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Poetry as Witness. Gregory of Nazianzus's Three Special Vocations: Theology, Mysticism, Poetry

THEODOR DAMIAN, PHD

Introduction

Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the giants of the early Christian Church, was a cornerstone of the growth of Christianity, as he was a very complex personality, very well educated, with an inquisitive mind and an inclination towards solitude and poetry. All dimensions of his life and all his skills, whether directly religious or not, were put in the service of the Christian Church, as he also “baptized” the lay culture and philosophy and made them serve the Church that he so much loved.

With his love for intellectual education, Gregory studied in Caesarea of Cappadocia, Caesarea of Palestine, Alexandria and Athens, famous places for learning, where, under brilliant teachers, both Christian and pagan, he acquired expertise in rhetoric, literature, philosophy and theology. These opportunities were God's gifts to him. And as he was aware of that, he knew what to do with what he had received: give them back to God in using them all for God's glory.

Gregory the Theologian

Gregory of Nazianzus is one of only three church personalities in the history of Christianity to be given the name “The Theologian”. Christ's disciple, John, who wrote one of the four gospels, was called “The Theologian”, then Gregory, and later, Simion, the New Theologian (Xth century).

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He was the most respected orator of his time, and also a well renowned theologian and philosopher. As John McGuckin wrote, “Gregory was, without question, the greatest stylist of the patristic age. He dominated Byzantium and its schools for centuries as the model of Christian rhetoric and philosophy”¹ and, one can add, of theology.

Gregory had written many discourses and sermons while serving in the Church of Nazianzus. Yet after his arrival in Constantinople he devoted all his energy to the defense of the Orthodox doctrine against heresy. It was in this capital city that he delivered the five famous theological discourses on the oneness and trinity of God that earned him the name “Theologos”, “The Theologian”. When he became patriarch, he put the same passion and intellectual capacity in the formulation of the Christian doctrine as he was president of the second Ecumenical Council in 381, which dealt with pneumatological issues.

Gregory was a leading and competent voice when it came to the formulation of the Orthodox Christian doctrine, in particular and with great emphasis in the field of the Trinitarian theology, then of Christology and Pneumatology. His main preoccupation in elaborating on the Christian doctrine was to fight the heresies of the time: Arianism and Apollinarianism (in the field of Christology and implicitly, that of the Trinity) and Macedonianism or Pneumatomachianism (in the field of Pneumatology, and again, implicitly, that of the Trinitarian theology).

His five famous theological orations or discourses explained the nature of the divine Trinity according to the Nicene doctrine, against the heretical teaching of Eunomius, a leading theologian in Constantinople.

“These are the quintessence of his theological work and the most important texts in Christian history for establishing the cardinal doctrine of the Trinity,” John McGuckin wrote.²

What Gregory did so well in prose discourse when it came to explaining the Nicene doctrine of the Church, he did just as well in his poetry.

As a general note, his entire poetry, including the autobiographical one, is full of theological references: yet the theology of the Church, the way he elaborated it against heresies, is put in verse form in his dogmatic poems. In this poetry he deals with both aspects of God’s life and activity: the immanent Trinity (*Deus ad intra*) and the economic Trinity (*Deus ad extra*).

Here is an example of how Gregory put some of the aspects of the Trinitarian doctrine in verses, in particular when it comes to the relation between the Father and the Son.

“There is one God, without beginning or cause, not limited by anything existing before, or afterwards to be, encompassing the eons, and infinite: the noble, great, only-begotten Son’s great Father: who had, in the Son, no suffering of anything fleshly, since he is mind. One other is God, not other in Godhead, God’s Word, who is his living paternal seal, the sole Son of Him who has no origin, and most Unique from the Unique, equal in might, so that, while the one remains the whole parent, the son, is world-maker, lawgiver, the Father’s strength and intellect” (*On the Father*).³

In the poem *On the Holy Spirit*, Gregory elaborates on the Spirit’s intra-Trinitarian and economic life: “Let us quake before the great Spirit, who is my God, who’s made me know God, who is God there above, and who forms God here: almighty, imparting manifold gifts, him whom the holy choir hymns, who brings life to those in heaven and on earth and is enthroned on high, coming from the Father, the divine force, self-commandeered; he is not a child (for there is one worthy Child of the One who’s best), nor is he outside the unseen Godhead, but of identical honor.”⁴

About the unity of the three hypostases in the divine Trinity Gregory writes in the same poem:

“I charge you so you understand this, by words of wisdom’s untold depths: that it refers to the unoriginate root, it doesn’t split the Godhead, so that you have got one sole power, not worshipped severally. From unity is the Trinity, and from Trinity again the unity: not as a source, a spring, a mighty river, sharing a single current, in three separate manners traverse the earth; nor as a torch, taken from a pyre, converges again in one; nor like a word, both going out from the mind and remaining in it; nor like some shimmering of dancing sunbeams off the waters, a restless gleaming, wavering on the walls approaching, then fleeing, fleeing, then drawing near. For God’s nature is not restless, nor flowing, nor again coalescing; but what is God’s is steadfast [...] In threefold lights the one nature is established, not a numberless unity, since it subsists in three excellences, nor a Threesome worshipped severally, since the nature is inseparable. In the Godhead is the unity, but they whose Godhead it is are three in number. Each is one God, if you should talk of them singly.”⁵

Gregory’s clear and systematic mind, his deep knowledge in culture in general and philosophy in particular, his oratorical skills, greatly contributed to the formulation of the Christian doctrine in a crucial century much troubled by politics and heresy. The reiteration of his theological elaboration from prose into poetry consolidated Gregory’s unparalleled authority in these matters of faith. He proved to have been the providential

man who lived in the right place and at the right time in the benefit of the Church.

Gregory the Mystic

According to Jean Bernardi, Gregory of Nazianzus actually had a double vocation: one, intellectual and academic, and another, a higher one, to which he sacrificed the first one, the philosophical vocation, which in Gregory's understanding was compatible and complementary with the mystical dimension of his personality which implied love of solitude, silence, contemplation, and prayer.⁶

However, there were times when Gregory himself was in a struggle, and dilemma, about his own vocation. He felt strongly attracted to philosophy, academia, and culture, in the lay sense of the term, but at the same time to the monastic life. In such moments he believed there was competition between the two types of life, the academic one being opposite to the contemplative one. In such cases he was reproaching himself for the successes he had in the academic field (rhetoric and poetry), with the sense of guilt that these preoccupations took him away from the monastic vocation⁷ even if, the success in one direction does not necessarily mean that there is incompatibility between that direction – academia – and the other – monasticism.

He lived constantly with the conscience of his belonging to God based on his mother's telling him, probably repeatedly, in his childhood, about how much she wanted to have a son and about her promise to consecrate him to God if she had one. Gregory speaks of his mother's promising him to God in several places, including in his poetry (*Sur sa vie*).⁸ In his autobiographical poem, the longest of all, he testifies straightforwardly: "From the beginning I belong to somebody else."⁹

That conscience of belonging to God is explained by Gregory circumstantially, as well. In other words, he tells the reader about the piety of his parents, and the powerful role models they were for him, the religious education he received in the family, including reading religious books and being surrounded with people who lead a holy life. All those circumstances contributed to his passion for following the good, the truth and the beautiful with fervor, for the cause of God.

While believing that he was not called for a sacerdotal life, Gregory was convinced that his vocation was for contemplation. He wanted to be a monk, not a priest. Solitude was the place where he felt comfortable.

Gregory's vocation for asceticism was of a particular kind; Gregory's kind. While he liked solitude, he didn't like the radical hardship that characterized the monastic life of other famous ascetics, such as many in the deserts of Sketes in Egypt or those of Palestine. Even his friend Basil was more radical than Gregory in the ascetic endeavors. As John McGuckin points out, "it would be easy to dismiss Gregory's objections [to Basil's ascetic lifestyle] as merely the refusal of an aristocrat to adopt poverty. It would also be easy to dismiss his incipient theories of monastic life (with mother and family near at hand, and safely under the shelter of an aristocratic establishment) as rather weak-kneed dilettantism."¹⁰ Gregory's nature was more moderate and his monastic vocation led him towards simplicity of lifestyle rather than towards performance of hardships.

"What Gregory saw as the whole purpose and justification of the solitary life was that it afforded time for the highest level of reflection, speculation, prayer and reading. It was this he wanted to do, not dig irrigation systems or cultivate turnips, or even direct recalcitrant congregations."¹¹

In his poem *Blessings of Various Lives*, Gregory is clear on the purpose of asceticism: it is to direct the whole heart to God and divinize the mind: "Blessed is he, whoever leads a solitary life, not at all mixing with worldly folk, but has divinized the mind. Blessed is he who, dwelling amidst many people, does not turn towards the many, but directs his whole heart to God."¹² In other words, one can live a solitary life even surrounded by people for as long as one knows how to concentrate wholly and specifically on such things as the exercise of heart and mind in a total dedication to God.

After 362 Gregory sought the relief of the "ascetically inclined estates" of his friend Basil, when he was too tired of the administrative duties in the Church of Nazianzus. Yet, when Basil tried to engage him in the daily work of the monastery, Gregory, with his constant penchant towards *theoria*, contemplation, and inner intellectual and spiritual growth in reflective solitude, as John McGuckin put it, left the place for a better one.¹³

As a final confirmation of his monastic vocation, Gregory, in 384, after several interventions on the civil and religious life of the city of Nazianzus, for the last years of his life, went into retirement to live a secluded life in Arianus more specifically in Karvali, west of Arianus.¹⁴

Gregory of Nazianzus was aware that the ascetic ideal is not for everyone, and even in the case of those who feel its vocation, it is lived differently. Yet, the point is to apply some ascetic exercises in order to

balance possible excesses in the daily life with the clear conscience that one lives under Christ's direction. This is what he calls "the high road", which basically changes your existential condition here. This is how he puts it: "There is not one common food that pleases all alike; neither is there but one way of life appropriate to Christians. For everyone, tears are best, and vigils and labors, to hold in check the raging of grievous passions, to conquer excess, to lie under Christ's strong hand, and to tremble at the prospect of the approaching day. And if you travel perfectly this high road, no longer are you mortal, but one of the heavenly host" (*Blessings of Various Lives*).¹⁵

Gregory the Poet

Gregory of Nazianzus was one of the most prolific poets of his time. As a theologian and ascetic he was not the only one who wrote poetry. Ephrem the Syrian, Paulin of Nola, Sinesius of Cyrene, and others wrote poetry.

When it comes to religion many in that time wrote the Christian doctrine in verses both heretics and Orthodox, in order to have the teachings memorized and spread around more easily. In fact, in Gregory's case, this was one of the reasons to write poetry in particular the poems with doctrinal content, in order to respond in the same manner to other Christological heresies, in particular the heresy of Apollinarianism, which, opposite to Arianism, held that the second person of the Trinity was directly united to the body of Jesus Christ. Consequently this body was not really human; it came from above and thus had a celestial and impassible nature, which also could not suffer in reality.¹⁶ This heresy was also spread in verse form by its author.¹⁷

Gregory's poetry was of transcendental inspiration, Pierre Gally writes. His poetry was not at all in any way inferior to the pagan poetry of the time, on the contrary. What characterized it was variety, sincerity, naturality.¹⁸

Indeed, as far as Gregory's poetical inspiration is concerned, it is only evident that his strong Christian faith shaped and gave content to every poem. As he knew and testified that he belongs to God, he made that visible in his writing. His poetry communicates to the reader the author's intuition about the Absolute, his tendency for the union/ communion with the divine. Yet that tendency indicates already a dramatic split, a fall from the good standing of man *coram Deo*, before God, and indeed the fallen condition of man is vividly expressed by Gregory in particular in passages where he

describes himself as a sinner. Just for one example, in the poem *On the Weakness of Human Nature*, he talks about “my faults that will never disappear; they last and this is what is most awkward in life.”¹⁹ On this occasion the poet also realizes that it is only in this life that one can, with faith and God’s grace, wash away sin; “if I die there is no more remedy for my past miseries,” Gregory writes.²⁰

This tendency for communion is characterized by a creative tension between the present place and the primordial place, between real and ideal as it is felt by the poet. The tension is dynamic in nature, and it implies pain and hope, exaltation as well, and these features become in themselves source of inspiration. This is the fundamental content of the metaphysical dimension of poetry, whether it is conscientized or not by the poet, and regardless of how the poet understands it (when he or she does): as inspiration, as grace, as a given, as intuition, etc.²¹

According to Ion Biberi, there is an analogy between the spiritual attitude of the poet and that of the mystic: every time that the mystic tries to express his inner states, he uses the means characteristic to poetry; but also one realizes that the poet uses the means of the mystic since it is mysticism that generates poetry and not the other way around. There are also differences between the two: while mysticism deals with silence, poetry deals with the word.²²

This is all true in the case of Gregory’s poetry and life, as he amazingly embodied both the mystic and the poet in everyday dealings and in all his writings.

And even where there seems to be a difference between mysticism and poetry, as mentioned above, since mysticism is concerned with silence and poetry with words, even there this difference is only superficial because in fact, the silence of the mystic can be found in the depth of the poetical word, so there is a marriage between word and silence and not a separation. The poetical word that tries to communicate the poet’s intuition of the Absolute is a word generated by the silence in which the Absolute abides. As the great XIVth century mystic Meister Eckhart wrote: God is a Word at the extremity of silence. Gregory is in perfect agreement with this description as evident in the combination of apophatic and cataphatic discourse when it comes to theological poems and in particular those on God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.²³

For example, when he talks apophatically about the Father: “There is one God, without beginning or cause, not limited by anything existing before or afterwards to be, encompassing the eons and infinite” (*On the Father*); about the Son: “He who has sprung from the Father is the great

God's Word: eternal son, the archetype's image, a nature equal to his parent. For the Son so great is the Father's glory, and from him he shone forth as only the Father and he that shone forth from the Father understand" (*On the Son*); about the Holy Spirit: "Almighty, imparting manifold gifts, him whom the holy choir hymns" (*On the Holy Spirit*);²⁴ but also when he talks cataphatically about the Father: "From his own spirit he gives life to all that lives", he is "the great king, the good father" (*Glory to the Father*);²⁵ and about the Son: "The Son is world-maker, lawgiver, the Father's strength and intellect" (*On the Father*)²⁶ and about the Holy Spirit: "Now to them he gave small illumination [...] even distributing himself to us later in tongues of fire" (*On the Holy Spirit*).²⁷

Conclusion

As one can see, the three vocations of Gregory were not separated from one another, but intertwined. His theology is elaborated in both prose and poetry, his mystical inclinations offered the fundamental ground for theological reflection and poetical expression and his poetry was like a crown of endeavors. If Gregory of Nazianzus would have only written poetry without having administrative positions in the Church and without having produced any theological treatise, by his poetry alone he would have deserved the name "the Theologian" and the fame he acquired for his entire life and activity, so rich is his poetry in theological elaboration, in fighting the heresies of the time, in subtlety of thinking, in poetical art, in quality and quantity, in the skill of combining in it this three main vocations and passions: theology, mysticism and poetry. Through each of them he opened a new way in these fields, just as the Japanese proverb states: "Before me there was no road; after me, there will be one."

NOTES:

¹ John A. McGuckin, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 2001, p. XXI.

² *Ibidem*, p. 264.

³ *On God and Man: The Theological Poetry of St. Gregory of Nazianzus*, Translated and Introduced by Peter Gilbert, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 2001, p. 38 (For future references to this book I will use the name of the translator).

⁴ Gilbert, p. 43.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 45-46.

⁶ Saint Grégoire de Nazianze, *Oeuvres Poétiques, Poèmes personnels*, II, 1, 1-11, text établi par André Tuilier et Guillaume Bady, traduction et notes par Jean Bernardi, Ed. Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2004, p. LII (For future references to this book I will use the name of the translator, Jean Bernardi).

⁷ Bernardi, p. 35.

⁸ *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze*, Textes choisis et présentés par Edmond Devolder dans la traduction de Paul Gallay, les Editions du Soleil Levant, Namur, Belgique, 1960, pp. 32-33; 37 (For future references to this book I will use the name of the translator, Paul Gallay).

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 33.

¹⁰ McGuckin, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 95.

¹² Gilbert, p. 147.

¹³ McGuckin, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

¹⁴ Stelianos Papadopoulos, *Vulturul ranit: Viata Sfintului Grigore Teologul [The Wounded Eagle: The Life of Saint Gregory the Theologian]*, Transl. by Pr. Dr. Constantin Coman and Diac. Cornel Coman, Ed. Bizantina, Bucuresti, 2002, pp. 282-285.

¹⁵ Gilbert, p. 149.

¹⁶ Gallay, p. 50, note 55.

¹⁷ Apollinaris the Younger was bishop of Laodicea (310-390) in Syria. He tried to explain the nature of Christ's person. Man is constituted by body, soul and mind. In Christ's case the Logos assumed only the body and the soul as human constitution. The mind was replaced by the Logos itself.

¹⁸ Gallay, p. 27.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

²⁰ *Ibid*.

²¹ Theodor Damian, *Philosophy and Literature: A Hermeneutics of the Metaphysical Challenge* [in Romanian], Romania de Maine Foundation Press, Bucharest, 2008, p. 22.

²² Ion Biberi, *Poezia, mod de existență [Poetry, Way of Existing]*, Editura pentru literatura, Bucuresti, 1968, pp. 140-141.

²³ Gilbert, pp. 37-47.

²⁴ *Idem, op. cit.*, pp. 43-47.

²⁵ *Saint Gregory Nazianzen, Selected Poems*, Translated with and Introduction by John McGuckin, SLG Press, Convent of the Incarnation, Fairacres Oxford, 1995, p. 10.

²⁶ Gilbert, pp. 37-38.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

Gregory of Nazianzus and Thomas Merton: Lives of Contemplation and Action

NICHOLAS GROVES

*Dedicated to Fr. Harry Vulopas,
Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, Holyoke, Ma.,
on the occasion of over fifty years of parish ministry*

Introduction

The relation of a life of active service in Christian churches and contemplation, what the Ancient Church often called *philosophia*, is a matter of as much importance today as it was in the fourth century of our era, when Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 330-391) and his contemporaries and friends, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa served the Church in their communities. And there are still many perspectives we can bring to the question- whether as scholars, active ministers, or both. I imagine I could, perhaps, have just as well given as a title “contemplation in action,” since, at least for Gregory, most of his life involving contemplation was (whether he liked it or not, and it seems he usually didn’t) spent in active service as either priest or bishop, and much of it in tumultuous politics, whether in Cappadocia or Constantinople. Yet, sadly enough, many people today would, almost by instinct, regard contemplation as a form of “inaction,” a kind of luxury we can’t afford with all the desperate needs calling for our attention, wars and rumors of wars, arrogances of power, and a widening gap between wealthy and needy. But that is certainly not my paper title!

What I wish to demonstrate is that Gregory’s experience and understanding of the contemplative life, of *philosophia*, was usually at the same time often highly active and engaged, and rarely far away from the many needs surrounding him. Also, his expressions of theological insight in

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the form of voluminous writings, raise the related question of whether and how the vocation of an author is that of action in contemplation. As we shall see, these vocations were carried out at some personal cost, and ended in apparent failure- with Gregory retreating from his position of episcopal leadership in Constantinople, hounded out by his critics and by political intrigue, and spending the remaining years of his life in retirement (yes, itself a form of contemplation!), writing elaborate defenses, along with impressive theological treatises.¹ A desire (*eros*, a word he uses- e.g., *Orat.* 2) for and commitment to a life of contemplation in action was equally to be a life of stripping, of deconstruction of the self, an ultimate form of sacrifice.

I propose to do this, at least partially, by comparing Gregory's life with that of probably the most well-known Roman Catholic monk of the twentieth century, the Trappist Thomas Merton (Fr. Louis), who lived from 1915-1968. In no way would I suggest there are exact parallels in life experience; rather there are many significant differences. Yet for both, the life of contemplation and action was one of personal confrontation with extraordinary, but sometimes unpleasant and challenging realities.

Gregory was to express his experience and understanding of *philosophia* in terms of the Platonic and Neo-Platonic categories familiar to him, lenses through which he would read Scripture. He saw his intense form of Christian life as one of vision, of participation in various ways in the sheer light of God.²

As he makes clear at considerable length in *Oration 2*, such engagement in a life of vision was well worth the practical costs it involved. Reluctantly, but faithfully, Gregory comes back to the service of his congregation in Nazianzus, and of his father, whom he will accuse of "tyrannically" ordaining him. As he sums this up at the beginning of his discourse:

"I am conquered, and I recognize my defeat: I submit myself to the Lord, and I take shelter (Ps.36,7) in you. Yes, the blessed David, or rather, the One who spoke through David, and who now still speaks through his intermediary, inspires my first words, because the best order (taxis) that one can follow in anything they do, in words or in acts, is to begin with God, and to end our journey in God (ex Theou te archesthai kai eis Theon anapauesthai). As to my motive, whether it be the revolt which has led me up to the present time and the fearfulness which had brought me to prolong my flight and to live far from you for a time that seemed much too long for some, and whether still my real sadness and change of heart which has led me to put myself once again in your hands, each among those who hate us

or love us, can imagine it and express it as he wishes, one refusing to absolve me, and another accepting my apology.³

Throughout his pastoral life, and his several retreats, he will find that a participation in theoria by no means excluded, but rather encouraged, active service in the world, especially in feeding and caring for the needy.⁴

The experience of contemplation was considerably more complex for Thomas Merton. I shall present his life and spiritual journey as having three interrelated parts, what I would call: 1. “the monk against the world,” where the world we live in is almost hopeless (a vision that teeters on the edge of Gnosticism or Manicheism), with the contemplative in the elect company of the enlightened; followed by (thank goodness!) 2. “the monk in and for the world,” with the contemplative growing in human consciousness, encountering racial and economic divisions, war, etc. (by far the engaged Merton most of us know), but- surprise of surprises- leading into 3. “the monk confronting himself,” and in Merton’s life taking the very disconcerting, if not outrageous form of a love affair with a student nurse , Margie Smith, just two years before his sudden death in Thailand from an electrical accident. Somehow the seemingly wise contemplative had to have an appointment with his own humanity, where he finds an eros that was both sensually human and divine, in God’s own chronos. I find it no accident that Merton was so preoccupied throughout his monastic life with a Divine Sophia, and then met her in human form. The rather dissonant, if not tragic, end of his life, far away from his own monastery, brings me to think that Merton’s appointment with Sophia and the earthly/earthly feminine was not finished.

In the examination that follows, I would like to argue, or propose, that we can best understand and appreciate both Gregory of Nazianzus and Merton if we see them as “restless souls.” They were, precisely, ‘restless’ in the ancient sense of being in search, or being led in a search, by a *telos*, or spiritual goal. This restlessness was to take different forms- interrupted careers for Gregory, and an increasing involvement in the world for Merton. But the goal was to be the same: a discovery of authenticity, of where they had arrived and where they had been (using Gregory’s phrase in *Oration 2*) as persons in the strange mystery and mercy of God.

The Life and Experience of Contemplation in Gregory of Nazianzus

In the short space of an essay, it is not possible to do more than sketch the most significant points of such a large theme. There have been numerous studies made of Gregory and contemplation (*philosophia*), and the research continues.⁵ Besides the large amount of space and energy Gregory devotes to this subject, which was the pursuit of his entire life, we need to consider the kind of writing the author practices. Many of his most important statements are made in a highly poetic form, with numerous references to other authors, especially Homer, Plato, etc. As we read a text, we at least sometimes need to perform a type of exegesis in evaluating it.

For Gregory, it is possible for the human soul to have a certain knowledge of God, since- as was also the understanding of Origen- we are “capable” of God (*moira Theou*). This is a part of our nature, of our being created in God’s image and likeness. The greatest happiness which is possible for us, being in image and likeness, is a certain experience of the Trinity.⁶ Human knowledge of God is not of an intellectual variety, as we would “know” the facts about a certain academic subject. Rather, as in Scripture, it is a personal knowing. At various points in his discourses, Gregory seems to delight in the paradox that God attracts us, so that we seek God. But then, equally, God reveals and then goes into hiding, as it were. As with Gregory’s spiritual master, Origen, God deliberately makes this acquaintance tantalizing and difficult, so that seekers would be “purified waiting patiently for the object of their desire.”⁷ Or: “We can only reach things in their nakedness if our own spirit is naked” (*Or.* 28, 21).

As Donald Winslow has pointed out in his study *The Dynamics of Salvation. A Study of Gregory of Nazianzus*, all *theologia* has to do with salvation, with soteriology. We do not “know” God in God’s essence or essential being, but rather by how God appears to us. (This is, at least partially, what later Byzantine theologians such as Gregory Palamas, will develop into discussions of God’s “essence” and “energies.” In that paradigm, we know or can be reached by God’s “energies.”)⁸ In the same sense, all *theologia* for Gregory of Nazianzus, as for the later tradition that follows him, is *oikonomia*, God’s governing of the world and, especially, humanity. Once again, we begin to “know” God by what God does for us, especially our salvation.⁹ When what is Godlike in us meets or experiences God, we can sense that “this union is not only the goal of life; it suggests also that there is an original intimacy that binds God to creation. But because this original intimacy has been broken, *theologia* has the further vocation of explaining how this separation has been or can be overcome.”¹⁰

Gregory seems to have had these experiences from the earliest years of his life, if we are to believe his numerous accounts.

Perhaps one of Gregory's earliest experiences of the mystery of God was his terrifying voyage from Alexandria to Athens when he was a young student. On his way to begin a long period of study in the venerable center of classical Greek culture, he met up with a ferocious storm. (I believe that this event actually happened, however much Gregory embellished it).¹¹ As he describes the storm:

“A confused and heartrending cry rose up:/ sailors, helmsmen, officers and passengers alike,/ all called out as one to Christ,/ even they who had not formerly acknowledged God.

... Despairing of everything here below/ I raised my eyes to You, my life, my breath, my light,/ My strength, my sole salvation,/ Source of my terror and affliction,/ But even so my gentle healer/ Who always weaves good things into disasters. . . / I said, I am Yours, Lord,/ From times past, and even now,/ Accept me once again/ The child of your honored servants/ A gift of earth and sea,/ Dedicated by the prayers of my mother/ And because of these extraordinary terrors./ Thus I shall live for you.”¹²

To use the language of the psychology of religious experience, we can say that the young Gregory was overwhelmed by the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* of a life or death experience. This is a fairly common occurrence, whether in war or peace, but is rarely reported in such an eloquent form. Events such as these are often life transforming. In Gregory's case it led him back to an even earlier experience, an extraordinary dream he had as a young boy, when he was invited to stand face to face with the Trinity. While I can only cite the most relevant parts of this powerful poem, I do believe the words and imagery reflect an actual dream experience, which was transforming in the direction it gave to the young man's life:

“Then while I was asleep there came to me this dream/ which drew me so sweetly to the incorruptible life./ There appeared to me two virgins dressed in shining robes,/ standing by my side in brilliant light./ Both were matched alike in beauty and stature,/ and both were adorned without that adornment which/ women take for beauty.. . . Seeing them, how great was my elation, and I said:/ How greatly they surpass all human kind./ My soul went out to them, and they kissed me/ upon the lips in token of love as to a beloved son./ And when I asked who these women were,/ And whence they came,/ One answered: ‘I am Virginity; the other, Simplicity./ We stand within the presence of Christ the Lord,/ rejoicing in the beauty of the heavenly choir of virgins./ But come now, child, and meld/ your mind with

ours; merge your lighted flame with ours,/ until we bear you up on high,
transfigured in light,/ through the very Aether/ to stand in the radiance of the
Immortal Trinity.’ / Saying this, they were borne through the Aether as I
watched/ their departing flight. These things were all as a dream,/ But long
after, my heart would take delight/ in these beautiful appearances of the
night, these shining images of incorruption.”

The dream was to be one of the most formative experiences of
Gregory’s life:

“And yet, their sacred discourse worked on my mind/ until
discernment of good and ill became fixed and stable in my soul,/ And the
spiritual mind at last was master of my desires.”¹³

If we accept this text as Gregory’s, as McGuckin and the great
majority of scholars do, we need to ask why it is important, and what
characteristics it shows us of Gregory’s experience of God. Dream visions
and accounts were common in the Classical and Late Antique worlds. They
were a medium of describing spiritual encounters, and were not necessarily
intended as literal narratives.¹⁴ As Patricia Cox Miller describes other vivid
dreams in Late Antiquity: “Perpetua, after all, awoke from her dream of
eating paradisaical cheese with the taste of something sweet in her mouth, and
Macrobius thought that a vision of the entire cosmos lay encoded in a
dream: monotheist and polytheist, martyr and philosopher alike subscribed
to the figurative world of dreams.”¹⁵ Dreams would have been a genre
familiar to the audience the author was addressing, as would have been the
carefully interwoven references to mystery cults. In composing a hymn to
Sophia, or her close daughters, what would be more natural than such an
account? But what can it tell us about Gregory and his understanding of
contemplation?

I believe it can tell us a great deal. If we transpose his poetic
description into terms more familiar to us, it reveals an intimate contact with
the divine- at once sensual and intellectual- as the words of *The song of
Solomon* about the kiss indicate.¹⁶ For Cox Miller: “The dream showed
Gregory that his life was a poetic text being written, not by himself, but by
that divine ‘other’ in whose image he desired to be remade.”¹⁷ Its highly
charged erotic images, including the rose, are erotic, but – equally and
paradoxically- ascetic. Particularly, we are witnessing an inner journey to
the Trinity, which for Gregory was always a personal and living reality, and
for which he would sacrifice his life and career. In addition, this hymn
shows Gregory’s sensitivity to the feminine, to Sophia, as a direct way to
God. Without too much psychology, I believe we could even suggest that
his own personal life in a family of strong and skillful women enhanced this

dream experience. He will later reflect on such early experiences when he describes his attraction for the life of contemplation in *Oration 2*, given when he had returned to Nazianzus for ministry on his father's demand: "So it was that there arose in me a kind of loving desire for the advantages of a life of stillness and of that retreat (*eros tou kalou tes hesuchias kai tes anachoreseos*) for which no one else so much as I who has been been attracted by the pursuit of eloquence (*logos*) could sense."¹⁸

Among many other narratives, the description of the approach to God in *Orations 27* and *28*, stands out in its clarity:

"It is not for everyone, people, philosophizing about God is not for everyone. It is not something that can be bought at a cheap price, or for those who crawl on the ground. What's more, it is not for every occasion or every audience or every subject, but there is a proper time and audience and subject. It is not for everyone, because it is for those who have been tested and have found a sure footing in contemplation- and, most importantly, who have been purified in soul and body, or at the very least are being purified. For it is dangerous for someone who is not pure to lay hold of what is pure, just as it is for weak eyes to gaze at the brightness of the sun."¹⁹

The experience of vision, of contemplation, makes of the contemplative a Moses, ascending Mount Sinai:

"I ascend the mountain with eagerness-or, to be honest, I am eager with hope, but at the same time I am afraid for my weakness- to enter into the cloud and meet with God, as God commands."

Indeed, there are grades, and distinctions, in this ascent:

"If anyone is an Aaron, let him go up with me and stand nearby, being willing to remain outside the cloud if necessary. . . if any are from the multitude and unworthy of such a height of contemplation- if they are altogether impure (*anagnos*) – let them not approach at all, for it is not safe.

Even if we are (safely) below the mountain, let us, the impure, behold the mountain smoking and (the) lightning- at once a terror and a marvel for those not able to ascend."²⁰

Our current life Gregory describes suggestively as one "of mirrors and enigmas," in which we can see only a "slender rivulet" of that radiant light that comes from God.²¹ In the waking dream of our life, we are involved in discerning images- those that are illusory and can lead us astray, and the authentic traces of God. Since our interior eyesight has been injured in that catastrophic event the Scriptures describe as the Fall and the exile from Paradise, the life of conversion, of the return to image by fulfilling likeness, is one of regaining our sight. This, literally, is contemplation.²²

The inner or contemplative experience “was greater than my understanding, the majesty, the elevation and the dignity, and the pure natures which could hardly comprehend the splendor of a God who hovered over the abyss, and that the darkness hid, because he is a very pure light, inaccessible to the multitude; who is both within this universe and outside of it, who is every beauty and above every beauty, who enlightens the understanding and yet exceeds our intelligence, who flees from our grasp as soon as we reach him, and who draws towards the heights the one who is seized by him, because he escapes us as soon as we approach him.”²³

Such descriptions of contemplation as these (and there are a multitude of others in Gregory’s writings, both prose and poetry) show his particular qualities as a theologian. Unlike some other readers, I cannot consider him as mainly a poet far removed from the intricacies of theological debate. If Gregory of Nyssa’s genius was in systematics, and a certain use of logic to undermine logic- as in the ongoing quarrels with Eunomius, etc.- our Gregory was a master at theology as metaphor.

Metaphor here is not some kind of whimsical way of description, but a key to unlocking mysteries half revealed and half hidden. For Gregory of Nazianzen the life of contemplation, of *theoria*, was both an involvement in love, and a journey. As we grow deeper in love, human or divine, we realize that the more we “know” the one we love, the deeper and more far-reaching are the aspects of the one we love. We never understand fully; love seeks to go further beyond the boundaries of what we sense. There are always surprises. This *theoria* is also a journey, an entrance into the cloud of Moses, and into a territory that keeps stretching beyond. Only those who have been “there,” or on that journey, can picture it. It is a destination always in motion, and no map or even GPS device can lead us very far. Or as Gregory tells us quite precisely in *Oration 45*:

“God forever was and is and will be. Or rather: God forever is. For was and will be are divisions of our own time and of our transitory nature. But He always is, and so calls Himself, as when he prophesied to Moses on the mountain. For he keeps all existence contained in himself, neither beginning, nor ending, a sort of sea of being, infinite and boundless, surpassing every conception of time and nature. By intellect alone is he shadowed forth and at that, very dimly and meagerly, not from what is in Him, but from what is about Him, as different images are put together to make one likeness of the truth which disappears before it can be grasped and slinks away before it can be known. By such imaginings is our mind enlightened; by such, cleansed; as with vision that cannot stand the lightning flash. To me it seems He does this that He may draw the mind toward

Himself by the Apprehensible (for what is absolutely unattainable is beyond hope or effort), then to amaze it by the Unapprehensible. So that in amazement it may long for Him the more. And, longing, may be cleansed and cleansed, be made god-like. And with such as these God associates as with kinsmen (to use a bold word), united with them and known as God to gods.”²⁴

In such a reading of the map of an inner experience Gregory sketches out areas that will later on be filled in, or extended, by such later travelers as Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas in the East, and Bernard of Clairvaux (12th cent.) in the West, to mention but a few on the same road.

Yet before we jump to an all too hasty conclusion that Gregory was only a deep and removed contemplative, avoiding the “world” and its corruptions, we need to recognize that he was equally concerned to tell his congregations, readers, and ourselves, that this same God was Christ, whose sharing of our flesh required that we see the material hunger and thirst of our brothers and sisters, share it, and relieve it.²⁵

If we examine Gregory’s career, we find several marked periods of retreat, or pursuit of contemplation. On numerous occasions, Gregory mentions that such breaks were necessary for him, and pursuits of his most cherished goal. From this perspective, we can say that his life had a rhythm of engagement and withdrawal- one never far removed from the other. Biographers and historians, at least from the nineteenth century onwards, have given a variety of explanations for this pattern. There are, basically, three supposed reasons advanced. First, that Gregory’s temperament was somehow too fragile or retiring for him to engage in any “active” ministry for too long a time. This has been an almost constant refrain of many accounts of his life. Secondly, there was the venerable tradition in ancient pagan as well as Christian philosophy to see periodic retirement as part of the pursuit of *theoria* and a life of service.²⁶ Finally, and most recently, scholars have pointed out various political circumstances in both Church and Empire that encouraged Gregory’s retreats.²⁷

I find all three explanations, to one degree or another, convincing. There is no reason we need to choose one alone. Yet I would caution strongly against too much emphasis on Gregory’s supposedly “retiring” personality. Too great an emphasis on psychohistory, on a “young man Gregory,” like Erik Erikson’s “Young Man Luther,” can make us forget that often the most important reasons for actions lie beyond the explanatory powers of scholars. The person, created in the image and likeness of God, eludes such a grasp. The best, and the most honest thing we can do as

historians is to trace out the patterns we see, and leave it to God, or a Higher Consciousness, to hazard a judgment of the meaning of these.

Certainly, Gregory's strong family was a determining factor in his formation and decisions he would make about his future life. As Peter Brown succinctly describes this family, part of an older aristocracy, it practiced "a stern, ceremonious Christianity, firmly rooted in the continued life of great households."²⁸ Reading the biography of Gregory's early years, I sense that his background was quite like that of an American southern aristocracy, with diligent but retiring men, and vigorous women directing households- much like the families pictured in the classic film, *Steel Magnolias*. There is much about fourth-century Cappadocia, with its rolling plains as ground for raising some of the best horses in the Empire, that suggest the American South.²⁹ The female presence was everywhere. Women such as Macrina, Basil's sister, started their own ascetic enterprises. While Gregory Senior earlier had been a convert to Christianity, it had been the example and encouragement of his wife Nonna that brought him into the Church.

From his earliest years, if we are to believe his later account, the younger Gregory believed he had been chosen for a special life of service to God, very much as in his dream that I recounted earlier: "As soon as I arrived I immediately became another's/ by means of a beneficial estrangement; for to God/ I was offered like a lamb or a sweet calf,/ a noble sacrifice and one endowed with reason-/ I would hesitate to say, like a second Samuel. . . I soon took on a certain dignity of age,/ and gradually there came upon me, as a cloud out of/ darkness,/ a desire for something greater."³⁰ It is significant that Gregory did not chose the starker and more bloody image of sacrifice, that of Aaron, to picture his dedication. Such harshness was always foreign to his nature.

Gregory's first period of retreat was the lengthy time, at least ten years, that he spent in study at Athens, in the company of Basil. "With him I shared my studies, my lodgings and/ my thoughts. And if I might boast a little,/ we formed a pair famous throughout Greece./ All things we held in common and one soul/ united our two separate bodies./ What particularly brought us together/ was this: God and a desire for higher things."³¹ For a variety of reasons, and perhaps under some family pressure, he returned to Nazianzus in 359, and began teaching rhetoric. By 361, his father felt that he needed to ordain his son to active ministry, and so the younger Gregory was ordained priest (probably in the Epiphany/Theophany season of 362). According to the accounts he gave of what he considered almost as a forced ordination, and an act of "tyranny" on the part of his father, the young man

reacted strongly, and fled to Basil's place of contemplative retreat. Shortly after, he feels compelled to return, and gives—at least in a simpler form than the final product—*Oration 2*, where he portrays his conception of ministry, and of why it must be rooted in a life of *theoria*.

