such as Carlton Pearson, Benjamin Dunn, John Crowder, Andrew Hronich, and Thomas Talbott would later emerge, contributing in varying degrees to the development of a universalist vision of salvation. Although their positions are neither identical nor universally accepted within charismatic circles, they reflect the same broader tendency to reinterpret traditional eschatology through the lens of God's universal love and the hope of the final restoration of all creation.¹⁶

Contemporary universalism and the promise of universal reconciliation

The charismatic movement in the United States, which developed around the 1960s and became associated with various networks of independent and free Christian churches, articulated a distinctive spiritual perspective on the relationship between humanity

¹³ Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, p. 54; Ilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, MI, 2000, p. 295.

¹⁴ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2007, p. 504.

¹⁵ David Bentley Hart, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

¹⁶ Michael J. McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018, p. 1278.

and God, one that differed significantly from the traditional ascetical models found in patristic and monastic Christianity.¹⁷

Whereas Eastern Christian spirituality and much of the classical Christian tradition emphasized asceticism as a process of ontological purification, a struggle against the passions, and a gradual participation in the divine life, the American charismatic milieu shifted the focus toward the immediate experience of grace, the affective dimension of faith, and the tangible manifestation of the Holy Spirit's power in everyday life.¹⁸

This spiritual shift profoundly influenced the way the relationship between God and sinful humanity came to be understood. Whereas the classical ascetical tradition often emphasized the necessity of continual and arduous spiritual struggle for the attainment of salvation, many contemporary charismatic circles stress the absolute initiative of divine love and the accessibility of grace to every person. Consequently, salvation increasingly came to be perceived less as the result of severe ascetical effort and more as an experience of unconditional acceptance and inner restoration.

Within this context emerges one of the key premises that facilitated the development of tendencies closely associated with contemporary Christian universalism. If God is understood above all as limitless love, healing, and reconciliation, then it becomes increasingly difficult for certain charismatic circles to accept the notion of a final and everlasting condemnation.¹⁹ Especially after the second half of the twentieth century, a segment of the American neo-charismatic milieu began to move away from the classical preaching centered on the fear of hell and eternal punishment, developing instead a spirituality of hope and universal restoration,²⁰ promoting an intensification of prayer gatherings and celebratory worship events.²¹

¹⁷ Donald Miller, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2007, pp. 12-13.

¹⁸ Michael McClymond, "Charismatic Renewal and Neo-Pentecostalism: From American Origins to Global Permutation", *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2014, pp. 41-42.

¹⁹ James Packer, „Theological Reflections on the Charismatic Movement. Part I”, in *Churchman*, Vol. 94, Nr. 1, 1980, p. 7.

²⁰ Stanley Grenz, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings in the Theology of Tomorrow*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Lisle, IL, 2000, p. 45.

²¹ James Packer, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

The teaching promoted within certain contemporary charismatic circles considerably diminished the importance of traditional asceticism and the notion of spiritual struggle. John Crowder argued that ascetic discipline does not authentically lead to union with God and that human attempts to approach the divine through their own efforts may, paradoxically, distance them from the experience of grace.²² From this perspective, grace is no longer understood as the result of an inner struggle and a gradual ascetic transformation, but rather as a reality already given, which simply needs to be received and experienced on an affective level. Likewise, Benjamin Dunn maintained that “we need only be dependent and passive recipients of the Gospel.”²³

This new spirituality developed within the framework of what numerous scholars have described as the “happy gospel”²⁴ that is, a form of Christianity predominantly oriented toward the experience of joy, personal fulfillment, emotional enthusiasm, and a continual sense of spiritual celebration. Rather than emphasizing repentance, suffering, the struggle against the passions, and the tragic dimension of human freedom, the *happy gospel* promotes the image of a spontaneous and affective relationship with God,²⁵ in which the believer is called to experience, already in this life, the state of happiness and inner freedom associated with salvation.

In this context, mystical experience is often described through images of ecstasy and “spiritual intoxication.” Crowder argued that wine is one of the few images capable of expressing the intensity of the joy and inner exaltation experienced when a person “drinks from the cup of salvation.”²⁶ Charismatic spirituality frequently draws upon metaphors of exuberance, festivity, and mystical intoxication in order to articulate the experience of divine grace.

Benjamin Dunn reconceptualizes salvation not as an eschatological event awaiting fulfillment at the Second Coming of

²² John Crowder, *Mystical Union*, Sons of Thunder, Santa Cruz, CA, 2010, p. 119.

²³ Benjamin Dunn, *The Happy Gospel! Effortless Union with a Happy God*, Destiny Image, Shippensburg, PA, 2021, p. 39.

²⁴ Christopher Kaczor, *The Gospel of Happiness: Rediscover Your Faith Through Spiritual Practice and Positive Psychology*, Image Books, New York, 2015, p. 24.

²⁵ Benjamin Dunn, *Oracles of the Ordinary: Chronicles from the Eternal Now*, Benjamin Dunn, Shippensburg, PA, 2026, p. 44.

²⁶ Benjamin Dunn, *The Happy Gospel*, p. 39.

Christ, but as a present reality already accessible “here and now,”²⁷ through a transformation in the way a person perceives his or her own spiritual identity. Within this perspective, what the Christian tradition has called condemnation or separation from God is not understood as a definitive ontological state, but rather as a false and illusory perception of one's own existence. Human beings experience the drama of alienation not because they are truly separated from God, but because they fail to recognize their true identity as revealed in Christ.

Consequently, salvation is no longer understood primarily as a future deliverance from eternal punishment, but as a process of spiritual awakening and growing awareness that Christ constitutes the authentic and deepest image of restored humanity. Condemnation is associated with spiritual ignorance and a distorted perception of the self, and it is overcome when individuals discover that their true identity is already grounded in Christ and in the divine love manifested universally.

Reinterpretation of hell and the Final Judgment

One of the most significant theological consequences of contemporary universalism as developed within the American charismatic milieu concerns the reinterpretation of the traditional doctrines of hell and the final judgment. Whereas in classical evangelical Protestantism the existence of eternal condemnation constituted one of the fundamental premises of soteriological discourse, numerous contemporary authors have begun to reassess this perspective in light of the emphasis placed on the universal love of God and the all-sufficient character of Christ's redemptive work.²⁸

This shift did not occur abruptly but was the result of a gradual transformation in religious sensibility. To the extent that God is described above all as infinite love and reconciliation, the doctrine of an eternal and irreversible separation begins to raise both theological and pastoral difficulties. For many believers and religious leaders, the question is no longer whether God is capable of condemning, but

²⁷ John Crowder, *Cosmos Reborn: Happy Theology on the New Creation*, Sons of Thunder, Santa Cruz, CA, p. 116.

²⁸ Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 38.

whether His love can ultimately accept the permanent loss of a portion of creation.²⁹

In this context, the figure of Carlton Pearson stands out as one of the most controversial personalities in contemporary American Christianity. Emerging from a Pentecostal background and shaped within the conservative evangelical tradition, Pearson became widely known for promoting a perspective he termed the “Gospel of Inclusion.”³⁰ According to this perspective, Christ’s death and resurrection accomplished a universal reconciliation between God and humanity, rendering the eternal exclusion of any segment of humankind incompatible with the very nature of divine love.³¹

Pearson describes the experience that led to this doctrinal transformation as emerging from a profound spiritual and pastoral crisis. Faced with human suffering, collective tragedies, and the destiny of individuals who had never truly encountered the Christian message, he began to question whether the existence of an eternal hell could be reconciled with the love of God.³² In Pearson’s view, the doctrine of eternal condemnation transforms the Gospel into a message of fear and diminishes the scope of Christ’s victory over sin and death. Rather than proclaiming the definitive reconciliation accomplished through the Cross, it suggests that evil ultimately retains a lasting triumph over a portion of humanity. Consequently, Pearson argues that the redemptive work of Christ must be understood as universally effective, extending to all people regardless of their explicit awareness of it or their religious affiliation. The final judgment, therefore, is no longer interpreted primarily as a moment of irreversible separation, but as the ultimate revelation of a reconciliation already accomplished in Christ.

Building upon these premises, Pearson develops an inclusive interpretation of salvation. He maintains that God does not regard human beings primarily through the lens of denominational affiliation or individual religious achievement, but rather through the objective reality of Christ’s redemptive work. Salvation thus becomes a universal reality inaugurated through the Paschal event, while faith is understood not as the condition that brings about salvation, but as the

²⁹ David Bentley Hart, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

³⁰ Carlton Pearson, *The Gospel of Inclusion*, Penguin, New York, 2006, p. 25.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

conscious response to a reconciliation that has already been accomplished.³³

This perspective generated strong reactions within the American evangelical community. Numerous denominations regarded Pearson's teaching as exceeding the boundaries of traditional Christian doctrine and as leading to the relativization of conversion, moral responsibility, and the necessity of personal faith. Critics argued that universalism risks transforming salvation into an inevitable process, thereby diminishing the significance of human freedom and the concrete response to God's call.³⁴

The debate, however, was not confined to the case of Carlton Pearson. In recent decades, numerous contemporary theologians have sought to provide intellectual foundations for the hope of a universal restoration. Thomas Talbott argues that perfect divine love and omnipotence are difficult to reconcile with the notion of eternal damnation.³⁵ Robin Parry maintains that a form of evangelical universalism can be articulated in a manner consistent with the authority of Scripture and the central affirmations of the Christian faith,³⁶ while David Bentley Hart argues that God's ultimate triumph over evil is intelligible only as the complete restoration of all creation.³⁷

Central to these reflections is a reexamination of the nature of hell. Instead of being conceived as a punitive and irrevocable state, hell is portrayed by certain authors as a therapeutic, pedagogical, or purgative experience intended to bring about spiritual transformation and restoration.³⁸ Divine judgment is interpreted not as an act of retributive vengeance but as an expression of divine love directed toward the healing and restoration of the human person. Even when a form of postmortem punishment is affirmed, it is generally

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ Michael J. McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption*, p. 1278.

³⁵ Thomas Talbott, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

³⁶ Robin A. Parry, *The Evangelical Universalist*, Cascade Books, Eugene, OR, 2012, p. 121.

³⁷ David Bentley Hart, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

³⁸ Ilarion Alfeyev, *Christ the Conqueror of Hell*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 2009, p. 203.

understood as temporary and therapeutic in nature, rather than final and irrevocable.³⁹

Consequently, contemporary charismatic universalism extends beyond the mere affirmation of the possible salvation of all humanity and entails a comprehensive reconfiguration of Christian eschatology. Concepts such as judgment, hell, punishment, and reconciliation are reconsidered through the lens of God's universal love and the belief that the ultimate goal of the divine economy is the full restoration of all creation.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, this perspective gives rise to a number of complex theological questions regarding human freedom, the nature of evil, and the relationship between divine justice and mercy, matters that will be subjected to critical analysis in the following section.

Theological and critical evaluation

Although the universalism developed within certain contemporary charismatic circles presents itself as an attempt to reaffirm the universal character of divine love, it raises a number of significant theological concerns. A critical analysis of this phenomenon cannot ignore the pastoral intuitions that contributed to its emergence; at the same time, however, it must examine the doctrinal implications of its reinterpretation of salvation, judgment, and human freedom. From an Orthodox perspective, the principal difficulty does not lie in the affirmation of God's universal love, a reality consistently present within the Tradition of the Church, but rather in the manner in which this love is related to personal freedom and to the concrete human response to the divine call.⁴¹

Grace and freedom

One of the fundamental characteristics of contemporary charismatic universalism is the emphasis placed on the absolute initiative of grace. In numerous theological formulations found in the writings of John Crowder, Benjamin Dunn, and Carlton Pearson, the

³⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2003, p. 318.

⁴⁰ John Crowder, *Cosmos Reborn*, p. 117.

⁴¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. II, p. 48.

work of God appears as an almost exclusively unilateral reality, while the human response tends to be reduced to the mere recognition of a salvation already accomplished.⁴²

Such a perspective, however, raises important questions regarding the status of human freedom. Orthodox tradition has consistently insisted on the synergistic character of salvation. God offers His grace universally and unconditionally, yet human beings are called to respond freely to this divine initiative. Salvation is neither the exclusive result of human effort nor the automatic effect of divine action; rather, it is the encounter between the love of God and the freedom of the human person.⁴³

Dumitru Stăniloae consistently maintains that genuine love is inconceivable apart from freedom. God does not force the human person into communion with Him, since any form of coercion would reduce the relationship between Creator and creature to an impersonal mechanism, thereby undermining the very possibility of authentic love. From this standpoint, the principal difficulty associated with certain forms of universalism is their tendency to portray Christ's victory as an inevitable outcome, thereby reducing the significance of personal freedom and human participation within the economy of salvation.⁴⁴

This observation should not be understood as a denial of the hope for the salvation of all humanity. The Church continually prays for the entire world and steadfastly affirms the universal scope of divine love.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the Church avoids elevating this hope to the status of dogmatic certainty, precisely in order to safeguard the reality of human freedom and the personal nature of the communion between God and the human person.

Asceticism and Religious Experience

Another major issue concerns the relationship between the experience of grace and the ascetical tradition of Christianity.

⁴² Dumitru Stăniloae, *Isus Hristos sau Restaurarea Omului*, Omniscope, București, 1993, p. 338.

⁴³ Michael J. McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption*, vol. II, p. 278.

⁴⁴ Margaret M. Poloma, *The Charismatic Movement: Is There a New Pentecost?*, Twayne Publishers, Boston, MA, 1982, p. 118.

⁴⁵ Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Capete despre dragoste*, Humanitas, București, 2008, p. 87.

Contemporary charismatic spirituality places particular emphasis on the affective experience of the divine presence, charismatic manifestations, and the sense of spiritual joy.⁴⁶ Although these dimensions are not foreign to the Christian tradition, they risk becoming problematic when separated from the ascetical process of personal transformation.

In the patristic tradition, the experience of God is not conceived as an isolated event or as something exclusively emotional. Rather, it is understood as the fruit of a long process of inner purification, struggle against the passions, and growth in virtue.⁴⁷ For the Eastern Fathers, grace does not abolish ascetical effort but enables and sustains it. Although salvation cannot be achieved through human powers alone, participation in the divine life nevertheless presupposes a real transformation of the human person and of one's mode of existence.⁴⁸

John Crowder's critique of traditional asceticism is rooted in the legitimate concern to avoid religious legalism and forms of spirituality grounded in the notion of human merit.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, in some formulations, this critique risks minimizing the significance of spiritual effort and reducing the Christian life to a predominantly psychological experience of acceptance. From an Orthodox standpoint, divine love does not eliminate ascetical struggle but rather transfigures and gives meaning to it. Grace and asceticism should not be viewed as opposing realities; instead, they represent complementary dimensions of the same process of deification (*theosis*), through which the human person is progressively conformed to the likeness of God.⁵⁰

In this respect, the theological reflections of Maximus the Confessor, Isaac the Syrian, and Sophrony Sakharov provide a balanced understanding of the relationship between grace and freedom. While all three affirm the universal scope of divine love, they likewise emphasize the necessity of a personal and active

⁴⁶ Isaac Sirul, *Cuvinte despre nevoință*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2003, p. 168.

⁴⁷ John Crowder, *Mystical Union*, Destiny Image, Shippensburg, PA, 2011, p. 78.

⁴⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Ascetica și Mistica Bisericii Ortodoxe*, Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București: 2002, p. 41.

⁴⁹ Arhimandritul Sofronie Saharov, *Vom vedea pe Dumnezeu precum este*, Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2005, p. 133.

⁵⁰ Bentley Hart, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

participation in the divine life, thereby preserving both the primacy of grace and the integrity of human freedom.⁵¹

Universalism between hope and doctrine

Perhaps the most significant theological issue raised by contemporary universalism concerns the distinction between the hope of universal salvation and its affirmation as a certain doctrine. Numerous contemporary authors, including David Bentley Hart, Thomas Talbott, and Robin Parry, seek to demonstrate that universal reconciliation constitutes the logical conclusion of divine love and omnipotence. Nevertheless, the Christian tradition has, in general, exercised considerable theological restraint when it comes to elevating this hope to the status of dogmatic certainty.⁵²

Orthodox spirituality is characterized by a persistent tension between the universality of divine love and the mystery of human freedom. God wills the salvation of all humanity, Christ offered Himself for the life of the whole world, and the Church continually intercedes on behalf of all creation.⁵³ Nevertheless, the concrete manner in which this love will be received by each individual remains a reality that surpasses the limits of human knowledge.

This position helps explain why many contemporary Orthodox theologians have preferred to speak of a universal hope rather than of dogmatic universalism.⁵⁴ The writings of Olivier Clément, Paul Evdokimov, and even certain reflections found in the work of Dumitru Stăniloae articulate, in various ways, a hope and longing for the universal restoration of humanity, while refraining from elevating this hope to the level of a definitive doctrinal statement concerning the ultimate destiny of all persons.⁵⁵

From this standpoint, contemporary charismatic universalism can be understood as the expression of a legitimate theological

⁵¹ Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 2000, p. 225.

⁵² Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Kingdom*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 2000, p. 193.

⁵³ Olivier Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, New City, London, 1993, p. 294; Paul Evdokimov, *L'Amour fou de Dieu*, Seuil, Paris, 1973, p. 118.

⁵⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, Vol. III, p. 347.

⁵⁵ Olivier Clément, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

intuition regarding the boundless nature of divine love. Yet it becomes theologically problematic when it seeks to remove altogether the dramatic reality of human freedom and the possibility of refusing communion with God. Situated between the certainty of universal condemnation and the certainty of universal salvation, the Orthodox tradition chooses instead to preserve a space for hope, prayer, and confidence in the inexhaustible mercy of God, while respecting the mystery of personal freedom and the ultimate judgment of God.

Conclusion

The analysis of the relationship between contemporary universalism and the American charismatic movement demonstrates that the development of new universalist perspectives cannot be understood solely as the result of isolated doctrinal reflections. Rather, it must be interpreted within the broader context of the spiritual, cultural, and religious transformations that have shaped Western Christianity in recent decades. The emphasis placed on the personal experience of grace, the unconditional character of divine love, and the possibility of an immediate relationship with God created a favorable climate for the re-evaluation of traditional eschatological doctrines, particularly those concerning hell and eternal condemnation.

Within contemporary charismatic circles, salvation is increasingly understood not merely as a juridical deliverance from punishment but as the restoration of the human person and the rediscovery of authentic identity in Christ. Authors such as John Crowder and Benjamin Dunn express this theological shift through their emphasis on grace as a reality already present and accessible, as well as through their reinterpretation of religious experience as an anticipatory participation in the reality of the Kingdom of God. In this context, universalism appears less as a rigorously formulated systematic doctrine and more as the expression of a hope grounded in the conviction that divine love seeks the restoration of all creation.

This orientation inevitably leads to a reconsideration of the traditional doctrine of hell. Figures such as Carlton Pearson, together with theologians such as Thomas Talbott, Robin Parry, and David Bentley Hart, challenge the compatibility of God's infinite love with

the existence of an everlasting and definitive condemnation. Rather than an eschatology centered on the irreversible separation of the saved from the condemned, these authors propose various forms of universal reconciliation in which divine judgment is understood primarily as a process of healing and restoration rather than as the expression of endless punishment.

At the same time, a critical analysis of these perspectives reveals significant theological difficulties. Orthodox tradition firmly affirms both the universality of God's love and the boundless character of divine mercy, while simultaneously insisting upon the reality of human freedom and the personal nature of communion with God. From this perspective, any formulation that transforms universal salvation into an inevitable necessity risks diminishing the significance of the human person's free response to the divine call and reducing the dramatic dimension of human existence.

Furthermore, Orthodox criticism draws attention to the tendency within certain forms of charismatic spirituality to minimize the role of ascetic struggle and progressive inner transformation. In the patristic tradition, the experience of grace and spiritual asceticism are not opposing realities but complementary dimensions of the same process of deification. It is precisely this perspective that preserves the balance between the gratuitousness of divine love and the free participation of the human person in the work of salvation.

In conclusion, contemporary charismatic universalism represents one of the most significant expressions of the reconfiguration of Christian eschatology within the American religious landscape. It reflects both a legitimate concern to affirm the universal love of God and the theological challenges generated by the attempt to reconcile that love with human freedom and the reality of evil. From an Orthodox perspective, the response to these tensions lies neither in affirming with certainty the eternal condemnation of a portion of humanity nor in dogmatically proclaiming universal salvation. Rather, it consists in maintaining an open eschatological hope, grounded in prayer for the whole world and in trust in the infinite mercy of God, who "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Alfeyev, Hilarion, *Christ the Conqueror of Hell*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 2009.
- Alfeyev, Hilarion, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, MI, 2000.
- Clément, Olivier, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, New City Press, London 1993.
- Crowder, John, *Cosmos Reborn: Happy Theology on the New Creation*, Sons of Thunder, Santa Cruz, CA, 2012.
- Crowder, John, *Mystical Union*, Sons of Thunder, Santa Cruz, CA 2010.
- Dayton, Donald W., *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 1987.
- Dunn, Benjamin, *Oracles of the Ordinary: Chronicles from the Eternal Now*, Benjamin Dunn Publishing, Shippensburg, PA, 2026.
- Dunn, Benjamin, *The Happy Gospel! Effortless Union with a Happy God*, Destiny Image, Shippensburg, PA, 2021.
- Evdokimov, Pavel, *L'Amour fou de Dieu*, Seuil, Paris, 1973.
- Hart, David Bentley, *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2019.
- Hollenweger, Walter J., *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide*, Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 1997.
- Isaac Sirul, *Cuvinte despre nevointă*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2003.
- Kaczor, Christopher, *The Gospel of Happiness: Rediscover Your Faith Through Spiritual Practice and Positive Psychology*, Image Books, New York, 2025.
- McClymond, Michael J., *The Devil's Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism*, 2 vols. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018.
- McClymond, Michael J., "Charismatic Renewal and Neo-Pentecostalism: From American Origins to Global Permutation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2014.
- Maxim Mărturisitorul, "Capete despre dragoste," in *Filocalia*, vol. II. Humanitas, București, 2008.
- Miller, Donald E., *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2007.
- Noll, Mark A., *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992.
- Packer, James I., "Theological Reflections on the Charismatic Movement. Part I." in *Churchman*, 94, no. 1 (1980), pp. 5–17.
- Parry, Robin A., *The Evangelical Universalist*, Cascade Books, Eugene, OR, 2012.

