



THE ROMANIAN INSTITUTE OF  
ORTHODOX THEOLOGY AND  
SPIRITUALITY

# *Symposium*

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THEODOR DAMIAN

## The Metaphysics of the Real and the Kingdom of God

**Abstract:** In some understandings real and reality are the same thing, in others they appear as different. In a dictionary definition “real” is that which exists in a real way (sic!) or in reality. In several other definitions “real” is something that exists effectively, concretely, truly, authentically, incontestably, objectively, independent of conscience or will, in contrast with fiction or idea, thus one would say, the phenomenal world. The essay explores the connection between the real and the sacred and more directly to the Kingdom of God.

**Keywords:** Real, reality, conscience, knowledge, essence, faith, sacred, profane, transfiguration, Kingdom of God.

### *The questions*

These reflections are generated by an earlier interview offered to Dr. Paul Doru Mugur, New York. The questions are not listed in a specific order, but at random for a larger challenge in the sense of stimulating more connections and comments.

Is the expression „the metaphysics of the real” an oxymoron or a pleonasm? It depends on how we understand the term “real,” yet the understandings are many and diverse, a kind of *quod capita tot sensus* in a more restricted manner.

In some understandings real and reality are the same thing, in others (i.e. Jacques Lacan) they appear as different. In a dictionary definition “real” is that which exists in a real way (sic!) or in reality. In several other definitions “real” is something that exists effectively, concretely, truly, authentically, incontestably, objectively, independent

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of conscience or will, in contrast with fiction or idea, thus one would say, the phenomenal world; here is a concept that belongs to the materialistic realism, which, according to Joshua Hren is as false as the one that maintains that reality is a social or subjective construct that is in constant change.<sup>1</sup>

As Bryan Magee writes, „the greatest part of reality is unknowable – because it is beyond any possible understanding – it is therefore inconceivable and unconceptualizable”.<sup>2</sup>

In another definition, the concrete real (therefore there is abstract real, too!) refers to the relation between „to be” and the external dimension of the experience of being. This explanation leads to the following question: what about the relation between „to be” and the internal dimension of the existing subject? Wouldn't that be part of the real? In other words, what can we say about the noumenal existent? In a simpler, maybe even simplistic understanding, the real would be what we perceive as being concrete, „palpable” in our surrounding, that which falls under our physical sense – yet, in this case, how do we explain the fact that metaphysics studies the most general features of *reality*, such as existence, time, processes and causality, the relation between mind and body, ontology (the study of being, or only of human being?). According to this point of view *realism* maintains that entities exist, no matter how they can be mentally perceived, and, on the other hand, idealism means that reality is in a certain sense constructed mentally and is closely related to ideas.

And if the real, let's say for the sake of simplification, and reality, both refer to something concrete, objective, effective, incontestable, is imagination part of the real? As the American sociologist Angel Adams Parham writes, it is. „Although the imaginary is often contrasted with the real, there is nothing unreal or fictional in regards to imagination and the way it shapes our life”.<sup>3</sup>

What about conscience? This cannot be known in an empirical way. Is it unreal, a fantasy, an illusion? We all say that it is real. Yet on what basis? If we say that it is based on thinking, on logical deductions, there is here a certain amount of faith and of general cultural context. We grow up with the idea that we have a conscience, and if we „have” it, it is something *real*. We believe what we are told when we are children. What we are told sounds good, unique, dignifying, and, in fact, we believe it, we like it. We believe what we want and we become what we believe.

Conscience, therefore, as it is not physical, is metaphysical. Does that mean that it is less real? This question that hides in it the conclusion opens the large domain of faith. We believe. Otherwise, what do we know, and how much do we know about the nature of conscience? Is our knowledge, in this case, empirical? No. Is it intuitive or of another kind? Is it objective? The American critic Marta Bayles believes that conscience is subjective and a mystery: "The subjective conscience cannot be explained even through the most advanced methods of physical sciences. [...] my conscience is my subjective experience of being alive," and the body is part of this experience.<sup>4</sup>

Returning to the idea about "having" and "being," about which Erich Fromm elaborates in detail in his book *To Have or to Be* (Harper and Row, New York, 1976) - when we say that we "have" a conscience, a soul, a body, instead of saying that we "are" a conscience, a soul, a body, don't we reify ourselves?

Karl Barth wrote that what man has, man destroys. Emil Cioran wrote in the same line of thought: "Man, who became profane, an agent of disintegration, always external or marginal to things, if he can get into them, he does it as the worm that gets into the fruit,"<sup>5</sup> and this destructive position of man in the universe is a direct consequence of the way in which man situates himself in regard to the world<sup>6</sup> because, as Cioran emphasizes, the way of knowledge man chose in life is through an offence, a criminal intention against creation, in front of which he stays as the self-proclaimed destructor.<sup>7</sup>

In this context, an old question appears: *What* is man? Or rather, *who* is man? What is man's essence? Is man what one can see plus the sum of his manifestations, say, manifestations "specific" to him? Is there an essence of Man? Aristotle considered that the essential nature of a thing is its Logos, as, for example, the boniness of a bone, or the nature, the specific essence of a given thing.<sup>8</sup>

If there is no essence of man, then we have to do with a mechanistic, reductionist conception of man. An engine is the sum of the physical pieces that constitute it. Yet is man *more* than an engine? What is that more if it is his essence? Essence comes from the Latin *esse*, to be. Yet in what exactly does "being" consist of? Is this *esse*, the essence, being real? If it is not real, is it an illusion, a fantasy?

This brings us to the great philosophical controversy about the relation between existence and essence. Which precedes which? Is essence the condition of existence and precedes it, as Plato would say, and even Parmenides, or vice versa, as Jean Paul Sartre maintains. Yet



is existence a reality? Is it part of the real? If yes, how do we know? Does it fall under the empire of our physical senses? The word *real* has also the connotation of true. What is truth (as Pilat of Pontus asked)? I can perceive the thing in front of me, today in one way and tomorrow in a different way. Which of the two perceptions is the right, true one?

Let's return to the idea of metaphysical reality. The real, reality implies the notions of authentic, true, logic, philosophical notions of great depth, but also of unceasing disputability. Which are the objective, immutable, guaranteed "scientific" criteria of the authentic, of truth? Can there be hidden truths? Can a hidden thought of mine be real? It can. The fact that it is hidden does not wipe out either its authenticity or its veridicity. Are there hidden realities (or not yet discovered realities) in the human condition, in the universe, in existence in general? Of course. Yet on what basis can I say "of course"? Based on intuition, based on a certain logic, based on a type of mystical knowledge?

In final analysis, even though I would be interested in an elaborate answer to these questions, I could say that I am not interested, as what is important in particular is whether the response is yes or no, and it is yes.

The renowned philosopher and anthropologist René Girard confirms this even through the inciting title of one of his first books, *Les choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*.

However, we also know that, if not in general, at least in many cases (even though I believe that in general), a thing's essence is metaphysical, transcendent, and that without its essence, the thing cannot stay in existence. So, what is it that is real? The thing that is perceived physically or its physically imperceptible essence, yet without which it could not be?

We get into Plato's world of divine ideas. Without the idea of a thing that thing could not exist. The thing is visible, its idea is not. It would be logical for one to say that what is real is the idea, and the thing is unreal. This is part of the controversy between Heraclitus of Ephesus and Parmenides of Elea. For Heraclitus, reality is what flows: *panta rhei*, everything flows. He was the proponent of change. Everything changes. Here he was "plagiarized" (!) by the father of modern chemistry, Lavoisier, who declared that in the universe everything changes from one form into another in equivalent parts.

What changes is physical. For Parmenides, what changes is unreal, illusory (as in *maya* in the hinduistic philosophies), as long as the real is related to the essence of things, and this one is unchanged, immutable (as the ideas of the things in the divine world of ideas, in Plato's thinking). In other words, if what is real is metaphysical, then the physical is unreal. Or we can accept two types of reality: one that is physical and one that is metaphysical. We can also think of the alternative *real*.

It is possible that the physical reality, generated by the one that is metaphysical, is meant to be transfigured in the sense of its coming back to the source, as in a kind of myth of eternal return, on which Mircea Eliade elaborated in detail in his book with this name. It is interesting how, in Eliade's interpretation, what gives a thing or action value and makes them become real is their participation in a reality that transcends them.<sup>9</sup>

A different possible approach: if last night I had a nightmare, is it real or not? The nightmare in itself, as a psychic state (of conscience?), is real, but that what happens in the nightmare is illusion. Yet Parmenides is right when he says that once I can think of a thing, it exists (be it only in potency – my note), because if it wouldn't exist, I could not even think of it. Evidently, he says this in relation to God, whom he called the mathematician of all things, yet why not in relation to people as well? And it does not matter if I think while being asleep or awake. In the end, a thought is a thought.

Finally, Carl Gustav Jung, with his most interesting and provocative question: It is clear that in a dream everything is unreal. Yet as long as we dream, we live the dream as the most concrete reality. There are people who die in their dreams because they lived so intensely what happened there. When we awake from the nightmare, from the dream, we think: "how good that it was just a dream." And here is the question: what if this life here is a dream and we live it "absolutely real" and "implicated", just like in the night's dream, and when we die, we "open our eyes" and realize that everything was an illusion, a nightmare, a dream, and in fact, the real opens and offers itself to us only then and there?

Another question. In order to consider a thing real, must we know everything about it? About conscience, we don't know everything and we consider it real. Is there a sixth or seventh physical sense through which we perceive reality? Then we can apply the same logic to other things that we do not know, but just guess, suspect,

assume (no matter how we call them or mis-name them), such as soul, eternity, God. If a certain thing can be considered real (conscience, essence, existence, idea, etc.) without it falling under the incidence of our physical senses, then couldn't other things be in the same situation? What about a scientific hypothesis like the Big Bang? Is it real or illusion? Does it fall under the incidence of our physical senses? Or is it a deduction that we call scientific, even though by definition, science, by not being dogmatic, does not dogmatize its theories, deductions. On the contrary, it accepts the possibility of error due to the lack of total information. The mathematician Hermann Bondi: "How can we know something if we don't know everything?" The knowledge of a part separated from the whole is deficient knowledge. The part broken from the whole functions differently than when it is placed in the whole, in its matrix. Yet who knows everything? Thus, what kind of weight do place on our knowledge? Is our *knowledge* real or pseudo? It is an illusion? How do we know? Do we? We don't know. We believe. We believe it is real. We believe that there was a Big-Bang. We believe that there is a God, that there is eternal life. In fact how do we know that we know? What is knowledge and what are its objective, immutable, guaranteed criteria?

Kant for example, raises serious questions regarding knowledge. We cannot know how we know, in which way we know. As Brayton Polka writes, Kant's "extraordinary insight is that that by which we (human subjects) know objects (things) we cannot know as we know these objects".<sup>10</sup>

What about faith? Is it real or not? How do we interpret the definition given by St. Paul: faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (Hebrews 11, 1). Both the confidence and the "assurance" belong to our inner conviction about a certain thing. Yet, if I believe in science's affirmations and science, each century changes its theories about the same object, is my belief in the changing science real or not? Or do we say, belief in itself, of a person, is real, yet its object can be unreal, as long as the scientific theories are, in many cases, constantly changing (sometimes from century to century or from generation to generation)?

What about our faith in God, God being an unchanged "object" of faith, in contrast with the "objects" of science?

## *The access to the real*

If we ask ourselves about the way in which we access the real, both physical and metaphysical, first of all we have to be clear as to which one of the two. If we refer to the physical real, all fields of life together, such as for example philosophy, science, religion, art, all help, each with its own instruments.

Philosophy, as critical thinking, and as the science that teaches us how to die, as Socrates put it, helps us discern; science offers its constantly new discoveries, religion brings the peace of the soul and the universal moral rule of love, respect and tolerance; the arts offer beauty and creativity, mysticism brings the chance of contemplation which leads to philosophy and religion, but also to the gate of passage from immanent to transcendent.

If we think of the metaphysical real, also, all the above fields of life help us to connect with the absolute, supreme reality, to link (re-ligare, religion) to God, not matter how once conceives the divinity. This is because philosophy comes with the essential questions about life and world, science allows us to believe in God by the very recognition of its own limits, religion par excellence connects us to God and also mysticism, and arts in that they point to the Absolute in all their forms of authentic manifestation.

Our daily life is the arena where the impact of all these domains in the conscience of each subject takes place.

Thus all these fields represent a direct pathway for the access to the real. I am not inclined to choose just one of them (even if my tendency is toward religion, because it is inclusive, it presupposes and accepts all others without the presumption that its role and place is threatened by them), because indeed all are manifestations, aptitudes of the human spirit, all with real impact on the human subject's life in its mysterious and vast complexity.

## *The celestial world*

In religion in general and Christianity in particular, God is the ultimate reality. He is the creator Almighty, proniator. I like the traditional expression from an orthodox translation of the Nicene Creed: in Romanian God is called "atotȕitorul", the one who maintains everything into being. The context in the Creed is as follows: "I believe in one God, Father "atotȕitorul" (not "almighty" as in the English

translation which has a different connotation), creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible”. One understands from the text, clearly, first of all the idea of creation *ex nihilo* (that is to say, of nothing natural, as Bryton Polka writes)<sup>11</sup> according to Christian doctrine, and then the idea about two worlds, not just one. Therefore, if God created also another world, the invisible one, things become better connected when we speak of the physical and metaphysical reality. The existence of the invisible world, scripturally speaking, but also in the order of the logical theological discourse, offers a foundation for the meaning of other expressions – testimony about this transcendent reality, expressions that we often understand, simply, as expressions of faith, yet without the need to place them in a larger context of the revelations about the metaphysical reality, expressions like this one, for instance: “... they will gather His elected ones from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other end” (Matthew 24, 31). It is clear from this text that there is one or several invisible worlds in which probably we will also go (for a new life of goodness or of pain, but this implies another discussion).

Also the phrase “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” indicates first that there is another world, another existential condition that we call, at the level of human understanding, heaven, kingdom of heaven, that over there is a complex and organized life, just like here, yet without the problems generated here by sin, which is a violation of God’s will and implicitly an error of thinking, a misperception of reality. In that world therefore God’s will is obeyed naturally; here we need advice, signs and signals, punishments, etc. And if that world is taken as existential model, it is clear that this one is meant to be like that one and this means unity between the two, continuity, compatibility, complementarity. This world is therefore called to transfiguration, a process where the profane becomes sacred, where the seed of the sacred hidden in the profane grows, encompasses, transforms the profane into what it is called to become: sacred.

Why the desire that God’s will be obeyed on earth as it is in heaven? Because fulfilling God’s will means to live according to our authentic condition which we don’t know, but which God knows; that is why we do not go about our will, as we don’t know what we really want and what we really need, what is fit for us, what we are meant to be, but God’s will, because He knows all these.

A doctor, too, wants the patient to obey the will, the advice of the doctor who knows better what needs to be done in order to defeat the illness, the pain, the suffering. Many patients go see a doctor, but that does not mean that they will also listen to “his will,” which is disinterested, based only on the desire and the intention to do good and be of help.

If we understand that in heaven God’s will is obeyed, this implies that there is an existence without sin, and it is toward that that we must strive here, in our condition affected by sin.

Evidently, there are many other texts that relate to the eschatology present in the Christian doctrine, including the one about a new heaven and a new earth.

### *Transfiguration*

The new heaven and the new earth that the Bible refers to (Matthew, Paul, Peter, John) are realities that indicate a process of progression of both existential conditions towards a new level of perfection. About the heaven’s renewal it is more difficult to speak, because we believe that the existence there is already an un sinful state; and if we speak of heaven in the sense of the phrase “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”, and the heaven is to be renewed, this would mean that even the celestial condition of being is subject to the infinite progression on the way to perfection, a type of process that St. Gregory of Nyssa calls *epectasis*. Yet if “heaven” refers to what is physically above the earth then, evidently, the reference is to the change, renewal of the physical universe (heaven, earth). In this case the renewal of heaven and earth (beyond the scientific considerations that could be made about this idea, at the level of quantum physics, for instance) could mean bringing the physical existential condition to the ideal metaphysical condition. We can think of this process in the sense of unification or integration or creating compatibility (the way we would call it does not really matter, what is important is the possibility of the process between the two).

Yet the transfiguration of matter, of the physical world is an issue and the “place” where man, himself transfigured, could get, in hell or in the kingdom of God, is another issue. The transfiguration of the universe (new heaven, new earth) does not bring with it implicitly my moving from hell to heaven or from the direction towards hell to the one towards heaven.

Because hell is metaphysical, too. And because the physical universe is one thing, and man is another. Here is the difference. In other words, the renewal of the universe is one thing and man's destiny, in function of how he makes it himself, how he chooses to live, is another thing. One must emphasize here that the Kingdom of God, as otherwise, hell, as well, are not "places" but states of existence, conditions where the soul goes without body, whereas the metaphysical post-apocalyptic universe could be accessible to the body as well, when it becomes immortal. The Orthodox Christian doctrine postulates the idea that after the physical death the soul goes where it took its existence from, as we say, based on faith, in a prayer from the service of the burial, and the body returns into the elements from which it was constituted until the general resurrection, that is, until the last judgment, when bodies, transfigured, will reunite with their own souls (a kind of reincarnation in the etymologic sense of the term; the soul goes back into the body it had before: re-in-carne, again in body, now a transfigured body). This reunification (soul and transfigured body) is the mode of existence in the post-apocalyptic, transcendent, eternal life, be it in the kingdom of God or in hell. In the Orthodox tradition there isn't the idea that in one "place" of the metaphysical existence one could go, after the Last Judgment, only in body and in another one in both, body and soul. At the Last Judgment the reunion soul-transfigured body will happen and anywhere one goes, one will go in this way.

### *Who is God*

If we want to think of the means by which we can get closer to God, such as, in the Orthodox tradition, for example fasting, prayer, good deeds, humility, among others, all based on faith, of course, we need to know who is God. Evidently, this is impossible. However, God reveals Himself to the world only as much as it needs in order to get closer to Him, to enter in communion with Him, to achieve what in general we call salvation.

The revelation can be made in natural ways (we can know certain things about the Creator through His creation) and in supernatural ways (through miraculous interventions in history) and, one could add, in a personal way (when God reveals Himself to people directly or indirectly). At one of the Orthodox services, using the

psalmist's reflection from the Old Testament, exactly this question is posed: "Who is the great God like our God?" and the answer is as follows: "You are the God who works wonders" (Ps. 76, 13). A miracle is, before all, a divine intervention that changes something in the order of nature in man's favor, a divine intervention in man's history or in that of the world.