At this point I believe it is necessary to outline something of the nature of ascetic and monastic life as it existed in the fourth century. Gregory was not to enter a religious community such as we know it. Recent studies have indicated rather that there was a great degree of fluidity in the various forms of such life. There were not the various “orders” we understand in western Christianity, which were only to develop beginning in the twelfth century. There were not even the types of cenobitic communities later to exist in the East, these being primarily formalized after the struggles with Iconoclasm. We can get a good sense of the ascetic experiments of the time by studying such accounts as the in depth presentation of Susanna Elm³² and the fascinating article of Gilbert Dagrón.³³ I believe we can best understand asceticism as was a society-wide impulse among Christians. There were as many forms for it as visions of what it could be. As with the more formal groups as virgins and deaconesses, exact rules governing these were yet to be fixed, just as the boundaries between the heretical and orthodox (such as with Eustathius of Sebaste, or the so-called Messalians) were often unclear. Susanna Elm presents Cappadocia, in particular, as having “an almost bewildering variety of experiments,” while “we also detect the presence of several themes which are replayed again and again, each time with the slightest variation.”³⁴

When Gregory returned to Nazianzus in the spring of 362, in time to preach the Easter discourse that became *Oration 2*, he began the alternating pattern between retreat and active ministry that Brooks Otis described in the memorable phrase “the throne and the mountain.” Otis summarizes Gregory's involvements in this fashion: “His whole life. . . was marked by a definite rhythm of advance and retreat, withdrawal and return, flight from the world and work in the world. . . He was indeed a double man, a dual personality: his oratory, his poetry, his very actions were obviously designed to attract and astound, to inspire public and private loyalties; yet these were but the husks or outer skin of an inner self that was not in the world at all but in the mountain-cloud surrounding the divine presence.” Hence the terms of throne and mountain— the throne of leadership positions in the Church, the mountain of solitude where we can meet God.³⁵ It was not that Gregory believed one form of life was superior to the other—although he probably preferred the quiet of *philosophia*— but that the two needed to be in dynamic tension. As *oikonomia*, the journey of salvation,

was a process with its own dynamism, so was the life of the Christian in the world, as Donald Winslow also explains.³⁶

It is quite possible, although by no means certain, that Gregory's withdrawal to Basil's settlement was a reaction against his father's signing of a homoian form of creed, an act seen as a betrayal of the Nicene faith by a group of vociferous monks who formed a kind of "anti-community" in Nazianzus. Thus, Gregory the younger would put himself in solidarity in another fashion against the "tyranny" of his father. Although there is a certain amount of evidence, mainly circumstantial, to make such a hypothesis attractive, we need to beware of accepting it as a total explanation. Gregory's own statements, especially in *Oration 2* and in his autobiographical poems, indicate reason enough in pointing out his reluctance to be forced into active service before he felt ready, and worthy, to take on himself this burden. Beeley sees this episode as formative for Gregory's later career, observing: "During this time (if not earlier) Gregory fashioned his characteristic ascetical theory of an ideal 'middle path' that combines quiet study and public service to others."³⁷

We may well ask, both about Gregory's experience with Basil, as well as his later periods of retreat, what were the practices he followed. It is significant that, to at least some extent, asceticism was a family enterprise for a number of his friends, including Basil and Basil's sister, Macrina.³⁸ As unusual as it may seem from our perspective, families were often the earliest centers of Christian ascetic endeavor, at least from the time of Origen in the third century. At this time what was to become later on the more normative pattern of the desert ascetics of Egypt and Syria was only one of many options for a life of dedication. It seems that Basil did visit some of these desert communities, probably after leaving Gregory in Athens, and tried to implement some of their practices.³⁹ This was not always to Gregory's liking.

Basil highly recommended his arrangement to Gregory, inviting him to join him in this experiment in (nearby) Pontus:

"The greatest praise we can give of this place is that, besides being suited, because of its singularly apt location, for the production of every kind of fruits, it nourishes the sweetest of all fruits to me- solitude."⁴⁰

In Basil's *Letter 2*⁴¹ he expands further on the fruits of this solitude:

"Now, solitude provides us with the greatest help toward this achievement" (that is, acquiring the divine teachings), "quieting our passions, and giving leisure to our reason to uproot them completely from the soul"⁴²

The recitation of the Psalms, particularly, increases the value of a contemplative setting:

“What, then, is more blessed than to imitate on earth the choirs of angels; hastening at break of day to pray, to glorify the Creator with hymns and songs, and, when the sun is brightly shining and we turn to our tasks, to accompany them everywhere with prayer, seasoning the daily work with hymns, as food with salt?”⁴³

Meditation on Scripture (what would be later called in the West *lectio divina*) is described and encouraged as part of Basil’s regimen. A sparse diet led to little sleep (“Sleep should be light and easily broken”), so that the middle of the night is the height of prayer: “What dawn is to others, this, midnight, is to the men who practice piety, especially since the quiet at dead of night gives leisure to the soul.”⁴⁴

It is quite likely that this was the form, or at least the outline, of the ascetic life Basil established. Such practice was to be what Gregory experienced when he joined Basil in this retreat. Another highly important part of this regimen was active service to the needy in the vicinity.⁴⁵ Thus it would be highly inaccurate to see this form of life as one where contemplation (*theoria*) was separated from action (*praxis*). Unlike later developments in the medieval West, there was no forced separation from the surrounding world. (I am not, of course, arguing that monks in the Latin West did not serve the needs of the poor in their vicinity. Of course they did, and with great dedication! Rather, there was a more marked sense of separation from the “world”- at least from the eleventh and into the twelfth century, as with the Carthusians and Cistercians.) Byzantine and Orthodox monastic practice more frequently involves a monastic community, or even individual monks, living in the middle of society. A recent example of this was the late Patriarch Pavle of Serbia. At the worst times of war and destruction, he refused to leave Kosovo, because he wanted to be in the middle of his people, at whatever danger and cost to himself.

For Gregory, however, Basil’s new Eden was not so inviting:

“As for myself, I can only admire your region of Pontus. . . your residence there as an exile, these mountain heights rising above our heads, the savage beasts that try your courage, and this desert which extends far, and (yes) even that ‘rat-hole’ you call a place of meditation [according to some scholars, a play on words, possibly found in Aristophanes,] a monastery and school surrounded by forests of wild trees, and the crown of mountains which really didn’t crown, but rather imprisoned you.”⁴⁶

Was Gregory serious, or mocking, or a little of both, in writing his friend in such a stilted and pedantic fashion? There seems here, as was often

the case with Gregory, to be a mixture of resentment and envy in his attitude to Basil. The friendship was rarely easy, and frequently seethed with underlying tensions. The water source at Pontus is even described as little more than a mud-hole! At the end of this particular ascetic experiment it appears that it was only the attentive care of Basil's mother which saved them from starvation.

It seems a safe conclusion that when Gregory joined Basil in his haunts of contemplation, and in plunging into the meditative study of Scripture and writings of their predecessors, e.g., the compilation of a *Philocalia* of Origen's works, he either accepted the austerity of the place, or at least decided not to waste his effort complaining about it. He would find more to encourage his own practice than to discourage it. And his own form of ascetic life would be different.

From the time of his return to Nazianzus for Pascha 362 until 379, a significant number of years, Gregory was involved in pastoral service, including the unsuccessful attempt made by Basil in 372-3 to appoint him as bishop of the small see of Sasima in an effort to keep Sasima under his jurisdiction.⁴⁷ He fled into solitude confronted with this challenge, being called back again to Nazianzus by his father. When his father died in 375, the son took over the episcopal see. Shortly after, he once again retired for a period of retreat for at least three years at the community of St. Thecla in Seleucia. From Seleucia Gregory was to be called to Constantinople by the orthodox community there who wanted to assert itself over the once dominant Arians.

Such was the pattern, the *taxis* or order of Gregory's life- a period of service followed by a period of contemplative retirement. In the opinion of some scholars, this was premeditated, a game of political strategy, a thinly veiled, if not cynical manipulation of Church polity for personal gain.⁴⁸ I prefer the view of Brooks Otis, and his delineation of "throne and mountain," which seems to do most justice to all of the evidence. Yet I also think that it is a fair assessment of Gregory's character to see him as very unsuited for the give and take, the compromise of politics- whether ecclesiastical or otherwise. His marked preference for *theoria*, expressed copiously in his writings, attests to his greatest love. The affairs in Constantinople from 379-381 will reveal this.

Gregory's adventure in Constantinople appears to have been part of a plan on the part of Nicene or Orthodox bishops to establish a beach-head in the imperial city. With the death of the emperor Valens who favored the Arians, and the accession of Theodosius who supported the Orthodox, the scene was set for an Orthodox victory. But this would not be achieved

without considerable struggle. Gregory's first Pascha at the Anastasia church included an invasion of the building by his enemies, who disrupted the service and threw stones. At one point, at least, he was a target for assassination. As if all of these attacks from without were not enough to try his spirit, Gregory had to face the deception of those who had seemed to be his allies, particularly that of Maximus the Cynic. Gregory had first written an Oration praising Maximus to the skies, portraying him as the ideal Christian philosopher. When he realized that he was being used for Maximus' own political ambitions, the ascetic-philosopher becomes a "villainous kennelkeeper," and "poor shorn dog," (all words where Gregory rings the changes on the Greek word for dog as well as Maximus' philosophical persuasion) who preferred the company of the low life of the capital, especially prostitutes and actors.⁴⁹ Yet in spite of hardships that would have led a weaker leader to resignation much earlier, Gregory persevered. As Christopher Beeley summarizes these events: "In less than two years he consolidated and increased the pro-Nicene community in the capital, almost solely through the force of his own pastoral and theological endeavors, and independent of imperial patronage."⁵⁰ Apparently able to do his best work under intense pressure, Gregory composed his five *Theological Orations*, which presented his understanding of the Nicene position, and are still among the foundational documents for Orthodox theological education.⁵¹ In Gregory's case certainly, when the going got tough, the tough got going.

Under such continuing difficulties, and uncertain of his allies, our bishop felt the time had come to resign. He gave a farewell address (*Oration 42*) to the bishops assembled in council. The fully written version of the address has many well-chosen words about bishops as political hacks, and was probably not delivered in entirety. Gregory went into retirement knowing that he would be replaced by someone politically safe and reliable (who would be an unbaptized civil servant Nectarius).⁵² As he presents the resignation speech in his long poem, "Concerning his own life," Gregory portrays his struggle as one of personal , intimate , devotion and love for the Trinity:

"How long shall we be laughed at as uncivilized beings/ who only understand one thing, how to paint for battle?/ Extend the hand of friendship cheerfully./ But I have become the prophet Jonah:/ I give myself as a means of saving the ship,/ although I am not responsible for the storm./ . . . I was raised to the throne unwillingly and now I willingly/ depart. My present state of health also urges me to do so./ To death alone do I still owe a debt: that is in God's hands./ But you, my Trinity, for you alone I care./ What

tongue will you have that is clever enough to defend/ you,/ or is at least independent and full of zeal?/ Farewell and be mindful of my hard work.”⁵³

Taking up his retreat at the family estate in Arianzus, Gregory will spend his remaining nine years of life in contemplation and in writing. Many of his most important compositions date from this time. Beeley once again gives an apt summary statement: “In the remaining years of his life, he conducted a massive literary campaign to rehabilitate his ecclesiastical reputation and to persuade his contemporaries and his posterity of the true, saving doctrine of the Trinity.”⁵⁴ He also argued for the value of a Christian *paideia* . But in spite of what he must have sensed were achievements, among Gregory’s last words there is a clear sadness, if not bitterness:

“Lord Christ, why have you bound me in these toils of the/ flesh?/ Why have you subjected me to this painful life?/ Of a godlike father I was born and of a mother who was not/ insignificant. As a result of her prayers I came into the/ light./ She prayed and dedicated me as a child to God./ A nocturnal vision instilled in me a burning desire for/ purity./ Christ was responsible for all this, but later I was dashed by/ the waves,/ snatched by greedy hands, my body crushed./ I fell among uncaring shepherds and experienced treachery./ I was deprived of my children and overwhelmed by/ misfortune./ Such has been the life of Gregory: what remains will be the/ concern/ of Christ the giver of life. Inscribe these words on my/ tombstone.”⁵⁵

In his final moments, Gregory pictured himself as a Jonah, one who had to be sacrificed for the good of the entire ship.

The Life and Experience of Contemplation in Thomas Merton

Introduction

In December of 1941, with the United States engaged in two major wars, a young English professor and new convert to Roman Catholicism entered the Trappist (Cistercian) Abbey of Gethsemani, set in the rolling hills and rural quiet of Bardstown, Kentucky. While Thomas Merton (to be known as Fr. Louis in the monastic community) was separated from Gregory of Nazianzus by more than thirteen hundred years, well over a millennium, their experiences of contemplation, as well as their own personal struggles in the contemplative journey bear much in common. Their differences also illuminate each other.

To begin with, both were haunted by the figure of Jonah. Different aspects of the prophet spoke to each, over the gap of centuries. If for Gregory Jonah was the persecuted victim who had to be thrown overboard (as in both his early journey en route to Athens and later in the political fray of Constantinople), for Merton Jonah was a great symbol of painful paradox, the paradox of his personal life. Writing in his journal *The Sign of Jonas* (1953), he relates himself to Jonah with a deep sensitivity to the biblical account and its imagery:

“The sign Jesus promised to the generation that did not understand Him was the ‘sign of Jonas the prophet’- that is, the sign of His own resurrection. The life of every monk, of every priest, of every Christian is signed with the sign of Jonas, because we all live by the power of Christ’s resurrection. But I feel that my own life is especially sealed with this great sign. . . because like Jonas himself I find myself traveling toward my destiny in the belly of a paradox.”⁵⁶

Until his untimely and unusual death at a monastic conference in Bangkok in 1968, Merton lived through many intense forms of this paradox. Throughout his life as a monk, he describes his journey as one of paradox. It was to be a paradox of self-offering, of self-forgetting, but equally of self-discovery. As we shall see, the discoveries could be comforting and engaging, but also at times, devastating. In perhaps one of his most gripping passages of this journal, he calls to God in both hope and desperation:

“God, my God, Whom I meet in darkness, with You it is always the same thing! Always the same question that nobody knows how to answer!”⁵⁷

The monastic part of Merton's journey⁵⁸ was to begin simply enough. He tells of his first view of the monastery, after the trip from Cincinnati and Bardstown:

"I looked at the rolling country, and at the pale ribbon of road in front of us, stretching out as grey as lead in the light of the moon. Then suddenly I saw a steeple that shone like silver in the moonlight, growing into sight from behind a rounded knoll. The tires sang on the empty road, and, breathless, I looked at the monastery that was revealed before me as we came over the rise. At the end of an avenue of trees was a big rectangular block of buildings, all dark, with a church crowned by a tower and a steeple and a cross: and the steeple was as bright as platinum and the whole place was as quiet as midnight and lost in the all-absorbing silence and solitude of the fields. Behind the monastery was a dark curtain of woods, and over to the west was a wooded valley, and beyond that a rampart of wooded hills, a barrier and a defense against the world."⁵⁹

The liturgy spoke to him as directly as nature:

"Liturgically speaking, you could hardly find a better time to become a monk than Advent. You begin a new life, you enter into a new world at the beginning of a new liturgical year. And everything that the Church gives you to sing, every prayer that you say in and with Christ in His Mystical Body is a cry of ardent desire for grace, for help, for the coming of the Messiah, the Redeemer. . . the cold stones of the Abbey church ring with a chant that glows with living flame, with clean, profound desire. It is an austere warmth, the warmth of Gregorian chant."⁶⁰

God is palpably present: "You rest in Him, and He heals you with His secret wisdom."

In his early impression of the monastic life as lived by the Trappists, Merton finds the same simplicity. As he described his view of the monks of Gethsemani practicing "the school of the Lord's service" (*Rule of St. Benedict, Prologue*):

"The Monastery is a school- a school in which we learn from God how to be happy. Our happiness consists in sharing the happiness of God, the perfection of His unlimited freedom, the perfection of His love."⁶¹

These first impressions, while beautiful, are almost too simple.

Writing in October of 1968, on the way to attending a conference of Christian and Asian monks, and shortly before his death, Merton expresses another vision of the monastic, and of the Christian life. It is as open-ended in its portrayal of his search as the earlier *Seven Storey Mountain* seemed definitive:

“First, let me struggle with the contradiction that I have to live with, in appearing before you in what I really consider to be a disguise, because I never, never wear this (a clerical collar). What I ordinarily wear is blue jeans and an open shirt; which brings me to the question that people have been asking to a great extent: Whom do you represent? What religion do you represent?”

Here, Merton’s picture of the monastic search is of a quest that joins the monk to other “marginal” figures in the world:

“In speaking for monks I am really speaking for a very strange kind of person, a marginal person, because the monk in the modern world is no longer an established person with an established place in society. We realize very keenly in America today that the monk is essentially outside of all establishments. He does not belong to an establishment. He is a marginal person who withdraws deliberately to the margin of society with a view to deepening fundamental human experience. . . . Thus I find myself representing perhaps hippies among you, poets, people of this kind who are seeking in all sorts of ways and have no established status whatever. . . . Are monks and hippies and poets relevant? No, we are deliberately irrelevant. We live with an ingrained irrelevance which is proper to every human being. The marginal man accepts the basic irrelevance of the human condition, an irrelevance which is manifested above all by the fact of death.” The main point for the monk, and his other counterparts in the world, is to move “beyond the dichotomy of life and death and to be, therefore, a witness to life.”⁶²

In this address, Merton articulates the goals of the contemplative life in terms of an ongoing search begun in this present world, perhaps as a distant- yet not so distant- companion of the philosopher, Christian or otherwise, described by Gregory of Nazianzus. From my perspective, I do not see these two articulations of goals as different- however separated by time and the cultural backgrounds which expressed them.

The difference in depth and in tone between the vision in *The Seven Storey Mountain* and that of *The Asian Journal*, and many other of Merton’s writings after the middle 1950s, and illustrated by the quotes given, came from a deep internal struggle for self- discovery. This discovery had a price, and could be both disheartening and embarrassing. Merton was to find that despite, or because of, the solitude of Gethsemani, he could not escape his past. He was to have many appointments with his own humanity, not the least of which was to be a passionate involvement with a student nurse, “Margie,” whom he met first when a patient in a hospital in Louisville in

1966. For Merton all these discoveries were to be ways of finding God at work in his life, God's answers to the desperate pleas of Jonah.

In the following discussion of Merton and his understanding of the contemplative life, and of his peculiar spiritual itinerary, I shall try to explain something of how this twentieth century monk came to see God's work in his own life and in the larger world. It was a move and a journey- both in perspective and in tone- from a churchly, if not pietistic, vantage point , where the monastery was a refuge from the errors and evils of the world, to one opening into ever wider vistas. Merton will frequently picture this journey as one into the heart of Divine Sophia:

“Most important of all - man's creative vocation to prepare, consciously, the ultimate triumph of Divine Wisdom. Man, the microcosm, the heart of the universe, is the one who is called to bring about the fusion of cosmic and historic process in the final invocation of God's wisdom and love. In the name of Christ and by his power, man has a work to accomplish. . . Our life is a powerful Pentecost in which the Holy Spirit, ever active in us, seeks to reach through our inspired hands and tongues into the very heart of the material world created to be spiritualized through the work of the Church, the Mystical Body of the Incarnate Word of God.”⁶³

If we can say that for Gregory of Nazianzus the contemplative search was for the Trinity, for which he had a personal love, for Merton the search was for a God whom he discovers, and in fact uncovers , by a continuing, and changing, unraveling of the layers of the onion of the self (if we can accept this metaphor). In the fashion of many mystics, East and West, Christian and non-Christian, and their clouds of unknowing, this process reveals a “no- thing,” the nakedness, beyond the various images of the self. In this process, Merton finds that: “The secret of my identity is hidden in the love and mercy of God.”⁶⁴

As we have seen, Gregory of Nazianzus' contemplative journey was one of alternation between the “throne” and the “mountain,” between active service and governing in the life of the Church, and a retreat in which he entered into greater intimacy with the mystery of God as Trinity. There was a living and continuing dialectic between these two paths, one for which there was some precedent in ancient Greek philosophy. In the case of Merton, his journey would be one which alternated, in the paradoxes with which he was fond, between life in the world, then “conversion” to the monastery, and finally a rediscovery of the world as a place worthy of his love. The monk, and any contemplative, was to be someone who was “human in this most inhuman of ages,” and whose task was “to guard the image of man for it is the image of God.”⁶⁵ Hence a greater consciousness

and engagement with the problems of racism and war which plagued western societies, and particularly the U.S. The contemplative was to find and then reconcile contradictions in the self, and then pray and work to bring about recognition of these and then reconciliation in society. In the words of a popular saying of the sixties, if you were not to be a part of the solution, you were part of the problem.

Finding the Heart of Contemplation

Many writers who have studied Thomas Merton have noted that there seem to have been two phases of his spiritual and intellectual life: the earlier (from his first involvement with Gethsemani in 1941 to the late 1950s) where he witnesses and writes as a monk against the world, deliberately withdrawn from its temptations and evils; and a monk who finds the world in and around himself, after experiencing a physical and perhaps emotional collapse (from the mid - 1950s until his sudden death in 1968), a contemplative engaging the world in its many dimensions- artistic, political, economic, even sexual. While such a picture of his life can be helpful, I find it basically unsatisfactory.

First of all, Merton himself realized his own contradictions, almost from the start of his career as a writer. Overwhelmed by the success of his autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, one of the top three bestsellers of 1947, he felt it presented too narrow and dramatic a distinction between the monk and the world, of the “good times” young man turned contemplative. This book, the reason for his early reputation, was to trouble him throughout his life, as if with its contrasting tones it was more of a melodrama than a real drama. In comments written for an anthology put together in the 1960s, *A Thomas Merton Reader*, he laments “ certain limitations created for myself with *The Seven Storey Mountain* “ and “the artificial public image which this autobiography created.”⁶⁶ As he grows in his own understanding of the meaning of his life, he sees his journey and struggle to be not between “the monk” confronting “the world, but against “the false self”:

“Everyone of us is shadowed by a false self. This is the man I want myself to be but who cannot exist, because God does not know anything about him. And to be unknown to God is altogether too much privacy . My false and private self is the one who wants to exist outside the reach of God’s will and God’s love- outside of reality and outside of life. And such a self cannot help but be an illusion.”⁶⁷

In fact, the “false self” can just as easily be hidden by a monastic habit, finding a certain comfort rather than challenge in seclusion. Even worse, “some souls full of good will and generosity embrace the monastic life, only to find their good will dissipated in futilities and routine”⁶⁸ In sharp contrast to the busyness and activist ideals of his contemplative monastery as they were expressed in the 1950s, Merton observes: “We think we have done great things because we are worn out. If we have rushed into the fields or into the woods and done a great deal of damage, we are satisfied.”⁶⁹ In at least one of his talks given to novices, he sardonically complains about the great cheese-making industry that was at the base of Gethsemani’s prosperity. Somehow, for Fr. Louis, a monk’s main job was not to be making and selling cheese. The motto which Merton’s abbot and frequent nemesis, Dom James Fox, gave to all his monks was “All for Jesus, through Mary, with a smile.” Cheese-making and forest work included! (Personal communication of a Geth. monk with author) To such shallow optimism and boosterism, Merton would reply from the depths of his own struggles: “Just because a cross is a cross, does it follow that it is the cross God intends for you? . . . Does the fact that all this is obedience make it really pleasing to God? I wonder. I do not ask these questions in a spirit of rebellion. I would really like to know the answers.”⁷⁰

Rather, the most dangerous enemy for the monk was the false self, or selves, as these were unmasked, and a corresponding feeling of dejection, a recoil of despair, the ageless monastic *acedia*, called a “dry rot. . . that eats out your substance with discouragement and fear,” once we are finished with the earlier exercise of “stuffing yourself inside your own mind and closing the door like a turtle.”⁷¹

In Merton’s own life these struggles and discouragements, especially in the early 1950s, expressed themselves in the forms of insomnia and general poor health, intensified by the diet and other rigors of Trappist practice. The forced community life that provided little opportunity for real friendship or intimacy particularly troubled him. He asks at one point simply to be left alone :

“This afternoon, let me/ Be a sad person. Am I not/ Permitted (like other men)/ To be sick of myself? // Am I not allowed to be hollow,/ Or fall in the hole/ Or break my bones (within me)/ In the trap set by my own/ Lie to myself? O my friend,/ I too must sin and sin/. . . While life and death/ Are killing one another in my flesh,/ Leave me in peace. I can enjoy,/ Even as other men, this agony. // Only (whoever you may be)/ Pray for my soul. Speak my name/ To Him, for in my bitterness/ I hardly speak to Him: and He/ While He is busy killing me/ Refuses to listen.”⁷²

When not overcome by discouragement, Merton finds increasingly in his search for a true self that he encounters the person of the living Christ. Especially, he finds that in meeting another individual, whether someone he particularly likes or dislikes, there can be “the apprehension of Christ in the other- never as ‘abstract essence,’ not merely symbolically but sacramentally, more than literally,” and that such meeting “depends first on the liberation of the image of Christ in ourselves. This is what Cassian, following the Beatitudes, calls ‘purity of heart’ and ‘poverty of spirit.’”⁷³ (*An Introduction to Christian Mysticism* is a revised version of a series of lectures Merton gave to monk- students at Gethsemani in the late 1950s and early 60s).

Even at an early point in his monastic journey, Merton sees that salvation is never just a personal matter:

“What every man looks for in life is his own salvation and the salvation of the men he lives with. By salvation I mean first of all the full discovery of who he himself really is. Then I mean something of the fulfillment of his own God-given powers, in the love of others and of God. I mean also the discovery that he cannot find himself in himself alone, but that he must find himself in and through others.”⁷⁴

Accompanied by his intense love and observation of the natural world around him, of hills and valleys, birds and animals, of the various constellations appearing at night (see his many references to these in the volumes of his Journals) he discovers an “intense awareness of all cosmic and human reality as ‘life in Christ,’ and the consequent plunge into love as the only dynamic and creative force which really honors this ‘Life’ by creating itself anew in Christ’s image.”⁷⁵

At this time in his life, in the mid- 1950s, Fr. Louis had several meetings with a Sophia figure, whom he will call “Proverb,” in dreams and deep meditations. This figurative woman will, strangely enough, prefigure the real woman, Margie, and the challenge of her love, that he will meet in 1966. Again, the “Proverb” figure will point to the hidden Christ. Writing to Boris Pasternak, with whom he had struck up a friendship by correspondence, he observes:

“Shall I perhaps tell you how I know Lara” (Pasternak’s heroine in *Doctor Zhivago*), “where I have met her? “ He tells of how “a very young Jewish girl. . . embraced me so that I was moved to the depths of my soul. I learned that her name was ‘Proverb,’ which I thought very simple and beautiful. . . A few days later I happened to be in a nearby city, which is very rare for us. I was walking alone in the crowded street and suddenly saw that everybody was Proverb and that in all of them shone her extraordinary

beauty and purity and shyness, even though they did not know who they were and were perhaps ashamed of their names. . . And they did not know their real identity as the Child so dear to God who, from the beginning, was playing in His sight all days, playing in the world.”⁷⁶

This meeting with “Proverb,” an event also expressed as his encounter with the everyday world in Louisville at “Fourth and Walnut” streets, marks the beginning of Merton’s active engagement with the world, “the monk in and for the world,” in its problems of war and peace, and racial tensions. It is as if finding the feminine within himself, he can approach the world in its contradictions with the same compassion he was finding for himself and his own contradictions.

On February 28, 1958, he writes a “love letter” to “Proverb,” a document astonishing in its prefiguring of the events of his later life:

“How grateful I am to you for loving in me something which I thought I had entirely lost, and someone who, I thought, I had long ago ceased to be. . . I must be careful what I say, for words cannot explain my love for you, and I do not wish, by my words, to harm that which in you is more real and more pure than in anyone else in the world- your lovely spontaneity, your simplicity, the generosity of your love. . . In your marvelous, innocent, love you are utterly alone; yet you have given your love to me, why I cannot imagine.”⁷⁷

It is here that he can shake off, “As if waking from a dream- the dream of my separateness” and find that he could be “suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, even though we were total strangers.”⁷⁸

So it was that the solitary twentieth century monk can break through into a perspective of engagement with the world, an affirmative Christology, that calls to mind a much earlier picture of Christian engagement, that of the Patristic *Epistle to Diognetus*:

“By union with God in (Christ) God does not remain in heaven, a dictator and overseer. He becomes man in order that the creation should continue in God’s manhood. . . It is in the Holy Spirit that man lives up to his true vocation as a Son of God and creator. . . the very heart of the New Testament. . . the power of charity as a Source of life.”⁷⁹

Or as the second century *Epistle to Diognetus* would phrase it:

“The great Creator of the worlds, the sovereign God of heaven, his holy and immortal truth to men on earth hath given”; where Christ is sent not in “wrath and power, as man he came to men,” coming as the Father would send “his son, himself a king”; since it would be by love that God became flesh in the world, in Christ and in us, “since force is not of God.”⁸⁰

I shall not attempt to chronicle or describe in any detail Thomas Merton as “monk in and for the world,” the second phase of his life as I have captioned it. The great majority of books devoted to him provide information in abundant detail. And the literature is still growing. (I can almost sense Merton’s rich sense of humor in seeing all of this from somewhere in a world we don’t yet inhabit. He must be getting many laughs about his own reputation !) Suffice it to say here that all of Fr. Louis’ points of involvement and engagement- war and peace, European colonialism as expressed in various parts of the world, racial separations and hatreds, to name just a few of the more central areas – have their source in his understanding of himself as not “separate,” but rather involved in the world around him. This interest was to include his ongoing fascination and study of Asian religions, especially Buddhism and Zen. And involved in finding Christ at the heart of all of these. There are quite a number of accounts of his meetings with different people who came to Gethsemani, both unknown and well-known. Nearly all of these include moments of humor. In at least one case, even of rolling on the floor in the guesthouse in uncontrollable laughter. While he could certainly experience in his depths the sorrows presented to him, he could equally see the ironic and the ridiculous. And he knew he was a part of that as well.

For Merton, in the variety of situations he encountered: “To choose the world is not merely a pious admission that the world is acceptable because it comes from the hand of God. . . . To choose the world is to choose to do the work I am capable of doing, in collaboration with my brother, to make the world better, more free, more just, more livable, more human. Rejection of the world and ‘contempt for the world’ is in fact not a choice but the evasion of choice.”⁸¹ He sensed the horrific irony in the name the survivors of the Hiroshima bombing gave the instrument of destruction:” In the year 1945 an Original Child was born. The name Original Child was given to it by the Japanese people, who recognized that it was the first of its kind.”⁸² Merton’s writings, both formal and in a voluminous correspondence, were about giving and bringing birth to our nature as created in the “image and likeness” of God, and our fulfillment of that, our *theosis* or divinization. (This is the central thesis of Christopher Pramuk’s provocative book, *Sophia. The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton* .) Political and social matters were a part of this *theosis*, of the restoration of image and likeness.

Perhaps the most illustrative of all of Merton’s books in terms of engagement with the world is *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*.⁸³ Written in diary form, it covers the early and mid 1960s. We could well call it a

panorama of the nineteen sixties. In the midst of America's war in Vietnam, racial strife, cultural revolution, as well as changes in the Roman Catholic Church and his own Cistercian Order- some of these large, some infinitesimal - he writes as someone "guilty" of happenings. He cannot, as the title indicates, stand aloof or aside. It covers a wide variety of topics, beginning with a dream Karl Barth had about Mozart:

"I was deeply moved by Barth's account of this dream and almost wanted to write him a letter about it. The dream concerns his salvation, and Barth perhaps is striving to admit that he will be saved more by the Mozart in himself than by his theology. Each day, for years, Barth played Mozart every morning before going to work on his dogma: unconsciously seeking to awaken, perhaps, the hidden sophianic Mozart in himself, the central wisdom that comes in tune with the divine and cosmic music and is saved by love, yes, even by *eros*. While the other, theological self, seemingly more concerned with love, grasps at a more stern, more cerebral *agape*: a love that, after all, is not in our own heart but *only in God* and revealed only to our head."⁸⁴

Once again, and at the beginning of his account, we find Wisdom, Sophia. And we are asked, as in the Divine Liturgy, to "attend."

In evaluating the monastic life in its varied manifestations, Merton finds it is not to be a "ghetto" :

"There is nothing whatever of the Ghetto spirit in St. Benedict. That is the wonderful thing both about the Rule and about the Saint: the freshness, the liberty of spirit, the sanity, the broadness, the healthiness of early Benedictine life . . . But when the monastery turns in on itself, interpreting interpretations of interpretations, it becomes a Ghetto. Reforms that concentrate too exclusively on a 'return to the letter' get involved in a web of interpretations, and fail to break the spell. They tend to let in some fresh air in one way, and in others they increase the danger of suffocation by locking all the windows that look outward to the world, or toward the sky."⁸⁵

With an alarming freshness and word of prophecy, a few years later, on January 28, he will remark about monastic "reform" : "Interminable petty questions about details of observance (radio or no radio!). The whole thing gets to be more and more trivial. . . . Also I do not think that the order in America is going or can go in any direction that leads anywhere except to mediocrity and bourgeois comfort- and superficiality."⁸⁶

How much more important would be the observations of the sky and nature, marked by liturgy, as if expressed in a *haiku*:

“This morning, before Prime, in the early morning sky, three antiquated monoplanes flew over the monastery with much noise, followed by a great heron.”⁸⁷

Merton senses that the heart of contemplative life, including monastic observance, is not only a *kenosis* or self-emptying, but a stripping, a total nakedness:

“Cistercian life strips the soul of everything that appeals. . . . When a man becomes a Cistercian, he is stripped not only of his clothes, or part of his skin, but of his whole body and most of his spirit as well. And it is not all finished the first day: far from it! The whole Cistercian life is an evisceration, a gutting and scouring of the human soul.”⁸⁸

Or as he expresses the same insight with some bitterness in the light of personal experiences in his last years:

“Spiritual nakedness. . . strips life down to the root where life and death are equal. . . . The point where you become free not to kill, not to exploit, not to destroy. Not to compete, because you are no longer afraid of death or the devil or poverty or failure. If you discover this nakedness, you’d better keep it private. . . . Society continues to do the service of keeping you in disguises, not for your comfort, but its own.”⁸⁹

The last level of stripping for Merton will come quite unexpectedly in the spring of 1966, when he meets a nurse, Margie Smith, variously identified as either “M” or “S” by different biographers. This will be the short period of the “monk confronting himself,” as I have named it. It was abruptly ended with his mysterious death by electrocution in Bangkok in December, 1968.

Merton realizes that he must have an operation on his back, one of his many recurring health problems. He went to a hospital in nearby Louisville for the operation. From the first day after the surgery, the monk senses a special care, a special touch, in the young and attractive nurse. On returning to Gethsemani he has a radical confrontation with an old issue, an appointment with his humanity: “Now I see more and more that there is only one realistic answer: Love. I have got to dare to love, and to bear the anxiety of self-questioning that love arouses in me, until ‘perfect love casts out fear.’”⁹⁰

“To dare to love.” This will be Merton’s last frontier, one he did not have the opportunity to fully explore.

Since we still lack a full account, or documentation on Merton and Margie’s relationship, and may never have one, no one can make an adequate or truly compassionate assessment of this final period of his life. (Merton destroyed a large part of correspondence relating to Margie,

including many letters she wrote him.) What we can say is that he was aware that the challenge of one –to- one intimacy, and of receiving love , was one that he sensed he could not face. For all his depths, and his profound knowledge of Christian and other spiritual traditions, as well as numerous friendships (as witnessed by his published correspondence), the personal, the intimate, was to be an unknown frontier, a giant question mark, marking the end of his life. The kind of life decision made by numerous people, a decision for love, was one he could not make. He found himself in a spiritual and emotional prison. There were many reasons for this, not the least of these his unusual family background. (More of this at the end of our account .) A little more than two years later, in the summer of 1968, and a few months from his Asian trip, he made one final telephone call to Margie. At that point there was little left of the relationship, and Merton hung up on the call in desperation. He sadly observed: “We are two half people wandering in two lost worlds.”⁹¹

Throughout the first part of the diary named *Learning to Love*, he describes the prison, the dilemma. It is a struggle between intimacy and solitude (or at least solitude as Merton understood it), leaving no place for any mixture of the two.

A few examples:

“Our hearts really are in tune. Our depths really communicate. And this is all. It is the real root and ground of everything and of this sexual love can only at best be a sign. Certainly it would be marvelous if we could communicate the whole thing in this sign, but I see no way of doing this without falling away completely from truth.” (Merton is referring here to his two vows, one to his monastic profession, and the other to the Catholic priesthood. He seems to see no way of asking for dispensation from either of these. Whether or not this was in fact the case in terms of the Canon Law of the time, or whether Merton’s own fear of intimacy used the situation as an excuse, is unclear. The fact remains that he would not cross this barrier. What is interesting and significant is that many other Catholic religious, male and female, did make such a decision at this time, the time of Vatican II). Rather, as he continues: “I have to continue my work of eliminating all craving, all passionate attachment, all self-seeking from this. And it is work. Evasion is no answer, and I am not sure I have a real answer or know just what to do. I have only in the end to trust God in this as in all my other perplexities and He will bring me through it all right.”⁹²

Merton fears bitter reprisals from some monastic authorities, especially his abbot. Such fears were well-founded, as it turned out:

“If I believe in love and in M., am I willing to face all the consequences frankly and despise the ridicule, the criticism and the injury without in any way cheaply giving in? The worst is that inevitably we will be cut off from each other with brutality and self-righteous refinements of official cruelty. In the solitude of my heart I will have to struggle to be ready for this, for here again we are both vulnerable and can easily be destroyed. . . I see how badly I need her love to complete me with its warmth and understanding and how utterly alone I am without her now. Some talk for a hermit! But it is true and I may as well admit it.”⁹³

“The heart of the matter is this. M. is a person with an enormous need to give love. She felt herself providentially drawn to me in the hospital and began to give me love the first day she cared for me. I knew before I left the hospital that she loved me. . . . I feel I must fully surrender to it” (their love) “because it will change and heal my life in a way that I fear, but I think it is necessary- in a way that will force me first of all to *receive an enormous amount of love* (which to tell the truth I have often feared).⁹⁴

After a somewhat clandestine meeting with Margie after a doctor’s appointment, Merton sums up his troubles in a more frank way than was usual with him:

“When I got home I called her and we were talking again, foolishly of possibilities, living together, my leaving here, ‘marrying’ her etc. But it is all preposterous. Society has no place for us and I haven’t the gall it takes to fight the whole world particularly when I don’t really want married life anyway; I want the life I have vowed.”⁹⁵ The hermit values his hermitage, and the solitude it provides him for prayer, reading, reflection and writing. As for Margie ? It would seem that somehow she would interfere with this. And yet? Here is part, at least, of the dilemma.

As he well understood and frequently noted, this in-between and often secretive situation could not continue for long. Margie poured out her heart in frequent letters. Merton played a “cat and mouse” game of making “forbidden” telephone calls from within the monastery, and was observed doing this. He arranged various meetings, and picnics, both at Gethsemani and in Louisville. Margie had friends bring her to the abbey, and take her back. Although we don’t know, and don’t need to know exact details, they struggled on the slippery slope of sexuality. It was only a matter of time. Dom James “found out” and confronted Merton.