- Parry, Robin A., and Christopher H. Partridge, eds., *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003.
- Pearson, Carlton, *The Gospel of Inclusion*, Penguin, New York, 2006.
- Poloma, Margaret M., *The Charismatic Movement: Is There a New Pentecost?*, Twayne Publishers, Boston, MA, 1982.
- Rieff, Philip, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987.
- Saharov, Sofronie, *Vom vedea pe Dumnezeu precum este*, Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2005.
- Stăniloae, Dumitru, *Ascetica și Mistica Bisericii Ortodoxe*, Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2002.
- Stăniloae, Dumitru, *Iisus Hristos sau Restaurarea Omului*, Omniscop, București, 1993.
- Stăniloae, Dumitru, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, 3 vols., Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2003.
- Synan, Vinson, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal, 1901–2001*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 2001.
- Talbott, Thomas, *The Inescapable Love of God*, Cascade Books, Eugene, OR, 2014.
- Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2007.
- Ware, Kallistos, *The Inner Kingdom*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 2000.
- Yong, Amos, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005.

The Influence of Sophocles on Contemporary Theatre or Sharing of Responsibility

Abstract: Sophocles' theatre reinforces the idea that we have the power to shape and reshape our own lives as well as our bodies. But lately when my gaze rises from the scale of society, I wonder when taking personal responsibility means letting go of collective responsibility. For Sophocles, to be human was to be potentially a hero of tragedy. He established the reviving tension between the "I" and the "we." But today we are carrying a lot of weight, and I do not mean my wrong diet. As a society we are trying to separate the individual from the communal responsibility. But surely the mystery of losing heritage lies in our Self. That is why complexity and decision making as a dialectical unit was a new quality Sophocles' characters defined.

Keywords: Sophocles, Antigone, Oedipus, Greek tragedy, pedagogy

I.

What is it about Sophocles' plays that their ideas still shape Western thought until this day? Why are these plays as relevant today as they were in antiquity, when they were considered a necessary part of a good citizen's education ?

Let's take *Antigone*. Nothing, it seems, could be more monolithic and understandable than the plot, the heroine, the conflict and the problem. It is therefore all the more surprising that almost no Greek tragedy has been more frequently and contradictorily interpreted than this one.

Heinz-Uwe Haus, PhD, is Professor emeritus of Theater, University of Delaware, Dept. of Theatre and Dance, Newark, Delaware, USA.

For the development of German theatre in the 19th century it was not only Shakespeare but Sophocles, too, who helped to break the dominance of Weimar classicism and realistic spectacle. Ludwig Tieck, the dramaturg, advocated psychologically realistic acting on a simple platform stage; he called for an approach at variance with the two dominant styles of the time. Tieck was the first modern critic to ask for the return to the open stage. He also believed that every element of a production should be supervised by a single and autocratic director, like the Ancient *didaskalos*. Tieck's chance to try out his ideas came in 1841, when William IV of Prussia decided to devote his court theatre in Potsdam to experimental productions. He summoned Tieck to stage *Antigone*, an innovation in itself, since professional productions of Greek tragedies were practically unknown at this time. Tieck extended the apron over the orchestra pit in a semicircle and constructed a Greek *skene*, which served as the only background to the action. After its success in Potsdam, the production was moved to the state theatre in Berlin and was soon adapted by companies all over middle Europe.

From Tieck's *Antigone* 1841 in Potsdam to Max Reinhardt's *Oedipus Rex* 1912 in Covent Garden, London, Sophocles' works became essential in the development of modern Western theatre and the profession of directing.

But not only are there many interpretations of the play and adaptations for the stage, many total remakes of this play have come into existence over more modern times, too. Consistency of theme, and hence of situation, and variability in the characters' behavior may be called the basic schema responsible for the persistent creative impetus that emanates from the figures of Sophocles' drama. To act, which is precisely the object of theatre, is to change the world and in changing it, of necessity to change one-self.

Since *Antigone* is quoted to be the most frequently interpreted and adapted (though I hear *Medea* is catching up in the ratings), we are better to first look at examples of these modern versions and adaptations of *Antigone*.

One early adaptation is not that modern for our times, but outdates its original by more than 1100 years. This play was written by Robert Grenier in 1580 and called *Antigone, ou La piété*.

Antigone was also very popular in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, often being played in times of political unrest. In 1804 Friedrich Hölderlin's translation *Antigone* coupled fidelity to the

original with poetic flair and aesthetic distinction. Anouilh's and Brecht's anti-Nazi-versions of the 1940s are two other famous examples, demonstrating the influence and functional value of Sophocles in contemporary theatre.

Antigone has also been used by the Irish to indict British occupation. In 1984, Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act* shows us an Antigone from Northern Ireland, and she is a freedom fighter. Another version that used the play for political reasons was Aidan Carl Mathews' *Antigone* of 1984. His heroine is unjustly murdered, whereas official propaganda claims that she has been seen in another country. In 1984 Brendan Kennelly sees Irish relevance in his version of *Antigone*. He focuses on the power of words for both good and evil. Both Antigone and Creon speak to each other in a common language, but they do not understand each other. This is, as we all witness, an ongoing tragedy in the peace negotiations between England and Ireland. Today it is hard to distinguish in a general way the individual man from the social man in us, and the social man is, of necessity, at the base of all our passions.

Antigone is not the only one of Sophocles' plays to be remade in large quantity. *Oedipus* is certainly more than an honorable mention when it comes to this aspect. In 1980, Steven Berkoff wrote *Greek*, a modern version of Sophocles' *Oedipus* that is set in the East End of London. Oedipus, called "Eddie" in this version, marries his mother and is perfectly happy to remain married to her. This is an example of a remake that uses the idea, but expands it into something more. Berkoff has extended poetic passages, particularly when Oedipus reveals his love for his mother as a sexually exciting partner.

Modern psychology, from psychoanalysis to behaviorism, provides the contemporary public with insights which help the director to form a quite different judgment of the case, considering the findings of sociology, economics, or history.

One reason for Berkoff writing his version in this way, and a reason why it is okay for him to do so, is the fact that theatre has always been about creating a spark. It is alive for the purpose, many times, of putting forth some controversial subject matter. It can be at its most dynamic when it is able to exhibit something that will arouse the interest and ideas of the onlookers of a performance. The idea is to force an audience to think critically and essentially about the material that they are being presented with.

Another version of *Oedipus* that is something slightly out of the ordinary is Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* of 1927. It is an operatic version performed in Latin. Stravinsky wanted modern audiences to concentrate on the music, so he used the Latin text as simply a percussive element of *alienation* that most people did not understand. In this version Jocasta fits into the role of diva. As her character grows in presence and strength, Oedipus' character is weakened.

There are definite allusions to a mass . . . By conflating the mass with archaic, perhaps Stravinsky reveals his pessimism yet at the same time his hope for some type of redemption. As this opera shows his genius in the music, it also represents a quietism in its ritual optimism. The emphasis is on collective renewal and rebirth rather than on the death of the individual.¹

The fact that these interpretations exist is not at all unbelievable or even highly unlikely. The characters are as timeless as the stories they are in. Kate Hamburger finds this to be the case also, in stating that

Oedipus and Antigone are figures which remain forever alive, constantly being shaped and reshaped by the various dramatic and linguistic styles of succeeding centuries. In fact, we fully appreciate the miracle of the prototypical Greek figures only when we recognize their constant modernity in all the diverse periods and context of their dramatic reincarnations.²

Oedipus and Antigone, however, are both extremely well known figures. A person would be hard pressed to find someone who has not at least heard their names or is not familiar with the basic stories. This fact alone might be an argument for explaining why these works have been reproduced in such a vast number. But trying to then explain in this fashion how a work of Sophocles that no longer exists, with the exception of fifty-seven lines of the original text, has been remade into a modern version is a little more difficult. But still, such a play does indeed exist. It is called *The Three Birds*, was written by Joanne Laurens a few years ago, and retells the story of Sophocles' *Tereus*.

¹ Marianne McDonald, *The Living Art of Greek Tragedy*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 2003, p. 67.

² Kate Hamburger, *From Sophocles to Sartre*, Frederick Ungar Publishing, New York, NY, 1969, p. 2.

The basic story is the same as was retold first by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*. However, the modern adaptation changes the plot slightly. In both versions the character Tereus is wed to Procne, but rapes her sister Philomela. In the original, the rape is committed solely out of lust for Philomela's physical form. In the adaptation, the author states that she found it much more interesting for Tereus to actually be in love with Philomela and commit the rape out of that emotion than out of some purely tyrannical force that no audience could empathize with.

The other change is that in the original, at the end the gods come down and change those three characters into birds. The author of this modern version says that "I felt a contemporary audience would find such a literal *deus ex machina* conclusion intolerably clumsy, and yet I found the transformation into birds beautiful, and wanted to include it, resulting in the version found here."³ This author chooses to simply put the idea of the birds in an epilogue by Procne and Philomela's father, Pandion, where he comments that he saw birds flying away when he got to the spot where he expected to find the three. She uses the same types of birds as Sophocles did in the original.

So, why all that? And how can plays over 1600 years old still bring to light ideas that relate to contemporary society? What is it, that the characters of Greek tragedy are perpetually capable of becoming 'modern' and of challenging dramatists to reinterpret them? What is the origin of the consistency as well as the variability that has given rise to reinterpretations of these figures? No doubt, Sophocles encourages spectators and performers to interpret. He tells the events in a way that the actors are able to play the incidents as historical ones. Brecht would qualify such an attitude as *an example of paedagogics*:

The conduct of the persons involved in them is not fixed and 'universally human'; it includes elements that have been or may be overtaken by the course of history, and is subject to criticism from the immediately following period's point of view⁴

³ Joanna Laurens, *The Three Birds*, Oberon Books, London, 2000, p. 5.

⁴ Bertolt Brecht, *The Development of and Aesthetic*, Ed. and Trans. John Willett, Methuen, London, 1964, p. 9.

Not only are the plays themselves retold and remade, but also the ideas that are in the plays are constantly revisited. Rush Rehm reminds us:

No aspect of Greek tragedy has been more contentious in recent years than its relationship to patriarchy and male domination. Generally speaking, men have held physical, social, political, economic, and legal power over women across much of the globe for most of recorded history. Greek tragedy certainly offers an array of characters who are sexist, gynophobic or misogynist.⁵

Indeed, many plays have come to the stage in all times throughout history, especially modern times, that deal with these specific issues. While they might not be examples of any one particular play, I think it is worth mentioning that the issues are still around and spawning new plays at this time.

And not just the idea of the male dominated society, but also the flip side, the idea of a feminist view, comes from ancient Greek tales. As well as portraying chauvinists who come to grief, tragedy presents remarkable female characters who challenge male power and patriarchy. Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Electra* demonstrate women's capacity for heroic resistance, his Medea and Ismene teach the audience *historization* as a related means of distancing the dramatic events and helping the audience to see the specific and changeable conditions shaping a character's situation. Ever since the early 20th century and the women's movement, Sophocles' theatrical techniques are commonly cited as a useful means for feminist revisions of theatrical realism (Caryl Churchill, Megan Terry or Monstrous Regiment come to mind. Not to mention the wide range of strong female characters from Ibsen's *Nora* to Brecht's *Gruscha*, and their quest to make a stand).

2.

Modern productions of Greek plays can vary greatly, and many different directors have many different approaches. Just think of Rondiris or Jessner, Minotis or Stein, Hilpert or Suzuki to imagine Sophocles' timeless genius. The best contemporary directors

⁵ Rush Rehm, *Radical Theatre: Greek Tragedy and the Modern World*, Biddles, London, 2003, p. 93.

challenged in accordance with Sophocles conventional assumptions (including so-called “Aristotelian”), developing practices and even theories of how acting could consciously make spectators critical observers and active participants in one creation of meaning on stage and in the audience. Their very different reading of the dramatic texts demonstrates how their productions became significant social, political, and artistic experiments due to the author’s authority. In most cases a two-way process of assimilation and adaption re-situates the subject of the movement of ideas and practice away from problems of theatrical interpretation or of the circulation of political aesthetics in a global setting. But what is the key in this matter of fact that Greek tragedy let us look at our deepest fears and continue to live in spite of them? These stories both engage our intellect and tell us about the world we live in. In terms of specific form Sophocles’ way of story telling is a training ground for a dramaturgy, where the tragic plot contains *reversal*, results opposite to those intended; *discovery*, which means within the play itself the change from love to hate, or from ignorance to knowledge, with consequent arousal of pity and fear (there is some justification for defining discovery as transference of knowledge from the protagonist to the audience); and *suffering*, from murder, torture, or injury of the hero, also arousing pity and fear. For Aristotle, this makes drama of greater import than history, which deals only in objective facts. It was no coincidence that one of my students, assigned to research Sophocles’ impact on modern theatre, focused on the stories and came to the conclusion: “They ask us what kind of life we want to live and give us the tools to live it. They show us that the unexamined life is not worth living and they offer us the keys to a better life.” And she summarized without any doubts, “These are the reasons why these stories are still so prevalent and widely presented today. These are all reasons why we still need these stories, even today, and certainly well into the future of our civilization.” Such a clear Aristotelian statement shows, in what way Sophocles’ plays provide a model for understanding of theatre in general. As long as youth identifies with Sophocles’ theatricality, there is hope, that the theatre today too “speaks the truth for the improvement of the city.”

It was Friedrich Nietzsche who reminded us that one of the great glories of the Greeks is that they didn't put their best in reflection. He meant by this that the most powerful things the Greeks have to teach us about moral life are not to be learned from their philosophy. Tragedy presents these things in an unmediated and compelling way which brings them home far more powerfully than philosophical dialogue. And Karlos Koun came to this point, when he warned me: "You can't have a sense of the Greek experience, even on the level of moral ideas, just from the philosophers; you get that only from the epics and the tragedies."⁶ The philosophers speculation, that the order of history was such that, in the end, man could free himself by his own efforts, was the opposite of the tragedians perception of social development. Human values, they saw, were contingent, limited, and dependent on love and fame. It is here, where Sophocles' view of personal responsibility includes some obligations to the collective good. Generally, Greek theatre regarded personal responsibility as a collective strength. Sophocles wrote plays that explored the place of humans within that order. The tragedy of his heroes typically erupts from decisions made and actions taken based on imperfect knowledge or conflicting claims. That's why it seems to the majority of people today that the Greek view of life comes closer to bearing out their actual experience of it than any of the great systems of belief, religious or other. The challenge is to be prepared to take seriously notions of duty, honour, justice; possibly even eternal verities. They may not have a daily relevance in our lives but we have to think they matter. It is in the performance, where the reasonable expectation transforms into a chosen condition. The performance arranges the events not necessarily in order of their occurrence but in an order that is likely, believable, and above all, inevitable. Sophocles knew how to use the myths which speak of the most basic of human emotions and moral perceptions in a way which transcends the particular situation of a dramatic plot and makes the audience feel their living truth.

The horror for us, as it was for the Ancient Greeks, is precisely to see that an Oedipus or a Creon can so easily be ourselves. Both display the glory and the weakness (*hamartia*) of the self-sufficient

⁶ Haus, Heinz-Uwe. *Griechisches Tagebuch* (unpublished), p. 13.

man. The once-noble Oedipus is dragged piecemeal, by his own doing, from wealth and power, stripped of reputation, made to wallow in a bed of murder, incest suicide, and personal disfigurement. How can we free ourselves from the tyranny of fate? Is fate something that locks us into a certain cell from which we are unable to break free? Is humankind not hindered by fate but asked to rise above its dictates to an exalted state of being? These are questions that *Oedipus Rex* raises. They are lofty and timeless. But we asked these questions over and over again during the rehearsals in 1994 in Philadelphia to find a specific contemporary reading of the events. In order to ground the text and its presentation, we insisted on attempting to describe *only* that which the actors could *visually* demonstrate. "Actors had to accept majestic, larger-than-life attitudes, concentrating on moment-to-moment extremes in viewpoints in order to produce extreme physical clarity and 'crispness', allowing themselves to succumb to the 'joy of being crisp'," reports Charles Helmetag, who played Teresias.⁷ The rehearsals focused on Sophocles' narrative concept - achieving its physicality and visualization due to the fact that things have to be walked through (*opsis*). We did not forget that the myth was known in Ancient Athens and looked out for metaphors to translate that. The audience was not there to discuss the results of the "crime story". "How has the crime been dealt with?" - that was the question. *The Elders of Thebes*, the *chorus*, became essential to the performance both in their capacity as actors in the events of the drama, and as *presenter* of its dominating theme in lyric terms.

Sophocles dramatized how elusive and fragile the ideal of justice was. The tragedy, written for a public festival, celebrated the state and, at the same time, called into question its official rhetoric. Oedipus conducts his investigation in the exact same manner that a Fifth-Century Athenian would have legally done. Ancient audiences understood this material and were easily able to make sense of these actions. Today, however, we do as readily comprehend Oedipus' insistence on sending for an elderly blind prophet to be his consultant.

Sophocles de-naturalizes "received truths," to challenge what is perceived as "natural," to uncover the confusion and to discover abuses. Sophocles' modernity lies in his thinking of intervention. His *gestus* weaves the two together: the discourse of the body and the

⁷ Charles Helmetag, "Heinz-Uwe Haus' Antigone at Villanova," in *Lo Straniero*, Nr. 32, Naples, 1999, p. 8.

discourse of the law. Its intersection occurs, literally, in the performer, a body, so to speak “in recess,” since the protagonist’s space (as well as the spectator’s!) is “in-between” spaces (inside/outside) and “in-between” times (past/future).

When Greek, American, German, Welsh and Japanese theatre artists were working together on *Antigone* in 1987 to re-open the Ancient theatre of Oiniades - in their very different languages and coming from different roots - we were drawn, bit by bit, into the spectacle of an unexpected, inconclusive turn of the play’s events. Thus it is obvious from Sophocles’ attitude towards “tragic myth” that one of the things he found in it, one of the powerful holds on them and their audience, was the authority of what we call “history.” For the Ancient Athenians, their vision of past, of their own history, was poetic from the start, its personages and events symbolic representations of every aspect of Man’s life on earth, his strength and weakness in the struggle against his fellow men, the forces of nature, and the bleak fact of his own mortality. The masked actors in the theatre of Dionysus present to the audience not only the historical figures of the hear-say past but also its own ambitions and its fate, its social cohesion.

4.

Sophocles’ theatre reinforces the idea that we have the power to shape and reshape our own lives as well as our bodies. But lately when my gaze rises from the scale of society, I wonder when taking personal responsibility means letting go of collective responsibility. For Sophocles, to be human was to be potentially a hero of tragedy. He established the reviving tension between the “I” and the “we.” But today we are carrying a lot of weight, and I do not mean my wrong diet. As a society we are trying to separate the individual from the communal responsibility. But surely the mystery of losing heritage lies in our Self. That is why complexity and decision making as a dialectical unit was a new quality Sophocles’ characters defined. The actors, not the *chorus*, control the rhythm of the plays. Unlike writers before him, he did not need a trilogy to contain his tragedies; his plays stood alone. But his technique of keeping the *chorus* present as people of Colonus, Thebes, and so on, creates community. The double function of the chorus, as actor and as commentator, submits the

conflicts of Antigone, Oedipus or Medea to the scrutiny and judgment of their fellow-men. The audience's presence and participation through the *chorus* in the acted events heightens the vividness and urgency of the action. Sharing of responsibility - that is what the Sophoclean drama trains its participants. It is only in the performance as we know it that driving emotions, relationships, and events enclosed in the text are released to stimulate the audience to reexamine their own contemporary events and relationships. By making the habitual and customary seem strange and unexpected, Sophocles wanted to stimulate his audience to ask questions, to stand back from the stage actions once in a while and wonder about what they saw there. Rather than accepting the actions of a character as inevitable, the spectator in Sophocles' theatre is encouraged to question: does it have to be this way? Has it always been so? Will it always remain so? The influence of Sophocles is based on its *gestus*, that drama does not deliver ready-made answers, but asks questions. Sophocles demands as the best contemporary theatre that the audience enter into the stage events with its critical rather than apologetic faculties. "All of us carry share of weight!" - personal responsibility includes some obligation to the collective good.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Brecht, Bertolt, *The Development of and Aesthetic*, Ed. and Trans. John Willett, Methuen, London, 1964.
- Hamburger, Kate., *From Sophocles to Sartre*, Frederick Ungar Publishing. New York, NY, 1969.
- Haus, Heinz-Uwe. *Griechisches Tagebuch* (unpublished).
- Helmetag, Charles, "Heinz-Uwe Haus' Antigone at Villanova," in *Lo Straniero*, Nr. 32, Naples, 1999.
- Laurens, Joanna, *The Three Birds*, Oberon Books, London, 2000.
- McDonald, Marianne, *The Living Art of Greek Tragedy*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 2003.
- Rehm, Rush, *Radical Theatre: Greek Tragedy and the Modern World*, Biddles, London, 2003.