Another answer to the question "Who is God" is given by St. John the Theologian: "God is love," and this is the reason for His intervention in the world's history, in His creation, in the life of man, who was created in His image. And yet another answer to the same question comes from a patristic source, namely from Theophilus of Antioch, taken over by Isaac the Syrian, Meister Eckhart and others, and I write it here in French as I have taken it from Olivier Clément: "Dieu est une Parole à l'extrémité du silence" ("God is a Word at the extremity of Silence"). Can one think of something more beautiful? If we speak of hidden truths, yet truths, this is the greatest one that illustrates the ineffability of God. From the abyss of His total transcendence God speaks to us. Therefore He cares for us, wants something from us, wants us back, He wants us by all means. That is why He intervenes in history so that we know that He is present, that our place is next to Him, that He loves us, loves us with a sacrificial love to the point where He recurses to the idea of incarnation of the divine Logos in history in order to speak to people in human ways and thus to have on them a greater impact than if He would thunder from the abyss of His transcendence. This would make us obey His will based on fear and not on conviction, which He does not want.

Therefore this is our God, and because He knows our nature, our condition, He not only sends us a call but offers us the adequate means that can help us to respond, to fulfill it. See the book of Deuteronomy where God says: "Look, I set before you today life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life that you may live" (30, 19). In other words, God respects the free will He gave us, as the supreme gift; however, when we are at an intersection, in doubt, in confusion, His advice comes clearly: choose life!

We can see in this context that God is the Lord, we belong to Him, a generous Lord who respects His own principles, who is consistent with Himself: I gave you freedom, I respect it. And I love you. Come! (Yet he does not force us). About God's logic and consistence there is a tradition that relates the following conversation between an atheist and St. Basil the Great. The atheist: if you pretend



that God in which you believe is almighty, can he create a stone so big that he cannot lift it? aiming to elicit an answer that, in one way or another, will deny God's omnipotence. Yet St. Basil responded that this big stone is Man, whom He created and whom, based on the freedom given at creation and on the logic of consistency, He will not force to love Him or to be saved.

Consequently, prayer, humility, fasting and other practices such as the Church's holy sacraments, are means through which in our conscience our belonging to God is crystallized. Prayer is a practice that keeps us awake in the idea of our dependence on God. Humility is nothing else than man's correct attitude *coram Deo*, once we realize our dependence on Him. Fasting combined with prayer, forgiveness, good deeds, etc. all have the role to prepare the human psyche, our soul for a more acute conscientization of the hierarchy of values, for their re-hierarchization; that implies a series of renunciations of things less important in favor of our awakening, of concentration of our attention on those that are most important, indeed on God as supreme value.

### *About God's Kingdom*

If we speak of God's Kingdom, to which Jesus Christ makes several references, we need to make a distinction between the metaphysical, transcendental existence in general and the Kingdom of God in particular.

The metaphysical reality, the transcendent world, according to Christian doctrine (and also according to a human logic that Hemmingway signals in one of his novels) is not necessarily the equivalent of God's Kingdom. The transcendent existence also implies hell, which is not God's Kingdom. In other words, as Lavoisier said (and earlier Heraclitus of Ephesus, possibly a Thracian and not necessarily a Greek philosopher), if everything changes from one form into another in equivalent measure, our life is not going to be lost either. It changes from one form into another, moves from one type of condition to another in equivalent measure. That is why we speak of transfiguration. This equivalency can be easily interpreted in the sense that the evil committed here brings one to evil (a sort of equivalency) and the good committed here brings one to the good (condition).

Thus God's Kingdom is accessible to all believers after death, yet not necessarily to all people. There would be room here to discuss

Origen's theory called *apokatastasis* according to which at the end of ends, in eschaton, God, being love, will offer the chance of salvation to all who are in hell, demons included.

If we want to think of the accessibility to God's Kingdom before death, in the Christian tradition there is the expression "the avant-taste of the Kingdom", which anyone who does God's will could have and who thus could experiment the "avant-taste" of the future realities. Such a moment is meant to happen in the framework of one's intelligent, full and efficient participation in the Divine Liturgy, which is a celebration of the mystery of God's Kingdom, as it even starts with the significant statement: "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

An interesting "definition" of the Kingdom of heaven is given by St. Paul who says that it doesn't consist of food and drinks, but that it is "peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14, 17). Surely, the Kingdom of heaven is a different type of reality than ours over here; it is sacred, and everybody is called to come there, according to how St. Paul writes to Timothy (I Timothy 2, 4): "all people are called to salvation and to the knowledge of the truth"; this statement raises an important problem about truth, namely whether we live in truth or not. The implication is that we don't; consequently it must be discovered, looked for, defined, hence Pilatus' question "what is truth?" Our call to the Kingdom is also well expressed in the extraordinary promise and call that Jesus makes to all believers: "Come you all the blessed of My Father and inherit the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Matthew 24, 34).

Christians, and, I would say, all people, live in a dual existential condition: as St. John Chrysostom nicely put it, they are at once citizens of time and of eternity. There is deep in the human soul a consciousness about the fact that man is more than what dies. Hence Horace's wonderful statement: *non omnis moriar* (there is no complete death) and that of Shakespeare (in one of the many translations in Romanian): "You are *too* beautiful to think you will die *completely* / and leave behind worms as inheritors" (my underlining), yet also a statement in an interesting hymn from the burial service in the Orthodox ritual: "The image of Your ineffable glory, Lord, I am, even though I bear the wounds of sin."

There is in the depth of the human soul a profound longing for immortality, for eternity, an inexplicable, ineffable sense about man's capacity to be more than he seems to be, that the ultimate meaning of

life is not the tomb but immortality, that *homo capax infiniti*, that we live facing eternity, not the tomb. It is based on this sense that all these universal beliefs, myths, legends about immortality, the spring of life, youth without old age appeared, all as an expression of the sense that we are more than we seem to be (a truth hidden in ourselves).

The center of Orthodox Christianity is indeed the faith in this ultimate reality, revealed to us culminantly in Jesus Christ, Son of God, our Savior who is the way to it.

The divine-human person of the Lord Jesus Christ is what distinguishes Christianity from other religions. The Son of God incarnated in history represents man's privileged way of access to the ultimate reality, God, that is why He said simply and clearly: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14, 6), and yes, the person of Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme gift that God offered to man out of love, as we read in the Gospel of John: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3, 16).

Here is also something to be noticed about God's logic and wisdom. Had not the divine Logos' incarnation in history been, man would have had to believe in an abstraction, and this would have raised the issue of inefficiency. Yet God, who knows us because He created us, eliminated this possibility in man's favor, ordering the incarnation of His Son, the divine Logos, so that people could hear, see, relate to and then believe more easily. That's how we humans are. We know this from other human experiences. Relatedness, concreteness, are essential for us when it comes to reaching an aim.

### *Sacred and profane*

The sacred is the condition that unites the two worlds, the one over here and the one beyond, even if the sacred is already this "beyond". Here one would massively invoke Mircea Eliade who elaborates excellently on the theme of the sacred being hidden in the profane (hidden truths). One needs to remember that God created the world "very good"; therefore it has in itself the dimension of the sacred in the sense that the seed of the sacred is placed there at creation. The world is meant to become sacred. As Christian Fathers used to say, the world was created in view of the Church, in order to become Church

(the sacred per se in this existence here indicates the divine dimension in the divine-human, theandric condition of the Church).

Thus, God being the perfect holiness, our advance on the way to holiness is advancing towards God, toward deification, theosis, which is the supreme goal of the Christian believer. Holiness is defined by the Church Fathers as our “longing for God”. Longing in itself is active, dynamic, it pushes one to its aim, as it is nicely put by Victor Eftimiu in *The Black Rooster*: “A longing held a long time in the soul / No matter how close death could be, will never die / It climbs, it grows, decrease, it struggles, seems extinct / Yet it explodes again and climbs undeterred / Like the flame that burns, like water, like the source / That breaks the solid rock, so longing overcomes.”

How good that the sacred is present in our world here and that it is meant to be the real thread (the seeds left behind in a labyrinth in order to find the way back), the ladder that climbs from earth to heaven.

So, the role of the profane reality is to lead to the sacred reality. The profane reality represents the fallen, corrupted condition of man after the primordial sin. Yet God, after this sin, did not break totally His connection with man, but placed in this very fallen, profane condition the seeds of this relation (re-ligo, re-ligare religion).

The Old Testament psalmist refers nicely to the way in which even the physical universe inhabited by the fallen man confesses God’s greatness and awakens in him the idea of God: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the skies proclaim the work of His hands” (Ps. 19, 1).

Then, even the present physical reality has a precise role in man’s evolution towards God. All these things offer man a chance and time to conscientize who he is, who he is called to be, what he had and lost or what he already has and what he could lose.

In conclusion, regardless of how we define the real, in physical or metaphysical terms, one thing is worth being emphasized when it comes to the need for transcendence, to the role and meaning that it should have in man’s thought and life, as the American theologian and philosopher Abraham Heschel articulates: “Existence without transcendence is a mode of being where things become idols and the idols become monsters”.<sup>12</sup>

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Joshua Hren, *Contemplative Realism: A Theological Aesthetical Manifesto* (Cf. Cassandra Nelson, „Tradition and the Individual Christian Talent,” in *The Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture*, Vol. 25, Nr. 3, Fall 2023, p. 145).

<sup>2</sup> Bryan Magee, *Ultimate Questions*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NY, 2016, Cf. Bryton Polka, „On Responding Ultimately to Ultimate Questions”, in *The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms*, Vol. 25, Nrs. 5-6, August – September 2020, p. 692.

<sup>3</sup> Angel Adams Parham, „Vocation and Moral Imagination,” in *The Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture*, Vol. 26, Nr. 1, Spring 2024, p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> Martha Bayles, “The Character of Tragedy,” in *The Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture*, Vol. 26, Nr. 1, Spring 2024, p. 64.

<sup>5</sup> Emil Cioran, *The Temptation to Exist*, Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1970, pp. 36-37.

<sup>6</sup> Theodor Damian, *Implicațiile spirituale ale teologiei icoanei / The Spiritual Implications of the Theology of Icon*, Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> E. Cioran, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>8</sup> Jürgen Lawrenz, “Confucius, Aristotle and the Golden Mean: Diptych on Ethical Virtues,” in *The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms*, Vol. 26, Nrs. 1-2, February - March 2021, p. 153.

<sup>9</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Mitul reîntoarcerii / The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Univers enciclopedic, București, 1999, p. 12.

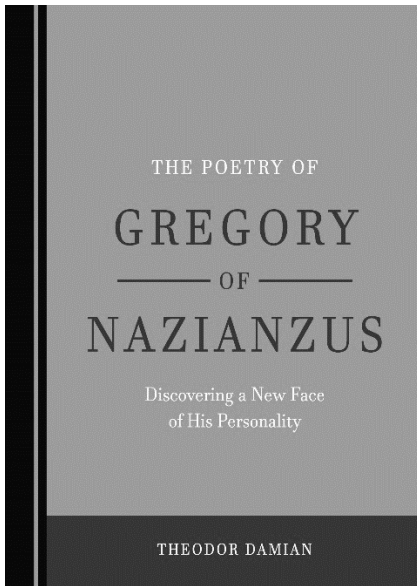
<sup>10</sup> Cf. Bryton Polka, “Love of Neighbor as the Golden Rule of Modernity”, book review for *Intuitive Knowing as Spiritual Experience* by Phillip H. Wiebe, in *The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms*, Vol. 26, Nrs. 1-2, February . March 2021, p. 89.

<sup>11</sup> Bryton Polka, “On Responding Ultimately....”, p. 696.

<sup>12</sup> A. Heschel, *Who Is Man*, Stanford University, Press, Stanford, CA, 1965, p. 86.

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Gregory of Nazianzus was a personality of first rank in the complex world of the 4th Christian century. Famous for his theological orations and for his role in the development of the Second Ecumenical Council in 381 in Constantinople, where he was the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, he was one of the most celebrated poets of his time, even though today he is known in particular for his major contributions to the establishment of the Orthodox theology that was confronted with the heresies of the time.

This book will allow the reader to discover not the theologian, but the poet in Gregory, as his poetry is the place where one can see the all-too-human aspects of his personality. As such, it represents a significant contribution to scholarship on Gregory, bringing to light new and defining characteristics of his life, thought and practice.

“Theodor Damian does us a great service in this book by reminding us what a fine poet Gregory was. A well-known and successful poet himself, Prof. Damian is able to enter into the heart as well as the mindset of Gregory’s World” (John McGuckin)

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HEINZ-UWE HAUS

## The Path to Europe's Multifaceted Identity

**Abstract:** In the process of globalization, two dynamics collide. One aims at leveling out cultural differences, the other emphasizes the need for diversity in cultural, social and economic developments in different regions of the world. Dealing with these dynamics is one of the great challenges of our century. In order to do justice to this, it is important to examine the similarities and differences between cultures more intensively to undergo historical-anthropological research and reflection; Building on this, education must be seen more than ever as an intercultural pan-European task.

**Keywords:** Europe, the Soviet era, Estonia, Greece, American way, culture, values, identity

The waves of crises that have hit Europe since the turn of the century have weakened the foundation of values on which the European Union was built, and it is becoming increasingly clear that there are alternative offers for the political and social order, some of which follow well-known patterns, and some of which are different represent something new in the conditions of a digitalized world. Part of the dialectic of this process is to be sure of the changeability of what is given. In the process of globalization, two dynamics collide. One aims at leveling out cultural differences, the other emphasizes the need for diversity in cultural, social and economic developments in different regions of the world. Dealing with these dynamics is one of the great challenges of our century. In order to do justice to this, the similarities and differences between cultures must be subjected to intensive historical-anthropological research and reflection; Based on this, education must be seen more than ever as an intercultural task. The current concept of culture, formulated at the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policy in Mexico in 1982, is based on the fact that “culture in its broadest sense can be viewed as the totality of the

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unique spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional aspects that make up a society or identify a social group. This includes not only art and literature, but also ways of life, basic human rights, value systems, traditions and Beliefs.”<sup>1</sup> In order to clarify the existential meaning of art and culture, we define the term “culture” very broadly: from the marching band to the symphony orchestra, from amateur music to theater, dance and opera to pop, to literature, fine art and film - and media art to socioculture. Since the beginning of human history, culture in all its forms has made a fundamental contribution to socio-political education. It is able to create a sense of community and cohesion. It connects people regardless of their age, gender or ethnic and social background and thus contributes significantly to the preservation and development of a pluralistic and peaceful society. It provides a variety of impulses and food for thought for the development of will and personality, it transports knowledge and it acts both as a guardian of ideal goods and as a visionary designer. In the European Union, a variety of initiatives are at work to “hold onto” and further develop cultural identity in the context of national self-determination.

Essential initiatives for the cultural self-determination of the peoples of the European Union are the awareness of the “other” and the joint development of the “common”. The prerequisite for this attitude to be promoted is the assurance of one’s “own”.

Estonia for example is a member of the EU and NATO that is exemplarily self-confident in terms of its culture and whose innovations are becoming increasingly popular. Due to its “smooth” participation in the European unification process, the Baltic country does not receive much attention. However, Estonia is by far the most advanced digital society in the world. Its population is one of the youngest in Europe. And she is Estonian and European.

Let us remember: in the period from 1945 to 1990, the targeted settlement of non-Estonian Soviet citizens, especially Russians, significantly changed the composition of the population according to nationalities to the detriment of the native Estonian population.

Estonia’s culture experienced a further cultural upheaval with the loss of German and Swedish populations as a result of the Second World War.

Since the end of the Soviet era, Estonian culture has been strongly oriented towards its northern neighbor Finland due to the relationship between the Estonian and Finnish languages. It is largely

western-oriented and maintains numerous collaborations with German societies, Protestant churches (North Elbe Church) and universities (Göttingen, Greifswald, Kiel, Konstanz, Munich and Münster). Also worth mentioning is the traditional song festival, which takes place every five years, where tens of thousands join together in a choir to sing national songs. Held every five years and featuring thousands of choristers and dancers in colorful national costumes, this lively outdoor festival began in 1869, at the start of the Estonian national movement. While the first song festival took place in Tartu (1869), growing interest and popularity meant that a separate venue for the festival soon became necessary. Since 1928, the Liederbühne, surrounded by picturesque pine forests on the Tallinn coast, has been home to the very popular festival. Dance events are a more recent tradition dating back to 1934 and today, for modern audiences, both traditions are inseparable. During the Soviet era, this heritage became a cultural weapon and demonstration of national independence. The fact that it continues to work for the benefit of the free-democratic social order is the complete opposite of the loss of values and the abandonment of one's own dominant culture under the conditions of European integration. 43,802 citizens took part in the 2019 Song and Dance Festival in Tallinn. What an example of a living legacy that denies the protagonists of "cancel culture" the stage.

An equally inspiring model of unity between artists, art and society can be found in Greece.

When the news of the death of the composer Mikis Theodorakis spread there on August 2, 2021, shortly before ten o'clock, the radio stations interrupted their programs. And then many stations played the song with which "Mikis", as most people in Greece affectionately called him, became world famous: the Sirtaki from the film "Alexis Zorba".

Theodorakis has become a symbol of the unbroken will for freedom and is revered in Greece like a folk hero. The composer, resistance fighter and politician has repeatedly campaigned for justice and democracy. His biography is shaped by resistance against the fascist occupying troops in the Second World War, his country's subsequent civil war and the Greek military dictatorship between 1967 and 1974. Greece's Culture Minister Lina Mendoni summed it up: „Today we have lost a piece of the Greek soul." Three days of national mourning were immediately announced.

As much as his folkloric music had an impact beyond Greece, for him it was always about the cultural identity and political self-determination of his home country. In the dungeon - only in his head, without pen or paper - he writes the cycle "Sun and Time", a dialogue with the "I". So he composes against the dictatorship and against his own madness. His songs are banned, but they circulate illegally on records and tapes and are sung secretly. They carry the resistance. "No one will take this country from us," says the setting of a poem by Yiannis Ritsos, for example. In 1970, an international solidarity movement - including artists such as Shostakovich and Bernstein - fought for his exile to France to study with Olivier Messiaen. This is where his "Canto General", his freedom credo based on texts by Neruda, was created. At the age of 34, he is also on stage at Covent Garden alongside Rudolf Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn, who made his "Antigone" ballet world famous.