As he describes the meeting (there were to be others):

“Decided the best thing was to own up and face Dom James (about the phone calls *only*) before he summoned me in. So I did. He was kind and tried to be understanding to some extent- his solution was of course ‘a

complete break.’ Wanted to write to M. himself but I refused- that would be disastrous- and he does not know who she is and I don’t think he needs to know.”⁹⁶

At a certain point in one of their encounters, Dom James confronts Merton with one of Margie’s letters. (Under Trappist regulations, at least at this time, abbots read the correspondence of monks.) In a cruel fashion, at least in Merton’s eyes, the abbot toys with whether to allow the recipient to read it. With such humiliation and much unwanted advice (another example of “All for Jesus, through Mary, with a smile” !). Even letters, apparently, were forbidden. Merton makes the break. The relationship is “over,” at least in its most intense phases. Whether or not he was aware of the depths within himself he was repressing, he writes:

“ ‘In order to untie a knot you must first find out how the knot was tied’ (Buddha). This morning for the first time, really since going to the hospital, I have real inner freedom and solitude- I love M. but in a different way, peacefully and without disturbances and inner tension. I feel once again I am *all here*. I have finally returned to my place and to my work, and am beginning once again to be what I am. It has been a time of gruesome yet beautiful alienation. Had a hard, restless night, kept waking up thinking of her, of what she might be feeling and suffering (I am worried, knowing her intensity) and then realizing my complete aloneness- and the solitude of the woods all around me, but realizing it as *right*.”⁹⁷

For all intents and purposes, Thomas Merton is back again at the task of being Fr. Louis, the deeply read and widely respected “monk in and for the world.” He becomes even more intensely involved in study and encounter with Asian religions, especially Buddhism in its different manifestations. His journal, *Learning to Love. Exploring Solitude and Freedom*, records again an intense engagement in the worlds of literature, politics, and world religions (at this time he particularly bonded with the writings of Albert Camus). In a meeting with the Dalai Lama, he impresses him as being a kind of Christian he had never met before, one totally open to the teachings of the *Dharma*, and yet fully rooted in his own tradition. During his Asian trip, he makes many other such encounters. It is of such meetings, and reflections on Buddhist art and literature (particularly figures of the Buddha in Sri Lanka) that much of Merton’s reputation will be made. Yet as we reflect on his later life- after Margie- I believe we need to ask at what cost were his insights made. In renouncing intimacy, for whatever reasons, or justifications, Merton renounced what was probably his deepest self. He turned away from his own nakedness, and allowed himself to be stripped of what was most precious and secret. In a moment of irony at the

last talk he gave in Bangkok, he ended the session by saying “And now, I’ll disappear.” He will die some hours later, in a freak accident with an electric fan, when getting out of a shower. I wonder if the “real” Thomas Merton had “disappeared” somewhat before this, when he broke off his life-line with love, with Margie. We shall never know the answer to this question.

While it is impossible for us to know what Merton would have done with newly found insights from an intimate encounter, we do have some hints. He openly describes his life with Margie as opening for him the “eighth day,” that eschatological period beyond creation much celebrated in early Christian literature, a point of re-creation and of rest beyond time.⁹⁸ In a poem with the title “Certain Proverbs Arise out of Dreams,” he outlines this reality: “In dreams there is only one great day to be celebrated, Its only reason is the other. You and I make one holiday. Together we create the light of this day for each other. This is love’s Genesis, always beginning and never ending. We are at all times in the first day of creation.” But such exalted realities are personal, intimate: “Why has God created you to be the center of my being? You are utterly holy and to me you have become a focus of inaccessible light. Suns explode from the light you spread through my guts and torn with love for you my cry becomes a hemorrhage of wild and cool stars. I wake with the knowledge of my whole meaning which is you. Our luck is irreversible. We are the chosen winners of sleep whose secret light is now clear to us after five or six explorations.”⁹⁹

This is Merton’s variation on a central theme in Cistercian and Augustinian spiritual tradition, what both St. Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St. Thierry in the twelfth century describe as “*amor ipse intellectus est*,” or “love itself is understanding.” In other words, in order for spiritual experience to be authentic, it needs to be personal, intimate.¹⁰⁰ With much sorrow and pain, Thomas Merton will discover this in a very twentieth century manifestation.

Perhaps the most revealing expression of how Merton saw his life with Margie as being an entrance into the “eighth day”¹⁰¹ is his poem written on the occasion of a picnic the two of them had near the Louisville airport, where millionaires landed their private jets. Contrasting this rather odd reality with the sublime, Merton writes (I excerpt from the longer poem) :

“LOUISVILLE AIRPORT, MAY 5, 1966”

“Here on the foolish grass/ where the rich in small jets/ land with their own hopes/ And their own kind// We with the gentle liturgy/ of shy children have permitted God/ To make again that first world/ Here on the foolish grass/ After the spring rain has dried/ And all the loneliness// Is for a

moment lost in that simple/ liturgy of children permitting God/ To make again that love which is His alone// His alone and terribly obscure and rare/ Love walks gently as a deer/ to where we sit on the green grass/ In the marvel of this day's going down/ Celebrated only/ By all the poets since the world began // This is God's own love He makes in us/ As all the foolish rich fly down/ on to the paradise of grass/ where the world first began/ where God began / To make His love in man and woman/ For the first time/ Here on the sky's shore/ Where the eternal sun goes down/ and all the millionaires in small jets/ land with their own hopes/ and their own kind."¹⁰²

I - for one - find it noteworthy that the possibilities suggested in this poem were not explored or developed in Merton's life. For whatever reasons, they were to be a last and forbidden frontier. They bring to mind the sad and dissonant notes of Gregory of Nazianzus' highly different reflections at the end of his career, where he gives voice to a fear that the real purposes of his life could never be fulfilled, that ecclesiastical politics trumped Trinitarian reality.

Thomas Merton : A Life of Contemplation

I shall not give more than a brief biographical sketch of our twentieth-century monk. There are numerous books covering different phases of his life, and his particular interests, as well as the two excellent biographies by Furlong and Mott. I see no need to add to this considerable literature. In addition, a more complete biography, which may one day be written, needs a greater passage of time for the unearthing of new material. The voices of some who are still living or recently deceased may be released once they are no longer bound by secrecy. Yet I do believe that the seeming contradictions and paradoxes in Merton's unusual journey can be best explained by underlining or highlighting some biographical facts.

The first part of Merton's life, until his conversion to Roman Catholicism in the late 1930s as a student at Columbia University, has little to mark him off from many young men of his generation and background. His was what has sometimes been called a "Lost Generation," of smart and quick intellectual repartee and gossip, much liquor, fast times, good friends, and "easy" women. He even had a reputation among his friends of "ruining" pianos because of the wild and furious way he played them! There was little, at least on the surface, to suggest deep spiritual conversion. At Columbia, Merton penned drawings suggesting a keen appreciation of female beauty. After his conversion, he was probably rejected by the Franciscan Order because he had fathered a child in England. His guardian,

and what was left of his family, seems to have felt he would never “grow up.” They ordered him back to the U.S., and he entered Columbia. Apparently he did not reveal his misdeeds in any detail to the Trappists before entering Gethsemani. Besides, they were well-known for receiving the most desperate of cases.¹⁰³

Yet there were two highly significant events from this early period—his travels in Europe as a young child with his father; and the tragic and abrupt death of his mother, Ruth, from stomach cancer. The travels and the mother, I find, were especially formative. Unlike Gregory of Nazianzus, Merton’s family was hardly overwhelming. Both parents were what we might call “free-lance” intellectuals, his mother a writer and father, Owen, a landscape painter. Merton himself was born in the small town of Prades in southern France, and only much later became an American citizen. In early travels, in Rome and Italy, he was entranced by Byzantine icons. (Of the few effects left at his death in Bangkok, there was an icon he carried with him.) His account of his travels in *The Seven Storey Mountain* shows how impressionable he was to his environment, especially to France and its culture. They also indicate a rootlessness, a lack of a place that was a center, that was to haunt him throughout his life. In many senses, Merton was always looking for a center, whether at Gethsemani or elsewhere.

His relationship, or lack of relationship, with his mother was equally powerful. From accounts Merton gives, Ruth was a demanding parent, having high standards in various ways for her son. But she was not comforting or encouraging. When she was dying from cancer in a hospital, the young man was forbidden to see her. The last moments were carefully controlled:

“Tom and John Paul (his younger brother) went to stay with their grandparents at Douglaston, and Owen played the piano every night at a movie theater to pay the hospital bills. Ruth did not see her children again after she went to the hospital, because, according to Merton, she thought scenes of morbidity should be kept from children.. . . On the day Ruth Merton died, little Tom, his father, his grandparents and his uncle went in a hired car to the hospital. The child sat in the car while the others went in, and he remembered the heavy rain and the desolate sky as he waited, and the heartbroken relatives who emerged. ‘When we got home to Douglaston, Father went into a room alone, and I followed him and found him weeping.’”¹⁰⁴

Significantly, the older Merton will dream of his mother in the depths of his struggles with feelings about Margie:

“I see a tangle of dark briars and light roses. My attention singles out one beautiful pink rose, which becomes luminous, and I am much aware of the silky texture of the petals. My Mother’s face appears behind the roses, which vanish!”¹⁰⁵

While we should not delve too deeply into Merton’s personality, I believe we can observe with some degree of fairness that the distant and tragic relations he had with his mother, and the forced separation at her death, helped to keep lasting female intimacy as a frontier that he could not cross. However he might ache for such real contact, spiritual as much as physical, he could not pass over certain thresholds. Perhaps because of how he understood his monastic and priestly vows, perhaps because inner forces were more than he could conquer. We are not permitted into this secret. But his insights into the creating and restoring powers of such love as expressed in his poems at the end suggest the beginning of a new (and also old) theology of human *eros* and *agape*, of an experience of the *Song of Solomon* equal to that of his Cistercian ancestors, Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St. Thierry. As it turned out, such a theology, a theology of the “eighth day,” was only to be sketched out in broad, if beautiful, strokes in his verse.¹⁰⁶

Merton’s attraction to the Trappist life in the early 1940s was to one of the most austere and forbidding forms of Christian monasticism. The original reform or renewal of life according to the *Rule of St. Benedict* by the monks of Citeaux (Cistercians) in the early twelfth century was *to be made even more strict* (if not inhuman) by the later reforms of Armand de Rance and Augustin LeStrange in seventeenth and eighteenth century France.¹⁰⁷ (Merton himself tells the story well in one of his earlier books).¹⁰⁸ On the openly Jansenist affiliations of Rance, and the closeness of Cistercian reforms at the convent of Port Royal we have significant literature available.¹⁰⁹ It would be hard to imagine a form of life more opposed to many of the depths of the young Thomas Merton.

The Abbey of Gethsemani, nestled in the hills and forests of rural Kentucky, a place of extraordinary beauty, was at a particular height of fervor when Merton entered in December of 1941. Under its abbot, Dom Frederick Dunne, who appreciated the young writer in a way that seemed impossible for the later Dom James Fox, it witnessed to a kind of life in stark contrast with the society around it. From shortly after his arrival at the monastery, Dom Frederic encouraged Merton in his writing, and gave him various assignments. However much he might desire it, he was not going to be allowed to escape from this part of his past. But life in this environment was to be far different from the freedoms of his worldly routines. As

explained to the writer James Thomas Baker : “for the first few years of his (Merton’s) monastic life the rules were so strict that the monks had little time for thoughts of the world, spending all their time in worship, physical labor, and trying to stay healthy. They never went outside the enclosure walls, and received almost no news from the outside world. . . Merton’s own body reacted negatively to these harsh conditions, and he became ill with a respiratory disease that was at first incorrectly diagnosed as tuberculosis.”¹¹⁰ This was to be the first of many illnesses in Merton’s monastic life.

While this austerity was considerably relaxed in the 1960s and after, both from internal changes in the Cistercian Order and from the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), Trappist life retains much of the purity, if not austerity, of its founders and reformers.¹¹¹ It is not a place to “escape” from the world, as the silence and isolation of the life allow any ghosts and problems from the past to rise up in even larger form, as with the first ascetics of the Desert. Hence the kind of mental and spiritual space that would allow Merton, and others, to write at depth about their inner struggles and discoveries. At the same time, a close life in community, with people you often can’t stand, also rubs off more than a few rough edges. As he sadly found out, there were more than a few listeners to his supposed “secret” telephone conversations with Margie. As well as willing informers to the abbot on such breaches of monastic discipline. A community of more than eighty (the size of Gethsemani in his last years) can still be a fishbowl. Such would be Merton’s daily routine at Gethsemani, and his constant need to find a meaningful solitude.

In the last two decades of Merton’s life, in the 1950s and 60s, he had two particular advantages and occasions for growth. Both were brought to him by that strange and contradictory figure, abbot Dom James Fox. Rather early in his monastic career, he was appointed to give conferences to different groups of monks- novices, juniors, and scholastics. These frequent classes gave Merton the opportunity to do wide and deep reading, especially in different areas of Christian theological and spiritual tradition. He was also to develop more than superficial acquaintance with other religious traditions, including Islam and Sufism. (Many of these conferences are available on tape. Besides his knowledge, they show a playful and sardonic side of this teacher.) Along with the lectures, Merton began to act as the spiritual father to a number of monks. Needless to say, his personal influence was considerable- both for men who stayed in the community, and many others who left to pursue different directions. The second plus to Merton’s life at this time was permission to live in a hermitage near the

monastery. He was one of the first Cistercian monks to revive this form of life within his Order. Curiously enough, Dom James himself would become a hermit when he retired from the office of abbot in 1968.¹¹² Merton cherished life in his small cabin, and was allowed to spend increasing amounts of time there. In the middle of his time with Margie, one of his greatest fears will be that Dom James might end the hermitage experience.

At the end, we find Merton with his hermitage life still intact, his contacts with Buddhist teachers and teachings increasing, and yet with a broken and unresolved relationship, a giant question mark at the center of himself, as he departs for his trip to Asia (see his *Asian Journal* for this trip) and conferences there in the fall of 1968.¹¹³ He will explain his final challenge as posed to him by some words from the Roman Catholic theologian, Hans Urs Von Balthasar: “To offer oneself to God as a sacrifice of obedience in faith. This is the crucial point.”¹¹⁴ We can well ask: What kind of obedience? What kind (s) of sacrifice? How do these involve the contemplative life, and the larger world? Yet Fr. Louis, Thomas Merton, leaves us with these questions as the personal *koans*, or spiritual puzzles, he sets for us. As a Christian and Zen master, he will not provide the answers.

Conclusion

It is a long distance, both in miles and in time, between fourth century Cappadocia and rural Kentucky, USA, at the end of the twentieth century; between the late Roman Empire and a United States divided by war in Vietnam and persistent racism and other social inequities. Yet, even with these distances, I believe there is much we can learn from Gregory of Nazianzus and Thomas Merton about what it means to be a contemplative engaged in the life of the larger world. What does it mean to pursue a life of *theoria* or *philosophia*? Certainly, as Merton often noted, a “contempt” of the world, or *contemptus mundi*, is not a Christian option.

As human persons and as Christians, we are created in the image and likeness of God. *Theosis* or divinization is both our birthright and vocation; to discover and recover the nature, the “original child” God intended each of us to be.¹¹⁵ Both authors we have examined emphasize to us as well that being a person we participate by our nature in the lives of others, in societies- in families, in governments, and in communities of worship. We engage with others in much the same way as the Trinity lives out relationship, in its “inner dance” as many of the Fathers called it, its *perichoresis*. That was why it was so crucial for Gregory of Nazianzus and his Cappadocian contemporaries that Christ be fully divine and fully human;

and that the Holy Spirit be God, and not some odd Gnostic emanation. As a natural consequence of this divine reality, no man, no woman, can be an island. This is not a trite saying. As Anthony taught from the desert of Egypt, the salvation and the well-being of my brother and sister is my concern.¹¹⁶ The final Judgment, whatever else it may mean, will be an oral exam about how we did with this.

Contemplation, *theoria*, was at the center of Gregory of Nazianzus' life. As he describes eloquently in his poetry, and as I have outlined, it was the early dedication to God by his mother and his vision of Wisdom inviting him to the Trinity that shaped the course of his adult life. His alternation between periods of retreat and active ministry in the Church, between the throne of governing and the mountain of contemplation, was to be his pattern. If he was separated too long from *hesychia*, from quiet, he felt that he was living only half his life. More than that, Gregory understood the dangers of involvement in activities, however worthwhile, that had lost their source in an inner life. I believe that in our own period of history at present we are becoming aware of a similar problem. It is no accident that "burn-out," as it is called, and *acedia*, or boredom and frustration, are stark contemporary realities. To find a rich and fulfilling career means finding significant time to be alone, and with close people in our lives. To have a ministry of fifty years, for example, is the fruit of a balance and of delight in the little things of life that God sends our way.

The "self" does not seem to have been a special problem or barrier for Gregory of Nazianzus. In a tradition rooted in both classical and Christian Greek culture, *paideia* or education required an integration of the mind and the spirit, of what Latins would call *animus* and *anima*.¹¹⁷ Nor does intimacy seem to have been a particular issue. Perhaps because of an almost too present family and its demands, Gregory found being alone to be a source of refreshment, if not a necessity. For both the Cappadocian and for Merton, integration of the different parts of the person, and an accompanying self-knowledge, were essential steps towards God.¹¹⁸ Humanistic psychology, as it has been called, was not an invention of the twentieth century.

In considerable contrast, I find Thomas Merton's spiritual journey to be haunted by an unresolved past, by differing pieces of a puzzle. The discovery of the self, of its many layers and even disguises, was necessary for a discovery of God, and of Sophia- as she appeared both in dreams and later on in a feminine person. His most persistent image, at least from the time of *The Sign of Jonas*, was that of the prophet buried in the belly of the whale, in the layers of self. Merton was especially conscious of the

temptation within himself and presented to him by others, to solidify a particular image of who he was- whether as the monastic convert from the evils of the world (as in *The Seven Storey Mountain* and subsequent early books), or as the later well-balanced and wise contemplative who was a source of inspiration for others.

In a burst of revealing anger, he writes to another monk in the monastery, Fr. Eudes Bamberger, whom Dom James had instructed to help Merton “straighten up and fly right” after Margie. (It just so happened that Bamberger was also the official psychiatrist in residence.) Responding to a meeting with Bamberger, he observes:

“The one essential thing to my mind that calls for argument is one on which argument will be entirely futile. I will therefore just state my own idea and pass on. It is the error that you and Rev. Father both share that before I was in some measure whole and consistent and now I am not, and the thing for me to do is to recover my previous wholeness. Anyone that thinks that I was whole and consistent before simply does not know me. My fall into inconsistency was nothing but the revelation of what I am. The fact that in community this could comfortably be hidden is to me the most valid argument why I should never under any circumstances get myself back into the comfort of pseudo-wholeness. I am now in several disedifying pieces.”¹¹⁹

In order to understand and appreciate Thomas Merton- for us an almost contemporary contemplative- I believe it is absolutely essential not to dismiss Margie. Shelving for the time being the related issues of Merton’s monastic and priestly vows, or how “inappropriate” his behavior seemed to some, I believe we must delve further if we are to be faithful to his experience, and for what it may teach us. The young nurse was not a temporary “blip” on our monk’s otherwise serene screen, or an infatuation that somehow a true spiritual seeker, and especially hermit, needed to “get over.” (With all due deference to Dom James as abbot!) Rather she was one of the final mentors in his journey of self-discovery, leading to a discovery of the Christ and the Sophia within. Merton’s involvement with her- however painfully terminated- opens a much larger question for us, that of intimacy, physical and spiritual, as a contemplative path. Can a contemplative be intimate with another person, and still pursue the goals most of the Christian tradition associates with a search for God? Or is this journey, somehow, the special province of celibates? Thomas Merton, Father Louis, dared to ask the question. Sadly enough, he did not live long enough to find much of an answer.

Curiously, there do not seem- at least at first glance- many models from the Christian past, either East or West, to direct us in answering it. There are few maps for the voyage. Rather we are often left, as with St. Augustine of Hippo in his *Confessions*, saying: "Lord, make me pure, but not yet!" There may, perhaps, be some help in the writings of the seventeenth century English poet, John Donne, "metaphysical" poet and preacher and dean of St. Paul's cathedral in London. As a writer of verse that explores the entire register of human love as a way to God, Donne also wrote powerful meditations and sermons. The very phrase "no man is an island," a title of one of Merton's books, showing his opening to the world, is from one of Donne's meditations: "No man is an island" . . . we are "a piece of the continent, a part of the main."¹²⁰ Also, we might investigate the *fin de siècle* French writer, Leon Bloy, robust and cantankerous author of the powerful yet often forgotten novel *la Femme Pauvre*. Bloy united sexuality and the spiritual journey, and had much to say about the mystery of woman. (Perhaps a little idealistic at times!) Many other examples may be awaiting discovery. Intimacy as a spiritual journey is a frontier, old but refreshingly new, that Christians of East and West are called to explore, a new dimension of the contemplative life.

Such intimacy can help us in the task of union with our larger selves. It can open us to many unexpected areas of life. As we become more comfortable with different dimensions within the self, we can experience others. As Merton noted (pre-Margie):

"If I can unite in myself, in my own spiritual life, the thought of the East and the West, of the Greek and the Latin Fathers, I will create in myself a reunion of the divided Church and from that unity in myself can come the exterior and visible unity of the Church. For if we want to bring together East and West we cannot do it by imposing one upon the other. We must contain both in ourselves, and transcend both in Christ."¹²¹

Such personal integration comes, as he found out, as part of a larger work of healing, or restoration.

A few final words about the setting of the contemplative search, "the world."

For both Gregory of Nazianzus and Thomas Merton, one of the chief frustrations in their lives was the mediocrity of the Church, and of Christian communities; between the Church as it should be and churches as they are. The situation doesn't seem to have changed much over the centuries. For Gregory it was the vast majority of his fellow bishops, whom he often considered as little better than bureaucrats. He tells us that this stunning mediocrity was one of his chief reasons for leaving Constantinople in his

final years. In the case of Merton, it was often his fellow monks at Gethsemani- many of whom he loved, and others who made his life a living hell- particularly with Margie. On a certain basic level he seemed to be unable to recognize that his involvement was highly irregular, if not scandalous for some. Abbot Dom James Fox, probably unfairly at times, comes in for special scorn. The spiritual discipline of developing compassion for those who had a different, and often limited, vision was one both Gregory and Merton could have engaged. Their high standards for themselves, imposed on others, created disharmony and alienation.

But such inner struggles could also point in another direction, to finding the contemplative in unexpected places. I shall give the final word on this to Merton, writing on August 4, 1966, in the midst of Margie:

“Are people like Camus and Muir the true monks of our day? Is monasticism to be really found in an external commitment to certain formal sacrifice and an institutional and ritual life or in the kind of solitude, integrity, commitment that Camus had, or the fidelity to vision that was Muir’s?”¹²²

What is the heart of spiritual practice for us? How do communities, monastic, parish, or otherwise, help or discourage us on our way as pilgrims? Both Gregory of Nazianzus and Thomas Merton invite us to explore these questions, as we examine their differing but parallel worlds.

NOTES:

¹ There are numerous biographies of Gregory of Nazianzus. The most recent, and in many ways the most complete, is that by John A. McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus. An Intellectual Biography* (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 2001, hereafter: McGuckin). Also helpful, especially in its analysis of basic themes, is Christopher A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light we See Light* (Oxford University Press, Oxford & NY, 2008, hereafter: Beeley). I would also recommend the earlier study by Rosemary Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus. Rhetor and Philosopher* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1969). Foundational work on Gregory was done by J.S. Plagnieux in *Grégoire de Nazianze Theologien: Etudes de Science religieuse 7* (Paris, 1952). Still useful, especially in terms of historical and cultural background, are A. Benoit, *St. Grégoire de Nazianze: sa vie, ses oeuvres, et son époque* (Marseille/Paris, 1876; repr. Hildesheim/NY, 1973) and Paul Gallay, *La Vie de Saint Grégoire de Nazianze* (Vitte, Lyon/Paris, 1943). The environment

of late fourth century Cappadocia and the related families of Gregory of Nyssa and Basil of Caesarea are the subject of three volumes of Raymond Van Dam, *Kingdom of Snow: Roman Rule and Greek Culture in Cappadocia* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA, 2002); *Families and Friends in Late Roman Cappadocia*. (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA, 2003); and *Becoming Christian. The Conversion of Roman Cappadocia* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA, 2003). Van Dam describes at some length the importance of family, and of family connections, in the closely knit society of the region of the Empire.

² Light was perhaps the major term by which Gregory portrayed human knowledge of God. Much more than metaphor, it was a language of experience. For a brief statement and illustrations of this, see Beeley .

³ *Sources Chrétiennes* version, vol. 247, pp. 84-89; my translation from Greek and French.

⁴ For background on social and economic problems facing Gregory and his colleagues, see Susan R. Holman *The Hungry are Dying. Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia*, Oxford University Press, NY, 2001, and S. Elm, "*Virgins of God*": *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994, chapters 1-4.

⁵ See in particular T. Spidlik, Grégoire de Nazianze. Introduction a l'étude de sa doctrine spirituelle, OCA, Rome, 1971.

⁶ See *Ibid.*, pp. 41-43, especially references to *Or.*24, 6 & *Or.* 21, 2.

⁷ *Or.* 32, 15, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.38.

⁸ For a recent study of Gregory Palamas and his teachings on energies, see George C. Papademetriou, *Introduction to St. Gregory Palamas*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, MA, 2004. His bibliography lists many earlier works, particularly those of John Meyendorff.

⁹ This is the basic thesis of Winslow's book (Donald Winslow, *The Dynamics of Salvation. A Study of Gregory of Nazianzus*, North American Patristic Society, Cambridge, MA, 1979). The relationship and interplay of *theologia* and *oikonomia* remain one of the main differences in understanding and emphasis between eastern and western, Greek and Latin, theologies. Salvation has been narrowed to a perspective centering on the cross in western theology.

¹⁰ Winslow, *op. cit.*, p.33.

¹¹ McGuckin, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-53.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 49-51.

¹³ Translation of McGuckin, pp.68-69.

¹⁴ That is, they were not seen, in the way many people do today, as some form of psychodrama. See Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1994, for an exploration of how dreams were understood in Gregory's time.

¹⁵ Patricia Cox Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁶ A theme also highly important for Gregory of Nazianzus himself, and for Origen, Gregory's spiritual master. On Origen and *Canticle*, see J. Christopher King, *Origen on the Song of Songs as the Spirit of Scripture. The Bridegroom's Perfect Marriage-Song*, Oxford University Press, Oxford & NY, 2005. The importance of the *Canticle* as a description of divine as well as human love will continue throughout the twelfth century in the West, especially with Bernard of Clairvaux. See E. Ann Matter, *The voice of my beloved: the Song of Songs in western medieval Christianity*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1990.

¹⁷ Patricia Cox Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

¹⁸ See J. Bernardi, ed., *Gégoire de Nazianze. Discours 1-3*, Cerf, Paris, 1978 (Sources Chrésiennes 247, pp.94-95). My translation and adaptation of Greek and French.

¹⁹ *Or.* 27.3, as translated and cited in Christopher A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God. 'In Your Light We Shall See Light,'* Oxford University Press, NY, 2008, pp. 67-68. The image of Moses was frequently applied to the pastor, particularly the bishop, at this time. See Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity. The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2005, pp.20; and chapter 4.

²⁰ *Or.* 28.2, quoted and translated in *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²¹ Patricia Cox Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 234, citing Gregory, *Or.* 7, 17.

²² For a brief treatment of this theme in Gregory, see Beeley, pp. 116-122, "Christology and Divinization."

²³ *Or.* 2. J. Bernardi, ed., pp. 188- 191. My translation.

²⁴ As quoted and translated in Brooks Otis, "The Throne and the Mountain: An Essay on St. Gregory Nazianzus," in *Classical Journal*, 56, 1961, p. 163.

²⁵ Gregory's *Oration 14*, concerned with the love of the poor, is especially devoted to this reality. English translation: "Oration 14: On the Love of the Poor," by Brian E. Daley, S.J., *Gregory of Nazianzus*, Routledge, London & NY, 2006, pp. 75- 97. See Rapp, pp. 223 ff. on bishops and care of the poor; also Holman, *The Hungry Are Dying*.

²⁶ On theoria as Christian philosophy, see Anne-Marie Malingrey, “Philosophia.” Etude d’un groupe de mots dans la littérature grecque, des Présocratiques au IV^e siècle après J.C., Klincksieck, Paris, 1961, especially ch. 7.

²⁷ For political circumstances, see particularly Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church. The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2004); and with abundant detail concerning the different periods of Gregory’s career: Francis Gautier, *La Retraite et le Sacerdoce chez Grégoire de Nazianze*, Brepols, Turnhout, 2002; also Rapp, *op.cit.*

²⁸ Peter Brown. *The Body and Society. Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Columbia University Press, NY, 1988, p. 285.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 285. For Cappadocian family backgrounds, see Raymond Van Dam, *Families and Friends*.

³⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Autobiographical poems*, Trans. and ed. by Carolinne White, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 17.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

³² Susanna Elm, ‘Virgins of God.’ *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994.

³³ “Les moines et la ville: le monachisme à Constantinople jusqu’au concile de Chalcedoine 451,” reprinted in Gilbert Dagron. *La romanité chrétienne en Orient*, Variorum, London, 1984, no. 8.

³⁴ Susanna Elm, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

³⁵ Brooks Otis, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

³⁶ Donald Winslow, *op. cit.*

³⁷ Christopher Beeley, *op. cit.*, p. 11; McGuckin, *op. cit.*, ch. 3, “Politics and Priesthood in Cappadocia,” pp. 101-115; and the lengthy explanation and hypotheses of F. Gautier, *op. cit.*, pt. 3, ch. 5.

³⁸ Susanna Elm, *op. cit.*, ch. 2: “Basil of Caesarea: The Classic Model”. For Basil’s understanding of monasticism as it developed: Thomas Spidlik, “L’idéal du monachisme basilien,” in Paul Jonathan Fedwick, ed., *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic. A Sixteen-Hundredth Anniversary Symposium*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto, 1981, pt. I, pp. 361- 374; Jean Gribomont, “Saint Basile,” in *Théologie de la Vie Monastique*, Aubier, Paris, 1961, pp. 99-113.

³⁹ Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1994. In early chapters of this book the author describes Basil’s developing vision of monasticism, and the important question of the influence of Eustathius of Sebaste.

⁴⁰ *Letter 14*, in *Saint Basil. Letters. Vol. I (1-185)*, trans. Agnes Clare Way, C.D.P., Catholic University Press, Washington, DC, 1951, “The Fathers of the Church”, pp. 47-48. Note here the strong suggestion or allusion to this place as a new Paradise, a new Eden.

⁴¹ Probably written later than *14*, see P. Rousseau. *Basil of Caesarea*, p. 65.

⁴² *Letter 2*, in *Saint Basil, Letters, Vol. I (1-185)*, pp. 6-7.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 7 and following.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁵ Service to needy in vicinity was frequently the practice in these communities. See Elm, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

⁴⁶ On exile or *xeniteia*, see: John McGuckin, “Aliens and Citizens of Elsewhere: *Xeniteia* in East Christian Monastic Literature,” in Dion C. Smythe, ed. *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider*, Ashgate/Variorum, Burlington, VT, 2000, pp. 23-38.

⁴⁷ McGuckin, *op. cit.*, ch.3, pp. 115-168 and ch.4, “Bishop of Sasima;” F. Gautier, *La Retraite*, pt.3, ch.7, “L’Affaire Sasimes: un Evêque sans Trone.”

⁴⁸ This seems to be the underlying tone, in a thesis of Neil Mclynn’s article, “A Self-Made Holy Man: The Case of Gregory Nazianzen,” in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6, 1998, pp. 463-483.

⁴⁹ McGuckin, *op. cit.*, ch.6, “Archbishop of Constantinople,” pp. 311-325.

⁵⁰ Christopher Beeley, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁵¹ Edition of *Five Theological Orations: Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning. The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen.* trans. Lionel Wickham and Frederick Williams, intro. and commentary Frederick W. Norris, Brill, Leiden, etc., 1991; commentary of McGuckin in *op. cit.*, ch. 5, “An Invitation to Byzantium,” pp. 277-310; analysis of texts relating to Maximus in Malingrey, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-211.

⁵² On resignation, see McGuckin, *op. cit.*, pp.359-366; comments by Beeley, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-60.

⁵³ C. White, ed. and trans., Gregory of Nazianzus. *Autobiographical Poems*, pp. 145-147.

⁵⁴ Beeley, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁵⁵ “Epitaph and synopsis of his life,” in C. White, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-183; also McGuckin, *op. cit.*, “An Epilogue,” pp. 399-400. Verses quoted and translated by McGuckin show the despondent state of Gregory on considering his past: “As before, a bitter grief still gnawed in me./ I could not appreciate all this beauty./ For when sorrow grips the mind,/ It finds it hard to sing its song./ My mind was in a whirl of battling thoughts./ Who was I? Who am I now? What shall I be?/ I could see no clear answers to it all./ Nor could I find anyone who knew any better than me.”

⁵⁶ Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*, Harcourt Brace, NY, 1953, p. v.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, “Fire Watch” at end.

⁵⁸ In my discussion of Merton, both of his contemplative vision and of his biography, I shall, for the most part, avoid the voluminous secondary literature devoted to him. I shall base myself rather on his own writings, and the two standard biographies: Monica Furlong, *Merton. A Biography*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980; and Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984. Hereafter: Furlong and Mott. I also have found the memories and comments of monks I have known at the Abbey of Gethsemani helpful. I am especially indebted to the late Fr. Crysogonus Waddell, a close personal friend of Merton, and the late Fr. Charles Dumont of the Abbaye de Scourmont in Belgium. Both have provided perspective and balance to interpret a vast amount of information about a highly puzzling and engaging man- known among monastics as Fr. Louis, as well as by the nickname “Uncle Louie.”

⁵⁹ Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Harcourt Brace, NY, 1948, p. 320.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 379.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

⁶² *Idem*, “Informal Talk Delivered at Calcutta, October, 1968,” in *The Asian Journal*, New Directions, NY, 1975, pp. 305 ff.

⁶³ *Idem*, *A Search for Solitude. Pursuing the Monk's Life*, v. 3 of *Journals*, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham, Harper, San Francisco, 1996, p.86.

⁶⁴ *Idem*, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, New Directions, NY, 1962, p. 35. Probably Merton's most sustained treatments of the “self” are his two works showing a deep engagement with Buddhism, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, New Directions, NY, 1965, and *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, New Directions, NY, 1968. In the latter, he puts the matter quite succinctly: “Zen enriches no one. There is no body to be found. The birds may come and circle for a while in the place where it is thought to be. But they soon go elsewhere. When they are gone, the ‘nothing,’ the ‘no-body’ that was there, suddenly appears. That is Zen. It was there all the time, but the scavengers missed it, because it was not their kind of prey” (p. ix).

⁶⁵ *Idem*, *Raids on the Unspeakable*, New Directions, NY, 1966, p.6, referring to a statement of the twentieth century Russian philosopher in exile, Nicholas Berdyaev.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Monica Furlong, *Merton. A Biography*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1980, p. 159.

⁶⁷ “False self”: quoted in Furlong, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

⁶⁸ Furlong, *op. cit.*, p. 265. In his talks given to monastic students at Gethsemani, Merton frequently described how easy it was to “blend in” anonymously in the community, shrinking from challenges rather than facing them. This was distinctly not the idea of monastic solitude, or monastic community, that he found genuine.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 147.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Furlong, *op. cit.*, pp. 176 and 151.

⁷² Thomas Merton, *The Strange Islands*, New Directions, NY, 1957, pp. 25-26.

⁷³ Thomas Merton, *An Introduction to Christian Mysticism*, Gethsemani, privately printed, 1952, as paraphrased in Christopher Pramuk, *Sophia. The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 2009, p.146. A description of the *logos* at the heart of the human person expresses Merton’s understanding of the unity of all in Christ: “The *logos* of a man is therefore something hidden in him, spiritual, simple, profound, unitive, loving, selfless, self-forgetting, oriented to love and to unity with God and other men in Christ. . . . Christ in us must be liberated, by purification, so that the ‘image’ in us, clothed anew with the light of the divine likeness, is able connaturally to recognize the same likeness in another, the same tendency to love, to simplicity, to unity. Without love this is completely impossible,” p. 28 of *An Introduction*, quoted in Pramuk, *op. cit.* *An Introduction* is a revised version of a series of lectures he gave at Gethsemani in the late 1950s and early 60s. At this time in Merton’s life, the reading of Maximus the Confessor, as well as Russian Sophia theologians Vladimir Soloviev and Sergius Bulgakov, had profound influence on the direction of his thought. See Pramuk for these influences.

⁷⁴ *Idem*, *No Man Is an Island*, Hartcourt Press, New York, 1955, p. xv.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁶ *Idem*, *Disputed Questions*, Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, NY, 1960, p. 12.

⁷⁷ *Idem*, *The Courage for Truth: The Letters of Thomas Merton to Writers*, ed. Christine M. Bochen, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, NY, 1993, pp. 89-90. Explaining his reading of Pasternak’s novel, Merton finds a fundamental theology underlying it: “The book is a world in itself. . . a sophiological world, a paradise and a hell, in which the great mystical figures of Yurii and Lara stand out as Adam and Eve and though they walk in darkness walk with their hand in the hand of God. The earth they walk is sacred because of them.”

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 158.

⁷⁹ *Idem*, *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monk’s Life*, p. 176.

- ⁸⁰ Version as it appears in the Episcopal Church arrangement, *The Hymnal 1940*; many other translations available.
- ⁸¹ Merton quoted in Pramuk, *op. cit.*, p. 158. The Louisville event and the Sophia quotes are usually interpreted as the beginning of Merton's more direct engagement in the world.
- ⁸² Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude*, p. 89.
- ⁸³ Furlong, *op. cit.*, p. 254.
- ⁸⁴ Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Doubleday, NY, 1966, p. 3.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 6.
- ⁸⁶ *Idem*, *Original Child Bomb*, quoted in Furlong, *op. cit.*, p. 254.
- ⁸⁷ *Idem*, *Conjectures*, p. 7.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.
- ⁸⁹ *Idem*, *Learning to Love: Exploring Solitude and Freedom*, v. 6 of *Journals*, ed. Christine M. Bochen, Harper-San Francisco, San Francisco, 1997, p. 14.
- ⁹⁰ Merton manuscript quoted in Thomas M. King, S.J., *Merton: Mystic at the Center of America*, Collegeville, MN, The Liturgical Press, 1992, p. 4.
- ⁹¹ Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*, eds. Naomi Burton Stone and Patrick Hart, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, San Diego, 1979. (I have not been able to locate this citation.) Nakedness and spiritual stripping become major themes in the later Merton.
- ⁹² *Idem*, *Learning to Love*, p. 45.
- ⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 47.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- ⁹⁹ *Idem*, "Restricted poems" - "Evening: Long Distance Call," quoted in Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, Houghton Mifflin, New York, 1984, p. 454.
- ¹⁰⁰ Last talk and "disappear": see Furlong, *op. cit.*, pp. 329-330; Mott, *op. cit.*, pp. 562-564.
- ¹⁰¹ Theology of "eighth day": This was a major theme in much of the theology of the Orthodox Church as it developed out of the Patristic tradition.
- ¹⁰² Poem quoted in *Learning to Love*, p. 65 (Many of the poems inspired by Margie are included in this volume of his diary). "Margie" poems: A limited edition of poems dedicated to Margie appeared as: Thomas Merton,

Eighteen Poems, New Directions, NY, 1968, 1985. A recent book, with an alluring but misleading title, describes Merton's life in relation with Margie: Mark Shaw, *Beneath the Mask of Holiness. Thomas Merton and the Forbidden Love Affair That Set Him Free*, Palgrave Macmillan, NY, 2009. I have reached my own conclusions separately, without consulting Shaw's work.