Theodor Damian

Cuvânt însetat de tăcere
Words longing for silence

Translated by Lidia Vianu Advisor Anne Stewart

E I K O N

Church Organization in the Istro-Pontic Region (End of the 10th Century – 12th Century)

Abstract. At the end of the 10th century, after a long absence from the historical sources, the Metropolis of Tomis reappears in sigillographic records. A seal, dated to the 10th-11th centuries, which belonged to a high-ranking cleric, Aniketos, “Metropolitan of Tomis”. The functioning of the Metropolis of Tomis at least until the mid-11th century, after the organization of the Archdiocese of Ohrid by Emperor Basil II, is further confirmed by sigillographic evidence. A seal, dated around 1050, belonged to a certain Basileios, “Metropolitan of Tomis.” The abandonment of the settlement at Tomis following the Uzes’ invasion of 1064-1065 decisively influenced the situation of the ecclesiastical diocese. We therefore conclude that, in this context, the Metropolis of Tomis also ceased to function. The first certain information regarding the functioning of an episcopal see in Dristra dates from the final years of Emperor Basil II's reign. It appears in the context of the ecclesiastical reorganization conducted by the emperor in the territories of the former Bulgarian Tsardom, dissolved in 1018. In the second *sigillion*, dedicated to defining the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Archbishopric of Ochrid (May 1020), the emperor includes the Diocese of Dristra. In the second half of the 11th century, the episcopal see of Dristra was elevated to the rank of metropolitan see. Removed from the jurisdiction of the Archbishopric of Ochrid, the diocese at the Lower Danube, now elevated to the rank of metropolis, was placed under the direct jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The first known hierarch of the newly elevated see was Metropolitan Leontios, very likely the same individual as the homonymous bishop attested in the sixth decade of the 11th century, or at least another figure bearing the same name. According to the available information, he took part in the sessions of the patriarchal synod held on November 6, 1071, and March 14, 1072. A decade later, another hierarch of Dristra, Metropolitan Christophoros, is mentioned as penultimate among 10 metropolitans and four archbishops who took part in the patriarchal synod of 20 March 1082, and likewise among 25 metropolitans and four archbishops present at the synod on 21 March. The same hierarch

Vasile Mărculeț, PhD, is an Independent Researcher from Mediaș, Romania.

of Dristra is also attested by five seals, dated around 1085, which identify him as “Metropolitan of Dristra and protosynkellos.” The functioning of the Metropolis of Dristra in the 12th century is also attested by a series of patriarchal acts. Among these, we note that the Lower Danube eparchy is recorded among the metropolises subordinate to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in two *Notitiae episcopatum* from the Komnenian period. Just as little is known about the hierarchs of Dristra from the 12th century and their activity. A series of details is transmitted to us by the Byzantine scholar Ioannes Tzetzes, who, in the middle of the same century, corresponded with Leon Charsianites, the Metropolitan of Dristra. the occupation of Dristra and the Lower Danube regions by the Vlach-Bulgarian Tsardom most likely occurred at the beginning of the 13th century. The functioning of the Metropolis of Dristra under Vlach-Bulgarian rule is confirmed by certain sources, such as the *Synodicon of the Autocephaly of the Patriarchate of Tarnovo*, whose composition began in 1235, and which was later included in the *Synodicon of Tsar Boril*, compiled in 1211. Based on the available information, we conclude that the transfer of Dristra to Vlach-Bulgarian control, and implicitly, that of the diocese of the Lower Danube to the jurisdiction of the Church of Tarnovo, occurred sometime between after 1204 and before 1235.

Keywords: Tomis, Dristra, Aniketos, Basileios, Leontios, Christophoros, Leon Charsianites

The Byzantine return to the Lower Danube in 971, and again after a short Bulgarian intermezzo between 976-1000, at the beginning of the 11th century, marked a decisive change in the status of the local Church, which, prior to the Byzantine conquest, was under the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Patriarchate. The ecclesiastical organization of the Byzantine territories in the region complemented the military-administrative structure. The importance Constantinople attributed to the local Church in the 10th-12th centuries is significant in highlighting the role of this institution within the empire’s policy in the area. To these are added two other *Notitiae* that register the metropolitan sees functioning at the end of the 12th century and the beginning of the 13th.

The Metropolis of Tomis

At the end of the 10th century, after a long absence from the historical sources, the Metropolis of Tomis reappears in sigillographic records.¹ What is particularly interesting is that the ecclesiastical eparchy between the Danube and the sea is referred to by the ancient name of the metropolitan see's residence, rather than by Konstantia/Constantia, the name by which the settlement was mentioned in the mid-10th century.²

For the period prior to the 10th century, the only references associated with the Tomis eparchy come from five *Notitiae Episcopatum* of the Church of Constantinople, dated between the 6th and 9th centuries.³ The information conveyed by these sources confirms an older conclusion: that "the Metropolis of Tomis was directly dependent on the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople."⁴

Still, a review of these texts reveals that, with the exception of *Notitia* no. 1, dated to the 6th-7th centuries, they reflect administrative-territorial and religious realities that certainly existed prior to the Bulgarian conquest at the end of the 7th century and the expansion of the Bulgarian Khaganate in the subsequent period. Following this expansion, the Bulgarian state wrested control of the Lower Danube territories from the Byzantine Empire, including the Istro-Pontic region.

¹ J. Nesbitt, N. Oikonomides, *Catalog of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, vol. 1. *Italy, North of the Balkans, North of the Black Sea*, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., 1991, p. 181, nr. 80.1-2.

² Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, Greek text edited by Gy. Moravcsik, English translation by R.J.H. Jenkins, Dumbarton Oaks, 1967, new, revised edition 1993, § 9; [or the editions: Constantin Porfirogenetul, *Carte de învățătură pentru fiul său Romanos*, traducere de V. Grecu, București, 1971, § 9; Constantin VII Porphyrogénète, *De Administrando Imperio*, oeuvre mise en page et traduite par M. Szwajcer, (without year), § 9, <https://remarcle.org/bloodwolf/historiens/constantin/table.htm> (accessed: Dec. 2024 – Jan. 2025)].

³ J. Darrouzès, *Notitiae episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*. Text critique, introduction et notes, Institut français d'études byzantines (IFEB), Paris, 1981, pp. 8-9, 18, 19, 32-33, 42-45, 47-48; Cf. Fl. Duță, "Le christianisme au Bas-Danube du X^e au commencement du XI^e siècle," in *Theologia*, 43, 2002, 1, pp. 184-185.

⁴ V. Mărculeț, *Organizare ecleziastică și implicații bizantine în spațiul românesc (secolele X-XV)*, Ed. Sfântul Ierarh Nicolae, Brăila, 2014, p. 31.

The first of the five *notitiae* lists Tomis, located in the “eparchy of Scythia,” as the second (position 40) autocephalous archbishopric.⁵ The second, dated to the 8th century or, at the latest, the first quarter of the 9th century, also places Tomis in the “eparchy of Scythia” in the second position (position 43) among the autocephalous archbishoprics under the Ecumenical Patriarchate.⁶ A third *Notitia Episcopatum*, a controversial one from the iconoclastic period dated between the end of the 8th and the middle of the 9th century, mentions the “metropolis of Tomis (Tomi metropolis)” (position 642) in the “eparchy of Scythia, parathalassia of the Pontus” alongside 14 other urban centers.⁷ Since this *notitia* lists metropolitan sees under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, it follows that Tomis was the seat of such a metropolis, with 14 suffragan bishoprics. In this *notitia*, the Metropolis of Tomis is no longer presented as an autocephalous eparchy. However, given the controversial nature of the source, its information must be treated with caution. A fourth *Notitia episcopatum*, dated around the mid-9th century, again places Tomis, within the “eparchy of Scythia” as the second (position 41) on a list of metropolitan sees under autocephalous authorities.⁸ Finally, the fifth *Notitia episcopatum*, also dated to the 9th century, provides similar information, listing Tomis, again in the “eparchy of Scythia,” as the second (position 45) on a list of autocephalous archbishoprics.⁹

Despite the information provided by these *Notitiae episcopatum*, it remains difficult to determine whether the Istro-Pontic eparchy continued to function uninterruptedly under Bulgarian rule, especially since Byzantine-Bulgarian political-military relations were strained for long periods. Therefore, we do not know whether the Tomis eparchy experienced interruptions in its functioning or if, perhaps, after such a period, it was reactivated following the Byzantine reconquest in 971.

⁵ J. Darrouzès, *op. cit.*, 1.40; Cf. Fl. Duță, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

⁶ *Ibidem*, 2.43; Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 184.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.40.642-656; Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.41; Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.45; Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

It seems that during this tumultuous period, Tomis itself experienced significant decline. This fact is recorded by Patriarch Nikephoros in his work *Breviarium*, written at the beginning of the 9th century, where he refers to the settlement as merely “a coastal village.”¹⁰

The functioning of the Metropolis of Tomis at the end of the 10th century and the beginning of the 11th century is confirmed, as already mentioned, by several sigillographic sources. In 1991, John Nesbitt and Nicolas Oikonomides published a seal, probably discovered in Istanbul and dated to the 10th-11th centuries, which belonged to a high-ranking cleric, Aniketos, “Metropolitan of Tomis.”¹¹

The exact ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Tomis during this period cannot be determined due to the lack of sources on the matter. Historian Ion Barnea believed that “during the 10th-12th centuries the bishoprics of northern half of Dobruja were under the authority” of the Metropolis of Tomis.¹² Likewise, Petre Diaconu suggested that the Istro-Pontic eparchy “had jurisdiction over the churches of northern Dobruja.”¹³

In our view, the theory proposed by Romanian historians is sustainable only if, alongside the Metropolis of Tomis, the Metropolis of Dristra (Dorostolon) also functioned, an idea they themselves supported.¹⁴ Since only an episcopal see existed at Dristra, some historians did not exclude the possibility that it may have been suffragan to the Metropolis of Tomis.¹⁵

¹⁰ Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople, *Short History*, text, translation, and commentary by Cy. Mango, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., 1990, § 42.

¹¹ J. Nesbitt, N. Oikonomides, *op. cit.*, p. 181, nr. 80.1.

¹² I. Barnea, “Noi date despre Mitropolia Tomisului,” in *Pontica*, XXIV, 1991, p. 281.

¹³ P. Diaconu, “Points de vue sur l’organisation ecclésiastique au Bas-Danube (Xe-XIe siècles),” in *Dacia. Revue d’archéologie et d’histoire ancienne*, nouvelle série, XXXVIII-XXXIX, 1994-1995, p. 452.

¹⁴ I. Barnea, “Noi date despre Mitropolia Tomisului,” p. 281; P. Diaconu, “Points de vue,” p. 452.

¹⁵ Al. Madgearu, “Organizarea bisericească la Dunărea de Jos în perioada 971-1020,” in *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie*, XIX, 2001, p. 15; *Idem*, “The Church Organization at the Lower Danube Between 971 and 1020,” in *Études Byzantines et Post-Byzantines*, IV, recueillies de publiées Em. Popescu et T. Teoteoi, Trinitas, Iași, 2001, p. 78.

A similar perspective regarding the jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Tomis was advanced by Alexandru Madgearu. For the late 10th century, he links the functioning of the Istro-Pontic eparchy to that of the *Theme of Western Mesopotamia*, which he places in the northern half of the region between the Danube and the sea.¹⁶ For the early 11th century, he considers it plausible that the Metropolis of Tomis had jurisdiction over the faithful along the entire Lower Danube. Consequently, Madgearu does not exclude the possibility that “both the Diocese of Dristra and that of Vidin were suffragan to the Metropolis of Tomis” until it ceased functioning in 1018.¹⁷

From our perspective, the possibility that the Metropolis of Tomis held ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the Diocese of Vidin, located in the western sector of the Lower Danube, is difficult to accept. However, if jurisdiction over the Diocese of Dristra is confirmed, we may conclude that the Metropolis of Tomis exercised religious authority over the entire Istro-Pontic region. For the time being, in the absence of definitive evidence, this remains only a hypothesis. We also do not rule out the possibility that the jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Tomis extended even further, possibly including some dioceses in northeastern Bulgaria. This view is supported by the fact that the bishoprics in those regions do not appear under the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Ohrid in the imperial diplomas of Basil II (976-1025), issued in 1019-1020, or in those of Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118), at the end of the 11th century.¹⁸ However, we

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 13; *Ibidem*, p. 76.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15; *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁸ H. Gelzer, “Ungedruckte und wenig bekannte Bistümerverzeichnisse der orientalischen Kirche, I,” in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, I, 1892, pp. 256-257, “II,” in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, II, 1893, pp. 42-46; Fr. Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565-1453*, 1. Teil, 2. Halbband: *Regesten von 867-1025*. Zweite Auflage neu bearbeitet von A.E. Müller, unter verantwortlicher Mitarbeit von Al. Beihammer, München, 2003, pp. 217-219, nr. 806, 807; [or the edition: Fr. Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565-1453*, 1. Teil: *Regesten von 565-1025*, München und Berlin, 1924, pp. 103-104, nr. 806, 807]; M. Gyóny, “L’èvêché vlaque de l’archevêché bulgare d’Achris aux XIe-XIVe siècles,” in *Études Slaves et Roumaines*, I, 1948, 3, pp. 150-152; Vasilka Tăpkova-Zaimova, *Bulgarians by Birth. The Comitopuls, Emperor Samuel and Their Successors According to Historical Sources and the Historiographic Tradition*, translated by P. Murdzhev, with an introduction by K. Petkov, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2017, pp. 46-49.

do not include the Diocese of Dristra among them, since Basil II placed it under the authority of the Archdiocese of Ohrid.¹⁹

The Bulgarian offensive following the success of the Cometopuli revolt in 976 removed eastern Bulgarian territories, and most of the Istro-Pontic region up to the southern limit of the Danube Delta, from Byzantine control. As has been shown, under these circumstances, the Metropolis of Ioannoupolis ceased functioning as a Byzantine eparchy.²⁰ As for the Metropolis of Tomis, its status in the new political-military and territorial context remains unknown due to a lack of information.

Nor is the status of the Tomis eparchy clarified during the organization of the Archdiocese of Ohrid by Basil II in 1019-1020. The absence of any reference to it has led historians to differing opinions. For example, Alexandru Madgearu, noting its absence in both the 1019 *sigillion* and the one from 1020, which only mentions the Diocese of Dristra in the Istro-Pontic area, argues that the Metropolis of Tomis “survived after the year 1000, but not after 1020.”²¹

A similar view is suggested, indirectly, by Mathias Gyóni in his study on the territorial extent of the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Ohrid, following its full establishment in 1020. According to his conclusion, the Bulgarian eparchy's jurisdiction was “bounded in the north roughly by the Danube and to the east by the Black Sea coast, stretching from the Danube Delta to Varna.”²² By including the entire Istro-Pontic area in the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Ohrid, Gyóni implicitly denied the existence of any metropolitan-level eparchy in the region.

In our view, based on the sources currently available, the conclusions of these historians cannot be upheld. The absence of the Metropolis of Tomis from the imperial *sigillia* that established the structure of the Archdiocese of Ohrid does not constitute sufficient evidence either for the cessation of the Istro-Pontic eparchy or for the complete extension of the Bulgarian eparchy's jurisdiction across the

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, II, p. 44; *Ibidem*, pp. 218-219, nr. 807; [or the edition: Fr. Dölger, *Regesten*, 1, p. 104, nr. 807]; Vasilka Tăpkova-Zaimova, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

²⁰ P. Diaconu, “Points de vue,” p. 452.

²¹ Al. Madgearu, “Organizarea bisericească la Dunărea de Jos,” p. 13; *Idem*, “The Church Organization at the Lower Danube,” p. 76.

²² M. Gyóny, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

entire territory between the Danube and the sea²³. What the authors of such opinions overlook is the fact that the northern part of the Istro-Pontic area, north of Dristra, was not mentioned at all by the emperor during the organization of the archdiocese. We believe this omission is due to the fact that the northern territories of the Istro-Pontic region were never lost by the Byzantine Empire after their reconquest in the summer of 971, and thus retained their military-administrative and ecclesiastical organization.²⁴

The functioning of the Metropolis of Tomis at least until the mid-11th century, after the organization of the Archdiocese of Ohrid by Emperor Basil II, is further confirmed by sigillographic evidence. A seal, likely found in Istanbul and dated around 1050, belonged to a certain Basileios, “Metropolitan of Tomis.”²⁵ This small lead object serves as undeniable proof of its existence at that time.

From the second half of the 11th century, sources referring to the Metropolis of Tomis disappear entirely. This raises a major question regarding the continuation of its activity into the 12th century.

The moment when the Metropolis of Tomis ceased to exist remains another controversial issue due to the lack of documentation. Historians who have addressed the question have not reached a consensus. Ion Barnea, for example, believed that the Metropolis of Tomis remained active, alongside that of Dristra, “probably as long as the Theme of Paristrion existed, that is, until the Asen uprising (1186), or possibly until the Latin Empire was established in Constantinople (1204).”²⁶

While Barnea’s conclusion is interesting and compelling, we find it debatable. The very few 12th-century references available on the ecclesiastical organization of the “cities of Paristrion” region, which included the Istro-Pontic area, tend to contradict it. This conclusion is further supported by the complete absence of information about the Metropolis of Tomis from the end of the 11th century onward.²⁷

Historian and archaeologist Petre Diaconu viewed the dissolution of the Metropolis of Tomis as a direct consequence of the

²³ V. Mărculeț, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

²⁴ V. Mărculeț, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

²⁵ J. Nesbitt, N. Oikonomides, *op. cit.*, p. 181, nr. 89.2.

²⁶ I. Barnea, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

²⁷ V. Mărculeț, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

establishment of the Metropolis of Dristra. According to his view, the end of the Istro-Pontic eparchy occurred around the mid-11th century, during the foundation and organization of the Metropolis of Dristra, around the year 1054.²⁸ His main argument is the monetary circulation pattern in Tomis during the 1070s-1080s, which reflects the town's decline into a rural settlement. He concludes that "the existence of a metropolis in a locality with a rural character is inconceivable for 11th-century Dobruja."²⁹

In contrast, Alexandru Madgearu argues that Tomis "achieved a certain degree of development" only during the reign of Basil II, but was later severely affected by the Pecheneg invasions of 1036.³⁰ Based on this observation, he states that "it is impossible for the Metropolis of Tomis to have continued into the late 11th century" and that "this metropolis survived after the year 1000, but not beyond 1020."³¹ He therefore concludes that "the Metropolis of Tomis was abolished in 1020, following the creation of the province of Paradounavon and in connection with the restructuring of the Archdiocese of Ohrid."³² Interestingly, and somewhat paradoxically, Madgearu, like Diaconu, whose theory he rejects, uses monetary circulation as his principal argument.³³

In our view, the seal of Metropolitan Basileios, dated around the year 1050, allows us to conclude that the dissolution of the Metropolis of Tomis occurred sometime after that date, likely in the second half of the 11th century.³⁴ Most probably, as Petre Diaconu argued, this took place with the elevation of the Diocese of Dristra to metropolitan status and its subsequent organization.

The continued functioning of the Metropolis of Tomis until that period is also supported by the development of the city of Tomis, the seat of the eparchy. Based on numismatic finds, Gheorghe Mănucu-Adameșteanu argued that "under Romanos III, the city reached its

²⁸ P. Diaconu, "Points de vue," p. 452.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ Al. Madgearu, "Organizarea bisericească la Dunărea de Jos," p. 13; *Idem*, "The Church Organization at the Lower Danube," p. 75.

³¹ *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*, p. 76

³² *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*

³⁴ V. Mărculeț, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

peak development.”³⁵ To support this claim, he pointed out that “the coin/year-of-reign ratio shows that the highest point of development came shortly after” the end of Constantine VIII’s reign (1025-1028), “when we record 12 coins of Emperor Romanos III (1028-1034) and a peak index of 2.00, compared to only 0.85 under the next emperor – Michael IV (1034-1041).”³⁶ Despite this evolution, archaeological findings, particularly the modest number of coins uncovered within the settlement, led the same scholar to conclude that, compared to other urban centers in the Istro-Pontic area, Tomis “failed to surpass the status of a lesser Byzantine urban center.”³⁷ Mănucu-Adameșteanu also acknowledged that the Pecheneg attacks of 1036 had severely impacted Tomis, which “soon after, ceased to exist.”³⁸ However, based on the most recent numismatic finds, anonymous coins or those issued by Emperors Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055) and Constantine X Doukas (1059-1066), he did not rule out the possibility that the settlement may have met its end following the Uzes’ attack in 1064-1065 or during the revolt of the Paristran cities in 1072.³⁹

From our point of view, the abandonment of the settlement at Tomis following the Uzes’ invasion of 1064–1065 decisively influenced the situation of the ecclesiastical diocese. We therefore conclude that, in this context, the Metropolis of Tomis also ceased to function.