When Theodorakis returned to his homeland in 1974 after the fall of the junta, people celebrated him as a folk hero. His first concert at the Karaiskaki Stadium became a festival of freedom. 55,000 spectators took part. Theodorakis had been courted by political parties since his youth. But he remained a restless, rebellious spirit. Theodorakis has not taken root in any political party. His creative power took sides with his people and his homeland. In an interview on his 95th birthday, Theodorakis summed up his political life: "I only trust the old Greek principle of democracy. There is only the fight for democracy and freedom, nothing more."<sup>2</sup>

He has composed hundreds of songs, ballets, cantatas, symphonies and major choral works. He also refers to Greek musical traditions in his symphonies. The bouzouki, the Greek lute, is usually present: it symbolizes the own, modern identity that Theodorakis wanted to give Greece with his music. He mixed folk tunes and the Ottoman musical tradition with special dance rhythms. The Byzantine liturgy can be found in his oratorios. He also incorporated the folk instrument bouzouki and its small form, the baglamas, into his classical works. His folk songs are sung in the concert hall as well as in the taverns. The mission since its beginnings is a cultural rebirth of the Greek nation: "As a man of the Greek left, I have an ideal: the renaissance of the Greek people, not only socially and economically."<sup>3</sup>

One of his strategies: to combine the texts of great Greek poets with folkloric melodies - in other words, to make high culture

compatible with the masses. A composer who broke down the boundaries between serious music and popular music and always fought politically for the reconciliation of hostile camps. Because an artist is obliged to the audience, the people, says Theodorakis. For him, composing is never an end in itself; he wants to initiate an attitude. But as inextricably linked as Mikis Theodorakis' work is to his political signaling effect, the proportion of directly politically motivated music in his enormous oeuvre is small. In a 2015 interview, he describes the dialectic of his creative power: "My musical homeland is Germany. I studied harmony, counterpoint and fugue, i.e. musical composition, at the Athens Conservatory, which was one hundred percent in the German tradition. My role models were Bach, Beethoven and Schubert, whom I studied in detail. I think it is therefore quite natural that my music - despite being Greek - has elements in it that come from the German musical tradition. This even applies to my songs. And I assume that this is why my music is so close to many people in Germany."<sup>4</sup>

Today his songs are part of the folklore. They don't miss any family celebration or demonstration. Because songs like "Sto Perigiali" ("Resignation") are simply timeless: "With the heart, with the breath – as well as longing, so much passion! We saw the mistakes of our lives and changed our lives!" The dance scene from Alexis Zorba's film burned itself into our heads with its melody - and a very specific image of Greece with it.

Based on the 1946 novel of the same name by Nikos Kazantzakis, the film "Alexis Zorbas" ("Zorba, the Greek," 1964) is set in a remote Cretan village. The main character is a British intellectual named Basil who suffers from writer's block. He travels to Greece to restart a family business. On the ship to Crete he meets Alexis Zorbas, a life-affirming, albeit very idiosyncratic, bon vivant. One look at the final dance scene is enough to get an unmistakable feeling of Greek life and thinking. Zorbas and his British friend dance the popular Sirtaki while an atmospheric melody by Mikis Theodorakis plays. In the background you can see the dry Cretan landscape and the Aegean Sea.

Really Greek, you might think, when Anthony Quinn aka Alexis Zorbas dances so carefree. However, to a Cretan from 1964, the year the film was released, the whole thing may have looked rather strange, since before the film the dance didn't exist at all. The choreographer Giorgos Provias, who was called "the Nureyev of folk dance" at the time, invented it specifically for the final scene. He was inspired by various Cretan dances. Nowadays the Sirtaki is considered the Greek

dance par excellence. The Greeks adopted Zorba's vitalistic worldview, just as the Sirtaki dance and the melodies of Theodorakis. Zorbas demonstrates the most Greek of all possibilities: he laughs, takes off his jacket and dances. He resists all injustice on his own. In order for the world to change for the better, something must above all change in human consciousness, in the humanity of today's people. He has to think about it.

On this connection, what art can assert, a quote from a conversation between Arila Siegert and Johannes Odenthal in May 2021 in Berlin on the occasion of rehearsals for the stage composition *Over the Wall* by Wassily Kandinsky. When staging the work, which was created in 1914, the dancer and choreographer Siegert is concerned with "showing an inner, existential creativity. Not via the external path, but via an internal path. The experience of what Kandinsky calls the soul. Or experiencing what moves us, what helps us, what allows us to experience this life as a miracle. (...) And I see a forward-looking approach in Kandinsky, (...) against alienation, from one another, but also from oneself. No one can take this inner work away from us. (...) You always have to save yourself. In every system."<sup>5</sup>

This describes the aesthetic spectrum of cultural initiatives: engaging creatively through memory, imagination, invention and improvisation.

Embracing a European transculturalism perspective calls for integration of new concepts and approaches in communication and education that promote active participation, adaptation, and interaction. It involves inquiry, framing, and positionality that challenge our taken-for-granted frames of references and expand our worldviews. Our experience of engaging in pan European dialog and critical reflection informs our national actions as the catalyst for positive social change and transformation. The European Union's environment for communicating, interacting, and learning without opposing cultural, national, and ethnic binaries is the result of the inclusive nature of the "Westernization" since the re-unification of the continent.

The Czech writer Radka Denemarkova describes the civil society context: "As far as the Czech Republic is concerned, I can hardly imagine today that there were times when Charter 77, founded by Vaclav Havel, did not exist. Such an idea creates a feeling of a moral vacuum and a total relativity of values."<sup>6</sup>

The fight for freedom and free critical thinking is a historical signpost, no matter how much “coping with the present” seems to set other priorities. Brecht writes: “Today goes into tomorrow fed by yesterday.”<sup>7</sup>

As is well known, fundamental initiatives of cultural change and awakening were initiated in (Western) Europe by the United States after the Second World War. From the Atlantic revolutions to Wilson’s idealism to the Atlantic Charter and Roosevelt’s United Nations: the ideal of an open society was formative for the development of civil society structures in post-war Western Europe and the American influence was correspondingly great. This also includes the lasting influence of art, such as jazz, which promoted Western value identity even before the war and during the time of the Iron Curtain. Despite its aesthetic independence, jazz - with roots in the African American blues tradition, Euro-American folk music and early urban popular music - has never completely given up its relationship to folk music and traditional musical styles, which contributed to its international spread. Can jazz serve as a social role model even under today’s conditions? Jazz was declared a national cultural treasure in the USA in 1987 because it has the potential to connect different social groups with one another. Let’s consider this aspect.

As is well known, the unstoppable success of American popular culture depended largely on how it managed to integrate deviant countercultures and sociocultural opposition into the mainstream. „The liveliness and thus the globalizability of this culture is reflected in its ability to integrate and transform diversity without completely leveling it out.”<sup>8</sup> Success always lay at the root of tensions. Hollywood films, for example, were from the outset for a multi-ethnic and class-based culture fragmented audience. They were never intended exclusively for a ruling elite. They appeared egalitarian. The same could be said for American popular music. “Popular cultural forms emerged whose imagery or whose musical principles were, at least theoretically, universally understandable. In particular, drawing “It was characterized by an incredibly fertile, cross-cultural mythopoietic power. American films, novels and melodies spoke to people from a wide range of cultures with an immediacy that they owed to their anti-elitist origins.”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore - and this is crucial - they created a multi-ethnic, racial and social diverse, capitalist identity that, after the collapse of the pre-war European order, gave hope, especially to Europe’s youth, for a new beginning. Until the mid-1950s, people in East and West seemed to

agree: "It is not Americanism that leads to cultural decline, but global materialism. That must be said clearly!" postulated a Swiss cultural scientist in 1955 and made it clear: "If Europe does not reflect, the concept of Western culture will completely lose its meaning and sound. America is making more rapid progress in the field of civilization; it has advanced further in social ethics. America takes each individual as important as the state, as well as one Social order is more important than a privileged status."<sup>10</sup>

What is considered relevant today are the impulses that gave rise to jazz as well as the social context of its effectiveness in the context of the American civil rights movement. Billie Holiday's legendary performance at Cafe Society in New York with her interpretation of „Strange Fruit" marked the beginning of the heyday of jazz in the middle third of the 20th century. In the 1950s it increasingly became the soundtrack to black emancipation. The cover of Roach's 1959 album *We Insist! The Freedom Now Suite* anticipates the aesthetics of rappers like Ice-T or N.W.A. John Coltrane's "A Love Supreme" seemed like the musical equivalent of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. At that time, music did not have to convey explicitly political content in order to still be inherently political in its attitude.

Music of freedom and the American way of life – these are the central elements of a myth that surrounds jazz. Behind the Iron Curtain, this myth gained an impact that we should still be aware of today. American jazz was the synonym for cosmopolitanism and freedom. Practicing jazz was an expression of civil disobedience. Even though little attention was paid to it outside the Eastern Bloc, lively and independent jazz scenes emerged in all East Central European countries and also in the Soviet Union. The Jazz Jamboree festival, which has been held regularly in Warsaw since 1956 to this day, eventually also attracted attention in the West, and *Polski Jazz* became, alongside Polish films and posters, the EU's pan-European heritage.

Jazz concerts created a scope for self-respect and self-assertion in order to be able to lead a kind of "real life in the wrong." Such nonconformism or claims to individuality could clearly be interpreted as political activism. The reasons for jazz's effectiveness in state socialism were not open protest or direct resistance, but rather its resistant character and the fact that, especially in the first two post-war decades, jazz became the nucleus of an alternative culture that

fundamentally undermined the rulers' monopoly of rule and power question asked. The implications for today are manifold.

The phenomenon of the stranger e.g. B. not only led to vehement rejection, but also to fascination and enthusiastic reception outside the jazz scene. In its signal effect as the music of America, jazz also provoked in a third way by challenging the traditional concept of culture of the European elites. The "Americanness" of jazz is an essential key to understanding its impact. The show *Music USA: Jazz Hour* and its host Willis Conover, which was heard every evening on the Voice of America radio station starting in 1955, achieved cult status throughout the Eastern Bloc.

Americanization undoubtedly promoted the will to resist the Soviet suppression of national identities and the deprivation of civil liberties in the Eastern Bloc. However, the influence of the USA has primarily promoted the integration process of European cultures under the conditions of an open and pluralistic society.

In everyday cultural life today, the American way of life has long since been "suspended" in its own traditions in a Hegelian manner. At the beginning of September 2021, 20 Romanian artists opened a studio in the former Securitate building in the center of Bucharest at their own expense with a three-year rental agreement. In the relic of a fallen dictatorship, artistic freedoms and self-determined initiatives are lived out and communicated with each other and with the audience. "We want to be free and work in a non-dogmatic way."<sup>11</sup> Their own initiative represents increasingly similar initiatives across the EU. Since the reunification of Europe, the "arrival in Europe" has been a process of cultural seizure of power. Free culture does not stand outside history, and history does not stand outside culture.

In the process of globalization, two dynamics collide. One aims at leveling out cultural differences, the other emphasizes the need for diversity in cultural, social and economic developments in different regions of the world. Dealing with these dynamics is one of the great challenges of our century. In order to do justice to this, it is important to examine the similarities and differences between cultures more intensively to undergo historical-anthropological research and reflection; Building on this, education must be seen more than ever as an intercultural pan-European task.



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<sup>2</sup> Mikis Theodorakis, “Sirtaki-Erfinder Mikis Theodorakis kritisiert Alexis Tsipras,” Interview mit Elisa Simantka, in *Berliner Zeitung*, May 7, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/zur-wahl-in-griechenland-warum-mikis-nicht-in-der-ddr-auftrat/12342232-3.html>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> *Journal der Künste*, Akademie der Künste Berlin, Vol. 16, German edition, September 2001, p. 6.

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## **A Canadian Example of Spiritual Autobiography: Fr. Marie-Victorin (1885-1944)**

**Abstract.** Important personality for the cultural landscape from the Canadian space, Marie Victorin (1885-1944) was not only a pioneer in the space of botanic, where he discovered new plants and contributed to the foundation of the Faculty of Sciences from Montreal being its first titular on the botanic chair, but also a professor and a priest member of the „Les Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes” (brothers of the Christian Schools), one of the most important religious orders from Canada who also wrote a rich list of theological studies and essays and had a rich correspondence. In the same time, he left ten notebooks containing his diaries between 1903 and 1920, where there can be found not only a chronology of the events that were contemporary to him, but also interesting notes of spiritual autobiographies. Starting from them and from their content we will try to emphasize the way how he sees the spiritual realities and to bring into attention the aforementioned work indicating its actuality and presenting the author in the context of the society where he lived. At the same time, we will try to show how his works can be used in order to create bridges among spiritualities in the ecumenical context.

**Keywords:** Autobiography, Christianity, saints, science, spirituality, virtue

### *Introduction*

Spiritual autobiography is for sure an important genre for the theological space. At the same time, it has also an interdisciplinary value. Recent studies, books or articles come to highlight its main defining aspects.<sup>1</sup> But despite of the rich literature dedicated to it that exists and of the increasing interest for the topic, there still are important aspects to discover in the contemporary scholarship. The aim of the present research is to bring into attention one of them.

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Therefore, in the present research we will try to focus on the spiritual autobiography of an important Canadian catholic priest, Fr. Marie-Victorin (1885-1994). Like many other representatives of the clergy, he was not only prominent for the work in the pastoral or theological field, but also for the one in the scientific field. Therefore, contemporary profiles define him as being “Quebec’s best-known scientist”<sup>2</sup> due to works like “his famous Flore laurentienne<sup>3</sup> (1935).”<sup>4</sup>

### *Fr. Marie-Victorin (1885-1944) – brief bio-bibliographic landmarks*

Due to the fact that there have been published until today several books, articles and studies dedicated both to his contributions in the botanic field, his correspondence, biography<sup>5</sup> or the exhaustive list of his publications,<sup>6</sup> we will only mark a few of the most important aspects that define the biography of the priest, member of “Les Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes”<sup>7</sup> from Canada, founder of important institutions like the Botanic Garden from Montreal<sup>8</sup> and author of important contributions from the scientific field.

On his secular name Conrad Kirouac, the future Fr. Marie-Victorin was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1885 a Kingsey Falls, in Quebec and was the son of Cyrille Kirouac Philomène Luneau.<sup>9</sup> Among five other sisters, he will not be the only one with a religious vocation in the family. His sister Adelcie will also join a religious order with the name Marie-des Anges and will be among the founders of different colleges in the Quebec region.

He will study at the schools of the “Frères des écoles chrétiennes”. When he was 16 years old, he will join the novitiate at Mont-de-La-Salle à Maisonneuve (Montréal), where he will become part of the order that ensured him the school preparation. Previously, in 1898, he will also study at the Comercial Academy of Quebec<sup>10</sup>. There he will receive the name Marie-Victorin. After teaching in the primary and secondary schools, in 1903, he will start to teach at Saint-Jérôme College. Here he will discover the passion for the botanic, after reading Fr. Léon Provancher’s<sup>11</sup> book dedicated to the Canadian flora. After this moment he will start to organise excursions with the purpose of discovering and studying vegetal specimens. From Saint-Jérôme, he

will teach at Westmount College and later, from 1902 until 1920, at Longueuil College.

His scientific debut will take place in 1908 with an article dedicated to the American flora in *Naturaliste Canadien* journal<sup>12</sup> followed in the next years by several others, appreciated by other North-American specialists from different universities.<sup>13</sup> Later, in 1916, his first scientific monograph, *Flore du Témiscouata* will appear.<sup>14</sup> His scientific approaches will be doubled in this period by other cultural and nationalist ones. Therefore, in 1910 he will be among the ones who will greet the publication of *Le Devoir* journal and in 1915 he will also start to publish there under the pseudonym “M. Son Pays” texts with sociological relevance. He will continue to cooperate with it until 1940 at the moment of his premature death.<sup>15</sup> In 1920 he will become professor at Montreal University, when the Faculty of Sciences was created there.<sup>16</sup>

Interesting is the fact that Marie-Victorin did not have at the beginning of his career a university diploma in the field, and he was just self-taught. Still, his credibility was never contested. Moreover, in 1922, he will defend his PhD theses and will therefore become a titular professor. Until 1928 he will also continue to teach at Longueuil College.<sup>17</sup>

Here, in 1920 he will open the Botanic laboratory from Montreal University (transformed in 1931 into the Botanic Institute) where he will be the director up to his death, and he will teach there a generation of researchers that will cooperate with him. Also, in 1922, he will be among the founders of the “Society of biology from Montreal” and will also attend different other associations in the field.

Among the important projects that will influence his life and will ensure his posterity, the Botanic Garden from Montreal must surely be mentioned. About this aspect a contemporary researcher that investigated his biography shows that:

His plea to Mayor Camillien Houde in 1935 for the creation of a botanical garden went down in Montréal’s history:

We will soon be celebrating Montréal’s three hundredth anniversary. You need to give a gift, a royal gift, to the City, our city. But Montréal is Ville-Marie, a woman... And you certainly can’t give her a storm sewer or a police station... It’s obvious what you must do! Give her a corsage for her lapel. Fill her arms to overflowing with all the roses and lilies of the field!<sup>18</sup>

The foundation of the institution will not be the only aspect that will interest him. He will monitor its evolution and offer a precious hand of help to its later developments. Therefore, in 1938 he will open the school of Horticultural learning and in 1943 he will develop also a collaboration with Montreal University, that will be unfortunately suspended one year later due to his death caused by a car-accident.<sup>19</sup>

In parallel with his scientific work, Marie-Victorin will also publish theological, literary and cultural essays, studies and articles, leaving behind a rich list of works.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, between 1903 and 1920 he will have a journal, published posthumously<sup>21</sup> containing both notes about his daily life, but also about his spiritual experiences.

### *Fr. Marie-Victorin and his spiritual autobiography*

Marie-Victorin is certainly just one author from a complex list of Catholic diaries that contain rich passages of spiritual autobiography. Starting with Saint Augustine's *Confessions*<sup>22</sup> and continuing with authors like Julian of Norwich,<sup>23</sup> Saint Teresa of Avila<sup>24</sup> until nowadays, when Thomas Merton<sup>25</sup>, the Saint John Paul the Second,<sup>26</sup> Saint Faustina Kowalska<sup>27</sup> or Mother Teresa of Calcutta,<sup>28</sup> the Occident will encourage this type of writings with relevance for the spiritual life and practical role. They will not only contain descriptions of mystical experiences, although these will be the most important topics found there, but also references with relevance to dogmatics, spirituality and other convergent domains.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, together with the spiritual autobiographies, there will be found a long list of diaries and books containing personal notes or memories of different priests, bishops, theologians or faithful. It must be also mentioned the fact that the Catholic space was the one who exported the model of the diary and also the one of the spiritual autobiography in other Christian traditions, like the Orthodox or the Protestant ones. For this reason, it must be said that the investigated writer had a long list of titles that have surely inspired him. Some of them are even mentioned within the notes signed by the Canadian botanist and theologian.

From the beginning it must be mentioned that the ten notebooks containing his diaries from 1903 and until 1920<sup>30</sup> cannot be classified as a spiritual autobiography, but rather as a classical diary. They contain clearly marked landmarks of time and space, and the accent falls on the

daily practical life rather than on the mystical vocation of the author and on his revelations. The author therefore describes sometimes the impressions created by the life in community, his trips, his pupils and their academic progress, the daily life, and also speaks about his struggles in the academic field. At the same time, there are important passages that can be subsumed to the spiritual autobiography where he details the feelings created by different special moments, about his relationship with God or even notes with prayers with doxological content. It can be observed that in the beginning of the period when he started to write, there is a bigger density of passages related with the spiritual experiences than in the latest ones.

### *Relationship with God*

For sure, the most important topic related to the spiritual autobiography that can be found in the notebooks written by Marie-Victorin is the relationship with God. This is, in fact, a general topic that can be found in all of them. In order to pray or to have a good evolution in the mystical life one needs to deepen his or her relationships with the divinity. The investigated author is conscious of this fact as it is evident in certain notes, where, for example, he writes a prayer, in an important moment of his life which is related to the Eucharist. The author imagines it as a prayer for his pupils, but at the same time, one can see there the rich personal dimension of the text.