¹⁰³ However unconventional, or even scandalous Merton's behavior at the time seemed to some (and particularly to a few - but not all - of his fellow monks at Gethsemani), he could well find a foundation for it in the search for God and for self at the heart of the Cistercian experience of the twelfth century. See Etienne Gilson. *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard*, trans. A.H.C. Downes, Sheed & Ward, NY, 1940, for an exposition of this vision, and its roots in earlier traditions.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in *Learning to Love*, pp. 52-53.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁶ For illuminating text and pictures relating to this early time see the memoir-biography of Merton's close friend from his years at Columbia, Edward Rice. *The man in the sycamore tree: the good times and hard life of Thomas Merton. An entertainment with photos*, Doubleday, Garden City, NY, 1970.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*. For Merton's youth before his entrance to Columbia, see Furlong, *op. cit.*, chapters 1-4; Mott, *op. cit.*, parts 1-3. In many ways Merton as a young monk at Gethsemani wanted to "forget" these years. I believe that this effort to try to obliterate or re-form his past explains much about why that past burst forth once again, often in unexpected ways. It could not be denied. As I have phrased it, he had to have an "appointment with his humanity."

¹⁰⁸ *Idem*, *The Waters of Siloe*, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1949.

¹⁰⁹ Jansenism and 17th century Trappists: Although not adhering to specifically "Jansenist" teachings, such as on the nature of grace, the larger mental and spiritual environment of the Port Royal reform and its spiritual father l'Abbe Saint-Cyran deeply influenced Rance and the first monks of La Trappe. See: A.J. Krailsheimer, *Armand Jean de Rance, Abbot of La Trappe: His Influence in the Cloister and the World*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1974; also by the same author: *Rance and the Trappist Legacy*, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, MI, 1985. For background of Port Royal: F. Ellen Weaver, *The Evolution of the Reform of Port Royal: From the Rule of Citeaux to Jansenism*, Beauchesne, Paris, 1978. Many Trappists still remain uncomfortable about these early Port Royal roots, and the experiences of Rance. But the historical record is clear about their

importance. The highly puzzling personality of Rance was the subject of a sardonic but clever biography by Abbe Henri Bremond *The Thundering Abbot. Armand de Rance, Reformer of La Trappe*, Sheed & Ward, London, 1930.

¹¹⁰ Account quoted in Furlong, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

¹¹¹ Two biographies of twentieth century Cistercian abbots describe movements of change. See: Frère Dieudonne Dufrasne, o.s.b., *Dom Anselme Le Bail. Abbe de Scourmont. 1913-1956. Un Moine. Un Abbe. Une Communauté*, Cahiers Scourmontois, 1, Scourmont, Belgium, 1999, and Dom Guy Marie Oury, *Dom Gabriel Sortais. An Amazing Abbot in Turbulent Times*, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, MI, 2006. Currents of reform began in Europe, parallel to the larger reform and renewal movements in the Roman Catholic Church, were only later to reach the U.S. Merton described some of these when he writes about meetings with French monks who visited Gethsemani. See especially comments throughout *The Sign of Jonas*. Because of his knowledge of French, almost a second language, he was often an official interpreter.

¹¹² See essay by (Dom) James Fox, "The Spiritual Son," in Patrick Hart, ed., *Thomas Merton. Monk*, Sheed and Ward, NY, 1974, pp. 141 - 159.

¹¹³ Quoted in *Learning to Love*, p. 91.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 91.

¹¹⁵ Divinization is a central theme in Merton, as in the early patristic tradition he studied and taught at Gethsemani.

¹¹⁶ Anthony and our salvation : "Our life and our death is with our neighbor. If we gain our brother, we have gained God, but if we scandalize our brother, we have sinned against Christ." ("Saying 9," in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers. The Alpha Collection*, Benedicta Ward, trans. Mowbray, London, 1975, p. 2).

¹¹⁷ Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, MA, 1961; also Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993.

¹¹⁸ See the presentation of Cappadocian psychology in Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa. Philosophical Background and Theological Significance*, Brill, Leiden, etc., 2000.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Merton, *Learning to Love*, p. 106.

¹²⁰ John Donne (1572- 1631) There are many editions of his poetry. Merton lectured on Donne at least once in classes he gave at Gethsemani.

¹²¹ Quoted in Furlong, *op. cit.*, p. 306, with other variations.

¹²² Thomas Merton, *Learning to Love*, p. 108.

The Language of Gender in the Byzantine World

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As Smith puts it, gender is about power relationships and the language which legitimates or denies their existence. “A gendered approach insists upon attention to hierarchies of power.”¹ Balsamon, a Byzantine canonist, characterizes marriage as the sharing of one human nature by two hypostases with the same soul. Female and male possess human nature according to a particular mode of existence. A woman in the context of marriage is a hypostasis sharing a common nature, but women are under the legal authority of their husbands. Women represent a lesser realization of humanity, possessing weak reasoning faculties.²

Peers makes a case for a kind of (spiritual) marriage being inscribed into the understanding of the Mandylion’s work: the Mandylion is the most famous East Christian and Byzantine touch relic of Christ, and was central to a Byzantine understanding of sacred history (it was a miraculous self-portrait and recapitulated the Incarnation). For Byzantines, the depiction of that face charged the act of face-to-face in that context with devotional urgency (*from a Byzantine view, harmony of the cosmos was only possible when fully Christianized*). Marriage was a central reality of life in the ancient and medieval worlds, playing a key role in imaginings of the relationship between God and humanity (the marriage rite in Byzantium has been less examined than it has been in the ancient world).³

Wood notes that women were intimately involved in the early Church: women are not often recorded in public roles and they are not shown to be involved with icons. At times during processions and ceremonies there were women present but not as the leading figures (men occupied the public position and women the subordinate role). Men, rather than women, were more likely to be portrayed as venerating icons. Icons and women were associated within the private sphere of Byzantine life, their homes.

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According to this discussion, women had a regularized position in the early Church: in the beginning they were admired for their help in spreading Christianity, but they began to be excluded from active participation in the Church in the fifth century. Wood reasons that legislation forms part of the evidence for the role women in the Church, as the secular law recognized the position of women in the Church hierarchy (the ecclesiastical legislation had an impact on how women were able to worship).⁴

Brown argues that during the Early Byzantine Empire, the iconography of angels and eunuchs became inextricably linked: when the art of the period itself is mustered, the close relationship of angels and eunuchs becomes clear, many eunuchs imitated angels by being celibate as well as not procreating, whereas angels and eunuchs serve as messengers and intermediaries between those of exalted status and the rest of humanity, and guardians of all. Eunuchs appear as the personal servants of the Emperor. Court eunuchs gained power under the Roman Empire, possessing a variety of offices and powers under the succeeding Byzantine Emperors. Eunuchs at court were often trusted advisors and had religious functions, for they protected the sacred space around the Emperor.⁵

The intricacies of the court ceremonial would have been meaningless without the eunuchs' knowledge. The Byzantines harbored a certain abhorrence of eunuchs, and the court eunuchs maintained continuity in the Byzantine lines of succession by manipulating elections.⁶ Ringrose focuses on the place of eunuchs in Byzantine society and culture: Byzantine society classed eunuchs as a separate gender category (eunuchs were a feature of Byzantine society throughout its history), and included sharply defined boundaries between social categories and genders. Gender is a socially constructed category, and was constructed in Byzantium in a way that differed from its construction in modern Western society. Roman and Byzantine law prohibited the making of eunuchs within the empire, but castration was in some way condoned by Byzantine culture.

That is to say, castration caused basic changes in the physiology, psychology, and moral character of the eunuch. Ringrose maintains that men who gave up their reproductive powers acquired expanded spiritual and intellectual powers. Byzantine attitudes about eunuchs were influenced by the importance of monasticism and the celibate life (eunuchs became increasingly integral to Byzantine society). Eunuchs constituted a third gender within Byzantium, Byzantine culture often saw eunuchs as involuntary celibates, whereas Byzantium accommodated gender constructs that went beyond the bipolarity of male/female.⁷

NOTES:

¹ J. M. H. Smith, "Introduction: Gendering the Early Medieval World," in Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith, eds., *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900*, Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, 2004, p. 7.

² Patrick Viscuso, "Theodore Balsamon's Canonical Images of Women," in *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 45, 2005, pp. 317-326.

³ Glenn A. Peers, "Masks, Marriage and the Byzantine Mandylion: Classical Inversions in the Tenth Century. *Narratio de translatione Constantinopolim imaginis Edessenaе*," in *Intermediality: History and Theory of the Arts, Literature and Technologies* 8, 2006, pp. 13-30.

⁴ Helen Wood, Helen, "Byzantine Women: Religion and Gender Construction," in *Rosetta* 7(5), 2009, pp. 19-32.

⁵ Amelia R. Brown, "Painting the Bodiless: Angels & Eunuchs in Byzantine Art and Culture," in A. Cervantes-Carson and D.J. Klein, eds., *Sex & Desire Across Boundaries*, Inter-Disciplinary Press, Freeland, 2012//////////e 2012 sau forthcoming. *Forthcoming*

⁶ Moran, Neil (2002), "Byzantine castrati," *Plainsong and Medieval Music* 11(2): 99-112.

⁷ Ringrose, Kathryn M. (2003), *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium*. Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press.

The Construction of Identity: From the Heraldic Signs to the Advertising Signs

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The concept of identity used in the realm of philosophy, religion, ideology, psychology, psychoanalysis, social psychology, society raises big questions and researchers have tried to circumscribe it to a perennial, exhaustive definition, because its complexity refers to both similarity and uniqueness. In other words, the contradiction between similarity and uniqueness, the oscillation “between radical alterity and total similarity” are the two facets which give substance and in several lines refer to the relationship between individual and collective. Interest in studying identity and issues arising from this matter is the subject “of very old debates [...] It is simply a conflict between the individual assertion and necessity, and the collective assertion and necessity, between personal identity search and search for a collective identity, between what is in the same time individual difference and similarity with another individual, between social visibility and conformity,” but also a major concern of people in ancient times. For example, during feudal and medieval times, the assertion of identity is directly related to the crest. If at first, the shield, a heraldic device dating from the twelfth century, had the primary function of establishing the identity in the war, then, it has come to signify family lineage, adoption, alliances, properties and professions, the recognition of suzerainty, of claims or even concessions. In today’s society, the logo has the valence to facilitate public recognition of a product, an institution or brand, creating a monolithic identity, if the institution uses in its socionym and unique visual style, an identity guarantor, the institution guaranteeing for the brands it owns and promotes, but also a brand identity, not based on the institution’s image, but the brand image it promotes. In all these cases, the logos will transmit values, the institution’s internal programs, thus recognizing that its members give a meaningful action.

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Being a collective mark is one of an organization metasign or/and brand and, not least, “a fundamental category of speech award and designation of an organization, thus ensuring its uni(ci)ty, an ongoing basis by reference to a unique expression.” Given all this, we can agree with Roland Reitter and Bernard Ramanantsoa, which state that the identity of the organization built by the logo is “all of which makes it identifiable and allowing identification with it. It’s what gives it continuity over time, which we called <identity> (the Memeti), internal consistency, despite its diversity and specificity or originality of the actors, its actors and the specificity of its values.” Comparing both crest and logo we can see that both have the primary function as the identification of transmitter. So, both elements provide insight into the transmitter, we enter in certain times, places, in different worlds and, from this perspective, we believe that the logo is the modern successor of the crest. If the crest is linked to the emergence of a new social order, feudalism, the same can be said about the logo: it invites us into a new history, in modern society, the consumer society. Common to both elements is the fact that they constantly enrich: the crest enriched as its owner acquired new positions, titles or territories, and the logo also evolved with the organization it represented, but continuing for several times, to remember where it started.

Decoding the significance of both the crest and logo requires certain complicity between the transmitter and receiver, the knowledge of certain social symbols. Both meanings of the crest and logo are tributaries of history and geography. In other words, their lives are bound to time, but also to a geographical area. In fact, their meaning meet human need to understand, shape and, ultimately, to view the abstract, to transcend beyond what is considered clearly visible. This meaning is constructed starting from the immeasurable capacity of the permutability of signs in different thematic registers by cutting the signified object from the landscape of its existence and projecting it to another geography, another history. Built on the shoulders of iconicity, meaning is an augmentation, an iconic hyperbolization of transmimetic perception, an infringement of the iconic text. In other words, meaning is articulated by transforming the icon into a metameaning vehicle. Topical and iconic syntax are repealed, and replaced by a new law that decrees another sense, another meaning. However, the global significance of an image in which icons and symbols cohabit is generated by the constant interfering between mimetic signifiers (icons) and the transmimetic ones. So, reading the iconic element and the symbolic one for both Land Rolls and the logos is performed in parallel, for the metamimetic element cannot take full emancipation to the mimetic register.

Noteworthy is the fact that, however, the scope of the shield is much larger than that of the logo. As the crest provides information on personal identity, collective, the area (countries, nations, fiefs), the claims of restitution, the dignity, patronage, cities, corporations, institutions, logos lead us only to the world of organizations, the commercial realm, providing information about company, product or brand; nothing about individuality, but only about a community regarded as an individual. If in the past under one arm all representatives of an army were fighting, individuals who lost their own identity, but only represented a community, today under the same logo does not appear a single product, one brand or one institution, but many different products, services, and institutions. It is true that this set of products and services, though different, can be regarded as a unit under the logo just as they are known. For example, under the Lacoste logo there are dozens of types of clothing, shoes and perfumes.

The same phenomenon, the meeting of various products under one logo, there is also regarding Ferrari's logo. If at first under this logo only one car brand was sold, then under the same icon also other products have been sold. There is already a range of electronic products bearing the signature or better "hoof" of the prance horse. Laptops, digital cameras and MP3 players have passed through the Ferrari paddocks and remained painted red and printed with the image of horse. Now came the Sharp 902 phone to pass through the same experience. The user interface has been modified specifically to stress once again the phone belonging to the Ferrari family. Another key issue, which to some extent stresses the link between the crest and the logo is related to the use of icons in the Land Rolls morphology and the morphology of existing logos: cross, lion, horse, crown, eagle etc. In most Land Rolls (e.g., Count of Toulouse crest), there are various crosses, the crusade symbol, and of fighting knights. Such icons are, as shown above, in the logo created for the antiNike website.

We find the Crown as logos of perfumes, but also in the logo of University of Brasov, the Brasovean newspaper *Hello*. The Lion, part of the Royal coat of Hanover and Ducal of Brunswick, the Great Ducal Houses of Luxembourg, Count of Flanders coat of arms, the Royal family of Italy, part of British kings' crown, is today the Peugeot logo. Birds, eagles, hawks and others can be found in modern logos of the University and Foundation of Brasov, Sextil Puscariu, the University of Sibiu, etc. Cabral horse I mentioned earlier represents an element of coat of Hanover and Ducal Royal House of Brunswick, and today is the Ferrari logo. Pointing it out, we can say that one of the old Dacian symbols, the wolf head, after a few stylistic corrections, is the Petrom logo. Although the two elements –

emblem and logo – do not have the same age, however we are dealing with two elements created for the same purpose: to establish identity the coat of arms was established primarily to combat identity and, by the logo, commercial identity.

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Medieval Women in Romanian Historical Fiction

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In nineteenth century Romanian fiction, the historical novel has a slower development in comparison with other literary genres: poetry, short story, theater plays or the social novel. Chronologically speaking, *Didascalìa* (1840) is the first novel that depicts a historic character, Michael the Great, and it actually belongs to a German writer, who chose to sign it with the initials of his name, F. W. L. In 1846, it is published the second novel, *Radu al III-lea de la Afumati* (Radu III from Afumati), written by a French professor, Buvelot, and translated by S. Andronic.

Published in 1853, the book *Hoții și hagiul* (*The Thieves and the Turk*) by Al. Pelimon is included in the category of ‘historical novels’, but it really proves to be a mystery novel. This confusion among terms such as history, romanced history or a history based writing, is present in many subtitles of novels or short stories. For example, Dimitrie Bolintineanu considers *Manoil* (1855) as a ‘national novel’, while *Elena* (1862) is ‘an original novel with political and philosophical origins.’ Once with the ‘history-based’ narration *Logofătul Baptiste Veleli* (*Baptiste Veleli Chancellor*) by V. A. Urechia, the historical writings open a new chapter in Romanian literature. The temporal paradigm of such works covers a long period of time; some writers went back to the times of the Roman Empire, during Emperor Tiberius or to the Byzantine of the 5th century, *Fiica lui Sejan* (*Sejanus’ Daughter*) and *Razbunarea lui Anastase* (*Anastase’s Revenge*), novels written by Ciru Oeconomu. In his unfinished novel *Misterele românilor* (*The Mysteries of Romanian People*), Gr. H. Grandea, in an attempt to demonstrate the continuity of the Romanian nation on these lands, is talking about Dacia; likewise I. Florantin in his short story *Decebal*, G. Baronzi places his action in *Fontana zânelor* (*The Fairies’ Fountain*) during the times right before Moldova’s first foundation, while Ioan Slavici, for the novel *Manea*, chose the epoch when Bulgarians turned Christians during tsar Boris’s rule, and the novel *Luca* presents the reign of

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Bodea in the mid-6th century. At the same time, the writers of the 19th century evoked the legendary characters of some rulers: George Baronzi writes about Vlad the Impaler (in *Biciul lui Dumnezeu (God's Whip)*, N. D. Popescu depicts Michael the Brave (1558-1601) in two novels: *Juneșea lui Mihai Bravu (Michael the Brave in his Youth)*, *Mihai Viteazul și călăul (Michael the Brave and the Hangman)*. Al. Pelimon wrote the novel *Matei Vodă la Mănăstirea Sadova, (Matei Voda at Sadova Monastery)*, Alexandru Odobescu evoked about *Mihnea Vodă cel Rău (Mihnea the Cruel)*, son of Vlad the Impaler, ruler of Wallachia, while Athanasie M. Marienescu talked about Petru Rareș (1527-1538) in the homonymous novel. "The Liberty Martyrs," as Ioachim Drăgescu calls Horia, Cloșca and Crișan, are the main characters of his novel *Noaptea carpatine sau istoria martirilor libertății (Nights in the Carpathians or the History of the Liberty Martyrs)*, while Ioan Florantin-Pop writes the novel *Horea*.

The historical writings of the 19th century, published after 1848, explore the reasons and consequences of revolution and individual fate of the revolutionary people, as in Al. Pelimon's novel, *Revoluția română de la 1848 (Romanian Revolution of 1848)*. The War of Independence is another historical moment, exploited by authors as a background for their writings, for instance N. D. Popescu in *Amazoana de la Rachova (The Amazon from Rachova)*, *Peneș Curcanul, Sora de caritate (Sister of Charity)*, *Prizonierul român de la Plevna (The Romanian Prisoner from Plevna)*. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were even women writers interested in approaching historical events for their writings, thus Bucura Dumbravă (Fanny Seculici) wrote the novel *Der Pandur (The Pandour)* about the revolutionary Tudor Vladimirescu and Sofia Nădejde signed a novel published in installments, *Tragedia Obrenovicilor (Obrevemenks' Tragedy)*, about the last days of the Serbian dynasty, The House of Obrenović. Unfortunately the Romanian critical apparatus over the historical writings stopped around researches accomplished in 1970s and 1980s (Teodor Virgolici, Marian Popa, Mihai Zamfir, as to mention few of the critics) and later there were only some sporadic mentions while writing monographs on specific writers. On the other hand, most of the nineteenth century authors who approached historical topics are considered minor writers and only a serious research dedicated to (un)canonical authors may lead to future developments in this field.

Most of the female characters in the history-based fictions in the 19th century are wives to the rulers, such as Elena for Petru Rareș in Athanasie M. Marienescu's novel, *Petru Rareș, principele Moldaviei (Petru Rares, the Principle of Moldavia)*, Doamna Maria, the wife for the young

Stephen the Young, in the short story Ștefan cel Tânăr Vodă (Stephen the Young), written by Dimitrie Bolintineanu or Queen Elena, Matei Vodă's wife in the novel *Matei Vodă la Mănăstirea Sadova* (*Matei Vodă at Sadova Monastery*) by Al. Pelimon.

Other female characters are daughters of rulers, like Princess Ruxandra of Vasile Lupu, present both in the short story *Ruxandra doamnă* (*Ruxandra the Queen*) written by Gheorghe Asachi and also in *Domnița Ruxandra* (*Princess Ruxandra*) written by Nicolae Gane, Voichița in the short story *Fiica lui Radu cel Frumos* (*Radu the Handsome's Daughter*) by Edgar Th. Aslan, Ruxanda and Chiajna, daughters of Petru Rareș, in the short stories *Alexandru Lăpușneanu* by Costache Negruzzi and *Doamna Chiajna* (*Queen Chiajna*) by Alexandru Odobescu, Elena, the daughter of Stephen the Great in the novel *Ursita* (*The Fate*) by Bogdan Petriceicu - Hasdeu. Some writings even bear the proper names of the main female characters, such: *Domnița Ruxandra* (Nicolae Gane), *Doamna Chiajna* (Alexandru Odobescu), *Ruxandra doamnă* (Gheorghe Asachi), which actually suggest the prominent presence of these women; some others, even if they are called after a female character, still do not succeed in elucidating the status of this character as the readers would have expected. For example, even if named *Fiica lui Sejan* (*Sejanus' Daughter*), the novel of Ciru Oeconomu, has as the main character, Sejanus, the praetor's prefect, the emperor's favorite, the most influent and strongest man in the Rome of the year 14. The novel follows the plots and murders that Sejanus had committed, in his desire to become an emperor. His daughter, Atilia, appears at the end of the novel, as a weak character. She is a young lady, enamored, whose lover is killed and she will be the victim of the people's revenge against Sejan. She is caught, thrown to jail; as the Roman law forbade anyone to kill a virgin; she is first raped by the jailkeeper and then savagely killed.

Space and time are two narrative conventions almost non-existent in the historical novel at the beginning. For most of the cases, under the influence of the theatre plays, a more developed literary genre than the prose, the writers proclaim the action's year in the introduction and then they move them on stage-like, confined spaces. Other writings, even if they draw historic events, rather confine within the pattern of the literature of mystery involving descriptive means as the sensational, disguise and surprise. It is what N. D. Popescu follows in *Amazoana de la Rachova* (*The Amazon from Rachova*), *Fata de la Cozia* (*The Girl from Cozia*), Maria Putoiana, in the novel *Radu Buzescu sau Han-Tătarul* (*Radu Buzescu or The Tartar Khan*) by Ion Dumitrescu or *Bucur, istoria fundării Bucureștilor*

(*Bucur, the Founding of Bucharest*), written by Al. Pelimon. Such writings stay close to the oral popular nature of the historical narration and distant themselves from the historical objectivity.

The artistic means used to describe the female characters do not distinguish themselves by number or innovation. Most of the time, the writers use the antithesis method, by bringing two types of characters on the stage: a beautiful, honest, brave woman and a slick, revengeful and destructive one (Elena and Sofia in *Ursita (The Fate)* by Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu, Voichița and Maria in *Fata de la Cozia (The Girl of Cozia)* by N. D. Popescu), or a strong and weak-willed one (Chiajna and Anca in *Doamna Chiajna* by Alexandru Odobescu).

In Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu's unfinished novel *Ursita (The Fate)*, Stephen the Great's daughter, Elena, is getting married with Joan, the son of tsar John III, and gives birth to a son, Dimitrie. But Joan dies and Elena finds herself lonely among strangers. Sofia, the wife of Ioan the III has also a son, Vasile, and there was a huge dilemma concerning the successor to the throne – the son or the nephew. Sofia, coming from a Greek background, is trying all the possible tricks to have her son be tsar. Even if she says about Elena that she converted to Judaism and called the witches to cast spells, her husband chose his nephew as his successor. But the peaceful situation lasts only for a year; the tsar, strongly influenced by his wife, changes his mind and throws Elena and her son into the darkest jail cell, where both of them will die. Describing the fight between Elena and Sofia, the author says that “it is dreadful, when men fight, power rejects power, when the word meets the word, honesty opposes honesty; but when women are fighting, it is three times worse, it is when fragility struggles to overcome fragility, hiding the venomous needle into the silence cloak or covered in honeyed words and in a crafty smile.”¹

Beauty represented a pivotal criterion in building female characters, thus the main or secondary female characters in the historical writings are described with artistic scarcity, and physical traits prevail over moral virtues, while the authors are trying to overdo each other in using unusual comparisons to portray their heroines. Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu says about Elena, Stephen the Great's daughter, that “the sun braided her hair from remnants of its rays, the moon offered her its whiteness, the blue sky reflected into the young lady's eyes, roses were blooming out her lips, a nightingale lent her its voice, the May zephyr wind gave her its aromatic blow; and the far-away oak on the Lebanon heights, was always lamenting to Holy God: somebody is slimmer than me!”²

Grigorie H. Grandea describes Cassandra, *Oasele de la Mitropolie* (*The Relics from Patriarchy*) as having black and thick hair that covers her head “as dark clouds in the night, better showing her rosaceous, oval and full face. Her black eyes were reflecting all her soul moods: sometimes gentle, other times dreamers or showing crazy desires of lust. Her mouth and chin looked like nests of kisses, and the neck was so beautiful that you would have cared less if you died hugging it.”³ Here, the physical description ends all of a sudden, even if Cassandra “was offering her favors among the Turkish officials and the handsome monks at the Patriarchy, she was only undressed down to her neck for the eyes of the readers. In the short story *Comoara de la Băneasa* (*The Treasure from Baneasa*), the same writer describes the two women mentioning the names and works of famous painters or sculptors, thus Glicera Castriotul had a head and a neck, of such beauty that would have gone mad Praxitel and Titian,” and Maria Mogoș looked “like a dryad. The last sun rays were setting down and soaking her seraphic body and face.”⁴

The appeal to the *vegetal symbols* is a style artifice used by many writers in portraying the female characters, from a physical or psychological perspective: Ruxandra was ‘sad and droopy as a *flower* under the scorching sun, with nothing to shelter her under’ (*Alexandru Lăpușneanul*), Ruxandra is ‘as white and serene as daybreak’ [nature elements], while Timuș, her would-be-husband ‘resembled the devil coming out of the church door’ (*Domnița Ruxandra/Princess Ruxandra*).

Similarly, the *animal imagery* is a frequent component of the portraits for female characters, as the writers are well aware of the effect of comparison with various wild or domestic animals, representative for instinctual actions or to exemplify the demoniac nature of the woman who kills her rival vilely: “When Glicera saw Maria, she vaulted like a *viper* and, in a moment when the pandours were fighting the Tartars, she hit Maria’s neck with a yataghan, who fell dead, like a *lily-of-the-valley* cut by a scythe.”⁵

Even if many female characters in the historical writings represent wives and daughters of rulers, they mainly play episodic roles and are on the stage only for a line, a gesture or a description that will set them apart as a model of select behavior, diplomacy and good mind. The woman who belonged to the society elite had titles of nobility, matching her husband’s, and she was called ‘păhârnicasă’ (the wife of the person who was pouring the drinks for the ruler and tasted them to see whether they were safe to drink’, ‘slugereasă’ (the wife of the supply administrator’, ‘medelniceasă’ (the wife of the person who was helping the ruler wash his hands, passed the

salt and served the food), pităreasă’ (the wife of the person in charge with the bread supplies) or ladies, a title acquired by birth or marriage.⁶ With the help of these characters, the authors intend to demonstrate that, even the laws would not allow the wives to take part in the husband’s council, they were actually the ‘brain’ behind the decisions taken by their men. About Queen Elena, the wife of ruler Matthew, *Matei Vodă la Monastirea Sadova* (*Ruler Matthew at Sadova Monastery*), written by Alexandru Pelimon, we are told that she was in his soul by, her gentle words and prayers. She would not get involved in any state affairs, but she enjoyed her rights for the society, as a mother involved in a woman’s education and good manners... “The marriage virtue, simplicity and cleanliness, house chores that are the woman’s crown for the family; her example was supposed to be transferred to the other ladies who were avoiding her, and further to the nation, as she is protecting the Romanian customs, the luxury that during Leon’s time had gained some ground, brought by foreigners along with lavish clothing ware and instruments from Venice, as well as the flavor of the contemporary aristocracy, which had so much impregnated the western states, the Lady of the Romanians was fighting against them as she was too much in love with local practice – of a nation where the church was giving it guidance and faith, as a strong goal, was leading them to heroism and inspiring them patriotic feelings...”⁷ Queen Elena (1598-1653) got involved along with her brother, Udriște Năsturel, in opening three printing houses in Wallachia, at the monasteries, Govora, Câmpulung and Dealu, where she supervised the printing and translations of many books, as to mention *De imitatione Christi* by Thomas de Kempis, (1647), a treatise for which she signed the Preface.

In the novel *Petru Rareș, principele Moldaviei* (*Petru Rares, the Principle of Moldavia*) Athanasie M. Marienescu introduces Queen Elena to readers while she is discussing with her husband an important historical action. Rareș is cast away from the throne after the boyars plotted and he managed to escape with his family, Elena, two sons, Iliăș, Ștefan and a daughter, Ruxandra, in the Ciceu fortress. After three months in exile, Queen Elena, advises him to go and humiliate himself in front of the Turkish pasha until he helped him to get back his throne, but Rareș disagrees: Elena answers that she will beg them in the name of the family because, because the tears of a woman, of an unhappy princess, of a mother will surely soften the emperor’s heart’. Thus she starts writing: ‘Your Majesty! Turkish emperor! Petru Rareș, my husband, the unhappy ruler of Moldova, has made an agreement in Buda with your Majesty, the most powerful Emperor on the face of the earth – and my husband broke this contract [...] Please, have mercy on the tears and crying of Moldavia’s

princess, the wife of Rareș, on the unhappiness of their children. Because we all will bow our heads under your sword if we are at fault, you should fail us; if we are not, then you should put us back into your highest grace. May the god of Mohammed melt the Emperor's heart, unjustly upset, to make us part of his great mercy; and send a letter to Ionu Zopolza to let us go from Ciceu so that we could come to Țarigrad (Constantinople), to bow our heads and humble ourselves before the feet of Your Majesty. Grant us clemency, to our grief. Elena, the princess of Moldavia.”⁸

In the short story *Lupul Mehedințeanu*, written by George Crețeanu, Maria Bercan, whose husband is unfairly sentenced to death, along with other eight boyars for treason against the ruler Radu Mihnea, tries to convince the people, gathered to watch the execution, to revenge the convicts: “You good people, look at these heads cut off from their bodies, this bloodshed, shed for you: and you, you are just standing here mindlessly and bear with such injustice? Will the outlanders crush the Romanian on his own land of birth? You people, blood shouts for blood. If you do not revenge these people, tomorrow it will be your turn; tyranny knows no limits, do not let it put its roots here, poor you!... Why are you standing quiet and sedated? Are your hearts quaking? Aren't you the sons of the valiant anymore? Romanians, brothers! Do not let Bercan's death go vindicated! You know very well that he was one of Michael the Brave's soldiers, you faithfully followed him amidst all battles, and the wounds on his body prove that. How lowly the Romanians have abated! It's been only twelve years since the hero died! Has the blood drained out of your veins? Go revenge, my brothers! Whoever is suffering from the injustice done to others will come and haunt him back. Greeks are the roots of wrongdoing: you all come and chase them out of the country!”⁹

There are writers who choose to lead the narrative line on an erotic paradigm and barely sketch the historic or social components in favor of several stories that overflow with elements of surprise and sensation. In many of such writings, the prototype of female characters is represented by women who need to fight to preserve their honor, a necessary feature so that they will be defined as integrated people into society. Many of women who find themselves in over-the-edge situations would rather die than live a dishonoring life, such as Rozalia, Th. M. Stoenescu, *Aron Vodă cel Cumplit* (*Aron the Cruel*), Branda (Gheorghe Asachi, *Dragoș*) or Iliana, Alexandru Pelimon, *Bucur, istoria fundării Bucureștilor* (*Bucur, the Founding of Bucharest*).

Branda, one of the main characters in the short story *Dragoș* written by Gheorghe Asachi, chooses to throw herself into the Siret River than to be

the wife of the ‘savage’ man who had kidnapped her away from her loved one. She carefully and cold bloody prepares her suicide when, the naked truth came before her eyes. “The queenly diadem, whose lure smell, reminded her of the menacing future: she looked down on in disdain at the barbarian adornments laid in front of her eyes and kissed the Romanian veil, which proved her chastity. Then, she took out of her blouse a little cross with a piece of wood from Jesus’ cross and swore on that holy sign that she would die in the name of truth and country; hence, she decided to do that while getting married to the barbarian man – she would come out of the prison, then cross the bridge to take her to the court and jump off the bridge into the River Siret – therefore, she would avoid to disgrace her parents’ religion and the oath made to Bogdan; still, she wanted to leave a sign about her fate for the future, so, in a dark corner of the cell she wrote her name, her story, a farewell to her bridegroom and the wish that the Siret river carry at least her body to the land of her country.”¹⁰

In the novel *Fiica lui Sejan (Sejanus’ Daughter)*, Agripina, the Emperor Tiberius’ daughter-in-law, spent her first years with her husband, Germanicus, in the middle of legions, breathing in the air of the victorious armies [...]; during the war with Germans – while Cecina’s army, cornered by Arminius and Inguiommer on a narrow road, amidst of marrow and forest, thought to have the same fate as Varus’ – going beyond the weaknesses of her gender, fulfilling the duties of a general; a woman who stood at one end of the bridge over Rhine, which the terrorized fugitives wanted to break down and, by her words and personal example, she lifted up the courage and stopped a fatal end for the army.”¹¹

Iliana, the protagonist of the novel *Bucur, istoria fundării Bucureștilor (Bucur, the Founding of Bucharest)*, “had left the palaces in the capital to join her father Bogdan Vodă to the battlefield, along with the maids and all her personnel, who were protecting her. But her heart, inclined more towards the holy things, would not miss any occasion to go to God’s place, to pray to the Mother of God for the health and happiness of her parent and for the freedom of country.”¹²

In the historical short story *Viața și faptele lui Mihai Viteazul (The Life and Deeds of Michael the Brave)*, Florica’s decision to die along with her father, Michael the Brave, made people in the market ask the ruler to be forgiven: “Then a young lady dressed in black, her hair down on her shoulders, beautiful and whitish like the pain of the noble hearts, made way through the crowd, then the soldiers, got on the torture bed and threw herself into Michael’s arms. ‘And now,’ she yelled, ‘come and kill us both!’”¹³

The woman disguised in a soldier is present in many historical writings. Irina, the main character of the short story *Stefan cel Mare* (*Stephen the Great*), written by Theodor M. Stoenu, is a country girl, raped by a soldier while she was clinically dead [quite a novelty for the 19th century fiction]. When she wakes up, many people will think she is a saint. But Irina finds out that she is going to have a baby so, full of shame, she leaves the village and goes to Stephen the Great's war camp. She puts on male clothes, takes the name of Toader and fights like a warrior.

Another prototype is the woman who is saving her husband or lover. Corbea, the main character in the homonymous short story, written by Theodor M. Stoenu, is locked up due to a political plot and his girlfriend, Mărioara Arhondărescu, goes to Alexandru III to plead for his forgiveness. But the ruler falls in love with her and keeps her in sequesters, asking her to obey and love him. And, again, we have the cliché of the woman who chooses between honor and compromise; honor will prevail: "Here you are, the ruler's mistress – those were her thoughts during her times of pain and disillusion. Death is so much sweeter!... Poor Corbea, how much he loves me!... And his reward is so sour! But I feel as coming close to the end of my life! I will probably die the same day like him! But what a deception!... He will die as a martyr and I as a whore!..."¹⁴ Alexandru III is banished from the kingdom by his cousin, Michael the Brave, who frees all the people in prison. Corbea, an army chief now, is looking for Mărioara who had joined a nunnery, finds her and tells her that he loves her. Then, he goes back to the battlefield, but he gets caught by the Turks, thrown in jail and tortured. Mărioara decides to go the battlefield to find her lover. She meets Michael the Brave, who is amazed by her courage and asks one of his captains to help her. Mărioara arrives at Constantinople and manages to free Corbea.

At the literary level, the present study aimed to connect the representations of women's roles with the idiosyncrasies of the transition from the romanticism to realism generated by the endurance of the tradition of romance and the persistence of the rooted cult of domesticity. The female characters are showcased in a process of change, into better or worse, from different perspectives. The dominant ones are the omniscient and psychological perspectives, as she is identified with her main roles: lover, spouse, wife and a mother. For the most part of the 19th century fiction, romanticism was the key word, and therefore, the examination of the female soul has acquired a certain structure. Thus, as typologies, we might delineate several characteristic features that the female characters are built after in historical prose: the emperor's daughter, the woman taking revenge on her husband or lover, the woman defending her honor, the woman going

on the battlefield to fight or find her lover, the woman disguised as a soldier, the (Romanian) woman kidnapped (and taken to a harem).

NOTES:

¹ Hașdeu Petriceicu, Bogdan “Ursita” (The Fate), *Opere (Complete Works)*. Ediție, note, comentarii, variante și indici de Stancu Ilin, I. Oprișan. Studiu introductiv de George Munteanu. Minerva, Saeculum, Bucharest, 1986–2003, vol. 3, p. 80.

² *Ibidem*, p. 77.

³ Grigorie Haralambie Granda, “Oasele de la Mitropolie [The Relics from Metropolitanate],” in *Scrieri (Complete Works)*. Ediție îngrijită, note și bibliografie de Pavel Țugui. Minerva, Bucharest, 1985, p. 231.

⁴ Grigorie Haralambie Granda, “Comoara de la Băneasa [The Treasure from Baneasa],” *op. cit.*, p. 439.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 412.

⁶ For further details see: Șarolta Solcan, *Femeile din Moldova, Transilvania și Țara Românească în Evul Mediu [Women in Moldavia, Transylvania, and Wallachia in the Middle Ages]*, University of Bucharest Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005.

⁷ Alexandru Pelimon, *Matei Vodă la Monastirea Sadova [Prince Matthew at Sadova Monastery]*, Tipografia C. Petrescu & I. G. Costescu, Bucharest, 1870, p. 28.

⁸ M. Athanasie Marienescu, *Petru Rareș, principele Moldavei*, Tipografia S. Filtsch, Sibiu, 1862, p. 26.

⁹ George Crețeanu, “Lupul Mehedințeanul” in *Patrie și libertate*, Minerva, Bucharest, 1988, p. 312.

¹⁰ Gheorghe Asachi, “Dragoș,” in *Nuvele istorice*, Bucharest, 1915, p. 19.

¹¹ Ciru Oeconomu, *Fiiica lui Sejan [Sejan’s Daughter]*, Imprimeria Statului, Bucharest, 1899, p. 229.

¹² Alexandru Pelimon, *Bucur, istoria fundării Bucureștilor [Bucur, the Founding of Bucharest]*, Imprimeria Iosif Romanov, Bucharest, 1899, p. 48.

¹³ Dimitrie Bolintineanu, “Viața și faptele lui Mihai Viteazul [The Life and Deeds of Michael the Brave],” in *Opere alese*, vol. I, Editura pentru Literatură, Bucharest, 1961, p. 91.

¹⁴ Theodor M. Stoenescu, *Corbea*, Tipografia Alexi, Brașov, 1892, p. 46.