The Metropolis of Dristra

The establishment of a church eparchy – whether episcopal or metropolitan – at Dristra by Emperor John I Tzimiskes remains an unresolved and controversial issue in historiography, due to the absence of direct evidence. However, we align ourselves with those historians who, based on the importance of this Lower Danube urban center, formerly a temporary residence of the Bulgarian Patriarchate and later the seat of a *strategos*, believe that the emperor established

³⁵ Gh. Mănucu-Adameșteanu, “Tomis – Constantia – Constanța,” in *Pontica*, XXIV, 1991, p. 323.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

or more likely reorganized here a higher-level ecclesiastical structure. This may have been either a bishopric subordinated to the Metropolis of Ioannoupolis or even a metropolis placed under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.⁴⁰

For the period before the 10th century, the only sources referring to the operation of an ecclesiastical diocese at Dristra are the same five *Notitiae episcopatum* we have already discussed. Thus, *Notitia* no. 1 records, at position 445, the *Diocese of Rodostolon* (correctly: Dorostolon), functioning as a suffragan to the second metropolis within the eparchy of Haemimontus, namely Markianoupolis.⁴¹ The same information appears in *Notitia* no. 2, where the *Diocese of Rodostolon* (Dorostolon) is listed at position 513, and in *Notitia* no. 4, where the Lower Danube diocese, still referred to as *Rodostolon*, is recorded at position 463.⁴² *Notitia* no. 3, however, provides completely different data. It notes that the *Diocese of Dorostolon*, listed at position 606, was a suffragan of the Metropolis of Odessos, within the eparchy of Moesia Prima⁴³.

The information from these *notitiae* concerning the Diocese of Dristra must be accepted with great caution. In this particular case, as can be observed, they contain several inconsistencies that require critical interpretation.

According to some credible sources, it seems that in the 10th century, the Diocese of Dristra was elevated to the rank of archbishopric. This is mentioned in the second *sigillion* regarding the organization of the Archdiocese of Ohrid, issued by Emperor Basil II in May 1020. That decree states that “during the reign of Peter in Bulgaria (Tsar between 927-969, n.n.), that [bishopric] shone with the dignity of an archbishopric, and afterwards, the archbishops [of Dristra] were moved from place to place, at one time to Triaditsa

⁴⁰ I. Jordanov, “Novi danni za Preslav v kraja na X vek,” in *Preslav*, 3, 1983, pp. 110-111; P. Diaconu, “Despre organizarea ecleziastică a regiunii Dunării de Jos (ultima treime a secolului X-secolul XII),” in *Studii Teologice*, s. II, a. XLII, 1990, 1, p. 113; *Idem*, “Sur l’organisation ecclésiastique dans la région du Bas-Danube (dernier tiers du X^e siècle-XII^e siècle),” in *Études Byzantines et Post-Byzantines*, II, recueillies de publiées Em. Popescu, O. Iliescu et T. Teoteoi, Ed. Academiei Române, București, 1991, p. 82; *Idem*, “Points de vue,” p. 449; Al. Madgearu, “Organizarea bisericească la Dunărea de Jos,” p. 11; *Idem*, “The Church Organization at the Lower Danube,” p. 73; Fl. Duță, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

⁴¹ J. Darrouzès, *op. cit.*, 1.33.445.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 2.32.513; 4.31.463.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3.36.606.

(Sofia, n.n.), another time to Vodena (Edessa in Greece, n.n.), and Moglena.”⁴⁴

These pieces of information allow us to formulate a more focused opinion on the status of the diocese at the Lower Danube. From them, we deduce that even prior to the year 969, the year of Tsar Petar's reign's end, Dristra had already lost its archiepiscopal rank. However, we do not know whether it retained or lost its episcopal status as well.

The situation and status of Dristra/Dorostolon after the Byzantine conquest of 971 are not mentioned in any sources. In this context, various hypotheses regarding the status of the Diocese of Dristra have been proposed. For instance, Petre Diaconu, relying on the “old ecclesiastical tradition” that the Lower Danube center had enjoyed since Roman times, concluded that it is hard to believe that Ioannes Tzimiskes “did not establish here a high-ranking ecclesiastical see, an episcopate or even a metropolitan see.”⁴⁵ At the same time, he did not exclude the possibility that the Metropolitan See of Ioannoupolis may have been transferred to Dristra when it ceased to function.⁴⁶ An inscription discovered in Silistra confirms the restoration of a church decorated with frescoes, a project undertaken during the reigns of Emperors Basil II and Constantine VIII. Michael Salamon, the most recent scholar to study it, dated the work between the years 976 and 981.⁴⁷ As a hypothesis, Petre Diaconu suggested that the restoration of the place of worship in Dristra, undertaken shortly after the death of Ioannes I Tzimiskes, possibly as an effort to “dismantle” some of the major actions of the former emperor, could be directly linked to the “transfer of the metropolitan see from Preslav to Dristra.”

Some sigillographic sources support the theory that a high-ranking ecclesiastical center was located in Dristra. Of particular note is the discovery in Silistra of a seal that belonged to Gregorios, “bishop of Severiados,” a locality in Cappadocia, dated to the last

⁴⁴ H. Gelzer, *op. cit.*, p. 44; Fr. Dölger, *op. cit.*, p. 219, nr. 807; [or the edition: Fr. Dölger, *Regesten*, 1, p. 104, nr. 807]; V. Tăpkova-Zaimova, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁴⁵ P. Diaconu, “Despre organizarea ecleziastică,” p. 113; *Idem*, “Sur l’organisation ecclésiastique,” p. 82.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 113, n. 54; *Ibidem*, p. 83, n. 54.

⁴⁷ M. Salamon, “Some Notes on an Inscription from Medieval Silistra (c. 976),” in *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes*, IX, 1971, 3, pp. 487-496.

third of the 10th century.⁴⁸ The presence of this seal in Dristra likely resulted from it accompanying a letter sent by the Cappadocian hierarch to a fellow bishop or another high-ranking cleric residing in the Lower Danube center.

The lack of information regarding the situation of the Diocese of Dristra at the end of the 10th century, particularly during the Bulgarian offensive against the Byzantine holdings in eastern Bulgaria, renders this period obscure. Some historians, such as Petre Diaconu, argue that during the functioning of the Metropolitan See of Ioannoupolis, the Diocese of Dristra was subordinate to it. After its cessation, following the Bulgarian reconquest of Preslav, it supposedly came under the jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Tomis.⁴⁹ According to Alexandru Madgearu, although equally difficult to confirm, the Diocese of Dristra “was subordinated to the Metropolis of Tomis until the latter was dissolved in 1018.”⁵⁰

The ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Diocese of Dristra during the last two decades of the 10th century and the first two decades of the 11th century is also little known. According to historian Adrian Gabor, after the Byzantine conquest of Vidin in 1002, “the episcopate of that city no longer depended on the Bulgarian Patriarchate of Ochrid, but became suffragan to the Metropolis of Dristra.”⁵¹

From our perspective, such a conclusion is not sustainable. At that time, Dristra hosted only an episcopal see with a status equal to that of the Vidin diocese, and such an arrangement would have implied the subordination of one episcopal see to another of the same rank, an unheard-of occurrence in the Eastern Church. In our view, the functioning of the Diocese of Dristra should be associated with the organization of the homonymous theme established by Ioannes I Tzimiskes in 971.⁵²

⁴⁸ Jordanov, “Neizdadeni vizantijski olovni pečati ot Silistra (II),” in *Izvestija na naporodnija muzej-Varna*, 21 (36), 1985, p. 100, nr. 4; Cf. V. Laurent, *Le Corpus des sceaux de l' Empire Byzantin*. Tome V: *L'Église*, première partie I: *L'Église de Constantinople*, A: *La hiérarchie*, Editions CNRS, Paris, 1963, pp. 176-177; Cf. P. Diaconu, “Sur l'organisation ecclésiastique,” p. 85.

⁴⁹ P. Diaconu, “Points de vue,” p. 452.

⁵⁰ Al. Madgearu, “Organizarea bisericească la Dunărea de Jos,” p. 15; *Idem*, “The Church Organization at the Lower Danube,” p. 78.

⁵¹ A. Gabor, “Organizarea administrativă și religioasă a Imperiului Bizantin dată de Vasile II Macedoneanul și importanța ei pentru istoria poporului român,” in *Studii Teologice*, s. II, a. XLI, 1989, 5-6, p. 111.

⁵² V. Mărculeț, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

The first certain information regarding the functioning of an episcopal see in Dristra dates from the final years of Emperor Basil II's reign. It appears in the context of the ecclesiastical reorganization conducted by the emperor in the territories of the former Bulgarian Tsardom, dissolved in 1018. In the second *sigillion*, dedicated to defining the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Archbishopric of Ochrid (May 1020), the emperor includes the Diocese of Dristra. The hierarch of Dristra was to "have 40 *kleroikoi* and 40 *paroikoi*, in the cities of his diocese and in the other surrounding towns."⁵³

The functioning of the Diocese of Dristra in the mid-11th century is further confirmed by sigillographic sources. Two seals, one discovered in Silistra and the other in Boyadzhik, in the Iambol region of Bulgaria, dated between 1050 and 1060 (most likely around the mid-1050s), belonged to Leontios, "monk and bishop of Dristra."⁵⁴ It is also possible that the monk Euthymios, mentioned by Ioannes Skylitzes and Georgios Kedrenos, who was tasked with converting the Pechenegs led by chieftain Kegenes and who had settled in the Empire around 1045-1046, also belonged to the Diocese of Dristra.⁵⁵

In the second half of the 11th century, the episcopal see of Dristra was elevated to the rank of metropolitan see. Removed from the jurisdiction of the Archbishopric of Ochrid, the diocese at the Lower Danube, now elevated to the rank of metropolis, was placed under the direct jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

As for the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Dristra during this period, no concrete information survives. We believe that it was placed in authority over the bishoprics of the southern Istro-Pontic region and eastern Bulgaria, which were

⁵³ H. Gelzer, *op. cit.*, p. 44; Fr. Dölger, *op. cit.*, p. 219, nr. 807; [or the edition: Fr. Dölger, *Regesten*, 1, p. 104, nr. 807]; V. Tăpkova-Zaimova, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁵⁴ I. Jordanov, *Corpus of Byzantine seals from Bulgaria*, vol. 1: *Byzantine Seals with Geographical Names*, Agato, Sofia, 2003, pp. 67-68, nr. 23.9; *Idem*, *Corpus of Byzantine seals from Bulgaria*, vol. 3. Part 1: *Text*, The National Institute of Archeology, Sofia, 2009, p. 565, nr. 1.709-1.710.

⁵⁵ I. Skylitzēs, *Empereurs de Constantinople*, text traduit par B. Flusin et annoté par J.-Cl. Cheynet, Ed. P. Lethielleux, Paris, 2003, Constantin Monomaque, 16; [or the edition: I. Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057*, introduction, text and notes translated by J. Wortley, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, Constantine IX Monomachos, 16]; G. Cedrenus, "Historiarum Compendium," in *Georgius Cedrenus Ioannis Scylitzae ope, ab Imm. Bekkero suppletus et emendates*, t. II, Bonnae, MDCCCXXXIX, p. 584.

removed from the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Tomis. We also maintain our previously expressed view that it is not impossible that the jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Dristra may have extended over that of the Diocese of Tomis, in the event that the latter ceased to function.⁵⁶

The first known hierarch of the newly elevated see was Metropolitan Leontios, very likely the same individual as the homonymous bishop attested in the sixth decade of the 11th century, or at least another figure bearing the same name. According to the available information, he took part in the sessions of the patriarchal synod held on November 6, 1071, and March 14, 1072, presided over by Patriarch Ioannes VIII Xiphilinos.⁵⁷ On March 14, 1072, the Metropolitan of Dristra signed 26th out of 27 metropolitans and 14 archbishops, on a synodal decree concerning the election of bishops to vacant sees and the hierarchy of bishops.⁵⁸

The level of development attained and the significance of the Theme of Paradounavon, or the “Paristriian cities,” to the Byzantine Empire's policy in the Lower Danube region during this period are aspects that can be indirectly inferred from the account of the journey made there by Saint Kyrillos of Philea (sometime between 1031 and 1043), as narrated by Nikolaos Kataskepenos,⁵⁹ from the conversion of the Pechenegs who had settled in the Empire (1045-1046),⁶⁰ and from the sermons of the Metropolitan of Euchaita, Ioannes Mauropous, delivered in 1047 and 1048/1049.⁶¹ Such developments

⁵⁶ V. Mărculeț, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁵⁷ N.A. Oikonomidès, “Un décret synodal inédit du patriarche Jean VIII Xiphilin concernant l’élection et l’ordination des évêques,” in *Revue des Études Byzantines*, XVIII, 1960, pp. 60-61.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 57, 61.

⁵⁹ *La vie de Saint Cyrille le Philéote moine byzantin († 1110)*, introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes par É. Sargologos, Société des Bollandistes, Bruxelles, 1964, 5.9; [or the edition: N. Kataskepenos, *Sfântul Chiril Fileotul – viața ca Filocalie*, traducere din limba greacă veche de Laura Enache, studiu introductiv de É. Sargologos, tradus din limba franceză de Florentina Drăgulănescu, ediție îngrijită, note și bibliografie diac. Il. M. Argatu, Doxologia, Iași, 2020, 5.9].

⁶⁰ J. Skylitzès, *op. cit.*, Constantin Monomaque, 16; [or the edition: J. Skylitzes, *A Synopsis*, Constantine IX Monomachos, 16]; G. Cedrenus, *op. cit.*, p. 584.

⁶¹ Iohannis Euchaitorum metropolitae, *Quae in Codice Vaticano Graeco 676 supersunt*. Iohannes Bollig descripsit. P. de Lagarde edidit, Gottingae, 1882, pp. 144-146, 179, 189, 191-193, nr. 182, 186; [text and translation in: *Fontes Historiae Dacoromanae/Izvoarele istoriei României*, III: *Scriptores Byzantini saec. XI-XIV/Scriptori*

justified the elevation of the Diocese of Dristra from an episcopal to a metropolitan see, all the more so since the Lower Danube center also served as the seat of the Theme of Paristrion or the Katepanate of Paradounavon.

Based on such information, Petre Diaconu argued that “The Diocese of Dristra was transformed into a metropolis in the fifth decade of the 11th century.”⁶² Later, revisiting this issue, the Romanian historian concluded that “The Metropolis of Dristra emerged at some point between the 1040s and 1070s” and that “the transformation of the Diocese of Dristra into a metropolitan see coincided with the suppression of the Diocese of Tomis.”⁶³

Returning to the information regarding the participation of Metropolitan Leontios of Dristra in the patriarchal synod of November 6, 1071, and March 14, 1072, his position as the penultimate signatory among the metropolitans present suggests that the elevation of the see to metropolitan rank was relatively recent in relation to the time of the synod. Correlating this with the information from the seals referring to Leontios as bishop, dated to the mid-1050s, we may assert that the elevation of the Diocese of Dristra to metropolitan status occurred sometime between the mid-1050s and the end of the 1060s, more precisely between the mid-1050s and before November 6, 1071. In conclusion, we may consider the mid-1050s as a *terminus post quem* and November 6, 1071 as a *terminus ante quem* for the elevation of the Danubian diocese to metropolitan rank⁶⁴.

The context in which the Diocese of Dristra was elevated to metropolitan status remains, as previously noted, another obscure aspect in the history of this ecclesiastical see. From our perspective, considering the period during which it functioned as a metropolis, two hypotheses may be proposed as the most plausible. The first is that the elevation of Dristra’s see may have resulted from the military-administrative reforms undertaken by Emperor Isaac I Komnenos (1057-1059) within the Katepanate of Paradounavon in 1059. The second hypothesis is that the organization of the Metropolis of Dristra

bizantini (sec. XI-XIV). Ediderunt/Publicate de Al. Eliaș și N.-Ș. Tanașoca, Ed. Academiei, București, 1975, pp. 2/3-12/13].

⁶² P. Diaconu, “Despre organizarea ecleziastică,” p. 114; *Idem*, “Sur l’organisation ecclésiastique,” p. 83.

⁶³ *Idem*, “Points de vue,” p. 452.

⁶⁴ V. Mărculeț, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

may have been a consequence of measures taken to address the effects of the powerful invasion by the Uzes in 1064/1065, which severely impacted Tomis, leading to its cessation.

A decade later, another hierarch of Dristra, Metropolitan Christophoros, is mentioned as penultimate among 10 metropolitans and four archbishops who took part in the patriarchal synod of 20 March 1082, and likewise among 25 metropolitans and four archbishops present at the synod on 21 March.⁶⁵ The same hierarch of Dristra is also attested by five seals found at Preslav, Silistra, and Pomorie in Bulgaria, dated around 1085, which identify him as “Metropolitan of Dristra and protosynkellos.”⁶⁶

For long periods, information about the Metropolis of Dristra is lacking. On the basis of the few brief notices we possess, we can ascertain that it continued to function in the 12th century. An ecclesiastical-geographical work entitled *The Order of the Patriarchal Thrones*, composed in 1143 by the former patriarchal nomophylax Nilos Doxapatris at the request of King Roger II of Sicily, lists among the metropolises subordinate to the Ecumenical Patriarchate that of “all the Paristrian cities, that is, those on the River Danube.”⁶⁷

The functioning of the Metropolis of Dristra in the 12th century is also attested by a series of patriarchal acts. Among these, we note that the Lower Danube eparchy is recorded among the metropolises subordinate to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in two *Notitiae episcopatum* from the Komnenian period.⁶⁸ To these are added two other *Notitiae* that register the metropolitan sees functioning at the end of the 12th century and the beginning of the 13th.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ J. Gouillard, “Le procès officiel de Jean l’Italien. Les actes et leurs sous-entendus,” in *Travaux et Mémoires*, 9, 1985, pp. 136/137, 140/141; N. A. Oikonomidès, “Un décret synodal inédit du patriarche Jean VIII Xiphilin,” pp. 60-61.

⁶⁶ I. Jordanov, *Pečatite ot Strategijata v Preslav*, Sofia University Press, Sofia, 1993, pp. 186-187, nr. 388; I. Jordanov, *Corpus*, 1, pp. 68-69, nr. 23.10; *Idem*, *Corpus*, 3/1, pp. 565-566, nr. 1.711-1.715.

⁶⁷ Nilus Doxapatris, “Taxis ton patriarchikon tronon,” in *Hieroclis Synecdemus et Notitiae Graecae Episcopatum. Accedunt Nili Doxapatris Notitia Patriarchatum et Locorum Nomina Immutata*. Ex recensione G. Parthey, Berolini, 1866, p. 297, § 229; [translation in: Nil Doxapatri, “Ordinea scaunelor patriarhatelor,” II, in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, XXXI, 1907-1908, 12, p. 1343].

⁶⁸ J. Darrouzès, *op. cit.*, 11.73, 12.71.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 13.73.781, 15.71

From the same period, we also have information regarding the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Dristra. In another part of his work, entitled *The Eparchies and Metropolises Subject to Constantinople*, Nilos Doxapatrius mentions “Rhodostolon (Dorostolon, n.n.) or Dristra of Haemimontus with five bishoprics.”⁷⁰ In an *opusculum* appended to his work of religious geography, the same author records “Dorostolon or Dristra having five bishoprics.”⁷¹

Which were the five episcopal sees under the jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Dristra is unknown. The only episcopal see for which we have a few extremely brief notices is Axiopolis, which was functioning at the end of the 11th century. Given that the cessation of the Metropolis of Tomis was an accomplished fact, the only metropolis under whose jurisdiction the Diocese of Axiopolis could have fallen was that of Dristra.

The sole and succinct reference to the Diocese of Axiopolis is found in a *Treatise on Transfers*, entitled *On transfers carried out for ordained hierarchs, from bishoprics to patriarchates, and on those transferred and deposed from the sees they held in other metropolises and bishoprics*. Concerning the situation of the bishop of Axiopolis, the treatise records that “being without office, the one from Axioupolis was given first [the episcopal see] of Abydos and then that of Apros.”⁷²

The treatise on transfers was written, according to its editor, the historian Jean Darrouzès, during the patriarchate of Nikolaos III Kyrdiniates-Grammatikos (1084-1111).⁷³ The moment when the transfer of the bishop of Axiopolis mentioned in the treatise took place was dated by historian Emilian Popescu to 1095. It was directly

⁷⁰ Nilus Doxapatrius, *op. cit.*, p. 301, § 295; [translation in: Nil Doxapatri, *op. cit.*, p. 1.345].

⁷¹ J. Darrouzès, *op. cit.*, 14.45.

⁷² J. Darrouzès, “Le traité des transferts. Édition critique et commentaire,” in *Revue des Études Byzantines*, 42, 1984, p. 182, § 53; Em. Popescu, “Știri noi despre istoria Dobrogei în secolul al XI-lea: Episcopia de Axiopolis,” in *Monumente istorice și izvoare creștine. Mărturii de străveche existență și de continuitate a românilor pe teritoriul Dunării de Jos și al Dobrogei*, Ed. Arhiepiscopiei Tomisului și Dunării de Jos, Galați, 1987, p. 128; *Idem*, *Christianitas Daco-Romana. Florilegium studiorum*, Ed. Academiei Române, București, 1994, p. 422.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

linked to the events generated by the powerful Cuman invasion south of the Danube in 1094, which struck the Istro-Pontic area violently.⁷⁴

The total absence of any other information about the episcopal see of Axiopolis leaves significant aspects of its evolution completely unknown. Given the geographical position of the fortress of Axiopolis, we maintain the opinion that the homonymous diocese exercised its ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the churches in the south-western regions between the Danube and the Black Sea.⁷⁵

The Diocese of Axiopolis was not the only eparchy of this rank in the area. Romanian historians Emilian Popescu and Petre Diaconu argue that other episcopal sees may have functioned at Dinogetia, Capidava, Troesmis, or in other fortresses.⁷⁶ Emilian Popescu does not even exclude the possibility that, at the end of the 11th century, the eparchy of Axiopolis held the rank of metropolis.⁷⁷ This thesis is, however, rejected, quite justifiably, in our view, by Alexandru Madgearu.⁷⁸

According to the views of some Romanian specialists, in the 11th-12th centuries the eparchy of Dristra exercised its authority over certain regions north of the Danube, along the river. Such an opinion was expressed by Petre Diaconu, who concluded that “it is evident that the Metropolis of Dristra also exercised its authority over regions on the left bank of the Danube during the 11th-12th centuries, comprising at least southern Oltenia, Muntenia, and Moldavia.”⁷⁹ The extension of the Metropolis of Dristra’s jurisdiction north of the Danube, the same historian maintains, is a fact “somewhat suggested by the letters of Ioannes Tzetzes to Metropolitan Charsianites.”⁸⁰ In the absence of firm information on this matter, however, we consider this view to remain merely a hypothesis.