The letter starts with a testimony of love for Jesus and for Eucharist. It continues in the same tone, speaking both about the future plans of the author and of the supposed readers, but is also proclaiming the love for God and asking that the beloved ones receive the blessing:

I love you, Jesus, with all the young ardour of my heart. I think and I understand that you are the only one worthy of my love and that all that exists is only lovable in you. I love You and I will not allow you to go from me. For You, I will defend in my soul and my body this lily of purity, treasure of my youth, which blossoms in the sun of the Eucharist and which I would like to present to you intact when my last day strikes. Divine Friend, since you are all mine, you cannot refuse me anything. Bless me, bless my youth, my activity, my aspirations, my plans for the future. Bless my father and my mother, my parents, my teachers, my benefactors. Bless those to whom my soul is attached. Always be among my friends and me, so that our friendship may be an upward march towards the true and the Good.<sup>31</sup>

Love is one of defining elements of the spiritual life. It has God himself as a model. At the same time, it is directed towards the others. As it can be seen from the prayer, the closer ones are part of the family, yet it is extended also to the ones who can be considered benefactors or to whom the soul is attached. The passage therefore indirectly speaks about the agents that are responsible, in the spiritual life, for the cultivation of love: the soul and the heart. At the same time, there is an emphasis on an important aspect related to the progress in the spiritual life: the vertical direction. Marie-Victorin is conscious that, in the presence of God, all the relationships receive consistence and asks Him to be the one who fulfils the friendships and make them to receive a new dimension.

While different authors of the genre pray for their enemies<sup>32</sup> and others who do not have anymore enemies pray even for the pagans and their salvation,<sup>33</sup> Marie-Victorin who is contemporary with some of them (like Silouane) also prays for the world. For him, the sinners are important to pray for and thus represent a topic of his prayers, while keeping the ones that are close to him, like his relatives, on the top of the list. He is also aware of the fact that the return to the world could transform him into a sinner and therefore insists in his prayers to ask God not to leave him and to be with him in the moments of difficulty and temptation:

Have mercy on the poor sinners, on those who are united to me by the ties of blood and affection. Show yourself to them so that they understand that you are the source of all true happiness and sincerely come back to you.

O Jesus, I must now leave you and return to the tumult of the world. Stay with me, and don't let me forget for a moment that today I have pressed you to my heart.<sup>34</sup>

### *Virtues and their spiritual role*

The relationship with God represents a complex topic. Marie Victorin is conscious of this fact. He therefore presents it when possible, also in the context of the practice of virtues. Thus one can find important notes speaking about love, humility, and other virtues. While some of them are related to the way in which he understands the realities or his purposes of life after receiving the Eucharist, others

focus on how certain moments in life determined the author to have a reflection on spiritual values. Therefore, for example, a note from 21<sup>st</sup> of June 1903 represents for him an opportunity to speak about how God gave him and his community a lesson of humility. Then, due to the bad weather, they could not realize a planned procession.<sup>35</sup> Yet this does not mean an end or a reason for disappointment, but rather an opportunity to deepen the relationship with God in humility. In another context, he speaks about the way how the tiredness made him not to be able to focus as well as he expected on the Holy Mass<sup>36</sup> and presents the event in the key of the aforementioned virtue.

As a professor, he was also interested in the way the relationship with his pupils could influence him. Sometimes, to make an entire class of people listen to you may be difficult. Marie-Victorin speaks about that in terms of a challenge, but at the same time sees it as an opportunity to work with himself. Here is such an example:

This afternoon I had to stiffen up against my “strong” class. God helping me, I succeeded. Thank you Good Master. It’s providential, every time I start to be happy with myself, this Good Master brings me back to humility. So much the better, it purifies my intentions. My Jesus, see my works, see my pains, bless me, make me a “Brother.”<sup>37</sup>

A later note will come to speak about the future evolution of his career as a professor and about the way in which this aspect was seen by him in the context of Christian principles.<sup>38</sup> Here, like in other passages as well, references to the Eucharist, seen as an important tool in the practice of virtues can be found. Any moment of Eucharist is seen by him like a diamond encrusted by God in his heart<sup>39</sup> or as an exhortation to pray to the immaculate heart of Christ.<sup>40</sup>

## *Conclusions*

As we have tried to show, the diaries of Marie-Victorin contain important passages of spiritual autobiography. The author himself manages to become a voice of the genre from the Quebec area, offering at the same time a valuable testimony with relevance to contemporary Christianity and ecumenical perspectives. In a society like the Canadian one, where so many voices speak against the Christian values and refuse to see the good aspects brought by the Church into people’s lives, but also in a global context which seems to become day after day hostile to the genuine Christian values, we consider important to re-



discover the author not only through his activity as a botanist, but also as a priest and as a man with serious spiritual concerns that provides insights about the inner features of his soul, his values, his relationship with God and the way how Eucharist and virtues can constitute genuine aspects that influence the evolution of the spiritual life. A comparative reading with other representatives of the genre of spiritual autobiography, both from the Catholic space (Saint Augustine, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Teresa of Calcutta, Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska, Saint John Paul the Second and others), Protestant (like Dag Hammarskjöld<sup>41</sup>) or from the Orthodox one (like Saint John of Kronstadt, Saint Silouan the Athonite, Nicolae Berdiaev or others) will not only help us to have a holistic overview of spirituality but also to create bridges of dialogue in the contemporary ecumenical field.

#### NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> See for example: Viktor Rakhnianskyi, Oleksandra Chernikova, Polina Khabotniakova, Anna Gaidash, "Reinterpretation of Spiritual Autobiography Genre in Richard Rodriguez's Darling," in *Baltic Journal of English Language, Literature and Culture*, XII (2022), pp. 101-113; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, *Reperete ale autobiografiei spirituale din spațiul ortodox în secolele XIX și XX: Ioan de Kronstadt, Siluan Athonitul și Nicolae Berdiaev (Landmarks of the spiritual autobiography from the Orthodox space in the XIXth and XXth centuries)*, Lumen Press, Iassy, Romania, 2019; Mary Clark Moschella, "Spiritual Autobiography and Older Adults," in *Pastoral Psychology*, LX (2011), Issue 1, pp. 95-98; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, *Self-knowledge and Theology – studies in spiritual autobiography*, Argonaut Publishing House and Symphologic Publishing, Cluj-Napoca (Romania) and Gatineau (Canada), 2020; Liam Harte (ed.), *A History of Irish Autobiography*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Aspects of political theology in the spiritual autobiography of Dag Hammarskjöld," in *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 74 (2018), no. 4, a4857, pp. 1-5; W. B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2014; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "An interdisciplinary genre in the Theological Literature: the spiritual autobiography and its landmarks for the Orthodox space," in *Journal of Education, Culture and Society*, 8 (2018), no. 1, 2018, pp. 145-150; Michelle Marchetti Coughlin, *The life and Writings of Mehetabel Chandler Coit*, University of Massachusetts Press, Massachusetts, 2012; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "The relevance of humiliation and body pain in the spiritual autobiographies of Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint Silouan the Athonite," in *Studia Monastica*, LXI (2019), no. 2, pp. 409-415; D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiographies in Early Modern England*, Oxford

University Press, Oxford and New York, 2005; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Peace and its ecumenical value according to recent spiritual autobiographies," in *Studia Monastica*, LXIV (2022), no. 2, pp. 491-504; David Martin, "Rescripting Spiritual Autobiography," in *Exchange*, XXXV (2006), Issue 1, 2006, pp. 91-100; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Aspects of political theology in the spiritual autobiography of Nicolae Steinhardt," in *Postmodern Openings*, 13 (2022), no. 4, pp. 548-560.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.bgci.org/files/Canada/english\\_docs/marie-victorin\\_ang.pdf](https://www.bgci.org/files/Canada/english_docs/marie-victorin_ang.pdf), accessed 23. 11. 2022.

<sup>3</sup> See: Marie-Victorin, *Flore laurentienne*, 3rd edition, eds. Luc Brouillet, Isabelle Goulet et al., Presses de l'Université de Montréal, Montréal, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.bgci.org/files/Canada/english\\_docs/marie-victorin\\_ang.pdf](https://www.bgci.org/files/Canada/english_docs/marie-victorin_ang.pdf), accessed 23. 11. 2022.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example: André Bouchard, *Marie-Victorin à Cuba: Correspondance avec le frère Léon André Bouchard*, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, Montréal, 2007; René Audet, "Frère Marie-Victorin, environnementaliste," in *Bulletin d'histoire politique*, 23 (2015), no. 2, pp. 32-47; Pierre Dansereau, "Brother Marie-Victorin 1885-1944," in *The American Midland Naturalist*, 33 (1945), no. 2, pp. I-VIII; Pierre Couture, *Marie-Victorin - le botaniste patriote (biographie romancée)*, XYZ éditeur, Montréal, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Céline Arseneault, "Mise a Jour Bibliographique De Marie-Victorin: 1942-1985, Et Corrections," in *Bull. SAJIB*, 9 (1985), no. 3, pp. 62-65, available at: [http://www2.ville.montreal.qc.ca/jardin/archives/biblio\\_mv/biblio\\_corrigee.pdf](http://www2.ville.montreal.qc.ca/jardin/archives/biblio_mv/biblio_corrigee.pdf), accessed 23. 11. 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Gilles Beaudet et Lucie Jasmin, "Avant-propos des editeurs," in *Frere Marie-Victorin, Mon miroir. Journaux intimes (1903-1920). Texte integral*, eds. Gilles Beaudet et Lucie Jasmin, Les Editions Fides, Montreal, 2004, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> René Audet, "Frère Marie-Victorin, environnementaliste," p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> Yves Gingras, "L'itinéraire du Frère Marie-Victorin, é.c. (1885-1944)," in *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, XXXIX (1985), no. 1, pp. 77-78.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/frere-marie-victorin>, accessed 19. 01. 2023.

<sup>11</sup> For more information about his life and activity, see also: [http://www.biographi.ca/fr/bio/provancher\\_leon\\_12F.html](http://www.biographi.ca/fr/bio/provancher_leon_12F.html), accessed 19. 01. 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Céline Arseneault, "Mise a Jour Bibliographique De Marie-Victorin: 1942-1985, Et Corrections", pp. 62-65.

<sup>13</sup> Madeleine Lavallée, *Marie-Victorin, un itinéraire exceptionnel*, Éditions Héritage Inc., Montreal, 1983, p. 243.

<sup>14</sup> Céline Arseneault, "Mise a Jour Bibliographique De Marie-Victorin: 1942-1985, Et Corrections", p. 62.

<sup>15</sup> <https://fondationlionelgroulx.org/programmation/15/03/10/figures-marquantes/marie-victorin-et-les-piliers-de-la-recherche-scientifique>, access 19. 01. 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Yves Gingras, "L'itinéraire du Frère Marie-Victorin, é.c. (1885-1944)," p. 79.

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.biographi.ca/fr/bio/kirouac\\_conrad\\_17F.html](http://www.biographi.ca/fr/bio/kirouac_conrad_17F.html), accessed 19. 01. 2023.

<sup>18</sup> <https://espacepourlavie.ca/en/brother-marie-victorin>, accessed 19.01. 2023.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>20</sup> Céline Arseneault, "Mise a Jour Bibliographique De Marie-Victorin: 1942-1985, Et Corrections", pp. 62-65.

- <sup>21</sup> Frère Marie-Victorin, *Mon miroir. Journaux intimes (1903-1920). Texte integral*, eds. Gilles Beaudet et Lucie Jasmin, Les Editions Fides, Montreal, 2004.
- <sup>22</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991.
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- <sup>27</sup> Maria Faustina Kowalska, *Mic jurnal - milostivirea lui Dumnezeu în sufletul meu (Small Diary – The Mercy of God in My Soul)*, Press of the Roman-Catholic diocese from Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania, 2008.
- <sup>28</sup> Teresa of Calcutta, *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta*, Doubleday, New York, 2007.
- <sup>29</sup> For more information about this topic, see: Iuliu-Marius Morariu, “Nicolas Berdyaev – The philosophical and political relevance of a spiritual autobiography,” in *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 76 (1), a5933, 2020, pp. 1-5; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, “Spiritual autobiographies as sources of the ecumenism: Dag Hammarskjöld's case,” in *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 77 (2021), no. 4, a 6272, pp. 1-6; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, “Spiritual Autobiographies Between Philosophical and Spiritual Counselling,” in *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 21 (2022), issue 61, pp. 19-30.
- <sup>30</sup> Gilles Beaudet et Lucie Jasmin, “Avant-propos des editeurs”, pp. 5-7.
- <sup>31</sup> Frère Marie-Victorin, *Mon miroir. Journaux intimes (1903-1920). Texte integral*, p. 237.
- <sup>32</sup> Saint John of Kronstadt, *Viața mea în Hristos (My life in Christ)*, Sophia Press, Bucharest, Romania, 2005, p. 34. Cf. Alla Selawry, *Jean de Cronstadt - Médiateur entre Dieu et les hommes*, Les Edition du Cerf, Le Sel de la Terre, Paris, Pully, 2001.
- <sup>33</sup> Silouane the Athonite, *Ecrits Spirituels - extraits*, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, Begrolles en Mauges, 1976, p. 45.
- <sup>34</sup> Frère Marie-Victorin, *Mon miroir. Journaux intimes (1903-1920). Texte integral*, p. 237.
- <sup>35</sup> “Decidedly, Our Lord wants to give us a lesson in humility; we could not, because of the bad weather, carry it in triumph in our streets; our hearts had to make up for it.” *Ibidem*, p. 17.
- <sup>36</sup> “In my communion this morning, I acted like the little dog who sleeps in front of his master. Good Jesus, forgive me...” *Ibidem*, p. 20.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>38</sup> “This morning, dear brother visitor announces to me that I am placed in the upper course. This is an encouragement that I hope I will be able to take advantage of. It is so beautiful to have science in the service of religion. I would be happy to consecrate it to the service of the Good Master with a loving heart and an intelligence enlightened by faith and science! That is my whole ambition here below, and I would be guilty of not bringing to fruition the talents that the goodness of God has bestowed upon me.” *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> “Another communion! Another diamond that the Good Master encrusts in my heart and for which I do not know how to thank! My God, when I think, I am ashamed of myself: above all, I am ashamed of my poor heart. I started talking to my holiday highs... Good Jesus, water and grow.” *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>40</sup> “Sacred Heart of Jesus and you, o my Mother, bless this work that I am undertaking... you know why! In these pages may your holy names be under my pen at all times; because they must be...are they...at all times in my heart.” *Ibid.*, p. 11. Sometimes starting from this he also speaks about his own heart and the way how is touched by Christ. For example: “This morning, prayer that touched me on the sharing of the heart. No, my Jesus, I don’t want to share mine; it is so small, so shriveled that it is only right that I give it all to you”. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> See: Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, Faber& Faber, London, 1972.

Heinz-Uwe Haus  
and Theatre Making in  
Cyprus and Greece



*Edited by*  
Heinz-Uwe Haus  
Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe

This book presents to the reader a selection of the considerable amount of material written and published in relation to Heinz-Uwe Haus's productions of Brecht's plays and Brechtian productions by other dramatists, especially ancient Greek drama, in Cyprus and Greece since his production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* marked the launch of the Cyprus National Theatre in 1975 after the country's political turmoil that had culminated in the Turkish invasion. This includes material written by Haus at the time for his cast, announcements of the productions in the media, newspaper reviews and academic articles about the productions, conference contributions, and reflections by cast members (both professional actors and university faculty) and designers (set, costume, light, music). His work in Cyprus and Greece led to further collaborations on productions of ancient Greek plays across the world.

## **The Vision of the Fathers of the Last Centuries: Archbishop Averchie Taușev (1906-1976)**

**Abstract:** It is well known that Christian spirituality unanimously affirms that the main goal of the human being is to be deified. All human powers were originally directed towards the attainment of perfection, meaning, towards God. Following the fall into sin, this natural orientation was distorted and the direction of these powers was reoriented towards man and the world. Thus, a „conflict of interests” was created between the original human nature and the nature of the fallen man. The symbiosis of archetypal drive and will is the only way of restoration. This article aims to make the term of “striving” as understandable as possible. It must be understood as the only way to fulfillment and to the acquisition of true happiness that can be found only in God. Only with and through Him can human fulfillment (deification), be achieved. Although dedicated to the contemporary man, the work of Archbishop Averchie often contains negative statements regarding the evolution of the world. In fact, his perspective intends to awaken the modern man, but for some it may be received as a discouragement. Also as a member of ROCOR (Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia) and considering the period in which he lived, which was deeply impacted by the consequences of communism, his understanding of the neediness can be accepted.

**Keywords:** Christian spirituality, unseen battle, deification, contemporary fathers.

### *Introduction*

Archbishop Averchie Taușev (born 19th October 1906 – reposed 13th April 1976), was born in Kazan, Russia. On the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution, he departed his country and took his family with him. In 1950, he was sent to the USA, where he later became the fourth abbot of the Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York. He was

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also a great defender of Orthodoxy, which made many converts, such as Father Seraphim Rose, to appreciate and praise him.

*The Need for Virtue: Asceticism in a Modern Secularized Society* is a true plea for the salvation of the contemporary man. Since it describes many current situations, the modern man will find it easy to identify with this exposition. Also, as a common point, there will be many references to St. Theophan the Recluse because, as mentioned, he was one of the spiritual mentors of Father Averchie. Other references include St. Ignatius Brianchaninov and John of Kronstadt.

### *The being and meaning of asceticism - confessed pride and christian humility*

Modern society regards asceticism as a type of self-torture, or self-mutilation. This statement may be valid in some respects, but mainly in the context of the controversy between science and religion. It can be seen as a sceptical response to religious fundamentalism<sup>1</sup>. If religion is seen as meaningless and unrelated to reality, then asceticism can justly be called „self-torture”. For many, asceticism means tormenting one’s body, walking on hot coals, sleeping on mats, or even inflicting wounds on oneself. This shows nothing other than man’s departure from the authentic spiritual life to which all have been called<sup>2</sup>. Some people see a pale, weak man and consider him a great ascetic. They relate only to the outward image, paying no attention to the inward one. They judge them before ever getting to come to fully know them. Being tired or weak is not the same as being ascetic.

In addition, yet another mistaken perspective is that of those who see asceticism as an end in itself<sup>3</sup>, and that it is simply a matter of abstaining, without a spiritual goal, from certain things. Man that is caught up in the cares of the world will never be able to understand the true depth of spiritual striving. Between asceticism and the spiritual life, there is an inscrutable intimacy. The main foundation of the spiritual life is faith, but faith is not complete without good works. The will attracts grace, but the diligence of good works is also required. The words of Christ are put forward as an argument: `Not everyone who says to me: Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Even if there is a true desire for good works, sinful impulses still fight against this

desire. But as the intensity of good works increases, the power of the passions decreases. In order to free himself, man must continually practise good works<sup>4</sup>. This practice of good works, in the conception of Father Averchie, bears the name of asceticism, the practitioner being therefore labeled an ascetic. It is true that the struggle with the passions may bring a certain forcing of the nature or suffering, but this is by no means the self-torture that modern man considers.