Ecclesiastical Art and Architecture at the Crossroads: The Three Hierarchs Church in Iași

ALICE ISABELLA SULLIVAN

Introduction

One of the most impressive architectural monuments of the Carpathian Mountain region is the Three Hierarchs Church located in the city of Iași, in the north-eastern part of modern Romania (Fig.1). Nothing quite like this ecclesiastical structure, entirely adorned both inside and outside with elaborate painted cycles of images and sculpted motifs, survives anywhere else in Europe. Built between 1635 and 1639, during the reign of Prince Vasile Lupu (1595-1661; *reg.* 1634-1653), the Three Hierarchs Church is regarded today as one of the most exquisite and striking monuments of seventeenth century Romanian art.¹ When it was first built, locals and foreigners alike marveled at the overall harmony of the architectural features and sumptuous decorations of this church, as do locals and travelers today.

Over the years, the Three Hierarchs Church has been the topic of numerous scholarly investigations. A number of studies have examined the architectural features of this building in light of the history of ecclesiastical architecture in Moldavia, as well as in the context of the monastic complex to which this church belonged.² Other investigations have discussed the iconographical and aesthetic values of the painted and sculpted motifs that embellish this religious edifice.³ And still others, in an effort to explain the unprecedented mixture—and yet exceptional synthesis—of Byzantine, western Gothic, Slavic, and Islamic architectural forms and sculpted motifs brought together in this structure, have considered the different functions of this church.⁴

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Fig.1 Three Hierarchs Church, Iași (Source: Wiki commons)

In their own right, each of these studies has significantly contributed to our current understanding of the form, function, and decoration of the Three Hierarchs Church, as well as aspects of the historical circumstances that contributed to such an exquisite architectural monument. And yet, while illuminating in many ways, these studies are not without their limitations. For one thing, while a few are written in French—a language more universally read and understood—the majority of the studies are published in Romanian—a language not so easily accessible to western scholars and non-specialists. This has contributed, at least to some degree, to the little attention paid by western European and North American scholars to this religious structure in particular, and to the artistic production of this region of Moldavia more generally. The physical and ideological barrier created by the Iron Curtain in the twentieth century has also rendered certain kinds of studies difficult. As a result of these circumstances, monuments such as the Three Hierarchs Church have been excluded from larger narratives of medieval and early modern European art, as well as Byzantine and ‘post-

Byzantine' art. In fact, no survey course, nor seminar, in art history taught in colleges and universities in the United States, for instance, discusses the artistic production of the Carpathian Mountain region, let alone the ecclesiastical art and architecture of Moldavia. The bigger picture is provided by our older and even current geographical, chronological, and cultural taxonomies into which Moldavia's architecture fits rather uneasily.

The extant evidence suggests, however, that the religious art and architecture of Moldavia from the late fifteenth and through the seventeenth centuries presents a fascinatingly complex process of cultural exchange and translation between the East and the West. The Three Hierarchs Church is no exception. This building is eclectic with respect to sources—even more so than other monuments from this region of Moldavia that date to this period—presenting in its form and carvings an unprecedented mixture and synthesis of forms from both the Orthodox and Latin ecclesiastical domains. Indeed, since Moldavia occupied at this time the frontier zone between western Europe and the Slavic-Byzantine world, continuous contact resulted in an assimilation of both eastern- and western-inspired aesthetic conventions into existing local traditions to surprising effects. Traditional forms in the fabric of the Three Hierarchs Church are supplemented, or enhanced one could say, by external influences to various degrees. Whereas the plan and a number of the architectural features of this building, for instance, follow an older and more traditional Moldavian style of ecclesiastical architecture that preserved and promoted for generations a continuation of traditional and spiritual identities in this region, other structural and decorative elements point to precedents from centers outside of Moldavia. Indeed, as it stands today, the Three Hierarchs Church is a testament to the varied cultural and artistic interactions that extended between Moldavia and the Byzantine world, the Ottoman Empire, and the west in the early modern period. As such, the architectural and artistic idioms of this particular church, as is the case also with most other ecclesiastical monuments built in this region beginning with the second half of the fifteenth century—thus in the period immediately following the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire to the Ottoman Turks in 1453—are expressive of complex social and religious politics, and therefore worth examining more thoroughly.

In what follows, my aim is twofold. Firstly, I seek to examine the eclectic nature of the Three Hierarchs Church, considering, primarily through a comparative approach, how the plan and architectural features of this structure, as well as its relief sculptures, inform its possible functions.⁵ Given the parameters of the current study, however, certain discussions are

precluded; namely, those centered on the liturgy in relation to the space of the church, and those dealing with the figural and abstract representations in light of medieval image theory. Additionally, while I will consider the complexities of cultural interaction and exchange in this region, I do not intend to discuss thoroughly the agents of exchange between this porous frontier territory and other centers. Instead, the argument will focus on an examination of the distinctive architectural and decorative features of the Three Hierarchs Church in regard to religious politics and patronage, in an effort to situate this monument more firmly in the history of 'post-Byzantine' ecclesiastical architecture in Eastern Europe. Secondly, I aim to demonstrate that an examination of the Three Hierarchs Church in particular can contribute to a better understanding of the artistic production and cultural identity of this geographical region of Moldavia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries more generally, and, also, to the broadening of current narratives of medieval and early modern European art.

Form: The Plan and Architectural Features of the Church

The Three Hierarchs Church was originally part of a fortified monastic complex where the church was located at the center, while the monastic buildings surrounded it on all sides. Paul of Aleppo (1627-1667), Archdeacon of Antioch, described the layout of this church during his travels across Moldavia with his father, the Patriarch Macarie, in the middle of the seventeenth century. "This monastery," Paul wrote, "is unique and very beautiful; it looks like a fortress and it is surrounded by walls of stone... The holy church is located at the center of the monastic complex."⁶ The fortifications of this church and some of the monastic buildings regrettably no longer stand. The bell tower, which rose above the main entrance to this monastic establishment, was completely destroyed in 1886.⁷ Today only the church itself and the Gothic Hall located immediately to its south, which now serves as a museum, survive.⁸

At the Three Hierarchs monastery, Prince Vasile Lupu set up in 1640 the first printing press in Moldavia where the first books in the Romanian language were published, and established the Vasilian College as an institution of higher education.⁹ Surrounded nowadays by homes, shops, and busy streets, the Three Hierarchs Church, while presenting its modern viewers only with a glimpse of its former glory, still inspires them to

imagine what this monastic complex may have looked like when it was first built in the first half of the seventeenth century.

The monastic establishment around the Three Hierarchs Church has a similar layout as the monasteries founded during the reign of Prince Stephen the Great (*reg.* 1457-1504) and that of his illegitimate son, Prince Peter Rareș (*reg.* 1527-1538 and 1541-1546)—essentially a centrally located church with the buildings of the monastic complex surrounding it on all sides in a square or rectangular format. In fact, architectural forms developed beginning with the second half of the fifteenth century were consolidated during the first decades of the sixteenth century. At this time, both older churches and newly built ones were also embellished with a large but consistent set of images. By the third decade of the sixteenth century, the plan, architectural features, and decorative programs of the monasteries scattered around the villages of northern Moldavia, formed in the crucible of the post-1453 world, emerged as a uniquely regional architectural phenomena that was perpetuated well into the seventeenth century.

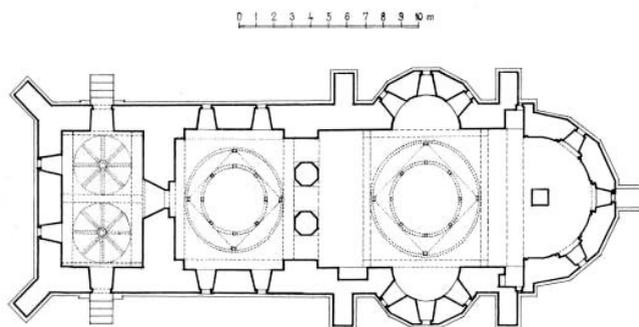


Fig.2 Ground plan for the Three Hierarchs Church. (Source: Constantin Sturzu, *Mănăstirea Sfinții Trei Ierarhi* (Mitropolia Moldovei și Bucovinei, Iași: Editura Doxologia, 2011, p. 14).

In its plan and architectural features the Three Hierarchs Church follows in the tradition of church building initiated in the decades immediately following the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The church is oriented west to east, as is the case with most Christian churches, positioned so that the apse of the church points in the direction of the rising sun (Fig.2). The ground plan of this church consists of a closed *exonarthex* with two

entrances—one on the south and the other on the north—and two window openings on the west; next is a *pronaos* with two windows on each side and a dome above; then follows a rectangular *naos* with three semicircular recesses or apses, each covered by a semicircular-dome and each having three window openings. There is a small entryway from the *exonarthex* into the *pronaos*, while three arcades mark the entrance from the *pronaos* into the *naos*. The triple arcade connecting the space of the *pronaos* and *naos* was a late-sixteenth-century architectural innovation that first appeared in the church dedicated to the Ascension at Galata Monastery in Iași, built between 1577 and 1578. In the churches that preceded the church at Galata Monastery, the passage from the *pronaos* into the *naos* was marked by a small doorway in the middle of a thick wall. This was eventually replaced, in Iași, by two massive piers supporting a triad of arches.

The *naos* of the Three Hierarchs Church is triconch in plan. It consists of two smaller side apses that extend on the north and south sides of the building. The larger apse, at the eastern end, marks the most sacred area of the church, serving as the place for the main altar where the mysteries of the Eucharist are celebrated. The ‘triconch plan’ appears not only in the Three Hierarchs Church, but in all other Orthodox ecclesiastical structures from this region of Moldavia built beginning with the second half of the fifteenth century.

Referring to the entire plan of the Three Hierarchs Church as a ‘triconch plan’, however, is not entirely accurate. The whole structure is not laid out in a triconch pattern—which generally consists of a larger centralized space (either square, circular, or oblong) and smaller side apses on three sides of this central space. An example of a ‘triconch plan’ church is the Katholikon or main cathedral of the Great Lavra Monastery from Mount Athos, built in 963—the first monastery built on the holy mountain. This type of plan seems to have been adopted in monastic settings and for monastic worship primarily and may best be understood, as the architectural historian Robert G. Osterhout suggests, as a “regional phenomenon” limited to the monastic communities on Mount Athos, from where about twenty examples survive, and to related areas in northern Greece and in the Balkan region.¹⁰ The ‘triconch plan’ has certainly made it to the Moldavian lands, as evident in the *naos* of the churches built beginning with the second half of the fifteenth century. But in addition to the triconch *naos*, these churches also have a *pronaos* and an *exonarthex*, and sometimes even a *burial chamber*, extending towards the west. Consequently, these structures are not ‘triconch plan’ structures per se. Their plans, rather, are more accurately

referred to as ‘elongated triconch plans’ in order to account for the extended western section of the building.

By what means architectural ideas, such as the ‘triconch plan’, traveled as far north as the Moldavian lands from the Byzantine world, and in particular from Mount Athos, is a question worth considering. Scholars have not thoroughly explored this issue of transmission to date, so further study on this topic is needed. I suggest here a few avenues of inquiry. Most recently, the art and architectural historian Slobodan Ćurčić published a major monograph that explores the continuity of Byzantine architectural traditions in the Balkan region. This study, although tremendously useful in establishing an history of architecture in the Balkan peninsula, has, unfortunately, as its northern-most geographical parameter the Danube River. This excludes from the discussion the architectural structures present in the lands north of the Danube, such as the monastery churches of northern Moldavia, and among them the Three Hierarchs Church.¹¹ It is possible that the princes of this region of Moldavia played a role in the transfer of ideas and artistic forms from the south and east. It is known, in fact, that after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, the rulers of Moldavia took an interest in Mount Athos—gifting precious objects to and financially supporting the building and restoration of monasteries there.¹² Ideas and artistic forms could have certainly traveled north as a result of these interactions between the Moldavian court and the monasteries on the Greek peninsula. Traveling artists also could have mediated the exchange of ideas between these Orthodox centers. However, in order to draw out the complexities of cultural interactions and exchange, and to chart their operation in this porous frontier region during the medieval and early modern periods, further inquiries are necessary, which are beyond the scope of the current study.

The plan and architectural features of the Three Hierarchs Church have both local and external precedents. The proportions, the ‘elongated triconch plan’, and the general forms present in the church primarily derive from the Moldavian style of ecclesiastical architecture developed beginning with the second half of the fifteenth century, which in turn has Byzantine prototypes and was adopted in this region in the decades following the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire. Some of the more characteristic features of this structure, however, have contemporary local precedents, at least to some degree, in the Church of the Ascension at Galata Monastery (1577-78) (Fig.3) and in the Church of the Descent of the Holy Spirit at Dragomirna Monastery (1602-09) (Fig. 4).¹³



Fig. 3 Church of the Ascension, Galata Monastery, Iași.
(Source: Author)



Fig. 4 Church of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, Dragomirna Monastery,
Mitocu Dragomirnei. (Source: Author)



Fig.5
Tower of the church at Dragomirna Monastery
(detail). (Source: Author)



FIG.6
Towers of the Three Hierarchs Church
(detail). (Source: Wiki Commons)

Like the church at Galata Monastery, the Three Hierarchs Church has two towers—one rising over the *naos*, and the other over the *pronaos*—that accentuate the verticality of the edifice. The two structures also share a similar buttress system evident on the exterior.¹⁴ Another distinctive feature of the exterior that both of these churches have in common is the prominent median decorative band—a twisted rope motif (also found in churches from Wallachia, the region south of the Carpathian Mountains in modern Romania)—that horizontally divides the façade in half.¹⁵ Both of these churches also have similar ground plans (although not in proportion) with three arcades leading from the *pronaos* into the *naos* area of the church. This scheme provides more unity to the liturgical space inside. The two churches also share the two entrances in the *exonarthex*—one from the north and one from the south—as well as two windows in the *pronaos* and the three in each of the apses of the *naos*.

With the church at Dragomirna Monastery, the Three Hierarchs Church also shares the prominent median string course that wraps around the exterior of the church, visually subdividing the façade. Moreover, the two churches have similar types of window and door frames, as well as the extensive relief carvings of their towers. The single tower rising over the *naos* of the church at Dragomirna Monastery is the first instance in Moldavia of an exterior surface being entirely covered with vegetal and geometric relief sculptures (Fig.5). This elaboration of detail anticipated,

moreover, the new phase of architecture in the seventeenth century. At the Three Hierarchs Church this scheme was taken up as well but it was not restricted only to the two towers of the church (Fig.6). Rather, it was extended to cover the entire exterior wall surface, giving the impression of an edifice clothed in a richly embroidered garment—a kind of sophisticated and elaborate *Außenwandbekleidung*.

Decoration: The Relief Sculptures of the Church

In fact, what distinguishes the Three Hierarchs Church from all other ecclesiastical structures in Moldavia and even in the entire world are the exterior relief sculptures that resemble a kind of stone embroidery (Fig.7). Over thirty distinctive registers of continuous bands of relief sculptures cover every available surface of the exterior. Scholars have traced the origins of this wide variety of stylized designs both to local buildings and to Armenian, Georgian, Persian, and Turkish models.¹⁶ The row of roundels

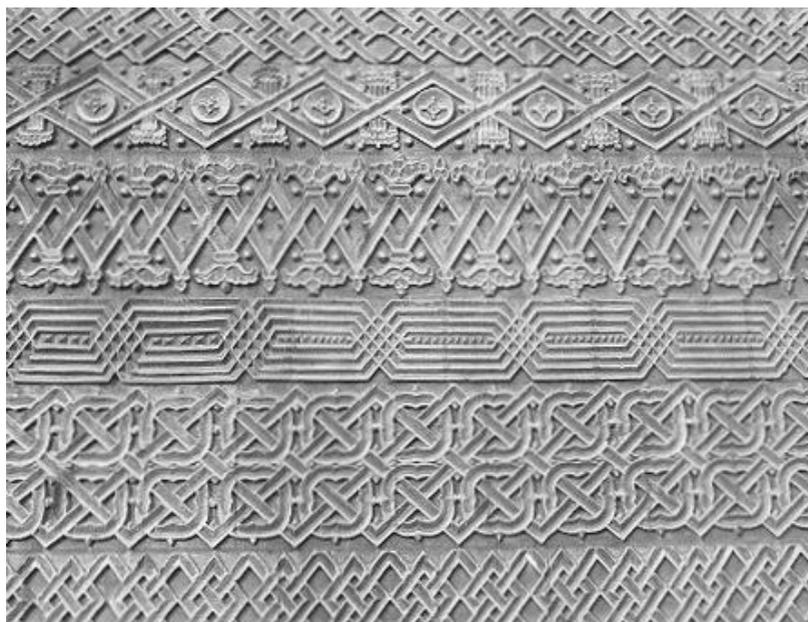


Fig.7. Detail of the exterior sculptures. Three Hierarchs Church, Iași
(Source: Wiki Commons)

with diverse floral patterns below the twisted-rope-motif string course, and the row of similar roundels above the row of niches, or colonnades, in the upper section of the building, resemble decorative motifs found in traditional folk embroidery and wood and stone carvings from this region. The niches above the cable molding, in turn, are framed by small stacked columns and hold in the center what scholars refer to as stylized representations of the ‘Tree of Life’ (Fig.8). Similar decorative motifs appear on the so-called ‘Pillars of Acre’ (*pili acritani*) that stand at the ceremonial entrance to the Basilica of San Marco in Venice (Fig.9). Although believed for quite some time to be of Syrian origin from the Church of Saint Saba in the port city of Saint John of Acre, the current general consensus among scholars is that these pillars originated from the church of Saint Polyeuktos in Constantinople and were brought to Venice as a result of the fourth crusade in 1204.¹⁷ The presence of this sculpted element in the exterior carvings at the Three Hierarchs Church and also on the so-called ‘Pillars of Acre’ points to the eastern, and more specifically Byzantine, origin of this motif. I would propose, moreover, that at the Three Hierarchs Church this is not the sole motif that symbolizes the Tree of Life, but rather the entire decorative façade of the church could be interpreted as echoing this idea because of its organic, yet ordered, form.

Fig.8
Detail of the exterior sculptures,
Three Hierarchs Church, Iași.
(Source: Author)



Fig.9 ‘Pillars of Acre’,
San Marco Basilica, Venice
(Source: Wiki Commons)

Foreign travelers from the seventeenth century praised the distinctive features of this church and the exterior carvings. Their surviving accounts paint a bright picture of this monument, revealing how awe-inspiring this church really was at the time it was erected. Paul of Aleppo, during his travels in Moldavia in the middle of the seventeenth century, wrote:

The entire world agrees that neither in Moldavia, nor in Wallachia, nor anywhere in the East nor the West is there a church that can equal this one in its decorations and beauty, which leave all visitors speechless.¹⁸

The Ottoman Turkish traveler Evliya Celebi (1611-1684?) likewise praised this church during his travels in Moldavia in 1659, writing:

...there is no way of describing [this church] in spoken words, nor in written ones. Being recently built, her stones of marble covered in gold shine so brightly as if they were the pages of an illuminated manuscript...whoever looks at these carvings will be amazed at the way they were sculpted...¹⁹

Whether or not the exterior sculptures of the Three Hierarchs Church were originally covered in gold is uncertain. Also uncertain is whether they were ever painted, considering how common it was for architectural sculpture to be painted in the West during the medieval and early modern period. Regardless of the original appearance of this church, today only a paler, yet still exquisite, image of its luster survives. An important question remains, however: why did Prince Vasile Lupu want such an elaborately carved edifice erected in Iași in the first place? And what were the functions of this ecclesiastical building, besides the fact that it served as a monastic church? In what follows I will outline several hypotheses that account for why the Three Hierarchs Church is so eclectic with regard to sources and so elaborate with regard to its exterior decorations. These interpretations are not exhaustive, but they do raise questions that invite further study.

The Functions and Significances of the Church

It is likely that in building the Three Hierarchs Church Prince Vasile Lupu intended to display his wealth, power, and position of influence within the Orthodox world. Prince Lupu has been described as a man of a lofty nature, more like that of an emperor than that of a prince. During his long reign—the longest in the seventeenth century in Moldavia—Prince Lupu imagined himself as an heir to the Byzantine rulers and as a leader and protector of the Orthodox faith.²⁰ And he could have had a peaceful reign had it not been for his grand ambitions; at one point he even attempted to conquer Transylvania in the west and Wallachia in the south in an effort to unite the three Orthodox and Romanian-speaking territories around the Carpathian Mountain region under his rule. In building the Three Hierarchs Church, then, Prince Lupu may have intended this monument to serve as a marker of personal status. In turn, the church would have rivaled, among others, the influential and grand cathedral at Curtea de Argeș built in the Byzantine style in the early decades of the sixteenth century by the prince of Wallachia at the time, Neogoe Basarab (*reg.* 1512-1521), who also raised his church in order to celebrate and symbolize his authority, wealth, and faith.²¹

The Three Hierarchs Church could also have been intended as a princely funerary church, since Prince Lupu and his immediate family were all buried there.²² As such, the church could have been conceived from the outset of as an elaborately decorated mausoleum.

The surviving evidence also suggests that in building the Three Hierarchs Church, Prince Lupu may have had even grander plans—plans that consisted of moving the seat of the Orthodox Church from Suceava, the former capital of Moldavia from 1388 to 1565, to Iași, the new capital of the principality. In Suceava, the seat of the Orthodox Church was at the Church of Saint George where the relics of Saint John the New, the patron saint of Moldavia, were kept. In a letter of 1638, however, written about three years after construction on the Three Hierarchs Church had begun, Prince Lupu referred to his new edifice as “the seat of the Orthodox Church” in Moldavia.²³ In this letter, the claim that Iași was the seat of the Orthodox Church in Moldavia is historically untrue, since this was not the case at the time. This statement, however, could be suggestive of Prince Lupu’s ambitious intentions for the Three Hierarchs Church, namely, to transform it into the new seat of the Orthodox Church in this region.²⁴

The relics of Saint John the New were never transferred to Iași; they remained in Suceava. But, as it turns out, the Three Hierarchs Church also received the relics of a famous saint. While the church was still under construction, the relics of Saint Parascheva were brought from Constantinople to Iași and displayed in the Three Hierarchs Church. Saint Parascheva, the saint best known and most venerated especially in the Balkan region, was even more favored in Moldavia than the patron saint of this region, Saint John the New. A number of scholars believe that Prince Lupu bought the relics from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, while others believe that these relics were gifted to him for his financial support, which he provided to the Patriarchate in Constantinople throughout his reign.²⁵ Although Constantinople was ruled by the Ottomans during Prince Lupu's reign, the city still had a sizable Orthodox community with a patriarch. Regardless of the circumstances of the exchange, the presence of Saint Parascheva's relics at the church of the Three Hierarchs elevated not only the status of the church and that of Iași as a capital city, but also that of Moldavia at large, in the eyes of the Orthodox world.

Inside the church, the relics of Saint Parascheva had a place of honor. They were kept in an elaborately decorated silver reliquary box that was displayed in a niche on the south wall. According to another account by Paul of Aleppo, the relics were kept in the south niche alongside a plaque of white marble inscribed in gold letters that narrated the story of how the relics made their way to Iași, and a mosaic decoration that retold the significant moments in Saint Parascheva's life.²⁶

Considering that these famous relics of Saint Parascheva were housed in the Three Hierarchs Church, the entire edifice could be interpreted as a monumental shrine.²⁷ In this guise, the extensive and elaborate exterior carvings of this church could be explained in light of reliquaries, since these objects that held precious remains were often lavishly adorned with carvings, valuable stones, and metals. Perhaps the appearance of the Three Hierarchs Church was intended to reflect the interior reliquary (or vice versa, although this is difficult to reconstruct today since the original reliquary no longer survives). Nevertheless, we could conceive of the entire Three Hierarchs Church as a reliquary on a monumental scale, built and decorated to house some of the most important relics of the Eastern Orthodox faith; and along with these relics, the body of one of the more influential rulers of Moldavia—Prince Vasile Lupu—as well as those of his immediate family members.

Conclusion

The Three Hierarchs Church serves an important place in the history of ecclesiastical architecture in Moldavia. Architecturally, it is a monastic church that follows in the tradition inaugurated by Prince Stephen the Great and Prince Peter Rareș—with churches built on an ‘elongated triconch plan’ scheme, and elaborately decorated both inside and outside with biblical scenes. The Three Hierarchs Church, however, also departs from this tradition in two major ways. Firstly, it presents a more unified liturgical space in having three arches separate the *pronaos* from the *naos* of the church, rather than a single entryway connecting these two spaces, as was the case in the churches of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. Secondly, it displays on the exterior, in lieu of painted biblical scenes, rows of stylized motifs sculpted in relief. These carvings may have been gilded or painted initially, but their surface decoration no longer survives today. These exterior carvings, in fact, attest to the contacts that may have extended between this region of Moldavia and the cultures of Western Europe and those of the Slavic-Byzantine world.

Indeed, the evidence suggests that the Three Hierarchs Church is eclectic with respect to its functions, and in its forms and decorations with respect to sources. This church reveals, on the one hand, the refined taste and ambitions of Prince Vasile Lupu. On the other hand, it presents an example of the complexities of cultural interaction and exchange in this porous frontier region of Moldavia in the early modern period—an aspect that requires more careful scholarly attention. And while this building and others like it from this region have been excluded from larger narratives of medieval and early modern European art, a further examination of this church in particular, and of the artistic production of Romania more generally, through cultural connections rather than as if in isolation, has the potential to reveal the complexities of cultural interaction and exchange between the Orthodox and Latin spheres in the Romanian lands in the medieval and early modern periods. Such a study would also enrich our understanding of the artistic production and cultural identity of this geographical region.

NOTES:

A version of this article was originally presented at the 47th International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo, Michigan, in the session “Romanian Medievalia: Narratives of Identity” organized by the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality in New York. At this event, I benefited from the insightful questions and suggestions of the audience members. Discussions with professors and colleagues in the departments of History and History of Art at the University of Michigan, as well as part of the Medieval and Early Modern Studies Lunch Series, where I presented and discussed aspects of this paper, have also helped with the structure and articulation of my ideas. I would especially like to thank my dissertation advisor, Professor Achim Timmermann, for carefully reading and providing revisions on a draft of this essay. Lehti Mairike Keelmann and Jennifer Gear—whose encouragement, support, and friendship have facilitated the completion of this article—have also read earlier versions and have provided helpful and illuminating comments. Additionally, I would like to thank the organizations and departments at the University of Michigan whose financial support enabled me to travel to Romania in the summer of 2012 to conduct additional research for this project. These include the Rackham Graduate School, the Medieval and Early Modern Studies Program, the International Institute, and the Department of the History of Art.

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

¹. An inscription written in Slavonic above the south entrance to the church explains that Prince Vasile Lupu built the church in honor of the three holy hierarchs or Ecumenical Teachers—the Archbishops of Constantinople Saint Gregory the Theologian (ca. 329 – ca. 389) and Saint John Chrysostom (ca. 347 – 407), and the Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia Saint Basil the Great (ca. 329 – 379)—who played pivotal roles in shaping Christianity and from whom this church took its name of the ‘Three Hierarchs’. The inscription reads: “By the will of the Father, with the help of the Son, and with the partaking of the Holy Spirit, I, the servant of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, and worshipper of the Holy Trinity, Prince Vasile, by the mercy of God ruler of Moldavia, together with our Lady Tudosca and with our children given by God, Prince Ioan, [Princess] Maria and [Princess] Rucsanda, have built this holy church in the name of the Three Holy Hierarchs, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory the Theologian and Saint John Chrysostom. And it was consecrated by the hand of Archbishop Varlaam on the 6th of May 7147 [1639].” The Romanian translation of the inscription can be found in Constantin Sturzu, *Manastirea Sfintii Trei Ierarhi*, Mitropolia Moldovei și Bucovinei, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2011, p.7.

². A number of these studies include: Alexandru Lapedatu, and André Lecomte du Noüy, *Câteva cuvinte asupra bisericilor “Sf. Nicolae-Domnesc” și “Trei Ierarhi” din Iași*, Administrația Casei Bisericii, Institutul de arte grafice “C. Göbl”, București, 1904; Sever Mureșanu, “Sala gotică sau refectoriul mănăstirii Trei

Ierarhi,” in *Junimea literara* 5, nr. 7-8 (1908), pp.149-152; Sever Mureșanu, “Clopotnița mănăstirii Trei Ierarhi,” in *Junimea literara* 5 (1908), pp.90-93; Gheorghe Balș, *Bisericile și mănăstirile moldovenești din veacurile al XVII-lea și al XVIII-lea*, Institutul de arte grafice “E. Marvan,” București, 1933; Nicolae Grigoraș, “Forma veche a bisericii Trei Ierarhi,” in *Cercetări istorice* 13-16, no. 1-2 (1937-1940), pp.295-298; Dan Bădărău, “Fost-a Enache din Constantinopol arhitectul bisericii ‘Trei Ierarhi’ din Iași?” in *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei* 3, nr. 1-2 (1956), pp.284-290; Nicolae Grigoraș, *Biserica Trei Ierarhi*, Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei și Sucevei, Iași, 1962; Alexandru Andronic, “Stema cu pisanie de pe turnul clopotniță al mănăstirii Trei Ierarhi din Iași,” in *Romanoslavica* 15 (1967), pp.255-257; Mira Voitec-Dordea, *Reflexe gotice in arhitectura Moldovei*, Meridiane, București, 1976; Răzvan Theodorescu, and Ioan Oprea, *Piatra Trei Ierarhilor sau despre o ipoteză a fastului in civilizatia românească*, Meridiane, București, 1979; Ana Dobjanschi, and Victor Simion, eds., *Arta in epoca lui Vasile Lupu*, Meridiane, București, 1979); Sever Mureșanu, “Biserica Trei Ierarhi,” in *Analele arhitecturii și ale artelor cu care se leagă I* (1980), pp.60-64, 88-93, 101-104, 118-123; Ștefan Emilian, “Biserica de la Trei Ierarhi din Iași,” in *Revista de istorie, arheologie și filologie* 5 (1985), pp.385-391; Aurelian Trișcu, “The ‘Three Hierarchs’ Church in Iași,” in *Journal of the German National Committee* (1995), pp.93-97.

³. A number of these studies include: Sever Mureșanu, “Cele trei portrete de la mănăstirea Trei Ierarhi,” in *Junimea literară* 6, nr. 3-4 (1909), pp.66-69, and nr. 5 (1909), pp.92-96; Gheorghe Balș, *Influences arméniennes et géorgiennes sur l’architecture roumaine. Communication faite au III-e Congres des Etudes byzantines—Atena, Vălenii de Munte, 1931*; Dinu C. Giurescu, “Contribuții la studiul broderiilor de la Trei Ierarhi,” in *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei* 36, nr. 3-4 (1960), pp.215-238; Ion Bănățeanu, “Aspecte ale influenței artei armeano-georgiene asupra artei religioase românești,” in *Glasy Bisericii* 24, no. 7-8 (1965), pp.705-706; Răzvan Theodorescu, “Manierism și ‘prim baroc’ postbizantin între Polonia și Stanbul: cazul moldav (1600-1650),” in *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei* 28 (1981), pp.63-93.

⁴. A number of these studies include: Paul Petrescu, “‘Pomul vieții’ in arta populară din România,” in *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei* 8, nr. 1 (1961), pp.41-82; Sorin Ifțimi, “O ipoteză privind Trei Ierarhii,” in *Anuarul Institutului de istorie A.D. Xenopol* 31 (1994), pp.77-82; Maria Magdalena Székely, “Un proiect nerealizat: Mitropolia de la Trei Ierarhi,” in *Anuarul Institutului de istorie A.D. Xenopol* 31 (1994), pp.73-76.

⁵. This study will not consider the interior wall paintings of the Three Hierarchs Church. While these are equally impressive as the exterior carvings, they were heavily restored during the later decades of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, and therefore it is difficult to reconstruct what they may have looked like originally. Fragments of the original paintings survive in the National Museum of Art, Bucharest. For an example, see *Muzeul Național de Artă al României: Artă Veche Românească*, 2nd ed., București, 2008, p.80.

⁶. “Această [mănăstire] este unică și prea frumoasă; seamănă cu o cetate și este

înconjurată cu ziduri de piatră... Sfânta biserică se află în mijlocul mănăstirii.” *Călători străini despre țările române*, vol. 6, București, 1976, p.47. Paul of Alep and the patriarch Macarie entered Moldavia on January 17, 1653.

⁷. Surviving prints reproduce what this tower may have looked like and how it was positioned relative to the church. A number of these prints are reproduced in Sorin Ifțimi’s essay “Timp Medieval—Timp Modern: Primul orologiu din țările Române (1640),” *Ceasuri pentru Romania*, http://ceasuripentruromania.ro/ceasuri.php?id_article=137 (accessed on October 19, 2012).

⁸. The Gothic Hall is a structure built by Prince Vasile Lupu, and it was last restored in 1960. The Three Hierarchs Church was damaged repeatedly throughout its history. In the middle of the seventeenth century, soon after it was built, it was plundered and burnt by invaders from the East and from the North. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the church was repeatedly damaged by earthquakes (1711, 1781, 1795, and 1802). Between 1882 and 1887 the architectural structure of the church was restored. The renovation of the interior, with its cycles of murals, was not completed until 1898. In 1904, during the reign of King Carol I of Romania, the church was re-consecrated.

⁹. The first volume in the Romanian language was printed at the Three Hierarchs monastery in 1643. Because of its educational purpose, this monastery was known not only as the “Monastery of the Patriarchs” but also as the “Monastery of the Teachers.” For more on this topic, see: Mihail Avădani, “Așezământul școlar de la Trei Ierarhi din Iași, prima instituție cu elemente de învățământ superior din Moldova,” in *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei* 47, nr. 5-6 (1971), pp.362-373, and 48, nr. 9-12 (1972), pp.775-788; Nicolae Grigoraș, “Primele cărți tipărite în tipografia de la Trei Ierarhi,” in *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei* 48, nr. 9-12 (1972), pp.822-824.

¹⁰. Robert G. Ousterhout, *Master Builders of Byzantium*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1999; reprinted by the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2008, p.18.

¹¹. Slobodan Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans From Diocletian to Suleyman the Magnificent, c.300-1550*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2010.

¹². For more on this topic see: Grigore Nandriș, *Documentele Slavo-Române din Mănăstirile Muntelui Athos, 1372-1658*, București, 1936; Petre S. Nasturel, *Le Mont Athos et les Roumains: Recherches sur leurs relations du milieu du XIVe siècle a 1654*, Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, Roma, 1986; Virgil Candea, “L’Athos et les Roumains,” in *Mount Athos and the Byzantine Monasticism*, eds. Anthony Bryer and Mary Cunningham, Variorum, Aldershot, 1996.

¹³. Although the original fortifications of the Three Hierarchs Church no longer survive, it is quite possible that they may have looked similar to the square fortification walls at Dragomirna Monastery and those found at Galata Monastery, as well as elsewhere in Moldavia.

¹⁴. It should be noted that the church at Galata Monastery is the first Moldavian example with two towers—one tower positioned over the *naos*; the other over the *pronaos*.

¹⁵. The church at Galata Monastery was the first in Moldavia to feature, as part of its exterior ornamentation, the twisted rope motif, which here divides the façade into an upper and a lower register.

¹⁶. Balș, *Influences arméniennes et géorgiennes sur l'architecture roumaine*, p.16; Bănățeanu, "Aspecte ale influenței artei armeano-georgiene asupra artei religioase românești," pp.705-706.

¹⁷. Martin Harrison, *A Temple for Byzantium: The Discovery and Excavation of Anicia Juliana's Palace Church in Istanbul*, London, 1989, pp.100, 132, 143.

¹⁸. "Toata lumea spune într-un glas că nici în Moldova, nici în Țara Românească și nici la cazaci nu este vreo biserică comparabilă cu aceasta, nici prin podoabe, nici prin frumusețe, căci ea minunează mintea celor ce o vizitează." in *Călători străini*, p.50. Paul of Alep's writings were originally titled *Rihlat al-Batrak al-Antaki Makarios al-Halabi (The Travels of Patriarch Măcărie from Alep)*. For a list of known copies of Paul's manuscript, see *Călători străini*, vol. 6, 13-14. A very good Romanian translation of the manuscript can also be found in this publication. Paul's account is particularly important because unlike the travelers that came before him, and whose accounts are translated and preserved in other volumes of *Călători străini despre țările române*, he did not look at earlier accounts to formulate his own. Therefore, his observations and descriptions are not influenced in any way by those of his predecessors. Paul's description of the Three Hierarchs Church was also published separately in M. Gaster, "Descrierea bisericii Trei Ierarhi din Iași de Paul de Aleppo," in *Revista pentru istorie, arheologie și filologie* I, 2, no. 2 (1883), pp.415-417.

¹⁹. "Nu poate fi descrisă nici cu graiul, nici cu pana. Fiind clădită de curând, pietrele de marmură strălucitoare lucesc și scânteiază, încât par că ar fi frunzele de pe un pergament iluminat... Îndeosebi înfloriturile de pe o piatră sunt astfel încadrate în ornamentele săpate cu discuri de soare, cu împletituri de linii, cu dantele de piatră și cu inscripții ornate, încât cel care le privește rămâne uimit de felul cum meșterul sculptor a cioplit marmora cu dalta sa," in *Călători străini*, vol. 6, pp.479-481. See also André Antalfi, "Description turque du monastère des Trois Hiérarques de Iassy, Extrait du "Voyage d'Evliya Tchébéli," in *Studia et acta orientalia* 1 (1957), pp.5-11.

²⁰. Kurt W. Treptow, ed., *A History of Romania*, East European Monographs, Columbia University Press, New York, 1996, p.169.

²¹. Dobjanschi and Simion, *Arta în epoca lui Vasile Lupu*, p.39.

²². In the *pronaos* are also the tombs of Dimitrie Cantemir and Alexandru Ioan Cuza.

²³. A letter written by Prince Vasile Lupu on 13 September 1638 to the counselor Feodor Feodorovici from the ambassador group of Moscow, asking the tsar for support, reads as follows: "...pentru pictori, căci în țara noastră nu se află de aceștia...să ne dea pictori buni și iscuțiți și să aibă voie meșterii noștri a face catapeteasma și răstignirea după obiceiul nostru bisericesc..., iar noi vom ținea neuitat în minte binefacerea și ajutorul Măriei Tale iubitoare de Dumnezeu și se va aminti numele Domniei Tale în această *mitropolie* a noastră nou zidită." [emphasis mine] The letter was published by Silviu Dragomir, "Contribuții privitoare la

relațiile Bisericii românești cu Rusia în veacul XVII,” in *Academia Română Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice* 2, no. 34 (1912), p.1157, anexa 10; partially reprinted in Székely, “Un proiect nerealizat: Mitropolia de la Trei Ierarhi,” p.75.

²⁴. The seat of the Orthodox Church in Moldavia was not moved to Iași during Prince Vasile Lupu’s lifetime. This was only accomplished in 1677, and it was not the Three Hierarchs Church that the seat was moved to. Rather, it was at the Church of Saint Nicholas in Iași.

²⁵. Nicolae Iorga, “Vasile Lupu ca următor al împăraților de la Răsărit,” in *Academia Română Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice* 2, no. 35 (1913), p.11; Maria Magdalena Székely and Ștefan S.Gorovei, “Contribuții la istoria Trei-Ierarhilor,” in *Anarul Institutului de Istorie A. D. Xenopol* 30 (1993), pp.435-438.