⁷⁴ Em. Popescu, “Episcopia de Axiopolis,” p. 136; Idem, *Christianitas Daco-Romana*, p. 431; P. Diaconu, “Despre organizarea ecleziastică,” p. 118; Idem, “Sur l’organisation ecclésiastique,” p. 87.

⁷⁵ V. Mărculeț, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁷⁶ Em. Popescu, “Episcopia de Axiopolis,” p. 137; Idem, *Christianitas Daco-Romana*, p. 431; P. Diaconu, “Despre organizarea ecleziastică,” p. 118; Idem, “Sur l’organisation ecclésiastique,” p. 87.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*.

⁷⁸ Al. Madgearu, “Organizarea bisericească la Dunărea de Jos,” p. 15; Idem, “The Church Organization at the Lower Danube,” p. 78.

⁷⁹ P. Diaconu, “Despre organizarea ecleziastică,” p. 119; Idem, “Sur l’organisation ecclésiastique,” p. 89.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 119, n. 99; *Ibidem*, p. 89, n. 99.

Just as little is known about the hierarchs of Dristra from the 12th century and their activity. A series of details is transmitted to us by the Byzantine scholar Ioannes Tzetzes, who, in the middle of the same century, corresponded with Leon Charsianites, the Metropolitan of Dristra. The letters of Leon Charsianites to Ioannes Tzetzes have not been preserved. However, five letters written by the scholar from Constantinople to the hierarch of the Lower Danube are known.⁸¹

Regarding the functioning of the other bishoprics under the jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Dristra, we have no written information. The only arguments that could be invoked to support their existence are archaeological in nature, which gives them a high degree of relativity, especially concerning their precise location.

The first of these letters is addressed to “the deacon kyr Leon Charsianites.”⁸² This form of address is proof that it was sent to the prelate of Dristra before he ascended to the metropolitan see. The second one addresses “the same, now Metropolitan of Dristra.”⁸³ Based on the wording, we deduce that the letter was addressed to the hierarch of Dristra shortly after his appointment as metropolitan. The next three letters, which are addressed to the “To His Eminence, the Most Reverend Metropolitan of Dristra” were clearly written during the time he held this office.⁸⁴

Very little is known, in general, about the tenure of Leon Charsianites. Historian Jonathan Shepard, cited by Petre Diaconu, believes that he assumed the see around 1145, and that he served in Dristra for approximately 30 years.⁸⁵ In the years 1157, 1166, 1170,

⁸¹ Ioannis Tzetzae *Epistulae*, recensuit P.A.M. Leone, Ed. B. G. Teubner, Leipzig, 1972, nr. 38, 39, 66, 80, 82; [translation into English: J. Shepard, “Tzetzes’ Letters to Leo at Dristra,” in *Byzantinische Forschungen*, VI, 1979, pp. 192-199, nr. 39, 66, 80, 82 (republished in: J. Shepard, *Emergent Elites and Byzantium in the Balkans and East-Central Europe*, Ashgate, London and New York, 2011, pp. 192-199, nr. 39, 66, 80, 82)].

⁸² *Ibidem*, nr. 38.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, nr. 39; [translation into English: J. Shepard, *op. cit.*, p. 192, nr. 39 (republished in: J. Shepard, *Emergent Elites*, p. 192, nr. 39)].

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, nr. 66, 80, 82; [translation into English: J. Shepard, *op. cit.*, p. 193, 196, 198, nr. 39, 80, 82 (republished in: J. Shepard, *Emergent Elites*, p. 193, 196, 198, nr. 39, 80, 82)].

⁸⁵ *Idem*, “Tzetzes’ Letters,” pp. 228-232; Cf. P. Diaconu, “Despre organizarea ecleziastică,” p. 115; Cf. *Idem*, “Sur l’organisation ecclésiastique,” p. 84; Cf. *Idem*, “Un mitropolit de Paristrion mai puțin cunoscut,” in *Studia Historica et Theologica. Omagiu profesorului Emilian Popescu*, Trinitas, Iași, 2003, pp. 327-329.

1172, and 1173, the hierarch of Dristra was present in Constantinople, where he participated in the works of the patriarchal synods.⁸⁶

The presence within the geographical area under the jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Dristra, especially in the Istro-Pontic region, of seals belonging to high-ranking prelates of the Eastern Church, such as Stephanos, “Archbishop of Arkadiopolis” or Michael, “Archpastor of Rosia” (Russia, n.n.) may constitute further proof of the functioning of the diocese of the Lower Danube.⁸⁷ These items likely accompanied letters sent by those hierarchs to high clergy of the local Church.

As for the duration of the functioning of the Metropolis of Dristra, which is one and the same with that of the *Paristrion cities*, we can only estimate. For example, Petre Diaconu claims that its dissolution “occurred in the first half of the 13th century, perhaps even simultaneously with the integration of this city into the borders of the Asenid state.”⁸⁸

At this point in our analysis, we consider it important to specify that the occupation of Dristra by the Vlach-Bulgarian Tsardom took place after the conquest of Constantinople by the participants of the Fourth Crusade and the dissolution of the Byzantine Empire. We base this opinion on the fact that in 1204, during the negotiations between Tsar Ioannitsa Asen (1197-1204) and Pope Innocent III for union with the Church of Rome, the Metropolis of Dristra is not mentioned among the dioceses subordinated to the Church of Tarnovo.⁸⁹ This leads to the conclusion that it remained under the jurisdiction of the

⁸⁶ M. D. Ionescu, *Dobrogea în pragul veacului al XX-lea. Geografie matematică, fizică, politică, economică și militară*, I. V. Socecu, București, 1904, p. 637; P. Diaconu, “Un mitropolit de Paristrion,” p. 327; J. Darrouzès, “Listes synodales et notitiae,” in *Revue des Études Byzantines*, XXVIII, 1970, pp. 78-80; V. Grumel, *Regestes des actes du Patriarcat de Constantinople*, vol. *Les actes des Patriarches*, fasc. II et III: *Les regestes de 715 à 1206*, deuxième édition revue et corrigée par J. Darrouzès, Institut Français d’Études Byzantines, Paris, 1989, pp. 551-554, nr. 1125, 1126.

⁸⁷ Jordanov, “Neizdadeni vizantijski,” p. 105, nr. 13; I. Barnea, “À propos de la découverte de deux sceaux byzantins de Dinogetia,” in *Dacia. Revue d’archéologie et d’histoire ancienne*, nouvelle série, II, 1958, p. 475.

⁸⁸ P. Diaconu, “Despre organizarea ecleziastică,” p. 120; *Idem*, “Sur l’organisation ecclésiastique,” p. 89.

⁸⁹ *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor* culese de E. de Hurmuzaki, vol. I: 1199-1345, partea 1, culese, și însoțite de note și variante de Nic. Densușianu, Ed. Socec, București, 1887, p. 29, nr. XX.

Ecumenical Patriarchate. Considering the completely different status of the other dioceses incorporated into the Vlach-Bulgarian Tsardom, all placed under the jurisdiction of the Church of Tarnovo, we believe this was only possible if Dristra had avoided falling under Vlach-Bulgarian rule until after 1204.⁹⁰

From our perspective, the occupation of Dristra and the Lower Danube regions by the Vlach-Bulgarian Tsardom most likely occurred at the beginning of the 13th century. The functioning of the Metropolis of Dristra under Vlach-Bulgarian rule is confirmed by certain sources, such as the *Synodicon of the Autocephaly of the Patriarchate of Tarnovo*, whose composition began in 1235, and which was later included in the *Synodicon of Tsar Boril*, compiled in 1211.⁹¹

Based on the available information, we conclude that the transfer of Dristra to Vlach-Bulgarian control, and implicitly, that of the diocese of the Lower Danube to the jurisdiction of the Church of Tarnovo, occurred sometime between after 1204 and before 1235.⁹² The Vlach-Bulgarian conquest did not mean the cessation of the diocese's functioning, but rather its removal from the religious obedience of Constantinople and its transfer under the jurisdiction of the Church of Tarnovo.⁹³ This change in religious subordination, as a result of conquest, marked the end of the last Byzantine period in the history of the diocese of the Lower Danube and the beginning of a new Bulgarian period in its history.

⁹⁰ V. Mărculeț, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁹¹ M.G. Popruženko, *Sinodika tsarija Borila*, Balgarska akademiya na naukite, Sofia, 1928, p. 92, § 155; *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor* culese de E. de Hurmuzaki, vol. I, partea 2: 1345-1450, culese, adnotate și publicate de Nic. Densușianu, Ed. Socec, București, 1890, pp. 808, 811, nr. DCXLV.

⁹² V. Mărculeț, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁹³ *Ibidem*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Barnea, Ion, "À propos de la découverte de deux sceaux byzantins de Dinogetia," in *Dacia. Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne*, nouvelle série, II, 1958, pp. 473-478.
- Barnea, Ion, "Noi date despre Mitropolia Tomisului," in *Pontica*, XXIV, 1991, pp. 277-282.
- Cedrenus, G., "Historiarum Compendium," in *Georgius Cedrenus Ioannis Scylitzae ope, ab Imm. Bekkero suppletus et emendates*, t. II, Bonnae, MDCCCXXXIX.
- Darrouzès, Jean, "Le traité des transferts. Édition critique et commentaire," in *Revue des Études Byzantines*, 42, 1984, pp. 147-214.
- Darrouzès, Jean, "Listes synodales et notitiae," in *Revue des Études Byzantines*, XXVIII, 1970, pp. 57-96.
- Darrouzès, Jean, *Notitiae episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*. Text critique, introduction et notes, Institut Français d'Etudes Byzantines (IFEB), Paris, 1981.
- Diaconu, Petre, "Despre organizarea ecleziastică a regiunii Dunării de Jos (ultima treime a secolului X-secolul XII)," in *Studii Teologice*, s. II, a. XLII, 1990, 1, pp. 103-120; *Idem*, "Sur l'organisation ecclésiastique dans la région du Bas-Danube (dernier tiers du X^e siècle-XII^e siècle)," in *Études Byzantines et Post-Byzantines*, II, 1991, pp. 73-89, recueillies et publiées par Em. Popescu, O. Iliescu et T. Teoteoi, Ed. Academiei Române, București, 1991.
- Diaconu, Petre, "Points de vue sur l'organisation ecclésiastique au Bas-Danube (Xe-XIe siècles)," in *Dacia. Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne*, nouvelle série, XXXVIII-XXXIX, 1994-1995, p. 449-452.
- Diaconu, Petre, "Un mitropolit de Paristrion mai puțin cunoscut," in *Studia Historica et Theologica. Omagiu profesorului Emilian Popescu*, Trinitas, Iași, 2003, pp. 327-329.
- Documente privitoare la istoria românilor* culese de E. de Hurmuzaki, vol. I: 1199-1345, partea 1, culese, și însoțite de note și variante de Nic. Densușianu, Ed. Socec, București, 1887; vol. I, partea 2: 1345-1450, culese, adnotate și publicate de Nic. Densușianu, Ed. Socec, București, 1890.
- Dölger, Franz, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565-1453*, 1. Teil, 2. Halbband: *Regesten von 867-1025*, zweite Auflage neu bearbeitet von A.E. Müller, unter verantwortlicher Mitarbeit von Al. Beihammer, München, 2003 [or the edition: Franz Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565-1453*, 1. Teil: *Regesten von 565-1025*, München und Berlin, 1924.
- Duță, Florian, "Le christianisme au Bas-Danube du X^e au commencement du XI^e siècle," in *Theologia*, 43, 2002, 1, pp. 181-192.

- Gabor, Adrian, "Organizarea administrativă și religioasă a Imperiului Bizantin dată de Vasile II Macedoneanul și importanța ei pentru istoria poporului român," in *Studii Teologice*, s. II, a. XLI, 1989, 5-6, pp. 98-117.
- Gouillard, Jean, "Le procès officiel de Jean l'Italien. Les actes et leurs sous-entendus," in *Travaux et Mémoires*, 9, 1985, pp. 133-174.
- Grumel, Venance, *Regestes des actes du Patriarcat de Constantinople*, vol. *Les actes des Patriarches*, fasc. II et III: *Les registes de 715 à 1206*, deuxième édition revue et corrigée par J. Darrouzès, Institut Français d'Etudes Byzantines, Paris, 1989.
- Gyóny, Mathias, "L'évêché vlaque de l'archevêché bulgare d'Achris aux XIe-XIVe siècles," in *Études Slaves et Roumaines*, I, 1948, 3, pp. 148-159.
- Gelzer, Heinrich, "Ungedruckte und wenig bekannte Bistümerverzeichnisse der orientalischen Kirche, I," in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, I, 1892, pp. 245-282; "Ungedruckte und wenig bekannte Bistümerverzeichnisse der orientalischen Kirche, II," in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, II, 1893, pp. 22-72.
- Ioannis Tzetzae *Epistulae*, recensuit P.A.M. Leone, Ed. B. G. Teubner, Leipzig, 1972 [translation into English: J. Shepard, "Tzetzes' Letters to Leo at Dristra," in *Byzantinische Forschungen*, VI, 1979, pp. 191-239 (republished in: J. Shepard, *Emergent Elites and Byzantium in the Balkans and East-Central Europe*, Ashgate, London and New York, 2011)].
- Iohannis Euchaitorum metropolitae, *Quae in Codice Vaticano Graeco 676 supersunt*. Iohannes Bollig descripsit. P. de Lagarde edidit, Gottingae, 1882 [text and translation in: *Fontes Historiae Daco-romanae/Izvoarele istoriei României*, III: *Scriptores Byzantini saec. XI-XIV/Scriitori bizantini (sec. XI-XIV)*. Ediderunt/Publicate de Al. Elian și N.-Ș. Tanașoca, Ed. Academiei, București, 1975].
- Ionescu, M. D., *Dobrogea în pragul veacului al XX-lea. Geografie matematică, fizică, politică, economică și militară*, I. V. Socecu, București, 1904.
- Jordanov, Ivan, "Neizdadeni vizantijski olovni pečati ot Silistra (II)," in *Izvestija na naporodnija muzej-Varna*, 21 (36), 1985, pp. 98-107; Cf. V. Laurent, *Le Corpus des sceaux de l'Empire Byzantin*. Tome V: *L'Église*, première partie I: *L'Église de Constantinople*, A: *La hiérarchie*, Editions CNRS, Paris, 1963.
- Jordanov, Ivan, "Novi danni za Preslav v krajja na X vek," in *Preslav*, 3, 1983, pp. 104-114.
- Jordanov, Ivan, *Corpus of Byzantine seals from Bulgaria*, vol. 1: *Byzantine Seals with Geographical Names*, Agato, Sofia, 2003.
- Jordanov, Ivan, *Corpus of Byzantine seals from Bulgaria*, vol. 3. Part 1: *Text*, The National Institute of Archeology, Sofia, 2009.

- Jordanov, Ivan, *Pečatite ot Strategijata v Preslav*, Sofia University Press, Sofia, 1993.
- La vie de Saint Cyrille le Philéote moine byzantin († 1110)*, introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes par É. Sargologos, Société des Bollandistes, Bruxelles, 1964 [or the edition: N. Kataskepenos, *Sfântul Chiril Fileotul – viața ca Filocalie*, traducere din limba greacă veche de Laura Enache, studiu introductiv de É. Sargologos, tradus din limba franceză de Florentina Drăgulănescu, ediție îngrijită, note și bibliografie diac. Il. M. Argatu, Doxologia, Iași, 2020].
- Madgearu, Alexandru, “Organizarea bisericească la Dunărea de Jos în perioada 971-1020,” in *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie*, XIX, 2001, pp. 9-22; *Idem*, “The Church Organization at the Lower Danube Between 971 and 1020,” in *Études Byzantines et Post-Byzantines*, IV, pp. 71-85, recueillies et publiées par Em. Popescu et T. Teoteoi, Trinitas, Iași, 2001.
- Mănucu-Adameșteanu, Gheorghe, “Tomis – Constantia – Constanța,” in *Pontica*, XXIV, 1991, pp. 299-327.
- Mărculeț, Vasile, *Organizare ecleziastică și implicații bizantine în spațiul românesc (secolele X-XV)*, Ed. Sfântul Ierarh Nicolae, Brăila, 2014.
- Nesbitt, John, Nicolas Oikonomides, *Catalog of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, vol. 1. *Italy, North of the Balkans, North of the Black Sea*, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC, 1991.
- Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople, *Short History*, text, translation, and commentary by Cy. Mango, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC, 1990.
- Nilus Doxapatrius, “Taxis ton patriarchikon tronon,” în *Hieroclis Synecdemus et Notitiae Graecae Episcopatum. Accedunt Nili Doxapatrii Notitia Patriarchatum et Locorum Nomina Immutata*. Ex recensione G. Parthey, Berolini, 1866 [translation in: Nil Doxapatri, “Ordinea scaunelor patriarhatelor,” II, in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, XXXI, 1907-1908].
- Oikonomidès, N. A., “Un décret synodal inédit du patriarche Jean VIII Xiphilin concernant l’élection et l’ordination des évêques,” in *Revue des Études Byzantines*, XVIII, 1960, pp. 55-78.
- Popescu, Emilian, “Știri noi despre istoria Dobrogei în secolul al XI-lea: Episcopia de Axiopolis,” in *Monumente istorice și izvoare creștine. Mărturii de străveche existență și de continuitate a românilor pe teritoriul Dunării de Jos și al Dobrogei*, Ed. Arhiepiscopiei Tomisului și Dunării de Jos, Galați, 1987.
- Popescu, Emilian, *Christianitas Daco-Romana. Florilegium studiorum*, Ed. Academiei Române, București, 1994.
- Popruženko, M. G., *Sinodika tsarija Borila*, Balgarska akademiya na naukite, Sofia, 1928.

- Porphyrogenitus, Constantine, *De Administrando Imperio*, Greek text edited by Gy. Moravcsik, English translation by R.J.H. Jenkins, Dumbarton Oaks, 1967, new, revised edition 1993 [or the editions: Constantin Porfirogenetul, *Carte de învățătură pentru fiul său Romanos*, traducere de V. Grecu, Ed. Academiei, București, 1971; Constantin VII Porphyrogénète, *De Administrando Imperio*, oeuvre mise en page et traduite par M. Szwajcer, without year, <https://remarcle.org/bloodwolf/historiens/constantin/table.htm> (accessed: Dec. 2024- Jan. 2025)].
- Salamon, Michael, "Some Notes on an Inscription from Medieval Silistra (c. 976)," in *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes*, IX, 1971, 3, pp. 487-496.
- Skylitzès, Ioannes, *Empereurs de Constantinople*, text traduit par B. Flusin et annoté par J.-Cl. Cheynet, Ed. P. Lethielleux, Paris, 2003, Constantin Monomaque, 16; [or the edition: J. Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057*, introduction, text and notes translated by J. Wortley, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, Constantine IX Monomachos, 16];
- Tăpkova-Zaimova, Vasilka, *Bulgarians by Birth. The Comitopuls, Emperor Samuel and Their Successors According to Historical Sources and the Historiographic Tradition*, translated by P. Murdzhhev, with an introduction by K. Petkov, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2017.

A special Orthodox example of spiritual autobiography: the diary of Fr. Sergius Bulgakov*

Abstract. Among the important diaries from the Eastern Orthodox space that can be also classified as part of the genre of spiritual autobiography, the one of Fr. Sergius Bulgakov must be surely mentioned. Containing notes written and published in *Vestnic (The Herald, Messenger)*, journal of the Russian Orthodox students from Prague between 1924 and 1925, the diary deals with aspects like prayer, priesthood, humility, but also with self-observation and the experiences of the author. At the same time, it helps the reader to discover an important spiritual father, scholar, professor and theologian and to see beyond controversial aspects of his work like the concept of „Sophia”. Accompanied by a foreword written by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, several notes of the translators, notes of editors, but also a historical introduction and the memories of a nun who knew him, the English translation of the diary (the 3rd one from Russian after the one in the Czech and French languages) is not only an useful tool for the theological scholarship, but also a useful lecture for any category of readers.

Keywords: Sergius Bulgakov, diary, Russian exile, Prague, communism

* Sergius Bulgakov, *Spiritual Diary*, Angelico Press, Brooklyn, NY, 2022.

Iuliu-Marius Morariu (protosyncell Maxim) PhD, Academy of Romanian Scientists, New York Branch, „Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Angelicum Pontifical University, Rome, Italy, Pretoria University, Pretoria, South Africa, „Saint George” Diocesan Cathedral in Saint-Hubert, Quebec, Canada.
--

Introduction

In the last years, spiritual autobiography passes, in the Christian space, thorough a period of re-discovery. While in the Catholic and Protestant ones there are printed and re-printed different editions of the representative works of the genre, in the Eastern Orthodox one, studies and articles dedicated to the topic are also published.¹ Among the main elements that made the genre useful not only to the scholarship, but to any category of readers, there the testimonial dimension, the historical and multidisciplinary values must be mentioned.