Furthermore, asceticism is a fighter, an athlete. For just as physical exercise is important for athletes, so is the spiritual exercise for ascetics. St. Nicholas Cabasila, speaking of the Holy Mysteries, likens Christ to an athlete, who through them, gives to those who unite themselves with Him, the crown of His victory<sup>5</sup>. This unceasing effort also involves a certain suffering called by the Church Fathers the crucifixion of the self. „But those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their bodies with their passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24). St. Paul also speaks of a duality of man as a result of the fall, whereby the flesh resists the doing of good (Romans 7:18-25).

This constant opposition by the law of sin, which is in the body, makes asceticism a necessity. The essence of asceticism consists in the constant striving or forcing ourselves not to do the things to which sin impels us, but rather to do what the law of God, the law of goodness, demands of us.<sup>6</sup>

However, it is not the deeds themselves that are considered good or bad, but the inner disposition from which they spring. Even the Pharisees did good works, but they did it to obtain vainglory. The hard battle, the „unseen war” as it is called, is fought in the soul. For the gravitational centre of the spiritual life is in fact the disposition of the soul. St. Isaac the Syrian says in his *Words on Spiritual Striving* that, „Evil habits are more to be feared than devils”. In his definition of asceticism, Father Averchie concludes that the human soul cannot deny its divine origin, and its fulfillment is only with God. Any other attempt at fulfillment is limited and cannot fully satisfy the infinite human aspiration.

All people should practice the habit of prayer, because all are called to share God. Today’s society, which is oriented towards a purely bodily life, totally avoids any notion of neediness. People in this kind of society, even some Christians, consider asceticism to be something that belongs only to monks. Of course, their duty is known, but they are not the only ones called to union with God. Therefore, the way differs, but asceticism belongs to everyone.



Moreover, the difference is that monks understand that withdrawal from the world facilitates the cultivation of virtues. Just as one who wishes to plant a vineyard chooses good soil, and there he goes to plant it, so monks choose their retreat from the world. The essence is the same, the difference is in the external forms of life<sup>7</sup>. The world was not created just for monks, and it is not only monks who commit sins. Asceticism is, therefore, for everyone. It is in accordance with nature and is no abuse of or to human nature. The cause of the bankruptcy of many, is that happiness is sought from the outside properties and not from within; for only in the soul can man find rest. So, asceticism is a common property of mankind. Desire is not a human invention, unpleasant in the sight of God, as some say. It is the only way to attain holiness and fulfill one's purpose as a spiritual being. The likeness to God to which everyone is called, can only be acquired through holiness, "Be holy because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). The spiritual battle, therefore, is also a spiritual weapon available to all, but those who refuse it refuse God Himself.

Today's world is full of so-called prophets of good. These people all claim to know the recipe for absolute happiness. It is much easier to listen to them than to the word of God, just as it was easier for the prophets to listen to the devil. The temptation is great, and the way is presented as much simpler and easier. The devil instilled them with his pride, and they are not content to obey God, but rather they want to become gods. As a result, this fall from pride can be seen by following history. It is a self-imposed spirit of human pride. It caused Cain's fratricide, the earth's flood and the ark of Noah, Ham's disrespect, and led to the tragedy at the Tower of Babel. Socially, this led to disrespect between peoples, the desire for superiority, pride created strife and division in nations created national pride. This pride caused wars and an endless string of conflicts. Faith then was dissolved with unity, and so each nation created its own so-called god according to its own mentality and desire. Thus pagan religion was born, and the passions were turned into idols (man-made gods). So, the abyss of decay was reached well before the Incarnation.

As a matter of fact, since the Nativity, the Incarnate God had to teach people anew what humility means by the example of His own earthly life. Throughout His earthly life, the Lord Jesus Christ showed humility, culminating during His death on the Cross, which, at that

time, was an extremely shameful death. Christ's opening words were: "Repent!"

[...] that is, lay aside your pride, acknowledge your sinfulness, and turn to the Lord, not with feelings of superiority, but with poverty of soul, acknowledge your lowliness, your unworthiness, and pray for forgiveness of sins and for mercy on you.<sup>8</sup>

Not to mention, in the Sermon on the Mount, the "poor in spirit" were blessed, that is, the meek of their own free will, and the "weary and heavy laden" (Matthew 11:28) are those called to rest. In the next verse, the Lord Himself even commends Himself as "meek and lowly in heart." At the Last Supper, there is another episode of humility, of the washing of the disciples' feet. So this is the "Spirit of Christ"! The Spirit of Christ is that of humility, that is, the opposite of the self-imposing spirit of human pride"<sup>9</sup>.

Still, the question arises, how to reconcile Christian weakness with the strong cult of personality<sup>10</sup> promoted today. The answer to this question lies in the understanding that Christian weakness is a power at work in everyone; it is the power of God (2 Cor. 12:9). The proof of the truth of these words is the victory of Christianity over persecution. Man is free, and grace works where it is permitted. Man's pride can intervene, and then grace withdraws, having no room to manifest itself. The struggle is great indeed, but the victory comes from a deliberate and genuine human act. Even an enviable ascetic life, if not accompanied by humility, is doomed to failure. Asceticism does not exempt man from heresy; and heresy is the fruit of pride. From here to the schism, the distance was very short<sup>11</sup>. Communism for example, led by this spirit of pride, promoted the break from all that is transcendent. Its focus has shifted towards man, towards his beauty, strength, ability and intelligence. It created, in effect, a rebirth of the primordial sin<sup>12</sup>, and the selfish image of man has replaced the image of God at the center of the existence of creation. This is the complete opposite of what the Holy Apostle Paul advised against human selfishness: "Bear one another's burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

Self-imposing pride has replaced any trace of godliness in man. The strong, capable, wise and self-sufficient man is his own god because he prides himself in such things. The disaster of the departing from the „Spirit of Christ" is and will become greater and greater. Only the spirit of humility and gentleness can save mankind.

## *The importance of spiritual discernment - evangelical love and human selflessness*

Referring to 1 Cor. 2:14, Father Averchie specifies that there are some people who cannot understand the things of the spirit. They can be meek, good, soulful but not spiritual. Man is made up of body and soul. The soul is to be regarded as the source of life, the cause of life and movement in every living being. The Savior's statement in Mk. 8:35 is much easier to understand in this light. But if it were only that, man would not deserve the title of crown of all creation. In the Epistle to the Hebrews 4, 12, St. Paul says that man is made up of body, soul and spirit. The soul is inferior to the spirit, because, as Saint Theophan the Recluse, whom Father Averchie quotes, says, the soul is entirely oriented towards the ordering of our temporary, earthly existence.

So, man is threefold, and the body belongs to the world, for it is made of earth (Acts 3:19). It was wisely made up by the Creator. He was endowed with the five senses and was given the functions of reproduction and survival in order to live and multiply. Without a soul, it would just be a lifeless machine<sup>13</sup>. It is the soul that transmits the sap of life to the body. The actions of the soul are divided into three and correspond to the three categories identified by psychology: thoughts - cognitive psychology; feelings - psychology of feelings and desires - psychology of desire. The organ of mental work is the brain, and the organ of feeling is the heart. The nucleus where all human experience is accumulated, is the heart. The will is the master of desires and is not managed by any organ. With the soul and body being connected, they generate the action of the will through the signals that are transmitted. The will then acts through the body. Therefore, the soul performs the three actions specified above, while the body performs the mundane ones. However, there is, according to some, a distorted view of the body:

The carnal body is always sinful, troubled by passions and vices, and not the body in its ordinary sense. When we speak of mortification of the body, of the flesh, we mean the crushing of sinful tendencies...and not contempt for the body as such.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, what distinguishes man from other living things is the higher principle of his existence, the divine element in his make-up, the crown of body and soul, namely the spirit. If all this is taken into

account, man can find that his purpose is far greater, and its fulfilment requires a special effort. Special does not mean unreal, but rather different from the spirit of the world. Thus, the concept of asceticism can be brought to light.

Once again, Father Averchie quotes from the book *The Spiritual Life and How to be Attuned to It* by St. Theophan the Recluse, and describes three modes of manifestation of the Spirit: Fear of God, the conscience and the thirst for God.<sup>15</sup> The first refers to the fact that man is very much aware of the existence of a higher Principle of life, above all existence, and fears it, knowing its bounty and greatness. Then, conscience intervenes to do what is pleasing to God. Thirst for God is that thirst for the infinite, for endless fulfillment, outside the sphere of worldly limitation and insufficiency, for an infinite aspiration cannot be fulfilled in finite matter. Therefore, the spiritual life is concerned with what is necessary for the spirit. Man's aspiration after the infinite is related to his likeness to God. For, man was not created to be a microcosm but a micro-theos.<sup>16</sup> But contemporary man has lost sight of this orientation of being. Ignoring the spiritual side has led to visible consequences in man's life, and to losing sight of the concept of spiritual striving. The soul is in no way material: "Materialists deny the soul completely, and consider it part of the brain and nervous system. Therefore, they consider the spiritual life a materialistic manifestation, studying it as a function of the brain, of the nervous system."<sup>17</sup>

So, the cause is that the self-imposed<sup>18</sup> pride of man has replaced faith in God; and the soul has been elevated above the spirit. But when the spirit claims its own, human pride will not be able to satisfy its needs, but will seek something worldly. "This kind of imitation, this substitution of spirituality for something emotional is a defining characteristic of our times"<sup>19</sup>. Today's man no longer differentiates between spiritual and worldly feelings and is often confused. In iconography, he prefers the rounded, red-cheeked, worldly face to the "elongated" spiritual one; religious singing is only good if it resembles opera, otherwise it generates boredom. Spiritual depth is overlooked. Father Averchie says that the difference is that a spiritual experience will never stimulate a bodily sensation.

Even so, the society around money has created a life-destroying mechanism. The focus is on productivity, and human life no longer allows retreat into introspection. The world is tense, always under pressure. Out of a desire to relax, man turns to the superficial solutions of the world, because only they are designed to allow him this repose

of relaxation. This entertainment is addictive and numbs the spiritual life; and so, man becomes exclusively “flesh”. This is the state of man, who, in the words of the psalmist, becomes a fool. Only by trusting in God can man rise from this depravity in which he has fallen.

Nevertheless, division and hatred are other consequences of this spirit of “self-imposed pride.” But the New Covenant promotes something else altogether, and by this the Christian identifies himself in society (John 13:34-35). Love generates life; the world was created out of love, asceticism is also born from love. In fact, the whole New Testament can be summed up in the verses of Matthew 22:37-40. This divine love mentioned cannot be isolated, but must be shared in order for it to be fulfilled.

Then follows the teaching about his deity (Matthew 22:41-46). The reason is: “Without faith that Jesus is the Son of God, there can be no true love of God and neighbor”<sup>20</sup>. It is only through the awareness that Christ sacrificed Himself for His neighbor that one can acquire true love for them; this is what today’s society needs:

Love believes man with his soul and bodily infirmities. The saddest situation is when the one you love does not understand you. You tell him your troubles, and he doesn’t believe you. This is the surest way to hurt someone. If you keep telling him that he’s helpless, that he’s eternally sick, or that he’s stupid and good for nothing, you’re sure to bring him down. A child who is always told he’s stupid will become that way, even if he’s a normal child.<sup>21</sup>

To cure the love of the poison of selfishness requires grace. Without it, man will consequentially live in the illusion of a false love of neighbor and of God, driven by self-love, unknowingly. This is not how God intended humankind to live.

In the society of altruism and philanthropy, morality is separated from religion. Christians are considered selfish because they do good either for fear of Judgement or for the reward of eternity. It is intended to show that autonomous morality is superior to Christian morality. The notion of being a Christian implies much more than just performing good works. It rather also presupposes first and foremost the faith in God, in Jesus Christ the Incarnate, and witness to Him.

Christianity makes this possible, it shows us that the purpose of doing good is present in our natural love of God as loving Father and doer of good, and in our love of our neighbor as brother in Christ. The

fatherly commandments of our loving God and our kinship with our neighbour inspire us.<sup>22</sup>

Concerning those who believe but do not do good works, the Pharisees' reproach is also their reproach. This superficial faith is severely reprov'd by the Saviour; St. James, in his Epistle, draws attention to the necessity of good works to give life to faith. The fault in this case lies not with religion but with the person.

In the view of rewarding good deeds and punishing bad ones, this conception is totally wrong. "These are neither exhortations nor pedagogical methods of inducing man to act in a particular way. They are the result of choosing a way of life, to which Jesus the Savior warns us very clearly."<sup>23</sup> The only true motivation that remains is love. However, the motivation of the morally autonomous man is not quite right either: "I do good only as much as is necessary for my own interest and success. For example, I help my neighbour, expecting that later he will help me in my time of need. I do no harm to anyone, lest anyone harm me"<sup>24</sup>. Christianity, on the other hand, is more than speculation, it is a way of life embodied in deeds<sup>25</sup>.

Another hidden spirit behind philanthropic actions is often unconscious vanity<sup>26</sup>. "The feeling of vanity is the motivation of the founders and administrators of philanthropic societies, for rich people who share a tiny amount of their wealth for good deeds, and then show themselves as philanthropists"<sup>27</sup>. Only the love of God can therefore determine a true moral life, in an age in which welfare and social assistance is a fad, but devoid of sap<sup>28</sup>. This perspective is perhaps too negative, ignoring many positive aspects of contemporary society. For example, many young people who have not had catechesis or deep spiritual experiences, have a desire to become better and help others by believing in a better world. Spirituality must look to man with hope, and make the most of this contemporary situation by filling it with sap. The Church also focuses first on its philanthropic actions and then on what lies behind other social actions. The Church's sap-filled action is perhaps the best response.

According to the author, the lack of sincere love for God and neighbor, dullness of thought, disinterest in the needs of one's neighbor and forgetfulness of the evangelical commandments marked by lack of repentance are the real causes of man's moral decay. To love God and to act with the thought that He is always present is the moral exhortation of salvation. Forgetting or even just ignoring the words of Scripture is also a consequence of man's pride:

It is the very same pride of self-importance of man who is unwilling to obey the evangelical commandments and unwilling to bow his head of iron and brow of brass before the teaching of Jesus and recognize that man's only true and saving way is the gospel of love of God, first of all, and secondly, of love of neighbor.<sup>29</sup>

### *Acquiring evangelical love - retreat of conscience*

Referring once again to Theophan the Recluse, Archbishop Averchie warns that the man of today is seized by self-love and selfishness, and therefore cannot acquire evangelical love. Faith in Christ and imitation of His humility is the only way to reach this love. The mere awareness of the Sacrifice of Calvary cannot fail to fill man with love and gratitude. There is also a false love of God, also born of pride. This is not a spiritual love, but a worldly and sensory love. Man does not love God, but loves his love for God. As St. Ignatius Brianchaninov said, the proof of sincere love for God is obedience and the fulfillment of the commandments. Repentance and the reading of Holy Scripture are seen as the only solutions to this issue. The level of faithfulness and love to which man must attain is that of the Cross:

God's supreme love was revealed through the Cross. Christ gave Himself out of love for our salvation, for our restoration. We too must strive to match His love in order to be cured of the selfishness in which we are sinking.<sup>30</sup>

Of course, the Holy Gospel's commands are contrary to the selfish desires of worldly happiness, which is why there are people who resist them. Modern society is more theonomic than atheistic. The main targets of the attacks are miracles, because, according to them, they are contrary to the laws of nature. Yet, there are multiple discoveries in science. What seemed impossible and unnatural a few years ago, is now discovered and proven by science. The most important law of nature is the law of God Who created nature. Just because miracles are not understood, it does not mean that they do not exist; in fact, they are in no way unnatural but super-natural.

Even so, some reject the Gospel because they consider it as impractical. "And, indeed, the Gospel is non-viable if we regard contemporary lifestyles as natural, normal, reasonable and unchanging"<sup>31</sup>. The interpretation of the future of this millennium is

categorical; it will either be saved or plunge into the abyss: *tertium non datur*.

Man, as an existing being, needs love. Unable to feel true love, he seeks substitutes for it in society: a political vision, a particular leader, a course of personal development, or a community whose ideal it is to be followed until death. These represent his thirst for love of God and neighbor, or they are intertwined (1 John 4:20). So, love of neighbor is an endemic need. Because of the fall of man, this love has also entered the sphere of selfishness. The love of one's neighbor is in fact the love of one's own feelings towards that neighbor. St. Paul teaches us that, „Love does not seek its own” (1 Cor. 13:15). “The man who loves is unselfish. The selfish person wants to possess everyone and everything. The loving man desires to give and to be given”<sup>32</sup>.

Love must, therefore, be spiritual and not physical. For the latter can easily turn into hatred. „Unfortunately, the man of the consumer society is dominated by two passions: the earning of money and the pleasures of the flesh”<sup>33</sup>. This is why the Savior manifests Himself so strongly in Holy Scripture against all that is related to selfishness and worldly love. Passionate love makes one to love oneself in the person of the other. The man is willing to do anything, taking this love to the extreme. “Spiritual love knows no partiality. It is reasonable and disciplined”<sup>34</sup>. The lack of peace in the soul brought by this love is the cause of the lack of peace in the whole world. Peace conferences held throughout the world are nothing more than delusions without this spirit of evangelical peace.

The contemporary man leads his existence as if consciousness were absent from the sphere of his activities. He often deludes himself in temporary pleasures without thinking deeply about whether something is really good or not<sup>35</sup>. The pursuit of happiness is good, but with discernment.

Often overlooked by many is the fact that those who committed crimes in the past usually understood that what they were doing was wrong and often repented and wanted to make amends for what they had done. Unlike them, most of our contemporaries have lost the concept of evil. When they do wrong, they will do it cold-bloodedly and without any emotion. They are numb to any prick of conscience and thus see no reason to repent.<sup>36</sup>

Lack of conscience is also a hallmark of our times. It is inscribed in everyone's heart ( Rom. 2:15) even if it is ignored. The effort that contemporary asceticism has to make is precisely to awaken



conscience, which can indeed become the source of human fulfillment. Although, some scientists label consciousness as man's 'self-preservation instinct or limit human existence strictly to the factual level'<sup>37</sup> and it also considers its mistake as possible<sup>38</sup>.

However, the Christian who is aware that this conscience is the divine tool to light the way to salvation, cannot agree with such statements. If this were so, the martyrs would in fact not exist. If it were merely an instinct of self-preservation, then man would not willingly sacrifice himself to save the life of his neighbor. Even so, these views can easily be dismantled. Only a conscience with a "sharp edge" can lead man to his ultimate goal, which is salvation and the sight of God. "The only escape is to guard our conscience. The Holy Fathers distinguish four ways of doing this: through our relationship with God, with our neighbour, with the world around us and with ourselves"<sup>39</sup>.

Repentance and reconciliation with one's conscience is the only way out of the fall into which the world is heading. For the "brook" of Matthew 5:25-26 is none other than conscience.

### *The Christian concept of freedom - guarding the heart in the face of worldly turmoil*

In order to understand the concepts of need, work, good and evil, it is necessary to know the concept of freedom. All these are the result of a decision, such as a deliberate human act. Necessity for good is an act of freedom. Man does not wish to become an ascetic out of obligation, but out of free will.