²⁶. See Paul of Alep’s account of the display of Saint Parascheva’s relics in the Three Hierarchs Church: “La dreapta...se află un arc consolv mare ale cărui colente, acoperite cu sculptură artistică, sînt de marmură albă. Se urcă tot pe trepte de marmură. In mijloc se află racla, care, pe dinăuntru și pe dinafară, are catifea roșie, împodobită cu ținte de argint; are și o încuietoare minunată...Ea este acoperită, ca în timpul vieții, cu vâluri și cu țesături de mătase brodate și altele de felul cesta. Deasupra ei sînt atîrnate candelile de argint și de aur, care ard zi și noapte,” in *Călători străini*, vol. 6, p.49.

²⁷. A similar interpretation was proposed by Ifimi, “O ipoteză privind Trei Ierarhii,” pp.77-82.

Does Wisdom Accompany Suffering? Pain, Frenzy and Their Treatment in Ancient Greek Drama and Performance

Suffer Me That I may Speak – Visitation from Heaven

HEINZ-UWE HAUS, PHD

*The People Go Away Relieved That They Are Better Off
in Their Own Shows*

W. H. Auden describes the suffering in Greek tragedy as “a visitation from Heaven, a punishment imposed upon the hero from without”.¹ Through enduring it, the hero expiates his sins and ends reconciled to the law, though it is for the gods not him to decide when his expiation is complete. When we discussed the subject during rehearsals of *Hecuba*, Aspasia Papatthanassiou, who played the lead, rejected the comparison of the Ancient Greek’s dramaturgy of Self-examination to modern concepts of repentance, which “miss the hero’s original subjective sin of *hybris*”. She reminded us all especially the young chorus members, that the tragic hero is not a wicked man from God, and that his fate is not appointed unto him by God, as the bible believes. On the other hand – and we discussed that we are too aware of the wounds afflicted by the junta just a few years earlier - , the Ancient past and we after-born meet in a common playground, where an investigative “I” does the examining: “Suffer me that I may speak; and after that I have spoken, mock on” (Job 21,3).² That is why theatre makers since Pericles’ Athens could use this Ancient dramaturgical wisdom, understanding the hero’s fall not just as a divine punishment for his initial sin, but also its effects and how he is responsible for them as indeed he is for his fall itself. “He is not an unwitting sinner”, Auden says, “but a self-

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deceiving one, who refuses his guilty conscience”.³ In my rehearsal notes of *Hecuba* I wrote down: “From Dithyramb to Dialogue”.

The biblical quotation “Suffer me that I may speak” sounds familiar – and finally, a contemporary like Brecht demands that the future development of drama and the theatre be philosophical: “It must not believe that one can identify oneself with our world by empathy, nor must it want this.”⁴

The suffering and rebirth of Dionysus becomes a model for the theatre, which explores the suffering and triumph of the human community. This transformative function for the drama ensures a very specific role for the spectators in watching the events:

- Because the protagonist’s fall is not entirely his or her own fault, the audience may end up pitying him or her.
- The fallen protagonist gains self-knowledge. He has a deeper insight into himself and understands his weakness.
- The audience undergoes *catharsis*, a purging of emotions, after experiencing pity, fear, shock and other strong feelings. The people go away relieved, that they are better off in their own existence than in that of the hero’s they observed.

For today’s Western societies, it is worthwhile to remember, that Greek theatre was part of the soul of the community, essential to the basic fabric of the life of the city-state. Through plays, the Greeks examined the relationships necessary to sustain human existence as they understood it. Family relationships, social organization, the relationships and obligations of individuals to the larger society; and the interplay between human action and the actions of the gods dominated their dramas. By raising ethical and political questions, the Greek plays helped shape the emergence of democracy in Athens.

While it is true that the concept of wisdom from suffering is basic to such theatre, it is also true that the very same concept has an important role to play in the formation of the conscience and mindset of the members of the polis in general. This paper analyzes the theme of wisdom from suffering as it applies to *King Oedipus*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Antigone*, and *Medea*. I examine how these plays reveal a progression of wisdom for Oedipus. Oedipus is blinded as predicted by the prophet, but his full maturity of understanding finally comes in the second play. In *Antigone*, Creon learns wisdom through the death of his son, but not before it is too late. Euripides’ *Medea* too reminds us, “that a life combining order with

happiness is something men must win for themselves in continual struggle with an unsympathetic environment.”⁵

My principal goals as director are always two. One is the discovery and reconstruction of some of the important principles by which Ancient Greek plays were written and performed, including the implicit habits, assumptions, constraints, liberties, conventions, and practices of stagecraft that were aspects of the dramatic world –especially those aspects that are most neglected, undervalued, or misunderstood by modern readers. The other is the promotion of a way of re-reading the plays that will incorporate an awareness of these principles, facilitate a more adequate recovery of their designs, and eventually convince readers that this approach, although not the only legitimate one, is more satisfying - and more appreciative of the Ancient Greek playwright’s accomplishment - than any other. But as much influenced by the nature of the specific problems today’s re-readings may be, they will mainly be variations on a common theme. Aspasia proclaimed clearly, when a dramaturgical discussion led to nowhere: “How should the resulting discoveries and inferences invite us to change or adjust our ways of attempting to understand Ancient Greek theatrical mind set?”

*“Use Value” of “Suffering as Civic Training”
The Chorus in Medea*

Hearing Medea lament, the Chorus of Corinthian Women offers sympathy and cautions her to practice restraint. The next time they sing they mention that the old order is changing: women used to be accused of faithlessness, but now the men have grown deceitful, and Medea has been deserted in a foreign land. After the scene in which Medea hurls her scathing denunciations at Jason, the Chorus again suggests restraint and expresses pity because Medea has no friend to help her; at this point Aegeus, King of Athens, who is passing through Corinth on a journey, meets Medea and promises to give her sanctuary, unaware of the crimes she is planning. Here the Chorus sings an ode in praise of Athens, which must have delighted the audience, although it is not entirely relevant to the action. The Chorus itself wonders how such a sacred city can give protection to a murderess, and begs Medea not to destroy her sons. Here we see the awkwardness of the Chorus in Euripidean drama: All the women in Corinth know that Medea plans to murder her children, but they do not inform Jason, nor do anything else about it, except to advise Medea against it. After Medea sends her children to Glauce with the poisoned gifts, the Chorus

expresses sorrow at the fact that the boys will be accomplices in their mother's crime, and weeps again because Medea intends to slay them. When the boys return, Medea, torn between her love for them and her determination to kill them, leads them resolutely into the house, while the Chorus laments that children bring only endless cares. As the women hear the cries issuing from indoors, but are prevented from entering, they pray to heaven to stay Medea's hand. At the end of the play, the Chorus sings a final song (the exodus); here the poet expresses his view of life in words which appear almost verbatim at the conclusion of four of his other plays. Euripides' outlook is not a cheerful one; he stresses the uncertainties of life and points out that those things we count on do not come to pass, while the things we do not dream of are bound to happen.

A Child of Our Time

Preparing this paper in our late 1920th villa in a small town north of Berlin, I was listening to a record, which addressed – if we think in dramaturgical terms - a familiar demos, the collective chorus of the Europeans, at the beginning of World War II.

“The world turns on its dark side- it is winter,” the chorus sings near the start of *A Child of Our Time* (1938-41), an oratorio by the English composer Michael Tippett. Unlike Haendel's *Messiah* and Bach's great Passions, the formal and spiritual models Tippett emulated, his oratorio fills no particular slot in the ecclesiastical calendar.

The event that served as the catalyst for *A Child of Our Time* actually occurred in a dark chapter of mankind's history. Herschel Grynszpan, a 17-year-old Polish Jew, alarmed by news that his family had been deported to Poland from Germany, shot and fatally wounded Ernst vom Rath, a German diplomat, in Paris on Nov. 7, 1938.

Vom Rath died two days later, on the 15th anniversary of Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch in Munich. Outraged by a Jewish assassin – and incited by Joseph Goebbels' speech at the site of the putsch – the Nazis retaliated with Kristallnacht, the “night of broken glass.”

The exact circumstances of the incident grew murky in later years, and evidence shows that the Nazis would have found another pretext to escalate the violence against the Jews in any case. But, for Tippett, a devout pacifist and a lifelong believer in art in the service of social justice, Grynszpan served as a symbol of an individual marginalized by society and

pushed by tyranny to commit an unthinkable act. Although he is the opposite of a tragic hero, a flaw in the nature of existence, relates him to the Ancient Greek mindset of thinking about our thinking, which is to ask questions and allow oneself for moral courage and discipline. He learns to look on himself and his world as the Ancients as if they were not his but a stranger's! That is Aristotelian, Biblical and Brechtian as well!

The fact that Grynspan quickly realized and regretted the cost of his rash act suited Tippett's humanitarian inclinations as well as his Jungian belief in the necessity of reconciling opposites into a harmonious whole. As Paul Griffiths noted in a 1999 essay for *The New York Times*, "Individuals and nations, as Tippett saw it, create enemies by finding other people to be trash cans for their own unacceptable qualities; if that truth could be acknowledged, the dialogue of warfare could be turned into a dialogue of acceptance and even love."⁶

That Tippett could have thought that the Nazis might recognize and accept their scapegoats is probably overstating his desires. But it is easy to imagine that he believed the German people could rise above the Nazis' predatory aims.

Work on *A Child of Our Time* began a few days after the outbreak of war in 1939. Tippett adopted his title from an antiwar novel by Odon von Horvath, an Austro-Hungarian playwright.

Tippett modeled the tripartite form of the piece after Haendel's *Messiah*. He wrote: "Part I deals with the general state of oppression of our time; Part II presents the particular story of a young man's attempt to seek justice by violence and the catastrophic consequence; Part III considers the morale to be drawn, if any." Sophisticated allusions to specific selections from *Messiah* are made.

From both Haendel and Bach, Tippett adopted a template of narrative recitative, contemplative arias, descriptive choruses and – specific to Bach's Passions – familiar chorales. Seeking an analog to Bach's Lutheran hymns, Tippett adopted five American spirituals. The settings specifically emulated the style of the Hall Johnson Choir, which Tippett had subsequently heard in *The Green Pastures*, a 1936 film.

In those spirituals – *Steal Away*, *Nobody Knows*, *Go Down*, *Moses*, *By and By* and *Deep River* – black Americans had made the plight of biblical Jews familiar and universal. In using them he meant to evoke not only the torments of contemporary Jews in wartime Europe but also those of anyone "rejected, cast out from the center of our society onto the fringes: into slums, into concentration camps, into ghettos." The composer's attitude towards pain, and frenzy, and their treatment at a turning point of

modern Western history relates clearly to basic questions of humanist identity.

I wish I would have had this record during the *Hecabe* rehearsals in 1982. We were preparing our production as part of the first “Capital of Europe” festival, for which the EU had chosen Athens - the birthplace of democracy. Today I am sure, that Tippett’s musical thinking and civic courage would have reminded us of the latent content of the fable. At a time where an iron curtain imposed an brute pain, frenzy and suffering for more than half of Europe’s people since the end of the Nazi regime , the free nations on the continent seemed to turn their collective back on the communist dictatorships. Slogans like “Competition of the systems” , “realpolitik” or “It’s the result of WW II” covered up the collaboration between the democracy and its enemy. Remember, how the Euripidian women tap into the resources of drama, and how their staging of the sacrifice before the eyes of the father intensifies his suffering. It is diabolic to force the father to live: he is an audience who is destroyed by suffering, rather than enlightened. Polymestor, like Tiresias and Oedipus can see the future. And when the ghost of Polydorus disappears, we see the mourning Hecuba. Her city has fallen, and she has lost many of her children already. The ‘civilized’ Greeks have triumphed over the barbarian Trojans, but what Euripides will show us is that war barbarizes everyone. No one is immune. The women in *Hecuba* are “children of our time”. Tippett’s oratorio gives us the understanding that we are all part of the tragedy that we view around us every day. Interpretation must itself be evaluated, within a historical view of human consciousness.

Human Life Hangs on the Edge of an Abyss

“Suffering is the price of being alive”; “make use of the suffering.” These straight forward advises come from different origins but are comparable. The first stems from the idea that suffering cannot be avoided and the second reflects a philosophy of the art of living. Most people try to deny and avoid the path of suffering. Yet, they often fail to realize that no matter how many detours they take around suffering, the construction of it is still going to be there. Suffering might even relocate close to them where they are forced to deal with it. In *King Oedipus*, the suffering of Oedipus comes from personal and criminal revelations. The dramatic events on stage demonstrate that, people gain wisdom from suffering through painful growth and acceptance.

A key to the work of Ancient Greek dramatists seems to be provided by Matthew Arnold in a phrase referring to Sophocles and the fact that he possessed an “even-balanced soul”. John Gassner summarizes this idea best in *Masters of the Drama*, when he writes: “He comprehended both the joy and grief of living, its beauty and ugliness, its moments of peace and its basic uncertainty so concisely expressed by his line ‘Human life, even in its utmost slender and struggle, hangs on the edge of an abyss.’”⁷

We remember, that Sophocles’ handling of human tragedy was influenced, in part, by the tragedies of war. During his lifetime he had witnessed the devastating Persian and Peloponnesian wars and even participated in a war himself when he served as a general with Pericles to quell rebellion on Samos, an Aegean island.

Ancient Athenian audiences trained themselves in dealing with contradictions. Being king is hard; the title alone comes with high prestige and expectations. Oedipus is put on a pedestal by the citizens of Thebes as if he were their God. That is their biggest mistake. So when the land of Thebes is plagued by disease and death, Oedipus pleads: “I know that you are deathly sick; and yet, sick as you are, not one is sick as I. Each of you suffers in himself alone his anguish, not another’s, but my spirit groans for the city, for myself, for you.” Oedipus not only wants the people to know that he suffers with them, but that he suffers substantially because his suffering includes theirs as well. Now I am not saying that he wasn’t sincere, just the fact that he knows how they saw him put pressure on him to exaggerate a little to make the point that he cared. His greatest suffering comes through the process of finding out who killed King Laius, a king before him, whose death was believed to have brought on the plague.

In portraying his characters, Sophocles raises the depiction of antagonistic contradictions to high art, making the characters unwitting victims of fate or their own shortcomings. The irony is both verbal (with characters speaking words laden with meaning unknown to them) and dramatic (with characters ensnaring themselves in predicaments charged with a danger that they do not recognize but that the audience well knows will lead to disaster). The audience knows, for example, what Oedipus did not know (until the end of *Oedipus the King*): that the man he killed and the woman he married were his father and mother. This type of dramaturgy occurs often in Sophocles’ plays, allowing the audience to become engrossed with a character’s response to a situation rather than the eventual outcome of the situation. In all events the audience observes how wisdom accompanies suffering. The central focus is the choices the characters make because of their pride.

Pride was considered a grave sin because it placed too much emphasis on individual will, thereby downplaying the will of the state and endangering the community as a whole. Because pride makes people unwilling to accept wise council, they act rashly and make bad decisions. Oedipus as king of Thebes exhibits great pride that blinds his ability to accept the truth. By contrast, the blind prophet Teiresias readily “sees” the truth. Thanks to whims of fate and his own pride and arrogance, Oedipus tumbles headlong into an abyss of humiliation, grief, and remorse in a single day.

Oedipus at Colonus achieves redemption through love, piety, and hardship. Stripped of dignity, he wanders in a wilderness of suffering for many years. Though blind, he begins to “see” again with the eye of his soul, recognizing his faults and realizing the importance of love and the right way of living with the help of his daughters, Antigone and Ismene.

In *Antigone* too intractability and pride cause the downfall of even the noblest humans. Both Creon and Antigone doom themselves with their recalcitrance. Through observing the events, the spectators draw conclusions as such: Overriding divine law with the law of the state leads to ruin. Creon’s refusal to permit Antigone to bury her brother Polynices was a violation of moral law even though Polynices had rebelled against Creon’s rule as king of Thebes. It is easy to understand, how injustice and tyranny can provoke justified civil disobedience. To uphold the moral law Antigone breaks the civil law. Down through the ages and into modern times, citizens have used this theme to guide them in redressing their grievances.

Processes Are Narrated As Changeable

What did Sophocles mean by his theatrical work and how are we to understand it today? His plays have subjected to widely divergent interpretations and obscure discussions; but all agree that he shows us what happens when the ostensibly good man succumbs to pride. And there is added poignancy: Creon, who is the protagonist rather than Antigone, and who is a kind of second Oedipus in his ruthless pursuit of what he thinks is right, brings final ruin to the house of Oedipus. He destroys not only himself, his wife, his son, and the love of these for him, but the very person his son is going to marry and the one who is most dedicated to the right—Antigone. The horror for us, as it was for the ancient Greeks, is precisely this: to see that we can act like an Oedipus or a Creon; both of whom

display the glory and the weakness (the fatal flaw) of self-sufficient man. And when Oedipus is dragged by his own doing from wealth and power, is stripped of reputation, made to wallow in a bed of murder, incest, suicide, and even personal disfigurement, the audience passes through such territories of fear and pity that the human heart is altogether purged. But if we are to understand what Sophocles intended to tell his audience, we must not separate the theory from the practice, the plays from the performances. We have to show how distant history can be made to connect with current events and live in a kind of dialectic between past significance and present meaning. We are obliged to visualize the events of the play, if we want to grasp something of the spirit and the roots of the dramatic heritage of Sophocles. Sophocles' theatre cannot be approached narrowly and formalistically. Sophocles did not advocate aesthetic means or dramaturgical techniques, but rather a method of theatrical representation based upon a particular way of viewing the world.

The most radical dialectical thinking and experimentation took place during the 20th century. The realism we were used to was no longer the mirror for the reality, in which we had to exist.

In a prologue to his *Antigone*, Bertolt Brecht, in 1951, formulated the following on realistic art:

“We ask you / to seek in your minds from similar deeds / of the immediate past or the absence / of similar deeds. And now / you will see us and the other actors / one and the other around the small arena / to enter in play, where once underneath the / animal skulls of barbaric cults / in far-away times humanity / rose to full height.”⁸

That is why the questions of the 1982 *Hecuba* production are the same in 2012: What does it feel like to lose a child? How does it feel to lose one's freedom? What permanent change and what response will follow? These are the terrible realities faced by women each day - in the past and today. Some feel justified in taking up arms, seeking terrible vengeance on those they see as a threat to their freedom. Hecuba is one of them, at the end she appears as something monstrous, frightful, and incomprehensible. Through her actions we see why she becomes weak, miserable, devastated, and progressively dehumanized. To establish such a basic attitude, we explored Euripides' purpose in representing Hecuba the way he does.

*Let Me finish My Comments with Listening Once Again
to Tippett's Oratorio:*

“He shoots the official—but he shoots only his dark brother—and see: he is dead”. After all: Wisdom does accompany suffering.

“I would know my shadow and my light, so shall I at last be whole,” the tenor soloist sings at the climax of the third part, delivering the work’s Jungian prescription for healing man and society alike. “Then courage, brother, dare the grave passage,” the bass responds. “Here is no final grieving but an abiding hope,” the soprano adds.

And inevitably, the icy chill of winter thaws. “The moving waters renew the earth,” the alto sings. “It is spring.” In that line, and in the conciliatory promise of the final spiritual, “Deep River,” comes a promise of deliverance that can surely warm any heart.

NOTES:

¹ W.H. Auden (ed.), *The Portable Greek Reader*, Penguin Books, New York, 1977, p. 24.

² *The Bible*, King James version, London 1876.

³ W.H. Auden, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁴ „Last Stage: Oedipus”, in *Brecht on Theatre*, edit. and transl. by John Willett, Hill and Wang, New York, 1996, p. 25.

⁵ Philip Vellacott, in: “Introduction,” *Euripides' Medea and Other Plays*, Penguin Books, London, 1963, p. 9.

⁶ Paul Griffiths quoted in: Steve Smith: “Darkly Spiritual Challenge to Injustice,” in: *The New York Times*, January 29, 2012, p. 23.

⁷ John Gassner *Masters of the Drama*, Random House, New York, 1954, p. 42.

⁸ Bertold Brecht, *Antigonemodell 1948*, West Berlin, 1949, p.17.

Originalitatea Spiritualității Ortodoxe Românești. Reflecții Duhovnicești ale Părintelui Profesor D. Stăniloae

IOAN C. TEȘU, PHD

A vorbi, astăzi, într-o epocă a globalizării, despre națiune și patriotism, despre vocația și rolul fiecărui popor în fața istoriei și a lui Dumnezeu, pare oarecum anacronic. Discursul despre națiune a avut mult de suferit în secolul trecut, ideea de naționalism fiind compromisă, fie de ideologiile extremiste, care au căutat eliminarea de pe arena istoriei a unor grupuri demografice, populații, neamuri sau rase, fie de alianțele create și întreținute forțat, prin regimuri totalitare și inumane.

Astăzi, pe fondul creării unor noi structuri și conglomerate plurinaționale, în vremuri de „liberă” și „largă” circulație, nu doar dintr-o țară în alta, ci chiar dintr-o emisferă în cealaltă, într-o vreme a eliminării granițelor și barierelor dintre numeroase țări, însăși Europa are aspectul de federație, în care actualele țări ce o compun, par niște cantoane sau districte, județe sau regiuni, ca structurile administrative și politice, cunoscute de unele țări membre, în trecut.

Într-un astfel de context, recursul la o istorie, fie ea chiar și recentă, având la bază identitatea specifică fiecărui grup sau populație, pare depășită. În plus, cel puțin pentru fostele țări comuniste, căderea unui regim totalitar și inuman, cu întreg eșafodajul lui, a deschis calea unor împrumuturi, mergând până la un mimetism inconștient, a unor obiceiuri, conduite și comportamente străine spiritului propriu, dar în deplină concordanță cu legile democrației și cu „mersul timpului”. Așa au pătruns, s-a creat chiar o industrie și produc profit sărbători precum Halloween, St. Valentine’s Day, care, dincolo de aspectul comercial, au profunde și grave implicații morale. Astfel de sărbători reprezintă vremea cea mai potrivită pentru încheierea

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căsătoriilor de probă, a mariajelor de o zi sau, mai degrabă, de o noapte, cu promisiunile lor de a oferi plăceri spectaculoase, concentrate, paroxistice.

Învățătura de credință ortodoxă acordă o mare prețuire ființei umane, subliniind că aceasta constituie creatura supremă și cea mai iubită a lui Dumnezeu. Ea a fost făcută din iubire, „după chipul și asemănarea” (Facere 1,26) Părintelui ei, iar întreaga sa viață este un permanent dialog cu El, în vederea ridicării sale la adevărata sa vocație - îndumnezeirea, adică la a deveni prin sinergie, adică prin lucrare personală și ajutor divin, ceea ce Dumnezeu este prin ființă. Dintr-o astfel de perspectivă, istoria însăși poate fi socotită a consemna pașii lui Dumnezeu prin lume, iar vremurile de criză - clipe și momente de judecată din partea Creatorului ei, Care, constatând îndepărtarea acesteia de izvoarele și scopul sau menirea ei, intervine pedagogic, din dorința de a o întoarce la traiectoria ei esențială și ființială.

Aceeași învățătură de credință ne învață că, la sfârșitul veacurilor și al lumii, fiecare viețuitor al ei se va prezenta la Judecata de Apoi, în „ceata” sa, adică dimpreună cu neamul său, având în fruntea lui sfinții și îngerii lui protectori, cuvioșii, ostenitorii și nevoitorii proprii, ba chiar și pe acelea dintre rudeniile sale, de dinainte sau de după el, care s-au mântuit, prin aspre nevoițe. Prin urmare, practicarea autentică a credinței ortodoxe implică, în mod absolut, cunoașterea învățăturii ei și practicarea lor, ceea ce echivalează cu descoperirea vocației fiecărei persoane în fața neamului său și a fiecărui neam înaintea lui Dumnezeu, Împăratul veacurilor.

Într-o astfel de cunoaștere, repere de o deosebită importanță aflăm în teologia Părintelui Profesor Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993), „sfântul Filocaliei” și „patriarhul teologiei academice românești”, el însuși un dar și o binecuvântare dumnezeiască pentru neamul românesc și prezență providențială în spațiul teologiei creștine a veacului al XX-lea.

Câteva elemente fundamentale ale acestei „teologii a neamului”, unele din trăsăturile distinctive ale Ortodoxiei și spiritualității ortodoxe românești, așa cum au fost ele identificate și analizate de Părintele Profesor, încearcă să le evidențieze și prezenta abordare, cu speranța că redescoperirea și afirmarea acestora ne va da o mai mare responsabilitate și o mai sporită demnitate în fața lumii și a lui Dumnezeu.

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Părintele Profesor Dumitru Stăniloae era pătruns de ideea valorii și a importanței pe care poporul român a avut-o pe arena istoriei europene, încă de la nașterea sa ca popor creștin. Religia creștină, adusă în ținuturile noastre de Sfântul Apostol Andrei, „cel întâi chemat la apostolat”, din zorii creștinismului, adică din primul veac al noii ere și nu la sfârșitul primului

mileniu, așa cum s-a întâmplat cu alte popoare vecine, a dus la sădirea, în însăși ființa sa etnică, a învățăturilor creștine, care i-au devenit apoi esențiale. În mod similar, profunzimea credinței lui și statornicia în păstrarea și transmiterea lor este rod al propovăduirii și viețuirii acestui popor în aceste adevăruri de credință cu o mie de ani în plus față de unii vecini creștini.

Poporul român, arăta Părintele Stăniloae, este „poporul cel mai pătruns de spiritualitatea ortodoxă”¹. „El, adaugă teologul român, s-a născut creștin. El n-are la bază o altă structură religioasă, care s-o tulbure pe cea ortodoxă. Însuși faptul că a trăit atâta vreme ferit de alte curente spirituale, numai în credința creștină, a contribuit la deplina cristalizare a sufletului în sensul ei”². Pentru el, trăirea Ortodoxiei a fost însăși esența vieții, rațiunea sa de a ființa și a-și impune creațiile, și acestea purtând amprenta profunde sale spiritualități, în fața lumii. Poporului român, Ortodoxia i-a fost „entelehia vieții”, călăuză ce i-a luminat drumul drept, normă și lege revelată, care l-a condus spre idealul său³.

O primă trăsătură a originalității românești, potrivit Părintelui Stăniloae, o constituie *profunzimea spiritualității sale*, aceasta manifestându-se în toate operele sufletului și ale culturii sale. Spre deosebire de civilizația occidentală, preocupată preponderent de trup și bunurile materiale, într-o cultură a căutării plăcerilor, și în mod deosebit a celor legate de trup și de lume, spiritualitatea românească acordă o atenție specială și cultivă bucuriile înalte, superioare, spirituale și religioase.

Aproape că nu există un alt popor ortodox care să-și fi împrăștiat să fi practicat mai fidel decât românii Ortodoxia. Toate manifestările vieții sale erau pătrunse, în trecut, de duhul credinței ortodoxe, o credință atât de înaltă, dar și atât de intim legată de sufletul omului. Dintr-o astfel de simbioză, a luat naștere o cultură și o spiritualitate, deopotrivă cosmică, dar și personală, a iubirii și dăruirii, a comuniunii depline, plină de simț estetic și de o sensibilitate deschisă, însă, la nou și noutate, pe care le-a sintetizat în opere și creații de o înaltă sensibilitate și spiritualitate.

Caracterul spiritual al întregii existențe a poporului român, trăită ca pe o lecție predată lui de Dumnezeu, se concretizează, în primul rând, în *credința sa puternică*. Aceasta l-a susținut și întărit în fiecare lucrare, individuală sau generală, iar credința sa i-a dat putere să înfrunte vitregiile vremurilor, cu speranța în ajutorul lui Dumnezeu, de a ajunge la unele liniștite și prielnice. „Cu Dumnezeu, spune Părintele Stăniloae, românul e tare. S-a dovedit mai tare ca neam. Cu „Doamne ajută!”, răzbește prin orice. „Doamne ajută!” a fost în viața românească secretul succesului, cheia biruinței și a rezistenței. Dar fără Dumnezeu suntem foarte slabi”⁴.

O sintegmă populară spune: „Codru-i frate cu românul!”, arătând, astfel, legătura dintre român și glia străbună. Părintele Stăniloae a sintetizat realitatea acestei osmoze, vorbind despre *spiritualitatea cosmică* a Ortodoxiei românești. Românul, spune teologul român, are două pasiuni mari: pământul și credința⁵, care constituie, pentru el, „cele două realități organice și esențiale ale vieții”⁶. Legătura pe care o are românul cu natura animală și vegetală este una mistică⁷.

Spre deosebire de etica apuseană, care a văzut în natură și în lumea materială un bun de exploatat, o sursă de profit, românul este legat profund de spațiul în care a trăit. El, spune teologul român, „dorește natura dintr-o necesitate sufletească mai adâncă. Natura îi trebuie ca parte de poezie a vieții, ca uniune tainică ce vrăjește. Românul contemplă natura, grăiește cu ea, îi reflectă în cântec murmurul izvorului și ritmurile mai domolite sau mai repezi ale adierii de vreme bună și ale vântului furtunatic”⁸.

Dezvoltând această idee, în lucrarea *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea poporului român*, Părintele Stăniloae spune că românul poartă, oriunde s-ar afla, în profunzimile sufletului său, chipul drag al țării sale și al celor pe care îi iubește, ca o matrice spirituală - „chipul românesc”⁹. Locurile dragi și chipul omului se imprimă, la român, unul în celălalt, astfel încât „există o corespondență între varietatea armonioasă a peisajului țării și varietatea a sufletului românesc, între doina meditativă și vederile largi de pe plaiuri, între râulețul vijelios și pâraiele iuți ale minții, între prispa casei românești și gazda care primește cu bucurie pe colindătorul cu căciula îndesată până peste urechi, între fluieratul sturzului și al naiului”¹⁰.

Dacă gândirea, cultura și civilizația apuseană este una antropocentrică și egolatră, preocupată exclusiv de om, iar de celelalte realități doar în măsura în care îi pot satisface acestuia dorințele sale, românul a transfigurat și încărcat de semnificații spirituale cadrul natural, aflându-se într-o familiaritate și afecțiune sinceră și profundă cu el.

Spre deosebire de exclusivismul antropologic și indiferența față de lumea exterioară a Apusului, manifestate prin „insensibilitatea față de tainica frumusețe sărbătorească a naturii”¹¹, românul, în baza legăturii sale aceasta, petrece multă vreme în mijlocul ei. Faptul că mulți din țărani români mai cultivă încă rudimentar pământul, cu animale, la coarnele plugului și nu mecanizat și că România nu a chimizat exclusiv culturile, folosind încă îngrășăminte naturale, dincolo de productivitatea mai redusă, crează, pe de o parte, un tablou de o rusticitate, un farmec și o frumusețe de basm, iar, pe de altă parte, arată dragostea și grija românului față de tot ceea ce dă și îi întreține viața; natura, pământul, animalele.

Atunci când se află în natură și între oameni, românul le imprimă nota sa de personalitate, îmbogățindu-se, totodată, din preaplina existenței acestora. Lipsa sa sau a acestora dă naștere, în sufletul românului, sentimentului de „dor”. „În dor, spune Părintele Profesor, românul trăiește simțirea intensă a legăturii în care se află cu cei care a viețuit la un loc, când e depărtat de ei. Dorul e simțirea acută a absenței acelora din orizontul său, care poartă urmele lor, ce nu pot fi umplute de alții. În dor, se trăiește o prezență sui-generis a celor absenți; se trăiește durerea absenței lor”¹².

Într-un astfel de comportament responsabil și personificat, putem identifica elementele unei adevărate eco-teologii populare românești.

Raportul dintre român și natura înconjurătoare, care îi oferă cadrul viețuirii sale, se prelungește într-o relație specială față de ceilalți semeni ai săi, societatea umană, încât spiritualitatea românească este considerată a fi una *a iubirii și comuniunii, a solidarității umane*. Spre deosebire de alte popoare, mult mai reci și retrase, care își trăiesc viața protocolar, într-o relație profesională, la locul de muncă, și se retrag apoi în intimitatea vieții de familie, izolându-se, românul caută întâlnirea, dialogul și comuniunea. Pentru el, singurătatea este o suferință, o boală și o lipsă, preferându-o doar în clipele sale de adâncă meditație și de rugăciune. El dorește să primească și să împărtășească experiențe de viață, simțind că aceasta nu îl împărtășește și sărăcește, ci îl îmbogățește și îl înobilează.

Relațiile sociale ale românului sunt caracterizate de „omenie”, despre care Părintele Stăniloae spune că are mai multe sensuri: „ea e prezentă în mod difuz într-o mulțime de însușiri ale poporului român. E un nume general pentru toate relațiile cinstitute, atente, sincere, înțelegătoare, lipsite de gânduri de înșelare a semenilor”¹³. Omenia românului se manifestă în ospitalitatea specific românească, dar și mila sa față de cel năpăstuit și încercat. Din multul sau puținul său, românul reușește totdeauna să rupă și pentru semenul său, cunoscut sau străin. „Omenind” pe cineva, găzduind, hrănind și adăpând pe un semen al său, el dăruiește o parte din sufletul său, din timpul său, din viața, din dragostea și generozitatea sa. Oricât de sărac ar fi, atunci când este sensibilizat, el găsește puterea morală și materială să ajute pe cineva și mai sărac încă decât el, într-un act de măreață milostenie sau generoasă filantropie.

Pentru român, grupul din care face parte și societatea, în general, are un rol esențial pentru afirmarea umană. „Românul, spune Părintele Profesor, prețuiește societatea pentru plusul ce-l adaugă personalității sale; el vrea să aibă în societate un rol propriu, deosebit de al celorlalți, el vrea să facă anumite observații care să pună în lumină inteligența lui, vrea să spună o

vorbă de duh și să cânte ceva propriu, dar și să facă un lucru propriu pentru a i se vedea destoinicia și vrednicia”¹⁴.

O altă notă esențială a spiritului românesc o constituie, potrivit Părintelui D. Stăniloae, *realismul, luciditatea și duiosia*, ce caracterizează manifestările sale. Românul autentic este o fire refractară aventurii, conservatoare în ceea ce privește istoria, convingerile și credințele sale, probând, astfel, „o judecată lucidă și un calm pe care nu-l pierde ușor”¹⁵. El are o intuiție duhovnicească a realității, fiind „dotat cu o luciditate scânteietoare, tăioasă, care are oroare de neclaritate și destramă orice ceață a ambiguității. El vrea să înțeleagă un lucru până la capăt”¹⁶, iar luciditatea de care dă dovadă în interpretarea evenimentelor și realităților vieții include, domeniul accesibil al acesteia, legătura cu domeniul unei alte înțelegeri, al înțelegerii spirituale”¹⁷. Luciditatea de care dă dovadă spiritul românesc, consideră teologul român, se arată în „deșteptăciunea românească”¹⁸ și istețimea sa nativă, iar atunci când surprinde aspecte lipsite de realism și obiectivitate, în umor și ironie.

O altă dimensiune generală a spiritualității românești o constituie *realismul ei, echilibrul și armonia* care caracterizează manifestările sale. „Simțul just al realului”¹⁹ conduce la un „echilibru minunat al înșușirilor, al raporturilor lui cu lumea”²⁰, la o „armonie complexă”²¹, o grație și seriozitate²² specifică, oglindită în toate creațiile sale, ceea ce le dă perenitate și profunzime.

În materie de credință, arată Părintele Stăniloae, echilibrul se manifestă prin evitarea extremelor și pășirea pe calea de aur a spiritualității ortodoxe autentice, calea de mijloc. „Noi, spune el, nu suntem nici unilateral raționaliști ca latinii din Occident sau ca grecii, care au influențat latinitatea occidentală, nici unilateral mistici ca slavii sau ca popoarele asiatice și africane - de un panteism și mai total prin religiile lor impersonaliste -, ci unim luciditatea rațională a latinității personaliste cu sentimentul de taină prezentă în toate, dar cu o taină luminoasă, în care se poate înainta la nesfârșit și care nu ne anulează ca persoane originare în sentimentul de comuniune pe care îl trăim”²³. Românul profund, continua Sfinția Sa, „nu e un sentimental exagerat ca meridionalul sau ca rusul, dar nici un scormonitor în tainele vieții ca germanul. Orice exagerare, orice extremism este pentru român, o dizarmonie care nu scapă de privirea lui fină și de ironia lui”²⁴.

Grația și armonia, echilibrul și delicatetea se manifestă în toate operele spiritului românesc: limbă, joc, cânt sau melos, port, casă de locuit sau curte; în arta sa: pictură, sculptură, în icoane și miniatură; în duhul de comuniune ce iradiază din bisericile și mănăstirile sale.

Limba română este dulce, melodiosă, fără căderi, ascensiuni sau ruperi bruște de tonalitate; jocul românesc, diferit de dansul actual, „e o bucurie gratuită, o comuniune, produsul unei inspirații personale și comune de fiecare clipă; dar e ceva serios”²⁵; portul tradițional este caracterizat de bună cuviință, decență și armonie cromatică; melosul sau cântul său redă „bogăția de stări și armonii a sufletului românesc”²⁶; habitatul românesc: casa și curtea, sunt expresie a capacității sale de sinteză între „practicitate și între deschiderea spre orizontul de vis și de imaginație, spre orizontul de taină al existenței”²⁷; după cum în creațiile artistice românești, „e o grație, o poezie, o armonie, o gândire delicată a omului care se îmbracă expresiv pentru alții sau împodobește expresiv un lucru util pentru altul sau pentru comunitatea din care face parte, dând expresie celor mai delicate gânduri pe care le nutrește pentru cel pe care-l iubește sau pentru comunitatea la care ține și în fața căreia vrea să se remarce”²⁸.

Toate acestea exprimă bogăția de stări sufletești ale spiritului românesc. Prin toate acestea, arată Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae, „românul se îmbracă și locuiește în poezie, fără a părăsi realitatea. Iar poezia revelează viața lui interioară în orizontul de taină al existenței și o proiectează în realitatea exterioară. E o poezie care nu se înstrăinează de realitate, ci o tranfigurează, adâncindu-i dimensiunile”²⁹.

Echilibru și grația, armonia și delicatețea spiritului românesc se manifestă în mod particular în bisericile pe care le-a ctitorit, ca loc de reculegere și închinare, de dialog și comunicare cu Dumnezeu, spațiu al redescoperirii de sine și al aflării sensului profund al existenței sale. Locașul de cult specific românesc este redus dimensional și aceasta dintr-o rațiune spirituală: aceea de a întreține spiritul de comuniune și a întări comunitatea credincioșilor, în duhul rugăciunii. „În Occident, arată Părintele Stăniloae, fiecare individ trebuia să fie, în evul mediu, pierdut în masa stăpânită de autoritatea bisericească, care trebuia să apară puternică și distantă. Toți credincioșii aveau să privească spre locul unde se afla autoritatea și nu să comunice între ei (...) Domurile din Occident sunt expresia raporturilor de forță și de supunere silită sau de individualism nepăsător la alții. Bisericuțele noastre sunt expresia delicateții, transparenței omului și a fragilității operei sale în fața divinului, fapt care merge în mână cu transparența și sensibilitatea omului în raporturile sale de comuniune și de familiaritate cu semenii săi...”³⁰.

Toate acestea dau mărturie asupra unui pronunțat *simț estetic*, asupra unui *accentuat simț al frumosului*, dovadă a unei reale „aristocrații” spirituale³¹, pe care spiritul românesc l-a cultivat totdeauna, atât în

momentele de exuberanță, cât și de mare și sfâșietoare durere³², în toate genurile și speciile artistice, ca, de altfel, în toate evenimentele existențiale.