One of the important authors from the field that still awaits to be discovered is Fr. Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944). Controversial in the theological space, he was a priest, a professor of theology and an important personality of the Russian exile. Expulsed from Russia in 1922, he will arrive in Paris after a moment of refuge in Prague. While in theology his contributions are related with the synthesis between patristic tradition, Russian philosophy and modern thinking and with the idea of „Sophia”, which almost transformed him in a heretic,² as a scholar, he published relevant titles in the field of theology, or social

¹ See, for example: Iuliu-Marius Morariu, *Repere ale autobiografiei spirituale din spațiul ortodox în secolele XIX și XX. Ioan de Kronstadt, Siluan Athonitul și Nicolae Berdiaev* [Landmarks of the spiritual autobiography from the Orthodox space. John of Kronstadt, Silouane the Athonite and Nicolae Berdyaev], Lumen, Iași, 2019; Maxim (Iuliu-Marius) Morariu, *Self-knowledge and Theology – studies in spiritual autobiography*, foreword by +Benedict Bistrițeanul, translation and revision of texts by Anca-Ioana Rus, Argonaut, Cluj-Napoca, and Symphologic Publishing, Gatineau, Canada, 2020; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, “Aspects of Applied Ethics in the Spiritual Autobiographies from the Orthodox Space in the 19th and 20th Centuries,” in Camelia Ignătescu, Antonio Sandu, Tomiță Ciulei (eds.), *Proceedings Volume: Rethinking Social Action. Core Values in Practice*, Lumen, Iași, and London, UK, 2017, pp. 548-557.

² For more information about his life and activity, see also: Rowan Williams, *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1999; Paul Ladouceur, *Serge Boulgakov. Itinéraire spirituel*, Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2011; Aidan Nichols, *Wisdom from Above: A Primer in the Theology of Father Sergei Bulgakov*, Gracewing, Leominster, 2005; Michel Stavrou (coord.), *La pensée de Serge Boulgakov*, Presses de l’Institut Saint-Serge, Paris, 2011; Antoine Arjakovsky, *La génération des penseurs religieux de l’émigration russe*, Cerf, Paris, 2002.

theology.³ Like authors such as Berdyaev,⁴ he also left an autobiographic work. There one finds aspects related with the genesis of his works or his ideas, but also his inner thoughts, or his interior struggles. For this reason, in the following pages we will focus on his spiritual diary, in an attempt to provide an invitation to analysis and debate.

Fr. Sergius Bulgakov and his spiritual autobiography: Introductory aspects

As the editors of the English version of his spiritual autobiography emphasize, Fr. Sergius wrote several diaries since his ordination into priesthood in 1918.⁵ Most of them were not written with the specific purpose of publication. The ones that we will use there, consisting in the English version of the document,⁶ contain texts

³ Such as: Serge Boulgakov, *La philosophie de l'économie*, L'Âge d'Homme, Lausanne, 1991; Serge Boulgakov, *Du marxisme à l'idéalisme*, L'Âge d'Homme, Lausanne, 1990; Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, translated by Boris Jakim, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2008; Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, translated by Boris Jakim, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004; Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush*, translated by Thomas Allan Smith, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2009; Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, translated by Boris Jakim, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002; Sergius Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, translated by Thomas Allan Smith, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2013; Sergius Bulgakov, *Sophia: The Wisdom of God*, translated by Patrick Thompson, Lindisfarne Press, Hudson, NY, 1993; Sergius Bulgakov, *The Friend of the Bridegroom: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Forerunner*, translated by Boris Jakim, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003; Sergius Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household*, translated by Catherine Evtuhov, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000; Sergius Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, translated by Thomas Allan Smith, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2012; Serge Boulgakov, *L'Agneau de Dieu*, traduit par Constantin Andronikof, L'Âge d'Homme, Lausanne, 1982; Serge Boulgakov, *L'Épouse de l'Agneau*, traduit par Constantin Andronikof, L'Âge d'Homme, Lausanne, 1984; Serge Boulgakov, *Le Paraclet*, traduit par Constantin Andronikof, L'Âge d'Homme, Lausanne, 1986.

⁴ Nicolas Berdiaev, *La connaissance de soi: Essai d'autobiographie*, traduit par Katherine Lampert, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1954.

⁵ Mark Roosien and Roberto J. De la Noval, „Translator's preface,” p. XV.

⁶ Namely: Sergius Bulgakov, *Spiritual diary*, Angelico Press, Brooklyn, NY, 2022. In the biographical introduction, Mark Roosien characterizes the text as follows: „The present volume, Bulgakov's *Spiritual Diary*, written in Prague from 1924 to 1925, offers a profoundly personal glimpse into the heart of this pastor and theologian in his formative, early years as a priest. It reveals how his ideas, which some have

published previously in *Vestnik* journal of the Russian Christian Movement between 1924 and 1925. As Rowan William underlines in the forward of the book:

The journal represents something of the costly process of finding a new centre of gravity in the daily duties of the priesthood and in the daily remembrance of mortality that went with this (p. XV).

The English version is the third one, after the Czech version released in 2009 and the Polish one from 2013 and comes to be part of the modern spiritual patrimony of the Eastern Orthodox Church⁷ and contains also the memoirs of Sister Johana Reitlinger about him (pp. 167-179). It speaks about the concerns of a man who was aware of the fact that „what surrounds us is love,”⁸ about the becoming of a later recognized spiritual father⁹ and about his struggles in social matters.¹⁰ Topics like the later one of „Sophia” can also be found there, which justifies the need for a theological introduction.

Aware of the prophetic mission of his life in the world,¹¹ he proves in his note to be a man of vocation, defined by an honest seeking for God, but also amazed by His love. Therefore, as one of the editors characterizes it:

In the *Spiritual Diary*, we see the soul of Bulgakov, the humble priest, the spiritual guide, the man who stands in wonder – on every page! –

criticized as excessively abstract, concretely shaped his life and personal spiritual journey” (p. 1).

⁷ „For Orthodox Christians, this volume represents a look into the soul of a teacher whose theological writings make up a rich part of their modern spiritual patrimony,” (Mark Roosien and Roberto J. De la Noval, „Translator’s preface”, p. XVII).

⁸ Rowan Williams, „Foreword”, p. XIII.

⁹ „It is striking that even those who were critical of his ideas – people like Alexander Schmemmann and Vladimir Lossky – acknowledged his devotion and integrity as a priest, while those who had known him directly as a spiritual father – the Zernovs, Sister Joanna Reitlinger, and many more – unhesitatingly bore witness to the depth of his spiritual discernment and his personal holiness” (Rowan Williams, „Foreword”, p. XI).

¹⁰ „Bulgakov, struggling to come to terms with the colossal trauma of the Revolution, had asked hard questions about the responsibility of the Russian Church for the collective apostasy that had overtaken the country, and wondered – too audibly for comfort – whether this was the effect of the division between Eastern Christendom and the See of Rome” (*Ibidem*).

¹¹ As Roosien underlines: „Bulgakov also saw his mission as a prophetic one. In August-September 1922, he wrote to Florensky and recalled how together, they had planned to usher in a new era for Orthodox Christianity” (p. 4).

at the activity of God in the world. Wonder! Is not that sophiology is all about? It was that fundamental vision, that of wonder, that he elsewhere transported into the language of theology (p. 24).

The diary

Close to contemporary Russian thinkers like Berdyaev,¹² but also of other authors of spiritual autobiographies like Saint John of Kronstadt,¹³ or Saint Silouane from Mount Athos,¹⁴ Fr. Bulgakov's diary gravitates also around topics like love, humility, prayer, Christ and the neighbor. Sometimes, the author insists on aspects like depression and uses quotations from the bible or different Christian authors at the beginning of his notes. The fact that they were prepared for publication in a journal edited in his youth, determines him to try to bring a note of joy in most of its pages while also inviting the discovery of the spiritual world. At the same time, the Russian priest does not neglect aspects like the fear of death and the testimonial aspects:

Last night, after being grievously impressed by the vanity of this age, by failure and by personal bitterness, I arrived home in a poisoned state, and all night – both in sleep and out of it – I languished and mourned. I felt myself submerged in a deep darkness, and as often happens, my whole life seemed to be a mistake and a failure. And I felt in me and on me the breath of death: it came and went and had possession of me (p. 53).

Notes dedicated to death and the feelings generated by its inevitability in human life are alternated with ones written either as

¹² Nicolas Berdyaev, *La connaissance de soi: Essai d'autobiographie*. Cf. Roberto J. De la Noval, „Theological Introduction,” p. 27.

¹³ Cf. John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ: The Spiritual Journals of St John of Kronstadt*, translated by E. E. Goulaeff, revised by Nicholas Kotar, Holy Trinity Publications, Jordanville, NY, 2015.

¹⁴ Silouan the Athonite, *Wisdom from Mount Athos: The Writings of Staretz Silouan, 1866–1938*, compiled by Archimandrite Sophrony; translated by Rosemary Edmonds, Mowbrays, London, UK, 1974.

prayers,¹⁵ doxologies,¹⁶ or notes with catechetical meaning. Fr. Sergius therefore uses his diary not only as a mirror of his soul, but also as a tool for education, due to its purpose and of the fact that the notes there were intended to be published. It is the case of the following one:

Here is the crux of the matter: God is omnipotent; Providence guides history to its end; thus our free actions – and they truly are free – are either allowed or not allowed onto the paths of history to the extent that they serve the manifestation of this divine wisdom, for God possesses history’s outcome already in the eternity that is Divine Sophia (p. 47).

Every moment of tiredness, concern, depression or darkness is followed by one of spiritual awakening and by the visit of the Holy Grace. Fr. Sergius insists on this aspect and invites his readers to focus more on the presence of God in their life than on the different unoptimistic states of soul. Thus, in a note written in Prague in 1924, he discloses:

After unrest and turmoil of heart cease, the Lord grants His light and peace and joy... Nothing has changed, only that the Lord touched my heart, and it rejoiced anew... O, human heart, seat of the image of God in man! What is more beautiful and sweeter than you, what is more joyful than love? For God is Love, and the one who loves abides in God (1 John 4:16). O, joy! O, joy of joys! The song of love resounds in the loving heart, and it melts away in bliss (p. 54).

Prayer

Like in all other spiritual autobiographies from the Christian tradition, prayer has an important role in one’s life. Fr. Bulgakov also speaks about prayer and connects it to love, God’s goodness or how to use it to fight temptation and the devil. In another note written in Prague, he underlines the fact that: „The lord has given us a spiritual

¹⁵ “My Christ, grant me one thing: to love You, to dissolve in this love. My light, my Most Sweet Jesus! My joy, my delight! Do not abandon this cold, death hearth, You who raise from the death” (p. 53).

¹⁶ “Lovely is Your world, Lord and everything is lovely within it. And – strange for me to say it – lovely too is my own bodily nature, lovely because You created it” (p. 27).

sword – prayer; yet how difficult is it for us to wield it when our hearts grow lazy and cold” (p. 54). For him, like for other authors of the genre,¹⁷ prayer is a form of manifestation of love, both for God and for the neighbour. He writes:

Love and prayer, prayer and love: only these two are the wings of the Christian life. When you stand at prayer and your heart grows enflamed from love for your sweet and dear fellow-travellers in life, then this flame spreads through the whole world and the soul is plunged into the ocean of love, into the bliss of love and it burns with so blissful a fire that the soul grows faint from this bliss. O, sweetness of sweetness, O, joy of joys, my most sweet Jesus! Enflame me with your fire, enkindle my soul, burn it in You (p. 62).

As Sister Johanna Reitlinger underlines, for the Russian theologian prayer was also related to humility.¹⁸ He saw humility as a form of dialogue with God, that helped the faithful to not fall into self-confidence and therefore in pride,¹⁹ but to develop a form of askesis based on love.²⁰

¹⁷ See, for example: Teresa of Calcutta, *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta*, Doubleday, New York, 2007.

¹⁸ „Fr. Sergius never imitated outward forms of humility. His humility was woven into the fabric of his life and was well-earned. The humility of his final years, this was primarily the humility of man before God, of time before eternity. It is linked with dying. So little really matters anymore when you have one foot in the grave. But before that – what a path of humility she walked! How difficult for those whom the Lord has thus singled out to bend the knee” (p. 172).

¹⁹ „Fr. Sergius did not like self-confidence, it was foreign to him. Often, when something in life was perplexing him, he would say half-jokingly, half-seriously, that self-confident people were some ‘other species’ ” (p. 172).

²⁰ „The ascetic struggle of Fr. Sergius was a struggle of love, a struggle of life, and not the artificial self-imposition of fetters. How Fr. Sergius lived everything in life to its limit, how he suffered again and again! He never turned away, never withdraw from painful situations in life (for the Christian this is and should be an ascetic struggle, and not Yoga-like exercises for the attainment of some occultist abilities), he thought, he searched, he agonized...” (p. 173).

Priesthood and penitence

If one would ask for two keywords of Fr. Bulgakov's diary that would start with the letter „p”, these would surely be priesthood and penitence. Related to prayer, they are also connected to humility that the writer often asked from God.²¹ Like Saint John of Kronstadt, he centered his ministry on the Eucharist²² and on the work of Grace in his soul.²³ Therefore, he will describe his vocation as follows:

How lofty and blessed is the priestly ministry. The Lord grants it to the priest to stand at the gates of eternity then they open to receive a departing soul, and the priest himself sees into these open gates, and this sight is like an indictment, and yet at the same time like a call that refreshes the soul by entering into it. This vision should introduce into the soul an unceasing remembrance of death as well as a consciousness of the proximity of these two worlds (p. 56).

The end of life and its imminence represent, in his opinion, a reason for penitence. The fact that the end could come in the next moment and man has no information about it must be seen as an attempt to motivate the Christian to be always ready for the encounter with God.²⁴ The same call to priests to become organs of the love of

²¹ “O God, grant me to humble myself. How often it happens that if something occurs not according to my will, my spirit is troubled and I am full of fury and impatience. Yet what I fail to see is that God is sending me a lesson in humility. Humble yourself, and you will conquer temptation, you will once again stand firm and lucid, free in your soul, but until that point, while you continue to revolt, you are a slave” (p. 158).

²² “For Saint John, the priestly ministry is twofold. It is a sacramental one, centred on the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy, a means of sanctification of man, litany, word, means of proclaiming the Word. It is also pastoral, based on the education of the heart (especially that of children), the spiritual guidance of those who are in search of God, and the guidance of their souls on the path of following the commandments of Christ. The priesthood is a way of manifesting patient and boundless love, for the ‘work of grace and liberation from all wickedness’ and for ‘transforming the bed of pain of the suffering into a bed of goodness’ ” (See Maxim Egger, “Lumières et ombres d’un saint au milieu du monde,” in Alla Selawry, *Jean de Kronstadt – Médiateur entre Dieu et les hommes*, traduction de l’allemand par Martine Redhon et Maxime Egger, Les Éditions du Cerf, Le Sel de la Terre, Paris, Pully, 2001, p. 9).

²³ Petru Botsi, *Sfântul Ioan de Kronstadt. Portret duhovnicesc [Saint John of Kronstadt. Spiritual portrait]*, translated into Romanian by Evloghie Munteanu, Bunavestire, Galați, 2003, p. 95.

²⁴ “The end is near: you see its face at times, but you don’t bring it into your life as a constant check, as a constant *correction* to your everyday life; you have no remembrance of the hour of death. But it approaches unexpectedly and in a totally *simple* fashion, just like every simple moment of life. In whatever work the Lord

God and voices that change the life of people which also can be found in John of Kronstadt's spiritual autobiography²⁵ is often encountered in the notes of Bulgakov. His notes also offer examples of prayer, doxology, or penitence. This is how he implores God for forgiveness of people's sins:

Lord, my Lord! How long will the anger of your fury against Your land last? (Ps. 80:4). Spare the land, have mercy, save it thorough Your angels from the cruel demons tormenting it, have mercy on these souls who are defiled from birth, deprived of holy baptism, corrupted in thought and feeling (p. 65).

Sin: From the Bible to political theology

Father Bulgakov places special emphasis on the multiple aspects of sin. The Russian theologian in exile sees the instauration of communism in his native country as a consequence of the sins of people and draws attention on the atheism imposed by communists and its related dangers (p. 65). He speaks about the judgement of God that will arrive, but also on the need to put all faith in Christ.²⁶ In a note close to ideas later expressed by authors like Fr. Nicolae Steinhardt,²⁷ he tries an exegesis of the passages dedicated to the fact that the meek will inherit the heaven. He therefore emphasizes that the release from desire of violence or vengeance indicates that one

catches you, in that will He judge you; and in just what will the lord catch you, pitiful soul of mine?" (p. 84).

²⁵ "Servants of God, priests! Learn to transform, through the comforting power of faith, the abode of pain, from which the Christian suffers, into an abode of joy; learn to make someone who considers himself the most unhappy of men, the happiest man on earth, convince him that 'being punished a little, he will receive a great reward' (Wisdom of Solomon 3, 5). Then you will be friends of men, comforting angels, organs of the Comforting Spirit" (See John of Kronstadt, *op. cit.*, p. 9).

²⁶ "When you see your life in its crises and turning points, then you behold the hand of God guiding you. The future is closed to us, but it is full, full of opportunities unknown to us yet known to God. And this is the marvellous book of God's miracles, the book of our life, that we read in the course of our life and that we, with astonishment, perceive when before us a new page is revealed" (p. 80).

²⁷ Nicolae Steinhardt, *Jurnalul fericirii [Journal of joy]*, second edition, Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1992, p. 53.

achieved the freedom of soul.²⁸ At the same time he insists on the fact that the judgement of one's brother should not be done before having a deep and complex evaluation of one's own spiritual state.²⁹ In a note dedicated to the new year that had just started, Fr. Bulgakov speaks about the way the time that passed is also related to his sins and thus constitutes a new reason for repentance:

Another year has passed, another page in the book of my life, burdened with new sins and temptations, has been turned; it belongs now to eternity and will appear before me, wretch that I am, at the Dread Judgement of Christ. O, Lord, my Lord, how long have I angered You, tested Your longsuffering? I see my infirmity, my sin, I languish in it and remain in it. But I praise Your miracles, O Lord, which You revealed to me in this world. All of life is a miracle, Your gifts are miracles: my loved ones my family, my friends, all my joys. It is a miracle to labour for You, for Your work on earth with which You have honoured me, unworthy as I am (p. 111).

An interesting diagnosis of sin and the sinner is offered in another entry of his diary. Here he defines the sinner as the only person who can be seen and understood as being lonely. The author underlines the following aspects:

There is no loneliness except in the sin. The sinner is alone, he has been abandoned by, and has himself abandoned, the Lord whom he offended, together with His Most pure Mother, the holy angels and the Holy God-pleasers, as well as his loved ones and neighbours. Before all, before everyone has he committed his sin, before everyone he is a wretched criminal. He carries in himself the secret of his sin and its resultant death. Sin is the despair and the death of the soul and its resultant death. Sin is the despair and the death of the soul, the second death (p. 138)."

²⁸ "If you are tempted to violence, if you have been treated unjustly, if within your anger and resentment arise and conquer you, then you are the one who is captive to your abuses, and your spirit is unfree. But only try to be meek and lowly heart (Matt. 11: 29), and you will become free, bright and calm, your mind will calmly show you the way and you will come out the victor of a difficult situation. The main thing is – guard yourself, guard your soul" (p. 85).

²⁹ "How often it happens that, seeing the error or weakness of your brother, you count yourself better than him, you condemn him, while you mourn in your heart his lack of wisdom. Meanwhile, if you do in fact see truly, then you must lay this onto your own conscience as well" (pp. 92-93).

Conclusion

As can be seen, Fr. Sergius Bulgakov's diary represents not only a valuable work in the field of theological scholarship, but also an important source of meditation on topics such as prayer, penitence, sin, and humility and other relevant aspects of living a spiritual life. Despite his approach on topics like „Sophia” he proves to be an important voice of Russian Eastern theology from exile and of the scholarship of the 20th century. Works like his diary emphasize the genesis of some of his ideas, invite to introspection and present the real face of a complex theological personality who was also recognized as an important spiritual father. His diary is worthy to be discovered, read, and compared with works of authors like John of Kronstadt, Nicolae Steinhardt, Silouane the Athonite, from the same theological background, but at the same time from different contexts and spaces.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Botsi, Petru, *Sfântul Ioan de Kronstadt. Portret duhovnicesc [Saint John of Kronstadt. Spiritual portrait]*, translated into Romanian by Evloghie Munteanu, Bunavestire, Galați, 2003.
- Egger, Maxim, “Lumières et ombres d’un saint au milieu du monde,” in Alla Selawry, *Jean de Cronstadt – Médiateur entre Dieu et les hommes*, traduction de l'allemand par Martine Redhon et Maxime Egger, Les Éditions du Cerf, Le Sel de la Terre, Paris, Pully, 2001.
- Steinhardt, Nicolae. *Jurnalul fericirii [Journal of joy]*, second edition, ed. Virgil Ciomoș, Dacia Press, Cluj-Napoca, 1992.