Moreover, man is superior in freedom and he was created by God with this freedom ingrained in himself. The choice of good over evil, or evil over good is, in fact, an act of human will. The motivation for this gift is obvious. Love expects love. This relationship is demanded by a free sharing, following a deliberate and unconstrained act. It is this specific obedience that kept the first people, Adam and Eve, in communion with God. Out of malice, the devil tempted them by cleverness, wishing to turn this free will against the One Creator. Once fallen from good, they felt the evil of disobedience and the turmoil of turning the will in the wrong direction. The tree that was placed in the middle of the garden (which God warned them not to eat from), became the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Once freedom and obedience were denied, the consequence was falling into the bondage of sin. This was the risk of man's creation<sup>40</sup>. As a result, human powers began to decline. Discernment began to darken:

The horror of man's condition lies in the alienation that has affected his mind. He has the impression that he does everything according to his will, that he acts completely independently, but in reality he is only doing the will of his master, the devil.<sup>41</sup>

Through the Incarnation, Christ took on „the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7), in order to free man from this captivity and restore the sin-wounded nature. He who obeys the Lord and is not dominated by sin, is considered free. The vicious man, incapable of satisfying his lusts, is still praying from hell on earth. For the man who is devout, however, the complete opposite is true for him. To be free, therefore, is to come out of the sphere of sin. Modern man's concept of freedom is completely different: To do whatever he wants, is to be free. Instead of being free from sin, people are chasing freedom from sin. Anything contrary to this principle is considered to be a constraint: According to St. John of Kronstadt, “man regards going to church, fasting, prayer, penance, and all the teachings and requirements of the Church as bondage, not knowing that all these are the requirements of his soul.” Thus the true essence of things is distorted and misunderstood by all who are controlled by the passions.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, the sinful man also shows his coldness and weakness in his relationship with his other fellow men. The sinner looks for every opportunity to justify his animalistic drive: freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of the individual, freedom of human rights, amongst many others. However, freedom is much more than that. To equate the concept of freedom with the concept of good is wrong. Choosing is indeed an act of freedom, but choosing right or wrong is an act of judgement. Misunderstood freedom has the following consequence: “For I do not do the good I will, but the evil I do not will, that I do” (Romans 7:19). Father Averchie calls self-imposed pride the cause of this distortion. For example, a journalist who is free to write anything, even evil topics, is like the murderer let loose. Moral debasement is the characteristic symbol of our times. The punishment to be received is described in detail in 2 Peter 2:9-19.

Guarding the heart is a requirement often found in the Holy Fathers. From the heart spring all human actions, as the Savior teaches

(Matthew 15:19). This means that a close attention to all inner movements is necessary:

“You take care of yourself!”. An important piece of advice that should serve as a lesson to us all [...] i.e. pay attention to your thoughts, feelings, desires and emotional states. Pay attention to everything that is going on in your soul, in your heart. Don't allow your heart to become a source of evil.<sup>43</sup>

To have a heart like an infant, as the Savior urges, means to preserve the innocence and purity that an infant has when it is small. Guarding the heart is necessary precisely for this purpose. In order for a man to guard his heart, he must first guard his senses, for these are the external receptors that transmit the signal to the heart. Negative influences on these organs must be avoided. „The opposite of the life lived in incessant vigil is destructive, and a destructive life is what most people lead today - people who do not care for the purity of the heart and life.”<sup>44</sup> People are careless and no longer watch over the external elements to guard the internal; on the contrary, they focus their existence on them. Man's soul is like a highway, neglect of the spiritual things defines this age. All that contemporary man seeks is his own pleasure and comfort. His only concern is that there is no pleasure and that he has not exhausted it yet. A need for spiritual self-discipline is obvious in a time when it is hard to find a moment of respite. The disorganized man must gather himself up within himself. He who does not understand himself cannot understand the one next to him either, and so, relationships between people are therefore destroyed. He who does not watch himself is not prepared to meet sorrow either, and that is why it unpleasantly surprises him.

Inattention also punishes the person concerned by boredom and monotony. Pleasure is exhausted, and consequently he is stricken with disappointment and sadness. This is one of the main causes of the increased suicide rate as well. “The greatest harm of inattention is that man's spiritual development is completely stagnant.”<sup>45</sup> The solution is to occupy time with spiritual activities and avoid time which is idle. Activities should also be carried out as calmly and gently as possible.

## *Resisting evil - fighting the unseen war*

The Savior urges that we should not resist an evil person (Matthew 5:38-42). However, this consists in not responding to evil with evil. Nevertheless, some people see this as a message that urges Christians to adopt an attitude of resignation in the face of evil. This theory is completely wrong because the fight against evil is the main purpose of Christian need. It all starts from a misconception of evil and struggle. "It is necessary that the struggle against evil be independent of the personal component."<sup>46</sup> Besides this, the Christian is duty-bound to fight every manifestation of evil.

Furthermore, Christians should not have any desire to take revenge, and so the Lord's Prayer teaches him that in order to be forgiven, he must, in turn, forgive others and if necessary, himself. The contemporary man is very easily offended by everything, and, as a result, he is filled with hatred and enmity. The stronger the pride, the stronger the offence is felt. Forgiveness is the way to peace. But not all peace is good, only the peace which unites man with God. To live in peace is not just to agree with atheists, immoral people, theomaniacs, persecutors of the faith, or even with heretics. "Yet we often understand and do just the opposite. Self-imposed pride forgives everything, except offenses to one's own person."<sup>47</sup> To look with indifference at the way evil destroys the world and people, is a sin against the love of one's neighbor. For the defence of truth and faith, and for the suppression of evil, extreme measures are seldom permitted in some cases. For example, in order to save the innocent from death, Christians are allowed to take up arms. Evil must not be covered up in any way, shape, or form, but there are some cases in which spiritual discernment is essential. Another example is when a hungry orphan steals a loaf of bread, he should be looked upon with compassion rather than immediately handed over to the law.

The conclusion is this: the Christian fights against the evil in his neighbor, not against himself, and evil must be overcome in one's own heart.

Moreover, the duty of the Christian and of asceticism is to fight evil unceasingly. The problem of the contemporary man is that he seeks evil first in his neighbor and only then in himself. In order to fight healthily against external evil, it is necessary first to overcome the internal evil. This is the war waged by the ascetics of all times and is known as the "unseen war". As the Scripture was left for all Christians, so this war must be waged by all Christians.

Today, however, the unseen war is confused with the physical war, and the neediness is seen as belonging only to clerics and monks. This war: "Is a continual, inward struggle that Christians wage in order to attain Christian perfection."<sup>48</sup> The soul's freedom from sins is understood by this perfection or holiness. The Savior came into the world for all, and the Holy Spirit descends upon all; therefore the struggle is required of all. The Church Fathers recognize the weight of this war because it is an interior war, waged against one's own selfishness. There are four dispositions of the heart that the Christian must have: never to rely on his own strength alone, to have unwavering faith, to work continually and to pray unceasingly. Pride has been man's problem throughout history, and when he trusts only in his own power, the other dispositions are nullified from the start. The contemporary man thinks he is "somebody" and is unaware of his weakness which blocks the work of grace.

Therefore, the first step to victory is to be aware of weaknesses. In this process, prayer is the way to gain this knowledge of weaknesses, but also God's help. "If prayer is the common work between man and God, it is for man to strive...and for God to give him the fruits of prayer."<sup>49</sup> Caution or vigilance is then required in this struggle to guard the heart and mind. The last step is in understanding that if there happened to be a fall it is surely known to God, and allowed for a purpose. The fall must also be dealt with the hope of crying out to God. Sometimes suffering is a means of creating closeness to God. The Merciful God of Scripture will not leave man in his time of need if he cries out in faith. Only grace can ensure victory in this war.

So, the test by which a man can tell whether he has full hope is the state after each fall. If the result is a depressing pain, then there is still a trace of pride, no matter how small, and the man is disappointed at the failure of his own effort in his conception. Quite another is the state of the one who recognises his own helplessness: he will recognise his own helplessness and ask God for help.

### *Christian spiritual striving*

Personal effort in the process of repentance is the essence of Christian need. Without personal effort and a deliberate act of man, God does not act. The moment the man decides to act, grace immediately comes to strengthen him. „Man's efforts are like a chalice

into which God drips his grace.”<sup>50</sup> The more the desire for good is increased, the more grace is grabbed.

Passages on the importance of spiritual striving in the unseen warfare are also found in Holy Scripture: “The kingdom of heaven is taken by effort, and those who strive lay hold of it” (Matthew 11:12). Once human intention is expressed, the work of grace intervenes and makes victory possible. The one who ventures on the path of spiritual ascent is called an ascetic and “asceticism is the only way to the bright and delightful beacon of happiness which everyone seeks.”<sup>51</sup>

To conclude, “Pride of self-imposition” is the main cause of the decay of contemporary man in the view of Father Averchie Taușev. Liberation from its bondage is the basic idea of his entire work.

#### NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> John F. Haught, *Știință și religie: de la conflict la dialog [Science and Religion: From Conflict to Dialogue]*, XXI: Eonul Dogmatic, București, 2002, pp. 22–24.

<sup>2</sup> Averchie Taușev, *Nevoința pentru virtute: asceza într-o societate modernă secularizată [Striving for Virtue: Asceticism in a Modern Secularized Society]*, Doxologia, Iași, 2016, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Averchie Taușev, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Sfântul Nicolae Cabasila, *Despre viața în Hristos [On Life in Christ]*, Editura Sophia, București, 2011. pp. 43–45.

<sup>6</sup> Averchie Taușev, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31–32.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup>In the DEX [The Explicative Dictionary of the Romanian Language] it is defined as follows: „Cult of personality = systematic attitude of (exaggerated) provoked and controlled admiration of a leader (or personality), considered as endowed with special intellectual, emotional, organizational, etc. qualities”. This attitude can also be directed towards the individual and is exactly what the author wishes to express.

<sup>11</sup> Grigore-Dinu Moș, „Știința și religia în mentalitatea omului contemporan. Riscurile ideologizării [Science and religion in contemporary man's mentality. The risks of ideologization]”, *Tabor*, 10 (October 2014), p. 77. Most probably this is the concept that Fr. Averchie refers to in his work.

<sup>12</sup> Averchie Taușev, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 49.

<sup>14</sup> Ilarion Alfeyev, *Taina Credinței [The Mystery of Faith]*, Doxologia, Iași, 2014, p. 109.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 51.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>17</sup> Averchie Taușev, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>18</sup> Although it is an ambiguous term and expressed in a unique way by the author, it can be understood if viewed contextually. In fact, the author is referring to the way in which pride manifests itself predominantly in modernity, namely the subjugation of others to the cult of the self, seen as the existential absolute. The battle with pride has been shifted from its abduction to the abduction of those who threaten its supremacy.

<sup>19</sup> Ilarion Alfeyev, *op.cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> Averchie Taușev, *op.cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>21</sup> IPS Andrei Andreicuț, *Dragostea fascinantă și nemuritoare [The Fascinating and Immortal Love]*, Ediția a II-a, Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2011, p. 42.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 67.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>25</sup> IPS Andrei Andreicuț, *Mai putem trăi frumos?: Pledoarie pentru o viață morală curată [Can We Still Live Beautifully? A Plea for an Innocent Moral Life]*, Ediția a II-a, Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2012, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> Here one can consider both the wounds than communism had left in the author's heart and the excessive greed of certain persons from the higher social classes of the American society in which he was living.

<sup>27</sup> Averchie Taușev, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> IPS Andrei Andreicuț, "Mai putem trăi...", p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Averchie Taușev, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>32</sup> IPS Andrei Andreicuț, "Mai putem trăi...", p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>34</sup> Averchie Taușev, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>35</sup> Stelian Pașca-Tușa, „Psalmul 1 - abordare isagogică, exegetică și teologică [Psalm I: An isagogical, exegetical, and theological approach]”, *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Theologia Orthodoxa* 59, 2 (2014), p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> Averchie Taușev, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>37</sup> Grigorie-Dinu Moș, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>38</sup> John F. Haught, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>39</sup> Averchie Taușev, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>40</sup> Ilarion Alfeyev, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>41</sup> Averchie Taușev, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 115.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>49</sup> Ilarion Alfeyev, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

<sup>50</sup> Averchie Taușev, *op. cit.*, p. 160

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p.162.

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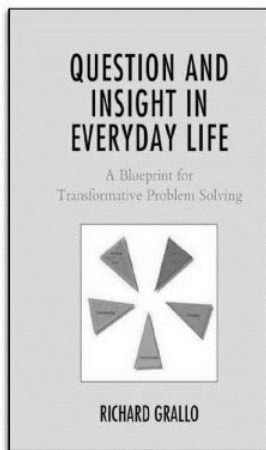


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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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## **The Diocese of Vicina in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century: from the Archbishopric to the Metropolitan Church**

**Abstract:** The Metropolitan Church of Vicina, the last religious eparchy established by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in the Istro-Pontic space, had a relatively short functioning period, between the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The cessation of its operation occurred in the context of the organization of the first metropolitan diocese dependent on the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the North-Danubian area, inhabited by Romanians, the Metropolitan Church of Ungrovlahiei. The Diocese of Vicina is thus a real link between the metropolitan ecclesiastical organization of the area inhabited by Romanians on the right bank of the Danube and the one on the left one. If the moment and the context in which it ceased to function are well known, those of its beginning still remain insufficiently elucidated.

**Keywords:** Vicina, ecclesiastical history, Byzantine rule, Ecumenical Patriarchate, Vlach-Bulgarian Tsardom

### *Controversial aspects regarding the history of the city and Diocese of Vicina*

*The history of the city of Vicina and, implicitly, of the homonymous diocese, presents a series of obscure aspects. Among these, the location of the fortress and the moment of the establishment of the ecclesiastical diocese occupy the foreground.*

Indisputably, given the commercial importance of Vicina in the Genovese trade of the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the location of the city was the aspect most vividly debated by historians. The location of Vicina - fortress, port and ecclesiastical diocese - stated Ion Dumitriu-Snagov, “attracted the attention of researchers with the intensity with which Troy raised more or less enigmatic questions”<sup>1</sup>.

The enigmatic citadel of Vicina, this veritable “Romanian Troy”, as the same historian called it, has been a subject of researchers’ concerns since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the discussions regarding its location constituting a still unresolved controversy. The controversy generated an “extensive and wide-ranging bibliography from the methodology of romantic history to that of multidisciplinary techniques”<sup>2</sup>.

We do not insist on presenting the controversy determined by the different opinions formulated by scholars regarding the location of Vicina. We only specify the fact that over time, they proposed its location, both outside the area inhabited by Romanians, in Cuban, Albania or in Bulgaria at Vidin, and inside it, in the Istro-Pontic area, at Măcin, Noviodunum-Isaccea, Nufăru, Troesmis-Turcoaia, Salsovia-Mahmudia, Axiopolis-Cernavodă, Capidava, Păcuil lui Soare or Samova<sup>3</sup>. We do not insist on this aspect as it has a secondary significance within our approach.

The impossibility of locating Vicina remains all the more inexplicable, since the information about it begins in 1086 and continues with interruptions, but also with a relative abundance between the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the 14<sup>th</sup> century, until the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, more precisely until 1465<sup>4</sup>.

The limited and extremely brief information at our disposal means that long periods and a number of aspects of the functioning of the Metropolitan Church of Vicina remain unknown or controversial. One of these, the most significant in our opinion, is the determination, even only approximately, of the moment of the establishment of the Istro-Pontic diocese.

### *The Diocese of Vicina from archbishopric to metropolitan church*

In two studies dedicated to this aspect, carried out two decades ago, following the analysis of the evolution of the political, military and religious factors in the region, we tried to offer an answer to the problem regarding the time of the establishment of the Metropolitan Church of Vicina<sup>5</sup>. Currently, by including in the discussion other information related to some of the mentioned factors, we consider it

necessary to resume the discussion on the subject and reevaluate the conclusions.

A more complete approach to the subject requires, first of all, at least a brief presentation of the content of the information from the sources available to us. We will add to this news the opinions expressed over time by various historians who have studied this issue.

The main information regarding the operation of the diocese of Vicina comes, first of all, from a series of patriarchal acts. A *Notitia episcopatum*, published by the historian Heinrich Gelzer in 1901, contains among the component pieces a list of the archbishoprics within the Eastern Church during the time of Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos (1258/1259-1282), mentions at position 162 “of Vicina (ἡ Βιτζίνα)”<sup>6</sup>. The compilation of the list in question was dated by Heinrich Gelzer between 1260-1270, and by Conrad Fink in 1249-1250, a proposal accepted by most researchers<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, an Appendix to the same notitia, records it among the archbishoprics, with rank 32, “and that of Ditzina (Vicina, n.n.) also 32 (καὶ ἡ Διτζίνη ὁμοῦ λβ’)”, just like the Archbishopric of Kodros<sup>8</sup>. In the same Appendix, in an apostille drawn up in 1299, it was recorded that

it should be known that, after the Greeks (Byzantines, n.n.) left Constantinople, by the punishment of Christ, until they returned to him, out of the good will to God, these metropolitan churches were honoured [with the rank of] [...] Didymoteichos, Vicina, Melagina<sup>9</sup>.

Another list, which mentions the archbishops raised around its drafting to the rank of metropolitan church, records at position 99 that “of Vicina (ὁ Βιτζίνης)”<sup>10</sup>. The historian Gheorghe I. Brătianu proposed the dating of this list after the year 1300, during the reign of the Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282-1328)<sup>11</sup>. A list of the participants in a patriarchal synod, held in the summer of 1285 in the capital of the empire, mentions among the metropolitans present, at position 35, the first known bishop of the diocese at the mouths of the Danube, in office from a previous year, “the humble metropolitan of the city guarded by God, Vicina, and hypertimos, Theodoros”<sup>12</sup>. A late note, drawn up shortly after 1343, also records that

[the metropolitan see] of Vicina, having also been honored [raised in hierarchical rank] by this emperor [Andronikos Palaiologos the Elder], was then despised, because the place is subject to the barbarians and has few Christian inhabitants<sup>13</sup>.

Some, indirect, sigilographical information is added to this information. It is the legend of a lead seal, attributed by specialists to the ecumenical patriarch Germanos II (1222-1240), discovered in an unidentified place on the territory of Dobruja, which has the following text: “Germanos, by the mercy of God, Archbishop of Constantinople, of The New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch”<sup>14</sup>. The significance of this seal lies in the fact that it accompanied a letter from the ecumenical patriarch of Nicaea addressed to a high hierarch who resided in the Istro-Pontic space, most likely even the superior of the Church here.

The available information leads to the conclusion that the eparchial see of Vicina was not raised directly to metropolitan rank. Prior to this moment, he held an archbishopric rank, directly dependent on the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in which sense a number of historians expressed themselves.

Since the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Michel le Quien advanced the idea that the diocese of Vicina was a suffragan bishopric or archbishopric of the Metropolitan Church of Alania, in the area of the Caucasus Mountains, a status preserved until the time of Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos, when it was raised to the rank of metropolitan church<sup>15</sup>. Later, the thesis formulated by him was taken up by Johann Elieser Theodor Wiltsch and Heinrich Gelzer<sup>16</sup>.