Având un simț al propriei individualități, spiritualitatea românească este, în același timp, *deschisă și altor culturi*, aflându-se într-un permanent dialog cu cele două lumi, civilizații și forme de spiritualitate între care se situează geografic: cea orientală și cea occidentală, păstrându-și, însă, lucid statornicia, discernământul și specificul său. Cunoscând și interpretând elementele proprii celor două lumi: Apusul și Răsăritul, ea este caracterizată de o capacitate superioară de sinteză și umanizare³³. Sufletul românesc, arată Părintele Profesor, „e larg deschis spre totala realitate și spre toate creațiile spiritului uman de pretutindeni. E deschis spre Occident, dar are legături și cu Orientul. Se interesează de tehnică, dar și de cultura spirituală”³⁴.

Prin aceasta, spiritualitatea românească își descoperă o altă trăsătură a originalității sale specifice: *spiritul de sinteză și vocația de legătură*, caracterul ei de punte între popoare, culturi, spiritualități și civilizații diferite, în echilibru și armonie, originalitate și luciditate.

Părintele Stăniloae, încrezător în originea și vocația poporului român, dar și în perspectivele acestuia, socotește că spiritualitatea noastră are capacitatea, vitalitatea și elementele necesare realizării unei „intermedieri pe scară mondială”³⁵. Dacă în primele veacuri ale formării și afirmării sale pe arena istoriei, ca popor creștin, s-a dovedit a fi o punte între romanitate, între traco-daci și între spiritualitatea bizantină de mai târziu, între slavi și popoarele germanice apusene³⁶, astăzi, el poate infuza duh și dorință de viață spirituală bogată, lumii contemporane. Spiritualitatea ortodoxă românească poate inspira atât cultura occidentală, caracterizată de teologul român prin „tendența ei de distincție, de definire, de lipsă de entuziasm etic și uman, dar prin aceasta ajunsă la un moment de epuizare spirituală”³⁷, dar și culturilor afro-asiatice, „încrezătoare în străfundurile indefinite ale realității, însuflețite de un mare și haotic elan vital, care-și iau forța din ideea identificării omului cu toate”³⁸.

Acestor culturi și viziuni diferite, unei civilizații materiale, lipsită de sens și finalitate spirituală înaltă, precum și unei spiritualități detașate de lumea concretă și fără un impact practic imediat, în contextul distinct al existenței umane, spiritualitatea românească, apreciază teologul român, le „poate indica drumul clar și fecund în același timp, al unei umanități personalizate și pline de elanul comuniunii. Spiritualitatea noastră poate da Occidentului forța, iar Orientului claritatea unui adevărat umanism, care să se folosească și de luciditatea Occidentului și de elanul generos și inepuizabil al Orientului”³⁹.

Chiar și din această sintetică prezentare a unor reflecții ale celui mai important teolog ortodox român al veacului trecut, ne putem da seama de trăsăturile distincte definitorii ale spiritualității ortodoxe românești, o spiritualitate încă vie și creatoare și care mai păstrează vocația și capacitatea sa de sinteză, în echilibru și luciditate.

Reflecțiile Părintelui Profesor Dumitru Stăniloae demonstrează o cunoaștere profundă a poporului și sufletului românesc, în profunzimile și cutele sale cele mai interioare, un spirit extrem de nuanțat de observație și reflecție, o încredere lucidă și un optimism echilibrat, în ceea ce privește contribuția pe care o poate aduce spiritualitatea românească lumii și omului contemporan. Multe dintre aceste afirmații ale sale ar putea fi socotite ca având o valoare predictică. Nu putem ignora, însă, faptul că tăvălugul comunist și ideologia atee, care a opresat și oprimat spiritul românesc timp de jumătate de veac, a alterat unele dintre trăsăturile definitorii ale acestei spiritualități profunde, zădărnicipându-i românului, uneori, chiar și încrederea în demnitatea proprie și vocația sa înaltă. Îndoctrinarea ridicată la rangul de politică de stat și fundament al unei false educații, al cărei scop utopic și ratat l-a constituit formarea „omului nou”, rupt de originile și legăturile sale spirituale firești; depopularea satelor tradiționale prin concentrarea lor în centre și civilizații urbane proletare, ridicarea incompetenței, minciunii, duplicității și compromisului la nivel de „principii directoare” în viața colectivă și individuală, promiterea unei fericiri „programate” și „raționalizate” doar în lumea prezentă și redusă la gulagul artificial creat, toate acestea nu puteau rămâne fără efecte asupra mentalului colectiv și asupra libertății individuale, efectele lor resimțindu-se acut și profund în contemporaneitate.

Se vorbește, adesea, în societatea românească actuală, despre „asanarea” morală a ei, însă puțini sunt cei care înțeleg că aceasta trebuie să se clădească pe cuvintele Evangheliei și ale credinței, pentru a putea influența real și profund, în bine, mentalități, deprinderi, comportamente, convingeri sistematice și premeditat pervertite. Reformarea și renașterea spiritului românesc trebuie să pornească de la cuvintele revelate și inspirate ale credinței, care l-au ghidat și l-au salvat de-al lungul existenței sale, din încercări chiar mai grele decât cele contemporane. Doar reșezând la temelia existenței sale cuvintele „cu putere multă” ale credinței sale ortodoxe, o credință a iubirii și desăvârșirii, neamul românesc și înalta sa spiritualitate își vor redescoperi autentice valorile proprii, putând oferi lumii întregi un model și un izvor de inspirație spirituală, într-o lume tot mai materialistă și egocentrică, dar, în același timp, o lume, tot mai însetată de sens înalt și de semnificație spirituală profundă.

NOTES:

¹ Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Ortodoxie și românism*, fără editură, fără loc și fără an; reeditare a cărții cu același titlu a Pr. D. Stăniloae, publicată la Sibiu în 1939, aflăm din postfața semnată de Asociația românilor din Bucovina de Nord, 1992), p. 63.

² *Ibidem.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 55.

⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea poporului român*, Ed. Elion, București 2001, p. 11.

¹⁰ *Ibidem.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹⁴ Idem, *Ortodoxie și românism...*, p. 56.

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*, p.62.

¹⁶ Idem, *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea...*, p. 76.

¹⁷ *Ibidem.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁹ Idem, *Ortodoxie și românism...*, p. 67.

²⁰ *Ibidem.*

²¹ Idem, *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea...*, p. 52.

²² *Ibidem.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁴ Idem, *Ortodoxie și românism...*, p. 67.

²⁵ Idem, *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea...*, p. 62.

²⁶ *Ibidem.*, p. 56.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

³¹ Idem, *Ortodoxie și românism...*, p. 68.

³² *Ibidem.*

³³ Idem, *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea...*, p. 125.

³⁴ *Ibidem.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 130

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

The Light of God in the Hebrew and Christian Tradition

CĂTĂLIN VATAMANU, PHD

The metaphor of „light” used for representing God is a favorite among the holy writers inspired by the God’s Spirit. In formulating the Nicene confession, the expression of faith „Light of Light, very God of very God” is of a paramount importance, as it affirms not only the birth out of eternity of the Son of the Father and His divinity, but also the unity of Being with the other two Persons of the Trinity. Key of the Nicene Christology, the Incarnation, manifestation of the Son’s consubstantiality with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is metaphorically expressed as „light of light”. Formulated as a dogma of the Church, the deeply theological phrase „light of light” is new, because the Holy Fathers did not want to give us a literal repetition of old ideas, but a continuation of them, a theological deepening of them.

In Antiquity, light in its various forms (the sun, other stars, light of fire, the lightening etc.), was considered a sign of God’s presence and a revealed form of His works. As opposed to it, darkness was perceived as an unnatural state of nature, the lack of divine presence and as a favourable time for evil spirits, contrary to the humans. The physical dualism „light-dark” evolved into an ethical dualism „good-bad”, the Old Testament (Psalm 112:4, Job 3:10; 12:22,25, 29:3, 30:26; Eccl. 2:13; Is. 5:20, Dan. 2:22; Am. 5:18,20; Mi. 7:8) and the New Testament Scriptures (Jn 3:19; 8:12,35; Acts 26:18, Rom. 2:19; I Cor. 4:5, II Cor. 6:14, Eph. 5:8; I Thess. 5:5, I Pet. 2:9, I Jn 2:8-9) often making reference to the facts „of light” of human beings or the „darkness” of sin in this world.

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The Divine Light in the Hebrew Tradition

In Hebrew, the verb אור *or* means „to light”, „to be or become light”, „to illuminate”. Beyond the common meaning of this verb, as exemplified in texts such as Gen. 44:3, I Sam. 29:10, II Sam. 2:32, Ex. 25:37, Gen. 1:15.17, there are several symbolic expressions intended to send the reader to the deeper meanings of the Hebrew terminology, in texts of great interest:

- I Sam. 14:27.29: „See, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened”, where the verb אור appears beside רָאָה „see”.

- Prov. 4:18: „But the way of the just is as the shining light¹, that shined more and more unto the perfect day” – a nice pun on אור „light” – אֶרֶב „way”.

- Is. 60:1-2: „Be enlightened, be enlightened, O Jerusalem, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and there shall be gross darkness on the nations: but the Lord shall appear upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee”. As the darkness covers the nations, leaving them in the darkness of ignorance, over the people of God shines the light of His glory. The same witness can we find into the hymn „Gracious Light”: „O Gracious Light of the Holy Glory (...) beholds the light of evening coming at sunset (at the time of the nightfall, in darkness), seeing *the evening light*”.

- God redeems the human soul „to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living” Job 33:30. The Hebrew words לְאֹרֶר בְּאֹרֶר „to be enlightened with the light” brings us closer to the phrase of the Christian Creed „Light of Light” and again to the hymn „Gracious Light”: The „Light of the Holy Glory” is the „Son of God and Giver of Life”. Therefore, the human soul's salvation is the result of man's return to the light of Christ's glory, the Life and the Giver of life Himself.

- Ps. 76:5 (75:4 in Romanian translation) uses for God the Hebrew Nifal participle נִאֲוֵר „with are enlightened”. Similarly, but this time the Hifil participle in Prov. 29:13: „He who enlightens”.

- Ps. 118:26-27: „Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord: (...) The Lord is God, and he has made his light to shine (נִאֲוֵר hifil imperfect) upon us”². These two verses were seen by the Fathers of the Church as prophetic references to the Incarnation of Christ and, specifically, to the Lord's entry into Jerusalem. The texts are part of the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom.

The words of God shine and give wisdom to the infants (Ps. 119:130), illuminate the darkness of man as God would light a lamp (Ps. 18:29), by God is the darkness no darkness and the night will light as a day (Ps. 139:12). Important is also the formula for the blessing of the priest, Num. 6:25: „The Lord makes His face to shine upon you”³.

In conclusion, God is the subject of the verb אור in texts: Num. 6:25, Ps. 13:4, 18:29, 31:17, 67:2, 80:4.8.20, 119:135, Prov. 29:13, Dan. 9:17, Ps. 118:27 (attention, all these are in hifil form, meaning „to determine enlightenment”).

The noun אור is found 118 times⁴ in the Hebrew Bible as „shine”, „light”, „light of the day” (Gen. 1:3.4, Job 3:9), artificial light (of fire, of lamp, of lightning etc.) or metaphorically (the light of life: Ps. 56:14, Job 33:30; light as a sign of prosperity: Job 22:28, 30:26; the commandment as a lamp and the Law as a light: אור חַמְצָה וְתוֹרַה אֹר חַמְצָה Prov. 6:23; the light of salvation, of redemption: Am. 5:18, Isa. 60:1, 42:6, 49:6, 51:4).

Light is the creation of God (Gen. 1:3-4, Isa. 45:7), for Whom this is like a garment (Ps. 104:2).

God is אור-יִשְׂרָאֵל „Light of Israel”, it will burn the Assyrian army like spines and thorns (Isa. 10:17), it is „the light and my salvation” (of the psalmist) יְהוָה אֹרְי וְיִשְׁעִי (Ps. 27:1, see Ps. 43:3) or of the Prophet יְהוָה אֹרְלִי (Micah 7:8). The house of Jacob is called to go in „light of the Lord” (Is. 2:5), because it is only in God’s light that we see light (Ps. 36:10).

Very important is the fact that in deutero-Isaiah it is not Yahwe who is called „light”, but Ebed-Yahwe, the Messiah-Christ is אור גוֹיִם „a light for the Gentiles” (Isa. 42:6, 49:6) and his Law will be אור עַמִּים „a light to the peoples” (Isa. 51:4)⁵. About messianic times, the same (Isa. 60:19-20) says: „The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the Lord will be your everlasting light (אור עוֹלָם), and your God will be your glory. (...) the Lord will be your everlasting light (...)”.

So the messianic times are characterized by a bright light, shown symbolically by Isaiah as seven times stronger than the normal light of the sun (Isa. 30:26). Glorious holiness of God is described in relation to the light, in both ancient Hebrew and in the New Testament perception (see, for example, the texts: I Tim. 6:16; I Jn 1:5.7, 2: 8-11).

In Jewish mysticism, light has a primordial character, and, as attribute of divine power, light surrounding God’s being⁶, it is personified. *Shekinah* shines everywhere, like the sun lights the entire earth (*Sanhedrin* 39a). Hebrew sages say in their writings that the glory, *Shekinah*,

accompanying the righteous (Gen. R., 81b) departs from the sinner (*Kiddushin* 31a), it is in the midst of men in prayer⁷.

An entire chapter of the Treaty of *Pesachim* (2a) discusses about the meanings of the Hebrew *אור*, the difference between light and morning light, in relation with the revealed texts of the first chapter of Genesis. A metaphorical presentation, of exceptional literary beauty, can be discovered by the reader in the 8a chapter of the same Treaty of *Pesachim*: „The soul of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the innermost parts of the belly”⁸. Light as a sign of God's presence surrounds the altar, and thus the altar candle should be kept always on, says the Rabbinic treaty *Yoma* 45b.

Light is a symbol of Torah (*Megilloth* 16b, cf. Prov. 6:23), of God (cf. Ps. 18:29) and of soul (cf. Prov. 20:27): „God says: If you will conscientiously keep my light in your soul, I will also keep your light, if you turn on my lights in the sanctuary, I will also turn on the great light for you in the future”⁹. Jewish mysticism often uses the metaphor of „light” for Torah and the laws written in it, and in concordance with the texts of the prophets Isaiah (2:2-3) and Micah (4:1-2) it is believed that in the Messianic times the Temple in Jerusalem will be the light of the entire world: „(...) the commandment is a light and the Torah a lamp, go now and attend to the light of the world [which is the Temple, of which] it is written: And all the nations become enlightened by it” (*Baba Bathra* 4a). Light is a sign of the messianic times to come: „(...) it is written: «Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of the seven days?» There is no difficulty: the former refers to the world to come; the latter to the days of the Messiah” (*Pesachim* 68a). Then, the illiterate, „who makes no use of the light of the Torah, the light of the Torah will not revive”, and „who makes use of the ‘light’ of the Torah will the ‘light’ of the Torah revive” (*Kethuboth* 111b).

Then, „the righteous shall stand in sunlight and the chosen ones in the light of eternal life, a life that does not know the fall of days, the days of the saints will not be counted, they looked for light, they found the righteousness of God in spirit”, „the right will be well and live in righteousness and the path to eternal light goes on, but it will not work for sinners only in darkness”, said Epistle of Enoch (54:3 and 89:3)¹⁰.

Beyond the mystical compiled Jewish texts, the religious practice, private or public, accurately reflects light, which, as presence of God, has a place in the Hebrew liturgical life.

The Egyptians’ lighting candles at the entrance of the house, outdoor, in the sunset, was an act of homage to the sun, which discovered its greatness in human form. The deuteron-canonical writing the Epistle of

Jeremiah 1:18 (actually, the sixth chapter of Baruch) refers to the Babylonian practice of ignition lights in front of the deities: „They turn on a light and yet more than for themselves, these gods are not able to see even a single one of them”. Lighting wax candles to invoke the deity or as an act of homage after a victory won with divine assistance was a widespread practice in Roman antiquity.

In the Jewish cultic tradition, the main act done at sunset, which marked the beginning of the new day, was the rite of flame and candle lights settlement, before which the priest burned incense „before the Lord”, i.e. before the veil of the Tabernacle (see Ex. 30: 6-8 and Lev. 24:14). Lighting Shabbat candles is one of the Hebrew traditional domestic practices and Rabbis stated it as an obligation (*chovah*) (*Shabbath* 25b)¹¹.

So, the Hebrew terminology, theology, mysticism and Jewish liturgical practice support the belief that light is a sign of life, of joy, of blessing and God's presence. If in the Old Testament the word אור is related in particular to the holiness of God, in the New Testament, Christ the Savior uses light φῶς as the revelation of His sacrificial love, and sign and identity for the disciples and for early Christians.

Christ – Light of the World

The New Testament revelation, fulfilment and perfection of the Old one, develops the metaphor of light and theophany, and by showing the equality between God the Father and God the Son, unveils the meaning of true salvation to the fallen humanity: redemption through Christ. The subject of the unity in being of Son of God Incarnate with God the Father is approached in a new theological manner in Saint John's prologue to his first catholic epistle: „And this is the announcement we heard from him that proclaimed so: that God is light (ὁ Θεὸς φῶς¹² ἔστιν) and no darkness is in Him. (...) And if we walk in the Light as He is light (ὡς αὐτὸς ἔστιν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ), then we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all our sin” (and in 1:5.7). Saint Paul also speaks about the unity of divinity and, referring perhaps to Ps. 104:2: God is „He who alone has immortality and dwells fully in unapproachable light (φῶς οἰκῶν ἀπρόσιτον)” (I Tim. 6:16), but the Apostle James (1:17): „Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights (ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φῶτων), with whom is no variableness neither

shadow of turning”. In the Trinity, the Son is „the radiance of glory (ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης¹³) and the image of his being (of God)” (Heb. 1:1-3).

The search and the holy desire of Moses and Elijah to see the full light of God's glory on Mount Tabor was fulfilled: „And he was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun and his garments became white as light” (Mt. 17:2). Through the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity, „ God, who said: «Let light shine out of darkness», made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Christ” (II Cor. 4:6).

The second coming of Christ will come with the same power and glory. The glorious presence of the Risen Son of God in His Church will remove any kind of darkness: „And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there” (Rev. 21:23-25, being reminiscent of the prophetic words of Ps. 89:16 and Isa. 60:1.19).

So the Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus Christ: „The people who sat in darkness saw great light and those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned them” (Mt. 4:16, Is. 9:1). „Again, I am writing new commandment, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is fading away and the light (τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν) begins to rise” (I In 2:8).

The Messianic promise: „you'll be the chosen people of all nations, that the earth is mine and you shall be My royal priesthood and holy nation” (Exodus 11:22), conditioned by obedience and the fulfilment of the covenant with His chosen people, was accomplished in the Church of Christ: „But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: (εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς)” (I Pt. 2:9). Commenting on this text, Saint Clement of Rome says: „He opened the eyes of our hearts through our minds. Through Him, our unwise and dark mind flourishes in His light, through Him, the Lord wanted us to taste immortal knowledge. He, «being the brightness of His majesty is greater than the angels, as He inherited names more special than them»”¹⁴. Israel's election turned the other nations, through disobedience, the choice of the nations that Jesus, the Messiah-Christ will be „light” not only to Zion (Isa. 2:3), but up to the end of earth: „For so hath the Lord

commanded us saying: „I have set thee to be a light (φῶς ἔθνῶν) to the Gentiles, that thou shouldst be for salvation unto the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47).

Apostle of Christ – „Light from Light, true God from true God” –, John confesses in the prologue to his Gospel: „In Him was life and the life was the light of men (τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων). And the light shineth in darkness (τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει) and the darkness comprehended it not” (Jn 1:4.5). In this text, like in others (e.g. In 6:17, 12:35 or I in 2:8), Saint John makes a clear reference to the darkness brought by sin, a theological theme whose meanings were also developed by two other New Testament writers: Peter (I Pt. 2:17) and Paul (I Thessaly. 5:4). The same well-written harbinger of divine light says: „And if we walk in the Light as He is light (ἐὰν δὲ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν ὡς αὐτός ἐστιν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ) then we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin on us” (I Jn 1:7).

Even if the „Light came into the world”, men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. „Whoever commits evil hates the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he who does truth comes to the light that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (Jn 3:19-21). Therefore, the hagiography of the New Testament urges us to become "sons of light" (τοὺς υἱοὺς τοῦ φωτός) (Lk. 16:8; Jn 12:36, I Thess. 5:5).

Christ the Lord is called directly „light”. He is, according to the singing praise of Righteous Simeon, „Light to the Gentiles discovery (φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν ἔθνῶν) and glory of Thy people, Israel” (Lk 2:32). For him, John the Baptist came to witness (εἰς μαρτυρίαν), „to testify about the Light, that all might believe through him. He was not light, but to bear witness of the Light. Word was the true Light (τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν), which enlightens every man coming into the world” (Jn 1:7-9).

The best known biblical text about the discovery of Christ as „light”, that became a theological definition is: „I am the light of the world. Who follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (ἐγὼ εἶμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου· ὁ ἀκολουθῶν ἐμοὶ οὐ μὴ περιπατήσει ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ, ἀλλ’ ἔξει τὸ φῶς τῆς ζωῆς) (Jn 6:12). Jesus had called His disciples „the light of the world” (Mt. 5:14), but this phrase does not create confusion, since their light is the light reflected from Christ. „As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (ὅταν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ᾶ, φῶς εἶμι τοῦ κόσμου), Christ underlined (Jn 9:5). Jesus was considered the true light of men (Jn 1:9, 3:19), as the Old Testament had also prophetically stated

(Ps. 27:1, 119:130, and Isa. 49:6, 60:19). If we take into account the fact that these words were spoken most likely in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles, Christ's description of Himself as light can be a direct reference to Old Testament theophany of the column of light that guided Israel through the desert to the Promised Land.

Commenting on this text in the context of the New Testament revealed, Father Dumitru Staniloae argued the divinity of Christ: „Therefore Jesus Christ called himself God incarnate and truth. He said so himself: «I am the Truth and the Life». And if knowledge perceives truth and is thus one with the light, Christ could say about himself, as the One who is Truth, that He is also «the light of the world». And if the light is knowledge of the truth, He could say about Himself that «he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness»". So He ultimately identifies Himself with love. Therefore, in the following words of Jesus, where He says he is the light, we also must see that He is love. He even says it directly that this light is life. „I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of." (Jn 8:12). The apostle Paul says the same about Christ when he calls Him the „Power and Wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:24). As Power, He is Life, and as Wisdom He is Light and Love"¹⁵.

Delivering a prophecy about His death and resurrection, Christ warns his disciples: „Light is a little while with you (...). While you have the light, believe in Light, to be sons of Light. (...) I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believes in me will not abide in darkness" (Jn 12:35-36.46). Therefore, the message of the Gospel of Christ is one of light full of joy and hope, a light which dazzles with its power, but a „gracious light", revealing God and through worship, shading life to all creation.

Conclusions

By assuming human nature in Christ, the „Light of the World" becomes an ecclesial medium for the descent of the Holy Spirit of God unto salvation, and on a personal level, the cathartic light in the soul of every Christian. Saint Cyril of Alexandria said: „Christ is the light by nature so He does not need light, but He plants it in us, who are created and out of divinity, His own light"¹⁶. So, bearer of light from the light of Christ, man is obliged to keep it shining and reflect it upon the creation that surrounds him. The dark passions, seen as a false light diminish the glow of the human nature and only virtue, „an expression of freedom regained", may be „the

means by which we reproduce its natural splendour of nature, which flashed in the sunlight shine divine”¹⁷.

The Nicæan Confession „Light from Light, true God from true God” unveils the Trinitarian Church communion of persons, but also the fact that man „driven towards the inner light”¹⁸ has the light of divine love as a foundation that has created and supported him. Only in this light, does man become god by grace, a stage in which „united with Him, we will fill all the light and the universe will be a kingdom of heaven, kingdom of light, a kingdom of light scattered between persons of the Trinity and It between human persons, united with Christ”¹⁹.

„Light from Light” is also an invocation in the Church of God-Light, as a permanent presence in our lives. An excerpt from a prayer of Saint Simeon the New Theologian, quoted by Father Dumitru Staniloae²⁰, may constitute a prayer-like conclusion: „Oh, Lord, may You be never-ending light and unset sun for me, shining for me everywhere, You, the One Who does not turn His back to anybody, so that we should not be covered by the darkness of our sins by not wanting to come to You”.

NOTES:

¹ Vb. אור in participle Qal, maybe with the meaning of „sunrise”.

² Hebrew: אֵל יְהוָה יִצְאָר לָנוּ; Septuagint: θεός κύριος καὶ ἐπέφανεν ἡμῖν. Interesting is the translation into Romanian: „S-a arătat nouă” („It was shown unto us”), which, if the verb was literally used, would be „S-a luminat nouă” („It was enlightened unto us”), a meaning which would be significant for the biblical argumentation of the article of the creed.

³ Hebrew: אֵל יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ יְהוָה; and which reappears insistently in Psalms: 31:17, 67:2, 80:4.8.20, 119:135, 4:7 (Ps. 4 is read at the service after Vespers).

⁴ אור, in Ludwig Koehler, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1953, p. 22. For a complete list of biblical references of the noun אור, both as subject and direct object, see: אור, in Gerhard Lisowsky, *Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alten Testament*, zweite Auflage, Württembergische Bibelanstalt, Stuttgart, 1958, pp. 36-37.

⁵ The idea was stated in another form, but with the same Messianic character in Isa. 9:1.

⁶ Cabbala states that God cannot be substance because substance is an exterior premise of divinity. God is *en-sof* (with no beginning), limitless, carrying in Him all potential forms of existence, He is the light which retreats or hides, a flame in darkness. „The Unique Saint dressed Himself with the light as if with a cat and the glow of His splendour enlightened the universe from one end to the other” (Gen. R.

3:4). Cf. A. Cohen, *Talmudul*, translated from French by C. Litman, Editura Hasefer, București, 2003, p. 85.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 97-98.

⁸ The Talmudic texts are translated after *Soncino English translation of the Babylonian Talmud*, edited by Rabbi Dr. Isidore Epstein, London, 1961.

⁹ Kaufmann Kohler, „Light”, in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. VIII, 1901-1906, p. 84.

¹⁰ *Cartea lui Enoh*, translated by Alexandru Anghel, Editura Herald, București, 2009.

¹¹ During lighting the candles before the Shabbat, the following blessing must be uttered: *Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat*. „Blessed are Thou Lord, our God, Eternal King, who has sanctified us with His commands and commended us to light the Shabbat lamp”.

¹² The greek φῶς (φωτός) derive from verb φάω „to shine”, „to light”.

¹³ The Hebrew Text would be: וְהוּא יְהוָה יְהוּרָה כְבוֹדוֹ.

¹⁴ Sfântul Clement Romanul, *Epistola către Corinteni*, 36:2, in *Scrierile Părinților Apostolici*, col. „Părinți și Scriitori bisericești”, vol. I, translations, notes, and explanations by Pr. D. Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (EIBMBOR), București, 1979, p. 65.

¹⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Sfânta Treime sau La început a fost iubirea*, EIBMBOR, București, 1993, p. 24.

¹⁶ Sfântul Chiril al Alexandriei, *Închinare în Duh și Adevăr*, book IX, 644D, apud Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 2, EIBMBOR, București, 1997, p. 101.

¹⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Natură și har în teologia bizantină,” in *Ortodoxia*, year XXVI (1974), no. 3, p. 407.

¹⁸ *Idem*, „Legătura între Euharistie și iubirea creștină,” in *Studii Teologice*, year XVII (1965), no. 1-2, p. 16.

¹⁹ *Idem*, *Studii de Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, 1991, p. 316.

²⁰ Cf. *Idem*, *Sfânta Treime...*, p. 104.

Inceputurile Scrisului în Limba Română și Statutul Mănăstirii Peri din Maramureș, Sec. al XIV-lea

NICOLAE IUGA, PHD

Atunci când este vorba despre începuturile scrisului în limba română, problemele sunt departe de a fi clarificate în toată întinderea lor. Există lucruri sigure amestecate cu altele nesigure, certitudini mixate cu presupuneri, fapte combinate cu fabulații, conjeturări edificate pe ipoteze foarte plauzibile cu alegații pur fanteziste. În genere se consideră că Scrisoarea lui Neacșu din Câmpulung, în fapt o veritabilă “Notă informativă” adresată lui Hans Beckner din Brașov, datând din 1521, este prima scriere în limba română care ni s-a păstrat, dar acest fapt nu poate exclude presupunerea că s-ar fi scris în limba română și mai-nainte de acest an. Însăși relativa “maturitate” a limbii din Scrisoarea lui Neacșu întărește această presupunere. Înălăturând cele câteva formule fixe din limba slavonă, “miezul limbii române ni se înfățișează curat și limpede”.¹

Ipoteze și argumente

Se emite în mod curent afirmația că primele scrieri în limba română, datând de la începutul sec. al XV-lea, sunt așa-numitele “texte rotacizante” sau “texte maramureșene” și că acestea au fost scrise undeva într-o mănăstire din Maramureș, fără alte precizări.

Dar, în raport cu exigențele științifice, susținerea argumentată a afirmației întâmpină o serie de reale dificultăți, care nu pot fi ignorate. Anume: (a) Nu se păstrează nicăieri nicunul dintre originalele acestor texte, deci lipsește cumva chiar obiectul cercetării. (b) Se păstrează doar un număr de patru texte, celebre de altfel, zise “texte rotacizante” (Codicele voronețean, Psaltirea voronețeană, Psaltirea Hurmuzaki și Psaltirea

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scheiană), despre care se știe cu certitudine doar că sunt copii făcute după manuscrise mai vechi și se presupune că procesul de copiere pentru unele texte s-a efectuat la mănăstirile din Moldova, în speță la Voroneț, unde unele dintre aceste documente vechi au fost descoperite în a doua jumătate a sec. al XIX-lea. (c) Aceste patru texte sunt copii, faptul este evident din cuprinsul lor, dar nu există nicăieri în aceste texte referiri care să-l indice pe copist, manuscrisul după care s-a copiat, nici locul și data unde s-a realizat copierea. (d) Nu există dovezi directe privind circulația/trecerea textelor rotacizante din Maramureș la Moldova. (e) De ce primele traduceri ale cărților bisericești în limba română se vor fi fost făcut în Maramureș, în secolul al XV-lea, și nu altundeva și altcândva?

Obiecțiile de mai sus sunt de fapt chestiuni de metodă științifică, de îndoială metodică de tip cartesian, proprie încercărilor de a fundamenta o știință cât mai riguroasă cu putință, dar care pot fi în parte depășite prin analiza detaliată a subiectului. Faptul că nu se mai păstrează niciunul dintre originalele acestor texte, supranumite de către lingviști nu doar “texte rotacizante” ci și “texte maramureșene”(!), nu înseamnă nicidecum că aceste originale nu ar fi existat. Copiile sunt numite, pe drept, “texte maramureșene” în virtutea faptului că acestea conservă o particularitate lingvistică de ordin fonetic, rotacismul, specific sub-dialectului/graiului maramureșean, dar nu și celui moldovean. Rotacismul nu este cunoscut/nu a fost semnalat în performarea curentă și nici atestat istoric în graiul local din zona Moldovei, dar era încă uzual, era viu în Maramureș, adică era performat natural de către generațiile vârstnice și neștiutoare de carte, respectiv ne-expuse la influențele livrești și mediatice, până în urmă cu două-trei decenii. Este de notorietate publică faptul că în Maramureș se zicea până recent (poate se mai pronunță și azi de către unele persoane mai înaintate în vârstă): “cer sărin” în loc de cer senin, “nimărui” în loc de nimănu, “verin” în loc de venin, “gerunt’e” în loc de genunchi ș.a.m.d. Putem, așadar, considera rotacismul ca pe un dat specific local și localizabil cu precizie, ca pe o marcă indelebilă specifică graiului și scrisului vechi maramureșean, o marcă proprie textelor originale, după care pot fi recunoscute indubitabil și copiile, indiferent unde s-ar fi realizat acestea, în întreg arealul limbii române. Apoi, mai sunt vizibile în textele rotacizante și unele urme ale influenței lingvistice maghiare (de exemplu: “gioc” în loc de joc, “gios” în loc de jos etc.), influențe prezente în graiul maramureșean, dar care istoricește nu s-ar fi putut exercita în Moldova.

În acest punct al demersului nostru se impune firesc interogația: de ce în Maramureș și nu altundeva? Și: de ce la început de secol XV și nu altcândva?

Majoritatea savanților români din a doua jumătate a sec. al XIX-lea și din sec. XX, dar și cercetătorii de dată recentă sunt de acord cu două fapte principale, corelate între ele: (a) primele traduceri ale cărților de slujbă au fost realizate din slavona bisericească în limba română la o mănăstire din Maramureș; și (b) efectuarea acestor traduceri trebuie pusă în legătură cu influența husită. Astfel, cercetătorul contemporan acad. Ioan Aurel Pop dar și mulți alții susțin ideea influenței husite,² venite din Cehia în nord-vestul Transilvaniei, respectiv în Maramureș. După cum se știe, reformatorul religios și scriitorul de limbă cehă Jan Hus a fost condamnat pentru erezie și ars pe rug la Constantz (în Elveția) la anul 1415, eveniment care a stârnit o puternică nemulțumire în Cehia și a declanșat războaiele numite husite (între 1419-1434), cu ecouri inclusiv în Transilvania.³ Să amintim aici numai binecunoscuta Răscoală de la Bobâlna (1437), cu o clară cauzalitate religioasă, determinată de încercarea episcopului catolic al Transilvaniei de a colecta zeciuiala restantă pe trei ani într-o singură tranșă, precum și măsura luată de același episcop catolic de a percepe taxe bisericești inclusiv de la români, care nu erau catolici ci ortodocși.⁴ Confrunțați cu aceste abuzuri dar și sub influența ideilor reformiste ale lui Jan Hus și a războaielor husite, țărani unguri și români din Transilvania s-au răsculat.

Una dintre ideile considerate eretice ale lui Jan Hus era aceea că Biblia și cărțile de slujbă trebuie traduse în limba poporului, el însuși scriind în ultimii ani ai vieții sale exclusiv în limba cehă. Influența ideilor husite pare cauza cea mai plauzibilă, pentru a explica împrejurarea că o serie de cărți de slujbă au fost traduse pentru prima oară în limba română în nord-vestul Transilvaniei, adică în Maramureș, în zona de maximă proximitate geografică româno-cehă, unde se știe că se produceau schimburi comerciale și de influență cultural-religioasă.

Manuscrisele supranumite “texte maramureșene” sau “texte rotacizante”, copii după originalele pierdute provenind din Maramureș, intitulate după locul în care au fost descoperite sau după numele donatorilor,⁵ sunt următoarele:

(a) Codicele voronețean (descoperit de către prof. I. Crețu în 1871 în Mănăstirea Voroneț și publicat la 1885 de G. Sbierea; manuscrisul este incomplet și conține o parte din Faptele Apostolilor, începând de la cap. 18 până la final, precum și Epistola Sf. Iacob și cele două Epistole ale Sf. Ap. Petru);

(b) Psaltirea Scheiană (după numele donatorului Sturza Scheianul; cuprinde psalmii lui David, plus o serie de cântări și rugăciuni, dintre care unele se regăsesc în Vechiul Testament, iar altele sunt adausuri de rugăciuni uzuale realizate de către autori necunoscuți);

(c) Psaltirea Voronețeană (descoperită de către Simion Florea Marian în 1882 în podul Mănăstirii Voroneț; manuscris incomplet, care cuprinde textul slavon al Psaltirii, alături de traducerea în limba română);

(d) Psaltirea Hurmuzaki (după numele donatorului, istoricul bucovinean Eudoxiu Hurmuzaki; reprezintă un alt text al Psaltirii, diferit de Psaltirea Scheiană și cea Voronețeană, despre care specialiștii susțin că ar fi fost tradus tot în Maramureș, la aceeași mănăstire ca și celelalte).

Toate aceste texte, copiile nu originalul, judecând după data fabricării hârtiei pe care au fost copiate, sunt datate de către savanți ca fiind realizate în prima jumătate a sec. al XVI-lea.

Potrivit savantului Nicolae Iorga, originalele acestor cărți de slujbă, Apostolul și Psaltirea, au fost traduse la Mănăstirea Peri din Maramureș între anii 1434-1437,⁶ deci cu aproximativ un secol mai-nainte de copierea lor în mănăstiri din Moldova. Mai precis, Nicolae Iorga susține că la Mănăstirea Peri din Maramureș au fost traduse între anii 1434-1437 două cărți de slujbă: un “Apostol” (cartea Faptele Apostolilor din Noul Testament, intitulată în originalul maramureșean: “Lucrul apostolesc”, precum și o serie de Epistole ale apostolilor) și o Psaltire. Acestea ar fi stat apoi la baza copiilor numite “texte maramureșene”, realizate în mănăstiri din Moldova. Istoricul Nicolae Iorga nu face referire directă la izvoarele pe care se bazează atunci când menționează cărțile traduse la Peri și datarea acestor traduceri, dar pe de altă parte nu au fost produse niciodată până în prezent nici un fel de dovezi contrarii, care să infirme susținerile acestui savant. Dimpotrivă, cercetătorii care s-au ocupat de temă⁷ acceptă cvasiunanim și în mod tacit trei aserțiuni cu valoare științifică: (a) localizarea proto-textelor maramureșene la Mănăstirea Peri din Maramureș, (b) datarea lor, cu oarecare variațiuni privind anii, în prima jumătate a sec. al XV-lea și (c) realizarea traducerilor sub influență husită.

Influența husită în Transilvania și Maramureș este sigură, păstrându-se o serie de documente în acest sens. În cursul războaielor husite, adepții lui Jan Hus făceau dovada unor idei privitoare la o reformă amplă și complexă a Bisericii Cataolice, ridicau o serie de revendicări atât de ordin dogmatic, cât și de ordin secular. De exemplu, ei solicitau ca, spre deosebire de practica răspândită în Biserica Catolică a cuminecării numai cu azimă, împărțșania să fie săvârșită sub ambele forme, atât cu azimă cât și cu vin, un element de oficiu liturgic care azi s-ar putea să nu mai aibă o relevanță soteriologică deosebită, în tot cazul să nu mai constituie o problemă de ordin sociologic, un motiv de război de exemplu, dar husiții mai criticau totodată vehement corupția în rândurile clerului, practica indulgențelor, pompa episcopală și veșmintele somptuoase, precum și avuțiile imese

adunate de către Biserică, o problemă actuală în toate timpurile. În fine, husiții mai cereau categoric “naționalizarea” serviciului divin, adică oficierea slujbelor bisericești pe limba poporului. Or, pentru asta era necesară mai întâi traducerea cărților de slujbă pe limba poporului.