Life and Mind

Perspectives on the Human Condition

Editors:

Theodor Damian, Richard Grallo, Bert F. Breiner



THEOTOKOS PRESS

LINO BIANCO

“National Unity Through Humanity”: Speech commemorating Victory Day in Malta, 2025

Abstract. 8 September is Victory Day in Malta. This commemoration is marked by a speech delivered by an individual selected by the Prime Minister of Malta. This article reproduces the speech delivered on 5 September of this year by the author. Inspired by the concept underlying the design for the memorial in remembrance for what this day stands, this speech puts forward arguments for national unity through determination, faith, civilization and diversity. It recalls Malta’s neutral and non-aligned status, and it calls out greed. Whilst arguing for diversity rather than homogeneity, it argues against advocating for the eradication of national identity. It concludes by stating that the symbiotic relation between courage, faith and civilization – born from the heart, soul and the mind, respectively – ensures national unity.

Keywords: Malta, national unity, humanity, Great Siege of Malta, courage, faith, civilization.

Victory Day in Malta is celebrated annually on 8 September. Since 1927, it has been marked by a speech. This article reproduces the one delivered by the author on 5 September 2025 which had as a theme “National Unity through Humanity.”*

* Lino Bianco, “L-Ghaqda Nazzjonali Permezz tal-Umanità,” in *Jum il-Vitorja: Lejla ta’ tiffkira 2025*, Festivals Malta, Malta, 2025. This speech was first published with footnotes and bibliographical references as Lino Bianco, “ ‘National Unity Through Humanity’: Speech commemorating Victory Day in Malta, 2025,” in *Terra Sebus. Acta Musei Sabesiensis*, 2025, 17, pp. 361-368. The original speech did not include them.

Lino Bianco, PhD, is Full Professor, resident academic at the University of Malta and the non-resident Ambassador of Malta to Bosnia and Herzegovina. He is the Ambassador Emeritus of Malta to Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova.
--

Honorable Prime Minister, distinguished guests, Maltese and foreign brothers and sisters.

Tonight, we gather at the memorial of the Great Siege of 1565 in remembrance of the victory through the valor of our forefathers in their struggle against the Ottoman Empire. The siege was a statement of resilience: the people of Malta – men, women and children – together bore the hardship with courage as they faced danger, blood and death. Today’s commemoration was revived soon after the 1927 elections for the Legislative Assembly. The first ever commemoration speech was delivered that year by the national poet Dun Karm Psaila.¹ His speech included the victory of the Maltese over the French in 1800. Later, the victory over Fascism and Nazism in the Second World War was included. 8 September was initially suggested as the day to mark the end of colonial rule in Malta, but the date for Independence Day was eventually set for 21 September.

In 1926, the Maltese artist Antonio Sciortino was commissioned to design this impressive memorial.² In metaphorical, neoclassical grammar marked by axuality and symmetry, this work of art includes masonry blocks with three allegorical standing figures in bronze – a central figure with two others, one on each side. The central figure represents courage whilst the figures on the right and left symbolize Catholic faith and civilization, respectively; the Great

¹ Oliver Friggieri, *It-Tifkira ta' L-Assedji: Tahdita*, Valletta, 1987, p. 3; Raymond Mangion, “Seddaq il-Ghaqda fil-Maltin, u s-Sliem,” in *Jum il-Vitorja: Lejla ta' Tifkira 2018*, Festivals Malta, Malta, 2018, p. 4.

² For a description of the memorial, see Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, *National Inventory of the Cultural Property of the Maltese Islands: Great Siege Monument*, N[ational] I[nventory of the] C[ultural] P[roperty of the] M[altese] I[slands] inv. no. 01144, 28 December 2012, https://web.archive.org/web/20200107132832/https://culture.gov.mt/en/culturalheritage/NICPMI_Database/01144.pdf, accessed 11/11/2025.

For a description of the plaster model see Gerald Bugeja, “Antonio Sciortino – The Lost Album,” in George Cassar (ed), *The Lost Album – Antonio Sciortino*, Kite, Malta, 2015, pp. 107–238: 199–200. As potential sources of inspiration, Bugeja cites Elisabeth Havasi, *Antonio Sciortino (1879–1947): A Monograph*, MA dissertation, Leopold-Franzens University of Innsbruck, Innsbruck, 1999, and Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, Sarah Moulden, *Antonio Sciortino and the British Academy of Arts in Rome*, Horizons Publications, Malta, 2012.

Siege was always read as the victory of the Cross over the Crescent, of the Latin civilization over the uncivilized. The memorial is positioned in the square between St John's Cathedral and the Law Courts, the palace of faith and the palace of justice, respectively. Wrapped in the flag of Malta, it was unveiled four months prior to 8 September 1927 by the British Lieutenant-Governor. During the inauguration, two speeches were delivered: one in Italian by Chief Justice Arturo Mercieca and another in Maltese by the friar Professor Anastasio Cuschieri.³ Cuschieri had a special fervor for the language of the Maltese populace, a semitic language written in Latin alphabet. Indeed, it is the only official Semitic language within the Afroasiatic family of the European Union. The 15th-century *Il-Kantilena* by Pietru Caxaro,⁴ the oldest known literary text in our language, was included earlier this year in the international register of UNESCO's Memory of the World.⁵ Our language emerges from the geophysical location of our islands. Today, nearly a century from this inauguration, we are gathered here, seated at the foot of this memorial, as if at a place of worship, facing the representation of the holy ground of salvation! What is the significance of this commemoration to contemporary Malta? What is its relevance to today's Malta?

Unity through determination

8 September was first celebrated as the national day in 1923, long before Malta's Independence, decades away from being a sovereign state, when we were not yet masters of our homeland in the true sense of the term. We had our national day where we celebrated pivotal historical events and asserted our distinct culture and identity in world civilization. 8 September was established unanimously as the National Day of Malta during the first Legislative Assembly out of a sense of national unity and pride in who we are;⁶ the spirit of unity as

³ Anon, "Il-Monument ta' l-1565," in *Il-Habib*, 15 May 1927, p. 1.

⁴ National Archives of Malta NAM, Notary Brandano Caxaro, *Notarial Registers Archives*, NAM-NRA-R175-REG-01.

⁵ UNESCO, "Petrus de Caxaro's *Kantilena*," in *UNESCO Memory of the World International Register*, 2025.

⁶ Legislative Assembly, *Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly of Malta: First Session – First Legislature: 12–13 George V, 1921–22*, Valletta, vol. 2,

a nation had long been there. At the time, our homeland was still under colonial rule. It is the day which united our past generations as a nation. This legacy was entrusted to us, and we are duty bound to safeguard, cherish and maintain it for present and future generations. Victory Day unifies us as a nation; it is the feast which recalls that when we stood united, we succeeded. When facing issues of freedom and identity, it was unity, courage and determination that allowed our ancestors to secure their victories despite overpowering circumstances. Another instance which manifested such national unity was in 1957, when the Legislative Assembly approved unanimously the Break with Britain Resolution. The main political leaders of the time were Malta's leading statesmen, Dom Mintoff and George Borg Olivier. On Dom Mintoff's resignation from the premiership, George Borg Olivier refused to form a minority government. Irrespective of their differences of opinion on how to attain independence and freedom, both leaders were loyal to their oath to serve the Maltese people and held the nation at heart. Both Borg Olivier and Mintoff loved and worked for the cause of Malta as a sovereign, democratic state, to serve as a beacon of peace, not war. Although they came from opposite sides of the political divide and had different opinions, they tackled the message, not the messenger. Their mutual respect on a personal basis helped unite our people.

Another manifestation of courage and determination was when the Parliament of Malta agreed and accepted to include the principal of military neutrality and non-alignment in our Constitution.⁷ For centuries we faced misery as we were made to serve and fight wars of others. We are not a nation of warriors; our traits are hospitality and a love of peace. The Acts of the Apostles recall how locals welcomed St Paul and those on board – the vulnerable – after their shipwreck with “unusual kindness” and provided them with food and shelter.⁸ With the constitutional amendment, our national status and vocation were included in the highest law of the state. Our Constitution maintains that “Malta is a neutral state actively pursuing peace, security and social progress among all nations by adhering to

1924, pp. 2137–2153: 2221–2246. See also Mario Spiteri, *The Maltese National Day, Standard and Flag in Maltese Legislation: 1849 to 1964*, LL.D. thesis, University of Malta, Msida, 2006, pp. 64–72.

⁷ *Constitution*, Department of Information, *Constitution of Malta*, Malta, 1992.

⁸ Acts 28, 2. Cited in Henry Wansbrough (ed.), *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1985, p. 1844.

a policy of non-alignment and refusing to participate in any military alliance.”⁹ At the time, attaining and maintaining neutrality was no mean feat of diplomacy. Malta’s position was respected by the superpowers at the time. A powerful endorsement of Malta’s foreign policy was the Malta Summit in 1989, where the United States and the Soviet Union declared an end to the Cold War.¹⁰ Their selection of our islands recalls our long reputation as a place of shelter at the cross-roads of the Mediterranean Sea. Military neutrality and non-alignment are not a trump card in foreign policy. These principles are in the hearts of our people; they reinforce Malta’s call to pursue and maintain a peaceful rapport with all nations.

Unity through faith

The concentration of built heritage dating to antiquity indicates that our islands were a sanctuary embracing places of worship. They were a haven, a place of refuge and protection, proffering complete trust to a supreme higher power for direction, assistance, and eventual, deliverance. Faith is belief with strong conviction. Our Constitution states that our faith is Roman Catholic.¹¹ Christianity, Islam and Judaism are the main faiths along the Mediterranean Basin, and indeed of Europe and Western Asia. They are Abrahamic monotheistic religions; their spiritual traditions share similar values, teachings and morality; these values will ensure that all peoples live in harmony. All these faiths disapprove of greed; they call for ethical conduct and compassion in the generation of wealth.

Greed is egoistic. It is uncompassionate and not altruistic. Greed renders the comfortably-off vulnerable and the vulnerable desperate. Greed undermines unity in our nation, the oneness which fluctuates around the middle ground rather than from one extreme to the other – the greedy rich and the vulnerable poor. Recalling the message of the Prime Minister Gerald Strickland for the occasion of Victory Day commemorated in 1927, we have a single goal: “the

⁹ *Constitution* 1992, article 1(3).

¹⁰ Richard Nelsson, “Malta Summit Ends the Cold War – Archive, 1989,” in *The Guardian*, 27 November 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/27/malta-summit-ends-the-cold-war-archive-1989>, accessed 11/11/2025.

¹¹ *Constitution* 1992, article 2(1).

wellbeing, the prosperity and happiness of the nation.”¹² The sun rises for all. Greed generates quick finance for the few but destroys the economy in the long term. Let’s not confuse accounts with economics; the latter is not an arithmetical science but a social one. When one looks at the tip of one’s nose, one’s vision is cross-eyed.

Unity through civilization

Civilization thrives where wisdom, justice and law rule. The rule of law does not imply the right to rule. Malta is a democratic republic. Democracy is the will of the majority over the minority. Through rigorous scrutiny, the nation benefits as decisions are taken which consider varying perspectives and opinions. Loyalty to the good of the nation and respect towards one another ensures humane, compassionate understanding which helps improve the workings of government. In his speech at the inauguration of this memorial, Cuschieri stated that where there is homeland, there is no partisan politics but love.¹³ Throughout their term in office, all Members of Parliament should reach out to others, whether endorsing their belief or otherwise, whether from their district or otherwise. Our islands are one district; we are all one family. Disagreement is healthy, but agreeing to reach out to others is healthier, commendable and secures unity in time of need. One reaps what one sows. Let’s move away from one’s ego to empathy, from cruel political discourse to one grounded in love and mutual respect. Destructive political division hinders progress; dehumanizing the opponent undermines oneself and renders an unreal representation of self; there is good in each one of us. The good unites us.

Unity in diversity

Nobody leaves one’s homeland to find refuge in another if not for hope for a better way of life. During the British colonial government, Maltese people were encouraged and supported to

¹² Gerald Strickland, “The 8th of September: An Appeal to the People,” in *The Malta Government Gazette*, 6 September 1927, pp. 749-750: 750. His message was dated 5 September 1927.

¹³ Anon, 1927, p. 1.

emigrate.¹⁴ Notably after the Second World War, a significant number of young people legally emigrated to English-speaking countries, such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.¹⁵ They emigrated where there was demand for workers, thus securing money to ensure their families were fed and could live better. These lands provided opportunities for our earlier generations. In today's Malta, unemployment is something of the past. On the contrary, there is a shortage of employees for labor-intensive work. Foreign workers are needed to support our economy. Some seek Malta as a place of refuge and protection – to use the Tunisian quasi-idiom, “Malta ħanina, hobża u sardina” (roughly translating as “Malta is kind, a bread loaf and a sardine”).¹⁶ Migrants with work permits run our waste disposal system; they are essential to our construction, healthcare and other sectors. Migrants from different countries set up associations in Malta whose cultural events and community initiatives flavour and enrich our, already rich, calendar. Differences, not homogeneity, enrich unity. Why not respect and accept them as Maltese diaspora is respected and accepted in the respective countries where they are present? Foreign workers are vulnerable to exploitation. Like us, they are humans and like us, they have dignity. They were brought over to help our economy as workers not slaves; they deserve respect and not exploitation of their toil. Their security and workplace rights should not differ from those of locals. Beyond nationality there is humanity.

Weeks ago, the Chamber of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises acknowledged that worker shortages are still an issue, but the skills of the imported workforce are improving.¹⁷ Proper vetting of who is allowed into the country would greatly benefit our society – we cannot afford to let everyone in, considering our small size, the

¹⁴ Lawrence Attard, “Emigration,” in Henry Frendo, Oliver Friggieri (eds), *Malta: Culture and Identity*, Ministry of Youth and the Arts, Malta, 1994, pp. 253-270.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ With respect to this proverb, see Joseph Aquilina, *A Comparative Dictionary of Maltese Proverbs*, Royal University of Malta, Malta, 1972, p. 488. See also discussion in Kurstin Gatt, “Perceptions of Malta in Arabic Proverbs and Idioms,” in Anthony J. Frendo, Kurstin Gatt (eds), *Arabic in Context: Essays on Language, Dialects, and Culture in Honour of Martin R. Zammit*, University of Cambridge & Open Book Publishers, Cambridge, 2025, pp. 315-338.

¹⁷ Neville Borg, “Worker Shortage Remains Top Challenge for Business, but Skills Are Improving,” in *Times of Malta*, 28 July 2025, p. 6.

most densely populated state in the European Union. Educated foreigners are cultured if they manage to recognize the local customs of the country they visit or live in. If the host country is respected and its rules are followed, it reduces cultural clashes, such as those we see in Malta nowadays.

Cultural diversity enriches our nation, yet we must not put aside our culture and beliefs to be “politically correct” or “in favor of diversity.” As a nation, we should stand by our psyche and not advocate for the slow but steady eradication of our identity.

The remembrance of 8 September is an acknowledgement of our identity; it is a statement of our unique individuality. This commemoration is a renewal of our vow to our homeland and the values for which it stands. There is more which unites rather than divides us. Let us focus on the former. This is the way to nurture a stronger nation and encourage constructive change. Putting aside vested interests in favor of shared values and the common good helps us as a nation to work together to resolve disputes; the national interest prevails. Everyone won when past generations pulled the rope in the same direction. Let us cultivate the bravery and the endurance to work towards consensus on national issues, in both local and overseas forums. Our islands will continue to stand high as an esteemed nation with its own unique spirit and renewed humanity amongst all other nations.

Courage is born from the heart, faith from the soul, and civilization from the mind. The symbiotic relationship between them ensures our unity as a nation. There is no need to justify one’s existence; the We is greater than the sum of the I’s. “Seddaq il-għaqda fil-Maltin u s-sliem,” which translates as “Confirm us all, in unity and peace.”¹⁸ May unity and peace prevail among the Maltese people.

¹⁸ Department of Information, *L-Innu Malti*, Malta, 7 July 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120707021427/http://www.doi.gov.mt/EN/state/anthem.asp>, accessed 11/11/2025.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Anon, "Il-Monument ta' l-1565," in *Il-Habib*, 15 May 1927, p. 1.
- Aquilina, Joseph, *A Comparative Dictionary of Maltese Proverbs*, Royal University of Malta, Malta, 1972.
- Attard, Lawrence, "Emigration," in Henry Frendo, Oliver Friggieri (eds), *Malta: Culture and Identity*, Ministry of Youth and the Arts, Malta, 1994, pp. 253-270.
- Bianco, Lino, "L-Għaqda Nazzjonali Permezz tal-Umanità," in *Jum il-Vitorja: Lejla ta' tifikira 2025*, Festivals Malta, Malta, 2025.
- Bianco, Lino, "'National Unity Through Humanity': Speech commemorating Victory Day in Malta, 2025," in *Terra Sebus. Acta Musei Sabesiensis*, 2025, 17, pp. 361-368.
- Borg, Neville, "Worker Shortage Remains Top Challenge for Business, but Skills Are Improving," in *Times of Malta*, 28 July 2025, p. 6.
- Bugeja, Gerald, "Antonio Sciortino – *The Lost Album*," in George Cassar (ed), *The Lost Album – Antonio Sciortino*, Kite, Malta, 2015, pp. 107-238.
- Constitution, Department of Information, *Constitution of Malta*, Malta, 1992.
- Department of Information, *L-Innu Malti*, Malta, 7 July 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120707021427/http://www.doi.gov.mt/EN/state/anthem.asp>, accessed 11/11/2025.
- Friggieri, Oliver, *It-Tifikira ta' L-Assedji: Tahdita*, Valletta, 1987.
- Gatt, Kurstin, "Perceptions of Malta in Arabic Proverbs and Idioms," in Anthony J. Frendo, Kurstin Gatt (eds), *Arabic in Context: Essays on Language, Dialects, and Culture in Honour of Martin R. Zammit*, University of Cambridge & Open Book Publishers, Cambridge, 2025, pp. 315-338.
- Havasi, Elisabeth, *Antonio Sciortino (1879–1947): A Monograph*, MA dissertation, Leopold-Franzens University of Innsbruck, Innsbruck, 1999.
- Legislative Assembly, *Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly of Malta: First Session – First Legislature: 12–13 George V, 1921-22*, Valletta, vol. 2, 1924.
- Mangion, Raymond, "Seddaq il-Għaqda fil-Maltin, u s-Sliem," in *Jum il-Vitorja: Lejla ta' Tifikira 2018*, Festivals Malta, Malta, 2018.
- National Archives of Malta, Notary Brandano Caxaro, *Notarial Registers Archives*, NAM-NRA-R175-REG-01.
- Nelsson, Richard, "Malta Summit Ends the Cold War – Archive, 1989," in *The Guardian*, 27 November 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/27/malta-summit-ends-the-cold-war-archive-1989>, accessed 11/11/2025.

- Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, *National Inventory of the Cultural Property of the Maltese Islands: Great Siege Monument*, N[ational] I[nventory of the] C[ultural] P[roperty of the] M[altese] I[slands] inv. no. 01144, 28 December 2012, https://web.archive.org/web/20200107132832/https://culture.gov.mt/en/culturalheritage/NICPMI_Database/01144.pdf, accessed 11/11/2025.
- Schembri Bonaci, Giuseppe, Moulden, Sarah, *Antonio Sciortino and the British Academy of Arts in Rome*, Horizons Publications, Malta, 2012.
- Spiteri, Mario, *The Maltese National Day, Standard and Flag in Maltese Legislation: 1849 to 1964*, LL.D. thesis, University of Malta, Msida, 2006.
- Strickland, Gerald, “The 8th of September: An Appeal to the People,” in *The Malta Government Gazette*, 6 September 1927, pp. 749-750.
- UNESCO, “Petrus de Caxaro’s Kantilena,” in *UNESCO Memory of the World International Register*, 2025.
- Wansbrough, Henry (ed.), *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1985.

Notes on Goethe's *Faust*

Awakening

The beginning is illegal, heretical, perilous – and eminently active. Not a trace of elegiac anguish. With the logical thoroughness of an academic and the self-indulgence of an anarchist, Faust surveys and passes judgment on the world he has known until now: the official academic world and its institutions, the society in which he has until now played a role. He even passes judgment on all his associates – none of whom can hold a candle to him – which we find believable when we later compare him with his colleague Wagner, who is not stupid, but a normal, intellectually gifted academic scholar. Here a man is burning all the bridges behind him and moving on to new frontiers. He will experience many things, but one thing is without doubt: he will never return to the narrow world of scholastic philosophy, dogmatic theology, speculative medicine and ossified jurisprudence. He is finished with the isolation of pure theory. But rejection is not freedom, and the three big attempts of this night end very differently than he wants. At dawn on Easter morning the man who had set out to seize all that the universe had to offer is left weeping with despair and uttering the words, “The earth has me again!”

The magnitude of the attempt is equivalent to the magnitude of the defeat. To get from “Am I a god?” to “I am like a worm” requires a great fall. The delights of the macrocosm soon show themselves to be delusory. The attempt to magically absorb and conquer infinite space and time is shattered from without. “You are like the spirit in your mind – not me!” Faust cannot comprehend the equivocation in this rejection – not here and now. Being forced to earn his freedom and existence is the final word of wisdom.¹

¹ The last word Wisdom ever has to say: / He only earns his Freedom and Existence, / Who's forced to win them freshly every day. (*Faust II*, V:vi. The Great Outer Court of the Palace).

Drawing himself back up from the collapse of knowing himself as the “most miserable of the sons of earth” and restoring his Faustian self awareness, he now counters the Earth Spirit’s rejection with “all or nothing.” Since “No dog can go on living like this,” the euphoric programmatic suicide is the unavoidable alternative: negative self-actualization. But then he is wrenched back from this explosion turned into implosion on Easter morning by a simple, almost banal stirring of emotion: childhood memories.