The basis of this theory is a forced or erroneous interpretation of piece information transmitted by the Byzantine historian Georgios Pachymeres. According to his account, following the defeat suffered by the Mongol noyan Nogai, a number of 16,000 Alans addressed the bishop of Vicina to mediate with Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos their establishment in the Byzantine Empire<sup>17</sup>.

An equally atypical opinion is formulated by Nicolae Iorga. In his synthesis dedicated to the history of the Romanian Church, referring to the political and religious situation of Bulgaria during the crisis at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, he states that

it is certain that, in these circumstances, Mircea, (Smileț, tsar between 1292 -1298, n.n.), his son and son-in-law, rulers of the shores of the Black Sea to the mouths of the Danube, stand in a bond of submission with the Greek patriarchal Church, brought back to Constantinople. In Varna, even before, there were bishops with the old metropolitan title: for the land that was called in Antiquity “Little Scythia”, they were given a suffragan bishop, who was placed in Vicina<sup>18</sup>.

As can be seen, for reasons that escape us, and in total contradiction with the information transmitted by the mentioned sources, Nicolae Iorga identifies in the diocese of Vicina a simple bishopric dependent on the Metropolitan Church of Varna. This theory becomes all the more surprising as a fact revealed by the information transmitted by the various sources, in the last decades of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Metropolitan Church of Vicina registered its maximum affirmation within the Eastern Church.

A few decades later, Radu Ștefan Ciobanu (Vergatti) also spoke for the initial organization of Vicina as a bishopric. In his opinion, archaeological, documentary and numismatic research attests the fact that “between the Empire of Nicaea and the area of the mouths of the Danube there were close ties in the period approximately between 1240-1261, in which it is assumed that the bishopric of Vicina was created”<sup>19</sup>.

Gheorghe I. Brătianu, who based his conclusions almost exclusively on the sources published by Heinrich Gelzer, whose dating he accepted, in his first study dedicated to Vicina, published in 1923, concluded that “Vicina was therefore from the beginning an archbishopric under Michael Palaiologos”<sup>20</sup>. The Romanian historian thus let it be understood, indirectly, that the moment of the foundation of the Archdiocese of Vicina should be sought at a date between 1258/1259-1282.

In a study dedicated to the seal of Patriarch Germanos II, from the year 1968, the historian Bucur Mitrea, numismatics and sigillography specialist, also spoke for the attestation of the diocese of Vicina as an archbishopric dependent on the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the middle of the seventh decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, as a consequence of the interest shown by the patriarchal authorities in the organization of the Church in the Istro-Pontic space. For this reason, he states that “as a result of the effort made” by the patriarchal authorities, returned to Constantinople, “in 1264 the Archbishopric of Vicina appears for the first time”, which means “that in Vicina, first of all, or possibly in another part of Dobrogea, before 1264 there was a church organization of a higher form, the archbishopric, dependent on the patriarchate”<sup>21</sup>. Based on this conclusion, the author concludes that “the mention of the Archdiocese of Vicina in 1264 should not be considered as a starting date, but only as one that has been preserved”<sup>22</sup>. The

Romanian researcher thus let it be understood that the establishment of the Archdiocese of Vicina dates from an earlier era.

For his part, Răzvan Theodorescu formulated an opinion close to that of Gheorghe I. Brătianu. In his synthesis, devoted to the beginnings of the Romanian medieval culture, from 1974, he considered that the presence of the seal of Gemanos II in the Dobrogean territories “would indicate in the third and fourth decades of the 13<sup>th</sup> century a «terminus ante quem» of the foundation of the archbishop’s see from Vicina”<sup>23</sup>.

The historian Ioan Rămureanu also speaks for the initial organization of Vicina as an archdiocese. According to the opinion expressed by him,

as a significant number of notables, merchants and Greek families had settled between 1204 and 1261 in the cities and ports on the maritime Danube and in those at its mouths, [...] the believers from these parts succeeded to obtain for their religious needs the creation of an archbishopric”, that of Vicina<sup>24</sup>.

We find that without advancing a date, he indirectly lets it be understood that the establishment of the Vicina Archbishopric would have occurred between 1204 and 1261.

Based on the same news, another issue debated by historians was the moment of the establishment of the Metropolitan Church of Vicina more precisely the raising of the archbishopric see from here to metropolitan rank. Due to the lack of consistency in information, the researchers, who pronounced on this aspect, could not, however, agree on its dating.

Regarding this subject, in his first study dedicated to Vicina, Gheorghe I. Brătianu considered that the homonymous diocese, founded during the time of Michael VIII Palaiologos as an archbishopric, “later became, under the reign of his son, the residence of a metropolitan”<sup>25</sup>. It follows from this conclusion that the Archbishopric of Vicina would have been raised to metropolitan rank at a date among 1282-1328.

In a new study devoted to the presence of Romanians at the mouths of the Danube in the beginning of the reign of the Palaiologos dynasty in the Byzantine Empire, published in 1945, Gheorghe I. Brătianu resumed the discussion on the moment of the establishment of the Metropolitan Church of Vicina, reconsidering his previously formulated conclusion. On this occasion, he concluded, “it is possible

that during the last years of the Empire of Nicaea and, perhaps on the occasion of the Balkan offensive of Ioan Vatatzes (Ioannes Vatatzes Doukas, n.n.), the metropolitan see of Vicina was founded”<sup>26</sup>. We deduce from this conclusion that Gheorghe I Brătianu dates the founding of the Metropolitanate of Vicina between 1242, the year of the beginning of the great Balkan campaigns of the Nicaea emperor, Ioannes III Vatatzes Doukas (1222-1254), and 1252, the year of the last large-scale military action of the Nicene basileus in the Balkan Peninsula.

From our point of view, expressed in the previous steps, which we continue to support, the direct connection of the great Balkan military campaigns of the Nicene emperor with the establishment of the Metropolitan Church of Vicina is not justified. We base this opinion on the fact that none of the respective military actions of Ioannes III Vatatzes Doukas targeted the northern Balkan territories of the Vlach-Bulgarian Tsardom, and even less the Istro-Pontic space, but only the regions of Thrace, from the south of the Balkan Mountains<sup>27</sup>.

For his part, the French historian Vitalien Laurent, discussing the issue of the restoration of Byzantine rule at the mouths of the Danube during the reign of Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos, also succinctly addressed the issue of dating the moment of the establishment of the Metropolitan Church of Vicina. Based on the information provided by the sources published by Heinrich Gelzer and their dating proposed by Conrad Fink, he considered that they, especially the apostille of 1299, “present the metropolitan churches created between 1204 and 1261”<sup>28</sup>. It emerges, indirectly, from this conclusion that the Metropolitan Church of Vicina was founded on an unspecified date in the mentioned interval.

Two and a half decades later, in an approach devoted to the situation of the Romanian Church in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Alexandru A. Bolşacov-Ghimpu formulated the opinion that the consecration of its bishops took place in the mentioned era “probably south of the Danube, in Ohrid or Târnovo. Later after 1234, when the latter became a patriarchate, the ordination could also be done at its other new metropolitan churches, among them, first of all, at Vicina”<sup>29</sup>.

The opinion expressed by Alexandru A. Bolşacov-Ghimpu indirectly leads to the conclusion that the moment of the establishment of the Metropolis of Vicina should be dated around the recognition of the Patriarchate of Târnovo by the political and ecclesiastical authorities from Constantinople, in 1235. Lacking any basis is,



however, the placement of the Istro-Pontic diocese under the dependence of the Patriarchate of Târnovo, the fact being known, supported by all the information from the available sources, that throughout its operation, the Metropolitan Church of Vicina was directly dependent on the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. In support of our conclusion, we bring, in addition to the sources already presented, a list of the suffragan metropolitan churches to the Târnovo Patriarchate, drawn up around 1235, during the reign of Tsar John Asen II (1218-1241), and attached to the *Synodikon of Tsar Boril*, in which the diocese of Vicina is not found, as an indisputable proof of the fact that it did not depend on the Bulgarian Church<sup>30</sup>.

According to the opinion of Ion Barnea, who emphasized, in his turn, the significance of the seal of Patriarch Germanos II, it should be put “in connection with some letter sent by this patriarch, during the refuge in Nicaea, most likely to the Metropolitan of Vicina, who depended directly by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople”<sup>31</sup>. The conclusion formulated by this historian leads to the finding that he considers the founding of the Metropolitan Church of Vicina to be an already fulfilled fact during the patriarchate of Germanos II, in Nicaea.

Historians Constantin C. Giurescu and, later, Mircea Păcurariu, adopted without reservation the thesis formulated by Vitalien Laurent, regarding the interval in which the Metropolitanate of Vicina could have been established. Consequently, the first of them claims that after initially Vicina was “the seat of a Greek bishopric”, later it was “elevated to the rank of metropolitan church between 1204 -1261 and depending on the Patriarchate of Constantinople”<sup>32</sup>. The second one claims that “the Metropolitan Church of Vicina came into being between 1204-1261, when the Byzantine Empire had moved its capital to Nicaea, as Constantinople was occupied by the Crusaders”<sup>33</sup>.

As far as he is concerned, Ioan Rămureanu admits that the elevation of the Archdiocese of Vicina to the rank of metropolitan church, before the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Although he remains reserved in advancing a moment of its elevation to the metropolitan rank, emphasising that “it is not possible to specify at what specific date it appears”, however, he concludes, that the Metropolitan Church of Vicina “existed around 1249-1250”<sup>34</sup>.

From Răzvan Theodorescu’s point of view, the interest shown by the imperial authorities for the territories at the mouths of the Danube, after 1204, associated with the action of the patriarchal

authorities to counter the Catholic propaganda in the region “seem to be determined very soon and the elevation of the rank of Vicina to the rank of metropolitan church, in the hierarchy of the Eastern Church, before 1261”<sup>35</sup>. In conclusion, he claims, the founding of the Metropolitan Church of Vicina took place “perhaps in the era of the first beginnings of Michael VIII in Nicaea (1258-1261) [...] - so around the years 1259-1260, at the latest”<sup>36</sup>. In a more recent historical synthesis, against the background of the resumption of the discussion on the church culture and structure in the Romanian space from the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, Răzvan Theodorescu persists in this conclusion, stating that the elevation of the Vicina Church to the rank of metropolitan church was “still before 1261, perhaps in the beginning of the reign of Michael VIII Palaeologus in Nicaea”<sup>37</sup>.

In the continuation of his deduction regarding the evolution of the diocese of Vicina, Radu Ștefan Ciobanu speaks for the elevation of Vicina to metropolitan rank towards the end of the reign of Emperor Mihail VIII Palaiologos. In this sense, he concludes that “it seems that under the same emperor, towards the end of his reign, the diocese of Vicina was raised to the rank of metropolitan church”<sup>38</sup>.

The thesis formulated by Radu Ștefan Ciobanu regarding the moment when Vicina was raised to the rank of metropolitan church, was taken up, very recently, at least partially, by Denis Căprăroiu, who puts it in a direct relationship with the alliance between Emperor Mihail VIII and the Mongolian noyan Nogai. As a result, he considered that

most likely, thanks to the alliance with Nogai (1273)”, the basileus of Constantinople “succeeds in restoring Byzantine hegemony over the «Paristrion islands», among them, of course, as a priority objective, Vicina. Moreover, in this context, the foundation of an Orthodox metropolitan church in Vicina could also take place<sup>39</sup>.

Among the recently expressed opinions, we note that of the priest Felix Lucian Neculai. He claims that the period in which the diocese of Vicina was raised to metropolitan rank “can only be between 1250-1261”, to conclude that “within this interval, the most favourable moment is 1259-1260”<sup>40</sup>.

From our point of view, the formulation of a relevant answer requires the consideration of other factors that could have determined the change in the rank of the Danube diocese. We have in mind here, first of all, the situation of the Lower Danube territories, as well as the evolution of the political and military factor in the area.

Regarding the situation of the territories at the mouths of the Danube, two points of view have been outlined in historiography. One of these belongs to those historians who admit a Vlach-Bulgarian rule over the Istro-Pontic space or over the largest part of it since the time of the first Asănești, the other, to researchers who express doubt or reject such rule. The basis of such opinions is a note made by canon Ansbertus in the work *Historia de expeditione Frederici Imperatoris*, in which he shows that upon the arrival of Emperor Friedrich I Barbarossa in the Balkan Peninsula, “Kalopetru the Vlach and his brother Asen, with the Vlachs subject to them, exercised a rule over a large part of Bulgaria and especially over the region where the Danube flows into the sea”<sup>41</sup>.

In Romanian historiography, such opinions were expressed, for example, by Constantin Brătescu, in the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and recently by Alexandru Madgearu. The first claims that in 1188, when the crusade led by the emperor Friedrich I Barbarossa, one of the leaders of Asănești, was being prepared, “Petru, a Romanian by birth, ruled the land between the Balkans and the Danube”, and that “Ansbertus knew precisely that between the Balkans and the mouths of the Danube” Peter and Asen ruled<sup>42</sup>. The second resumes the thesis and claims that the information transmitted by Ansbertus “means that present-day Dobruja or most of it was already controlled by the rebels in the summer of 1189”<sup>43</sup>. Consequently, he claims, “the idea that the state created by Peter and Asen did not include this territory before 1204 or later cannot be accepted, because it is not based on any argument”<sup>44</sup>.

Indirectly, Aurel Decei spoke in the same sense, concluding that after crossing the Danube, “the crusaders found that a new state had been established to the north and northeast. [...]. It was the new Romanian-Bulgarian Empire”<sup>45</sup>. We ourselves have opted for this theory at some point<sup>46</sup>.

At the opposite pole are those historians who cast doubts or reject a Vlach-Bulgarian rule over the entire Istro-Pontic space or a part of it. Such opinions were expressed among others by Petre Diaconu, Ernest Oberländer-Târnoveanu, Gh. Mănuclu-Adameșteanu, Sergiu Iosipescu and others<sup>47</sup>.

A more nuanced, even ambiguous opinion, expresses Ștefan Ștefănescu. According to the conclusion formulated by him,

the territory between the Danube and the Black Sea, which will later take the name of Dobruja, although it seems not to have been part of the Vlach-Bulgarian Tsardom, depended on it during the periods of firm affirmation of the central authority of the tsars<sup>48</sup>.

As for us, based on deeper analyses of information, we have reconsidered our previously expressed opinion, so we admit a partial rule of the Vlach-Bulgarian Tsardom over the territories of the Istro-Pontic space. We are of the opinion that it included only the southern regions of the area. Those at the mouths of the Danube remained outside this dominion and in relation to the Greek Empire of Nicaea.

With certainty, the annexation of the southern regions of the Istro-Pontic space to the Vlach-Bulgarian Tsardom did not occur before 1204, but much later. In support of our opinion, we bring as an argument the information transmitted by the Byzantine chroniclers, Niketas Choniates and Georgios Akropolites, first of all, the first contemporary of the events, which presents the evolution of the political and military relations between the Byzantine Empire and the Vlach-Bulgarian Tsardom from the moment of the outbreak of the anti-Byzantine revolt of the Vlachs and the Bulgarians, supported by the North-Danube Cumans, in 1185 and until the conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204. It is significant that none of the Byzantine authors mentions any Vlach-Bulgarian-Cuman military operation against the imperial dominions between the Danube and the Black Sea<sup>49</sup>.

In our opinion, the annexation of the southern regions of the Istro-Pontic space to the Vlach-Bulgarian state was not achieved until much later, most probably, between 1230 and 1235. The basis of our opinion is the absence of any references to them in the privilege of 1230, granted by Tsar John Asen II (1218-1241) to Ragusa, and on the mention in 1235, in the list of suffragan dioceses of the Patriarchate of Târnova of the Metropolitan Church of Dristra<sup>50</sup>. Based on this finding, we believe that we can accept the year 1230 as a *terminus post quem*, and the year 1235 as the *terminus ante quem* of the occupation of these regions. We also argue that the Vlach-Bulgarian rule in the Istro-Pontic area did not include the regions at the mouths of the Danube, which after 1204 very likely remained “in connection with the Greek Empire of Nicaea”<sup>51</sup>. This situation would also be preserved after 1230-1235. The very organization of the local Church in dependence on the Ecumenical Patriarchate lends solidity to our opinion.

The separate evolution from that of the Vlach-Bulgarian Tsardom of the territories at the mouths of the Danube is also supported by other sources. For example, a piece of information of this type comes from the chronicle *Tevarih-i al-i Selçük* or *Selçük* or *Selçüknâme* of the Turkish chronicler Yazicioglu Ali Efendi (15<sup>th</sup> century). Inspired by older sources, the chronicle records an expedition to the Crimea against the Cuman-held city of Sugdak (Sudak, Sogdaia, Soldaia) by the Seljuk sultan of Konya, Ala-ed-Din Keikobâd I (1220-1237), undertaken in the years 1221-1223. On the occasion of the account of the Seljuk expedition, the Turkish chronicler records that “since in the attack against the Khazars [some] the soldiers were afraid of the sea, they went by land through the Wallachian country, keeping the seashore: they reached the city of Sugdak”<sup>52</sup>.

The historian Tahsimn Gemil, who highlighted the significance of the passage, identifies the *Wallachian country* mentioned by Yazicioglu Ali with a political organization “existing before 1221-1223”<sup>53</sup>. The respective political formation, the author claims, “included the western coast of the Black Sea”<sup>54</sup>. If we consider the fact that the west-Pontic coast up to the proximity of the mouths of the Danube was under the rule of the Vlach-Bulgarian Tsardom, we believe that the Wallachian country, from the chronicle of Yazicioglu Ali Efendi, must be sought outside its borders, the only area where it could be located being at the mouths of the Danube.

The year 1234 brought with it radical changes in political and religious terms. As is known, in 1204, the Vlach-Bulgarian tsar, Ioniță Asen (1197-1207) had opted for the union of the Church of Târnova with the Church of Rome. His religious policy was continued by his successors, Tsars Boril (1207-1218) and John Asen II (1218-1241), until 1234.

The return to Orthodoxy of Tsar John Asen II, in 1234, radically changed the data of the problem. The act of the tsar from Târnovo was eminently by political objectives. Among these in the foreground was undoubtedly his intention to conquer Constantinople from the Latins. The abandonment of Catholicism and the Latin side was accompanied, in 1234/1235, by the conclusion of an anti-Catholic and anti-Latin alliance with the emperor of Nicaea, Ioannes III Vatatzes Doukas, his main competitor for the occupation of the metropolis on the Bosphorus, already engaged in the action of *restauratio* of the Byzantine Empire. Religiously, the accession of the Vlach-Bulgarian tsar to the Orthodox

side had significant consequences for the Vlach-Bulgarian Church. In the summer of 1235, at the request of the Vlach-Bulgarian tsar, the great patriarchal synod, meeting in Lampsacus, decided to elevate the Church of Târnovo to the rank of Patriarchate and recognize its autocephaly. Very likely, concurrently with these events, or shortly after their consummation, the Church in the regions at the mouths of the Danube, in connection with the Empire of Nicaea, was organized as an archbishopric dependent on the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The corroboration of these events with the information provided by the mentioned sources allows us to issue the hypothesis that *the moment of the establishment of the Vicina Archbishopric can be dated between 1234/1235-1240*. In our opinion, the act of establishing the archbishopric at the mouth of the Danube was consummated at the end of 1234 or at the beginning of 1235 at the earliest, when the Vlach-Bulgarian-Nicean alliance was concluded and the elevation of the Church of Târnovo to the rank of patriarch, and at the latest in the first part of 1240, before the end of the patriarchate of Germanos II, the one who patronized those changes in the religious plan<sup>55</sup>.