Din Cehia și Slovacia de azi huseitismul a pătruns în zona de contiguitate geografică a Maramureșului. Un document din epocă semnalează faptul îngrijorător că în Zips (regiune din nord-estul Slovaciei de azi și din vecinătatea Maramureșului medieval) se practică cuminecătura după reforma husită, sub ambele forme, cu azimă și cu vin. Alt document, datat la 6 ianuarie 1456, este o scrisoare a celebrului teolog iezuit Ioan de Capistrano, comandant în oastea lui Iancu de Hunedoara, prin care se cere nobililor ardeleni “să pustiască bisericilor valahilor schismatici, ale sârbilor și ale husiților eretici”.⁸ Se pot ridica, în mod firesc, și unele întrebări conexe, precum: ce se înțelege în document prin “valahi schismatici”? Este vorba doar de români “schismatici” în sensul că erau de confesiune ortodoxă, bizantină, sau de români care erau deja adepții unor idei husite? De ce valahii sunt puși laolaltă cu ereticii husiți? Cine sunt aici “sârbii”? Sunt sârbi de neam sau sunt români ortodocși aflați sub ascultarea canonică a vreunui episcop sârb și, prin urmare, numiți prin extensie “sârbi”, așa cum s-a mai întâmplat în unele zone din Ardeal și Maramureș spre sfârșitul sec. al XVIII-lea? Și cine sunt “husiții eretici”, de ce neam? Vor fi existat și români printre ei? Etc., etc. Indiferent de răspunsurile particulare care se pot imagina la aceste întrebări și la altele, un lucru esențial este clar, că “erezia” husită a fost pătruns în Ardeal și în Maramureș și că o componentă importantă a acesteia, cu un veac mai-nainte de Luther și Calvin, era exigența ca Sfintele Scripturi să fie traduse pe limba poporului.

Un argument suplimentar

Despre începuturile scrisului în limba română s-a scris, după cum era și firesc, mai mult din punct de vedere filologic și istoric. S-a studiat amănunțit textul ca fapt filologic în sine, s-au făcut observații judicioase asupra unor aspecte care țin de evoluția limbii, s-au făcut conexiuni cu fapte istorice și s-au realizat deducții, au fost urmate criteriile de plauzibilitate și au fost criticate opiniile adverse cu argumente logice aparent imbatabile, fără legătură cu fapte non-lingvistice colaterale. S-au făcut multe în domeniu, dar s-a neglijat în schimb instituția în care au fost realizate aceste traduceri, mănăstirea în care s-a muncit pe text de către călugări și cărturari anonimi. Adică Mănăstirea de la Perii Maramureșului.

Intrebarea care se impune aici este: avea oare acea mănăstire din Maramureș, Mănăstirea Peri, călugări învățați și cărturari poligloți, în stare să realizeze traduceri pe la început de secol XV? În definitiv, ce fel de mănăstire exista atunci la Peri în Maramureș?

În satul Peri din Maramureș (în dreapta Tisei, azi în Ucraina, la vreo 15 km în aval de Sighet) exista încă din sec. al XIV-lea o mănăstire ortodoxă română, cu hramul păzitorului de spațiu sacru Sfântul Arhanghel Mihail, mănăstire ctitorită de către însuși Dragoș Voievod, descălecătorul de mai târziu al Țării Moldovei, împreună cu fratele său Drag. Acest fapt istoric ca atare nu a fost pus de către nimeni la îndoială și nici nu ar fi putut fi pus, pentru că este amplu documentat în Diplomele Maramureșene.⁹

După ce urmașii lui Dragoș Vodă au fost alungați de la domnia Moldovei de către Bogdan I, la anul 1359, doi nepoți ai deja răposatului voievod Dragoș, Balc și Drag, s-au întors în Maramureș și au refăcut vechea ctitorie Drăgoșeștilor de la Peri, înzestrându-o cu trei sate și alte proprietăți.¹⁰ Apoi, în primăvara anului 1391, voievodul Drag pornește într-o lungă și nu lipsită de primejdii călătorie până la Constantinopol, cu scopul de a obține, de la însuși patriarhul ecumenic, pentru Mănăstirea Peri statutul de stavropighie a Patriarhiei Ecumenice și de Episcopie Ortodoxă pentru românii de aici, din Maramureș și din nord-vestul Transilvaniei. De ce? Explicația este în fapt simplă. Centrul episcopal ortodox pentru românii din nordul actualei României și slavii din proximitate se afla pe atunci în Cetatea Haliciului. În anul 1387, Cetatea Haliciului este anexată de către Polonia, iar regele Cazimir al Poloniei a cerut Patriarhului ecumenic Filotei să ridice Haliciul la rang de mitropolie,¹¹ dar numai pentru credincioșii ortodocși din regatul său. În acest context, românii ortodocși din Maramureș și de la Moldova rămâneau fără o autoritate proprie de rang episcopal, iar pe de altă parte românii maramureșeni nu voiau ca, în probleme de ordin bisericesc, să fie puși sub ascultarea vreunui episcop catolic din Ungaria.¹² Atunci au fost începute demersuri de către domnitorul Moldovei Petru I Mușat, de înființare a unei mitropolii ortodoxe proprii pentru Moldova, demersuri finalizate abia în anul 1401. Și tot atunci voievozii maramureșeni au inițiat demersuri, tot la Patriarhia Ecumenică de la Constantinopol, pentru crearea unei instituții proprii de rang episcopal. Miza era deosebită. Trecerea Haliciului la Polonia a însemnat un vid de putere, nu în sens militar ci în sens ecclesiastic și simbolic, precum și o problemă cu o dimensiune economică, anume dreptul de a colecta dări bisericești, iar acest vid trebuia grabnic compensat, prin instituirea unor noi centre de putere simbolică și de organizare bisericească pentru românii din Maramureș și Moldova.

Așadar, în vara anului 1391, voievodul maramureșean Drag se află la Patriarhia Ecumenică unde, pe data de 13 august, primește din “cinstita mână” a Patriarhului Antonie al IV-lea al Constantinopolei, “al Romei celei noi și a întregii lumi” Gramata de ridicare a Mănăstirii de la Peri din Maramureș la rangul de Stavropighie patriarhală, un fapt cu consecințe istorice încă insuficient studiate și evaluate. Textul Gramatei, în versiune latină, a fost publicat integral în *Dilpomele Maramureșene* de către Ioan Mihalyi.¹³

După ample formule introductiv-protocolare și diplomatice de tip bizantin, în care Patriarhul Constantinopolului îi numește pe voievozii maramureșeni Balc și Drag “frați de prea bun neam, în chip fericit născuți și în Dumnezeu cinstiți ai Smereniei Noastre” etc., Gramata instituie, în esență, următoarele: (a) Mănăstirea Peri trece în proprietatea Patriarhiei de la Constantinopol prin donație (“...ecclesiam videlicet in nomine Sancti Michaelis fundatam donarunt ac obtulerunt ita”); (b) Sus-zisa Mănăstire, de acum și în urmarea timpurilor, se va bucura de supravegherea și protecția Patriarhiei ecumenice, iar preoții de aici, în semn de obediență simbolică, vor pomeni numele patriarhului ecumenic la toate slujbele dumnezeiești (“... cum magnum honore in nostram protectione suscepimus [...] et quod in omnibus divini officii pro suo patriarcha faciet commemorationem”); (c) Se delimitează teritoriul de sub autoritatea Stavropighiei patriarhale maramureșene, în afară de Maramureș, după cum urmează: Sălajul, Medieșul (adică Satu Mare), Ugocea și Bârjaba (din Ucraina de azi), Ciceul, Ungurașul și Almașul (adică Bihorul), o întindere considerabilă, chiar și pentru o mitropolie din epoca modernă, care poate fi străbătută cu alte mijloace de transport și comunicații; (d) Egumenul Pahomie, care este și abatele Mănăstirii, are autoritate deplină asupra veniturilor Mănăstirii și asupra ținuturilor arondate (“Pachomius prior et abbas plenariam autoritatem habent super omnes proventus dicti monasterii ac pertinentiarum”); (e) Egumenul trebuie să supravegheze preoții și poporul, dar aici va trebui să funcționeze și un anume fel de școală teologică, deoarece egumenul are și obligația de a-i învăța pe toți, preoți și popor cele folositoare și mântuitoare pentru suflet (“ut eos ad bona opera indiciet et erudiat animae”); (f) Egumenul mai are autoritatea să judece și să cerceteze judecățile făcute de către preoți, din toate ținuturile amintite supuse Scaunului său bisericesc, ca un fel de instanță de apel (“judicare omnes causas ad sede ecclesiasticam spectantes in dicto monasterio et pertinentiis eiusdem”); (g) Iară dacă se va întâmpla ca egumenul Pahomie să moară, “căci toți suntem muritori” (“ut omnes mortales sumus”), atunci toți frații călugări, cu ctitorii Balc și Drag și cu toți oamenii, mici și mari,

din ținuturile supuse Stavropighiei se vor aduna și vor alege într-o adunare deschisă un nou egumen, sub autoritatea și cu binecuvântarea Patriarhiei (“omnes fratres spirituales tunc et Balicza ac Drag cum omnibus hoiminibus parvis et magnis in dictis pertinetiis residentibus ac congregatis aperte ut ita congregati priori eligat nostra autoritate et benedictione”), o prevedere imperativă și un precedent canonic, care anticipează cu multe secole Statutul bisericesc conceput de Sf. Andrei Șaguna Mitropolitul Ardealului, în a doua jumătate a sec. al XIX-lea, care leagă strâns Biserica Ortodoxă de popor, dând poporului posibilitatea de a se pronunța, prin delegați, cu privire la alegerile de ierarh.

Stavropighia Patriarhiei Ecumenice cu rang de Episcopie Ortodoxă de la Perii Maramureșului a avut o soartă vitregă. La 1397, ducele Theodor Koriatovici, înfrânt fiind de lituanieni în bătălia de la Bratzlaw, se refugiază împreună cu ce a mai fost rămas din armata sa și cu o numeroasă comunitate ruteană în Ungaria. Aici primește de la regele maghiar un domeniu, pe care ridică Cetatea Munkácsului. La începutul secolului următor, la Munkács ia ființă o Episcopie Ortodoxă ruteană. De aici va începe un lung șir de vexațiuni și abuzuri, de rivalități și lupte sângeroase împotriva Stavropighiei de la Peri. Miza era dreptul de colectare a dărilor bisericești de pe o întindere considerabilă. Constantinopolul cade sub stăpânire otomană, la 1453 și, deci, nu mai poate oferi protecție stavropigiilor proprii. Mănăstirea Peri este atacată în mod repetat de militarii trimiși de episcopul de la Munkács, este jefuită și incendiată, pierzându-se astfel multe documente, cărți de slujbă și manuscrise extrem de prețioase. După aproximativ o sută de ani, cele două instituții bisericești ajung la judecata regelui maghiar Ladiszlau II, în problema dreptului de colectare a dărilor bisericești, iar sentința regală a fost dată în favoarea Episcopiei de la Munkács.¹⁴ După aceasta, Mănăstirea Peri a scăzut ca importanță și a fost desființată cu totul și clădirile demolate, la început de sec. al XVIII-lea, în contextul expansiunii uniata.

La judecata regelui maghiar, reprezentanții Mănăstirii Peri se prezintă cu o traducere în latină a Gramatei patriarhale, scrisă în original în greaca veche, deoarece latina era limbă de Cancelarie în Regatul Maghiar, iar greaca nu. Așa se explică faptul că în Diplomele Maramureșene s-a păstrat versiunea latină a Gramatei. Multă vreme s-a crezut că Gramata originală s-a pierdut, distrusă fiind în incendiile repetate care au afectat Mănăstirea Peri. Dar – surpriză! – Gramata originală a fost ascunsă, spre a fi ferită de distrugere, în... Moldova, probabil în vreo mănăstire de aici! Originalul grecesc a ajuns, de la nu se știe de la care mănăstire din Moldova, la omul politic și cărturarul Mihai Kogălniceanu, care l-a și publicat în a sa

“Arhiva Românească” în anul 1841. Ioan Mihalyi de Apșa a confruntat, printr-un intermediul unui profesor de greacă veche de la Universitatea din Budapesta, textul grecesc publicat de către Kogălniceanu cu cel latin publicat de el și a ajuns la concluzia că traducerea latină efectuată la Peri reproduce fidel originalul grecesc.

Când a fost dusă spre păstrare Gramata originală grecească la mănăstirea respectivă din Moldova? Au fost duse tot atunci și cărți de slujbă traduse în românește la Mănăstirea Peri din Maramureș? Probabil, chiar foarte probabil. Un lucru este însă sigur: legăturile între Mănăstirea Ortodoxă Română de la Peri din Maramureș și mănăstirile din ortodoxe române din Moldova au existat, fără îndoială, pe parcursul veacului al XV-lea.

Concluzie

Atunci când se fac considerații generale asupra primelor scrieri în limba română, scrieri numite și “texte maramureșene”, în baza a felurite conjeturări și criterii de plauzibilitate, fără a se spune sau chiar fără a se ști nimic despre mănăstirea din Maramureș în care au fost efectuate aceste prime traduceri ale cărților bisericești în limba română, ar fi deosebit de util, ca argumentație de ordin istoric și criteriu de plauzibilitate, să se realizeze și un scurt excurs despre Mănăstirea de la Peri. Cercetătorii ar putea descoperi faptul că această mănăstire a avut (în limbajul de azi) o “capacitate instituțională” uimitoare. Că aceasta a fost o adevărată instituție culturală de tip european. Că aceasta a fost Stavropighie a Patriarhiei Ecumenice încă de la sfârșitul sec. al XIV-lea, că aici a funcționat într-un sens mai extins al termenului, o școală teologică, că aici au existat cărturari care au avut capacitatea de a traduce din greaca veche în latină. Și că aici au fost receptate ideile religios-reformiste ale lui Jan Hus, ceea ce a condus la realizarea primelor traduceri în limba română, în deceniu al patrulea al sec. al XV-lea și la punerea bazelor limbii naționale.

Cunoașterea unor lucruri despre Mănăstirea Peri din Maramureș, despre capacitatea sa instituțională, se poate constitui într-un puternic argument inedit, în sprijinul ideii că primele traduceri ale cărților bisericești în limba română s-au realizat aici, în această mănăstire.

NOTES:

- ¹ N. Cartoian, *Istoria literaturii române vechi*, Ed. a II-a, Univ. București, 2004, p. 47.
- ² Ioan Aurel Pop, “Voievodatul Transilvaniei”, în *Istoria României. Transilvania*, Vol. I, Ed. G. Barițiu, Cluj-Napoca, 1997, p. 494.
- ³ Nicolae Iuga, “Elemente de civilizație medievală românească în bazinul Tisei superioare”, în *Studii de Știință și Cultură*, Arad, nr. 3 (14)/2008, p. 17.
- ⁴ Constantin C. Giurescu, *Istoria României în date*, București, E.S., 1971, p. 92.
- ⁵ apud. www.crestinortodox.ro/primele-traduceri-romanesti-ale-cartilor-de-sjluba (site consultat la 29.06.2011).
- ⁶ Nicolae Iorga, *Sate și preoți din Ardeal*, Ed. Saeculum, București, 2007, p. 64.
- ⁷ Ion M. Bota, “Maramureșul – leagănul primelor scrieri în limba română”, în *Maramureș*, Ed. Risoprint, Cluj-Napoca, 1996, pp. 38-46.
- ⁸ Cartoian, N., *op. cit.*, p. 49.
- ⁹ I. Mihalyi de Apșa, *Diplome Maramureșene*, Editura Sziget, 1900, p. 109.
- ¹⁰ Păcurariu, Mircea, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, vol. I, Ed. BOR, 1980, p. 274.
- ¹¹ Păcurariu, Mircea, *op. cit.*, p. 250.
- ¹² Dudaș, Florian, “Codicele prologar slavon scris la Mănăstirea Peri”, în *Crisia*, Ed. Muzeul Țării Crișurilor, Oradea, nr. 40/2010, p. 210.
- ¹³ I. Mihalyi de Apșa, *op. cit.*, pp. 600-601.
- ¹⁴ I. Mihalyi de Apșa, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

Chartofilaxul: bibliotecarul în Imperiul Bizantin

Silviu Constantin Nedelcu

Chartofilaxul (scurtă prezentare)

Termenul *hartofilax*, *chartofilax* sau *chartophylax* își are originea în Bizanț, și desemna o persoană ce făcea parte din anturajul Patriarhului din Constantinopol.

De la Părintele Profesor Ioan N. Floca aflăm că „Patriarhii și-au organizat grupurile de colaboratori sau curțile de demnitari sau dregători, ținând seama de două lucruri și anume : mai întâi de niște rînduieli tradiționale rămase de la Sfinții Apostoli și din primele veacuri ale erei creștine, și apoi după rînduielile de organizare a demnitarilor de la curtea imperială”¹.

În ce privește organizarea grupurilor de colaboratori după rînduielile tradiționale rămase de la Sfinții Apostoli și din primele veacuri ale erei creștine, patriarhii au luat ca cifră simbolică numărul 7, având 7 diaconi², apoi un număr corespunzător de presbiteri³, economi, episcopi precum și alți slujitori bisericești.

Patriarhii au luat, cât privește rînduielile de organizare a demnitarilor de la curtea imperială, următoarele norme:

1. Constituirea unui consiliu restrâns de demnitari⁴, asemănător cu acela pe care împăratul îl avea în jurul său, fiind format din sftnicii cei mai apropiați și utili. Acest consiliu de miniștri restrâns al împăratului era format de regulă din 5 înalți demnitari ai Imperiului Bizantin, de unde le-a venit și numele de *pentadă*⁵.

2. Sporirea numărului de pentade exact ca la curtea imperială. La început a fost o singură pentadă, apoi s-au constituit mai multe, purtând numele de pentada întâi, pentada a doua, pentada a treia, ajungându-se în final la 9 pentade⁶. Pentada întâi purta numele de protipentadă⁷, „cuvânt folosit odinioară la noi pentru a designa clasa cea mai înaltă a boierimii”⁸.

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3. Adoptarea unor numiri pentru diversele dregătorii bisericești.

Începând cu epoca împăratului Justinian cel Mare (527-565), curtea patriarhală de la Constantinopol era organizată după modelul curții imperiale. Patriarhul de Constantinopol a împărțit, în funcțiile de atribuțiile fiecărui demnitar, colosul de oameni pe care îi avea în jurul său și anume: curtea internă și curtea externă.

Curtea internă era formată din călugări, sfetnici apropiați ai patriarhului care avea ca sarcină principală îngrijirea și supravegherea întregului patriarhat⁹. Trăind fiecare într-o chilie aproape de cea a patriarhului, erau numiți *sinceli*¹⁰, iar primul dintre ei se numea *protosincel*¹¹.

Curtea externă era formată din două grupuri numite *coruri*, unul de-a dreapta și altul de-a stânga patriarhului. Fiecare cor era format din 9 pentade, sau grupuri de 5 demnitari. Corul din dreapta, care avea cea mai mare importanță fiind și sfetnicul patriarhului, era format din 3 pentade. Din prima pentadă făceau parte următorii demnitari bisericești, care s-au numit mai târziu și arhonți, și anume: 1. *economul*; 2. *sachelarul*; 3. *schevofilaxul*; 4. *hartofilaxul*¹²; 5. *sacheliul*.

Având în vedere tema acestei lucrări nu voi explica și celelalte dregătorii, ci mă voi referi numai la aceea de *hartofilax*.

Părintele Profesor Ioan N. Floca spune că „Hartofilaxul îndeplinea funcția de păstrător al hîrtilor oficiale, adică a actelor sau documentelor sau a corespondenței, precum și a arhivei unui centru bisericesc. El era în același timp și șeful cancelariei din centrele bisericești ierarhice, sau cancelarul acestora. Numele lui vine de la grecescul χαρτοφύλαξ care însemnează păzitor, paznic, strajă sau străjuitor al hîrtilor, în sensul de păzitor al actelor și păstrător al lor ca documente, lucrare care și constituia îndatorirea principală a hartofilaxului. El era ajutat ca și ceilalți arhonți, de un întreg personaj cu pregătire corespunzătoare”¹³.

Această demnitate de *hartofilax*, atestată începând cu secolul al VI-lea, cel mai probabil din vremea împăratului Justinian, era deținută, de regulă, de un *diacon*¹⁴. Avea și rolul, pe lângă acela de a fi arhivistul și cancelarul documentelor oficiale, de a ține locul patriarhului când era convocat sinodul¹⁵.

Ce este foarte interesant, este faptul că unele mănăstiri avea în administrația lor un *hartofilax* sau o *hartofilaxă*¹⁶, un călugăr sau o călugăriță responsabil(ă) cu protejarea și conservarea înregistrărilor monastice¹⁷ precum și păstrarea unei evidențe a documentelor (cărților) împrumutate¹⁸.

Astfel, această funcție nu desemna doar o persoană, de regulă un călugăr, din anturajul patriarhului din Constantinopol, care se ocupa de arhiva cancelariei și documentele oficiale, ci și un călugăr sau o călugăriță care avea ca responsabilitate protejarea, conservarea cărților din biblioteca mănăstirii, precum și păstrarea unei evidențe a cărților împrumutate, călugărilor din mănăstire.

Biblioteca din Constantinopol

Cetatea Romei, care va fi inima Imperiului Roman, a fost fondată pe 21 aprilie 753 potrivit istoriografiei latine de către Romulus, descendent din eroul Troian Eneas¹⁹.

Ea va fi capitala Imperiului Roman până la urcarea pe tron a împăratului Constantin cel Mare (306-337), care va muta capitala din peninsula italică în Asia Mică. El urcă pe tron în anul 306, iar în anul 324 va ordona construirea noii capitale, pe malul Bosforului, pe locul vechii cetăți Bizanțion. Motivele alegerii făcute de Constantin cel Mare erau acelea de a supraveghea granița orientală a Imperiului în lupta cu perșii, și limesul sud-dunărean. Astfel pe 11 mai 330²⁰ va fi inaugurată noua capitală, ce-i va purta numele vreme de 11 secole, până în anul 1453 când sultanul Mahomed al II-lea va cucerii Imperiul prin cucerirea cetății, căreia îi va preschimba numele din Constantinopol în Istanbul²¹.

Cunoscutul bizantinolog Steven Runciman afirmă că „după întemeierea Constantinopolului, primele acte oficiale ale Împăraților au fost acelea de a construi o bibliotecă publică într-unul din porticurile²² Palatului (imperial)”.²³ Se pare că exista interesul pentru învățarea de carte și pentru biblioteci, mai ales din partea împăraților, fapt ce a condus mai târziu cu o sută de ani la înființarea Universității din Constantinopol, când împăratul Teodosie al II-lea a legitimat înființarea noii universități în data de 25 februarie 425. Universitatea avea 10 profesori de gramatică greacă, 10 profesori de gramatică latină, 5 retori greci, 3 retori latini, o catedră de filosofie și 2 catedre de drept²⁴, toți profesorii fiind plătiți foarte bine de stat, cu obligația ca ei să își dedice timpul activității didactice.

Reîntorcându-ne la biblioteca publică din Constantinopol, Steven Runciman spune că la fondarea ei cuprindea aproximativ „7000 de cărți, un număr mare având în vedere faptul că atunci erau în mare parte manuscrise, suluri sau codici”²⁵. Tot el spune că „în jurul anului 477 existau 100 000 de cărți în această bibliotecă; din nefericire a fost incendiată în timpul revoltei

ce-a avut loc în acel an, și multe din ele au fost distruse. Ea a fost reconstruită curând și repopulată cu cărți, și a continuat să funcționeze până în 1204, în ciuda diverselor cutremure sau incendii ce-au mai avut loc [...] Universitatea din Constantinopol s-a folosit de Biblioteca publică²⁶.

Nu se poate admite ideea înființării unei universități, fără ca viitorii studenți să aibă acces la o bibliotecă. Având în vedere faptul că Constantinopolul era la acea vreme cel mai mare oraș al vremii²⁷, nu putem concepe ideea că nu ar fi existat o bibliotecă publică.

În afară de biblioteca publică din Constantinopol mai existau și alte biblioteci „private”, cum ar fi biblioteca împăratului, cea a patriarhului, precum și cele din mănăstirile din capitală.

În capitala Imperiului Bizantin existau mai multe mănăstiri care, erau situate în cartierele liniștite ale capitalei, înconjurată de grădini întinse. Istoricul Ovidiu Drimba spune că „fiecare mănăstire prezenta de fapt un complex de clădiri: locuința egumenului, dormitoarele călugărilor, săli de mese, pivnițe și cămări de alimente, ateliere de lucru, locuințe pentru pelerini, un spital, un azil, o bibliotecă și o școală pentru novici”²⁸.

Una din bibliotecile celebre ale Imperiului Bizantin a fost cea a Patriarhului Fotie (858-867, 877-886). Acesta a fost ofițer în garda palatului, demnitar imperial și apoi profesor la Universitate. Fiind un bibliofil pasionat, a scris o lucrare intitulată *Myriobiblion* (cunoscută sub numele de *Biblioteca lui Fotie*), o lucrare enciclopedică unde prezintă 300 de opere ale scriitorilor greci antici, cu „adnotații și date biografice asupra autorilor lor, și uneori aprecieri critice”²⁹.

Steven Runciman spune că „atunci când un savant sau colecționar deceda, moștenitorii săi puteau pune în vânzare biblioteca sa”³⁰.

După 1204, când a avut loc Cruciada a IV-a, când francezii au cucerit Constantinopolul, instaurând Imperiul latin de Răsărit, bibliotecile publice cât și a celelalte biblioteci particulare au fost arse împreună cu clădirile lor, cu excepția câtorva cărți ce au fost salvate de venețieni³¹.

Începând cu anul 1261, când Constantinopolul a fost recucerit, împărații bizantini au făcut tot ce le-a stat în putere pentru a restaura Biblioteca Publică³².

În 1453, o dată ce fost cucerit de către turci Constantinopolul, s-a încheiat activitatea bibliotecilor bizantine. Multe din ele au fost distruse iar altele au intrat în posesia sultanului, care le-a adăugat bibliotecii sale³³.

Chartofilaxul: bibliotecarul în Imperiul Bizantin

Dl. Profesor Mircea Regneală, în cartea sa intitulată *Noi studii de biblioteconomie*, spune că „în Imperiul Roman, cel care răspundea de bibliotecă era procuratorul bibliotecilor, un fel de director general. Acesta avea în subordine și atelierele de copiiști care alimentau cu noi titluri bibliotecile”³⁴.

În Imperiul Roman de Răsărit, care s-a numit mai târziu Imperiul Bizantin, bibliotecarul se numea *chartophylax* sau *hartofilax*. Majoritatea istoricilor sunt de acord și conchid că *chartofilaxul* este prezentat în documentele bizantine ca fiind persoana, de regulă un călugăr, care avea atribuția de arhivist³⁵, responsabil cu scrisorile și alte documente oficiale³⁶. Această definiție este preluată și se regăsește și pe unele site-uri de pe internet³⁷.

Astfel bibliotecarul din Bizanț era asociat în mod automat cu un călugăr aflat în slujba patriarhului, care se ocupa de arhiva patriarhiei și, implicit, de biblioteca patriarhiei. Pe lângă activitatea sa de arhivist, *chartophylaxul* era considerat a fi „*mâna dreaptă*”³⁸ a patriarhului.

Prima dată când este consemnat termenul *chartophylax*, este în legile³⁹ împăratului bizantin Justinian cel Mare (527-565).

Prima menționare istorică a atribuțiilor *chartophylax-ului* este la Sinodul al VI-lea Ecumenic, care a avut loc în Constantinopol în anul 680. Aici sinodalii au cerut „să verifice autenticitatea unui număr mare de documente. Pentru acest lucru au recurs la verificarea arhivei și bibliotecii patriarhale”⁴⁰, apelând în mod repetat la ajutorul *chartophylaxului*.

La început în atribuția *chartophylaxului* intra și aceea de a avea grijă de arhiva patriarhală⁴¹, această funcție desemnând arhivistul. În secolul 7, la Sinodul al VI-lea Ecumenic, avem dovada că *chartophylaxul* avea și altă atribuție, și anume aceea de bibliotecar al Patriarhiei.

Unele mănăstiri aveau în administrația lor un *hartofilax* sau o *hartofilaxă*, un călugăr sau o călugăriță responsabil(ă) cu protejarea și conservarea cărților precum și păstrarea unei evidențe a cărților împrumutate⁴². Acestea sunt funcțiile unui bibliotecar, din perioada respectivă. Astfel, această funcție nu desemna doar o persoană, de regulă un călugăr, din anturajul patriarhului din Constantinopol, care se ocupa de arhiva cancelariei și documentele oficiale, ci și un călugăr sau o călugăriță care avea ca responsabilitate protejarea, conservarea cărților din biblioteca mănăstirii, precum și păstrarea unei evidențe a cărților împrumutate, călugărilor din mănăstire.

Se pare că în mănăstiri bibliotecile erau organizate pe anumite categorii și aveau un inventar cu: actele emise de împărați (în ordine cronologică), precum și alte documente.

Chartophylaxul sau călugărul-bibliotecar, avea o responsabilitate foarte mare, și anume, aceea de a păstra bine manuscrisele originale, pe care le avea biblioteca⁴³.

Unii patriarhi ai Constantinopolului au deținut funcția de chartophylax, înainte de a ajunge pe tron, având grijă de arhiva – biblioteca Bisericii Sfânta Sofia din capitală. Așa este și cazul Patriarhului Ioan Becos, precum și a multor teologi bizantini care au deținut această funcție.

Chartophylaxul era echivalentul bibliotecarului de la Roma⁴⁴, funcție îndeplinită de un episcop-cardinal.

Concluzii

Termenul chartophylax desemna în Imperiul Bizantin nu doar pe călugărul, care îndeplinea funcția de arhivist și totodată secretar al Patriarhului de Constantinopol, ci și bibliotecarul în Imperiul Bizantin.

Dumbarton Oaks în dicționarul său prezintă funcțiile pe care le îndeplinea bibliotecarul în acea vreme. Ceea ce mi s-a părut interesant, este faptul că în fiecare mănăstire exista un bibliotecar ce se îngrijea de lectura întregii obști monahale, dar și de restaurarea și conservarea cărților.

Totodată mi s-a părut interesant faptul că o dată cu fondarea Constantinopolului, împărații bizantini au înființat o bibliotecă publică de care s-au îngrijit în mod deosebit. Interesant este faptul că Universitatea din Constantinopol împrumuta cărți de-aici, cum spune istoricul Steven Runciman.

Tema este destul de largă, însă nu am apucat decât să expun pe scurt semnificația bibliotecarului precum și atribuțiile sale, întrucât spațiul alocat nu mi-a permis acest lucru. Voi dezbate cândva acest subiect mai pe larg într-un alt studiu.

NOTES:

¹ Ioan N. Floca, *Drept canonic ortodox. Legislație și administrație bisericească*, [online], vol. 1, București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1990, p. 340, [citat: 13 ianuarie 2013], Disponibil online: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/72932269/Drept-canonic-FLOCA>

² Aveau sarcina de a se ocupa de asistența socială din Biserică

³ Preoți

⁴ În Răsărit se numeau *arhonți*, iar în Apus se numeau cardinali cf. *Ibidem*, p. 340

⁵ Termen grecesc care este format din *penta* = 5 și *tados* = grup, adică grup de cinci sau cincime

⁶ Numărul este unul simbolic, desemnând cele 9 cete îngeresti așa cum le prezintă Sfântul Dionisie Areopagitul în opera sa *Despre ierarhiile cerești*

⁷ Termen grecesc format din *protos* = primul și *pentadă*, adică prima sau întâia pentadă

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 340

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 342

¹⁰ Adică împreună trăitori în chilie

¹¹ Termen grecesc format din *protos* = primul, întâiul și *sincl*, adică primul, întâiul sincl

¹² Joseph Laurent, "Communication: Sur la valeur des inscriptions grecques postérieures à 1453," in *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, [online], Volume 22, 1898. p.570, [citat: 3 februarie 2013], Disponibil online: http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/bch_00074217_1898_num_22_1_3504.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 343.

¹⁴ Treapta inferioară *preotului*.

¹⁵ R.J. Macrides, "Chartophylax," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, [online], Alexander P. Kazhdan (editor șef), vol. 1, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1991, pp.415-416, [citat: 13 ianuarie 2013], Disponibil online: http://www.generalfiles.com/download/g59681f68hfi0/The%20Oxford%20Dictionary%20of%20Byzantium_Vol.%201_OUP_1991.pdf.html.

¹⁶ Traducere forțată, adaptată de mine în limba română la genul feminin, de la originalul grecesc *chartophylakissa*.

¹⁷ A cărților deținute în bibliotecă.

¹⁸ Macrides, *op. cit.*, p.416.

¹⁹ *Istoria lumii în date*, elaborată de Horia C. Matei, Florin Constantiniu, Marcel D. Popa, Nicolae C. Nicolescu, Gheorghe Rădulescu, sub conducerea Acad. Prof. Andrei Oțetea, Editura Enciclopedică Română, București, 1972, p. 35.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

²¹ Denumirea actuală a fostei capitale a Imperiului Bizantin, *Istambul*, are la bază 2 cuvinte grecești: *istin* și *polin*, care însemnau „a merge la Cetate / Capitală”, deoarece în vremea respectivă Constantinopolul era o minune a lumii antice încât i-a determinat pe trimișii cneazului Vladimir al Rusiei la Constantinopol în anul 988, să afirme că nu știau de se află în cer sau pe pământ.

²² Porticul este o galerie exterioară, mărginită de o colonadă, uneori cu arcade, care servește ca loc de adăpost sau de plimbare în jurul unei piețe, al unei clădiri etc. sau ca intrare monumentală într-un edificiu, cf. *Dicționar explicativ al limbii române*, ediția a II-a, Editura Univers enciclopedic, București, 1998, p. 827.

- ²³ Steven Runciman, "The Ancient Christian Libraries of the East," in *Bulletin of the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries*, [online], March 1978, New series, No. 11, p. 6, [citată: 2 februarie 2013], Disponibil online: <http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/abtapl/01-11.pdf>.
- ²⁴ Emanoil Băbuș, *Bizanțul, istorie și spiritualitate*, Editura Sofia, București, 2003, p. 88.
- ²⁵ Steven Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
- ²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 6-7.
- ²⁷ Se crede că orașul avea aproximativ 1 milion de locuitori.
- ²⁸ Ovidiu Drîmba, *Istoria culturii și civilizației*, ediție definitivă, vol. 1. Editura Saeculum I.O., Editura Vestala, București, 1999, p. 266.
- ²⁹ Ovidiu Drîmba. *op. cit.*, pp. 294-295
- ³⁰ Steven Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 7
- ³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 7
- ³² *Ibidem*, pp. 7-8
- ³³ *Ibidem*, p. 8
- ³⁴ Mircea Regneală, *Noi studii de biblioteconomie*, Asociația Bibliotecarilor din România, București, 2009. p. 26 (Biblioteca ABIR).
- ³⁵ FREUND., GUILL. *Grand dictionnaire de la langue latine sur un nouveau plan*, [online], tome premier, Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot et C^{ie}, 1929, p. 475, [citată: 3 februarie 2013], Disponibil online: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k58464809.r=chartophylax.langFR>;
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- ³⁶ Această părere este împărtășită de: BEURLIER, Abbé E. *Le Chartophylax de La Grande Église de Constantinople*. În: *Compte rendu du troisième congrès scientifique international des chatoliques tenu a Bruxelles du 3 au 8 septembre 1894*, [online], Bruxelles: Société Belge de Librairie, 1895, pp. 252, (cincième section, sciences historiques), [citată: 13 ianuarie 2013], Disponibil online: <http://it.scribd.com/doc/41607806/Chartophylax>; MACRIDES, R. J. CHARTOPHYLAX. În: *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, [online], Alexander P. Kazhdan (editor șef), vol. 1, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 415-416, [Citată: 13 ianuarie 2013], Disponibil online: http://www.generalfiles.com/download/gS59681f68hfi0/The%20Oxford%20Dictionary%20of%20Byzantium_Vol.%201_OUP_1991.pdf.html; ROSSER, John H. *Historical dictionary of Byzantium*, [online], (s.l.): Lanham, Md. : Scarecrow Press, 2001, p. 75, [citată: 13 ianuarie 2013], Disponibil online: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/105053873/Historical-Dictionary-of-Byzantium>; WEHMEYER, Jeffrey M. *The chartophylax: archivist and librarian to the patriarch in Constantinople*. În *Libraries & Culture*, [online], Winter 1997, Vol. 32, Nr. 1, pp. 107-112, [citată: 13 ianuarie 2013], Disponibil online: http://sentra.ischool.utexas.edu/~lcr/archive/fulltext/LandC_32_1_Wehmeyer.pdf

³⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chartophylax> (Site accesat pe 12 ianuarie 2013); <http://www.listisbig.com/Chartophylax.html> (Site accesat pe 12 ianuarie 2013); <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/chartophylax> (Site accesat pe 12 ianuarie 2013); <http://historymedren.about.com/od/cterms/g/chartophylax.htm> (Site accesat pe 12 ianuarie 2013); <http://orthodoxwiki.org/Chartophylax> (Site accesat pe 14 ianuarie 2013)

³⁸ CAHIER, P. Ch. *Nouveaux mélanges d'archéologie d'histoire et de littérature sur le moyen âge. Bibliothèques*, [online], tome premier, Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot et C^{ie}, 1877, p. 74, [citât: 3 februarie 2013], Disponibil online: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k54406998.r=chartophylax.langFR>

³⁹ MONGEZ, M. *Encyclopédie méthodique. Antiquités, mythologie, diplomathique des chartres et chronologie*, [online], tome premier, Paris, Liege: Librairie Panckoucke, Plomteux, 1886, p. 750, [citât: 13 ianuarie 2013], Disponibil online: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k61413976.r=Encyclop%C3%A9die+m%C3%A9thodique+Antiquit%C3%A9s%2C+mythologie%2C+diplomathique+des+chartres+t+chronologie+.langEN>

⁴⁰ BEURLIER, Abbé E. Le Chartophylax de La Grande Église de Constantinople. În: *Compte rendu du troisième congrès scientifique international des chatoliques tenu a Bruxelles du 3 au 8 septembre 1894*, [online], Bruxelles: Société Belge de Librairie, 1895, p. 253, (cinquième section, sciences historiques), [citât: 13 ianuarie 2013], Disponibil online: <http://it.scribd.com/doc/41607806/Chartophylax>

⁴¹ DARROUZÈS, Jean, Vie de Théodore de Sykéon. I. Texte grec. II. Traduction, commentaire et appendice par André-Jean Festugière. În: *Revue des études byzantines*, [online], Année 1972, Volume 30, Numéro 1 p. 346, [citât: 3 februarie 2013], Disponibil online: http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/rebyz_07665598_1972_num_30_1_1459_t1_345_0000_2

⁴² MACRIDES, R. J., *op. cit.*, p. 416

⁴³ LEFORT, M. Jacques. Histoire des institutions de l'Empire byzantin. În: *École pratique des hautes études*, [online] 4e section, sciences historiques et philologiques. Livret 12. 1996-1997. 1998. p. 131, [citât: 3 februarie 2013], Disponibil online: http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/ephe_0000-0001_1996_num_12_1_10182

⁴⁴ WEHMEYER, Jeffrey M. The chartophylax: archivist and librarian to the patriarch in Constantinople. În *Libraries & Culture*, [online], Winter 1997, Vol. 32, Nr. 1, pp. 109, [citât: 13 ianuarie 2013], Disponibil online: http://sentra.ischool.utexas.edu/~lcr/archive/fulltext/LandC_32_1_Wehmeyer.pdf