But the suicide is theoretically carried out. The “all or nothing” stays with him, and he will die many such deaths. In this hour he is predisposed for the course of his life: he who does not fear death will also accept the devil.

Alternative

Easter stroll -- Faust among the people – a happy resurrection? Even great sympathy toward his character cannot hide that he is distant and aloof from other people, and that their gratitude evokes only a despairing bad conscience in him. He can understand their joy in nature, given the burden and limitation of their lives, but he can’t relate to it. He remains a pained observer: where they dance, he dreams of flying, and already the protest and rebellion are there again. The failed magician will be easy prey for the poodle trailing flames.

The briefly opened door of the study closes again. The unappeased restlessness seeks the quiet of the evening in the cozy lamplight, but this is a strange self-deception: the catacombs of rebellion as reading room for a devotional hour. But already in the first sentence of the New Testament, it isn’t working. Faust, the dissatisfied, translates anew, “In the beginning was the Deed!” and immediately the poodle begins to whine. Mephisto, simultaneously disturbed and called, appears on the scene after staging a short, gimmicky introductory event – “Why all the fuss?” The action man, the practitioner, the man of the world offers his services, explaining, “Even the coarsest company will make you feel more human.” He has more of such banal proposals, and therein the solution to the riddle is hidden, though including the solution is unintended by him and not yet recognized by Faust. The solution is in the experience of living, and engaging in the sphere of human activity and individual fulfillment. But for the moment, there is no talk of this. Faust, who

has nothing left to lose anyway, is deftly manipulated to a low point by Mephisto, in which he renounces not only faith, hope and charity, but also reason and knowledge, and then dedicates himself to frenzy and “the rush of incidents.” Instead of identification with the universe, identification with humanity – but the step into the real is oriented in a pessimistic direction: “And with it, one day meet my end.”

Mephisto’s error in the wager is after all very understandable. He is convinced that the experience that he offers, and as he understands it, must inevitably corrupt Faust. That is wholly the attitude of the philistine (“What is man, but half angel and half devil”) who doesn’t believe in how the experience can humanize.

But Faust is playing his own trump card at this moment: “As soon as I stop striving, I’m a slave.” With these – historically sensational – terms of the wager, he keeps their duel under purely earthly and human conditions. This is where he gets his chance – but no certain victory: active striving to see, to discover, to engage in endless desire. The wager is to be taken literally and contextually: it’s not only a question of “the moment” and the “Stay with me,” but also a question of knowing the difference between the “the right way and the wrong” that is mentioned in the prologue in heaven. In the sense of this “double-entry bookkeeping,” Faust’s accounts are not settled until the end. The scales of judgment teeter between the two participants in the wager all the way to Philemon and Baucus (*Faust, Part II*). It’s not until the vision that we see a final decision, that the eternal striving has led upwards. At that point the argument about the moment becomes pointless.

When Faust exits, the student enters. Vague and yet energetic ambition encounters Mephisto’s cold analysis of the facts. This scene illustrates Faust’s account of his situation at the beginning. But where Faust rebelled, Mephisto shines with the escape he offers both the student and Faust: adapt to the dull misery of life, of which the highlight is poking around lingerie. Then he flies off with Faust on the magic cloak, and the “new course of life” begins in the academic neighborhood: Auerbach’s Cellar. Faust, unused to this kind of academic life, is initially inhibited, then aloof. He experiences only the vulgar flipside of the milieu he has abandoned. This is only a confirmation of the break he has made from his life, and no new beginning. For Mephisto this episode represents no grand operation, but a botched start.

Observations on Plot, Form and Rhythm

After Auerbach's Cellar comes the first break – for us the intermission. After that there is a new tone, a leap into another level.

Note on the course of the plot: Faust exits his study (in the broad sense) and enters the world. He engages in lively and sensual activity, which shows the measure of this man, and changes him.

Aesthetically, this is the move from accentuated subjectivity of the first phase into a gradual objectification of Faust in the world. This objectification grows continually until the vision (at the end of *Faust II*), in which he sees the potential of unifying subject and object, self and humanity, freedom & necessity.

Scenically this corresponds to the importance of the monolog. Everything is experienced with Faust, through Faust, everything is seen, shown and absorbed by him and for him. Empathy and identification are required. There's no true dialog with living, corporeal partners like Wagner. And the actual dialog partners (Earth Spirit, Mephisto) are more like counterpoints in a monolog than they are real partner. Mephisto, in his double role of both fantastic and highly terrestrial figure, leads the way into the second phase, from Faust's monolog world into his dialog world, and this world appears to him in Gretchen, as Gretchen, and through her.

It is worth noting how, after the diversity of voices that follow in *Faust, Part II*, (the scenes: Court of the Emperor, Classical Walpurgis Night, the Helen act and War), the monolog prevails again in the 5th act. Faust's journey of experience and perception manifests itself in the height of subjectivity (blindness and monolog) and yet becomes one with the deepest objectivity. ("Upon free soil with a free people" – but NOT in the placid calm of an end – "surrounded by danger" one must conquer freedom every day...).

The rhythm of the first part is rapid. The joke becomes serious: "begin with the end of the world, and then slowly build up from there..." Here there is not only external tempo on top of the events, but also painstakingly subdued fervor in the moments of rest, in the lyrical mood, and above all, there are harsh, fast, often contrapuntal montages of scenes, and they culminate in the clamoring contradiction between the static, tender idyll of Gretchen's world and the dynamic passion of her bursting into love.

This internal and external tempo, the montages of contradictions – these are not only technique, but appropriate form for

the revolutionary explosive power of the fable. This is a revolution taking place in Germany – on stage (and in philosophy).

The usual Mephisto

It's time to leave the theatrical black, white & green demon behind us. Mephisto as devil belongs in the costume of folk tale: horns, talons, cloven foot, tail, shaggy fur, gruesomely comical. As an earthly being he wears normal human clothing and a normal human face. What kind of devil would he be if he couldn't conjure up a human appearance that inspired confidence? And what a statement! – discovering the devil in that which is “normal”! He never quite sheds being the Prince of Darkness, he must deal with the annoyances of daily life and human custom, he is happy when he is allowed to behave as he generally would in his line of work (Witch's Kitchen, Walpurgis Night), and has the mysterious and yet also ludicrous contradiction between his human appearance and his devilish magic tricks. All of these things give this figure theatrical dimensions, the appeal and wit in the combination of earthly partner and medieval specter.

There is nothing demonic about Mephisto. He's too negative for that (said Goethe to Eckermann). At the same time Goethe declares both the “dismal, unsatisfied ambition of the protagonist” along with the “derision and harsh irony of Mephistopheles” to be parts of his own nature. Mephisto is clever, with esprit, wit, and sometimes even charm; he is sharp observer and keen analyst, and he is a realist when Faust is an idealistic rhetorician. Already in the prologue the Lord declares that people need a prickly negative partner. It's clear that Faust would be lost without Mephisto – he wouldn't take a step into real life and experience. That negation begins in a dull manner and becomes nasty, but it begins, and therein lies the possibility of creating. Mephisto's magic arts are on the level of county fair tricks, but also in anticipation of technical advances (flight, military techniques, building of canals, shipping). Evil motivation cannot diminish technical quality. It is clear that there is no human progress in which Mephistophelian characteristics have not played a role. Mephisto has something that is both attractive and necessary.

But what do these abilities add up to? Faust is always in danger from vague passion, furious desire for insight, unbridled desire for experience; he stands at the edge of chaos and is able to maintain his

ground only because of the creative essence of his human existence. He needs Mephisto, but without this essence, he would be lost through Mephisto.

For Mephisto experience, intelligence, and realism (materialism) conversely add up to negative essence: pessimism, egotism and opportunism are his life's maxims. He is a philistine. There is a polarity in his character: he's attractive and appealing, but his being also inspires repulsion and rejection, and the horror at repulsion and rejection is exactly the goal. The Mephisto philistine shimmers in many shades: he is an intellectual and a back-alley plebian; he's conservative and then progressive. In his *core* he is – in complete opposition to Faust – *static*. Faust criticizes, offers opposition, rebels – there is motion from the internal to the external, and the external to the internal. Mephisto analyzes, mocks, and both practices and preaches assimilation: this is only intake from the external to the internal. Mephisto accordingly bears all the rules and laws (and restraints) of the devil's world from which he has emerged, as a matter of course. He is the chief executive officer of hell, with the tangible technical and magical skills of his business, but lacking the ambition and the ability to change anything about himself or hell. A man like Faust – a man who both possesses and uses the ability to shed his own skin and to grow beyond himself – is highly irritating to Mephisto the philistine. These abilities alone allow the Faust who is initially helpless and dependent on Mephisto and his kind in all terrestrial things to be victorious in the end.

Mephisto as an earthly being has a capable brain, is a shrewd thinker, cynical practitioner, and platitudinous philosopher. This life-threatening combination needs only external attributes and a dramatic introduction (the prologue in heaven), and the devil on earth is ready.

Beginning and Ending in Heaven

The play begins in heaven (after the prelude in the theater), and this scene is on the open stage, with bare stagecraft, with familiar props, very modern and direct: we and our audience.

This is a theatrical heaven: the act of theater, the deed, is to show, and then to play without inhibition. We don't want clericalism, transcendentalism or coyly underplayed atheism here. In this case one must build on Faust's earthly story.

The basic situation is similar to the milieu of a feudal medieval court: welcoming of the hosts, report, paying homage. Then further, a view of the big picture. The archangel's extolment is genuine and dreadful at the same time – they don't pay close attention to earth. "And yet your servants, Lord, revere the gentle turning of your day." Mephisto arrives late, is out of place, takes a stand against this view: nihilism against *apologetics*! Out of the old struggle (Lucifer, Adam and Eve, Job) the wager emerges: the Lord, who finds his self-confident serenity challenged, makes use of Faust as a new example: one human represents the chance for humanity. Overlying the wager is a repressed irritation and uncertainty in the Lord: the conclusion is open, the human has all possibilities in himself; Creation was ended imperfectly: humankind has the ability to bring creation to its conclusion or destroy it. With the view from the prologue in heaven onto the distant earth, Faust's story receives a general theme: does life has meaning, does humanity have a chance at advancement, of knowledge, ruling over the world, or is life only an empty cycle of forced existence between birth and death in which one chases naked self-preservation, stale indulgence, futile deeds and animal pleasures?

The prologue in heaven turns Faust into the chief witness, and the function of the prologue is to put Faust's philosophic and historic story in a prominent position. Coming out of the prologue, the audience must become Faust, then become his witness, and finally become judge. The audience must produce a positive judgment from the vision – otherwise the heaven of the epilogue (at the end of *Faust II*) becomes a superfluous and empty apotheosis.

Here Faust's story leads again into the heights above time and space, out of the narrow historical reality into the unlimited reality of development. The heaven of the prologue drew humoristic elements out of the dramatic setting – it wasn't material, but still of the world. The heaven of the epilog is distant, almost crystalline, deeply earnest. The difference emphasizes that the cycle will not be closed with an enlightening answer to the wager of the beginning. Instead of that we get the resurrection of Faust as a theatrical image for the resolution of his ambition in the coming centuries. No conclusion of motion, but ever onward, upward without end: Faust, youthful, a gigantic individual, because he has become an example, goes through all spheres of heaven, through all times. The task remains to show this movement without end: it is the essence of history.

NOTE:

The author adapted and directed Goethe's *Faust I* for the Resident Ensemble Players (REP), Thompson Theatre, Roselle Center for the Arts, University of Delaware, Newark (opening March 8, 2014). The REP is Delaware's only resident professional acting company. Presenting some of the less frequently produced classics like *Faust* is part of their mission to give audience and company the opportunity to engage in the diverse riches of live theatre.

Scenic and Lighting Design: William Browning, Costumes: Andrea Barrier, Choreography: Joann Browning; Faust: Stephen Pelinski, Mephisto: Mic Matarrese, Gretchen: Sara J. Griffin.

BOOK REVIEW

**Paul H. B. Chang, *The spiritual person. An Intellectual Biography of Watchman Nee*,
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2026, 215 pp.**

Watchman Nee (1903–1972) was for sure one of the important voices of the Christian missionarism in the 20th century China. Teacher, Church leader and spiritual writer, he experienced a strong personal conversion during his youth and later developed a network of Churches known as a local Church movement, defined by elements like the autonomy of each local congregation, unity of believers and a simple life, based on the principles of the New Testament. Moreover, as a writer, he developed aspects related with the inner spiritual life, or the work of the Holy Spirit. The fact of being persecuted by the Communists (he spent 20 years in prison, where he died in 1972) transformed him not only in a martyr, but also in an exponent of the unwavering faith.

Therefore, the initiative of Paul H. B. Chang to dedicate him a monograph is not only an event with relevance for scholarship, but also a demarche with multiple valences. The author himself is interested in the newer forms of Christianity and focuses on the period from the 19th centuries and up to the present. His particular area of expertise is the Chinese Christianity, which has experienced both rapid growth and diversification. This is one of the main reasons that brings him close to Watchmann Nee, whose work, message, life and legacy tries to investigate there.

Segmented into six big chapters and accompanied by an introduction (pp. 1-18), the book deals with the conversion of the future missionary (pp. 19-38), underlining key elements like: resistance (pp. 27-28), politics and religion (pp. 29-33) and acceptance (pp. 33-38). Later on, in the second chapter (pp. 39-64), entitled: „Fuzhou: Church and Conflict”, questions like the Baptism, Denominations and Bread Breaking (pp. 39-43) are brought into debate, together with aspects like the mentor (Margaret Emma Barber, pp. 47-48), or the vision of the local Churches and the

particularities of his ecclesiology (pp. 52-56). The ideas are continued in the next one dedicated to the construction of a „spiritual person” (pp. 65-96), where aspects like *the spiritual person* (pp. 65-67), *the faith principle* (pp. 67-69), or other aspects that are presented in his works. Chang insists on the fact that:

The Spiritual Person is rigorously focused on the experience of the individual believer and has almost nothing to say about the church in any way. Nevertheless, the work should not be read in a vacuum. It is important to recall that during the writing of *The Spiritual Person*, Nee was simultaneously writing and publishing issues of *The Christian* that meticulously outlined his Brethren-inspired ecclesiology. Nee’s ideas and writings on the church always constituted a central pillar of his thought and work. In fact, Nee claimed that God prompted him to write *The Spiritual Person* by reminding him of his „first vision” of the local Churches. Thus, in Nee’s own thinking, *The Spiritual Person* was a guide to individual Christians with a view towards fostering healthy churches (p. 79).

The investigation continues with the fourth chapter dedicated to the Nanjing Decade (pp. 97-129), the fifth one entitled: „The Breaking of the Outer Person” (pp. 130-154), where he elaborates on aspects like excommunication and restauration (pp. 133-136), self-denial and brokenness (pp. 137-139), his rejection of asceticism (pp. 139-141), and the adjustments in church practice. The sixth chapter is dedicated to his persecutions (pp. 155-182), while the last one to his legacy (pp. 183-200). The author also decides to accompany his demarche with an appendix (pp. 201-206), containing letters and interviews with the translators of his work.¹

Rich in information, well written and bringing into attention an author that has not been enough investigated by the contemporary scholarship, Paul H. B. Chang’s monograph *The spiritual person. An*

¹ Thus, for example, one of them says that: „In terms of the main text itself, many of the editorial changes correct grammatical errors or make sentence fragments into full thoughts in a straightforward manner. It is true that the phrases: „Do not look for the truth from a lie” and „We should not look for truth among deceptions, because we can never find it” are not equivalent. The first phrase is a simple command, aphoristic and vague. The second offers a reason for the aphorism and suggests a more categorical rejection, namely that is impossible to find truth from lies. Still, even if the phrases are not equivalent, they are not opposed and the second may be understood as an earnest attempt to elucidate the former. These additions may also trace back to other source materials” (p. 203).

Intellectual Biography of Watchman Nee fills a gap in contemporary research. It is, together with other books and articles dedicated to the Chinese missionary², a valuable contribution that invites the reader to discover a complex world with its own accomplishments and persecutions, a space where, despite of the oppositions, Christianity managed to arrive.

² Like: Kinnear Angus I., *Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee*, Fort Washington PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1973; Lee Witness, *Watchman Nee: A Seer of the Divine Revelation in the Present Age*, Living Stream Ministry, Anaheim CA, 1991; Dana Roberts, *Understanding Watchman Nee*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids MI, 1980; Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2010; Huo Shui, *The Theology of Watchman Nee*, China Christian Council Press, Shanghai, 1995; Luke Wesley, *The Church in China: Persecuted, Purified, and Triumphant*, OM Publishing, Carlisle, 2004; Andrew T. Kaiser, *The Rushing on of the Purposes of God*, Pickwick Publications, Eugene, OR, 2016; Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, "Watchman Nee and the Local Church Movement in China," in *Studies in World Christianity*, 19 (2013), no. 1: pp. 50-69; Lian Xi, "The Rise of Chinese Indigenous Christianity," in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 72 (2013), no. 4, 2013, pp. 933-955; Kim-kwong Chan, "Christianity in China: From Watchman Nee to the House Churches," in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 36 (2012), no. 2, pp. 75-82; Richard Madsen, "Chinese Protestant Movements and the Legacy of Watchman Nee," in *China Review*, 10 (2010), nr. 2, pp. 1-20; Philip L. Wickeri, "The Spirituality of Watchman Nee," in *Chinese Theological Review*, no. 18 (2004), pp. 45-63; Alan Hunter, "Protestantism in Contemporary China," in *Religion*, 17 (1987), no. 1, 1987; David Aikman, "Watchman Nee and the Chinese Church," in *Christianity Today*, 45 (2001), no. 6, pp. 38-45; Lian Xi, "Watchman Nee and the Local Church," in *Christianity in China: A Scholars' Guide*, Brill, Leiden, 2017, pp. 233-250; Ryan Dunch, "Revivalism and Watchman Nee," in *Protestantism in Modern China*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2005, pp. 112-130; Joseph Lee, "The Legacy of Watchman Nee," in *Christianity and Modern China*, Routledge, London, 2014, pp. 89-104.

Symposium

Topics of the Symposia held every year in the first weekend in December, between 1993-2017.

Starting with the 2019 issue the journal *Symposium* is no longer a thematic publication.

Nation and Identity: Reconciling the Traditional Sense of Belonging with the Globalist Tendencies of Current Post-Culturalism

Symposium, Nr. XXV/1, 2018

Knowledge and Enchantment: A World without Mystery?

Symposium, Nr. XXIV/1, 2017

Cultural Transparency and the Loss of Privacy in the Era of Digital Technology:

How Is This Shaping Our Becoming and the Ethical Dilemmas Related to It

Symposium, Nr. XXIII/1, 2016

Remembering Peace:

Justice, and Forgiveness in a Time of War

Symposium, Nr. XXII/1, 2015

Vivat Academia!

How Post-Modern Rhetoric Shapes Our Understanding of Modern and Pre-Modern Values

Symposium, Nr. XXI/1, 2014

Time, Place and Self in Interdisciplinary Narratives

Symposium, Nr. XX/1, 2013

Alienation and Authenticity in Environments of the 21st Century: Technology, Person and Transcendence

Symposium, Nr. XIX/1, 2012

Meaning and Mystery: From the Philosophy of Knowledge to the Theology of Person

Symposium, Nr. XVIII/1, 2011

Religion and Politics: The Human Society between the Power of God and the Power of Man

Symposium, Nr. XVII/1, 2010

Cult and Culture: The Transcendental Roots of Human Civilization

Symposium, Nr. XVI/1, 2009

Theology and Literature: The Deification of Imagination and Its Cathartic Function in Spiritual Growth

Symposium, Nr. XV/1, 2008

The Glory of Knowledge: Construction and Deconstruction. When Human Quest Ends in Apophasis

Symposium, Nr. XIV/1, 2007

Unity in Diversity: Can We Live Together in an Apocalyptic World?

Symposium, Nr. XIII/1, 2006

Globalization from A (Archeology) to S (Spirituality): What Is It and Who Needs It?

Symposium, Nr. XII/1, 2005

Science and Theology: New Challenges and Perspectives

Symposium, Nr. XI/1, 2004

Contemporary Culture in the Light of Christian Spirituality at the Beginning of the Third Millennium. The Secular Realities and Spiritual Perspectives

Symposium, Nr. X/1, 2003

Prayer as Theology of the Mind and of the Heart for the Humanity in the New Millennium

Symposium, Nr. IX/1, 2002

Humanity in the Third Millennium and the Mystery of the Divine

Symposium, Nr. VIII/1, 2001

Jesus Christ as the Theandric Paradigm of Man's Restoration at the Dawn of the Third Millennium

Symposium, Nr. VII/1, 2000

The Theological Legacy of Fr. Dumitru Staniloae and its Ecumenical Actuality

Symposium, Nr. VI/1, 1999

Rediscovering God: The Relation between God and Man and its Significance for our Life Today

Symposium, Nr. V/1, 1998

Freedom and Responsibility in Contemporary Society

Symposium, Nr. IV/1, 1997

Divine Creation and Human Responsibility in the Context of Contemporary Ecological Preoccupations

Symposium, Nr. III/1, 1996

Quo Vadis Homo? Salvation and the Modern World

Symposium, Nr. II/1, 1995

Worship and Identity in our Contemporary Society

Symposium, Nr. I/1, 1994