In a short time political and military events precipitated. In 1242, the Vlach-Bulgarian Tsardom, falling into a serious political crisis, which occurred after the death of Tsar John Asen II in 1241, was violently hit by the great Mongol invasion. In his account of these events, the Persian author Rashid al-Din informs us that Prince Qadan, the commander of the Mongol forces operating in the northern Balkan Peninsula, in 1242, “returned and took two cities from the Ulaqs (Vlachs, n.n.), Qarqin and Qasla after a few fights”<sup>56</sup>. In other manuscripts and translations, the names of the two cities appear as Qirqin or Tirnîn and Qïla or Kïla respectively<sup>57</sup>. This led some historians to identify the two cities occupied by the Mongols with Târnovo and Chilia, respectively, an identification rejected by others<sup>58</sup>.

Following the Mongol invasion, the Vlach-Bulgarian Tsardom became vassal to the Mongols, and the regions at the mouths of the Danube came under their control, including those under the religious jurisdiction of the diocese of Vicina. The fact is confirmed, indirectly, by a note by Guillaume de Rubruquis (William de Rubruck), who, following the journey undertaken to the court of the great khan, a decade later, in 1253-1255, recorded that

toward the west from the mouth of the Tanais (Don, n.n.) to the Danube everything is theirs. And even beyond the Danube, in the

direction of Constantinople, Blakia, the land of Asen, and Little Bulgaria as far as Slavonia, all pay tribute to them<sup>59</sup>.

In 1261, Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos of Nicea restored the Byzantine Empire at Constantinople. Shortly after the return of the empire to the Bosphorus, the territories on the west-Pontic coast, from Thracia to the mouths of the Danube, came back into the attention of Byzantium, which, by virtue of its alleged previous rights of dominion over them, initiated the action to reconquer them. In 1262-1263, a combined campaign on water and land, organized by the Byzantine emperor, brought under the control of the empire, a part of the Bulgarian coast, with the port cities, among which the Byzantine historian Georgios Pachymeres lists Mesembria (Nesebăr), Anchialos (Pomorie), Sozopolis (Sozopol) Agathoupolis (Ahtopol), Kanstritzion (probably near Cape Kastrič), as well as “and other fortresses”<sup>60</sup>.

The Byzantine campaign also reached the Istro-Pontic territories. This allowed the restoration of the empire’s control over the region at the mouths of the Danube, most likely the delta area and the neighbouring one, where Vicina was established. The significance of the Byzantine success is underlined in a panegyric attributed to the rhetor Michael Holobolos, dated 1272 or 1273, addressed to emperor Michael VIII, in which it is stated that “many Paristriian islands rejoiced that you are their emperor, gave up the planned revolt knowing that they were subjected to illegitimate sovereigns”<sup>61</sup>.

Mihail Holobolos’ text confirms, as Gheorghe I. Brătianu stated, “the reality of a Byzantine domination at the mouths of the Danube in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century”<sup>62</sup>. As for the “Paristriian islands”, to which the speech of the Byzantine rhetorician refers, they were identified by Vitalien Laurent with “those at the mouth of the Danube” or with the sandbanks in the delta, considering that they could have been Beștepe hill, the Island of Serpents or even, today the disappeared island, Peuke<sup>63</sup>.

The results of the archaeological excavations strengthen the conclusions regarding the Byzantine presence in the regions at the mouths of the Danube, in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, supported by the literary and documentary sources. The traces of constructions, glazed ceramics, ornaments or monetary discoveries, consisting, first of all, in the hyperperis of the first emperors of the Palaiologos dynasty, revealed by them, both in the area of the mouths of the Danube, and in

the north-Danube territories, along the river, are an eloquent proof from this point of view<sup>64</sup>.

In order to consolidate the positions and influence of the Byzantine Empire in the region, Michael VIII colonized here, in 1263-1264, a significant group of Seljuk Turks. Following repeated requests addressed to the basileus Sarî-Saltuk, one of the lieutenants of the former sultan of Ikonion, Izz-ed-Din Keykâvus (1246-1259), who took refuge in the empire, received the right to settle with about 10,000 families of Turks in the territories at the mouths of the Danube, recently reconquered by Byzantium<sup>65</sup>. The significance of the Turkish colonization in the regions at the mouths of the Danube is, moreover, widely presented in the works of Muslim authors from the 14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>66</sup>.

The objective of the imperial authorities was that the Seljuk Turks, colonized in the north of the Istro-Pontic space, were to ensure the defence of the border on the maritime Danube. The intention of the imperial court finds indirect expression in the work of the Byzantine author Nikephoros Gregoras, who states that Izz-ed-Din's followers, "a large body of men fit for battle, were baptized and incorporated into the Greek army"<sup>67</sup>.

At the same time, in the western regions of the Golden Horde, the Noyan Nogai established itself as a first-rank political and military personality. For over three decades he would exercise his authority over these territories, like a true independent sovereign.

Following two military campaigns against the Byzantine Empire, in 1265 and 1271, which reached Constantinople's dominions in Thrace, the powerful noyan regulated his relations with Michael VIII, the two becoming allies. The alliance with the Byzantine basileus was strengthened by the marriage of Nogai with Euphrosyna, the natural daughter of the emperor (1272)<sup>68</sup>.

The alliance with Nogai, which would last until the fall of the latter, in 1299-1300, strengthened the positions of the Byzantine Empire at the mouths of the Danube. Very probably, in this favourable political context, the elevation of the Vicina Archdiocese to the rank of metropolitan church also took place<sup>69</sup>.

The exact moment of the founding of the Metropolitan Church of Vicina is not known. But we know that in the summer of 1285 it held this rank<sup>70</sup>. We consider, therefore, that we can admit the summer of 1285 as a *terminus ante quem* of the raising of the Lower Danube diocese to metropolitan rank.



Two lists of metropolitans from the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century date the establishment of the Metropolitan Church of Vicina during the reign of Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos, whose reign began on December 11, 1282. Combining this fact with the news from the summer of 1285, we consider that the elevation of the diocese of Vicina to the rank of metropolitan church occurred in the first two and a half years of the reign of the new emperor. Since it is impossible to admit that in the few days until the end of the year, he was concerned with the problem of the Danube diocese, we consider that this fact could not have happened until the following year. Based on this finding, we accept the year 1283 as the *terminus post quem* of the elevation of the archbishopric seat of Vicina to metropolitan rank. In conclusion, we consider that we can admit the year 1283 as a *terminus post quem*, and the summer of 1285 a *terminus ante quem* of the elevation of the diocese of Vicina from the rank of archbishopric to that of metropolitan church.

### *Final considerations*

The Eparchy of Vicina, the last one constituted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in the Istro-Pontic space, had a relatively short operation, between the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. During this period it was successively raised to the rank of archbishopric and then of metropolitan church.

The association of political, military and religious events with the information transmitted by the mentioned sources allows us to formulate the hypothesis that *the moment of the establishment of the Archbishopric of Vicina can be dated between 1234/1235-1240*. In our opinion, the act of establishing the archbishopric at the mouths of the Danube was consummated at the end of 1234 or at the beginning of 1235 at the earliest, when the Vlach-Bulgarian-Nicaean alliance was concluded and the elevation of the Church of Târnovo to the rank of patriarch, and at the latest in the first part of 1240, before the end of the patriarchate of Germanos II, the one who patronized those changes in the religious plan.

The exact moment of the founding of the Metropolitan Church of Vicina is not known. But we know that in the summer of 1285 it held this rank<sup>71</sup>. Therefore, we consider that the elevation of the diocese of Vicina from the rank of archbishopric to that of metropolitan church

took place, at the latest, in the summer of 1285. Most likely, the elevation of the diocese of Vicina to metropolitan rank occurred in the first two and a half years of the reign of Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos, who started on December 11, 1282. Consequently, we accept the year 1283 as the *terminus post quem* of the elevation of the archbishopric see of Vicina to metropolitan rank. In conclusion, we can admit the year 1283 as a *terminus post quem*, and the summer of 1285 a *terminus ante quem* of the elevation of the diocese of Vicina from the rank of archbishopric to that of metropolitan church.

#### NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> I. Dumitriu-Snagov, „Borgiana V și Borgiana VIII. Două hărți italiene din Renaștere și localizarea Vicinei pe Dunăre,” in *Revista de Istorie*, 32, 1979, 10, p. 1941.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> M. le Quien, *Oriens Christianus, in quator Patriarchatus digestus, quo exhibentur Ecclesiae, Patriarchae caeterique praesules totius Orientis*, t. I, Parisiis, MDCCXL, XI.II, col. 1349-1350; J.E.T. Wiltsch, *Handbuch der Geographie und Statistik von Zeiten der Apostel bis zu Antenge des sechszehnten Jahrhunderts. Mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Ausbreitung des Judenthums und Mohammedanismus nach den Quellen und besten Hülfsmitteln*, vol. II, Berlin, 1846, p. 352, § 608; E. de Hurmuzaki, *Fragmente zur Geschichte der Rumänen*, vol. I, Bucharest, 1878, p. 206; G.A. Rallys, M. Potlis, *Syntagma ton Theion kai ieron kanonon*, t. V, Athena, 1855, p. 494, n. 5; W. Tomaschek, „Zur Kunde der Hämus-Halbinsel, II. Die Handelswege im 12. Jahrhundert nach den Erkundigungen des Arabers Idrisi,” in *Sitzungsberichte der Philosophisch-Historische Classe der Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol 113, Wien, 1886, pp. 303-303; H. Gelzer, „Ungedruckte und ungenügend veröffentlichte Texte der Notitae episcopatum ein Beitrag zur byzantinischen Kirchen- und Verwaltungsgeschichte,” in *Abhandlungen der philosophie-philologie Classe der königlich bayerischen Akademie der Wiensenschaften*, I, Bd. XXI, Abth. III, 1899-1901, München, 1901, p. 595; C. Auner, *Câteva momente din începuturile Bisericii Române*, Blaj, 1902, p. 101; A.D. Xenopol, *Istoria românilor din Dacia Traiană*, vol. II. *De la întemeierea Țărilor Române până la moartea lui Petru Rareș*. Text stabilit de N. Stoicescu și Maria Simionescu. Note, comentarii, prefață, indice și ilustrația de N. Stoicescu, București, 1986, p. 198; N. Grămadă, „Vicina. Izvoare cartografice. Originea numelui. Identificarea orașului,” in *Codrul Cosminului*, I, 1924, pp. 456-459; C. Marinescu, „Le Danube et le littoral occidental et septentrional de la Mer Noire dans «Libro del Conosçimiento»,” in *Revue Historique du Sud-Est Européen*, III, 1926, 1-4, p. 1-8; C. Andreescu, „Așezări franciscan la Dunăre și Marea Neagră,” in *Cercetări Istorie*, VIII-IX, 1932-1933, 2, pp. 155-163; Gh. I. Brătianu, *Recherches sur Vicina et Cetatea Albă*, Bucarest, 1935, pp. 10-11, 27; V. Laurent, „Un évêché fantôme ou la Bitzina taurique,” in *Échos d'Orient*, XXXVIII, 1939, 193-194, pp.

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## **BOOK REVIEWS**





DANIEL SÎRBU

Darrel J. Fasching, *No One Left Behind-Is Universal Salvation Biblical?*, iUniverse, Inc., Bloomington, 2011, 156 pp.

Darrel J. Fasching is not only an author of theological books, but also teaches religious studies. He does this at the University of South Florida, in Tampa, Florida. He has multiple engaging theological books. Some of these are the following: *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (1981); *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation in Ethics* (1992); *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* (1993); *The Coming of the Millenium: Good News for the Whole Human Race* (1996) and he is also co-author of *Religion and Globalization* (2008) together with John Esposito and Todd Lewis; *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach to Global Ethics* (2011) 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, together with Dell DeChant and David Lantigua; *World Religions Today*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (2011) together with John Esposito and Todd Lewis once more. He is well-known for his books, which give him increased authority in this area of religious studies. He is also a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States. He currently resides in Lutz, Florida with his wife Laura, where he worships at All Saints Lutheran Church.

*No One Left Behind: Is Universal Salvation Biblical?* was originally published as *The Coming of the Millenium: Good News for the Whole Human Race*. He talks about subjects such as the Millennium in an age of false prophets, Babel - the Gospel hospitality to strangers, Wrestling with the stranger, and so forth. These are theological chapters that speak eloquently regarding various historical and contemporary events. For example, he refers to situations related to Adolf Hitler and his views about the Jews and how he tried to bring them to an end and also to his regime meant to become the kingdom for 1,000 years. The author also speaks about how Christians in the year 2000 began to read the Book of Revelation to make themselves believe that the Second Coming of Christ is at hand which has been mentioned multiple times in the Gospels (Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:15; Luke 17:20; Acts 28:31). He elaborates on how to distinguish different Protestant beliefs and how

they differ from other mainline Christian traditions as well as on the impact these beliefs have on daily Christian life.

Fasching then proceeds to a theological interpretation of what he calls “the children of light” and “The children of darkness” and elaborates on how Christians can or cannot defend their belief in God.

Other topics include episodes from the Middle Ages, such as the Crusades, emphasizing the importance of story-telling and explaining what it means for us to be “story-dwellers”.

In another chapter the author discusses the idea of wrestling with the stranger, and he mentions the story in Genesis 32:22-31 when Jacob wrestled with God on the ground and then he asked God to bless him, which God did renaming Jacob “Israel” because he prevailed while struggling with God. This type of wrestling is conducing to what Fasching calls “mutual respect and spiritual transformation.” He then connects the story to our own ways of facing the stranger because “we all have moments when we wrestle with the stranger,” and explains how such a confrontation can strengthen the sense of identity.

The idea of the “stranger” also implies alienation. The author encourages readers to have a similar sense of a stranger’s alienation, which will help us to go deeper into finding who we really are, and that will make us think ethically because “to be ethical means to step outside our own skin and view our own life and actions as if we were one another.” He warns us that “if we encounter God only in those who are like ourselves, the danger is that we are only worshipping our own self-image” which could lead to a type of egotistical idolatry. We must question ourselves since “the stranger’s ways are not our ways and his thoughts are not ours.” Yet we need to find what we have in common since we are all created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27). A discussion about Jesus the stranger is followed by a comparison between Jesus and Israel with details on Christ’s death and resurrection and how we assume His salvific work in our daily life.

Another chapter discusses the issue of Pentecost as the reverse of Babel and also how Pentecost in the Christian Church relates to strangers.

Lastly the author interprets the prophesies in the Book of Revelation, refers to how people, in general, are frightened at the idea of an apocalyptic event at the end of the world, of the last judgment and the punishment of the sinners.

Fasching suggests that “only a remnant of true believers will be saved, as they are caught up in ‘the rapture’ and carried into the heavens just before God’s catastrophic judgements fall upon the earth and the rest of the human race.” After this, a new heaven and new earth will emerge which will not have sinners or non-believers in it and that will be the eternal kingdom of God.

In conclusion, Darrell J. Fasching’s book is an interesting and helpful read for not only aspiring theologians, but also for anyone who just wants to learn more about history and the Christian religion and how the events presented there reflect today’s beliefs and life.

MAXIM (IULIU-MARIUS) MORARIU

Fr. Constantin Necula, Prof. Alexandru Vlad Ciurea, PhD, *Regăsirea ființei prin știință și credință [Rediscovering Being Through Science and Faith]*, Bookzone, Bucharest, 2023, 302 pp.

Both Prof. Dr. Alexandru-Vladimir Ciurea and Fr. Prof. Dr. Constantin Valer Necula are well-known personalities in Romania and abroad. While the first one is a honorary member of the Romanian Academy and a neurosurgeon with a brilliant work both in the practical field, as also in the theoretical one (almost 1000 surgeries, 39 books, 161 articles indexed Web of Science, and numberless prizes for his activity), the second one is not only a professor, author of almost 100 books, dean of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Sibiu, TV speaker, but also one of the most respected spiritual fathers of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

The fact that the two have decided to come together and discuss the relationship between religion and science is of special importance. The result of their dialogue has become the content of the work that we intend to present here. The book is segmented in eleven chapters and an interesting epilogue signed by Prof. Ciurea where he talks about the relevance and the usefulness of the dialogue between religion and science in contemporary society, as stated at the beginning:

Returning, for example, to belief in myths or obscure insular certainties does not represent a demanding foundation of the theology of faith. How else do you think we have enough of those who call themselves believers, willing to fill the world with cheap mediocrity, with personal obsessions, or frustrations. No, faith is not about your complaints about God. You can apply it to people, as a formula for calculating the failure of vocation (p. 9).

Fr. Constantin Necula on the other hand discusses the complex definition of faith by providing patristic landmarks referring to the relevance of science (p. 45-77) or emphasizing the way in which Fathers of the Church like Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom or Basil the Great speak about science and its relevance to the Christian religion (pp. 45-77). He also explains that “theology as a science cannot be argued according to the pseudo-rigors of today’s scientism which democratizes the principles of inquiry and censors hundreds of years of literature” (p. 57).

Prof. Ciurea not only provides interesting approaches on the way science and theology could converge in contemporary society, but also speaks about science at the borders between the two fields, and gives the example of „neurotheology”:

Neurotheology, also known as ‘spiritual neuroscience’ is an emerging field of study that aims to understand the relationship between brain science and religion. Researchers in this field strive to explain the neurological basis of spiritual experiences, such as the perception that time, fear, or self-awareness have dissolved; spiritual reverence; unity with universal.

Recently, there has been considerable interest in neurotheology worldwide. Neurotheology is multidisciplinary in nature and includes the fields of theology, religious studies, religious experience and practice, philosophy, cognitive science, neuroscience, psychology, and anthropology. Each of these fields can contribute to neurotheology, and reciprocally, neurotheology can ultimately contribute to each of these fields” (p. 116).

As it is underlined in the epilogue of the book, the communication is the key for both, approaching God and understanding between people (p. 299). At the same time, the discovery of Orthodoxy and of its principles can enrich science and increase the role it plays in contemporary society.

The book that provides not only a rich and important information about a complex and actual topic is not only a step ahead in the dialogue between theology and science made by two of the main representatives of both domains from the Romanian space, but also an invitation to dialogue and meditation and a scholarly contribution that should not be neglected by the scholarship of both fields. The openness with which the two authors choose to present the fields they represent, their availability for dialogue and problematization and the convergence of their discourses are parts of the strengths of this valuable research, dense in content and yet easy to read, which we warmly recommend to any category of readers.

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